

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING PARENTS OF MIXED-HERITAGE CHILDREN:
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

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B.A., University of the Nations, 2000
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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Cross-national phenomenon is often cloaked behind the shadow of interracial phenomenon. This study specifically focused on the cross-national phenomenon, especially the couples' experience as parents of their mixed-heritage child. In the process of exploration, both the couples' marital and parenting experience were captured. By employing a qualitative approach and analysis, eight cross-national couples who lived in the Midwest were recruited and interviewed about their parenting experience. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded and analyzed. The results of the study produced five categories of cross-national couples' experience: perceptions, relational dynamics, parent/child relationship issues, contextual influences, and essential coping strategies. By utilizing systemic perspectives, the descriptive findings were further analyzed in order to describe the potential interactions among categories, themes, and concepts. The analysis revealed five essential domains that were integral to the couples' cross-national parenting experience including, the individual domain, the couple domain, the child domain, the environmental domain, and the parenting domain. It is evident that the majority of cross-national couples did not always perceive their relational context in term of being mixed or cross-national but rather simply as couple or parent. It was not until the birth of their children that couples typically began to face the reality of being cross-national couples. Participants identified both unique strengths and challenges of being parents of mixed-heritage children. The findings suggested that the experience of cross-national parents are both common as well as unique, shaped by the multifaceted domains and their interactions. The systemic analysis revealed those idiosyncratic domains and factors within those domains. Although all of these domains appeared equally significant in contributing to the parenting quality and experience, the couple, the parenting and the environmental domains appeared to have the

greatest influence. The more couples work toward cohesion and harmony in the different domains of their lives, the more favorable their experience was. Clinical implications for therapists working with cross-national couples and parents, utilizing the systemic framework, are discussed. Recommendations for future studies are also presented.

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Dedication

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To my precious daughters, Kayla and Maica, who have been and will always be my greatest pride and joy. Remember: All things are possible with Christ!

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, diversity has become the norm rather than the exception. Whether it is in the United States or the remote island of Zanzibar, it is no longer an unusual phenomenon for people to encounter and interact with others who are racially or culturally different from themselves. The advances in global technology have brought people from different cultures and nationalities in a closer proximity. The ease of world travel has opened up previously unimaginable opportunities for people to interact with different cultures and worldviews that challenge their own. In some parts of the world, with the invention of and easy access to the World Wide Web, people can even choose to "travel" the world in the comfort of their home. The boundaries of oceans and continents are no longer major barriers. Language does not even stop people from reaching out to each other. What was unthinkable in the past, now seems to be a daily reality. The possibility of experiencing the world and new facets of human relationship are now endless. As growing diversity has become inevitable and a common phenomenon, people from all ethnic and racial backgrounds have greater opportunities to interact with each other and live in closer proximity. This blazes the way for personal relationships to form, love to grow, and romance to occur. Mixed-marriage and families are the consequence.

Glossary of Terms

The use of particular terminology in a scholarly work can often cause confusion to the readers. To prevent possible misunderstanding, I would like to introduce and clarify some of the specific terminology used in this study.

People's immediate reaction, when they hear the word *biracial*, is often to think that it is all about the racial mix between Black and White individuals. Partially, this is because of the great number of existing studies primarily focused on the Black/White relationships. There also appears to be an implicit assumption that the information gained from these types of studies will have relevance in the broader context. One of the primary reasons why many scholars use Black-White samples as their trajectory is the history of a long-standing racial chasm and the most extreme political tensions involving these two races in the U.S. (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Given that context, it is assumed that other types of mixed-race relations would not have the intensity of repercussions as would the mix between Black and White. Although it is undeniable that the majority of biracial literature addresses this issue from the "Black and White" context, it is noteworthy that, in reality, the greatest numbers of biracial children in the United States are from families where both parents come from two different non-White racial groups, for instance Black-Hispanic (Nishimura & Bol, 1997).

The term *biracial* in this study is used *specifically* to describe an individual whose background is composed of two different races. In this study, the term does not exclusively refer to the Black-White racial mix only but also other possible racial mixtures, such as Black/Asian, White/Hispanic, etc. There are mixed-race individuals who possess more than two racial backgrounds. Therefore, in order to accommodate that

status, the term *mixed-race* will be interchangeably and even preferably used with the term *biracial* in this study.

Occasionally, the term *bicultural/biethnic* is used interchangeably with the term *biracial* in the literature. However, I would like to make a clear distinction between these two terms in this study. In my perception, one's race does not always necessarily define one's reality of experiencing the world. An individual may appear to be a fully Asian, based on his or her physical complexion or *phenotype*, yet in actuality fully embody a Caucasian person's idiosyncratic values, lifestyles and worldview. This often is found in the cases of international adoption and the second or third generation of immigrants, who, either by conscious choice, or simply by the natural process of assimilation, choose to disregard the cultural legacy of their parents. Therefore, the term *biethnic/bicultural* in this study is only specifically used to define those individuals who embrace and practice facets of both their cultural heritages. These bicultural individuals would likely display their commitment in embracing their cultural heritages by devoutly adhering to both of their distinct cultural norms and practices. Because there are mixed-race individuals who are more than just "bi-cultural," the term *mixed-ethnic/culture* will be used in this study.

The primary emphasis of this study is on the "ethnic" difference rather than racial differences. However, when we talk about mixed-ethnic/interethnic marriages or the offspring of cross-national marriage, there is a great likelihood that it will also involve racial differences. Therefore, the word *mixed-heritage* will be used to describe those individuals who have combined ethnic and racial legacy resulting from their parent's mixed-relationships/marriages.

Lastly, there will be a difference in how the terms *interracial* and *cross-national marriage* are defined in this study. I define *interracial marriage* as the relationship or marital union between two individuals whose *racial background* is different from each other, yet they share and understand the majority of their fundamental cultural norms, values and lifestyles. In this context, the individuals who marry interracially typically share the same nationality or citizenship. These individuals may either have been born in the U.S. or been assimilated into the U.S. culture from an early age. Many of these individuals might fundamentally have embodied American or Western Cultural characteristics. This is exemplified in many of the children of the first generation of immigrants. *Cross-national marriage* is used *specifically* to describe the marital union between individuals, who are different ethnically/culturally and also possibly racially, due to the difference in country of origin. In most cases, couples who marry cross-nationally do not share fundamental cultural norms, values, and lifestyles. It is also typical that these couples will have a different nationality or citizenship. Couples who marry cross-nationally typically are given the privilege and/or option to assume their spouses' nationality. Certainly it does not operate the same way across the country. Some spouses would alter their citizenship status, while others hold onto their original citizenship. In this study, I included some individuals, who share same nationality with their spouses, with condition that at least one of the partners was raised in another country outside the U.S. for most his/her life.

The term *mixed-marriage* will be used as a more general term to describe a relationship between couples who marry interethnically and interracially.

The Birth of The Multiracial Movement in the U.S.

Upon winning the Masters Golf Tournament at age 21, Tiger Woods became a notable celebrity. In addition to his spectacular success as a young professional golfer, Woods' declaration of his 'Cablinasian' multiracial identity as one-eighth Caucasian, one-fourth Black, one-eighth American Indian, and one-half Asian seemed to spark the birth of a multiracial movement in the United States during the last decade of 20th century (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2004). As society began to note the increasing visibility of biracial celebrities who exposed their mixed heritage, such as Halle Berry, Nicolle Richie, and Vin Diesel, there seemed to be a dramatic increase in the number of people who acknowledge and claimed their multi-heritage. Although claiming multi-ethnic and/or multi-racial identity is not for everyone and not necessarily without a price, many mixed-heritage individuals and families gradually seem to recognize the personal benefits in validating their multiracial or mixed-heritage legacy. As the demographic composition of U.S. society continues to change, the increase in tolerance and acceptance of multi-heritage people has spread in many cities and local communities across the United States (Nakazawa, 2003). This progressive acceptance and legitimacy of multi-heritage identity reached a significant point with the pivotal change in the U.S. 2000 census, when the option for checking multiple racial backgrounds was made possible.

Since the last antimiscegenation laws were repealed in 1967, the multi-ethnic/racial baby boom started in the United States (Root, 1992). Within the frame of globalization, interracial and cross-national relationships and marriages are now considered to be more common (Gibbs, 1989). The growing visibility of interracial couples and/or multicultural families, which was estimated about 1 in 25 families (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2000), shows an indication that this type of familial constellation will be the future reality of our dynamic society. Nearly 7 million people (2.4%) have identified themselves as multiracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Forty-two percent, or 2.9 million, of these multiracial individuals were under 18 years old, which is almost double those who are under 18 who fall into the “one race” category (Nakazawa, 2003). Nakazawa (2003) pointed out that, according to a 2002 report by the Population Division of the U.S. Census, the figures reflected in the 2000 census may even be underreported. It was more likely that the number of mixed-race children was closer to 4.5 million at that time. She also noted that it is approximated that 1 in 16 children under the age of 18 are now mixed-racial.

Cross-National Marriage

Seto and Cavallaro (2007) stated that cross-national marriage is a more recent social phenomenon as compared to other form of mixed-marriages, such as interracial. The United States has drawn people from all over the world throughout its history and has become a fertile ground for cross-national marriages. During the period of 1800s to the beginning of the 1900s, European immigrants, followed by Chinese and Japanese immigrants, made their way into the United States (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007). In 1960s and 1970s, growing segments of immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean continuously landed in the U.S. (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999). As the waves of immigrants began to fill the land, the U.S. Government established a variety of immigration laws restricting the numbers of these immigrants entering the United States (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007). Although marriages of American citizens and immigrants were discouraged in the past, the practice continued. In 1945, the “War

Brides” phenomenon not only became increasingly common, but also received special treatment from the government (Cottrell, 1990). “Since then, military influence has been prevalent among cross-national couples, and a positive correlation has been found between the presence of military stations in different countries and the number of foreign brides coming to the United States (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007, p.259).”

With the changing of era, cross-national marriages continue to increase. However, when the existing literature focuses on the issues related to intermarriage, the focal points were often on the mixing of race and ethnicity with much less or no attention on the nationality (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007). “Because many cross-national marriages may also be interracial and/or interethnic marriage, some concerns of cross-national couples are explained within the contexts of these differences (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007, p. 259).” I strongly believe that cross-national marriage is similar and different from interracial marriages. There are aspects of cross-national marriages and family life that deserve further investigation. Seto and Cavallaro (2007) stated that the numerous combinations of nationalities and cultural variables create substantial and complex variations within this cross-national phenomenon.

As the number of mixed-marriages continuously skyrockets with each decade – from 1.5 million in 1990 to more than 4 million in 2000 – our society will inevitably become more multicultural (Nakazawa, 2003). Given these changes in the U.S. societal context, I often wondered how these changes in demographics contribute to the overall experience of being a mixed-couple and family. Questions related to this phenomenon triggered my interest in exploring further this specific phenomenon. For example, how do the majority of people respond to cross-national marriage? Is there any difference in the

experience of interracial marriage versus cross-national marriage? How does this changing demographic shape the interethnic couples' parenting experience of their mixed-heritage children? What are the factors that influence the interethnic parent's parenting role and processes? What are the challenges and benefits of being a cross-national couple/family?

Purpose of the study

This study was born as an initial response to these quandaries posed above. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine in-depth the phenomenon of being a mixed-heritage family in the present U.S. societal context. A particular focus will be given to *the experience of being cross-national parents in raising their mixed-heritage children.*

As not only interracial marriages but also cross-national marriages have become more common, issues related to parenting mixed-heritage children will be more vital and relevant. Numerous studies on the topic of biracial identity and related issues have noted both positive and negative implications of being mixed-race. Parents of these mixed-race children often express serious concerns about the mental, psychological, emotional and social well-being of their children. How they can raise them in the "correct" way is also of great concern. In many cases, the parents of mixed-heritage children are not mixed-ethnic or race themselves. It is not uncommon for parents of mixed-heritage children to struggle with lack of knowledge, feelings of incompetence, and inadequacy in understanding and validating their mixed-heritage children's experience. Many parents of mixed-heritage children desperately long for insight into how they can nurture, guide, and

protect their children in ways that are constructive for their developmental and for their psychological, emotional, social, and overall well-being.

This study begins with a general assumption that parents play a significant role in shaping the lives of their children. Studies on the topic of biracial children consistently identify parents as one of the most vital factors that contribute to the process of their development and identity (Byrd & Garwick, 2004; Kenney, 2002). Cross-national couples have a unique parenting experience, which is different from other monoethnic or even interracial couples. I believe that cross-national couples will bring their unique experience to their parenting roles and processes. Not only does this unique circumstance affect their identity as a couple but also consequently will influence their parenting endeavors as well as how their children experience being a family and especially, being mixed-heritage individuals. Given this hypotheses, I am interested to explore the cross-national parents' parenting experience, and at the same time to investigate their experience as couples.

Statement of the problem

Research and counseling literature on biracial children and mixed-race related topics have been the cornerstone of this study. *Although the race is not the emphasis in this study, but rather the ethnic and national differences*, a great amount of literature related to race, mixed-race or biraciality will be provided as the foundation. The existing literatures on race were used only to provide a background for cross-national marital and parenting context, which is the center focus of this study. I consider the literature on racial issues as important because it is often used as a template for how the U.S. culture deals with multicultural issues. The existing literature on race, to a great extent, crucially

informs the key relevant contexts of multicultural issues in U.S. – historically, socially and politically – and is helpful for understanding the present cross-national phenomenon.

The existing literature has given valuable insights into the experience of being mixed-race and the multidimensional aspects that shape psychological, emotional, familial and social experiences. There are a considerable number of studies that qualitatively explored the experience of being biracial/mixed race, which, in most cases, represent the racial mix between Black and White. There are also many studies that emphasize issues related to the identity of being mixed-race and its life implications. There are also quite a number of resources that focus on the “parenting” aspect of the topic. Some of them primarily utilize the developmental approach, which focuses on guiding the parents on how they can intervene in their mixed-race children’s developmental phases. As helpful as these resources are, it is often quite a challenge to fully implement those suggested “how to” strategies given, the vast number of variables embedded in each child’s personality and context. In addition, given the sensitivity of the issues involving racial and cultural issues, it is challenging to address this salient issue without bias.

While the research studies on mixed-racial dynamics continue to advance, there is paucity in information that explicitly describes and emphasizes *the systemic processes of being a cross-national mixed-heritage family*. It is only in recent years that I found a resource that approaches the mixed-race parenting process from the systemic standpoint, which I found valuable (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2004). This book lays out a variety of salient components that shape the experience of mixed race children, such as parents, school environment, peers, extended families, etc. However, despite this valuable

information, in-depth qualitative investigation, specific to each of these contributing factors, is almost uncharted. The main focus of the existing studies has also been on the biracial individual. There are not many studies that look closely at the other domains associated with the mixed-heritage experience, such as parent's domain, or parenting domain. I believe that an understanding of each of these contributing domains and how they systemically interact and influence each other in shaping the cross-national couples, their mixed-heritage children, and the parenting experience will certainly expand the knowledge of the mixed-heritage phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to generate insights and theories about the experience of cross-national married parents who are raising their mixed-heritage children. There appear to be implicit assumptions that suggest there is similarity or no significant difference among a cross-national marriage/parenting and interracial marriage/parenting. Therefore, the studies done specifically in the context of cross-national marriage are sparse. This research study is essential because it added “the missing brick on the wall” associated with the topic of marriage and parenting specifically in cross-national context.

Although there may be similarities in the experience of being parents of mixed-heritage children in the context of both cross-national and interracial marriage, there are unique dynamics and differences that shape the experience of being parents of mixed-heritage children in the context of a cross-national marriage that are worth further exploration, especially given the changing landscape of U.S. society. This study is designed to unpack those unique factors and dynamics within this relational context and to understand it from the systemic and ecological points of view.

It is the intention of this study to benefit the field of family studies and human services. The findings that result from this study will add to the existing knowledge of multicultural issues, especially related to mixed-ethnic/racial ones. The findings of this study will benefit couples who are anticipating being parents of mixed-heritage children as well as individuals who are contemplating being involved in a cross-national relationship.

From the clinical stance, given the growing numbers of mixed-race individuals and the potential unique challenges they may encounter as result of being racially mixed, marriage and family therapists (MFTs) and other mental health professionals will likely have a greater opportunity to encounter and serve this type of population in their clinical practices. The sensitivity and knowledge, regarding issues related to mixed-race phenomenon, will be essential for the success of therapeutic work with multiracial clients. Therefore, MFTs and other mental health clinicians will likely benefit from the findings of this study.

Last but not the least, I also hope that the findings of this study will benefit these courageous couples who were willing to share their lives and make their stories known. I desire that the findings of this study, in some way, can be enlightening and encouraging to them as they continue their journey as mixed-heritage families.

The overarching research question for this study is *what is the lived experience of being parents of mixed-heritage children*. The following questions will be further explored throughout this study:

- What is the lived experience of being parents of mixed-heritage children?
- What is most important to the parents as they raise their mixed-heritage children?

- How do the parent's unique personal background and characteristics influence their parenting approach and experience?
- How does the parents' cultural background influence their parenting approach?
- What parenting approach do the parents' use to raise or socialize their mixed-race children?
- How does the parent approach the differences in the parenting styles and practices?

In the next chapter, we will shift our attention to what the existing literature describe about the mixed-race phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past three decades, scholars have devoted a significant attention to exploring multiracial/ multicultural issues, especially since the concept of globalization has become more of a reality. Scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology, family studies and mental health realize that this multicultural phenomenon has created a complex, distinct scenario. As a result, the long-neglected issues relating to mixed- marriage and mixed-heritage children have been recognized as areas that deserve closer attention. Consequently, scholarly works and publications on these topics have begun to emerge. As both scholars and society have started to recognize the legitimacy of multiracialism and multiculturalism as fields of study, the increased understanding and growing tolerance of multiculturalism has continued to spread nationally and globally (Kenney, 2002; Root 1998). In spite of this, mixed-ethnic/mixed-race relations have not gone unchallenged. Obtaining the knowledge and the skills for living in this culturally- and racially-diverse environment has never been so vital as it is today. Although scholars have attempted to examine this topic from a variety of perspectives and academic disciplines, further exploration is still needed to paint a fuller picture of this intricate and fascinating phenomenon in today's changing society.

When the purpose of research is to produce a theory grounded in data, it is important that researchers keep their minds clear of preconceived ideas that can potentially compromise the integrity of their findings (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Yet, by the same token, it is also important that researchers are fully familiar with the area under study in order to avoid reinventing the wheel (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Therefore, in light of this, the purpose of this chapter is twofold:

first, to introduce the reader to the existing studies related to mixed-heritage children and families; and second, to familiarize the reader with the gaps in the literature about the topic. I also would like for the reader to note that the literature greatly emphasized the "racial" aspect of the culture rather than ethnicity. Although my study more emphasizes the "ethnic" and the "cross-national" aspect of the culture, I find the existing literature about race will provide an important basis and a panoramic view of this study.

Race as Social Construction

I find it important to start the review of literature with issue of race. There is no question that race can be a highly delicate and emotionally charged issue. It is still a disturbing topic in the United States as well as in many other nations in the world. History has recorded many unforgettable examples of extreme oppression of humanity based on racial and ethnic issues. For instance, the genocide of Native Americans, the Black slavery, the Germanic Nazi slaughter of the Jewish, the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Croatia, etc. All have portrayed vivid examples of events associated with race that have impacted the history of humankind. The problems around the issues of race and ethnicity continue to remain in the fabric of the U.S. and global society up to this very day. Although its manifestation may vary across the nations and the scale of malice may appear pale in comparison to the ones mentioned above, it is sufficient to say that racial issues are still present and often are at the root of relational hostilities in many societies, including the U.S. (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006).

Much confusion as to the difference between race and ethnicity often adds to the complexity in dealing with these matters. Some people use the terms "race" and "ethnicity" interchangeably, while others would define them differently. Fluehr-Lobban (2006) a distinguished professor of anthropology at Rhode Island College, defines ethnicity as the

“sociological expression of culture – it is derived from socially ascribed identity as well as self-identity” (p.17). In short, ethnicity is primarily about culture. It is about common heritage and shared identity, expressed by distinct customs including, beliefs, values, taboos, behaviors, dress, food and artistic products of a group of people passed on from one generation to another (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006; Young, 2004). Ethnicity is a complex concept. To learn one’s ethnicity, one is required to do more than just to look at one’s ‘skin color’ but to carefully discern and learn about one’s lifestyles and background (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006). In reference to race, Fluehr-Lobban (2006) defined it as “...[A] unique concept belonging in the history of ideas, the world of biology, and the realm of social science” (p.5). There was a misconception that suggests that one’s skin color was the determining factor of who one was. This misconception was supported by a simplistic idea that suggests that ‘what you need in order to ‘know’ someone is simply by looking at the color of one’s skin.’ In reality, race has a greater implication beyond than just a skin color. Fluehr-Lobban argued that race has actually never been *solely* about the physical features of human variation. Historically, race has been used both to *classify* and to *rank* human beings according to degree of superiority and inferiority, not only to describe outward physical appearance or phenotype essentially (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006).

The very notion of stereotypes, biologically-determined and the innate superiority/inferiority derived from one’s race, has received sharp criticism and has been mostly rejected, particularly after the world witnessed firsthand the horrible manifestation of Nazi supremacy ideology (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006). Yet, despite a wider society’s acknowledgment that race is nothing but the byproduct of social construction, the long-standing myths, negative beliefs and stereotypes based on race remain persistent (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006; Harrison, 1995). Understanding some of the historical background and the underlying myths and stereotypes

pertaining to race and ethnic issues, especially race-mixing, is a vital part of comprehending racially mixed children and their families. Their life experiences and the challenges they encounter affect them developmentally, psychologically, emotionally and relationally.

Historical Review

Mixed-race phenomenon is not a novel or recent concept. Wehrly, Kenney and Kenney (1999) noted that the relational intermixing among Native Americans was common long before the arrival of the Europeans and Africans. Jaimes (1995) argued, based on the research on “genetic markers” that the evidence of tribal mixing among Native Americans could have been dated back as early as pre-Columbian times. Therefore, there is nothing novel about mixed-race relations. What appears to be novel is the fact that there has been gradual softening and acceptance toward these types of phenomena and marriages, especially in the United States. This movement towards acceptance is the fruit of centuries of rigorous debate and the complicated process of battling racism and prejudice against mixed-race individuals and mixed-race marriages.

A key factor that inhibits the process of acceptance of multiculturalism or mixed relations, specifically in the United States, is rooted in the historical relationship between Blacks and Whites (Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999). The issues of superiority, economic and legal power, and privilege of Whites over Blacks throughout American history were the core issues underlying the inauguration of hypodescent (“one drop rule”) and antimiscegenation laws. The following information provides a brief summary and a glimpse of how past history has contributed to the understanding of the ongoing struggle of mixed-relations, especially involving race.

The years between 1660 and 1849 were considered a vital period that set the stage for the relations between the Whites and Blacks (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999). It was during this period of time that the antimiscegenation laws and the concept of hypodescency were conceived. The economic and legal system of American society at that time had focused essentially on how to seize control over Blacks and Native Americans as the groups of people who were considered to be most *different from* Whites. As Wehrly, Kenney and Kenney (1999) described, “There was a political need to create a myth of racial superiority and purity based on religious beliefs and this was used to lay the foundation for the intolerance of interracial mixing...”(p. 13). The *anti-miscegenation law*, that is the legal prohibition of interracial marriage, was only a tool used by the government to ensure the hierarchical and superior status of Whites and to sustain their *political and economical privileges* over African Americans and Native Americans (Frankenberg, 1995). Therefore, there was more to the prohibition of interracial marriages between White people and people of other races than just the opposition to sexual relations between them. As Pascoe (1991) described, the prohibition of mixed marriage was essentially intended to prevent the people of other color, especially Black men, to gain a right of entry to the White society power base. Nevertheless, in spite of the establishment of the antimiscegenation laws, mixed marriages among Africans, Europeans and Native Americans continued to take place.

It was not until the era of slavery that the concept of racial identity began to emerge. Although the institution of slavery was grounded on a White ideology of racial separation and an absolute social prohibition of mixed-race union, the era of slavery, in actuality, brought the Whites and Blacks into closer physical proximity (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Consequently, interracial sexual relations between White male slave owners and Black female

slaves were almost an inevitable phenomenon. Even though the nature of the majority of interracial unions between White slave owners and their Black female slaves was rather exploitative, this strictly forbidden practice was occurring on a regular basis, in spite of social prohibition against interracial marriage (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). The mixed-race union produced a mixed-race child or *mulatto*, who was considered a disgrace and a threat to the “ideological logic of the slave system” (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002, p. 5). Due to their ambiguous status and phenotype, some mullattos were tolerated and given more privilege than their monoracial counterparts (Davis, 1991). As the number of mulattos grew, and the sexual unions between mulatto and unmixed Black slaves were continuously occurring, a “whitened” Black population developed (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). It was noted that, by the end of slavery, there was a full continuum of physical traits of Black people ranging from Black to White (Davis, 1991).

With an increased need for Black slaves, the White ruling class needed a system to organize and separate those who were “free” and “slave”; it was during this period that skin color was primarily used as a determinant of one’s designation (Spickard, 1989). To simplify this categorization process and to reinforce the prohibition of unions between Black men and White women, legal statutes of the “one drop rule” or “hypodescent” were enacted. This one-drop rule mandated that any drop of Black blood in the mixed marital union between Black and White would downgrade a mixed-race child to the racial group of the lower-status parent (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Although a mixed-race child was almost automatically relegated to slave status, light-skinned mulattos were frequently given special privileges (Berlin, 1975). Some of the privileges granted to the light-skinned mulatto included work in the master’s house, education, trading skills, and access to White culture (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002).

In some regions, such as Charleston and New Orleans, free mulattos successfully connected themselves socially with Whites. This added advantage often allowed the mulattos to serve as a buffer between Whites and Blacks (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002).

This unique relationship between the mulattos and Whites started to deteriorate as the Civil War approached. As the Whites became increasingly defensive of slavery, and the sense of alienation, distrust and hostility towards Whites arose, the mulattos gradually shifted their alignment, as well as their sense of identity, significantly toward Blacks during the war (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). At the conclusion of the Civil War, the concept of the one-drop rule was tacitly accepted by both groups. There was a full agreement between Whites and Blacks that the one-drop rule was an inevitable reality. As Whites perceived mulattos more as enemies, due to their intimate alignment with their Black fellows, mulattos also began to solidify their racial identity as part of the Black race (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002).

Apart from the Black and the mulatto group, immigrants were the other significant group that contributed to the complexity of mixed-race relations in America. Wehrly, Kenney and Kenney (1999) noted that, with the exception of African slaves, between 1660 and 1849, immigration was still primarily a European experience. However, as the American political and economic interest continuously moved toward the west, immigrant laborers were in a great demand for mining and railway development (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999). Waves of immigrants, who contributed to the multi-racial and multi-ethnic mix, such as, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and Filipinos, gradually entered the United States and made it their home. As these waves of immigrants arrived and cross-national marriages became more commonplace, White Americans became even more cautious concerning these increasing cross-ethnic/national unions. Built on the philosophies that emphasized the White superiority and denied the

legitimacy of multiracialism, during the period of 1850 to 1919, state legislatures added “all other non-White” people to the existing anti-miscegenation laws and made it practically impossible for anyone whose ancestry was non-White to assume a White identity or ever to be considered as White (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999). This led to the further evolution of anti-miscegenation laws, which included all non-White people. Around this time, the concept of monoracial identity began to take effect. The “hybrid” option of racial identity was no longer an alternative. Racial identity was simplified to an “either/or” concept or the two extreme poles - “pure” or “impure” (Nakashima, 1992; Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999). There were all kinds of laws enacted during the period of 1850 to 1919. In 1905, for example, a California law declared that existing interracial and cross-national marriages were void. Black-White marriages were considered as a criminal act and deserved sentences in a form of fine (up to \$1000) and prison time for 10 years or more (Spickard, 1989). Although many of the northern states abolished the anti-miscegenation law after the Civil War, laws against miscegenation remained in force in the West and South of the United States through much of the twentieth century (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999).

The years 1920 to 1967 were considered to be “a time of invisibility and quiet change” (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999, p. 20). Both the state and federal governments continued working on refining the hypodescent and antimiscegenation laws. “The White legal system had achieved its goals of constructing the concept of “racial purity” and, therefore, clearly distinguished the “superior” from the “inferior” (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999, p. 20). As the Americans adopted and celebrated the monoracial identity, interracial marriages decreased and multi-heritage people, who claimed to have a multiracial/ethnic identity, shied away and were becoming invisible. The only option that multi-heritage people had was to identify

themselves with the people of color (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999). As bleak as this situation was for the mixed-racial people, this era (1920 to 1967) marked a significant new start of multiracialism in the United States, manifested by the unification and growth of the pride of the people of color (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999). From this point on, the emancipation of multiracialism continued to evolve despite adversity. The United States of America today is not the same as it was three decades ago. The number of not only mixed-race, but also and cross-national marriages has exponentially increased in America. Yet, to declare that U.S. society has fully freed itself from the misconceptions – the myths and stereotypes - of mixed-race or mixed-ethnic relations is to err. The myths and stereotypes of mixed-race/ethnic unions and the fruits of those unions are still very much alive in the fabric of the U.S. society.

Myths and Stereotypes on Mixed-Race Unions and Individuals

In a general sense, it is reasonable to expect, even today, that one could encounter racial and cultural stereotypes throughout the world. Nash (1992) stated, “We either buy into them and live with their insidious effects or stand up to them and risk the wrath of those who benefit from them” (p. 330). Mixed-heritage couples and individuals often have to encounter this ongoing internal and external battle and many of them must summon their courage to face these racial and cultural myths and stereotypes. The myths and stereotypes of mixed-unions and individuals often include both psychological and sexual aspects (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999).

On the Mixed-Race Couple

Spickard (1989) noted some underlying psychological themes that have frequently been used to support the idea that mixed marriages are essentially pathological. Some of those myths and stereotypes go as far as suggesting the abnormality in thinking or behavior of either or both

partners of the mixed-race couple. Other themes suggest that those who choose to intermarry must have one or more of the following unhealthy motives: rebellious attitude toward family, racial self-hatred, or passion for the exotic (Spickard, 1989). In addition to these myths, Nakashima (1992) also noted that there were misconceptions that inferred that “people of color who marry Whites are trying to ‘raise’ themselves economically, socially, and racially; intermarriage and multi-heritage people represent the loss or the ‘dilution’ of distinct ethnic and racial groups; and mixed-people and their families have dubious political and social loyalties” (p. 162).

Spickard (1989) also reported gender and sexual stereotypes related to the mixed-relations. Whites often view Black women “as unnaturally passionate, attractive, easily exploitable sex objects and possessing exceptional sexual capabilities and enthusiasm” (Spickard, 1989, p. 238). Asian women often are perceived as “exotic, erotic creatures able to please men in special ways” (Spickard, 1989, p. 40). There seems to be an underlying viewpoint that suggests that sexual behaviors of people of color are more “excessive, animalistic or exotic,” as compared to more “restrained or ‘civilized’ sexuality of White women and men” (Frankenberg, 1995, p. 75). However, it is noteworthy that studies with these conclusions have been critically questioned and their scientific validity has been challenged (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999).

On the Mixed Race Individual

There seems to be a persistent belief suggesting that it is “unnatural to mix the races” and “that intermarriage ‘lowers’ the biological superiority of the White race” (Nakashima, 1992, p. 165). These myths and stereotypes suggest that the biological disharmony tied to the sociocultural ambiguity as result of race mixing will only cause the mixed-race individuals to be

marginalized and outcast (Nakashima, 1992). As Nakashima (1992) articulated, “a multiracial person was doomed to a life of conflicting cultures and unfulfilled desires to be one or the other” (p. 165).

Regardless of the persistent and commonly accepted stereotypes that suggest multiracial people as being physically beautiful and attractive, mixed-race individuals are often stereotypically identified as “sexually immoral and out of control” (Nakashima, 1992, p. 168). Myths and stereotypes seem to perpetually suggest that as the offspring of an “immoral” union, mixed-race offspring can be reasonably expected to inherit the sexual immorality as well as psychological abnormality of their parents (Wehrly, Kenney & Kenney, 1999).

It is obvious that these stereotypes might find their foundation in the White race’s power, privilege, and supremacy ideology of the past. As societies have become more accepting of the notion of diversity and equality and move closer toward embracing multi-heritage realities, there is a likelihood that these myths and stereotypes are fading away. Yet, none seems to have the ultimate answer as to how the society at large deals with these stereotypes and to what extent these myths and stereotypes affect today’s mixed-race individuals and their family life experience.

The results of research studies that seek to determine if there actually is a significant difference in the mixed-race individuals’ psychosocial adjustment and family relationships, as compared to their monoracial peers, are varied. There are studies reporting that there was no significant difference identified in those areas. The work of Nishimura and Bol (1997), for example, found that, according to the school counselor’s report (78%), the majority of biracial students experience the *same* behavioral problems experienced by other students. Their study indicated that only 17% of the school counselors responded that biracial children exhibited *more*

behavioral problems. While there are other studies supporting the notion that mixed-race individuals are able to successfully adjust to their intricate multiracial experience, nonetheless, studies also showed that they *do* encounter unique challenges, which many of their monoracial counterparts would never have to experience (Bracey, Bámaca, & Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Gibbs, 1998; Nishimura & Bol, 1997; Phillips, 2004; Williams, 1999).

Mixed Race Experience

“*What are you?*” is most likely a question that many biracial individuals often encounter at some point in their social interactions with others. No matter how sincerely and sensitively this question is presented, it conveys a message to the biracial individuals that they are ‘different’ from others. Although being different does not always necessarily mean bad, racial difference unfortunately seems to have an inevitable negative repercussion. It is irrefutable that the geographical and demographic context in which one lives is an important factor in how one understands and makes meaning out of his or her racial ‘different-ness’ as well as how one’s racial difference is perceived, accepted, or rejected. In a country where race is an influential factor in how an individual is perceived, biracial individuals who live in the United States are likely to encounter a complex life experience (Nishimura & Bol, 1997). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that there is a variation in levels of tension and difficulty associated with being a biracial or mixed-racial individual. Studies indicated that there are numerous variables in the ecosystem that need to be taken into consideration in order to fully understand biracial individuals’ life experience and their quality of life (Phillips, 2004; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005).

In the U.S., over the past decades, there has been an indication of growing awareness in the field of social science of the need to further explore the issues related to biracial or

multicultural identities and realities (Gibbs, 1998). This increased awareness primarily stemmed from the shocking realization that biracial children and adolescents are, in fact, the fastest growing group in the U.S. population. The U.S. 2000 Census documented that 42% of people who reported having more than one racial background were younger than 18 years old (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Challenges Faced by Biracial Individuals

Mixed-heritage people are often expected to experience confusion about their racial or ethnic identity that may lead to the development of emotional problems, such as low-self-esteem, and a variety of other psychological or behavioral problems (Gibbs, 1987; Rockquemore & Brunson, 2004). Several studies have looked at biracial adolescents and self-esteem (Brown, 2001; Cauce, Hiraga, Mason, Aguilar, Ordonez & Gonzales, 1992; Chang, 1974; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996). It is important to note that the results of research studies have been divergent and inconclusive as to the correlation between being biracial and self-esteem. Some of these findings suggested that biracial adolescents tended to have higher self-esteem than their monoracial peers, while others discovered lower self-esteem or no significant differences at all. For example, in a recent study utilizing a large representative sample, Bracey et al. (2004) discovered significant differences between biracial and monoracial adolescents in regard to their self-esteem. From their findings, they concluded that biracial adolescents had significantly lower self-esteem than Black adolescents and, yet, when it compares to the Asian adolescents, they had significantly higher self-esteem.

Drawing from the data set of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Udry, 1998), an enormously rich data base that provides documentation of the impact of social environment on adolescents' physical and mental health, Milan & Keiley (2000) found that

biracial adolescents were more vulnerable to psychological dysfunction. Their studies specifically identified that biracial adolescents tended to demonstrate a higher risk of developing delinquency, school-related problems, depression, somatization, and problems associated with self-worth than their monoracial counterparts (Milan & Keiley, 2000). As result of this maladaptive functioning, biracial adolescents were the most likely to be receiving some form of professional mental health services. Typical clinical issues presented in therapy include identity confusion, self-hatred, suicide, substance abuse, alienation, self-denial, gender identity confusion, issues related to guilt and disloyalty (Gibbs, 1987). Seventeen percent of biracial adolescents in Milan & Keiley's (2000) study were identified as receiving psychological intervention, as opposed to 13% of non-White monoracial and 10% of White counterparts.

It is not uncommon that some biracial individuals tend to equate their racial differences with being inferior, as a result of their perceived 'marginal status' (Nakashima, 1992). Biracial individuals might believe that they are not 'just different' but also rather "incomplete, impure or worthless". The societal racism often causes a greater disempowerment in biracial individuals by triggering the feelings of fear and shame, causing them to feel that they are not as entitled as a "full-blooded" individual (Fukuyama, 1999, p.14). The humiliating experience of being labeled with offensive terms, such as *banana*, *mulatto*, *oreo*, *coconut*, *exotic*, and *half-and-half*, only heightens the internal tug-of-war, which exacerbates the feelings of inferiority. Biracial individuals may go through the experience of being scrutinized by their peers (e.g., some would consider them to be "not Black enough"), while other people would attempt to dictate and define their existence by suggesting how they should think, feel, talk and act (Williams, 1999). A sense of not being able to neatly fit with one or more racial backgrounds could cause biracial individuals to feel as though they are "nothing" (Williams, 1999). Studies involving 120 school

counselors in an urban school district in the midsouthern area of the United States, showed that biracial students faced greater difficulty with peer acceptance than their monoracial counterparts (Nishimura & Bol, 1997).

As the exploration of this biracial phenomenon continues to grow and literature begins to portray the unique challenges that biracial individuals must encounter, scholars particularly recognize distinct experience of biracial females. In recent years scholars started to give a closer attention to this topic.

Specific Challenges Faced By Biracial Females

There is a general assumption that suggests that biracial females would likely encounter greater challenges and be in “a position of double jeopardy” especially given the “racist and sexist historical, political, economical and social institutions that underlie American society” (Nishimura, 2004). Issues related to social exclusion and rejection often are the real concerns of many biracial females, especially those who are undergoing adolescence (Gibbs, 1998; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993). The needs to “fit in” and to “feel good” about themselves are often the two key concerns of many adolescent females universally (Phillips, 2004). Given their unique circumstances, biracial adolescent females are often perceived to face unique obstacles to feeling accepted by their peers.

Physical appearance has been noted as one of the most salient factors when it comes to the experience of being a biracial female (Kenney, 2002). Studies on adolescent self-esteem show that there is a significant correlation between adolescent girls’ physical self-esteem and their overall self-esteem (Harter, 1990). Biracial women’s own perceptions of their physical attractiveness might also significantly impact not only their overall self-esteem but also their behavioral choices in social relationships with others (Phillips, 2004). Biracial women, who

perceive their physical appearance as marginal with regard to societal established beauty, may have the tendency to gain the acceptance of others by agreeing to conform to racialized sexual stereotypes. As described earlier, a common stereotype associated with biracial women often include being “exotic, sexual, passionate, immoral and promiscuous” (Nakashima, 1992; Root, 1994 as cited in Lee, 2004). Lee (2004) argued that “[I]t is likely that sexual activity is part of the life of more than one out of every two biracial teenage girls” (p. 206). Some biracial women compromise their personal lifestyles and values by becoming involved in risky behavior, such as engaging in frequent sexual activity and/or substance abuse in order to gain the acceptance of her peer group (Phillips, 2004).

Rockquemore (2002) stated, “For mixed-race women, issues surrounding appearances and identity are magnified (p. 489).” For biracial females, their distinct physical features (e.g., skin complexion, hair texture, unique facial and body features) may have both positive and negative repercussions on their social relationships with others (Robert-Clarke, Roberts, & Morokoff, 2004). Physical features can be both an asset as well as a source of confusion (Nishimura, 2004). It has been a widely accepted notion that white or lighter skin complexion is the standard of attractiveness and beauty in the United States. Lighter skinned individuals often portray an image of success involving personal power (Lakoff & Scherr, 1984), higher educational attainment and personal income (Hunter, 1998). Bond and Cash (1992) discovered that Black women are fully aware that lighter-skinned Black women are more desirable and more highly preferred by the Black men as soul mates. Therefore, it is not uncommon for biracial females, who come from the mix of Black and White heritage, especially those with lighter skin complexion, to feel racially-torn and socially scrutinized by both groups. Biracial females who have a lighter skin tone, embrace their White heritage, and live in White community often face

criticism by their Black fellow for “thinking they are better because of the way they look” (Streeter, 1996, p. 319). On the other hand, biracial women who have a lighter skin tone and yet embrace their Black heritage will often still being perceived as not “fully” Black. “Light-skinned women, aware of unearned privileges, experience resentment, distrust and rejection of other Blacks and may even feel their sense of group belonging threatened” (Rockquemore, 2002, p. 489). Such circumstances put many biracial women in a tight bind where they often feel lost and excluded by the peer group of both of their racial heritages. Given the paucity in information, I question the relevance of the same conclusions being drawn for women of non-black/white racial backgrounds. Would lighter skin still be a preference or would darker skin pose a problem for those whose heritage is mixed between Korean and Middle Easterners? Would phenotype be intimately linked to one’s racial identity as it does to mixed-race relations between the Black/White populations? This subject needs to be studied more fully.

Issues related to dating and romantic relationships are also the recurrent themes in the studies of biracial females. Scholars noted both negative and positive aspects of dating as a biracial female (Phillips, 2004; Roberts-Clarke et al., 2004). Some biracial adolescent girls feel that their dating choices are limited to only adolescent boys of color (Gibbs & Moscovitz-Sweet, 1991). Others believe that certain individuals might not even want, consider, nor accept them as potential dating partners, simply due to their biracial status (Robert-Clarke et al., 2004). However, the literature shows that biracial women perceive and experience their dating or romantic relationship very differently from their male counterparts. Some biracial women see their biraciality as an asset and express pride in it. For them, being a biracial woman in a romantic relationship gives them an additional advantage because of their ability to embrace wider perspectives, cultural diversity and experience, which not only benefit themselves but also

their future children (Roberts-Clarke et al., 2004). In their qualitative analysis study of the dating experiences of biracial women, Robert-Clarke et al. (2004) indicated that some biracial women believed that they are attractive to some potential romantic partners simply due to their unique dual or mixed-heritage. Although there seems diverse responses and perspectives in regard to the biracial women's experience on romantic relationships, Robert-Clarke et al. (2004) found it noteworthy that biracial women seemed to identify more positive facets of being biracial than negative ones in the context of romantic relationships.

Regardless of their gender, mixed-heritage individuals encounter developmental challenges like their mono-heritage counterparts. However, it is common knowledge that mixed-race individuals may struggle with an additional developmental challenges, which often force them to re-evaluate their racial identity (Nishimura & Bol, 1997). Many mixed-heritage children feel torn and forced to make a single declaration of their racial or ethnic identity (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Lee, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995). The fluidity and ambiguity of their socialization experience and cultural membership make it hard for them to navigate the developmental process both in and outside of the family context.

Biracial Identity

Topics related to racial identity of biracial individuals have been the center focus of many studies in the recent decade (Tizard & Phoenix, 1995). Universally, psychologists, mental health professionals, and child development experts concur that the establishment of strong, positive and healthy self-identity is a fundamental task that each individual must accomplish in order to possess a stable, secure, and high level of self-esteem. As mentioned above, it is reasonable to anticipate that biracial individuals will struggle with similar challenges associated with identity development as do their monoracial counterparts. However, it is also noteworthy that biracial or

multiracial individuals are most likely to encounter more complex challenges in forming a healthy sense of identity (Nakazawa, 2003; Morrison & Bordere, 2001). Those complex challenges often are the result of not only having to face the normal obstacles required to establish an identity, but also the fact that biracial individuals must successfully negotiate the intricacies of dealing with more than one race and social group (Herman, 2004; Nishimura & Bol, 1997; Tefera, 2005).

Numerous studies have emphasized that a healthy sense of identity is fundamental to one's psychological well-being (Erikson, 1968; Rosenthal, 1987). It is through their sense of identity that individuals understand their sense of self and are able to make sense of their life experiences, which are acquired primarily through social interaction (Herman, 2004). This process begins in early childhood when they begin to actively explore themselves and their identity by comparing themselves to their parents and peers. Children as young as three or four years old were found to have started developing self-recognition (Morrison & Bordere, 2001) and a sense of ethnic and racial identity (Katz, 1987). Developmental scholars assert that identity development is a process that continues throughout life (Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1966; Piaget, 1954). This process of identity development is multifaceted and is complex. The factors that significantly influence one's identity formation include family and social environment, gender, class, personality characteristic, and ethnic and racial group membership (Rosenthal, 1987). It is suggested that a person has successfully reached a firm identity when he or she is able to develop a sense of autonomy from their parents, to foster the capacity to relate with others who are both different and similar to themselves, and to form a sense of uniqueness as an individual by comparing and differentiating themselves from others (Erikson, 1966 as cited in Herman, 2004).

In his classic *hierarchy of needs* theory, Maslow (1943, 1970) proposed that the need for love, affection and belonging is one of the five fundamental needs that human beings must satisfy. He believed that, in order to experience love and affection, people must find their place in their group where the exchange of love, affection and sense of belonging takes place. Maslow (1943, 1970) also suggested the importance of self-esteem as another vital need. According to him, each human being desires to have a stable, high level of self-respect, as well as respect from others. He maintained that one's self-esteem is essentially built on the quality of this experience of love, affection and sense of belonging. An individual nurtures and increases his or her self-esteem, not only through accomplishment but also through obtaining the sense of recognition, importance, and appreciation from other people. Maslow (1943, 1970) argued that these basic needs are essential. Thwarting these needs causes maladjustment and severe psychopathology in an individual. In the context of members of minority groups, especially those who experience marginalization, such as mixed-race individuals, these fundamental needs to belong and be esteemed are more significant. Given the challenges of societal racism, sense of "isolation" and scrutiny at all different levels, the mixed-race people's success in discovering their sense of belonging has powerful impact on how they can survive and thrive in life.

When it comes to matters related to identity among biracial or mixed-race individuals, it is important to understand the individual's ethnic, racial and biracial (or multiracial) identity. The following section will discuss these concepts and distinctions among ethnic identity, racial identity and integrated identity, and how they contribute to the overall identity formation for the biracial or mixed-race individuals.

Ethnic Identity

There seems to be unanimity among social scientists that ethnic identity is essential to one's self-concept and psychological functioning (Phinney, 1990). Sometimes, however, there is confusion in defining the difference between ethnic identity and racial identity. As inseparable as ethnic and racial identity may seem, I think it is important to isolate their subtle differences in concept and definition. Herman (2004) defined *ethnic identity* as "the strength or importance of one's identification with a particular culture" (p. 732). Phinney and Chavira (1992) voiced a similar definition, suggesting that ethnic identity is "a secure commitment to one's group, based on knowledge and understanding obtained through an active participation of one's cultural background (p. 272)." This concept of ethnic identity is dynamic, fluid and multifaceted, since it requires more than just a simple understanding of one's cultural idiosyncratic beliefs, rituals, customs, norms, symbols and lifestyles. It is possible that a person can identify him or herself with more than one ethnic identity (Herman, 2004). For example, individuals who, were raised for many years in a foreign country where people were allowed to designate their biracial identity, may have the capacity to acknowledge their dual ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is often perceived as having a 'physiological' component, such as skin complexion and facial features. Societal stereotypes may suggest that, if one has a curly hair or darker skin color, he or she may have an African American ethnic heritage. Although this fact might be true to a certain extent, it is important to recognize that physiological factors do not determine one's ethnic identity.

Phinney (1990) believed that ethnic identity is comprised of three basic components: self-identification, sense of belonging, and attitudes towards one's ethnic group. In order to successfully achieve an ethnic identity, an individual is required to begin with exploration of his or her cultural heritage(s), and to then define an ethnic self-identification or "label" for himself

or herself (Phinney, 1990, p.503). A sense of belonging is the second component of ethnic identity that can be fostered through developing an attachment to one's ethnic group and realizing the distinctions from other cultural groups (Phinney, 1990). One's attitudes or feelings toward his or her group are the third facet of ethnic identity. Positive attitudes or feelings are demonstrated through the sense of acceptance, pride, and contentment about one's ethnic heritage (Phinney, 1990). The congruence of these three components are important to the stability of one's ethnic identity. Those who feel they belong to and have positive feelings towards their ethnic heritage seem to be more embracing and celebratory of their ethnic identity than those who face the incongruence of these three components (Phinney, 1990).

The importance of having a solid sense of ethnic identity is well-supported in literature. Since ethnic identity meets basic human needs, as Maslow (1943, 1970) proposed, it is perceived to be a salient factor that leads to the enhancement of one's emotional and psychological well-being (Bracey et al., 2004). Martinez and Dukes (1997) reported that ethnic identity does not only positively influence one's global self-esteem, but also one's academic self-confidence and the overall purpose in life. In their studies, they found that the higher one's ethnic identity score, the higher the scores on those other facets as well (Martinez & Dukes, 1997). Literature also notes other perceived benefits of having a strong ethnic identity. Those include providing a buffer against the effects of racism and societal stereotypes (Martinez & Dukes, 1997). Martinez and Dukes (1997) suggested that those who have a strong sense of ethnic identity are less likely to internalize negative societal stereotypes of their ethnic group that may degrade their self-esteem and self-confidence. People who have not yet fully explored or developed a strong sense of ethnic identity, as we often find in many youths and adolescents, may encounter difficulty in finding meaning in their ethnicity or their lives in general (Martinez & Dukes, 1997). Given the

rationality mentioned above, social scientists believe that it is essential for individuals, especially mixed-race people, not only to have an increased awareness of their ‘unique’ ethnic identity, but also to navigate through the complexity of the multidimensionality of their ethnic heritage in order to experience greater fulfillment and optimal well-being in their lives.

Racial Identity

People often find that their claimed racial identity provides a template for who they are as individuals and how they live in the society. They claim that their motivation and the meaning of their lives are profoundly connected, inspired, and shaped by their racial identity. Therefore, it is obvious that racial identity is also an essential factor in one’s psychosocial development and overall life quality.

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, race is essentially socially constructed. Wijeyesinghe (2001) referred it as “[S]ocially constructed concepts that divide the human population into subgroups based on real or perceived differences in such things as physical appearance or place of ancestral origin” (p.130).” This concept is often based on the “sociopolitical model of oppression” (Yeh & Hwang, 2000, p. 422). If race is socially constructed, so is racial identity. Hill and Thomas (2000) stated that “racial identity refers to a person’s identifying or not identifying with the racial group of his or her racial categorization” (p. 193).

Over several decades, studies on the biracial or mixed-race phenomenon have made the issue of identity development their prime focus. Implicit in those studies is the concept that developing a *fixed* or *stable identity* is fundamental (Herman, 2004). Herman (2004) argued that this notion of a fixed identity in the context of the biracial or mixed-race phenomenon might not be as relevant as it is in other contexts, such as gender identity development or monoracial

identity development. Jacobs (1992) argues that there should be more *fluidity* in how one approaches identity development in the context of biracial or mixed-race identity. A fluid approach to mixed-race identity is considered essential because it provides room for the mixed-race individuals to further explore, understand, and make meaning out of their complex multiracial identity as they mature developmentally, emotionally, psychologically and socially. The existing literature noted how a sense of identity of mixed-race children tends to evolve with their developmental phases, as well as their surrounding contexts (Herman, 2004; Kenney, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004).

Research on racial identity among multiracial people has evolved dramatically over the past several decades (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). In the early decades of research on the topic of biracial or interracial marriages, which predominantly was between Black and White, the offspring of Black-White unions automatically adopted Black identity. Thus, racial identity was not a “negotiable reality” (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). Since assuming Black identity was considered as the healthy ideal, those mixed-race individuals who failed to achieve Black identity, both socially and psychologically, were considered as tragic and directed to seek counseling services (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004).

In more recent decades, as Rockquemore and Brunsma (2004) stated, “the pendulum has swung in the opposite (albeit no less essentialist) direction” (p. 86). Contemporary researchers (see Gibbs, 1989; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) on this subject point towards the direction of the development of ‘biracial’ or ‘integrative’ identity as the new trend of “psychological ideal” (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004, p.88). Biracial or integrative identity, in this context, specifically means the capacity to *combine* all the racial backgrounds (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). The effect of this new research position on biracial identity inevitably pushes

the concept toward another extreme by generating a new single-and-correct racial category called ‘biracial’. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002, 2004) argued that researchers and counselors attempt to invent or prescribe a ‘singular-and-correct’ racial identity for mixed-race individuals which undermines the complex reality of multiracial/multiethnic existence. This poses a problem because it conveys an implicit message that it is pathological if a person does not fully embrace ‘both’ or ‘all’ aspects of their racial or ethnic heritage within one labeled category.

With the changing nature of interracial relations in the United States, as manifested by the decline of structural barriers among racial groups and the ever-increasing numbers of intercultural and cross-national marriages, multiracial people must make a variety of choices about their racial identity (Rockquemore, 2002). Since a single dimension of racial categorization does not seem to adequately capture the depth or the essence of a mixed-race individual’s experience, multidimensional perspectives and systemic understanding of the development of biracial identity are needed.

Multidimensionality of Biracial Identity

There seems to be an implicit assumption suggesting that there is a “correct” identification for mixed-race individuals. In reality, to restrict mixed-race individuals to a single category is to deny their integral multidimensional reality. Williams (1999) argues that the dichotomous “*either/or*” approach to racial identity fails to fully describe the complex experiences of multicultural children by forcing them to fit into a simplistic paradigm. Therefore, she maintains that the simultaneous approach to mixed-racial identification, the “*both/and*”, is not only possible but also necessary in order to reconcile the intricacy of mixed-race identities. As much as this integrative and inclusive approach seems to correct the monolithic

understanding of mixed-racial identity, nonetheless, this “both/and” approach itself seems to lack authenticity in portraying the broader spectrum of mixed-racial identities.

In their qualitative study of 177 biracial individuals, Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2004) were able to construct a more comprehensive understanding of mixed-racial identity. In their findings, the authors discovered that there are at least four racial identity options with which mixed-race individuals tend to identify themselves: a *singular identity*, a *border identity*, a *protean identity* and a *transcendent identity*. Mixed-race individuals who choose a *singular identity* identify themselves exclusively with only one of their racial backgrounds. “For these individuals, biracialism refers exclusively to their ancestry yet has no meaning whatsoever to their personal self-understanding” (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004, p. 90). This option now has become more accessible, especially for those who ‘pass as White’, as the one-drop rule has gradually been losing its power in the society. The *border identity* refers to mixed-race people who describe their racial identity as “neither exclusively Black nor White, but as a blending of the two” (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004, p. 91). Contemporary scholars (see Root, 1996; Daniel, 1996) often refer to this specific category as a ‘biracial’ or ‘blended’ identity. Mixed-race individuals, who choose this type of identity, tend to resist the dichotomization and hierarchical valuation of racial differences and often perceive their racial identity as the “new hybrid category of social identity” (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004, p. 91).

Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2004) also discovered a group of mixed-race individuals who described their racial identity as a fluid state called *protean identity*. These mixed-race individuals feel that their racial identity is constantly shifting and highly influenced by the given contexts in which they are embedded. The benefit of assuming this type of identity is that the individuals not only have the ability to “reference themselves simultaneously,” but also to

function as “an insider” within their multiple racial contexts (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004, p. 92). For example, a racially mixed, Black-White individual, who grew up in all-white neighborhood and attended predominantly white private schools, may be accepted within the white society’s educational system but can also maintain a closed-knitted relationship with his or her extended Black family. These types of individuals tend to feel comfortable with their dual heritages and pride in their capacity to shift their racial identity as the situation demands. Often, the term ‘integrative identity’ is also used to classify this population.

The last category is called the *transcendent identity*. Mixed-race people, who fall into this category, typically are the ones who refuse to be rigidly defined by the existing racial categorization system (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004). As a result, they *consciously* choose to deny and disregard the concept of racial identity altogether. There was an initial assumption that individuals, who choose this type of self-understanding, simply succumb to the superficial “color-blind” ideology, which is the lack of awareness and experience of how racial stratification might be able to negatively influences one’s life experience (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004). This assumption was generated by one of the studies that showed that the white-appearing, mixed-race persons often tended to choose a “color-blind” identity in order to reduce cognitive dissonance (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004). However, a follow-up study on this topic reconceptualized those assumptions, suggesting that these transcendent mixed-race individuals were actually not immune to negative experiences nor did they have a color-blind mentality (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004). In addition, Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2004) also noted that there is a full spectrum of physical appearance of mixed-race individuals, ranging from dramatically specific features to few racially specific characteristics, who claim themselves as transcendent racially. Although some would call it a “denial,” by assuming this ‘stranger’s

perspective' to race, these racially transcendent mixed-race individuals prevent themselves from being hurt emotionally by focusing on other characteristics of their identity which are not specifically connected to their racial characteristics. Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2004) stated, "this lack of a racialized self-understanding meant there simply were no feelings to be hurt, no adjustment to be made, and no racial identity to validate or contest in daily social interaction"(p. 73).

The Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2004)'s study above shows that there are a variety of racial identity options that mixed-raced individuals can adopt. Eventually, it all seems a matter of personal choice. However, the important question to raise is whether one would essentially need to be "biracial" or to fully achieve the protean identity (integrative) in order to experience the full benefits of being a mixed-race individual. Could one just simply choose a singular or transcendent racial identity and still be a healthy and well-adjusted mixed-race individual? Rockquemore & Laszloffy (2005) asserted that the mixed-race individual's process of coming to terms with accepting the fundamental reality of their mixed-race ancestry is much more important than the actual choice of their racial identity.

In addition, Rockquemore & Brunnsma (2004, 2006) also pointed out that social validation deserves greater attention in the study of the development of a healthy and secure racial identity of mixed-race individual. Identity development is not an isolated process. Quoting Stone (1962), Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2004) stated that "racial identity development relies on the social psychological process of validation, because identities are interactionally validated self-understandings" (p. 93). Mixed-race people understand and construct their racial identity as they are influenced by the cultural norms and social interactions in which they are embedded. Social validation, whether from the friends, family members or community, plays a profound role in the

construction and maintenance of multicultural identity, which consequently shapes one's sense of self-concept (Gibbs, 1998; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2004). In their study, Rockquemore & Brunnsma (2004) illustrated that Black-White individuals, whose biracial identity is repeatedly invalidated by their Black fellows, reported feeling closer to white friends who accepted and validated their biraciality. Therefore, the racial identity choices that mixed-race individuals make are greatly influenced by the degree of validation they receive (or fail to receive) from their social environments (Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2004). Researchers discovered that those individuals, whose mixed-race identity remains unvalidated socially, are often found to be among the clinical samples (Bowles, 1993; Gibbs, 1998).

Advantages of Being a Mixed Race Individual

Many studies on biracial issues tend to overemphasize the negative aspects or experiences of being a mixed-race individual. As it can be easily found in literature, biracial individuals are often pathologized as 'confused' or have a deep-seated identity problems, primarily due to the complexity of their multiple backgrounds (Helms, 1995). I personally believe that it is important to have a balanced and comprehensive view of this phenomenon in order to understand its reality.

Some empirical studies, (Hall, 1980, Herman, 1970 as cited in Poston, 1990; Nash, 1995; Nakazawa, 2003) in fact, noted the advantages of being biracial or mixed- race. Some of those advantages include having a higher level of self-esteem, due to an increased sense of uniqueness, having the abilities to bridge cultures and to enjoy the best of both worlds, and being more open-minded, welcoming and sensitive to other people (Brown, 2001; Chang, 1974; Gibbs & Hines, 1992; Ross, 1996; Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999). Nash (1995) reported that biracial

children, who were successfully raised to truly embrace their biracial identities, were found to be happier than their monoracial peers.

Not all mixed-heritage children and individuals are necessarily the candidates for a ‘clinical sample’ nor are they socially or psychologically disturbed. Some mixed-heritage children and individuals appear to have the capacity to soar above the challenges related to their unique mixed-race/ethnic realities and blossom into well functioning, confident and competent individuals. Often I found it intriguing to learn what factors caused these differences to emerge in the mixed-race individuals who fall into the clinical category and those who are psychologically and emotionally well adjusted and secure. My natural reaction to this quandary often is: What did their parents do that contributed to their well-being as mixed-heritage individuals?

On Parenting

There is a host of scholarly literature on the topic of parenting. It is both common, as well as scientific, knowledge that parents hold an important role in the development and well being of their children (Belsky, 1984). Parents, who have wrestled with the task of parenting, know full well that parenting does not only have one “color.” Parenting practices and behaviors are varied and are distinct to each parental unit. Each parent has unique ingredients to add flavor to his or her parenting experiences. As true as it is, however, there also seems to be a universal objective about parenting that all parents of both monoracial/ethnic and multiracial/ethnic children share in common: to do their best to prepare their children for life. Levine (1988) proposed a distinction between what parents want *for* their children and what they want *from* their children. It is argued that, although the latter is diverse and more culturally-specific, the former is universal. Those universal objectives that parents want for their children may include survival and health, the

acquisition of economic capabilities, and the attainment of cultural values are locally prevalent (Levine, 1988). Thus, in order to accomplish that purpose, parents have the task of nurturing and shaping their children's experience.

The General Task of Parenting

It has been emphasized in the existing literature that the parent's childrearing approach influences the child's development, behaviors, and competence (See Baumrind, 1966, 1989, 1991; Leung & Kim, 1998). Baumrind's (1966, 1989, 1991, 1996) well-known parenting prototypes suggest that the *authoritative parenting* style, which is characterized by high levels of control and high levels of responsiveness, results in a more desirable outcome in the child when compared to other parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian, permissive and rejecting-neglecting). The literature also has noted that the child, who comes from an authoritative home, is often associated with higher level of competence and character. This child typically has a greater capacity to be socially assertive and responsible (Baumrind, 1989). Leung and Kim (1998) found that the authoritative style leads to the development of intrinsic motivation in the child, which, in turn, influences his or her academic competence. Baumrind (1991) further examined her authoritative parenting styles with adolescents and discovered that authoritative parents were highly successful in protecting their adolescents from many of the problems related to drug use.

There is another study that looked at the relationship between authoritative parenting styles and the transmission of ethnic identity. In their study of Jewish families, Davey, Fish, Askew and Robila (2003) found that there was a correlation between the authoritative parenting style and the positive transmission of Jewish identity. Although this study is insufficient to be generalized across many cultures and parents from different cultures may utilize different parenting approaches beyond what Baumrind proposed in her prototypes (Davey et al., 2003), it

is evident that the literature seems highly supportive of the significance of parenting styles, especially the authoritative parenting approach, in producing optimal results in the child's competence and behaviors. The question is: "Is parenting style the only factor that shapes the child's development and competence?" Is there any other factor that importantly contributes to the development, the behaviors and the overall well-being of the child?

Belsky's (1984) influential thesis on the "determinants of parenting" expanded the conceptual understanding of childrearing processes. In his process model, Belsky (1984) proposed that the parenting process is a systemic process that involves at least three general sources of influence: the parent's contribution, the child's contribution, and the contextual sources of stress and support. In his thesis, Belsky (1984) reasoned that it takes psychologically healthy and mature parents to provide sensitive, stimulating, and growth-facilitating environments in order for the children to grow. Therefore, the parents' enduring characteristics, include their psychological well-being, which often is a product of their own developmental and family history, are essential factors that influence their own parenting process. The characteristics of the child (e.g., temperament) have also been noted in the scholarly literature as a confounding factor that influences the parent-child relationship. Belsky (1984) pointed out that "even in nonabusive samples, characteristics of children hypothesized to make them more or less difficult to care for do indeed seem to shape the quantity and quality of parental care they receive" (p. 86). It seems obvious how the child characteristics, parent characteristics and parenting styles can systematically interact and influence each other. For example, an introverted parent, who was abused as a child may have the tendency to use strict and harsh parenting styles with his or her expressive child who is highly temperamental. The lessons learned in the parent's own childhood reach across the generations to affect the child in the next generation. Therefore,

in light of this, Lerner & Lerner (1983 as cited in Belsky, 1984) suggested that “the goodness-of-fit” between parent and child is crucial in determining the quality of relationship between them. Parents and children, whose personal styles fit well together, will create a better quality of life for both the parents and the children.

Belsky (1984) also argued that contextual sources of stress and support play an important role in supporting or undermining parental competence and functioning. In the context of the marital relationship, the literature demonstrated that there are correlations among the quality of spousal relationship and mutual supports that each spouse gives to another, positive parenting functioning, and the child’s overall adjustment (Belsky, 1984; Fincham, 1998; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996). Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman (1978 as cited in Belsky, 1984) stated that fathers, who felt supported by their wives, tended to have a higher level of competence in parenting their infants, regardless of their temperamental level.

Besides spousal or marital quality, social support networks also positively contribute to parenting competence. Cochran and Brassard (1979 as cited in Belsky, 1984) proposed that social support networks are essential because not only can they enhance self-esteem but also consequently can enhance the patience and sensitivity required in the parenting process. Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers-Walls (1994) included “Care for Self”, in their National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM), as a core foundational factor for the parenting process. This Care of Self category includes management of stress and family resources, social connections with others, and partnering in parenting with the spouse or significant others.

I find that Belsky’s (1984) “determinants of parenting” concept is essential for my study, primarily because it lays out a nice initial framework about the systemic processes of parenting. Belsky’s (1984) thesis showed that there are multi-interconnecting factors that directly and

indirectly influence parenting process, beyond just the parenting styles, which to a certain extent determine the parenting competence, experience, and outcome. Given the additional complexity of the context in which the mixed-race families are embedded, parenting mixed-race children will need this type of systemic understanding and processes to fully capture the interplay among factors or microsystems within this context.

The Task of Parenting Mixed Heritage Children

It is indisputable that parents of mixed-heritage children will encounter similar developmental challenges that the parents of monoracial/monocultural children would encounter. Both the parents of mixed-heritage children and the parents of monheritage children may wrestle with common issues related to child training and discipline. Both may face typical struggles guiding and connecting with their children as they are going through the turmoil of adolescence. However, the parents of mixed-heritage children are more likely to be presented with additional challenges.

It is often assumed that the challenges of childrearing that parents of mixed heritage children encounter is mainly due to their racial and/or cultural differences (Kenney, 2002). Although it cannot be denied that these differences may contribute to their parenting difficulties, Kenney (2002) stated that the significance of these differences on the dynamics of the relationship seemed to be of little concern for many of the mixed-heritage couples. It appears that societal prejudice and racism have caused more significant dilemmas and concerns to the parents and their mixed-heritage children than racial or ethnic differences. Often times, in the face of this societal prejudice or racism, many parents of mixed-heritage children do not know what they need to do to prepare, protect, and comfort their children from the outside isolation and pressures. A descriptive study of Black-White interracial family identity, conducted by Byrd &

Garwick (2004), noted that the majority of parents of mixed-race children felt that they “lacked guidance or resources” to explain to their children about issues concerning race (p. 32). McClurg (2004) also asserted that parents of biracial children often feel inadequate in helping their children identify and understand their bicultural being. Byrd and Garwick (2004) identified that many of the participants in their study only talked in term of “doing the best [they] can” (p. 33) in regard to their parenting efforts. Their findings showed that the parents struggled to rear their biracial children partially because they had no role model of being bicultural and knew no professional expert with whom to consult (Byrd & Garwick, 2004). I personally think that their struggle is largely attributed to the fact that many parents of mixed-race children never fully know and experience how it really feels to be a mixed-race child and reared in a racially-sensitive society.

The complex task of integrating their dual or multiple ethnic/racial family backgrounds has been perceived as a unique challenge for the parents, the children and the family as a whole. Cote and Bornstein (2004) indicated that a number of studies suggested that there is strong correlation between parenting cognition (e.g., parent’s attributions, self-perceptions and knowledge) and parenting behaviors, which consequently will influence the child’s development. In their studies of parenting multicultural children, Cote and Bornstein (2004) discovered that parenting cognitions differ among cultural groups. They also asserted that, because parenting cognitions often strongly relate to one’s core aspect of identity, it acculturates very slowly, if at all. Therefore, cross-cultural couples are likely presented with real challenges as to what being parents is all about and how they should implement their parenting roles, in light of their differing beliefs about and styles of parenting.

Theoretical Assumptions About Raising Mixed-Heritage Children

Theoretically, family and social scientists agree that the experience of being a human is shaped by the multiple factors and the surrounding contexts in which they are embedded. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed, in his Ecological theory of human development, that human beings develop and are fostered within distinct interconnected systems. Applying this ecological concept, therefore, the experience of mixed-race individuals is greatly influenced by their multi-interdependent contexts. These multi-interdependent contexts may include the parental system, neighborhood, peers, extended family, school, friends and the larger socio-cultural system (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). Each of these systems may, directly and indirectly, be influenced by the broader systems, which, in many ways, affect the experience of being a mixed-race individual. Having sufficient understanding of each of these different systems is not only essential to better grasp the experience of mixed-race individuals, but also to eventually learn what factors contribute to their resilience and adaptability.

Several researchers asserted that the end product of the identity of mixed-race individuals is a matter of personal choice (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Williams, 1999). Regardless of the social contexts that influence and shape the process, in most cases, the individuals themselves eventually define their own sense of identity. However, it is noteworthy that the family system seems to be the prime contributor to the formulation of one's identity. In almost every study that examined the experience of mixed-heritage children within the family system, *the parent factor* was identified as a significant variable that influenced the lives of mixed-heritage children (Basu, 2000; Byrd & Garwick, 2004; Kenney, 2002; Lee, 2004; Martinez, 2001; McClurg, 2004; Poston, 1990; Roberts-Clarke et al., 2004; Tomishima, 2000; Quintana, 1999; Zwiebach-Sherman, 1999). Although scholars and authors acknowledge the essential roles that the parents

assume in the development of their mixed-heritage children's sense of identity, only a few have actually investigated the experience of the parents of mixed-heritage children and almost all of those studies focused on Black-and-White biracial children (see Coleman, 2001).

Publications on the topic of parenting or raising biracial children are starting to emerge. Although, to a certain extent, these resources might be helpful in assisting both parents and helping professionals in understanding the intricate experience of mixed-race children, they might not necessarily provide all the answers to the questions of how to raise a mixed-race family. Some people might find that the information is lacking in its relevance to their personal or familial experience, due to the narrowly defined "biracial" experience or to the emphasis *just* being given to the issue of *race* and to the mix of Black and White. There are likely other possible multi-racial/ethnic combinations which may yield different experiences.

Many scholars present the matter of raising mixed-race children from a variety of viewpoints. The majority of these authors address the matter from a developmental stance (see Kich's (1992) three-stage model, Donna Nakazawa's *Does Anybody Else Look Like Me?*, for examples). Looking through this developmental lens, the authors perceive that one's racial identity formation is achieved through a series of age-appropriate progressions that are linear and sequential in nature (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). For example, Kich (1992) suggested that it is essential for parents of mixed-race children to foster the development of positive self-concept and multiracial identity of their children during the ages of three to ten. This period is vital, primarily because the child is going through the *phase of awareness* and *dissonance*. Between the ages of eight to late adolescence, Kich (1992) argued that mixed-race children would typically go through the *struggle for acceptance* stage, prior to moving into the *self-acceptance* and *assertion of mixed-racial identity phase* during their post-adolescence stage.

Many researchers suggested that it is essential for parents to take an active role as their mixed-heritage children proceed through the developmental milestones. The literature on the topic suggests the parents of mixed-heritage children orient and expose their children to persons, books, dolls, and pictures that are reflective of a variety of races and cultures (Wardle, 1999). Parents of mixed-heritage children are also often advised to establish a secure family environment where open and healthy communication about issues associated to race and being a mixed-heritage individual/family can be discussed constructively (Wardle, 1999).

Other authors, such as Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005), in their recently published book, *Raising Biracial Children*, approached the process of parenting biracial children primarily using a systemic lens. From this stance, they heavily emphasized the significance of the multi-systems and the surrounding contexts in influencing the overall experience of mixed-race children and their families. Being trained as a marriage and family therapist who utilizes much the systemic thinking, I concur with their point of view. Thus, this dissertation is an attempt to build and expand on Rockquemore and Laszloffy's initial work in portraying the interplay of broader factors and the systemic processes that mold mixed-heritage children and their family's life experiences.

Gaps in the Literature

As a parent of mixed-heritage children, this topic of study is very personal to me. Having been born and raised in Indonesia with a Chinese heritage, married to a Japanese woman and raising our American-born mixed-race/ethnic children in the Midwest, my wife and I are often in a quandary about the different aspects of our children's experience of being ethnically mixed. As parents, we have questions about their psychological, emotional, and social adjustment. We have questions about their sense of identity. At times, we have questions about how to raise them "the

right way,” if there is such a thing, given the complexity of their multi-ethnic lives. Sometimes we wonder which languages we should teach them and in which cultural observances we should participate. In desperation, at times, my wife and I turned to the parenting books relevant to this topic to broaden our perspectives. There were times the information on those books hit home, yet there were many times I paused and wondered how to apply the information to my given unique context.

As stated previously that as the number of interracial couples and cross-cultural/national marriages keeps growing, the numbers of mixed-heritage offspring will also increase rapidly. With these changes in the broader context, it seems realistic to expect that the mixed-heritage individuals and families will open up a ‘new chapter’ of experiences, as compared to the realities of decades ago. In addition, marriage and family therapists and other helping professionals who work with family and children will be much more likely to encounter, on a regular basis in the future, a clientele who is multiracial/ethnic. In the near future, for educators and practitioners to have a high level of understanding, comfort, and expertise about biracial or multiracial-related issues it will no longer be an option but rather fundamental. Therefore, an increased and ongoing research in the area of working with multi-heritage individuals (and their families) is importantly needed.

In recent years, the field of helping profession has made good progress towards advancing the understanding of multicultural issues. It is, however, noted that an increased awareness and continuous improvement are still necessary. The result of recent exploratory studies of helping professionals who work with biracial children and adolescents showed that “the lack of training” was one of the four major concerns about working with the biracial populations (Page, 2003). The other three concerns that the helping professionals often encounter

include the lack of real-life experiences, awareness of acceptance of biracial children by others, and comfort dealing with identity issues (Page, 2003).

It also appears that, even within the field of marriage and family therapy itself, there is a significant paucity of information about topics related to biracial/mixed-race phenomenon. The search done in the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) website's search engine using keywords such as biracial child, parenting biracial child, mixed-race child, parenting multiracial child, parenting multiethnic children, mixed-race couples only resulted in three matches. Two out of the three resources are only available in the audio mode and these sources of information (see Laszloffy, 2003, 2004) focus their primary attention on the Black and White experience. Looking at this reality, I strongly believe that the field of marriage and family therapy would need to generate more research studies on such pertinent topics in order to better train clinicians to meet the needs of our ever-changing societies.

Certainly there are a variety of aspects of this topic that researchers could further investigate. As mentioned earlier, the experience of mixed-heritage individuals and their families are very much influenced by multi-interconnected microsystems (e.g., parent, peer, school, etc.), which are embedded in the larger systems (e.g., socio-cultural). In my conceptualization, each of the microsystems consist of unique factors and patterns that will have direct influences on the children's overall experience of being a mixed-race individual. As illustrated on the model (See *Figure 2.1*), there are significant interactions between mixed-heritage children's internal and external factors. *The internal factors* consist of the children's natural characteristics, such as physical features and gender. As mentioned earlier, in the case of mixed-racial, phenotype often is a confounding factor that affects the children's experience of being mixed-race (Rockquemore, 2002). The literature also noted the unique differences between males and females in how they

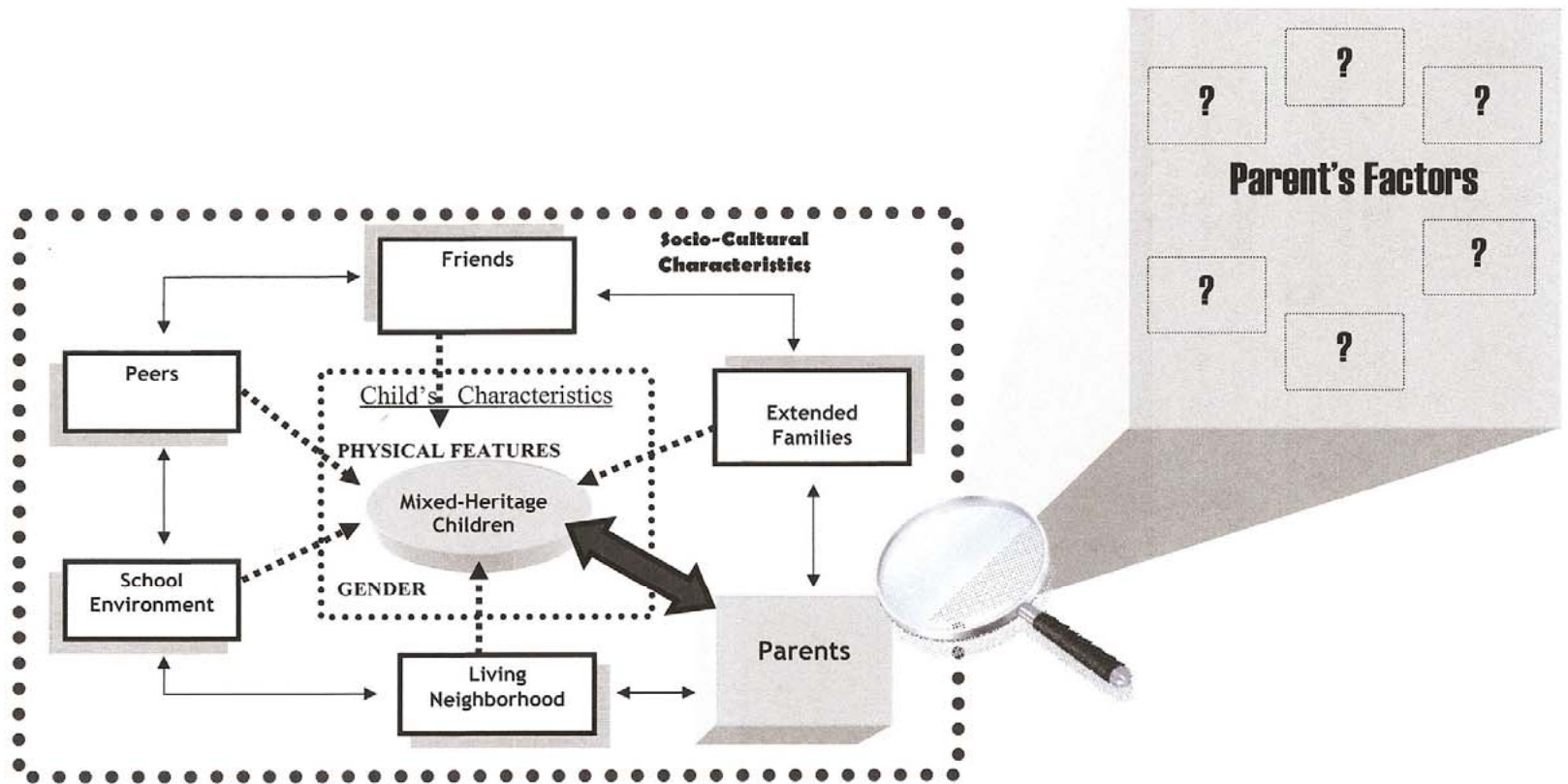
experience, internalize and cope with the challenges of being mixed-race (Rockquemore, 2002). For example, literature noted that biracial men do not typically experience interactional negativity from Black men the way biracial females do (Rockquemore, 2002). In essence, these internal factors are fundamental to one's experience of the world as mixed-race individuals.

The external factors, or the surrounding factors (e.g., parents, friends, extended families, school environment, etc.), are also the essential contributors that mold the children's experience and self-understanding of being a mixed-race or ethnic individual. Systemically, each microsystem among these external factors will be likely to have both direct and indirect influences on other microsystems. For example, extended families are likely to have a stronger influence on the mixed-heritage children's parents' personal characteristics and, consequently, how they rear their children. The parents' choices of living and school environments for their children may be strongly influenced by their individual and couple characteristics as a cross-racial/cultural couple/parent. Peers and friends are known as vital factors that either enhance or hamper the growth of a secured mixed-race identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004).

The type of friendship that the children of mixed-race or ethnic individuals have often is determined primarily by the contexts of their social environments, such as living and school locations. Some microsystems have more direct impact on other microsystems, while others tend to be more indirect. Nonetheless, having systemic views and understanding of these complex interactions is helpful to better understand the unique experience of mixed-heritage individuals/families.

Granted that assumption, it is essential to gain in-depth perspectives of what those contributing factors and typical patterns are and how they affect, both positively and negatively, the mixed-race children's life experience.

Figure 2.1 The Systemic Model of Mixed-Heritage Children's Experience



The review of literature shows that there is a paucity in research studies that specifically examine these microsystems *in the context of parenting*. Since it is not feasible to explore all the Microsystems in depth in the context of this dissertation, I will only be focusing on one domain for this purpose: the parents.

Research Questions

As parent of mixed-heritage children within a cross-national context, I am particularly interested in exploring the parents' lived experience in being parents and how they work with their spouses in raising their mixed-heritage children. The purpose of this study is to better understand the parents of mixed-heritage children's parenting perspectives and experiences, the challenges, as well as the joy of assuming this essential role in the lives of their children. With systemic perspectives as the conceptual framework, the understanding of this phenomenon will be informed by the participants' words and stories. In order to gain this understanding, the following research questions were used:

- What is the lived experience of being parents of mixed-heritage children?
- What is most important to the parents as they raise their mixed-heritage children?
- How do the parent's unique personal background and characteristics influence their parenting approach and experience?
- How does the parents' cultural background influence their parenting approach?
- What parenting approach do the parents' use to raise or socialize their mixed-race children?
- How does the parent approach the differences in the parenting styles and practices?

CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

Fundamentally, the research questions determine the methodology used in any research study. My research questions were focused on developing an understanding of the multidimensional experiences of parenting mixed-heritage children and the multifaceted factors contributing to this process. Because the purpose of this study was to seek in-depth understanding of the day-to-day realities of the participants and to develop explanatory theories about a phenomenon, a qualitative methodology was required (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002).

Rationale

I chose to use a qualitative method because I was interested in exploring the experience and phenomenon of being parents of mixed-heritage children in depth and detail at a very personal level. There was scarcity in the existing studies that specifically focus on the parents' experience, although there were a lot of studies on the topic of "biracial" children. To understand the complexity of their perceptions, feelings and meanings of their reality, which are difficult to measure by statistical/numerical description, I needed a methodology that allows me to enter the "inner experience" of my participants (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2000). Also, because each parent's perceptions, feelings and the meanings that they constructed were elusive, dynamic, and unique to their personal contexts, I needed a methodology that was supple enough to provide room for flexibility and openness as I watched the data unfold. Because this type of exploration is also personal in nature, I find it essential that I employ methods that are interactive, humanistic, and holistic (Creswell, 2003). Different from quantitative methodologies, which are intended to make generalizations, qualitative methodology is typically used to generate theory or

identify a pattern of understanding about a specific phenomenon rooted in the data gathered from the participants (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the use of the qualitative methods allowed me to capture the subtleties of the experiences of parents of mixed race children and to generate rich, detailed and concrete descriptions of that phenomenon in the way that quantitative methodology cannot.

Participants

In this research study, eight parents of mixed-heritage children were interviewed. Seven out of eight couples who participated in this study lived in the Midwest. The Midwest was selected as the geographic location for this study primarily because of the convenience and cost-effective. When the study was conducted, I was living in the Midwest. I also believe that the geographical context for this particular research topic was crucial primarily because geographical location significantly influences how one experiences his/her reality. The Midwest was still considered a relatively conservative region compared to some other parts of the United States, such as the East and the West Coasts. In addition, I also recognized that there were relatively fewer international people/immigrants and mixed-heritage people in this part of the United States (Jeffreys & Rytina, 2006). This added a unique aspect to the experience of being a cross-national couples and raising children. This unique aspect included the experience of being “double” minority, especially for the partner who might *already* be a minority person given his/her racial/cultural background. In addition, living in the conservative atmosphere, the cross-national couples might likely deal with more challenges associated with traditional norms, values and practices of the surrounding people. Cross-national couples might be perceived as “being radical or liberal” which might pose additional concern, a concern that they might not need to face if

they were to live in the West or East Coast of the United States. These were some of the rationales of why Midwest was selected as the location of interest.

Sample Recruitment

Given the logic of qualitative inquiry, it is typical that a research study would focus in depth on a small sample, rather than broadly on a large sample as in quantitative studies (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) asserted that focusing on a small sample enables the qualitative researcher to “inquir[e] into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context and nuance” (p. 227). Therefore, generalization of the study’s findings is often not the ultimate end. Although there may be trade-offs in whatever methodology is utilized in a research study, the most salient question is whether the researcher has been able to select sampling strategies that best fit the research questions and the overall purpose of the study (Patton, 2002).

Given the research questions and the qualitative framework of this study, “information-rich cases” were selected for inclusion in this study (Patton, 2002, p. 230). In this case, the parents of mixed-heritage children were the unit of analysis. Patton (2002) maintains that the strength of qualitative research lies in the utilization of the sampling strategy, often known as *purposive sampling*, which allows the researcher to gain insight and in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon. Within purposive sampling, criterion and snowball methods are implemented. Criterion method is a sampling strategy that utilizes a set of criteria. To ensure that the study was well focused, I reviewed and selected the participants based on a set of predetermined criteria (Patton, 2002). Only the participants who met this criteria were chosen for an interview. The criteria will be described in the following section. In order to locate research participants who fit the criteria a snowball sampling method was utilized. Snowball method is a sampling recruitment process used to locate information-rich key participants. This snowball

method utilizes “the word-of-mouth”-type an approach. I asked people with whom I was in contact and others who resided in the surrounding community to assist me in identifying or recommending potential participants for the study. In addition, I also distributed recruitment fliers to a variety sites in local university that describe the nature of the study, criteria for participation and my contact information (See Appendix D). The instructions for participating in the study were provided on the flier. Potential participants were requested to call or email me to inform me of their interest in participating.

During my initial contact with the potential participants over the phone prior to interview, I confirmed that they met all of the basic criteria for participating in the study. Those who met the basic criteria and confirmed their willingness to be involved in the study were selected and scheduled for face-to-face interviews. I provided the participants the Screening Questionnaire (See Appendix B) in the interview room to complete before the interview took place. At the end of each interview, participants were provided with recruitment fliers to give to their friends and relatives extending the invitation to participate in the study. In qualitative research, data gathering and analysis processes take place simultaneously (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As I engaged in the process of interviews, I also started working on the data. I paid close attention to the raw data and what initial key information emerged. Key information that was identified from one interview was successively used to inform the next interview. Therefore, this interview process continued until the themes and patterns started to reach the point of saturation (Patton, 2002).

Parent Sample

In this study, the parents of mixed-heritage children were the unit of analysis. To prevent the occurrence of extreme polarity in the data and to ensure that the study was focused and

systematic, basic criteria were established. The basic criterion for selecting the sample was that the participants had to be in a heterosexual marriage. Another aspect that added to the uniqueness of this study was that the couples had to be cross-national or mixed-heritage couples. Thus, at least one of the spouses must have been racially and/or ethnically different from the other spouse. One of the spouses must have been raised primarily in a country other than the U.S. As described throughout Chapter 2, most literature on biracial families/children has emphasized U.S. black-white relationships. This contextual difference has the potential to shed a unique light on being cross-national couples/parents, because one or both spouses might also have encounter the challenges of adapting to a foreign culture or nation.

An additional criterion was that the couple had to be the biological parents of mixed-ethnic/race children between the ages of five and eighteen. This specific criterion was important to select parents who are still *in the process of parenting* their mixed-heritage children. Participants were expected to be representative of what would be considered typical cross-national or mixed-heritage families. Couples, who represented other criteria or distinct cases beyond the standard of typical cross-national families, such as unmarried couples, same-sex couples, stepparents, adoptive parents, parents of mixed-race children with disabilities etc., were not included in the study. These couples/parents listed above are likely to experience additional challenges distinct to their unique circumstances, which other couples/parents may not encounter. Therefore, to facilitate saturation in the analysis process, less “typical” cases, such as any family constellation involving one or more characteristics mentioned above, was excluded for this study.

Procedure

Patton (2002) asserted that qualitative findings can evolve from three kinds of data collection: written documents, observation and in-depth open-ended interviews. Written documents constitute a particularly rich source of information, such as records, artifacts, letters, archives, family genealogies and even photographs. These documents are essential in a qualitative inquiry because it can provide the researcher with information that cannot be observed (Patton, 2002). Observation often requires the researcher to be present and immerse himself/herself at the physical setting being studied. During this process of observation, the researcher may let his/her presence known by their subjects and interact with them or simply being completely unknown and 'invisible' to them. Open-ended interview involves the researcher's direct interactions with the subjects being study. Researchers would typically conduct the interview process with either having a completely-predetermined set of questions in mind or simply by letting their spontaneous reactions guide the direction of the interview. Conducting unobtrusive observation and experiencing full immersion in the families being studied is the ultimate aim of *naturalistic inquiry*. However, full immersion was not practically possible for this study. Since it would have necessitated the researcher living in the house of the mixed-race families in order to immerse himself or herself for this study. Unobtrusive observations are also limited to external behaviors and do not allow the researcher to see what is happening inside people (Patton, 2002). Therefore, in-depth open-ended interviews were selected as the most feasible and practical data collection strategy to accomplish this research objective.

Widdershoven (1994) maintained that narrative accounts often serve as windows into human life because human life is narratively organized. Narrative scholars, whether they are authors or therapists, understand full well the power of stories in human life. Through narration,

people build their lived reality. As Nichols and Schwartz (2001) asserted, “Stories don’t mirror life, they shape it” (p. 388). Therefore, by delving deeply into the stories of these parents of mixed-race children, I hoped to gain an understanding of their perspectives and the meaning of the experiences of being parents of mixed-heritage children. I was interested in capturing how they perceived their experience, described it, felt about it, made sense of it, and talked about it to others (Patton, 2003). Thus, it was through face-to-face in-depth interviews with those who have had direct experience that data was gathered.

Given the naturalistic and emergent nature of this study, I kept a research diary throughout the process in order to record my feelings, thoughts and experiences. This reflectivity was essential, especially in the latter part of the research process as I analyzed and synthesized the data. The research diary greatly helped me in the process of creating a coherent interpretation and holistic understanding about the mixed-heritage parents’ experience. A research diary was particularly useful not only as a tool to capture a fuller picture of the research process, but also more importantly as I witnessed the emergence and evolution of the findings.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the research proposal was submitted to the KSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The IRB contact information was provided for the participants’ reference in case any questions or concerns arise. The participants were informed about the overall research protocols. They also learned about the potential risks of their participation in the study prior to the interview as described in the informed consent document (See Appendix E), which parents signed to indicate their agreement to participate.

Typical in any research process, matters related to confidentiality are often a serious concern, especially when it involves personal information (Patton, 2003). Therefore, to address these concerns, the researcher informed the participants of their rights of confidentiality (See

Appendix E). All participants identifying information, such as names, were altered, modified or omitted from the transcripts to ensure the participants' confidentiality was protected. I assigned specific codes to the participants' written transcripts in order to assist me in identifying the correct match between the participants and their raw data. The participants were ensured that their raw information was securely protected under lock and key. The access to these documents was only given to the primary investigator and secondary investigator. I informed the participants that the recordings of the interviews would be destroyed three years after the study is fully completed.

Interview Guide

In the interview process, I combined the *standardized open-ended interview* approach with a *general interview guide* approach. The standardized open-ended interview is an interview process that requires an advance preparation of an interview instrument, constitutes specific questions, to be asked across interviews. To use the standardized open-ended interview approach effectively, I carefully crafted the wording of each interview question ahead of time (Patton, 2002). This careful focus on detail was to ensure that each participant was being asked the same questions throughout the process. Research studies that involve multiple interviewers often find that standardized open-interview strategy is essential for supporting its legitimacy and credibility, since it minimizes the variation among interviewers, especially if it involves inexperienced interviewers (Patton, 2002). Although, in this study, variation concerning interviewers was not a main concern because I was the only interviewer throughout the study, utilizing this standardized open-ended interview approach was useful to establish priorities about questions that needed to be asked and to focus on what the study was intended to examine.

The interview guide approach is slightly different from the standardized interview, which may appear quite structured and rigid. The interview guide approach is fluid and flexible. It is used simply to provide a “framework” to the interview process. With this framework as point of reference, I could ensure that not only did I have the same basic lines of inquiry to pursue with each of the participants, but also have some flexibility to engage in meaningful conversations, to respond spontaneously, and to probe effectively within a limited time frame (Patton, 2002). Since the questions that I created on the standardized open-ended interview instrument might be limited to what I knew and assumed based on the existing literature (Lofland & Lofland, 1995), the use of the interview guide approach was useful in allowing me to have some room for creativity to explore other arenas that have never been examined.

One of the uniqueness of a qualitative study often lies in its emergent and flexibly quality. The use of this combined method in research study often allows the researchers to “go with the flow” and yet still being purposeful. When speaking of combined interview strategies, Patton (2002) articulated that, “[The] combined strategy offers the interviewer flexibility in probing and in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the interview instrument’s development” (p. 347). Given the time limitation of this study and the sense of focus that I needed, I felt it was necessary and practically reasonable to utilize the combined standardized open-ended interview and interview guide method.

The open-ended standardized interview instrument contains a series of questions and probes associated with the overarching research questions of the study (See Appendix A). These questions and probes were adjusted whenever deemed necessary. Additional emerging questions also were included based on the participants’ reactions and responses. This open-ended

standardized interview instrument was not distributed to the participants. It was primarily used to help me to organize my thoughts and the interview process. This open-ended standardized interview instrument was pilot-tested with several international mixed-race couples to determine the effectiveness and functionality of the instrument. Any lack of clarity within the instrument was modified accordingly, prior to being used in the interview process with the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the importance of refining the interview instruments as the data is collected to fit the nature of the *emergent design* of the study. To adhere to this advice, I adapted the interview questions to fit any information previously unknown throughout the interview process.

Throughout the data gathering process, I took notes as the participants tell their stories. Note-taking often is considered as an integral part of qualitative research projects: from the interview process to writing the analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Not only does note-taking help me to manage the massive amount of data and to code and sort categories in the process of analysis, it also was important during and after the interview process. As Patton (2002) stated, note-taking serves purposes beyond just jotting notes. Note-taking during the interview often helps influence and pace the interview process by nonverbally conveying and reinforcing to the participants that what they have to say is noteworthy (Patton, 2002). Post-interview note-taking also was significant, primarily because it allowed me to reflect and record my feelings, thoughts and detailed impressions of the whole interview process, including the surrounding environment and the researcher's observations about the interviewees' expressions and responses (Patton, 2002). These descriptive field notes were especially helpful for me to "re-connect" to the overall impressions and experience of the interviews that I had with the participants as I put the findings into perspectives and establish a context for the interpretation and analysis (Patton, 2002). Based

in these notes, I was able to examine if there was coherence in the participants' verbal account and the overall process of the interview. In addition, these contextual impressions recorded on the field notes was also useful to help me continually raise new and more specific questions, which I tried to answer in succeeding interviews (Patton, 2002).

Parent Interview

The parents of mixed-heritage children were interviewed face to face. The interviews were conducted at a variety of locations, depending on the couple's choice and comfort level. Some couples preferred to meet for an interview at their residence, while others found that meeting at a conference room located at the university was more convenient and comfortable. One couple even offered to come to the interviewer's residence for an interview. The length of interviews varied, ranging from 42 to 134 minutes with an average of 73 minutes. The interview process began with the explanation and the signing of informed consent. All of the couples demonstrated interest and agreed to be contacted further if additional information was required, especially if the participants had any feedback on the preliminary results of the data analysis.

In the beginning of the interview process, I oriented the parents to the interview protocols. In my encounter with the participants, I disclosed to them that I, myself, was a parent of mixed-race children. This self-disclosure was intended to establish a common ground with the participants, which I hoped enhance the rapport building process. The participants were invited to ask me questions. In addition, I also emphasized to the participants to answer only those questions with which they felt comfortable as well as to stop the interview process if they experience distress at any time during the interview.

While conducting qualitative research, it is important to fully capture the context of the subject being studied (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2000). It is through the absorption of the

subject's contexts, including the physical environment, their behavior, and expressions that the researcher is able to formulate a deeper understanding of the topic being investigated. In this process, the parents' responses - their words and expressions - are the important raw data to capture. Therefore, I audio-digitally recorded the interview process. The recorded data was transcribed verbatim by me, prior to being fully analyzed. All the parents were fully informed about this procedure.

Description of Participants

The participants in this study consisted of eight cross-national couples with varying backgrounds (see Table 3.1). All of these couples were parents and in their first marriage. The length of years of marriage was, on average, 18.31 years with the shortest being six and a half years and the longest being 31 years. The total number of children of these couples was 21. The minimum number of children in a family was one and the maximum number was four, with an average of 2.62. The ages of the children ranged from two to 30 years old. Four children were younger than six. Six children were between the ages of six and 12. Seven children were between the ages of 13 and 18. Four children were older than 19.

Seven out of eight couples currently lived in the Midwest, while one couple lived in Japan. This couple was interviewed during their furlough in the husband's hometown in the Midwest. Six out of eight husbands who participated in this study were born in the United States and identified themselves racially as White. The other one was born in Spain and identified himself racially as Hispanic. Four out of eight husbands identified themselves ethnically as White/Caucasian, while the rest identified their ethnic background more specifically as Cherokee Indian/Scotch/Irish, Italian American, Irish and "anti imperial/globalist American". The ages of the husbands ranged from 42 to 57 with an average of 49.5 years old.

Of eight wives, there was only one who was American. She identified herself racially as White, but ethnically as Irish/English/Scottish. The other seven wife participants were from foreign countries. Four were from Japan, one was from South Korea, one was from Taiwan and one was from Germany. The wives who were from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan identified themselves racially as Asian and ethnically as Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese. The wife who was German identified herself racially as White/Caucasian and ethnically as German/European. The ages of the wives ranged from 43 to 54 with an average of 47. All of the wives spoke their husbands' native language, which predominantly was English. Only six out of eight husbands spoke, with varying degrees of fluency, their wives' native language. Four out of eight couples either shared the same religious background or had no religious affiliation at all. Generally, at least one of the couples tended to be quite cautious and reserved in the beginning. However, the couples quickly engaged in the interview process when they started to tell their stories. The overall ambiance of the interview process was generally relaxed and informal. It is primarily because the couples were aware that I share the experience of being a parent of mixed-ethnic/race children.

The interview process started with an emphasis on learning about the couple's individual backgrounds and what led them to choose a cross-national marriage. I also targeted my questions in order to learn the couples' perceptions and experiences of a cross-national marriage. Subsequently, I directed my questions toward their experiences as cross-national parents. At the end of the interview, I provided the couples with a copy of my recruitment fliers and asked them if they could refer me one or two of their acquaintances or friends to participate in the study. After each interview, I emailed the couple and thanked them for their contribution to the study. Almost all of the couples responded very positively about their experience of participating in the interview. Some of the couples verbalized a response personally to me at the end of the

Table 3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants, N = 8 Couples

Characteristics	N	%
Married Couple	8	100.0
Years of Marriage		
Minimum : 6.5 years		
Maximum : 31 years		
Mean : 18.31 years		
Std. Deviation : 7.77		
Sex		
Male	8	
Female	8	
Age		
Husband		
Minimum : 42 years old		
Maximum : 57 years old		
Mean : 49.5 years old		
Std. Deviation : 4.92		
Wife		
Minimum : 43 years old		
Maximum : 54 years old		
Mean : 47 years old		
Std Deviation : 3.87		
Education		
Husband		
High School/Some College		
Associate Degree	1	12.5
Bachelor Degree	2	25.0
Master's Degree	2	25.0
Doctorate Degree	3	37.5
Wife		
High School/Some College	3	37.5
Bachelor Degree	2	25.0
Master's Degree	2	25.0
Doctorate Degree	1	12.5
Birth Country		
Husband		
United States of America	7	87.5
Spain	1	12.5
Wife		
German	1	12.5
Japan	4	50.0
Korea	1	12.5
Taiwan	1	12.5
United States of America	1	12.5

Table 3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants, N = 8 Couples (Cont.)

Characteristics	N	%
Racial Identity		
Husband		
Hispanic	1	12.5
White	7	87.5
Wife		
Asian	6	87.5
White	2	12.5
Ethnic Identity		
Husband		
White/Caucasian American	4	50.0
“Anti imperial/globalist American”	1	12.5
Cherokee Indian/Scotch-Irish	1	12.5
Irish	1	12.5
Italian American	1	12.5
Wife		
German/European	1	12.5
Irish/English/Scottish	1	12.5
Japanese	4	50.0
Korean	1	12.5
Taiwanese	1	12.5
Religion		
Buddhism	1	12.5*
Christian	4	50.0*
Protestant	1	12.5*
Episcopalian	1	12.5*
Methodist	1	12.5*
Roman Catholic	2	50.0*
Shinto	1	12.5*
None	4	50.0*
No Data	1	12.5*
Number of Spouses Share Same Religion Or No Religion	4	50.0
Common Language		
Husband		
Speak Wife’s Native Language (at least “some”)	6	75.0
None at All	2	25.0
Wife		
Speak Husband’s Native Language (at least “some”)	8	100.0
None at All	0	0.0
Total Number of Children		
Below 6 years old	: 4	
Between 6 to 12 years old	: 6	
Between 13 to 18 year old	: 7	
19 years old and older	: 4	

* These numbers add up to 200%, because it includes both husbands & wives.

interview, while others responded in writing. Some of the couples mentioned that the interview provided them with an opportunity to reflect deeper on their marriage. Frequently, they realized that there were aspects of their marriage of which they had not previously been aware of before participating in the study. Other couples stated that they were excited about the study because it gave them the opportunity to articulate their life story.

Analysis

Patton (2002) stated that “qualitative analysis transforms data into findings” (p. 432). This process of transformation is unique from one researcher to another, since there are no absolute rules for analyzing the data or exact formulas to replicate the researcher’s analytical process (Patton, 2002). Qualitative analysis, in essence, depends on the “analytical intellect and style of the analyst” (Patton, 2002, p. 433). Therefore, in order to ensure the authenticity of the process, I attempted to record and track, step-by-step, the analytical procedures that I used throughout the study (Patton, 2002).

I desired that the result of this exploratory study was more than just to add “knowledge for the sake of knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 215). I hoped to contribute knowledge that would enable people to understand their parenting role. I envisioned that the findings of this study would be enlightening not only for those who were already parents of mixed-race children but also for couples who anticipated becoming parents. The findings also might be useful in preparing those who were single and were in quandary about their desire to enter into a cross-national marriage. Educators and practitioners might be able to utilize these findings as they provide services and work with couples and families. Therefore, in light of this, the data was analyzed within a framework of applied research (Patton, 2002).

Delort (2006) stated that “In qualitative methodology, there is an inherent tension between what is known and what is yet to be discovered” (p. 63). It is typical in a qualitative analysis that inductive and deductive processes are incorporated. Inductive analysis is the process of discovering and generating patterns, themes and categories from the raw data (Patton, 2002). To produce such results, the researcher must interact intensively with the data in order to allow common themes and categories to emerge (Patton, 2002). In this study, I started with carefully examining the raw data produced from the interviews. I compared one participant’s responses to another in order to glean key words, statements, patterns and themes. As I read all the verbatim transcripts I made some comments in the margins. I developed coding classifications and organization systems in order to create a framework that enabled me to arrange the emerging data systematically into categories (Patton, 2002). These categories were the essence of the theory, because the final conclusion of the study was drawn partially from these categories. Quotes from the participants were extracted and matched with the emerging themes and concepts to be used to support the interpretation of the findings in the latter part of analysis (Patton, 2002).

In contrast, deductive analysis is defined as one in which themes and categories already exist and are utilized by the researcher. The researcher may use *sensitizing concepts* in deductive analysis (Patton, 2002). Sensitizing concepts are information or data derived from social sciences, research literature, and previous research findings (Patton, 2002). This strategy is useful because it provides the researcher with “a general sense of reference” (Patton, 2002, p. 456). In this study, I have used the sensitizing concepts to inform me what areas of this phenomenon that still remained unexplored. Sensitizing concepts have also assisted me to come up with the research questions and many specific interview questions and probes listed on the

Interview Guide (See Appendix A). In the process of drawing the conclusion of the study, I used these sensitizing concepts to support or confirm the emerging findings yielded inductively.

Thus, in the final analysis, I utilized the integrative data analysis method, which is also known as a *retroductive* process (Burr, 1973). This process of integrating the inductive and deductive approaches sought to generate theory that is *grounded* in the data. It was through this combined process of analysis that findings were not only established but also affirmed as to their appropriateness and authenticity (Patton, 2002).

One of the biggest challenges of qualitative analysis lies in the efforts of managing, simplifying, making sense of, constructing and communicating the essence of a massive amount of data (Patton, 2002). Content analysis fundamentally is a process of capturing the core content of interviews in order to specify what is significant (Patton, 2002). This involves “identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying and labeling the primary patterns in the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Therefore, in order to maintain a degree of continuity in the analysis process, I conducted and transcribed the interviews verbatim in order to gain a fuller sense of each participant’s narrative. This allowed me to immerse myself more fully in the data before particularly searching for common patterns and themes (Patton, 2002). I also made efforts to familiar myself with the manuscripts by repeatedly reading and wrestling with the information to ensure that I had clear and coherent understanding of the participants’ stories.

Description of Coding and Analysis Procedures

In the coding process, I initially began by reviewing all the verbatim transcripts. After multiple readings of the transcripts and getting a basic sense of the fundamental content of the data, I started by “free coding” the transcripts. I searched for certain words, phrases, concepts, and meanings that describe different nuances of the men’s and a women’s experiences as cross-

national couples. In the margin of the transcripts, I marked the coding and made notes of the possible categories under which coding could be organized. Following that, I returned to the transcripts and re-immersed myself in them prior to creating in vivo coding through the use of the “Nvivo 7 qualitative software” (http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx). In this process of creating the in vivo coding, I tried, as accurately as possible, to use the participants’ own words. However, to facilitate the sorting and organization process, I added capitalized words to the in vivo coding to distinguish my words from the participants’ words. Next, I carefully examined the in vivo coding list and grouped similar themes and concepts under new categories. After identifying these main themes and concepts, I looked for specific statements from each couple to be used to support the emerging findings. Finally, in perusing the transcripts, I arrived at a place of saturation, I discerned consistently repeated themes and concepts which emerged from the interview process.

Coding Check Procedure

Qualitative inquiry is fundamentally emergent and interpretive (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative researchers establish initial codes, organize those codes into themes and categories, and eventually propose a broad interpretation. All of these endeavors can lead to subjective biases. Therefore, to enhance the accuracy and validity of the findings of the study, I utilized two code checkers. The first and primary code checker is an associate professor in Family Studies and Human Services, who is a member of my dissertation committee. She is a senior researcher who specializes in qualitative inquiry. She has conducted numerous qualitative studies and has written extensively in scholarly journals. She had previous knowledge about the cross-cultural issues and, in fact, had recently published scholarly articles related to these subject matter. Given her broad knowledge and expertise, both in the area of qualitative inquiry and cross-cultural

issues and, especially as female, she brought balance and unique perspectives to the analysis process

The second code checker was a colleague who is a research professor, a recent graduate with a PhD in Marriage and Family Therapy. He conducted a qualitative study for his doctoral dissertation and has a lot of exposure in qualitative and quantitative research. He had no knowledge of my literature review and had no experience in conducting research studies related to cross-national relationship/family issues. His role was primarily to coach me in my initial coding and analysis process. As code checkers, they were able to attest to the integrity of the analysis process, as well as bring valuable and fresh perspectives to the analysis process.

Throughout the coding and analysis process, the code checkers were actively involved in reviewing the transcripts. The code checkers read through all the verbatim transcriptions and evaluated the “in vivo” coding, initial themes, and categories. I met with code checkers from time to time to get feedback from them and refined my analysis approach accordingly. At the end, the code checkers eventually reviewed the final main themes to ensure that they represented all the participants’ voices captured in the study.

I believe that the findings adequately captured the uniqueness and depth of a cross-national couple’s experience of being parents of mixed-ethnic/race children. Given the variety of responses that the couples shared, I will report only the themes and categories that consistently occurred throughout all the transcripts. The remaining data that is unique will still be treated as valuable information and will be addressed further in the discussion section. In the following section, I will describe the themes as well as the voices of the participants who articulate them.

Verification

Essential to any research study is the concern of internal and external validity. Researchers normally employ a variety of strategies and steps to eliminate threats to these two domains and to secure the legitimacy and credibility of their research. Although there are differences in how quantitative and qualitative researchers approach the issues of validity, fundamentally, the vital goal of any research study is to meaningfully measure or capture the object/phenomenon under study with rigor and a minimal amount of bias.

In qualitative research, Patton (2002) specifies *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity* as the essentials required to be examined to verify the ‘trustworthiness’ of the study. Internal homogeneity is defined as “the extent to which the data that belong in a certain category hold together or “dovetail” in a meaningful way” (Patton, 2002, p. 465). External heterogeneity is “the extent to which difference among categories are bold and clear” (p. 465). To strengthen the internal and external validity in this study, I employed the following strategies. First, *triangulation* of data, which is the collection of data through several methods, will be utilized (Creswell, 2003). In the analysis, interpretation, and conclusions of the study, I incorporated all the different aspects of the research activities, including the interviews, field-work observation and memos. I also built what Maykut and Morehouse (1994) described as “an audit trail”, which consisted of interview transcripts, field notes and memos, recorded in the research diary in order to portray a fuller picture of the overall research process (p. 146). The development of possible categories, subcategories, concepts and interrelated categories was particularly kept and documented in this diary. This diary was kept and documented so that other researchers can scrutinize the research process. Both implicit and explicit reactions and responses from the participants and their spouse, especially, were discreetly documented and

taken into account as I interpreted and made sense of the data (Patton, 2002). I perceived this process of examining the participants' implicit and explicit responses fits with a triangulation method, because in the way it provided me the opportunity to verify if there was coherence between what the participants state explicitly (or verbally) with what they demonstrate subtly (or nonverbally).

Second, *code checkers* were utilized. I requested that a colleague of mine who has successfully completed his qualitative doctoral dissertation, and a faculty advisor to serve as code checkers. My colleague's role was primarily to assist me in the early stages of coding and analysis process. My faculty advisor intensively assisted me throughout the analysis process, including the coding, analysis and writing process. I created themes and categories, while my faculty advisor would verify if my coding and analysis was congruent. I continuously discussed and incorporated the feedback I received from her in the process. Throughout the research process and especially during the coding and analysis period, I worked closely with my major professor and a faculty advisor. This process aligned with what Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend of the importance of having a *research team* in a qualitative project in order to enhance the reliability of the study.

Third, *case-study confirmation*. I created case studies of my participants as a way to verify the reliability and validity of the information I had. In each case study, I described the characteristics of my participants, the main content of their interviews, the highlights of their interactional patterns as well as my personal conceptualizations of their lives' dynamics. A faculty advisor, who read all the verbatim transcripts of the interviews, reviewed my case studies and examined if there is any incongruence in my presentation and conceptualization.

The findings of this study were also compared to other existing literature pertaining to the subject, in order to verify and support their “*confirmatory significance*” which is how the findings are validated by other work, and/or to identify its groundbreaking findings, which Patton (2002) call as “*innovative significance*” (p. 467). There is a considerable breadth of study concerning biracial or mixed children and the factors that influence these children’s life experiences in the context of interracial and some in the context of “cross-national.” The depth, however, is limited. This study was particularly intended to provide more “*substantive significance*” in the domain of “cross-national” or “mixed-heritage” more specifically, rather than producing the statistical significance or making broad generalizations about it (Patton, 2002, p. 467). As a researcher, it was my goal to authentically present all the steps taken and to minimize my biases by explicitly communicating what I *believe* I observed and what I *actually* observed (Rafuls & Moon, 1996). In order to ensure this, I kept going back and forth, checking my perceptions and interpretations against the raw evidence I had through the interviews, field-observations and the personal memos recorded throughout the research process.

Researcher as Measurement Tool

Patton (2002) stated that “the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (p. 341). It is the primary task of the interviewer to invite the participants to open up their world and to usher the researcher into their reality. In essence, despite the participants’ significant role as the prime information resources, the interviewer actually holds the key to this journey of discovery. In light of that, it is vital that the researcher is fully prepared to recognize in advance his or her role regarding this interview process. There seems to be an agreement among the qualitative researchers that researchers who undertake this type of study must demonstrate certain characteristics to make the whole process successful and

fulfilling. Those characteristics include a fascination about the variation of human experience, a deep and genuine interest in learning about people, and a disciplined and rigorous approach, based on skill and technique (Patton, 2002).

Given the sustained and intensive experience that the researcher typically has with his/her participants in the process of conducting qualitative research, additional steps will be taken to insure the trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell, 2003). Unique in its own way, qualitative methods consider the credibility of the researcher to be one of the prime factors that enhance the integrity of the study. Patton (2002) stated that “[t]he researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry” (p. 566). It is not only important for researchers to be aware of their own characteristics but also to explicitly report how those characteristics may potentially contribute to the study (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I found it important to make my personal background known to the readers.

I am the father of two young mixed-race children who were born in the United States. At the time this study is being conducted, my oldest daughter is almost 4 years old and my youngest is almost a year old. My wife and I are a cross-national couple. I identify my racial identity as Indonesian-Chinese and my wife identifies hers as Japanese. We both were born and raised in our home countries of Indonesia and Japan. It has been approximately 10 years since I first arrived in the United States as an international student. During my undergraduate studies, I had the privilege of living short term in several countries, such as India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and the Philippines, which, to a great extent, has transformed my outlook on life. My wife and I met each other in Hawaii as we were students in a multiethnic institution. Shortly after our wedding in Japan, we moved to Pasadena, California, where we lived for several years prior to moving to Manhattan, Kansas. As I consider my life experiences, it is

natural for me to develop a genuine interest in cross-national marriage and mixed family dynamic, due to my familial context. I also have become comfortable relating to people socially and professionally because of my experience living in multiethnic/multiracial environments.

I earned a masters degree in theology and second masters degree in marriage and family therapy. I am a licensed marriage and family therapist in the State of Kansas. I have been practicing marriage and family therapy under the supervision of clinical licensed therapists for 4 years. My clinical experience has involved working with individuals, groups, couples and families in a community mental health center, a university counseling center, and inpatient/outpatient hospital settings. I also have had two-and-a-half years of experience teaching a family studies and human services undergraduate level course during my doctoral studies at Kansas State University.

Given this background, I am aware of the potential biases I may have concerning the subject matter, primarily that I am living the experience of being cross-culturally married and am a parent of racially mixed children. However, I believe that recognizing this reality from the outset and expressing it explicitly is the first important step to safeguarding that my biases do not infiltrate the research process. Patton (2002) emphasized the importance of maintaining *emphatic neutrality*, which is “a middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding” (p.50). In the overall process of conducting this research, I was committed to maintaining this emphatic neutrality. I believe that the years of training and experiences I have had as a therapist enabled me to engage with my participants empathically and effectively. In addition, with the mentoring guidance I received from my major professor and committee advisors, I am confident that I authentically generated a study that was credible and trustworthy.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

Review of Research Questions

As delineated in the previous chapters, the main objective of this study was to explore and understand the experience of being parents of mixed heritage children. Therefore, in order to effectively achieve that objective, a correct research methodology needed to be employed. I chose qualitative methodology as the vehicle to assist me to answer my research questions. The overarching research question that I posed was *what is the lived experience of being parents of mixed-heritage children?* In the process of seeking an answer to this fundamental question, I was able to discern the most important issues to the parents of mixed-heritage children and how the parent's unique personal characteristics, as well as cultural characteristics, influence their parenting approach. Through the participants' stories, I also got a glimpse of the approaches parents used to socialize their mixed-ethnic/race children and I was able to perceive the way parents navigate the difficult challenge of cultural differences in the activity of parenting.

I have listened deliberately and analyzed reflectively my participants' stories, both during and after the interview, in order to capture the essence of their experiences. In order to fully portray the participants' descriptions and not to confuse them with my own interpretation, I set this chapter apart primarily to report the *descriptive* findings. In this chapter, I will solely describe the descriptive themes and categories that emerged during the first phase of analysis. Given the variety of responses that the couples shared, I will only report the themes and categories that consistently occurred throughout all the transcripts. In the discussion chapter, I will also explore briefly the apparently systemic relationships among themes and concepts that compose the cross-national parents' experience as couples and parents. In the following section,

I will describe the categories, themes as well as the verbatim voices of the participants to support those categories and themes.

Categories and Themes

Five major categories emerged from the cross-national couples' narratives of their experience of being parents of mixed-ethnic/race children. These five major of themes consisted of perceptions, relational dynamics, parent/child relationship issues, contextual influences and essential coping strategies (see Table 4.1). Since the experience of being a parent is delicately connected with the experience of being a couple, these categories integrate both contexts. Each of these categories is supported by separate themes. A total of 15 discrete themes emerged from the interviews conducted with the couples. In the following section, each of the categories and its supporting themes is described more comprehensively. The parents' verbatim comments and quotes are used to exemplify and support the themes.

All eight couples provided comments *in each category*. However, only selected excerpts from a few of them will be used to illustrate the themes. It is also important to note that, because this research study involved participants for whom English is their second language, some of their expressions are unique and not as grammatically correct as perhaps those for whom English is their native tongue. Therefore, some additional words, marked by parentheses, were added to the actual quotes, in order to provide the readers with more clarity of the meaning behind the statements expressed. To protect the participant's confidentiality, the specific culture and/or the geographical location that the participants mentioned were slightly modified. Parentheses were used to note any changes. Each participants' name was changed to a pseudonym in order to protect his/her confidentiality.

Table 4.1 Categories and Themes About the Experience of Being Cross-National Couples

Categories	Themes		Brief Definition
PERCEPTIONS	Living a Cross-National Life	No Big Deal	Responses that imply that being in cross-national context is not the issue.
		Self-Invisible	Responses that imply that the “mixed culture” is not necessarily the focal point of life.
	Perceived Strengths of Being Cross-National	Couples	Responses that reflect the excitement and appreciation of being in cross national context. Cross-national dynamic is perceived as strength.
		Parents	
	Challenges of Being Cross-National	Couples	Responses that reflect challenging experiences of being in cross national context
		Parents	
Cultural Impact on Individuals		Responses that reflect the effects of culture on the individual	
RELATIONAL DYNAMICS	Commonalities		“Common” dynamics that couples/parents face (not unique to cross-national couples)
	Uniquely Cross-National Aspects		“Context-specific” dynamics that are faced primarily by cross national couples/parents
	Contributing Factors		Contributing factors that might have an influence to the relational dynamics
PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP ISSUES	Sense of Mixed Heritage Pride		Responses that reflect parents’ sense of pride and acknowledgment of their children’s unique strengths as a mixed-ethnic individual
	Parental Wishes & Expectations		Different areas that parents identified as essential for their children to achieve or experience
	Purposeful Parenting Acts		Purpose-driven actions that parents implemented in pursuit of their wishes and expectations for their mixed-ethnic/race child
	Reactions to Bilingual Training		Responses that reflects the children’s reactions to parents’ bilingual training
CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES	Social Support	Environment	Responses about how local environments impacts the experience of being in cross-national context
		Family	Responses about how extended family impact the experience of being in cross-national context
		Friends	Responses about how friends impact the experience of being in cross-national context
ESSENTIALS COPING STRATEGIES	Personal Attributes		Personal attributes that are essential for being in a cross-national couple relationship
	Adaptive Survival Strategies		Adaptive strategies or behaviors being in cross national context
	Success Tips	Singles	Advice for singles who are interested in cross-national relationship
		Couples/ Parents	Advice for cross national couples/parents

Perceptions

The first, in fact the overarching, research question of this study seeks to understand the lived experience of parents of mixed-ethnic/race children. Although essentially all the five categories, combined together, would provide the broader range of information about the overall lived experience, this first category captures the essence of what being a cross-national couple, as well as cross-national parent, is like. Based on the responses, it is obvious that cross-national marriage and parenting are diverse and unique in their own right. The experience of each cross-national couple, whether as partner or parent was fundamentally distinct from one couple to another. Within this category, couples indicated their perceptions of their *life experience as cross-national couples*, as well as *their perceived strengths, challenges faced, and the cultural impact* they experienced.

Living a Cross-National Life

Cross-national couples described their perceptions and experiences divergently. However, within those divergent responses, there seemed to be a clear and bold statement that conveyed that entering into a cross-national relationship was not viewed as a big issue. Johnny responded to my question if it was “natural” for him and his wife to enter into cross-national marriage. Johnny stated, “[I] [n]ever really thought of it as an issue, [it is] not something I give a lot of thought to!

Another couple, Christian and Selma, echoed the same response when asked if it was “natural” for them to proceed into cross-national marriage, knowing that they came from two different cultures. They said:

CHRISTIAN: I don’t think that was ever consideration for me one way or the other that the fact that she was from a different culture.

SELMA: No. uhm.

CHRISTIAN: At that point I did not speak German at all. So, I could not understand when the first time I went to visit her parents over Christmas one year, about a year after we've known each other... You had to translate pretty much everything else because I couldn't speak any German at all. Only a few words. But I do not think that it was ever seen as a boundary or wall or anything like that. So, I do not think the international aspect was taken as that important.

SELMA: No, It was not big at all.

Another participant, Bob, perceived that being in a cross-national relationship was easier for him than for his wife, Sally. His prior experience of being in his wife's cultural community facilitated the idea of a cross-national relationship. He stated:

BOB: For me, the cross-cultural/cross-race was relatively, probably easier than for her, because I've already had roommates from Taiwan for several years and I was already immersed in that community, whereas Sally, she had not been here that long when we met. So, I do not know she could speak for herself. But for me it did not seem like a strange to do that because I was already involved with a lot of people, not romantically, but most of my friends at that time were from Taiwan. It was not a big jump to have romantic relationship with someone from Taiwan. But for Sally maybe very different.

Other participants commented that there were other matters that were more important than their cultural differences. Sally, for example, stated that finding a job in the U.S. was more important to her than focusing on the cultural differences in their marriage. When differences occurred between her and her husband, it was normally related to other relational factors (e.g., children), rather than cross-cultural issues per se. Therefore, she did not necessarily perceive being in a cross-national marriage as the real problem.

SALLY: For me, the main thing, finding a job is harder because I planned to go back to Taiwan and then changed the course. So, in this setting and to find a job and then my English not that great at that time, I think it's most difficult part. As for marriage in dealing with things, I do not see a huge difficulty.

BOB: We do not worry [about] communication usually. [It is] not a problem for us or any more than anyone else that speaking the same language. So, that's not a problem.

SALLY: We have lots of cultural things. Fight, okay. I mean fight...culturally founded.

BOB: I think most of our conflicts have to do with the kids.

SALLY: That's true. So, we have those kinds of conflicts. Not as much...

ANDREW: Between you?!

SALLY: Yeah!

BOB: Yeah! I think it's right!

SALLY: For me, maybe for international marriage it's easy in a way.

Cross-national couples did not deny that there are cultural differences to face. However, it seemed that those differences were not always the "problem." Like Sally, Tony echoed a similar response that cross-national marriage did not really make a big difference in his life. The cultural differences in manners and customs were essentially learnable behaviors. There were common factors that are typically present in all marriages, such as whether or not to have children, that actually affected the relationships more than culture differences.

TONY: I do not think it really made so much difference until you have kids, to me. To me, there's much, the big difference is not being married or being single. The difference is having kids or not having kids. And I thought after we got married, at least for me, our life was not that much different from what it had been. To me, I honestly think, okay, you have the obvious differences. Language is the big thing. And then daily custom, [for example] take off your shoes, but to me, I am not an idiot. I can learn those things fairly easy. I mean taking off your shoes is not what you need an advance training for or using chopsticks, or whatever going to the mosque, whatever it happens to be. This does not present a cognitive challenge. It is just a series of motions that you go through.

KimSook, who has been married for 23 years, stated that, more than language or cultural differences, the most important issue for her was to feel as though she is part of a family. She said, “[It] [d]oes not matter what. I believe what I learned, [it] does not matter [if] you [have] different culture, different language, man and woman. Having family, have a family, your children [of] your own...[is the most important].”

Four out of eight couples stated explicitly that they did not see or think of themselves in cross-national terms. It appeared that all cross-national couples thought and saw their spouses simply as their wife or husband. In effect, there is a sense of self-invisibility when it comes to this context. While other people might focus more on the cross-national differences, the cross-national couples, themselves, actually were not always consciously aware of their own status. One couple laughed when I presented them with a question, asking about their couple experience with an emphasis on their “mixed-ness.”

ANDREW: How was your experience being mixed race, cross-national couple? What was the joy or the fun of it, if you could start with that?

MORI: I do not see us as international couple. Just my husband and me most of the time (laughed).

GEORGE: Except when she’s cussing me out (laughed). We cannot go through life thinking international. This is an international, No! This is my wife!

It seemed that the more similarities that the husband and wife shared, regardless of their nationality, the harder it was for them to think of themselves as unique in their cross-nationality.

Johnny and Emma, expressed the following:

JOHNNY: I cannot think if anything. Again, it’s even hard for us to envision ourselves as a cross-cultural couple sometimes because the amount of similarities that we have in the religious part, the upbringing. And again Emma’s familiarity with Ireland through her parents’ heritage.

This sense of self-invisibility did not apply only to the couples, but also to their children. If couples did not see themselves as cross-national, neither did they perceive their children in this way. It is a misconception that cross-national couples make their “mixed relationship” a point of focus. It did not seem that the mixed-race aspect of their relationship played the central role. This is illustrated by my conversation with Mori and George:

ANDREW: How much aware you are that your children is a mixed-race when you looked at them. When you raising them?

MORI: I was not thinking about that all the time. I could not be thinking [about it] all the time.

ANDREW: It was not the focus?

MORI: No, [it] was not in my focus. Our kids being mixed and we’re interracial marriage was not in my focus.

GEORGE: The only time I thought of it was when some fool try to bring it up.

From time to time, cross-national couples are made aware of their unique status when they encounter certain circumstances, as George noted above. Emma, for example, talked about how the lack of common references between her and her husband often made her realize that she was in a cross-national marriage. Cross-national couples often did not deal with this reference gap between them until after their marriage.

EMMA: I think those realizations for me came after we’re married. Little things were, I thought, ”Oh, he is not American”. Sometimes it still hits me when people are talking about a TV show that we grew up with or some history thing from our childhood, he doesn’t really relate to it. And I think, “Oh,yeah, that’s right. He grew up in a different country. [He] does not have the same shared experiences of childhood as I do”, So, but I think, it was only after we married it really became apparent.

There were other circumstances that seemed to remind the cross-national couples of their mixed status, such as language limitations and custom differences. In my interview with Dan and Kiyo, Kiyo described how her difficulty in expressing herself freely often served as a reminder

of their cross-national status as couple. They also talked about the differences in customs that played a role in making them aware of their unique marital context.

ANDREW: How often do you see your marriage as cross-cultural marriage?

DAN: It depends.

KIYO: When I want to say something like how I feel or about inside it is difficult to explain.

ANDREW: Can you elaborate a little bit? What made it difficult?

KIYO: Yeah, sometimes. Maybe just my English (laughed).

DAN: Yeah, language.

ANDREW: So, that's what made it difficult for you, Kiyo, to kind of express yourself. And then you realize that this is a cross-cultural marriage?

DAN & KIYO: Yes! (laughed).

ANDREW: Any other situation that kind of made you aware that. "Yes, we're cross-cultural marriage?"

KIYO: Like [issues related to] money. I thought [there was a] different when some of our friends got married.

DAN: Weddings are thought of differently in Japan than in America. There's a lot of gift giving and returning gifts.

KIYO: It's one example.

DAN: There weddings are expensive. You give a gift to people to come. And usually they give money, but that's quite a bit of money, so you give half of it back or as they give a lot so you gave half or like say a thousand dollars, you give five hundreds gift certificate back. If they give you hundred dollars, you give them thirty or forty dollars back. So, that's a lot of different.

All the cross-national couples were able to identify and appreciate their unique strengths of being in this cross-national context. The next section will describe what the couples consider being the highlights of their strengths, and subsequently followed by the parents' perspectives of their strengths.

Perceived Strengths of Being Cross-National

Some cross-national couples described their joy and appreciation of their strengths at great length, while others simply noted how exciting their life experiences are.

KURT: I think it is exciting.

KIMIYO: Yeah, it is exciting.

KURT: It's exciting. It's exciting because (laughed) it's sort of like, to make an analogy. It is sort of like being invited to dinner and not knowing what things they serve before you get there.

KIMIYO: Everyday is kind of different.

Kiyo echoed quite similar comments to Kurt and Kimiyo's, that one of the things that they enjoyed the most about being a cross-national couple was the range of foods and lifestyles that they enjoy experiencing. She said, "Variety! (laughed). Lifestyle and foods." To a certain extent, this sense of differentness brings freshness as to the marital relationship. Emma explained how this experience was true for her, "[A]nd for us, again, I think, it always keep things fresh. You never know. When things do hit me like, "Wow." Yeah, I think it just keeps things fresh sometimes."

Five out of eight participants felt that being a cross-national couple has opened up the gate of relational opportunities with all kinds of people. Sally has a sense that people are automatically more opened and drawn to her and her husband, because they assume that they must be open-minded, because they are married cross-nationally.

SALLY: What positive side is that people see us as international couple and they think we are more open minded. People are more approach to us. With all different background, ethnic background, and they see us as that kind of people. So, they accept us more. This is a very positive side, I think. That's it!

BOB: Oh, for example, this weekend we went out to dinner three nights. One of the three. Two out of the three were with the Taiwanese families. Unlikely that would be happening if I were married to an American girl. Possible, but unlikely.

But it's the nice thing. I hear all kind of points of views on all kinds of issues. Taiwan has a strong influence from Japan. So, Sally speaks some Japanese. I speak some Japanese. We're interested in Japanese food and Japanese cultures. We also have a lot of friends from Japan. Not a lot, not a lot in Manhattan but I mean we know quite a few people from Japan. And I think these doors get opened. Once you yourselves are multicultural, it is much easier to be in the rest of this multicultural community and even not our culture, from Europe, it is easier for us, because we've already to be looking outside of our own cultures. We have Indian friends, European friends. Once you're outside, I think once you're outside of your little shell, your own culture. Once your shell broken, the whole world is open for you. And our shell was broken 25 years ago.

Christian and Selma believe that one of the strengths that has resulted from their cross-national marriage is the sense of adaptability and flexibility in various countries and cultures.

Christian referred to his wife's country of origin as his "second home." Selma felt that traveling to new places has become easier for her.

CHRISTIAN: I don't know, certainly for the kids, yeah, I think that there's advantage. I guess just feeling comfortable being in two different societies, in two different countries. Germany is second home for me now... even though I do not have German citizenship, don't have the equivalent of the green card or anything like that. But it is what I consider to be a second home... I think it's surely the benefit that I feel comfortable in both cultures, both places, both countries.

SELMA: And I think you become more flexible, too, like when you travel anywhere now. For me, for example, since I know the United States now. I know the way of life here because I have been here since '85 (laughed). But it maybe it makes it easier when you go to somewhere else to adapt to certain things.

All the cross-national couples acknowledged the strengths of their marriage, due to the richness that each brought into the relationship. Cross-national couples learned from and were challenged by each other. One's perceptions or misperceptions were stretched, evaluated, and modified. Couples who willingly went through such a process were able to grow deeper in their understanding of themselves and their spouses. George, who has been married for over three decades, stated:

GEORGE: I think, for me, one of the greatest things about the cross-cultural marriage... is there's the fact there's so much brought into it from both sides. I learned a lot from my wife. Sometimes it was a lesson about just (incomplete statement). A lot of times, a lesson about how I think. You cannot make any relationship go if you do not understand the other person. And being married to Mori was made me often times challenge my own ideas, preconception that I had...

Cross-national couples also identified their joys as parents. Six out of eight cross-national parents prided themselves in their greater access to world travel as a significant advantage. Many of them almost spontaneously identified extensive overseas traveling with their children as the primary strength.

EMMA: Like showing our kids. I think it is also nice for our families to get to see what is like to live abroad. The father is not American. And I think, the joys of more traveling and (incomplete statement). Well, you've seen a lot of Ireland than any of your siblings, because when we go over there, we bring the kids all over the place.

It was not only the cross-national parents who were aware of their unique strengths, but apparently others identified these too. Christian shared his acquaintances' and friends' observations about the strengths he and his wife had by being cross-national parents.

CHRISTIAN: What I do get once in awhile, "Oh, what a wonderful experience for your kids", "Oh, your kids do not know how lucky they are."

SELMA: Oh, that's true! Yeah.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, they'll really benefit from this down the road, the fact that they are bilingual, that they have been exposed to... Europe, that they have lived there for extended period", people said that. "Oh, that's a wonderful advantage they have, [what a] wonderful experience for them.

Cross-national couples realized the many advantages they have given their unique marital and familial context. They celebrated their differences and perceived them as distinct strength. However, there also were challenges that cross-national couples encountered.

Challenges of Being Cross-National

The challenges that cross-national couples encountered were shared by others who were not in cross-national marriages, but also are racial or ethnic minorities. Other challenges were uniquely specific to the cross-national context. For example, Sally felt that people's questioning of her decision to marry a person outside of her ethnic/racial context and assumptions that people make about her marital status was an annoying and negative experience.

SALLY: There's a negative side. Because people seem see (incomplete statement). I do not know he (referring to Bob) probably never see. But some [people]. I worked with the children before. And the kids knows that he's American and then they told me, "What, why not you marry the people of your own kind?" Little kids!

BOB: In the preschool?

SALLY: Yeah, preschool kids. They said to me, and also sometimes people see [that] your husband is American. They automatically assume say, "Your husband must be military!" To me, it's not say as negative but in a way, it's assumption there. They assume so many things. I am, "You're Korean?" and then "Military?" all these kind of stuff. So to me, I do not like that....I do not like people identify me as a different race. Not say race, from different country.

BOB: Yeah, that's the downside. She is proud of her heritage. She does not like to be assumed from other heritage when she is not.

SALLY: Yeah. That's right! Well, that's the negative side.

Sooner or later cross-national couples will face a major decision, concerning which country to live in. Although there seem to be various responses to this question, for some couples, this issue was one of the most challenging in their marriage. For example, Furuko stated, "Well, one [important] thing [is] where are you gonna live? In Japan? I am Japanese. He is American. Japan or America? That's one big part!" Emma also echoed similar concern, "The difficult part of being a cross-cultural couple is figuring out where do you want to live? Because somebody has to be away from home."

This process of leaving one's home country behind was very challenging for some of the participants. The foreign spouses, at least, had to face the challenges of separation and isolation, which often created homesickness. Some of the foreign spouses who participated in this study had never lived in the United States prior to their marriage. Therefore, their initial entry into the United States was shocking to them and required much adjustment and adaptation. KimSook poignantly poured out her experience:

KIMSOOK: For me, it's difficult, especially when you...[are] separate[d] from [your] culture. You [are] just independent when you wedding. You [are] independent from your parents. But, for me it's difficult...[Leaving] all behind and coming [here] just with him. Then [you feel] homesick. Because I was very much close with [my] family...It's homesick[ness] and you do not have anyone here... It's difficult besides any relatives here. You're alone! It's difficult!

As parents, the greatest challenges for cross-national couples normally revolve around their children's experiences and school activities. Furuko and Tony shared their feelings of confusion when dealing with their children's school-related matters. They lacked familiarity with the overall school system here in the United States. Both Furuko and Tony experienced culture shock, as Tony left the United States and lived in overseas for many years.

ANDREW: How was that for you being mixed-race cross-cultural couple? What is your general experience?

FURUKO: Sometimes [it was] too hard. When I moved to this country, everything was different. Like school and everything. And then he (referring to Tony) did not know either because he left for so long (laughed).

TONY: Yes, for me, it was like being in a foreign country!

FURUKO: And then one thing [that] was very difficult to me was about (name of the first child"), about [her] school. Because I did not know system or anything and I always confused of so many things.

A common occurrence for mixed-ethnic/race children is for them to encounter challenges because of their ethnicity or race. Although there seem to be a various degrees of difficulty,

parents of mixed-ethnic children often deal with this type of challenge. Five out of eight parents in this study reported that their children had encountered some sort of ethnic and/or racially-related insults or other problems. Mori and George reflected on their experience:

ANDREW: What are the particular challenges of being parents of mixed-race children that you encountered?

MORI: I did not know how to comfort Judy, [my oldest child]. The oldest one had the most difficult time being mixed, I think, and I did not know how to comfort her.

ANDREW: Was she struggled because of her identity as a mixed-race?

MORI: I think so! I think so.

GEORGE: I am not sure if she struggled because of that. [I think] part of it was. [But] part of her struggle was she's going through her teenage years and she's a exceptionally bright individual and she found it challenging to deal sometimes with some individuals here. She put up with some insults from the kids at school. Racist insults. She was excluded from some groups because of the fact that she was Japanese background, I think. It took awhile for her to adjust with that. Once she figured out how to get over on the idiots, she did fine.

Cross-national couples were not exempted from difficulties and challenges due to their mixed-marital context. It was obvious that cultural factors played role in influencing the cross-national couples' and parents' experience.

Cultural Impact on Individuals

There were also some cultural impacts that all cross-national participants experienced. The specific effects of these differed from one individual to another, as well as from one couple to another and one parent to another. Some couples noted the direct link for them between cultural impacts experienced on an individual level and as couple or parents. For some, these impacts were subtle, others profound. Christian and Selma provided one of the examples of the

former. They noticed that there was a difference in their cultural values and behaviors. However, these differences did not seem to have an important effect on their lives as a couple or as parents.

CHRISTIAN: Well, I mean there's some differences in the culture, in the way people behave and the things they value and sort of the things. But I do not think there is a major difference.

SELMA: I do not think so. I mean, for example, if I would compare that to like China, Taiwan, Japan compare that to the US that's like day and night. Mostly the culture. Whereas Germany and the US, I do not think there's that many cultural differences per se. The only thing that I would say, but again for us, that's not relevant to all, is that the people here in US tend to be not to be very direct, whereas European, German would go right to the point. Not talking around the subject and for me, that's very different when I first got here, but as far as between us there's never an issue.

ANDREW: So, the couple relationship, in term of cultural differences is not necessarily a challenge, if we want to call that, in your experience?

SELMA: No, no!

CHRISTIAN: No, I do not think it's a challenge!

ANDREW: How does it come to play in your parenting?

SELMA: [Concerning to] parenting I don't think there's that much different. I mean it is not culturally founded, I do not think.

CHRISTIAN: No, I do not think.

SELMA: I mean, the traditions are yeah. We do try to incorporate both of course. That's there. But really [in regard to] the parenting per se, I do not think that comes in to play.

CHRISTIAN: So, I mean, there's differences like differences in personality.

SELMA: Yeah, but I think it is more personality, not necessarily culturally related.

KimSook had a different experience when it came to the effect of cultural differences on her personal life. Her husband, David, explained how challenging it was for his wife to feel

welcomed and adapt to the new culture she was entering. The sense of being restricted in what she could and could not do was very evident.

DAVID: But I guess, for her, for my wife it was real difficult, the cultural change. It was not the same thing as Korea. In Korea, I noticed that, she could do anything. She could go shopping. She could go to the [market and] prepare the meals everyday and everyday they [are] going and get food, and they [are] bringing [it] home and cook it at the same day and all that. In here, NO!!! In here you are like, you need to plan for the week... You do not go daily. In Korea, she has more active interaction with people [and] with the things.

KimSook even made a clearer statement that, as important as the language was, it was not the issue that complicated her relationship with her husband. The misunderstandings that occurred in her relationship with David were due to the cultural differences.

KIMSOOK: Because I believe language it's not a problem. [Yes], It is important for communication. [It is] very important! But that behind the culture. The culture is really really [the] problem, [more] than language to understanding. Because the culture is different... And so, it's for me it's difficult when I came here, just learning English. I am not that much focus myself to English [at] that time... [although] we knew and under[stood] between the language, but understand[ing one another was the] problem, I guess sometimes. Because he (referring to David) doesn't understand. He doesn't GET IT. It's culture way.

DAVID: I still don't get things.

KIMSOOK: Yeah. Culture way is really, really [the problem]. So, that's more difficult, the culture!

ANDREW: So "culture" for you is a challenge, more than language?

KIMSOOK: Yeah, more than language.

DAVID: Language is not that much problem...

KIMSOOK: Culture makes misunderstanding. Not because the language.

As mentioned earlier, each individual experienced the impact of culture very differently. Language difference was not the issue for KimSook, but it was a significant issue for Mori. Mori

did not only consider speaking English as a struggle but also, more importantly, how Americans lacked sensitivity in recognizing her struggle as a foreigner in learning the language.

MORI: The beginning it was a challenge because I had to learn English. Because when I left Japan all the foreigners come to Japan, they were curious about Japanese. They were curious about that country, so they're so open-minded. They're trying to meet Japanese, so they speak slow, easy and nicer way. But, I'm over this side, they did not consider anything that I needed. I was challenged. I have (paused) The big challenge was getting used to hearing English the way people speak in this country.

In some cases, the cultural impact also manifested itself in the form of ethnic or racial prejudice. A few participants encountered this type of challenge for themselves and their children. Because Mori was Asian, and especially Japanese, former enemies of the U. S., she faced more severe prejudice. The role of race, interlocked with historical and political issues, was apparently still quite prominent in the effects of cultural impact on individuals within the cross-national context.

ANDREW: The sense of prejudice that you experienced, was it particularly because Mori is a foreigner or is it because you're both cross-culturally married?

MORI: I do not think [so]. No! I have not felt anything because we're internationally married. Most of me being Asian. I feel if I am from European country. Like if I am white-skin Caucasian I will feel different with it. There are times this because of me being Asian or me being a Japanese who started the World War II. Start [the] war against this country. There are few times.

Emma recognized that there were some cultural divides that impacted her life and relationship. She reported that differences in customs and values had a significant impact in her socialization during her extended stay in her husband's home country. This stark difference in how her culture and her husband's culture approached personal relationships initially caused difficulties for both of them.

EMMA: Irish ways of socializing is a little bit different. It is very friendly on (paused), it is very friendly, but it is very hard to make good friends, you know

what I mean? They are friendly on one level [but to] go to a deeper level is much more American. And that, I think it's difficult for both of us to adjust too. Both, for him (referring to the husband), would be is here, keeping things from everybody and not taking it to another level. And me, when we were over there wanting to take it to another level and not having people accept that. So, I think, there are some cultural divides that have had an impact on us.

Another cultural impact was related to language. Those couples who shared common languages might have not presented language as an issue. However, those who are like Kurt, who did not speak his wife's native tongue, encountered struggles. Kurt indicated that there was a sense of "paranoia" that he experienced when he was surrounded by people who constantly spoke another language that was foreign to him. The struggle of not being able to understand, to contribute, and to engage in the conversation was very painful.

ANDREW: Are there any challenges, related to cultural or racial particularly, in your relationship?

KURT: (laughed...) I could probably speak to that some because I know a couple of times that we've been in Japan. Sometimes regardless of how hard I tried, I was always curious about what are they talking about because there would be times they were just be chattering along and I go "what are they talking about?" I think it's inevitable at some point in time you start getting little paranoid "Well, are they talking about me? What are they talking about?", and then I asked her (referring to the wife) "What did they talking about?" [Then, wife said to the husband] "Wait, wait!" I am like, "No! I do not want [wait], I want to talk now. What's going on?!" I know that it was more my own paranoid and suspicion than anything else. There would be time when that little thought would wiggle its way into my subconscious (laughed). I think it's natural, and of course, I think it is probably true in her case [too].

KIMIYO: [S]ometimes it's difficult [the] southern accent. Accent is different and also I tried to associate [and] blend in with his [family] but we're really [having] good relation with family but sometimes [I have] my fear.

The cultural impacts were present in all the cross-national couples, yet their manifestations and the impact level were varied from couples to others. Language, societal prejudice and cultural understanding appeared to be the main cultural factors that were identified impacting the cross-national couples.

Summary of Perception

This theme of perceptions portrays couples' perceptions on their life experiences of being in the cross-national context. Based on their responses, it obviously appeared that there was diverse experience when it came to the reality and the lived experience of cross-national couples. Cross national couples also clearly acknowledged their joy and strengths for being in mixed-marriages, despite of the additional challenges they must encounter. It was evident that not all the challenges that cross-national couples encountered were unique to their mixed context. Many of those challenges were actually common challenge also encountered by couples in general. Cross-national couples experienced the impact of cultural differences on varying aspects and levels.

Relational Dynamics

The second category focused specifically on the relational dynamics that cross-national couples/parents experienced. This category of relational dynamics added more nuances to the lived experience the cross-national parents and couples, portrayed in the first category. Based on the participants' responses, it was apparent that cross-national couples/parents encountered both "common" relational dynamics, similar to the ones encountered by their monocultural counterparts, as well as "uniquely specific" relational dynamics that were unique to their cross-national context. These dynamics could be attributed to the interactions among a variety of contributing factors. To a certain degree, this category provided some answers to the third research question that seeks to uncover how the parent's unique personal characteristics influence their parenting approach. Out of the participants' responses, three distinct themes emerged: *commonalities*, *uniquely specific dynamics* and *contributing factors*.

Commonalities

Cross-national couples revealed that there was nothing mysterious that actually led them to marry cross-nationally. All of them straightforwardly stated that one of the most fundamental factors that ushered the couples into marriage was simply the feelings of attraction they had for each other. The participants mentioned all kinds of attractions they had toward each others, such as physical beauty, personal attributes, the feelings of enjoyment of each other's company, the sense of similarity or differences, etc. It seemed that there were always certain characteristics of the other person, whether it was positive personal attributes or even eccentricities that captured one's interest in another. For example, Johnny and Emma found that their cultural difference was interesting. Emma made specific reference to Johnny's thick accent and thought of it as intriguing. However, it was their sense of good fit that pulled them closer together.

JOHNNY: I guess we both found each other interesting.

EMMA: Yeah, and I think also interesting too to meet someone from another culture. And yeah the accent. Well, when you can understand it. His accent has mellowed quite a bit I would say over the years.

JOHNNY: What else pulled us together? I do not know, we matched up pretty well, I guess (laughed). And the usual things that bring many people together.

Apart from the relational dynamic of attraction, all cross-national couples also indicated relational concerns that are quite common in couple relationships. Issues related to parenting, meeting basic needs, such as finances, housing, food and clothing were identified as significant factors. When unfulfilled, these factors could create stress that would interfere with a relationship and life as couple and parent.

TONY: To me, I have never experienced [cultural difference as a challenge]. Okay, now in the last 10 years, I think when there is a problem, it is not a cultural for the most part. It's not the cultural thing. It's the everyday things, like money. I think. Work. Being too busy and then other things, like say for example, since I've lived in Japan for so long a lot of things relating to everyday lives [are not a

problem]. To me, like the big stress, things like money, you know. To me! that's like economic pressures. To me, that's the big thing.

Mori also voiced similar comments, yet with additional emphasis on the importance of stability as family. She believed that having a stable home should be the center focus, not so much issues about ethnicity or race.

MORI: Yeah, I only (paused), the most concern I think was meet[ing] the basic needs. We should have enough money to meet the basic needs, house, food, and clothing and so on that was very important. But, at least he came home every evening. Father goes to work in the morning and come home every night. Having a family life is the most important things. Stable home then the kids should do well at school.

ANDREW: Stability! So, race is not so much the centered focus. Although it is part of importance.

MORI: No matter where you move to, [having a] stable home and husband [who] do not mess around with other people. Not necessarily husband, both parents, do not mess around, [and] leaving the kids behind, that's the most important thing, I think. Meet the kids' needs.

The participants in this study described quite vividly that many of their relational dynamics were universal experiences that all couples, regardless their ethnic or racial composition, are likely to encounter. Since I was primarily interested in exploring the couple's experience as parents, in the following section I specifically focused on the couple's relational dynamic as parents. Based on the data gathered, it was interesting to discover that, in their parent role, cross-national couples also encountered common dynamics similar to the ones that monoethnic parents would typically encounter. For example, this dynamic was portrayed in Bob and Sally's relationship. Although Sally indicated that she and her husband had lots of "fights" that were culturally based, from their further explanation, it appeared that the relational conflicts that they had with each other as parents were not so much due to their cultural differences per se, but more on their differences in attitude and expectations towards their children.

SALLY: We have lots of cultural things. Fight, okay. I mean, fight [that]culturally founded.

BOB: I think most of our conflicts have to do with the kids.

SALLY: That's true.

BOB: Sally is a stereotypical Asian mom. [She] wants the kids to be the top in the class, etc. I am (paused) I see they are working, I think that's good enough. So this gives rise to our conflicts because, if I want to do something for the kids, in term of Easter basket as she mentioned and I do not get her support, in fact even [the] opposite. kind of empty support, I do not like that! If the kids are not practicing the piano well enough and she is always the one pushing them to play the piano and she does not like it that I am not pushing them to play the piano. So, it is the different attitudes towards the kids that are the biggest part of our conflicts usually, I think!

ANDREW: So, this is not so much you both as a couple, but when the child comes along.

BOB: I think so!!

ANDREW: How do you navigate through these challenges that you mentioned earlier with the parenting with the cultural differences on top of this?

BOB: I think Sally does her "Asian mom-thing" as the kids would call it. And for me, I think it's a bit over the top, but I am okay with it. I mean, the kids are (paused) they do well in school, etc, etc. So, I am okay with that. I think it's somewhere over the top sometimes, but I am okay with it.

In addition to the difference in attitudes and expectations, it also appeared that cross national parents struggled with a common issue of spousal support. Given the differences in expectation towards their children, parents tended to differ in their approach of parental roles. While one parent is concerned that the children accomplish certain things, beyond than just "standard" achievement, the other parent tended to "balance it out" by taking "a step back" type of approach. This difference in parental approach often inevitably caused the one parent to feel unsupported by his or her spouse and felt that she or he needed to "fight the battle alone".

BOB: The conflict comes for us is because I don't, I am not up there with her doing this. [In] another words, she, I think, feels the burden of having to do all

pushing on her own and being the bad guy. And I do not have to be the bad guy. Oh, I am bad don't get me wrong (laughed). But not necessarily on this issue. She feels like she's fighting this war alone. I think that gives rise to some grief between us. But it's not because of the fundamental disagreement on how to raise the kids, I think it's a bit over the top and I just do not want to push it, besides she's pushing it so hard why am I gonna add to this. That's [what] I think. You can add to that.

SALLY: Yes, this is part of [it]. I feel I always have to tell the kids to do this and do that and it's exhausting. We all have to work and then come home and keeps on pounding on those things and then, I just feel he can do the same thing instead I'm [always the one who is] pushing them.

BOB: On the other hand, I feel like that they have been pounded enough (laughed), so I do not say much (laughed). But it's definitely an issue for us because she does not see me supporting her in this job. She sees me helping raise the kids but not on all these issues...

The issue regarding spousal support was not uncommon within the parental system. It appeared that the glitches in this issue were not because the partner did not care to support his or her spouse in their roles together as parents, but so often the partner's ways of supporting were completely different from what the other spouse desired or expected.

KIMSOOK: I put schedule. 24 hours schedule in refrigerator there. The[ir] wake up time and all that. So, they did that. That's [the] way they think [how] they [should be] living, because mom always [there, so they must] listen. [They] follow... direction very well. Then suddenly they [are] grown up teenagers. After middle school, ... I need his help, but ...he (referring to husband) knows that I am used to all the time with the kids. He [was] kind of he does not know where to starting. Then, I am asking for help. High school [students need some] direction for college and all that. Then, he suddenly jumped in trying to help. He thought, "Oh my children are doing too much, they need"

ANDREW: a break.

KIMSOOK: So, he is trying to helping me. [But] not [the] right way!

Parents' different values and expectations of what type of educational activities that they believed their children should be doing could lead to some clashes in the parental dynamics.

David and KimSook shared their experience about their relational challenges when it comes to dealing with different expectations towards children and their parental approach.

KIMSOOK: So, every four year old birthday, I give [my child] a chance to [an] early music program. My husband thought “I am the crazy one!” Because why younger children [must do this]. [They should] go play outside, and riding bike, kicking the ball, that’s the way supposed to be.

DAVID: The same things I do when I was a kid. But in the way, music at four? I was playing soccer [at that age].

KIMSOOK: He does not understand that. Even I do not have that much money, I want to spend that money for educat[ion]. That’s kind in my mind.

ANDREW: So, I am hearing you’re saying that “education is important”.

KIMSOOK: For me, it’s very important!

DAVID: The education challenge is kind of (paused) is... kind a different for me. Like she said, my family is more laid back. When I do something extra-curricular like judo, or something I want to have fun with. On her thing of it, extra-curricular is like taking... the math in the summer. Take music. I never [did or thought of that]. If it is not because my wife, I never probably would have put my kids on music, just for the fact, I do not believe to have a four year old playing cello. And my son start playing at four years old. Even when my daughter, my first daughter, she (referring to wife) told me, “I want to put Suzie on violin lesson!”. She was seven! I am going like, “Seven? That’s too young to put someone on violin!” So, she had different focus from a more laid-back background that I am coming. She has given more strict background or did more discipline.

The relational dynamics between parents could create a split in the children’s perception of their parents – for example, “the good cop vs. the bad cop.” The parents’ differences might be mainly attributed to the parents’ parental styles or possibly due to their personality differences. This dynamic is also universal in the parental dynamic.

DAVID: Because I am more liberal.

KIMSOOK: Yeah!

DAVID: She is the Republican, I am the Democrat!

KIMSOOK: He is a good-cop and I'm the bad-cop!

DAVID: I am the liberal and she is the conservative, okay.

KIMSOOK: So, I am also the bad-cop, he is the good-cop, [as] my children say so. So, I am like ... education [or] academic way, I am focused! [If] they do everything too well done, then they...

ANDREW: Free...

KIMSOOK: Yeah, free! [And if] they do not do that and it's gonna be hard time with me. But my husband (incomplete statement).

DAVID: I am taking [them] through the back door and we go to see movies...

KIMSOOK: Yeah! My husband, even [when] I'm mad. Because it's a different, also [perhaps it] is [the] culture. Also, but lots [of it] my husband's personally... even not [about] culture. [Whether] different culture [and] even [if] you [have the] same culture, ... raising your children is a lot of work, okay! [simply] because mom and daddy [have] different personality.

Even though culture was implicitly mentioned as playing some roles in the parenting process, however, the majority of parents in this study placed more emphasis on their personality differences as contributing factors that affected their parental dynamic rather than culture.

Christian and Selma explained:

CHRISTIAN: Well, she tends to be more direct; I tend to be more circular.

CHRISTIAN, SELMA & ANDREW: (All laughed)

CHRISTIAN: So, I mean, there's differences like differences in personality.

SELMA: Yeah, but I think it is more personality, not necessarily culturally related.

Like monocultural parents, cross-national parents also dealt with issues related to parenting in general. Kiyoo and Dan mentioned about their difficulties in dealing with their differences in ideas of discipline.

ANDREW: Is there anything in particular, because you are cross-culturally married couple, that contributes to challenges in how you are being a couple?

KIYO: Children.

DAN: Children, probably.

KIYO: We have different idea (laughed) to disciplining.

DAN: Discipline [the] children.

Other parents reported that they encountered challenges, related to their children's developmental phases. Some parents have gone through it, while others were still undergoing those challenges during the time of this study was conducted. Bob and Sally talked about the developmental issues that their children had to face. As parents, they watched how their children wrestled with it, which to a degree brought them concern. For example, the issues of acceptance – they wondered if their children were accepted by their peers at school, given the group “cliques” that were rampant among teenagers. It is universal phenomenon.

SALLY: The kids have more other issues, to me, not only this race issues and also other issues. [As] a teenager, they [have] so many other issues.

BOB: Middle school is the worst. All the cliques [in the school]. The race is small part of all the other cliques activities.

ANDREW: Developmental thing?

SALLY: Yeah.

BOB: Yeah. Who is the prettiest? Who has the most boyfriend?...

Tony and Furuko discussed the changing relationship they had with their children as they were going through the adolescent years. Their experience seemed to reflect the phenomenon that the many families would encounter. Tony said, “[W]hen you're like, Beth is 14. When you 14, 15, 16, it does not matter, your parents are strange. And ... parents are an embarrassment. They are stupid. And they do not know anything. And this, I think, is pretty universal.”

Cross-national parents also wrestled with issue that I called “partiality” – a potent technique that children commonly use in order to get their way by playing the “dad-says-mom-says” game. Children would typically report to one of their parents what and how dad/dad said and did to them with an intention to put the other parent in a bind and eventually give in to their wishes. This seems to happen across cultures.

BOB: [O]ur daughters are great with explanations. She gave us why she was unexcused, why should be okayed, [which] sounded okay to me. So I said “Okay!”. And then, she said [to mom], “Dad said things are okay, why are you giving me so much trouble!”

SALLY: The kids are manipulative. All the kids (laughed).

BOB: The kids are smart. They know how to use these differences in the parents whether you’re multicultural or not. Kids know how to do this well. When you are multicultural they have even more chances to use this.

Seven out of eight parents in this study indicated that mothers tended to have a stronger influence on the children. Given the mothers’ very nature and the amount of time mothers typically would spend with their children as compared to fathers, especially if the mothers are a stay-home-moms; the significance of the mother’s role could not be overestimated. KimSook shared briefly about the parental dynamics she experienced in her life and how her culture was more influential in her children’s life than her husband’s, especially when her children were still young:

KIMSOOK: [Parents from] different culture, [from] different language parents... really need [to] focus. ...Children when they are young 100% almost, 90% [what they need] is mom. Children needs mom than daddy. Daddy is always go to work or school. Dad leaves every morning. But mom spends time, if mom she does not work, she staying there for them when they are young. So, they follow very much my way, my cultural way when they are young.

To be a parent requires a lot of attention, stamina and energy. It is a common phenomenon that children, especially the younger ones, would expect their parents to engage

with them in play and activities, regardless of the parents' level of physical stamina and their emotional condition. Cross-national parents are not exempt from this constant demand, which sometimes truly presented a real challenge. It is a universal phenomenon. Kurt described how his child's physical demands on him were more a challenging issue that somewhat affected his life and relational dynamic than necessarily having a mixed-ethnic child.

KURT: But, I think the biggest challenge that we are faced is not the fact that he is cross-cultural child, but the fact that he is an only child. I think that has been more a serious challenge for us and him. Because we're both not young anymore and I get home from work sometimes I am so tired... When I get home, the first thing come out of his mouth, "I want to play" And I like, Wow, I do not really feel like it right now. And there's that challenge. I do not really see where he's being mixed ancestry or mixed-cultural background is really that much of a challenge.

Each parent, regardless his or her cultural background, shared the ultimate parenting fundamental that was support and unconditional love for their children. All of the participants demonstrated this characteristic in their role as parents. KimSook straightforwardly stated that it was essentially significant for parents to affirm their love for their children tangibly. This type of relational dynamic between parents and child was suggested to be, in effect, the anchor of the relationship. These were the ultimate commonalities in relational dynamics that cross-national couples displayed: to care, to invest in, and to love their children for who they are.

DAVID: [A]nd I am still think that we get involved a lot. My wife probably more. She gets involved on whole day kids' activities.

KIMSOOK: [In the kids'] every activity, [I am always] be there.

DAVID: She spends a lot of time with the kids. On the soccer field [for example]

KIMSOOK: Do not just send the kids to the school. Join with [other] parents any activities, and especially [for] younger children... [For] these younger children, [this] first thing [is really] important. This young couple, mom and daddy, need to show [to their children and let them] know ...how much they love them! T[ell and] show [them] how... important persons [they are]...

Cross-national couples faced common experience encountered by other couples who are not cross-national. Cross-national couples dealt with matters related to attraction, the importance of family stability, differences in attitudes and expectations toward children, spousal support, and personality differences in their relationship. As parents, cross-national couples also similarly faced issues related to their children's developmental phases, parenting interactions, the mother's stronger influence on the children, the constant demand of parenting, the importance of unconditional support and love for the children. Nonetheless, cross-national couples also faced experiences that were unique to their cross-national context.

Uniquely Cross-National Aspects

Given their unique relational composition, cross-national did experience unique-specific relational dynamics, exclusive to their mixed-ethnic context. There were one or two experiences that were listed in this section that might appear common to all couples at the first glance. However, it is important to note that the cross-national couples believed that, although there was a varying degree of the cultural impacts on their relationship, their experience was most likely "accentuated" by their cultural idiosyncrasies. Kurt stated succinctly:

KURT: I think going back to what we discussed earlier, to the degree that people in the traditional relationship have these kinds of challenges. This challenge are the kinds of challenges that we have are that much more accentuated because you are facing other challenges that people in traditional relationship are not going to face.

For example, David admitted that there was some minor difficulty that took place simply because they both came from different cultures, but he did not really see that being a cross-cultural couple was really the problem.

DAVID: I guess, I do not know too much about the Korean culture. So, I do not see difficulties, just minor things. She makes me to do things one way, but I do not do it that way because I am Hispanic.

Although all cross-national couples demonstrated that there were differences in how each spouse experienced their relational dynamics, four out of eight couples identified it more overtly than others, especially related to cultural issues. For example, while David did not perceive that culture had a major impact, his wife adamantly believed that culture had a significant impact on their relational dynamics.

KIMSOOK: I believe language it's not a problem. It is important for communication. Very important! But that behind [there is] the culture. The culture is really really [the] problem, [more] than language to understanding. Because the culture is different! Culture makes misunderstanding. Not because the language. If I explain [to] him (referring to husband), he do[es] not get it! Because of culture. For me, we're now still [struggle although] we understand each other language. [But] still culture still there!

Although being married cross-nationally appeared to potentially expand one's worldview and even sometimes took the focus off of one's own culture, it does not necessarily mean that cross-national spouses could easily forsake their own cultural preferences and ideologies. Six out of eight cross-national couples in this study, in different ways, talked about how they still had strong feelings toward certain aspects of their culture that they appreciated more than their spouse's.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, I know. Once in awhile there will be a little argument about, "Well, if we live in Germany we will be able to do this" or "If we live in the United States we can do this" And sometimes the kids sort of watch this go on and you kind of wonder what they (could not be identified from the recording). Sometimes they take sides, sometimes they stay out of it. I think they realized that we both have strong feelings about certain aspects of the country that we grew up in, the things that we like...

Johnny and Emma voiced a similar concern. Because cultural issues can be so fundamentally embedded in one's life and personhood, it was not uncommon that cross-national

couples had to struggle with delicate and persistent issues. Johnny and Emma explained more explicitly about how their cultural differences affected their relationship.

JOHNNY: Boy, it's hard for me to think of any sort of issue. There are things like in Ireland, a lot of people drink and social drinking is very common. [It is] sort of an accepted part of the culture. And good deal of people drink to excess. It's something about the culture, about Irish culture that Emma does not like and really dislikes. But it is something that I really grew up with and sort of don't see as that big of an issue.

EMMA: Yeah, we've had different experiences culturally. Well, especially socially as he said with the drinking, which I am not opposed to alcohol, just drinking to excess or adults doing it. So, I do not like that part of the culture, the Irish culture. That really bothers me. And there are other things I like, which is the community spirit which I do not think that we have in the United States as much. I think we come across little cultural thing, [issues of] how you talk with people, even a little bit different sometimes. In the early years of our marriage, Johnny would think I was being (incomplete statement), I was asking too many questions of his neighbors that you would not ask in Ireland. So, I was not aware of some of the social taboos, like "Oh, you do not discuss that!" I did not know and that sort of thing.

Reflecting on his relational dynamic with his wife, David recognized his tendencies to be overprotective toward his wife. He made it clear that part of it could be attributed to his cultural characteristics that it was proper for man to protect the woman. He said, "Me, for me [it was] new also. I do not know, [I was] emotionally too protective. "Don't go this, do not go there" I did not want nothing to happen [to my wife]. It's my culture I guess, we'll overprotect girl. We always have I guess. But so, it was the small things like that..."

Six of eight cross-national couples mentioned that they experienced situations in their relationship where there was a very little conceptual understanding or cognitive acceptance between spouses about particular things, circumstances, or issues. Although this might also happen to couples who are not cross-national, these participants clearly indicated that it was culturally-based. The conversation between Johnny and Emma displayed this dynamic:

EMMA: We have big thing about like Johnny's attachment to land, where he was raised. I just do not get that. As American, I do not get "Oh, my grandfather was born here, my father was born here, so I want have this land". I just do not understand that concept of attachment to specific land, his land.

JOHNNY: And funerals.

EMMA: Oh, funerals! Yeah!

JOHNNY: We go to funerals a lot in Ireland. It is an important part of the culture. It is not something that, and again, you tend to know more people in rural environment, so you end up knowing more people who died. So you go to more funerals.

EMMA: But they go to funerals to people not even that they knew somehow. So, yeah, I do not get the funeral business. I do not get the death thing. I do not get the attachment to land. I do not think no matter how long I live in Ireland or talk, I just kind a wish it would not be the part of me. I'll say, "I know you believe that, [but] I do not see why" (laughed).

One other salient issue that the cross-national couples often identified affecting their relational dynamics was the geographical location of where to live. As the surrounding environment was commonly identified as one of the prominent factors in the context of being parents of mixed-ethnic children, cross-national couples wrestled with this issue very seriously. Because each environment might have its own "culture," the couples were likely required to deal with cultures that were extremely foreign to them. The problem was likely to emerge when one of the spouses demonstrated lack of interest or assertively refused to live in the spouse's foreign country.

ANDREW: Have you considered to leave the U.S. someday and live in Ireland as family?

EMMA: There is no way in hell, I am ever living in Ireland. No! I did it once and I am not doing it again. I did it twice! It's my lifetime limit. It's rainy. overcast all the time, and it's not sunny at all. I mean it's rarely. I just would not be able to live there. That has been point of contention between us as an international couple. Because it's hard when one of the spouses does not want ever go to your homeland. So, that has been hard for us...

To a degree, cross-national couples experienced quite a challenge in their relational dynamics. There were always common relational challenges that all couples would consistently encounter in their relationship. However, cross-national couples tended to have additional challenges by having either a lack of or no common references to things, such as lifestyles, cultural and/or childhood experiences. Emma expressed her thought on this issue:

EMMA: Yeah, I mean there are moments we think, "Jeezzz." just the level of understanding backgrounds and schooling and how we were raised, much different like, "Oh, it would be easier if I do not have to explain what it was like to go to school for me, what it was like growing up for me." Because he does not have those references.

As parents, cross-national couples have to work through the issues of blending their cultural backgrounds. Some parents clearly envisioned establishing a family with more emphasis on one culture, while others tried to integrate both cultural backgrounds into their family life.

Bob talked about how he and his wife managed to resolve their cultural differences.

BOB: I would say from both of our sides are blended. Her blend is more emphasiz[ing] Taiwanese... but she certainly make all kinds of concessions on American issues. Mine is more American ... All the things kids do in school nowadays and everything, you don't do that in Taiwan or at least did not do it during her growing up. All these extracurricular activities, and dating and parties and this and this. No! So, she had to make these huge concessions.

As discussed previously, cross-cultural parents do not consciously think of themselves in terms of their "cross-cultural"-ness but see their wife or husband as simply their spouse. They perceived their children in the same way. However, despite of this "self-invisibility", cross-national parents were very aware of the importance of providing their children with a wider view of life and broad cultural exposures. This dynamic appeared to be quite unique to cross-national families. Emma said, "I think because we come from different places, and because we've chosen

to live the places where we were raised. We bring up our kids with maybe wider views of life than if we're both Kansans and both from Manhattan.”

Cross-national parents also demonstrated a concern about their mixed-ethnic children's sense of identity. Four out of eight parents were more concerned than the rest of the parents. Even though not all the cross-national parents had dealt with or were necessarily experiencing this particular problem, nonetheless, this sense of concern was common.

ANDREW: [B]ecause they are mixed-race children, do you have any concern?

DAN: Not as much, right now I know it.

KIYO: About their identity. I hope they will find their own identity as they are themselves during they will grow up, I hope they will find their own identity.

Cross national parents demonstrated varying levels of concern about the effects of being “different” on their children. This concern was primarily directed to the treatment their children received from their peers due to their mixed-ness. Four out of eight parents had encountered specific issues related to their children's being treated differently.

SALLY: ...like at school, kids friendly together they play whatever. In Annie (the first child)'s [school], I do not find them as much, but in Mary (the second child)'s school, [yes]. Because those kids, group of kids are the popular kids. They exclude you. “You are not popular because of your race” I do not know. [It] makes me suspicious because the whole groups are White.

BOB: No data. The whole group is blonde hair, blue eyes, White girls.

SALLY: That's right! So, I do not know.

BOB: It makes you suspicious if your daughter is not part of that group because she is not blonde hair, blue eyes, White girl. No evidence! but just makes you suspicious sometimes.

Parents who participated in this study indicated that it was not because their children were “mixed” that they encountered problems. The core problem was due to the fact that they

were not exactly the same race as the majority of the people they encountered. In other words, it was the fact that they were a racial minority. As Bob and Sally noted, it was racial difference that was more significant than the mix-ness of their child.

SALLY: That's right! and Mary will come home and cry about it because people make fun of them. [They] sa[id], "You're Chinese. You have eyes like this"

BOB: Now, but not, it's not [because they're] mixed. It's the making fun of the Asian part of her.

SALLY: Asian. More the Asian side!

BOB: But in the case of being teased over, it is not being teased because of being biracial, but because being Chinese.

SALLY: Not biracial. Yes! Yeah, that's true! But basic the problem is with the race.

Parents of mixed-ethnic children found this type of prejudice was difficult for them to address. They mentioned a variety of ways that they responded to this challenge and what they did in order to intervene. Bob and Sally's explanation painted a good picture of what cross-national parents would likely experience in dealing with this type of challenge. Sometimes parents felt that there was nothing they could do to alleviate their children's emotional struggle, and simply told their child to ignore it. Other parents tried to emotionally comfort their child by "rationalizing" the incident and telling their child how smart and attractive they were and how those things caused jealousy. Typically, the parents simply relied on the school authorities to intervene on their behalf whenever appropriate. This reduced any relational complications with the other children's parents.

ANDREW: How do you, as parents, step in when your child struggle in that issue?

SALLY: It is difficult because I have been through it so I know. I think it's hard. And a lot of times I tell my kids to ignore it. Really.

BOB: It is almost all you can do. As Sally said, mainly the younger one, mainly because she is more sensitive to it. The older one just puts some of the thick skin and we do not even know about it most of the time until year after. But then the younger one, she is very sensitive to any kind of teasing from anybody. So, she would be in tears very easily. Well, we just tell her that “Look, maybe your athletic, you’re pretty, you’re smart. Some kids are jealous. They are gonna say mean things”. That’s what we try to explain to her. The bottom line is we just tell her to ignore, because what else can you do? You can’t start a fight. If you call their parents makes it worse. “Look, if you ignore they will stop. They will only tease you if they know they are having an effect. If you ignore it.... Pretend there’s no problem with it, okay”. So she tries to follow, but it’s hard for the kid.

SALLY: But one thing good is the school, I notice. I forgot how it happened in [one of the diverse schools] [In this diverse school]. kids would tell and tell, so, teacher would intervene. But in the middle school, less teacher intervene. But on the other hand, if that happens in the classroom, they will call the kids out to the principal office or tell them to time out, whatever, punish the kid.

BOB: So, without Mary taking any action. So, the school steps in.

SALLY: [T]hey will step in. unless the school does not know, nothing they can do. I used to tell the kids, “Just ignore that.” I would not tell them to go tell the school unless something really hurtful. I think I would tell them to report it. It’s not really a big issues. I think my kids need to learn to deal it with themselves. So, I never really say [or] tell them what to do. Sometimes I’d tell them “You’re not Chinese anyway. You’re from Taiwan.”, but this not really solve the issue. But sometimes I tell them, ”You’re smart. You just don’t’ have to care about this.” That’s it!

Lastly, one other uniquely specific relational dynamic that cross-national parents frequently faced was the sense of isolation or lack of support. To be cross-nationally married, at least one of the spouses had to leave his or her comfort zone and support system, which presented some challenges individually as well as relationally. As much as traditional monoethnic couples had to adjust in their marriage, cross-national couples encountered heightened challenges. Cross-national parents who were in some other special circumstance, such as military, encountered even greater challenges, given the added stress of the constant moves they typically had to go through. Mori told her experience of how challenging it was for

her to be in this cross-national context with the lack of support she received from her family and others:

MORI: Yeah, having kids helped keeps us together. I think [for the] most part... You have to take care kids because nobody else would take care your kids, our parents were not near. We do not have any relatives. We never have any relatives nearby because we're moving every few years because of military. I do not know just recently I started to feel I can enjoy my life. But, I feel kind of late on that [because of] my age. I want my youth back (laughed) to do thing that I could not do. But, anyway kids are the most part that kept us together. There were times I told him that, if I did not have the kids, I would have left him. If we're living in Japan, I would go back to my parents much much sooner, much earlier.

Given their unique relational composition, cross-national couples did experience unique-specific relational dynamics, exclusive to their mixed-ethnic context. Some of those unique dynamics were: accentuated relational experience, differences in how spouses experience their relationship due to cultural influences, strong feelings toward one's or spouse's culture, the lack of conceptual understanding or cognitive acceptance about the spouse's culture and common reference. Cross-national parents also uniquely dealt with issues related to the integration of culture(s) in the family, their children's sense of identity as mixed-individual, the racist and prejudice reactions their children received from their peers, and parenting isolation due to lack of familial support. These cross-national couples' experience were also shaped by contributing factors.

Contributing Factors

There were contributing factors that seemed to influence the relational dynamics of the cross-national couples. Because of these contributing factors, the experience of each cross-cultural couples were very diverse and unique. The first factor was level of immersion. At least one spouse in each couple had immersion experience in his/her spouse's culture. It appeared that there was close connection between the spouse's level of immersion into the other spouse's

culture and the couple's relational dynamics. The greater level of immersion one had in his or her spouse's culture, the more cohesive their relational dynamic appeared. Bob did not perceive marrying someone cross-nationally as strange, primarily because he was already immersed in his wife's culture due to solid friendships that had already been established with people from his wife's culture.

BOB: For me, the cross-cultural/cross-race was relatively, probably easier than for her, because I've already had roommates from Taiwan for several years and I was already immersed in that community. It did not seem like a strange [thing] to do that because I was already involved with a lot of people, not romantically. Most of my friends at that time were from Taiwan. It was not a big jump to have romantic relationship with someone from Taiwan.

Dan echoed a similar experience, stating that his compatibility with his wife's culture had to do with his previous exposure and immersion in it.

DAN: I think for me, I felt very comfortable in Japan. with the Japanese. And my roommate married Japanese. Stayed and worked in Japan. So, I was around a lot of Japanese too, at school, in seminary, in church. Japanese church in Kentucky. So, for me, it was natural.

Spouses might not necessarily have had direct immersion experience in the other spouse's culture. Nonetheless, they had developed a positive attitude about their spouse's culture either through an encounter with that culture or through reading. This positive attitude and sense of respect were influential factors that shaped the couples' relational dynamics.

KURT: And I do have a high regard, very high respect for her (referring to his wife) cultural background. And I think the education has part of this. When I met her I already knew quite a bit about her culture and the historical background of her culture. Of course, I've learned more since, but that had a lot of impact on us.

One's family of origin has a significant effect on the cross-national couple's relationship. Five out of eight couples talked about the effects of their parent's parenting approach as it related to their own parenting styles. These couples discussed how they tended to imitate their parents'

parenting styles. Some couples overtly expressed that their similar upbringing made it easier for them to agree in their parenting style. Kurt and Kimiyo explained that they had both implemented the disciplinary model similar to that which they experienced growing up in their own homes.

KURT: I have a very strict parent. I know she did too.

KIMIYO: My parents were strict. So, we do to him. We did not do recently but...

KURT: When he was younger and...

KIMIYO: We did time out. And if time out does not work, occasionally we spanked...

Cross-national parents did not always necessarily adopt all their parents' parenting values and customs. Some couples purposefully deviated from their parents' methods. David gave his reason why he and his wife found it necessary for one of them to stay at home with their children, rather than following their parents' example.

DAVID: [H]er parents worked when she was young, my parents worked. Something that we decided to do is that [only] one of us [should work]! I must say, somebody raising my kids... Why do I want have somebody raising my kids? My kids!? So, I mean, even though the baby-sitting and all that, it's the American thing to do, I am against it in the way. I want them to know us. We know how our parents did. And you know [do you] want to know what? We want to change that!! For me that it was important.

One's family of origin also influences how one envisions the type of marriage or family one would like to have. Some participants indicated that their family of origin influenced their mate selection preference. David explained that dealing with his mother's strong character and witnessing the "dynamite" marriage of his parents caused him to decide to choose the opposite type of woman and marriage than his parents had had.

DAVID: [W]hen I was growing up my idea of the oriental woman, it was they're submissive and they listen. Fool me!

KIMSOOK: (laughed)

DAVID: Because I saw when I was kid, you know all these Japanese movies and the women behind them and all that. So, I thought it was gonna be something more passive than my dad's dynamite marriage.

KIMSOOK: (laughed)

DAVID: So, fool me! On that sense, I was something more peaceful. Kind of different from my parents', from my dad's side. And knowing that my mom, she was so strict...

Participants also indicated that family backgrounds and characteristics had a significant impact on their relational dynamics. David described how his wife's maternal family was more accepting of an international relationship than her paternal side of the family, due to their broader cultural exposures.

DAVID: But the mother's side, they are kind more international, like she said her uncle speaks English and all that. He did some dealing with the military and all that. They're kind a more international...her mother's side. More open to international things. More the father's side is more strict cultural Korean root.

Johnny also believed that the lack of cultural clash between him and his wife could be attributed to the fact that his wife was raised in a family that shared his cultural heritage.

JOHNNY: I do not know the difference is kind of subtle. It is not a big of distinction between [cultures]. [My wife's] parents are Irish Americans. Her grandmother was from Ireland. And she had visited Ireland when she was younger. And her parents had visited Ireland quite a bit. So, there was not as big as clash of culture as you might get with other couples. I cannot think of anything. Again, it's even hard for us to envision ourselves as a cross-cultural couple sometimes because the amount of similarities that we have in the religious part, the upbringing. And again [my wife's] familiarity with Ireland through her parents' heritage...

Cross-national parents also indicated that the environment in which one is born or is raised had as much effect on their relational dynamics as their culture. Johnny explained that,

because he grew up on a farm and his wife was raised in suburbia, their relationship was challenged as a result.

JOHNNY: I think apart from the sort of cultural Irish vs. American thing, she is more suburban and I was brought in a very rural environment, so that different was just as strong for me as just any differences in cultures.

ANDREW: Can you kind of little elaborate on it?

JOHNNY: Well, I grew up on a farm, small farm. And [my wife] did not! And so her childhood was very different from mine in terms of not having sort of farm chores to do, working at farm tasks, just being around animals and those kinds of things. And, so those are experiences that she never had that I did have a lot of.

Religion also emerged as a significant factor that affected the cross-national couple's relational experience. Of eight couples, four identified themselves as having no religious affiliation at all. The other four couples had to work out their religious differences. Kurt and Kimiyo briefly talked about how their respectful attitudes toward each other's religion were helpful in their relationship, as well as their parenting approach. However, in spite of this they still had to work out some philosophical disagreements.

KIMIYO: We did not mention before but our religious backgrounds are really different. [This] kind of [things in] this country, we should mention this one, too.

KURT: I have never believed in the superiority of one religion over another. I believe that they are all wanting to accomplish the same thing that is inner peace and belief in the value of life and perhaps after life. And I think that if you want to be successful in this kind of relationship, then you better have that kind of concept about it.

KIMIYO: But still we sometimes, not argue, we discuss.

KURT: Oh, we have philosophical disagreement.

Cross-national couples pointed out that having the same religious background eliminated much of their cultural conflict. Johnny and Emma talked about how their compatibility could be attributed to their similar religious background. For example, as a family, the most of the holiday

events they celebrated were religiously-based. Therefore, there was no concern about it whatsoever.

JOHNNY: Yeah, there is no major difference in the holidays. Again. We both were grown in Catholic culture. Irish is almost exclusively Catholic there. I was growing up there. Emma grew up in Catholic family here.

EMMA: So, no. Because we do most these holidays that we celebrate are religious, Christmas, Easter. [We] have the same thing.

JOHNNY: No major differences there! Again, it's even hard for us to envision ourselves as a cross-cultural couple sometimes because the amount of similarities that we have in the religious part, the upbringing.

The participants talked about how religion affected not only their relational dynamics as nuclear family but also their parents' responses to their mixed-marriage. Emma mentioned, "Well, because your parents did not know me when I went back there and that was sort of an issue for them, in the way. But, because we're the same religion, that's help. I think if we're not the same religion there would have been a lot more oppositions to our match up."

Personal characteristics also appeared to be another significant contributing factor. Dan shared how there was a good-fit between his personal characteristics and his wife's cultural characteristics, which made the culture very comfortable to him.

DAN: [I] am real quiet, and not outgoing. So, that's more similar to the Japanese culture instead American culture

ANDREW: So, it fits with ("wife")?

DAN: with Japanese.

Another significant factor that seemed to play a role in cross-national couples' relational dynamics was ethnic identity. It was quite evident that one's ethnic identity influenced how couples approached their marital and parenting dynamics. Cross-national parents, who had a strong ethnic identity, appeared to expect their children to embrace both parents' cultural

heritages, while there was lack of this expectation for those parents who did not have as strong ethnic identity themselves. For example, Tony explicitly stated that he did not have a strong ethnic identity as an American. He also rejected any ethnic or racial label or categorization as result of his constructed worldview.

TONY: [F]rom the time they were born, there was one thing I wanted to avoid. I did not want my kids to be American. I did not want them to be Japanese. I want them to be themselves. And even now, and I tell them. We're in America. So, I do not have to tell them "don't be like the other Japanese", because it is not the factor. I tell them "Don't follow the American kids are doing because the chances are they are wrong" (laughed)... To me. I think the big thing is, I said before I do not really have a strong cultural, national racial identity. I really don't. I honestly don't. I really reject a lot of this label and category... And I am being perfectly honest, it's not a wishful thinking. They are not the prime motivator in my worldview. My worldview has been constructed.

Summary of Relational Dynamics

This category of relational dynamics portrays the various dynamics encountered by cross-national couples in their relationship. This category captured the commonalities and the uniqueness of cross-national marriage and parenting as compared to the "traditional" marriage and parenting. In general, couples were required to be invested in their marital and parenting relationship. In this process of investing, all couples regardless whether they were mixed or not, faced common challenges, such as resolving conflict between spouses, dealing with the child's developmental issues, etc. Cross-national relationships will similarly face those challenges, yet with additional nuances. These nuances were primarily rooted in one's cultural characteristics. Cross-national couples differed in their perspectives of how cultural differences contributed to their life or relational challenges. Nonetheless, all of the couples acknowledged the effects of their cultural differences on their relationship.

Parent/Child Relationship Issues

The third category focused specifically on different aspects of cross-national parents' experiences in relation to their children. This category consisted of the following four themes: *sense of mixed-heritage pride, parental wishes and expectations, purposeful parenting acts, and reactions to bilingual training*. This category addressed the research questions that sought to understand cross-national parents' logic and values which they deemed important in raising their mixed-ethnic children.

Sense of Mixed-Heritage Pride

Fundamentally all parents, regardless of their nationality, have a sense of pride in their children's uniqueness as individuals. Parents normally search for their children's potential and competence. This is something in which most parents take pride, even to the point to boasting or exaggerating. However, parents of mixed-ethnic/race children appear to take pride in their children's accomplishments, because of their unique ethnicity. One of the most commonly repeated themes, mentioned by these parents, was their children's multilingual ability. Children of cross-national parents had a greater aptitude to master more than one language. For example, Bob and Sally talked about their children's bilingual ability.

BOB: They both are very very good in speaking Chinese.

ANDREW: So, they are bilingual?

BOB: Yeah. yeah.

SALLY: Yeah, half. [They] cannot read and write.

BOB: Oh, they are bilingual. Not native, not native speaking, but native understanding almost.

The majority cross-national parents overtly stated their children's multilingual ability as an important asset. Parents noted that the multilingual ability gave their children a sense of confidence, especially when they had the opportunity to be immersed in the culture. As several other parents, Selma noted the benefit to their children of being bilingual and described her pleasure in her children's experience of being born and raised in this cross-national context. She was proud that her child was bilingual and had developed bi-cultural confidence and independence.

SELMA: [My son] was pretty much grew up with German. I mean that was his first primary language. And then we went back, and he was six or seven, so he did the entire first grade in German. And I think for him that was just absolutely great, because it gave him a lot more of confidence. He was fluent in two languages. And after initially coming back here, he had to catch up with his reading because he was not used to that obviously. But he overcome that fairly quickly. So, for him, it was tremendous experience and for us too because now he's so independent when we go back in the summer, he goes off by himself. He goes to stores. He shops. He can handle the Euro. No problem. So, yeah, he's no problem in either country, which is great!

Selma and Christian observed their child's sense of confidence, not only when he was overseas but also in the United States. Like the other cross-national parents, they took pride in their children's dual-citizenship privileges.

CHRISTIAN: He hears German. For example, at [here] somewhere, at a sporting event or something like that. He'll even go up and start talking German to this person. Somebody whom he does not even know...[He is] very comfortable in both culture[s].

ANDREW: Wow, what a confident building!

SELMA: Oh, yeah. Absolutely!

CHRISTIAN: And he's got dual citizenships. So, every place in the U.S. is open to him, so every place in Europe because he got German passport, so he could potentially go anywhere and live in Europe because of that.

All cross-national parents were excited about the diverse exposure they could provide for their children. Apparently, cross-national parents had a greater access to international travel and were excited and proud of their ability to provide this wonderful opportunity for their children.

SELMA: I mean for our kids, for example, I see it as a tremendous advantage because they get exposed to two different things. I mean here they are totally immersed in the American way of life so-to-speak. Everything from school, the whole environment, sports, everything. When we go to Germany and we go every summer, they have a different language, there's different food, different environment, certainly different culture in the sense. There's a lot more of history there. For example, we drive a half an hour and there's a Medieval castle. We do not have here. So, they get all of this...

Cross-national parents also recognized their children's open-minded quality as a significant strength. George shared how his children had the ability to cohesively integrate two different concepts. Rather than thinking in term of "black-and-white" mode, his children were able to conceptualize certain things with "fewer preconceptions."

GEORGE: I'd say that they're blend[ed]. They both grew up with enough knowledge of Japanese. They both spoke, could read and write to some extent Japanese. They had seen Japan. They've got some of the culture from the standpoint of the food and the traditions that had been discussed and carried on. Of course, they're not Japanese, they're American. But they understand enough about it to at least have some connection. At the same time, as American, both of them are more open-minded than the average American. The average American tends to be, for example, very polarized. Either I am a Republican or I am a Democrat. Neither of my daughters are that way. They tend to look at the problems and see it with fewer preconceptions.

ANDREW: That the advantages, would you call that?

GEORGE: Yes! You have to deal with reality and that's what they do. They do it better than the average person who's grown up in the insular community.

Cross-national parents were proud of their children's strengths and advantages, which derived exclusively from their mixed-heritage context. Some of those strengths and advantages included multilingual ability and an increased sense of personal and bicultural confidence

because of it, open-minded quality due to diverse exposures and multiple citizenships. Cross-national parents also had wishes and expectations of their mixed-heritage children.

Wishes and Expectations

The expectations that cross-cultural parents had for their children were both universal and distinctive. The universal expectations were ones typically shared by all parents, for example, having good manners, and receiving a good education. Four out of eight couples stated that they took etiquette seriously and took time to teach their children to behave properly. Bob stated, “Now in term of discipline with our kids, we’re in the same boats on this. We both do not want our kids misbehaving in public and acting rude in public and all those things. We both very very tough on this issue.”

Cross national parents’ desire to provide a safe and healthy environment for their children is a universal trait shared by all parents. Regardless of culture, this phenomenon appeared to be pre-eminent. Tony stated, “[I] give you my honest answer. I want them to be healthy, safe and happy! That’s the big thing. To do what they’re doing.”

Five out of eight parents emphasized education as one of the essentials that they considered to be of utmost importance. Emma said, “Now, we both want the kids to be well-read and educated. It’s very important to us to promote that.”

George placed an emphasis on education because he believed that it was the basis for survival in life. He also stressed the importance of his children’s maintaining a connection with their parents’ cultural heritages.

GEORGE: [The] emphasis is that the kids have to perform well on school. It does not seem to be something that is touchy-feeling. But we both feel that they have to have good basis for going on in life. We both felt that they should be exposed to Japanese culture as much as possible.

ANDREW: So, both cultures are important.

GEORGE: Yes, absolutely! Being exposed to them. Understanding them and having some connections to both sides. Very important!

Cross-national parents had wishes and expectations regarding their children's mixed-heritage. I asked parents if it was important that their children were bi-ethnic/racial. There were diverse responses to this question. One parent indicated that they wanted their children to have a stronger connection to one ethnic background, more than the other. Seven out of eight parents did not feel that it was particularly important for their children to be one or the other, as long as they had exposure to and appreciation of their mixed-heritage. Johnny shared his thoughts:

JOHNNY: That's not something that I personally feel particularly strongly. I do not think. They (referring to his children) want to think of themselves as American, that's fine. They want to think of themselves as Irish, that's fine.

ANDREW: So, it is not really a matter whether they are to be one or to be bicultural, biracial or whatever is it, then?

JOHNNY: No! No. I think they appreciate being the Irish part of their heritage and I do not expect any of them will even want to live over there or be there longer term.

EMMA: But, they'll enjoy it.

JOHNNY: Yeah, they will enjoy visiting there, I am sure. And I think they have seen enough of my family they want to go and visit at some point, I think. That's important for me.

Parents explained that they did not necessarily expect their children to embrace both of their heritages, since it was their children's personal choice as to how they wanted to identify themselves. While two parents clearly asserted with what ethnic identity they wanted their child to identify, six out of eight parents refrained from imposing their own agenda to their child and rather wished their children to make a personal decision someday about their own identity. This was clear in Kurt's answers, during the following interview:

ANDREW: Now, to tag on, what happens if (“child”) someday as he grows up and he only chooses only one part of his cultural identity or racial identity, instead of being able to integrate both of them?

KURT: I don’t think he will do that. I don’t think he will do that. I think he will embrace both and I am not saying that I place all of my hopes and desires upon that outcome whatever he chooses. It is his life! So once we raise him and he steps out on his own and assumes the reins of his own life, then he will have to make those decisions. But I held out belief that he will embrace both cultures, because both cultures have value...

KimSook and David indicated that they would respect their children’s decision concerning their identity. However, they believed that it was important that their children understood their family roots. Therefore, as parents, they were convinced that it was their job to educate the children as to where they came from and leave the outcome to their children when they grew up.

KIMSOOK: For me, I do not want they lost what they are. It’s important also what you[r] family from. Family root is important. I do not want they just lost in the air. Do not know, what they are. It is important that they should know everybody each human and then what they are and what they come from. It is important. Other way...it is their socialize life. What they want to be, [if they want to] change [it], [it’s] their life to [make] choice [and] to change it. But they should, my children should know what they are, what they come from. It is important!

ANDREW: But you are not imposing on them to be “this” or “that”?

KIMSOOK: No! No! No! Both.

DAVID: No! We do not pushing them to be Korean or Hispanic

KIMSOOK: Their choice! ... raising time I will do, but [when] they’re matured...[and] grown up, that’s their choice what[ever] their life, whatever they do, [it’s] their choice!

Parents placed more importance on their children’s finding security in their identity. They pointed out succinctly that it was not with “which camp” to associate with that was important to them. They ultimately hoped that their children would simply be who they really were. Cross-

national parents realized that they and their children were living in a new globalized era. They believed that, in order to survive in this global society, one must become comfortable with diversity. They wanted their children not to feel trapped by their cultural heritage but be emotionally secure and proud of it. David's expression seemed to epitomize the desire of all the parents' that their children would embrace their mixed ethnic/race heritage. He wanted his children to be very secure in their identity as mixed-ethnic/race individuals.

DAVID: And the child hopefully thinks more liberal. [have] international thinking, "Oh, it is not a big deal about having parents of their different" And they can say, "Yeah, I am American, even though my mom is Korean and my dad is Hispanic, ...and all that. But I am here in the United States and it's normal!" That's what I want they learn that they can be in an environment, that they can see us as two different culture comes together and make something that is they do not feel a change of a culture behind them, that they feel something natural and free of thinking, "Yeah, my parents are mixed! No problems! What else?!" They do not feel the pressure of somebody putting them down and anything like that.

All of the cross-national parents explicitly stressed their wishes and intention in providing their children with greater exposure to various cultures so that their worldview would be widened.

EMMA: He and I had a very similar idea about how to parent our kids. A lot of them is education and exposure to a wider world. I want my kids to know, because we are from other places, too, that there are so much out there.

ANDREW: Do you want to add to that?

JOHNNY: No, I think that's accurate. That's probably the major thing in term of the way we parents our kids: having desire to expose them to a lot of things and to encourage them to see the rest of the world beyond where we live right now.

All of the cross-national parents passionately desired their children to be multilingual. The parents perceived their children's mixed-context as a strength. It provided them with a greater ability to speak more than just one language. Therefore, cross-national parents believed that their children should not miss this precious opportunity. Tony and Furuko also

acknowledged the importance for their children to continuously maintain their bilingual ability. They believed language was “the key.” Tony even made his expectation known to their children that they must take a language course when they went to college. Tony said, “Yeah... I’ve told both of them. I made them promise when they go to college that they study Japanese. Regardless whatever they study, study Japanese in college. That’s all!”

Cross-national parents had wishes and expectations for their children. Their expectations involved universal and distinct. It seemed to be fundamental that all parents expected their children to be “healthy, safe and happy.” Yet, cross-national parents also had additional distinctive expectations. Their distinctive expectations were primarily revolve around issues related to diverse exposures and broader worldview, mixed-heritage identity and multilingual acquisition. Cross-national parents who participated in this study discussed the different ways they used to attain those wishes and expectations.

Purposeful Parenting Acts

To achieve their wishes and expectations, cross national parents proactively and thoughtfully implemented intentional behavior in their parenting. During the interviews, these parents stated that, if they did not specifically teach their children about their heritage, they doubted that their children would be able to sustain and appreciate their multi-ethnic backgrounds, given the strong influence of the surrounding environment. Overseas traveling was one of the major themes that all cross-national parents identified to be significant. Parents believed that it was one of the effective ways to orient their children to their ethnic heritages. Sally said that traveling with her children to her home country was a regular activity that they did as family.

SALLY: Older one, I think I traveled with them all the time to Taiwan almost every year. So, they are really experienced a lot of Taiwanese culture. The more they get into it, they really enjoy to be in Taiwan.

BOB: They're already gonna be tied to the US. So, what can we do to make them culturally tied in to Taiwan. Bring to Taiwan at least once a year. Speak Chinese in the home. Talk about at the right time of the year [for example], Chinese New Year's holidays. These kinds of stuff.

The majority of the participants asserted that taking their children overseas and allowing them to live with their extended families was one of the important ways to expose them to their ethnic background, as well as to become acquainted with their other side of their family.

Although Emma preferred that her children identify themselves as Americans, she strongly believed that it was important for them to travel and visit with their paternal relatives who live overseas. She believed that it was one of the ways they could foster the sense of bonding and connection.

EMMA: Yeah, I think, if I were being truthful, I'd say I want my kids to identify as American, I want them to be American. I want them to feel strong patriotism for this country. But at the same time, we do expose them to their Irish side and try to get them connected, because that's where their uncles and aunts, and some cousins and their grandparents and they love them all! So, there is a strong connection there.

It was clearly evident that cross-national parents utilized the travel experience to expose their children to a broader world as well as to their mixed-ethnic heritage.

CHRISTIAN: [W]hen we go to Germany, they're always (incomplete statement), we stay in the international guest house at university house over there. So there were people from all countries... all cultures... all over the world. So, our kids got exposed to a lot of international... international foods, and play with kids...

In the previous section, cross-national parents explicitly stated that they wanted their children to have a broader perspective of the world. Cross-national parents intentionally made a concerted effort to expose their children as many cross-cultural opportunities as possible. One

participant illustrated this point very well by saying that, regardless of the differences between her and her husband's religious background, she wanted her child to be exposed to both religions. She believed that her child had the freedom to eventually choose for himself his religion. Therefore, according to her, it was her job to provide all kinds of religious opportunities for her child.

KIMIYO: I'd like to introduce him to many different religious or not only religious, I introduce many stuff. I mean, different [things]. So, I hope I wish he is gonna be [the one who] choose [for] himself later. We prepare him to give him to the many opportunities. We are not rich (laughed), but try to give him many opportunities!

The ability of their children to be bilingual and to maintain their multi-lingual ability were important to cross-national parents. Parents put a lot of effort into this endeavor. It was common for these parents to initiate conversation using foreign language at home or accumulate foreign learning material, such as books, tapes, videos, and other artistic materials, as a way to keep their children connected to their multiple cultural backgrounds, as well as to learn the language. Furuko stated, "Well, you know what? I brought the Japanese kind of origami books. That's easy. So, and then I brought so many Japanese books, I used to read to them."

It also was common for cross-national parents to speak in their own native tongue with their children at home from the time they were born. In fact, all of the parents had attempted those efforts, although some of them finally stopped doing that.

KIMSOOK: Like 3 year old, they know. Also, before that, when Lisa (the oldest daughter) was young. I believe she was 3 [or] 3 1/2, she was going to preschool in 4 year. Because I am speaking Korean everyday at home. I do not want to speak English. I teach because I do not want their educate behind. So [I did] extra [education]. Teaching ABC and all that beginning when they are baby. She always [experienced that]. I have to [be the one who] do, but extra. I need to [be] speaking Korean always with them. So, my children [when] they are 2 year, they think this language [was the] only [one] they can use....

Some parents believed that the most effective way to foster their children's bilingual ability was to take them overseas regularly, where they could immerse themselves in the culture and practice the language directly.

SELMA: Now, here at home. It's like bilingual?! Well, If we would not go back every year. They would not be bilingual. I do not think. Because to do this at home, what we've tried, because we have German books, we have German videos, I mean anything, but here at home, they're kind of refuse to speak German. We tried to whenever we came back from Germany, we had this big things that we tried to speak one day a week German, but never works. (laughed)

Other parents decided to go hire a tutor to teach their children their native language. KimSook stated, "I think I am gonna teach them more now. I, we talked about that and I am gonna get private tutor. Even [typically] no one want a, even music, everything they do not want to learn from parents!"

Kimiyo saw the discomfort her child experienced when she spoke with him in her native language in front of his friends. One of the ways she tried to help him recognize that this was a normal experience was to associate with other culturally diverse parents who spoke various foreign languages.

KIMIYO: I tried to him, first of all, I told you before he was kind of complain in speaking Japanese. I think he was three years old or something. [He said] why I have to speak Japanese. So, he's complaint and already three years old. But that time, I started to, I making another friends, not only Japanese. I associated with another, I think, I had a real close with one Venezuela friend. One of them come from Venezuela. [Other one]come from Korea. And we already associated with them. And they speak with their children their languages. One was Spanish to her daughters, and one Korean to her son. So, we did always. I think once a week or twice a week sometime. We get together we do show each other examples. Exposed to him to this is natural. You speak to me in Japanese and in public you speak English to your friend or something. But I try to show him that people has many another background.... family has a different type of family and he's kind of used to now.

Each of these parents used different approaches to encourage their children to appreciate their mixed-heritage, particularly in regard to their bilingual ability. Christian approached his children by continuously reminding them about the great advantages they had by being mixed-ethnic children. Christian stated, “Yeah! Except, again, we tell them over and over, what an advantage they have because they do have the ability now legally, in terms of thought processes, in terms of language, to live in either part of the world if they want.”

Cross-national parents strived to integrate their cultural differences whenever possible. They introduced the differences in their customs and traditions to their children in order for them to remain connected to their multiethnic heritage. Selma explained how she and her husband implemented this integration of customs and traditions into their family.

SELMA: But I think, I mean, what we do consciously maybe is, for example, Germany has a little bit different custom for Christmas. Okay. We do that here! So we have a real tree with real candles, and in Germany what we call Christmas Eve is where you exchange presents, and not the morning of the 25th. So, for sometime, we alternated. We did it one year like on the 25 and the next year we did it on the morning of 25th. I mean the 24th. So, they get both sides. And that, I think, yeah, that’s a conscious effort to instill that in the kids that there is a different way of doing things.

In a lot of ways, cross-national parents were very intentional in their parenting. They had specific wishes and expectations that they hoped their children would fulfill. Thus, they directed their parenting behavior toward those goals without rigidly imposing their agenda on their kids. However, parents also influenced their children in ways that they often did not realize or intend. For example, Christian and Selma talked about how their differences in beliefs and perspectives, which were culturally founded, actually had effects on their children. Thus, they indirectly, yet constantly, communicated and shaped their children’s beliefs and values.

CHRISTIAN: I think that there are things that, in this country, they will accept and take for granted because that’s the way their friends think about it... You sometimes have different perspectives on those sort of things and say, “Well, the

Europeans think this...or German people view this this way.” and the kids pick up some of that, too. Especially Mark (the first child) picks up some of that.

SELMA: That’s true! Yeah. But, I mean, we do not take extra steps for him to...

CHRISTIAN: We do not take, but no! You pointed out things to him like, ”Damn, SUV!“ or something like that.

SELMA: (laughed)

CHRISTIAN: “European, we never drive, we do not drive those in Germany, something like that and I think he’s sort of picked up on that kind of things ...

SELMA: But that’s more like involuntary. It is not that I do that conscious, consciously! It’s just kind of ...

CHRISTIAN: But you’re expressing your beliefs and thoughts which happened to be different than maybe those other people what he sees, and he’s sort of picked up some of those.

Cross-national parents demonstrated a high level of investment and proactivity in their parenting practices. Their high level of investment and proactivity appeared to be motivated by their recognition of their children’s unique potential of being raised in a multicultural familial context. Some of these parents missed some of those potentials, such as bilingual ability, etc. when they were children, therefore, they did not want the same experience to happen with their own children. Nonetheless, despite of the parents’ level of investment and proactivity, parents also faced challenging responses and reactions from their children, especially in the area of bilingual training.

Reactions to Bilingual Training

In unison, cross-national parents stated that the greatest challenge they encountered in parenting their children was related to the language issue. They reported a variety of responses from their children concerning bilingual training. It appeared that mixed-ethnic children were

uncomfortable speaking multilingually at home. For example, Kimiyo's young son once or twice told his mom not to use her native language with him when he was at school.

KIMIYO: He does not have problem at preschool or kindergarten, but some, one time he told me when I speak to him in Japanese. I think when he was preschool, he said, "Please don't speak Japanese to me in front of other friends!" He mentioned one time or twice when he was preschool.

Five out of eight parents reported that their children tended to reply to them in English when they spoke with their children in their native language. KimSook said, "They understand Korean but they talking back [to me in] English."

According to the data collected in this study, children appear to be somewhat hesitant to engage in bilingual or multilingual interaction with their parents. However, they seemed to be willing to use their foreign language with other people. Christian and Selma shared how their children were more willing to interact with others in foreign language than to them. They also explained their speculation of why that happened.

CHRISTIAN: The woman who works in the cafeteria in the (purposely omitted) school is German.

SELMA: Yeah, they speak German with her (laughed).

CHRISTIAN: And Mark (the first child) speaks German with her all the time when he goes and buys his lunch at there when he's in elementary school. He's at middle school now, and he speaks German with her but he won't speak it at home with us (laughed).

ANDREW: Have you asked him why is that, because I wonder?

SELMA: I do not know. I think it is just because their friends speak English. Everything they hear here is English, and German is just absolutely not on their docket.

As much as parents were aware of the importance for their children to be multilingual, parents also knew that they have limited "control" on this matter, due to their surrounding

environment. Tony also acknowledged this grave challenge when it came to this bilingual training. He stated, “It’s the hard thing. Yeah, to me, it’s a hard one. That’s the one that you really cannot control, because you cannot control their entire environment.”

Summary of Parent-To-Child

This category of parent/child relationship issues portrayed the cross-national parents’ lived experience in relating to their children. The data collected revealed that cross-national parents commonly recognized and were proud of their children’s unique strengths, due to the fact that they were raised in a unique familial context. Cross-national parents had similar wishes and expectations as other parents. However, it was apparent that cross-national parents also have specific expectations of their children that were particular, which monocultural parents do not have, such as multilingual capacity and broader cultural exposure. Since cross-national parents were determined about their wishes and expectations, they tended to be purposeful and even driven in their parenting in pursuit of those perceived goals and expectations. Among other particular wishes and expectations, the bilingual issue was paramount. Cross-national parents experienced a variety of responses from their children when the bilingual training was implemented.

Contextual Influences

It is essential to take into account their nature and the quality of social support in order to fully understand the experience of cross-national couples. A strong and supportive social context appeared to positively influence the couples’ overall experience of being a cross-national family. From the data collected, it was obvious that cross-national parents received all sort of supports from a variety of sources. These sources were: *environment, family and friends*.

Environment

The surrounding environment significantly effected and shaped cross-national couples' life experience. All the couples who participated in this study referred to the way their environment influenced their experience. Since six out of eight participants lived in a college town, to a greater extent they had similar impressions and experiences, which were all positive. Bob and Sally talked about their positive experience of living in the diverse college environment:

BOB: We are in the university environment which is already multicultural, that's not an issue. It's not like we're the only multicultural people in the small town in Western Kansas, we are in the university environment. Everybody is multicultural.

ANDREW: So, you do not get any necessarily negative effects from your surrounding as international couple?

BOB: Oh, I would say only positive effects.

SALLY: Not at all!

BOB: It exposes us to more cultures.

David, in general, appreciated the fact that America is an ethnically diverse country. However, he particularly appreciated the local environment he lived in which enriched the lives of his children.

DAVID: Something that I like about the United States is the big old pot with all the ethnicity and variety. I am only here in [a city in Midwest], I do enjoy [this local] environment that is so international. My kids go to school and they have oriental friends, from Pakistan, Middle East, anything. They have a variety of friends.

I asked parents if they necessarily have to make special efforts in parenting their children, because their children were mixed-ethnic. The majority of the parents stated that they did not feel that it was necessary for them to do anything special for their children, particularly due to the

diverse and accepting environments they lived. This theme was captured well in my conversation with Bob and Sally.

ANDREW: So, Bob, Sally, did you necessarily need to take extra step in parenting knowing that your children are mixed-race necessarily?

SALLY: Not to me!

BOB: I do not think so. You got to understand, especially place like [this town]. If we live in Dodge City maybe we would do something. I never thought about it. All of our lives we live in the area since we're married. Well, our kids we're born in [a college town in Midwest] So, I mean, [This town] is very international for a little town in [Midwest]. So it never occurred to me to do anything special.

Johnny and Emma also expressed similar ideas as Bob and Sally. They believed that they would have a different experience as cross-national couple, if they have lived in a rural town that had very little diversity.

ANDREW: So, your children had experienced kind of challenge right there in Europe. How about here in a small town, [in Midwest]?

JOHNNY: No!

EMMA: I do not think so!

JOHNNY: No, because in [this town], there were lots of kids who come from different backgrounds. And even if there were not, they were basically American kids.

EMMA: And I wonder if it would have been a different experience if we were in... say, a small town rural Kansas. And you moved in with your accent and our kids probably would have been different than [this town]. [This town] is kind of international community for [Midwest].

ANDREW: Sure. So for you don't, whether for your children or yourselves as a couple, you do not. Do you get that kind of repercussion from the community, the fact that you are cross-cultural?

JOHNNY & EMMA: No!

Dan and Kiyo lived in Japan. I was interested to note how their experience differed from other cross-national couples who lived in the Midwest. I asked them how the Japanese responded to their mixed-marriage status. Dan and Kiyo said that there was not much difference. They believed that the familiarity that their surrounding environment has, to a certain extent, influenced their responses toward them.

ANDREW: How do your surroundings respond to you the fact that you are cross-cultural couples. Because it seems to me that you were not living in the big city, so I am curious to know and your context is Japan. How do your surroundings, the ...people, who live around you respond to you, Dan, Kiyo?

DAN: Pretty well.

KIYO: Uh, uhm.

DAN: In our area there's some other cross-cultural marriages, too.

The surrounding environment's familiarity with cross-national relationships or marriage certainly played role in how it responded to couples who were in this particular context. George and Mori talked about their years of experience living in a military community. Because a cross-national type of relationship or marriage was not an uncommon phenomenon within the military context, Mori did not necessarily experience the same degree of difficulty being a cross-national couple, as they did when they were out of the military context.

MORI: Yeah, most of our lives together, we're in the community, military community. So, military community is more open-minded with the foreigners, foreign-born-wife. I do not think, I did not feel that I was worried that much. I do not know After we settled in [one place in Midwest] or here when we're exposed to some native in each places. That's when I became more aware about how they see me, that I am a foreigner to them.

ANDREW: I see. So, because you were within the military community it was not a concern?

MORI: Not much because there were enough wives from other countries so openly I did not feel that I was mistreated.

The environment shaped and influenced cross-national couples' life experience. It appeared that the more diverse, accepting and supportive the environment where the couples/parents live the positive their experiences were. Family was also identified as an important factor that influence cross-national couples' experience.

Family

Cross-national couples tended to encounter challenges related to their family's acceptance or approval of their "unique" mixed-relationship composition, generally, during the early stage of their relationship. Yet, they also identified the importance of family's support in their lives as couples. Although not every couple, who participated in this study, explicitly mentioned the involvement of their family, a few participants spoke of the significant role their extended family played in their lives as couples. Bob, for example, appreciated his parents-in-law's genuine support and sense of respect toward him and his wife. In his experience, he did not encounter his in-laws as being interfering or meddling with his family's autonomy.

BOB: [B]ut now having said all that, once we're married, and even before we married from my side point of view, [they were] totally supportive. Her family is always very supportive. Her sister always were, and her parents are always very nice to me, always very supportive. And they learned, as far as I know anyway, not kind of like meddling in laws trying to cause trouble or anything. Very supportive! Once they accepted it the fact that we're getting married always they're just always very nice.

David and KimSook also talked about how grateful they were for their families' genuine support in their marriage. In the interview I had with the couple, they expressed how they valued the closeness they have with their extended families.

KIMSOOK: We thank you for both parents now. We thank you.... They are really good parents...After all that problem [early in our relationship], but [now] they are positive way to helping [us] as family. We always communicate on the phone every week [and] we [are] very much close...

DAVID: Everybody on my family take her side. They ignore me. She wins! It's kind of interesting that way is being positive and my family has accepted [her]. They had never had any problem [with our cross-national marriage]. They're real supportive!

David and KimSook elaborated how their parents' support significantly enhanced their role as parents in raising their children.

KIMSOOK: It's family supposed...[We are] relatives [with] each other. [My] in-laws...[demonstrate] positive thing [or] way [in] helping [us]. That's great for me! I thank God...

DAVID: And they approved our marriage and all that.

KIMSOOK: So, that's helping me and my husband really, we can be good [parents]. So, we can raise family... children.... we feel great as parents!

ANDREW: So, they play important roles?!

KIMSOOK: Important! Yeah, that very important! I think!

DAVID: Even though they are two different cultures. They are supportive in a lot of things. Like my mother supportive the music [education] that we never had when we're a kid. She is supportive to my wife a lot...

KimSook also described how her mother-in-law has been a source of strength for her to survive her cross-national experience. The encouragement and emotional support she received from her mother-in-law has enabled her to grow as individual and a spouse. In addition to emotional support, she also mentioned that there was another type of support, financial, that was very helpful for them as they established their young family.

KIMSOOK: I think it's because my mother in law, she is a lady. She knows what woman going through... She give me advice, "You woman have to be wise [and] to be stand up!" She helped me! She [has] that kind of character. She give me advice. So, I do not have any relative here. She give me strength for how to survive here. When [my children] start beginning 4 year birthday, I give instrument. My oldest one is starting 7 years old. Because that time my husband he was student in university... [when] you [are] student and you marry. You have kids to finance... it's difficult. So, she's 7 years old. My mother in law she [was] helping to music program. [To hire] private tutor....

Familial factor was identified as an essential factor that influenced cross-national couples' experience. It appeared that the more supportive the familial factors were, the more positive the couples' parenting experiences were. Cross-national couples also identified friends as important factor.

Friends

It is common for cross-national couples to live thousand of miles away from at least one of their extended families. Some couples were able to maintain a close connection despite the great geographical distance. Others established new support systems in the environment they lived and turned to them for occasional support. There is certainly a different degree of relationship and support that one establishes and upon which one relies. Some people approach a relationship rather superficially, while others invest in it seriously. David and KimSook told their story about how they established a strong and deep relationship with an older friend, who helped them through the initial struggles in their marriage as a cross-national couple.

DAVID: The one thing that helped us a lot at the beginning is... the time I became more Christian. I was Catholic and I changed to another religion and became more Christian. I met a couple in church that he is American and she is [foreigner who shares the same culture as my wife]. She actually is like our parents here in the United States... And they are elderly couple. They are not a young couple or same age and all that. So, actually was they have some wisdom, I guess, that we do not have. It's several time that they came 1 o'clock, 2 0'clock in the morning. She (referring to wife) wanted to leave and all that but she (the older friend's wife) talked to my wife and all that. But I guess, for her, for my wife, it was real difficult, the cultural change. So, and it was difficult for her at the beginning. But, it was, I guess, a blessing that the elder couple that, I guess, they had gone though that problem. [So they] helped us go through rough beginning that it was of the culture differences.

Summary of Influencing Context

This category of influencing context portrays how social support was a vital part in the lives and experience of being cross-national couples. Much of the quality of being a couple in the context of cross-national often times was determined by the level of support they received from their environment, family, and surrounding friends. The higher or more positive the support they received from these factors, the more likely the couples would have a positive experience as a mixed-ethnic/race family.

Essential Coping Strategies

Cross-national couples faced common and unique challenges. Some of those common challenges were typically shared by couples in general, while other challenges were exclusively unique for the cross-national context. The unique challenges that couples encountered frequently were rooted in the couples' cultural differences and the unique dynamics embedded in that given context or interactions. Because cultural difference exists in the context of cross-national marriage and parenting, couples were required to deal with those challenges effectively in order to create a cohesive and healthy environment for their family. One of the research questions of this study was to figure out how the parents approach their parenting differences. This section will portray the information about how cross-national couples approached their life and what tools did they use to overcome their life challenges. Three themes emerged from the analysis: *personal attributes, adaptive survival strategies, and success tips.*

Personal Attributes

Personal attributes contribute to the success of being in a cross-national relationship, both as couples and parents in an important way. Several personal attributes emerged from the

interviews conducted with the participants. First is persistence. Although some participants did not explicitly use the word, the characteristic of persistence was clearly demonstrated. Some of the participants faced an incredibly difficult process to marry cross-nationally because of their parent's disapproval. However, all of them were able to weather those challenges and proceeded with their intention. For example, Mori described her persistence when her parents disapproved of her intention to marry George.

ANDREW: How did you manage through those challenges when your parents were not so happy about the relationship from the beginning?

MORI: Let's see (laughed). They knew my character that I would not listen to them (laughed). Then they just put up with me!

ANDREW: So you proceeded with it?

MORI: Yeah, I had my mind made up!

Cross-national couples perhaps would agree with Kurt when he stated how important "being stubborn" was in this type of relationship. Kurt perceived that his and his wife's persistent and stubborn characteristics were actually their strengths. He strongly believed that, because of their persistency, their marriage flourished.

KURT: [A]nd I am very stubborn, there is no doubt. But I believe that being stubborn is as much as positive as it is negative, because it gives you the tenacity to work through the problems. [A] person who is a fly-by-night, wishy-washy kind of, go-with-the-flow is not going to survive in this kind of relationship. They won't. I do not see it happening. And that's just my perspective on it. But I know that there had been time where the fact that we're stubborn probably helped us survive in this relationship.

Another characteristic of persistence that participants identified was patience. Cross-national couples certainly must foster this attribute in order to navigate through their relational challenges successfully. As in relationships in general, it takes time to learn about and understand each other and work through personal differences. A cross-national relationship

requires an even greater sense of patience and understanding. As Mori stated, “Patience is most what you need. For international married mixed couples, patience... patience and understanding. Not demanding too much.”

George echoed his wife’s comment on not being too demanding. In his comment, it also was evident that he had great appreciation for his wife’s culture.

GEORGE: I think, in my opinion Japanese culture has a lot to offer. At no point the Japanese stand up and demand things or, if they do, they really blow it like I’d refer it to the war, get beyond that. But among themselves, they do not stand up and demand things. But they talk it out and they do it in very very interesting manners to me, because I am very used to American, I demand. But I am not the type to demand myself!

Cross-national couples also believed the importance of being spontaneous and flexible.

Kurt asserted that, given the diversity in cross-cultural relationships, it is essential to be spontaneous and flexible.

KURT: [I] feel like that you have to have that kind of, I won’t say it’s a careless attitude. They may have care attitude of what they are going to happen today. You have to have the spontaneity and you have to have the ability to be flexible. And if you are not, I do not see how you are going to be successful, because it is just not going to vote well for people who expect a lot of continuity and a lot of sameness in that relationship because there is, I mean, the whole idea behind this... is a mixing of cultures and there is a great deal of diversity involved. And so, you have to have that kind of flexibility, that kind of spontaneity to survive.

Christian and Selma also emphasized the importance of being flexible. However, in addition to that, they believed in the value of being a “learner.” In their opinion, it was imperative for couples to foster a curious attitude and to adopt the stance of a learner.

SELMA: Flexibility, I think. That’s probably the most important.

CHRISTIAN: That’s yeah! Yeah, and again, the willingness to learn about that person’s culture, that person’s country and that’s person’s language and tradition maybe. In some cases, maybe religious differences if they are coming from...

SELMA: So curiosity.

Another fundamental attribute that participants identified as essential was mutual respect. Cross-national couples recognized that differences between couples sometimes were inevitable. However, they noted that differences should not necessarily be a hindrance to building cohesive marriages. A couple's demonstration of mutual respect would most likely enable them to sustain and enhance their relationship.

KIMIYO: Last comment. [I think] parenting and [in] any culture or any society...[the] first of all [is the] parents [themselves]. Our relationship should be [the primary]. Of course, we have sometimes different opinions and we're sometimes argue, but there has to be mutual respect there. It is important to raise children [that way].

As was mentioned earlier, the religious differences within a couple tend to create tension in a marital relationship and parenting style. The attribute of respect becomes much more important for couples who do not share the same religious background. Kurt said that he tried to be more flexible in his religious beliefs and not to impose his faith on his wife, "I tend to be more flexible in terms of my belief. Yes, I believe there is a God... I believe there must have been some kind of creation [but] I am not entirely convinced... [and] I am not arrogant as to believe that my faith supersedes hers."

Tony and Furuko noted that in the end the most important thing was not about a "cross-national" relationship, but that it was all about "relationships" in general. The most important thing was for a person to demonstrate genuine thoughtfulness toward his or her spouse.

FURUKO: [S]ee everybody different, so everybody has different [ways of] thinking, different thing. And if you [are] thinking a little bit about [your husband] or he has to think a little bit about me, that's ... [what is] more important! Right?

TONY: Yeah! But then even if we're both [Asian] or both American, it's the same thing!

FURUKO: Same, same! Because I do not think like Japanese and American is...sin to marry, [or] like difficult. That's not [the] important thing. I think [the] important thing is see personally? [The] person.

Personal attributes appeared to significantly contribute to the cohesion and harmony in a cross-national relationship both as couples. Some of these couples' attributes were inherent, others were developed out of the relationships. When the couples utilized their adaptive attributes as resources, they were likely to be sufficiently robust to weather their marital and parenting challenges. In addition to personal attributes, an adaptive relational strategy was also emerged as an important aspect of cross-national marriage and parenting.

Adaptive Survival Strategies

Cross-national couples utilized a variety of adaptive behaviors to navigate through their relationships. These adaptive strategies are generally applicable to marriages and parenting relationships. Participants, for example, talked about the importance of respect toward each other's culture. This theme of respect constantly was present both implicitly and explicitly throughout the interviews I had with the participants. Cross-national couples/parents mentioned that respect and sensitivity for each other's culture positively influenced both their marital and parenting relationship. David talked about how respect and acceptance were really crucial in this type of relationship. He mentioned the importance for cross-national couples to work on welcoming and integrating their cultural backgrounds into their lives, rather than isolating one culture from the other.

DAVID: I understand, I understand. She has [her] culture, I have [my] culture. But, it's [important] to give the freedom, not to isolate them. Not... she would come here and I said, "forget about your culture. We're in the United States now. We're better be American. NO!" You still value culture that those stay forever with you. But, it's to me to understand and for her to understand me, too, on my culture. From there just have one combination of which we accept things, [and] we do not accept things, and that's why the beginning is rough. We're trying to....

what things we accept from each other on the culture, even though we are in the American culture.

Kurt emphasized the importance of trust in the couple relationship, especially in the context of parenting. As discussed earlier, cross-national parents typically encounter more acute challenges, due to their cultural differences. It is fostering a solid sense of trust within the couple's relationship that enables them to parent more consistently and effectively.

KURT: [I] know she would agree with me a 100%. The most important thing that you have to have in this kind of relationship when there are cultural differences is trust. I trust her to make the best decisions in the interest of our child. And she trusts me to do the same. And if we do not trust each other, then there is nothing! Because trust is the foundation of any relationship obviously and trust is where we derive our ability to allow the other person to do what they think is appropriate and I am not going to say that we always agree with each other when we take disciplinary actions against our son because it is not probably not true. If she does something to discipline our son, I support 100% and she does the same for me. And because if she does something, and then he comes to me and says "well, you know daddy, mommy did this" I said, "Well, okay, she did that [and] that's fine!" And of course, if he did the same to me and went to her, she would say the same. So, the trust and the consistency in parenting are extremely important.

Six out of eight couples who participated in this study have been married for more than 15 years. These couples demonstrated characteristics that are typical of most successful marriages, such as commitment and persistence. KimSook talked about her struggles early in her marriage. Yet, despite these, she made up her mind to remain committed and to save her marriage. This theme of commitment and persistence seemed to be universal amongst the couples I interviewed.

KIMSOOK: [In] the beginning I... wanted to [be] responsib[le] [for] my marry. That's [how] I learned from my parents that they always [said], "You dying for the [marriage and] with him". So, [I wanted to be] very much responsib[le]. [It] does not matter whatever you are going through you need to save your marry. That's [the] way what I used to know.

When it came to the questions of how these couples dealt with their differences, cross-national couples used a variety of adaptive strategies. One couple appeared to deal with their

differences by focusing more on their similarities. When I asked Tony and Furuko about how they actually addressed their differences, Furuko straightforwardly stated, in effect, to not make the differences a big deal, but rather focused on being thoughtful toward each other. Tony also briefly noted the importance of compromise in this type of relationship.

ANDREW: How did you work it through, the difference part?

FURUKO: Don't worry about it!!!

ANDREW, TONY & FURUKO: (all laughed)

FURUKO: [A]nd then little bit [try to] think about each other.

TONY: And compromise.

David echoed what Furuko stated. He mentioned the differences in relationship, especially in this cross-national context, were just inevitable. Couples might clash with each other, due to those cultural differences. Yet, couples could untangle and move beyond their struggles, if they focused on being caring toward each other.

DAVID: She (referring to his wife) got her culture, I got my culture. We clashed on something. But through the years we had become one, now we care about each other a lot. And [it] does not matter [in regard to] our [differences in] culture, it is more about we care about each other now. We have overcome that beginning that is real rough or some part.

As reflected in David's words that relationship evolves, cross-national couples, as other general couples, experienced this relational transition in different seasons of their lives. It appeared that going through this process of transition and transformation was vital to the health of the relationship. George and Mori stated how a relationship must change and grow, which meant it requires evolution and modification.

GEORGE: Thirty years down the line and if that I was gonna say that we learned, I learned anything from our relationship [is] relationship has to change and grow everyday. We're not the same couple that we're in 1976.

MORI: Not even 10 years ago.

GEORGE: Even 10 years ago, we're not the same couple. We both got older. We both got more understanding of each other. When I was in the military there was a different dynamic involved... I treat Mori differently now than I did when I was in.

Other couples addressed their similarities and differences openly and honestly. They acknowledged what their differences were and yet optimistically believed that they have the power and capacity to overcome those differences. For example, Kurt described, "Well, I think there was an acknowledgement that we had similarities, but there was also an acknowledgement that, "Yes, we have some differences, but they are not insurmountable!"

Cross-national couples also pointed out the importance of communication. They believed that transparent communication was one of the key tools in dealing with their cultural differences. Emma and Johnny agreed how important the transparent and good communication was in the couple dynamic. Emma demonstrated that a spouse could actually be, in a way, the coach and supporter for his/her partner in dealing with cultural differences and challenges. All of this could be accomplished through good communication. She also strongly believed that it was through good communication that couples could successfully lay out and align their expectations clearly and openly, which was crucial for relationship whether as couple or parent.

ANDREW: So, how did you negotiate that when you encounter this cultural divide?

EMMA: Well, like talking about it. When I say like "Hey"- with me with the Irish culture, "I do not like that part of it" And then you would say, "Hey, do not expect things, it's not their way of doing things, do not expect it from people", because I would have expectation, different expectations. He had to tell me that, "It's not the way things have ever been done. They would not ever gonna do it that way [or] do not try to change them." That kind of things. I think it's all about the communication, talking to each other. And, but not only talking with each other, but laying out expectations. Luckily we agree on a lot of our expectations. So, I mean the attribute is basically being able to talk about thing, and being able to compromise. That's it.

JOHNNY: Yeah, I think that... Just communicating environment is an important thing.

To have a quality relationship, couples must learn how to deal with relational conflicts effectively. In the case of cross-national context, it is the same way. Kimiyo talked about how her and her husband made attempts to solve their conflicts as soon as possible. It appeared that their approach has positive effects on their relationship as a couple and as parents. Kimiyo explained, “[W]e had similar character. I think [when we argue] a couple hours [or] one hour, two hours [then] we [are] getting along again. We don’t upset, we don’t carry the [conflict onto the] next day or the next week or so. We try to [solve it quickly].

From the data gathered, it appeared that not all cross-national couples perceived language differences as concerns or barriers to their relationships. However, some couples identified common language as an important factor. In addition to language, Couples also pointed out the importance of having some familiarity with their spouses’ culture. These language and familiarity factors were believed to positively contribute to the couple’s overall relationship.

SELMA: Well. I do not know. I mean for me, being able to speak the language here, when I got here, that was a plus. And I think it is probably more difficult for people when relationship cannot speak each other’s language or cannot communicate fluently in a language period (laughed), which I guess could happen. But other than that, for me, it was not just that different because at that point in time when I met Christian I was already here for three years. So, at that point in time, it was not that new anymore for me. So, I do not think it was really that much [different].

Kurt specifically mentioned having education as an important factor for achieving a successful and functional cross-national relationship. In his experience, Kurt felt that his education helped him not only to gain broader information about his wife’s cultural background but also resulted in the capacity to develop a sense of respect toward his wife and her culture.

KURT: I'll tell you this. If there is anything that helps me more than anything else, in terms of being able to be successful and functional in our relationship, it was an education.

KIMIYO: Yes, education is important.

KURT: There is no way that I could have ever possibly hoped to cope with some of the challenges that we have encountered in our relationship if I did not have my educational background to fall back on. I do have a high regard, very high respect for her cultural background. And I think the education has part of this. When I met her I already knew quite a bit about her culture and the historical background of her culture. Of course, I've learned more since, but that had a lot of impact on us.

Cross-national couples demonstrated a high level of investment in their relationships. In fact, it appeared that it was their commitment in investing to their relationship that actually enabled them to reap the benefits and enjoy the positive experiences as couples. Kurt articulately stated his belief about the matter of commitment in the couple and parenting relationship.

KURT: Marriage is work!

KIMIYO: Yes!

KURT: I think it requires, well I am sure this is something that has been beaten to death by many different authors. It requires a high level of commitment. You are not going to go into a relationship with a person or you going to spend every waking hours with them or what would likely be the rest of your life and not put forth some kind of legitimate efforts to make the relationship work. It is not going to happen.

ANDREW: It sounds to me that you both are really invested in your marriage?

KURT: Oh yeah. That's a good way of putting [it]. There is a high level of investment on both of our part, because we realize that whatever outcome there is in our lives, and in our son's life is based upon what we're willing to put into it now.

Cross-national couples utilized a variety of strategies to sustain their relationship. In fact, many of these strategies are the basic and common strategies required for sustaining any relationship. Respect, trust, commitment, compromise, effective communication were only some

of the ones mentioned above. Cross-national couples/parents in this study also offered some suggestions and recommendations how to be successful as couples and parents.

Success Tips

This section consists of a variety of tips that the participants gave in order to be successful in their marriages as cross cultural persons. I divided this section into two subsections: The first subsection focuses on the recommendation directed for singles, who are drawn toward a cross-national relationship. The second one is directed for couples, who are already involved in one. Some of the themes and concepts were already mentioned previously and will have overlap with each other. However, I believe it important to capture and describe accurately the participants' particular ideas for singles and couples.

Christian and Selma suggested that it was important for singles to have flexible characteristics, if they wanted to be in cross-cultural relationship. It is out of these flexible attitudes that they are then likely to foster a sense of curiosity and willingness to learn about their partner's unique cultural backgrounds.

ANDREW: The last question is this. For those who are singles, who are contemplating about whether or not be in cross-ethnic, cross-national, cross-cultural relationship. What would you think personal attributes do they need to have as they are contemplating entering into this type of relationship?

SELMA: Flexibility! I think. That's probably the most important.

CHRISTIAN: That's yeah! Yeah and again, the willingness to learn about that person's culture, that person's country and that's person's language and tradition maybe. In some cases, maybe religious differences.

SELMA: So curiosity.

Given the nature of cross-national relationships, which involves a great deal of diversity, open-mindedness is essential. Kurt asserted the importance of being mentally prepared and ready

before entering into this arena. According to him, couples, who get into a cross-national relationship without having sufficient mental preparation in regard to their differences and potential challenges, may encounter grave difficulties that could imperil their chances of success.

KURT: And I think that's really important in this kind of relationship. Is that you had better acknowledge early on that, "Yes, I am willing to deal with the differences that I am going to encounter or I am not", and if you are not, then you better move on. Because they are gonna come fast and furious. And if you are not ready to deal with them, then you better not get involved, because it won't work!

While some participants recommended focusing on the differences, others suggested celebrating the similarities instead. Dan succinctly suggested that singles should not make differences a big issue because differences in relational context are almost inevitable, regardless of a cross cultural context or not. Dan said, "There is always differences [in marriage]. Do not make it a big issue. Realize that there are gonna be differences."

Different expectations between couples could create a great rift that leads to chronic conflicts, especially when those expectations are not effectively communicated. Therefore, understanding each other's expectations is fundamentally essential in any relationship. George recommended that it is wise for singles, who are contemplating to be in a cross-national relationship, to carefully learn and clearly understand their perspective spouses' expectations prior to marriage.

GEORGE: We had to learn or what we could expect from each other. What we had to give to each other. And sometimes it is not the same expectation based on where you came from. Mori did not expect the same things from me that a girl from [Midwest] would expect. And some of her expectations were surprise to me. We had to work through that. I have seen a lot of, especially I think in cross cultural marriages, an awful lot of young kids who get into them and for various reasons they could not adapt to that idea. They could not understand that they [and]... their spouse had different expectation in what they had. And if there is anything I could tell people who are contemplating it [is try to] understand what your spouse wants before you get married (laughed).

One of the ways that singles could learn and understand their potential spouses closer and better is simply by exposing or immersing themselves in the culture. Some participants recommended that it could be significantly beneficial for singles to experience their potential spouses directly in their culture prior to marriage. Emma, in effect, stated that it could be an “eye-opening” experience to see the unique characteristics of the potential spouse which otherwise were unseen in other location.

JOHNNY: If they are say, meeting here in [the Midwest], and they are both from different countries. It would be good for them to see the environment that the other one grew up in before they marry.

EMMA: That’s absolutely. That’s a good [idea]

JOHNNY: I think it would be important for the person to know something about the culture of the other person. But I think that it would be very difficult for somebody from Japan to meet here with somebody from Germany and get married without knowing anything about the culture each of them came from.

EMMA: And I think also, too, that exactly what Johnny said, seeing someone in their own environment is very different from seeing someone in another environment. Like I said, Johnny’s accents how it changes when he talks with his family. Or when he goes home he is a different person in [his home country] than he is here. You should see them how they act in their own home, in their own family, in their own community, in their own language. Seeing somebody in their own environment, because otherwise ...it’s so deep-seated, your cultural identity, your ethnic identity. You may not be aware of it until the other person [note] how deep seated it is.

Self-confidence appeared to play an important role in how one functions in a relationship. Based on her experience, Mori noticed how her lack of self-confidence earlier in her marriage negatively affected her well being, as well as relationships with others and her eventual role as parent. Therefore, she noted that single people should develop a sense of confidence in themselves and the culture where they came from.

ANDREW: What messages if you can tell young or even singles who are anticipating to be in cross-cultural relationship?

MORI: Have confidence. Have confidence of where you come from.

ANDREW: Do you mean their own culture?

MORI: Yeah. You cannot be looking down yourself because people look down on you. You need to have confidence.

ANDREW: About who you are and what your culture is?

MORI: Yeah. Nothing wrong the way you grow up. You're born into it and nothing wrong with it.

Participants also had specific recommendations for the cross-national couples who are already going through the experience of being in a mixed-ethnic or cross-national family. Although some of the themes might overlap with the ones previously mentioned, hearing the participants' recommendations directed specifically to the couples can be very beneficial to couples in sustaining and enhancing their relationships.

Open-mindedness and respect were mentioned by the participants as important attributes. It appeared that couples must develop an open-minded attitude and a sense of respect in order to "survive" comfortably in this cross-national context.

BOB: Open-mindedness. Number one. I think open-minded. She has to be very open-minded to survive in a foreign country. I had to be open-minded in order to survive in our house (laughed).

SALLY: For me, really respect about different cultures.

BOB: Yes!

SALLY: That's very important. Even when you do not like it. Or lots of things really... [about] the American things I really totally disagree and I don't like it, but that's the way it is. In the way [I must] respect. If you respect how people do things as they do then you're more comfortable with the situation.

Participants also identified acceptance and appreciation as important concepts that should be mutually practiced in this type of relationship. Acceptance and appreciation of each other's

culture may often require the couples to change some of their ways of doing things, in order to integrate and accommodate the spouse's culture.

EMMA: I think being able to accept [that] every culture has good points and bad points. Being able to appreciate the other culture and accept it, which is sometimes hard. You want to do things your way, the way you always have done them. Sometimes be open to changing the way you celebrate a holiday. Changing which holidays you celebrate.

Another way couples could demonstrate respect and acceptance is by being inclusive of the other culture, instead of dismissing it. Christian talked about how culture is importantly vital and fundamental in one's life, which cannot be easily disputed. Therefore, it is unrealistic and unfair to disregard the spouse's culture.

CHRISTIAN: If you had a mixed-racial couple and you live in the home country of one and ...the partner who is in their home country said, "Well, we do not need to know about your country because we're not living there." Well, to me that's sign of problem! You just can't expect that person to basically forget and lose everything that they grew up with just because the fact that they happen to live in your country or culture.

David also similarly echoed Christian's words by emphasizing the significance of accepting and assimilating each other's culture as a cross-national couple. He even humorously talked about how he effectively "handled" his wife when his wife pressured him to conform to her cultural expectations.

DAVID: My opinion is that, not to put your culture above the other one. Trying to assimilate. Understand the person's culture. But also you do not trying to say, "Well, I am the... American.... better. We're in United States. No!" You are a couple! You need to know a little bit about their culture, they need to a little about your culture. It assume there's gonna be bumpy road, but it is something that they need to be working by knowing, "I am not trying to overcome [or] I do not need to coerce my culture on her. She doesn't push her culture on me"

Christian also mentioned how having a similar religion was most helpful to their cross-national marriage. However, he noted, even if the couples do not share religious beliefs, it is

imperative that they demonstrate respect and appreciation of each other's religious beliefs and practices.

CHRISTIAN: We're coming [from], we both were Protestant so the differences are not all that great. But, you get somebody who is Catholic and somebody who is Muslim. Obviously they two are very different religion there. They really need to make an effort to learn and appreciate and be tolerant of that person's religious beliefs, if religion is important part of that particular individual or the person.

The whole concept of willingness to learn and understand each other's culture was also essential in cross-national context, because it affected the couple's marriage as well as parenting. David stated that parents are the model for their children. The parents' willingness to learn from and share with each other will be reflected in their children.

DAVID: So, on that, us, as culture, the couple, when they start knowing each other and all that, they need to realize that it is not gonna be a battle of who is gonna win. But should be a sharing of what we want to learn from each other. And to learn as a couple. And all that sharing is gonna be reflective on the kids!

Although not all the spouses in this study were able to speak their spouse's native language – nor emphasized speaking their spouses' language as important, couples strongly believed that language was an important means to help them learn and understand each other's culture better. Christian and Selma elaborated more on the importance of language in cross-national relationship. According to them, language might not only affect the couples' relationship as partner but also as parents when they start rearing their children.

CHRISTIAN: Well, I think one thing that is crucial is that, if it's a mixed-race or mixed-ethnic marriage, that each person should learn to the extent they can the other person's language. And wherever you decide to live, whichever country you really should learn the language of your partner. I think that's fundamental because once you've done that and then when you go to that person's home country, you can at least learn and understand and be able to (incomplete statement)

SELMA: Yeah. Maybe you understand a few things better. You understand the way of life. You can communicate with the people there. You can, yeah....

CHRISTIAN: And it becomes even more crucial when you have children.

Having the “right” chemistry is often times considered to be an important ingredient for relationship and even marriage. However, according to KimSook, for cross-national relationships, chemistry alone won’t “cut it.” She believed that it is crucial for couples to really know and understand about each other both mentally and emotionally. She also noted the importance of building a strong connection with the spouses’ extended family by helping them understand and support the relationship.

KIMSOOK: [Y]ounger couple, [especially] the new couple who marry international. I really really want to say [that] they have to know [each other] before marry. They have to know them very well. [To] know very well each other, [is the] first thing! ...Any marry is same thing... When my husband said, “You have to share information... mentally from your heart...” [It’s] really [true] you have to share. If not, you understand your way, another one understand their way, [there will be] misunderstand[ing]! That’s problem! ... [try to] taking time to know [each other] better... [especially for the] young couple and then share information... That’s I think most important. Not just [the] chemistry! No, that don’t gonna work! [As] cross-cultural [couple] share, [try] to know each other better. And also [it is] important is their both parents or families to unite to making [them] understand [about your relationship].

Environment obviously plays an important role for the couples and the family. Bob talked about how his and his family’s experience as cross-national was primarily influenced by their surrounding environment. Although he did not give specific advice to couples, however, he implicitly conveyed the importance of geographical location couples choose to live for them and their kids.

BOB: I think it depends large amount on where you live, your environment. If we were, even just the couple we are living in, say, Dodge City, Kansas. It could be that we have a lot more difficulties, especially with the kids. With ourselves it would not change, but with the kids, especially it might be. I am not saying it is since I have never lived in Dodge City. KS, but I could imagine it could be a lot

more difficult because the kids could be crueler because this is a novelty for them and the kids are always cruel around novelty. So, the advice you might give might be very different. For us living here in [this town], especially us being involved with the university, we're completely surrounded by the international. So for us, I do not know, it does not seem all that strange to be international. We're oriented! In fact, if any it's a good thing. There isn't basically a downside.

Beside it was crucial to pay attention to the external factors, such as environment.

KimSook recommended cross-national parents to pay more attention to their nature and quality of their relationship. She talked about the importance for parents to “work together” and be on the same page as they parent their children.

KIMSOOK: So, it's most difficult is really [between] mom and dad. They really need to talk before they say [anything] to [the] kids!

ANDREW: Work together?

KIMSOOK: Work together before what you do. You [must] give the same idea [to the kids]. Just for me, really ... raising family, especially children, is your life... your responsibility [for] your marriage is really important... Really important. And you have to thinking really wise way. How you want to raise [your children]... So [if there is] anything problem, you have to talk before, you both mom and daddy, especially [talk about] what [are] you[r] plan[s]... When your son and daughter got problem, then you talk before what we gonna do for them... But [when] you do not ...each other communication before [then] you jumping on the kids, that is really gonna be ugly, ugly, ugly, turn to ugly! Also, kids [are] gonna [be] confused between mom and dad. So, really [you]... really you have to twice, three times, four times. You have to hard working on that.

Along with the concept of working together as parents, participants also recommended cross-national parents have some sort of “game plan.” This plan could consist of the goals or objectives they wanted for their children and their family. Hearing my participants' stories, I could sense that each parent seems to have specific visions for their children and family. Johnny and Emma talked about their game plan:

EMMA: It would have been helpful. I mean, we're kind a had the same approach in a lot of things. But, may be having a game plan for how you do want to raise your kids, like, ”Okay, do we want to spend a lot of time in this culture or

that culture or do we want (left uncompleted)” We did not really we kind of knew that going in.

JOHNNY: Knew what?

EMMA: That we want to spend a lot of time, as much as time with our families and where we were. I think for a lot of couple it might need to be negotiated or stated up front. “Okay, we want our kids to be able to feel as much part of the father’s culture or the mother’s. We want our kids to be able to fit in”. Kind of a game plan what the priorities are for raising the kids. I mean most parents do that anyway. But I think it is a little bit more difficult when you have cross-cultural on top of that. One of the things we decided early on [was] not having our kids watch as much TV as typical American child. Johnny was very busy with after school chores. They did not have TV over in Ireland much at all. They have a couple of channels, right?

JOHNNY: We had one channel for most of my childhood.

EMMA: But that was a great thing! He grew up with very limited TV exposure. So, we have our kids when they’re little, I thought, “Well, that’s a good thing that I want to have to. I do not want them to sit in from of TV or Computer or playing video game a whole day.” So, we put a severe limitation on that with our kids. That was a good thing!

In their diverse approach to parenting, cross-national parents appeared to have their children’s best interest in their hearts and minds. This obviously appeared to be the most fundamental aspect of parenting which surpassed culture differences. One couple talked about one of the reasons that motivated her and her husband to seriously work out their marriage for the sake of their child. Kimiyo said, “And also, we have a son, five year-old-son. I think, of course, we try to get along or work [on] this marriage for him, too.”

Participants also suggested the couples focus on the advantages and benefits they brought for their children, despite of the challenges related to cultural differences. Johnny talked about the importance of compromise in this type of relationship. Therefore, cross-national couples do not necessarily need to “give up” their unique ethnic identity.

JOHNNY: Well, I think focus on the benefits of what you give your children in term of diversity of experiences that you bring to marriage and that you can give

to them. It should not be, no any reason to give up of any part, I think, of your identity. Those kinds of compromises. I think it is a win-win!

Every parent, regardless their culture, would agree that the parent's fundamental role is to love their children. David and KimSook brought up this basic concept explicitly during interview. They strongly believed that parents should communicate and demonstrate their love to their children successfully.

KIMSOOK: And things share information [with your children] when [they are] young is better. And [be] behind them always.... Any parents can do that. Even [demonstrate that] you care, "how much.... I love you!" Be parents! I think not because international parents, any mom and daddy have to be there for them... Show you love [your kids] and share information [with them].

DAVID: Like she said, I think that showing that you love your kids. Even there is such thing as "tough love" and passive love. But that's going above culture! And that is something that is important that we [try to let] our kids know that we love them.

Beyond communicating and demonstrating love to the children, participants also mentioned the importance for the parents to demonstrate love toward each other as couple in front of their children. Culture differences might contribute to some discomfort to couples when it comes to demonstrate their affections in front of others, including their children. For David, it was important that his children to know that there is a bond of love between mom and dad.

DAVID: So, love is go above the culture. And should be probably the beginning you show! Not only love to them. But you love the other person, that you love your wife. Our kids seeing that we kiss, we hug and all that. Some culture do not do that. Like my wife in the beginning, it was like, "Ehm?" On the oriental culture, I guess, they don't their hold hands and all that, and front kiss. I said, "it's not here, [it] is not a problem!" So, they (the kids) see that.

Participants strongly recommended cross-national parents to not confuse their children about their mixed-heritages. They believed that parents play such an important role in guiding and affirming their children about their multiethnic backgrounds. It is important that parents

assist their children, so that their unique cultural heritages do not become a “handicap” for them. Participants recommended that one of the ways parents could do that was to share stories and information with their children about their heritages. KimSook described how telling her children stories about their extended families was one of the ways she used to connect the children with their heritages.

KIMSOOK: After 3 years, 3 years start, they know their parents they are different. But most important, help the younger children. [The] parents [should] show how much important...[their children are]! How much [you] love them! And always told [them] what they come from! Father’s side, mother’s side, both grandpa’s story [and] grandma’s story. Let them interesting [about] ... their uncle. “Uncle was” or “Grandpa, what great grandpa was”. [Tell] all their background. “Great, great grandpa was, how he was“ And ... give information! Do not just give short information, give ... what[ever] do you know...[about] cultural things. Give them! Told them!

All the cross-national parents who participated in this study emphasized the importance of orienting and exposing their children to their cultural heritages. Some parents regularly took their children overseas so that they have a continuous immersion experience with part of their heritage, others attempted to integrate the cross-cultural experience on daily basis in their family life. Dan and Kiyo articulated this importance of broad cultural opportunities and experiences for their children.

ANDREW: Last one, last question. What would you suggest for parents of mixed-ethnic children in order to effectively parent their mixed-race children?

DAN: I think experience both cultures, both traditions, holidays maybe in both places, I think. To be open to both experiences. Yeah, opportunities and experiences of both cultures.

Commitment to a relationship can never be overemphasized. It was one of the key themes that vividly emerged throughout the interviews with the participants in this study. All couples believed that strong commitment is required in order to achieve success and sense of fulfillment.

Cross-national marriages and parenting appeared to require more effort and commitment, due to extra challenges that they likely to face. Kurt and Kimiyo asserted this concept of commitment very confidently in their statements.

KURT: Well, I think that is essential. If you are not will in making efforts, then it's not going to work!

KIMIYO: Yeah, I think in any marriage even [when] you [have] same racial or same culture background or same religion. [Marriage] needs efforts. Marriage is really...

KURT: Marriage is work.

KIMIYO: Yes.

KURT: I think it requires, well, I am sure this is something that has been beaten to death by many different authors. It requires a high level of commitment. You are not going to go into a relationship with a person or you going to spend every waking hours with them or what would likely be the rest of your live, and not put forth some kind of legitimate efforts to make the relationship work. It is not going to happen.

Tony talked about marital success and happiness quite uniquely. Instead of focusing on what one could do for the other, he concentrated on what one could do for himself/herself. Instead of the external, he emphasized the internal. Therefore, he recommended that cross-national couples search for happiness within themselves, rather than expecting others to provide that.

TONY: See, but I think there is also another key element here [for] international marriage, any marriage. Where is success or happiness is going to come from? Is it going to come from with-out or with-in? And I think the basic mistake a lot people make in marriage and anything else is looking outside of themselves whether success or the happiness. It's never going to come from there! It comes from within! I mean, like the marriage "Oh, this marriage or this person is going to do something for me, supplies something that I lack [or] whatever I am lacking, or want or need. To come from with-out, it does not work that way! It comes from with-in. If it doesn't come from with-in, and that's not going to happen.

Summary of Coping Essentials

This category of coping essentials includes three separate themes, yet with each having similar attributes. They were descriptions of a variety of personal attributes, adaptive strategies and advice that couples and parents identified to be significant in sustaining and enhancing their relationships as cross-national families. Those concepts and ideas that overlapped or were repeatedly mentioned were especially essential.

Chapter Four provided in-depth descriptions of the experiences of cross-national couples as parents. The five emerging categories, consisted of *perceptions*, *relational dynamics*, *parent/child relationship issues*, *contextual influences* and *essential coping strategies*, and their separate themes were explained in much detail. Each reported category was strongly consistent throughout the interviews. To support the validity of the themes, direct quotes of the participants were included in each of the themes within each category.

In the following chapter, I will evaluate and integrate the themes and categories descriptively described in this chapter. I will utilize systemic perspective in my attempt to reach a deeper understanding of these unique cross-national parenting dynamics, and also at the same time explain the broader implications of this process. A systemic model of parenting mixed-heritage children will be provided and delineated.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss how the findings of this study correspond with the existing literature related to marriage and parenting and particularly cross-national marriage and parenting. I also will briefly discuss and interpret the findings by analyzing them from ecological and systemic points of view. Although the results delineated in Chapter Four provided the descriptions of the various factors that were commonly found in the cross-national marriage and parenting context, it did not draw systemic connections among factors. Therefore, the one main objective of this chapter is to describe how those factors could possibly interact and influence the overall process and experience of being parents of mixed-ethnic/race children. This study is to be practical and clinically applicable to the practice of Marriage and Family Therapy, therefore the clinical implications of these findings will be examined. Furthermore, the strengths and the limitations of the study, as well as the direction of future research, will be addressed in this chapter.

Comparisons of Findings with the Existing Literature

The studies on mixed marriages are various and numerous. The study of the mixed-cultural marriage and its related phenomenon (e.g., adjustment issues, child rearing, etc) could be dated as early as 1977 by the work of Tseng, McDermott, and Marezki, but it was not until 1990 that a comprehensive examination of cross-cultural marriage was given the spotlight. The publication of Ho's *Intermarried Couples in Therapy* was a significant marker in this particular topic of study (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Despite the numerous studies on the issues of mixed marriages, many authors often have chosen to focus on a racially based definition of mixed marriages by emphasizing race and the associated power differentials as the focal point, rather

than ethnic differences (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). When the authors have focused on the ethnic differences within mixed marriages, the context of the observation often was limited within the same nationality, rather than *across* nationality. There was also apparently a lack of clear distinction in the literature between *interethnic* studies and *cross-national* studies, which misrepresented the understanding of cross-national phenomenon. For example, the popular terms, such as interracial, intermarriage, interethnic marriage, and cross-cultural marriage were frequently used rather synonymously and interchangeably. Although there might be similarities between interracial and cross-national marriages, to “equate cross-national with cross-cultural is overly simplistic” (Cottrell, 1990, p.152). I agree with Cotrell because I found that there were nuances and challenges of cross-national marriage that interethnic couples never have to encounter. For example, interethnic couples do not typically have to struggle with immigration related issues since they share similar nationality. Interethnic couples may have differences in term of their cultural customs and traditions but they may not have language differences, etc. Cottrell (1990) considered the study of cross-national marriage as a more recent social phenomenon, as compared to other forms of mixed marriages (e.g., interracial marriages). In recent years, there have been an increasing number of studies that specifically examine the cross-national marriage/family phenomenon, as opposed to “general” mixed marriages/families. I believe this is the reflection and the response of the increasing number of cross-national marriages in the last decades.

Seto and Cavallaro (2007) asserted how challenging it can be to fully understand accurately cross-national couples’ experiences, due to the broad variations resulting from the numerous possible combinations of nationalities and other cultural variables. The findings of this study confirmed their statement. This current study showed a great variety of perceptions and

experiences of being cross-national couples, although many of the couples who participated came from a similar background (e.g., white husbands married to Asian wives, lived in a similar geographical and social environment, the majority were educated and associated with the university). Therefore, in order to fully understand one's cross-national marital and parenting experience, one must understand what the different factors are and how those factors interact and influence each other to compose one's experience. For example, a Japanese man from a lower class background, who is married to a high class female from Africa and lives in England, would have a completely different cross-national marriage experience from a mixed-heritage Japanese man from a middle class who is married to a lower class female from China and lives in Malaysia.

Seto and Cavallaro (2007) noted that there were several key elements that would likely have a significant impact on cross-national couples' experiences, such as living location, reactions from third parties (e.g. family, friends and society), linguistic acquisition and acculturation, complexity in cultural differences, and processes pertaining to immigration. The findings of this present study produced similar conclusion as the one Seto and Cavallaro suggested. The participants of the present study asserted that the environmental factor was essential. Because the majority of them lived in a diverse university town, they did not have negative reactions from their surrounding community. The affirmative responses they received from their friends and the surrounding neighbors significantly enriched their experience of being a cross-national couple and family. In this study, only a few couples, more specifically two wives, noted the challenges they encountered related to linguistic acquisition and acculturation. The majority of the participants did not find language acquisition or acculturation as an issue. A partial explanation to this is that the wives in this present study were dealing with the American

culture and English language. Because of the broad influence of American culture in the world and as English has become more of a universal language, adapting to the U.S. culture and English language may not be as challenging as to other non-Western cultures or languages. It appears that the majority of the wives are already familiar with speaking and understanding English prior to marrying cross-nationally. Some of these wives had lived in the United States for educational purposes. Therefore, cultural and language differences were not the main issue. Cross-national couples, who live in a country other than the United States and where English is not the predominant language, will perhaps face more challenges in terms of linguistic acquisition and acculturation.

Seto and Cavallaro (2007) also argued that, in addition to language and the socio-environmental factors, immigration laws could complicate the cross-national relationship. Cross-national couples were required to exercise greater patience and expend more financial resources in order to proceed successfully with immigration requirement. The process of becoming a naturalized citizen and the potential loss of citizenship in one's homeland are other added challenges that cross-national couples must face (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007). Immigration issues are frequently noted as a critical challenge in cross-national marriage. However, I found none of the participants in this present study mentioned about immigration matters at all. In part this could be due to the upper middle-class status of the sample and the fact that each couple lived in the native country of one of the spouses. This is an area that might deserve a closer attention in future studies to understand if and how immigration has effects on their marriage. Cross-national couples, who live in a neutral or third country, will experience issues related to immigration differently than those who live in the spouse's country. Cross-national couples who live in a neutral zone possibly experience more restriction in terms of their rights and privileges, which

consequently could cause additional pressure and stress in their marriage. Because each country is unique in its immigration law, there are great variations in regard to this matter.

Adams (2003) found that living in a foreign country could contribute additional stress to some individuals who are in cross-national marriages. The majority of the cross-national spouses who participated in the present study showed that the adjustment they had to make to live in their spouse's country required much effort and commitment. For some it was easier than for others, but, nonetheless, it still required effort and determination. Some of the husbands in the present study overtly acknowledged the pressures and concessions that their wives had to make to live in the United States or their home country. One wife clearly asserted that to live in her husband's home country was "not an option" because of cultural pressures and stresses she had experienced in the past. Cottrell (1990) asserted that, because it is common for cross-national couples to maintain connection with their countries and families of origin, by living away from one or both families of origin, the couples are more likely to miss sharing important life events of their extended families, such as weddings, illnesses, etc. (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007). Participants in the present study confirmed what Cottrell stated about the challenges of living far away from the families and relatives and the sense of loss and homesickness it caused. None of the participants fully discussed how they dealt with issues related to significant life events, such as illness or death of family members or relatives. Because of these financial resources and flexible schedules, I wonder how many of them could always visit or have resources for these related matters. Cross-national couples who do not have time flexibility or financial resources will certainly have unique emotional experience when it comes to this matter.

Adams (2003) indicated that there is likely a relationship between the specific country of residence and the emotional experiences between partners, which consequently affects their

marital quality. Seto and Cavallaro (2007) also noted how the place of residence could have an impact on the couples' power distribution in a marriage. This present study did not specifically address issues of gender, culture and power differences. However, there was an indication that might confirm the ideas that Seto and Cavallaro previously mentioned. To a degree, it is plausible to believe that there is a relationship among gender, culture, power difference, and marital quality in cross-national marriage. It appears that the environment where the couples live plays a significant role in conditioning the interplay among these factors. The characteristic of cross-national marriage of the couples who participated in the present study was relatively egalitarian. It is possible that their egalitarian relationship was heavily influenced and conditioned by the U.S. context in which they are embedded. These couples might have adjusted or organized their experience differently if they were to live in one of the Asian countries or other countries where hierarchical gender relationships are the norm. Wieling's (2003) study on White and Latino/Latina couples illustrated this concept. In her study, she showed how the Latino/Latina spouses often had no choice but to acculturate into the dominant White society, while their White spouses had the option of choosing whether they wanted to acculturate into the spouse's culture. Seto and Cavallaro (2007) maintained, "Perhaps deciding where to live is a common challenge among a variety of marital relationships. However, such decisions may come with greater consequences when two people from two different nationalities are married" (p. 260). The decision about where to live was certainly an important concern for cross-national couples, as the participants of the present study clearly indicated. Location and the societal atmosphere shaped the couples' perceptions about gender roles and power differences, which obviously has had an effect on their marital dynamics.

The cross-national couples often did not perceive their differences as an issue, but their friends, immediate families, and relatives could be very uncomfortable with it (Crohn, 1995; Cottrell, 1990). In Olofsson's (2004) review of *Cross-Cultural Marriage: Identity and Choice*, she summarized that the biggest problems for mixed-marriages often rested not with the partners, but with the relatives, friends, and society surrounding the couple. The findings of this present study showed the importance of familial, extended family, and social support. Although none of the participants explicitly stated that they received opposition from their friends, several couples did assert that they faced great challenges from their parents and extended families about being in a cross-national relationship. Breger and Hill (1998) argued that the reactions and responses cross-national couples received from their immediate social environment could influence the couples' feelings of acceptance and rejection, which might have effects on their relationship as couples, as well as within greater social contexts. This corresponds with my findings, suggesting the importance of the choice of location of residence and the socio-environmental context as previously discussed. Furthermore, there also seems to be a vicious cycle between one's feeling unaccepted and one's ability to adjust. It appears that the more feeling rejected one is by his or her environment, the more emotionally tensed and guarded he or she will become toward others with whom she or he is in relationship. The more guarded one is, the more feeling isolated and rejected he or she will become. The cycle continues. One participant in this present study stated how she struggled with the feeling of low self-esteem, due to being Japanese and living in the United States – the former World War II enemy of Japan. Her emotional sensitivity and guardedness hampered her ability to build positive relationships with those from surrounding society.

The literature on cross-national marriage also noted the significance of language and how it might impact the couples. Breger and Hill (1998) maintained that the lack of language acquisition could significantly influence one of the spouses' ability to obtain employment, adjust to the new environment, and establish social support outside the marriage. The spouse's stress from lack of adjustment could trickle down, adversely affecting the couple's overall relationship (Usita & Poulsen, 2003). Romano (1988) also suggested that language could be a factor that increases misunderstandings between cross-national couples. I found it interesting that there were only two couples who specifically identified language as an issue. Even so, these two couples did not explicitly recognize language as a source of misunderstanding in marriage. The couples who participated in this study stated that language differences limited their verbal and emotional expression but was not specifically a source of misunderstanding. It is possible that it was underreported. One couple asserted that the source of misunderstanding in their marriage was more due to culture rather than language differences. Although the majority of the couples who participated in this study did not particularly indicate language as a major problem in their relationships, all of them noted the significance of language, especially in the process of parenting their mixed-heritage children.

Seto and Cavallaro (2007) stated that, due to tremendous diversity and variation in cross-national marriages, cross-national couples must have a good understanding about both sides of their familial and cultural heritages in order to fully appreciate and embrace cultural, racial, and national identities that they brought into marriage. They also stated that "a couple's shared language does not necessarily equate to understanding of cultures presented in the marital dyad" and "things that are seemingly minor differences to one spouse or family may be more symbolic to the other side" (p. 261). This concept of the importance of learning and understanding each

other's cultural characteristics in cross-national marriage corresponds with the words of the participants in this study. Some participants clearly asserted the importance of being interested in learning and being willing to learn, accept and grow as cross-national couples. Participants recommended that cross-national couples have immersion experience in each other's country of origin in order to enhance their understanding of the culture and their relationship as couple.

Breger and Hill (1998) reported that political issues were found to have a strong influence on the cultural adaptation of cross-national couples. They asserted that political context determines the definition of who is considered to be an insider or an outsider. The presence of political tension between spouses' cultures might exacerbate the couples' experience, especially if they live in either one of their countries of origin. In addition, the state and political issues could restrict or even refuse the cross-national couples' permission to marry (Breger, 1998). The negative image or discourses of one's spouse's country presented by the media can adversely affect one's cross-national marriage experience (Breger, 1998). In this present study, none of the participants brought up issues related to politics and its effects on their cross-national marriage. To a degree, it could be expected because the countries that were involved in this study had a cordial political relationship with each other at the time of the study (e.g., the U.S. and Japan, the U.S. and Germany). I might have had different results if the majority of the cross-national couples I interviewed for this present study were the marriages between a U.S. person and a person from a country with political tensions with the U.S.

Khatib-Chahidi, Hill, and Paton (1998) conducted a pilot study of 20 females about mate selection in international mixed-marriage. Their findings suggested that more than half of the participants who married cross-national, had foreign antecedents of some sorts. The majority of them had no religious convictions. They also found that many of the participants had

experienced positive exposures to foreign cultures and to foreigners. These experiences included traveling and living abroad. This corresponds to the findings of this study. All of the participants in this present study had either travel or lived overseas or at least were associated with foreign culture(s) prior to marriage. Some participants made it clear that it was “natural” for them to marry their wives because of the positive exposures they had with their wives’ cultures. The sense of attraction and positive experiences they had with their spouses and their culture/countryman motivated them to consider pursuing further serious romantic relationships leading to marriage.

Another essential finding, Khatib-Chahidi, et al. (1998) found 17 out of 20 had life experiences that had left them in situations where they felt they did not belong to the social environment where they found themselves prior to marriage. Cohen (1982) argued that marrying cross-culturally could provide someone with a sense of a more definite identity, while providing a valid reason to avoid the difficulties he or she encounters in developing individuality within his or her culture of origin. There were indications that some participants utilized cross-national marriage as “a way out” from their own culture. One participant was extremely disappointed with his government and decided to leave his own country to live overseas for decades. Another participant had an internal conflict about her own ethnic identity as Japanese and wanted to leave her own country. She married an American, lived overseas, and raised her children as American. These were two different stories from the participants in this study that confirmed Khatib-Chahidi’s findings.

Khatib-Chahidi, et al. (1998) also discovered a recurring pattern of personality traits that were apparent in these participants, such as being more adventurous, free-thinking, unconventional, and emotionally stable than the average. To a great degree, the findings of their

study correspond with the findings of the present study. Couples, who participated in this present study, identified an adventurous spirit, flexibility, curiosity and spontaneity as essential personality traits that a person must have in order to be in a cross-national marriage.

Hughes and Dickson (2006) documented the important effects of religion on personal relationships, especially in marriage and family. They recognized that studies on cross-cultural or cross-national marriages were lacking focus on the effects of partners' disparate religious preferences on their marital and familial relationships. Burger and Millardo (1995) argued that the lack of a shared social network can cause ambivalence toward marriage, which may lead to more problems and conflicts within the marriage. Interfaith couples were more than likely to lead separate lifestyles (Liao & Stevens, 1998) which might consequently deteriorate the cohesion in their marriage. Although interfaith couples encounter universal marital and parenting issues, the literature indicated that interfaith couples faced more challenges than same-faith couples and were more likely to end in divorce (Hughes & Dickson, 2006). The couples who participated in the present study similarly asserted the importance of shared religion in their family life. In this study, I found one half of the couples shared the same religion or have no religion at all, while the rest were interfaith. The participants overtly noted how significant the influence of religion was in their lives, especially in their role as parent. Cross-national couples, who did not share religious beliefs, appeared to encounter added challenges in their marriage and parenting.

Hsu (2001) found that different concepts in family boundaries and obligations, role division between spouses, mismatched cultural expectations, and differing coping strategies and child-rearing practices contributed to common problems among cross-national couples. Most of the participants in the current study reported that they did not encounter many relational challenges as marital partners. The problems started to emerge when the children were born. This

is consistent with research on parenting in general that suggested most marital relational problems took place during the childrearing phase (Mackey & O'Brien, 1998). However, scholars proposed that the challenges of the child-rearing phase for cross-national parents are more dramatic and can be a significant source of conflict for a cross-national marriage, especially due to parenting role and style differences (Crippen & Brew, 2007). They described that cross-national parents may have to deal with their contradictory goals in each stage of their children's development. For instance, in the early years, the issues related to discipline and parenting style are more prominent, while in the later years, parents are more likely to deal with their children's mixed-racial or ethnic identification issues.

Keller et al. (2004) maintained that parenting ideas and beliefs were deeply embedded in cultural values, which could be very resistant to change. Since culture shapes and defines one's values, beliefs, norms, and meanings, cross-national parents must address their differences directly in order to parent effectively. Falicov (1995) and Root (2001) suggested the importance of *mutual acculturation*, which is a two-way assimilation process that needs to critically take place in any cross-national relationship. This concept suggests that both partners, those who belong to the dominant group as well as those who belong to minority group, should equally engage in this mutual influencing cultural process. This corresponds with the findings of the current study suggesting the importance for cross-national couples to be willing to learn from and adapt to each other's cultures. For example, one of the participants strongly asserted that it is crucial for cross-national couples/parents to learn and speak each other's native language(s). The basic concept of this idea is that, by learning the native tongue of one's spouse, he/she will gain a much deeper understanding and experience of that specific culture, which will enhance the person's level of engagement.

The results of this study suggest that there were important connections among couples' marital quality, the parenting process/experience, and the parenting outcome. This concept corresponds with Bradford et al.'s (2003) study, suggesting that there was a significant relationship among marital conflict, diminished parenting, and maladaptive behaviors in adolescents across cultural groups. Heath (1995) asserted that there is a relationship between better outcomes in children and parents' increased involvement and shared parental expectations for their parenting.

Crippen and Brew (2007) asserted that cross-national couples must work on negotiation and integration of their cultural differences as a couple. Yet, when they become parents, they face a new challenge – a challenge to create a new family identity. Crippen and Brew noted that family rituals and traditions could be used as a means to indirectly negotiate the formation of the new family identity for cross-national families. This, again, corresponds with my findings. The participants in the present study indicated how they negotiated, integrated, and implemented “blended” family rituals and traditions in their family life as much as they could in order to orient their children to their mixed heritage. One couple stated that they would alternate the opening of the Christmas' gifts every year. One year they would do it the German way, and the following year they would do it the American way.

In her study of eight mixed-heritage children whose ages ranged from 18 to 34 years old, Maxwell (1998) reported that children of mixed marriages experienced problems related to issues of acceptance, either being accepted or wanting to be accepted by one or more of the cultural groups with which they were affiliated. One particular aspect that seemed to be an important factor that denotes differences was physical characteristics. Maxwell (1998) noted that peer relationships, social environment, socio-economic-status, and developmental factors would

significantly affect the mixed-heritage children's experience. Despite the challenges that face mixed-heritage children, it is important to note that mixed-heritage children can adjust effectively, even with their multiple cultural and racial heritages. A study of ethnic identification and psychological well-being among 127 mixed-parentage Arab-European adolescents showed that the adolescents' ethnic identities were significantly positively correlated with self-esteem and quality of life scores and significantly negatively correlated with anxiety and depression (Abu-Rayya, 2006). Abu Rayya (2006) also showed, that mixed-heritage adolescents did not necessarily assimilate into their dominant heritage as some theories suggested. Although the findings of this study did not have strong data to support this particular claim, some minor indications that reflect the claim mentioned above were found. In this present study, I did not find cases suggesting that mixed-heritage children are maladaptive, at least based on the report from the cross-national parents.

Crippen and Brew (2007), citing Mann and Waldron (1977) and Johnson (1995) said that, although cultural differences could cause more discord in the cross-national relationships, cultural diversity in a relationship also could provide greater richness and potential solutions to the problems. In fact, one of the strengths of the cross-national family is the family's ability to weather and/or triumph over adversities. This was strongly displayed in the findings of this study. The couples in this present study described that their marital and parenting relationships were not always smooth and perfect. Some of them had gone through challenges in their cross-national relationship to the point of threatening the stability of their marriage. However, they were able to survive through the storm and remain married. In spite of these challenges, these couples also asserted that they saw great benefits and joy by being in a cross-national relationship. They found themselves to be stronger individuals and couples as they focused on

their strengths, instead of their weaknesses, and the uniqueness they brought into both the marriage and parenting.

This section obviously showed that the findings of this study, to a great extent, correspond with the existing literature on the topic. However, there were some noticeable differences between this study and previous research. These different nuances that were not captured by this study were expected because of great variations that this type of study entails. Cross-national families can vary along so many different variables as to make the possible combinations of factors impossible to fully control. A few things that I consider to be a new contribution to the study of cross-national phenomenon are: first, the diverse perceptions cross-national couples have of their cross-national experience; second, the description of parenting dynamics between parent and child; and third, the description of adaptive strategies that cross-national couples utilize to sustain and enhance their marital and parenting relationship. In the next section, I will attempt to explain my conceptualization and the implication of the findings of this study from the systemic point of view.

Systemic Model of Cross-National Parenting

The categories and the themes described in the previous chapter captured the key patterns and concepts that all of the participating cross-national couples encountered and experienced in their parenting. However, the findings also indicated that the dynamics and experiences of being parents of mixed-heritage children in the cross-national context were unique to each couple and family. For example, participants shared their diverse perceptions of being in cross-national relationships. Some couples spoke of their experiences as “easy” or “no big deal,” while others thought of them as challenging and difficult. Some couples focused on their relational difficulties as partners or parents, due to language differences, while others emphasized cultural differences.

All of these parents fully discussed their children's strengths and great potential and the fact that they were born into a multicultural family context. Yet, each parent guided and engaged his or her children in the parenting process differently. For example, one parent wanted her children to have a "strong patriotic spirit" that evolved from their cultural heritages, while others did not really think it mattered if their children were one or the other as long as they maintain a "sense of connection" with their multiple cultural heritages. This is only one of many variations from the findings. Therefore, I strongly believe that to generalize cross-national marital or parenting experience is to err, simply due to the enormous number of factors that contribute to the variations of the dynamics.

As I discovered the presence of these variations in the dynamics and experiences of cross-national couples, I was curious to examine and apply the findings of this study from the systemic perspectives. In this process of understanding and explaining this application, a preliminary systemic model of cross-national parenting was created (See Figure 5.1). The in-depth analysis and discussion of this systemic mechanism is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I will discuss the preliminary ideas of this mechanism.

There were at least five main domains that significantly appeared to influence the experience of parenting mixed-heritage children. The complex interactions among these domains created a unique parenting experience for each cross-national family. Those five domains included *the individual domain*, *the couple domain*, *the child domain*, *the parenting domain* and *the environmental domain*. Each of these domains was composed of various elements. Apparently, there were also interactions among factors in each domain that shaped the uniqueness of one's experience in a particular domain. Therefore, my primary thesis is that, in order to understand the cross-national parenting experience, it is essential that one understands

the contributing factors within each domain, as well as the systemic interactions among those domains. In the following sections, the contributing factors, the connections, and the possible relationships among categories that likely influence the unique dynamics and experience of cross-national marriage and parenting will be outlined.

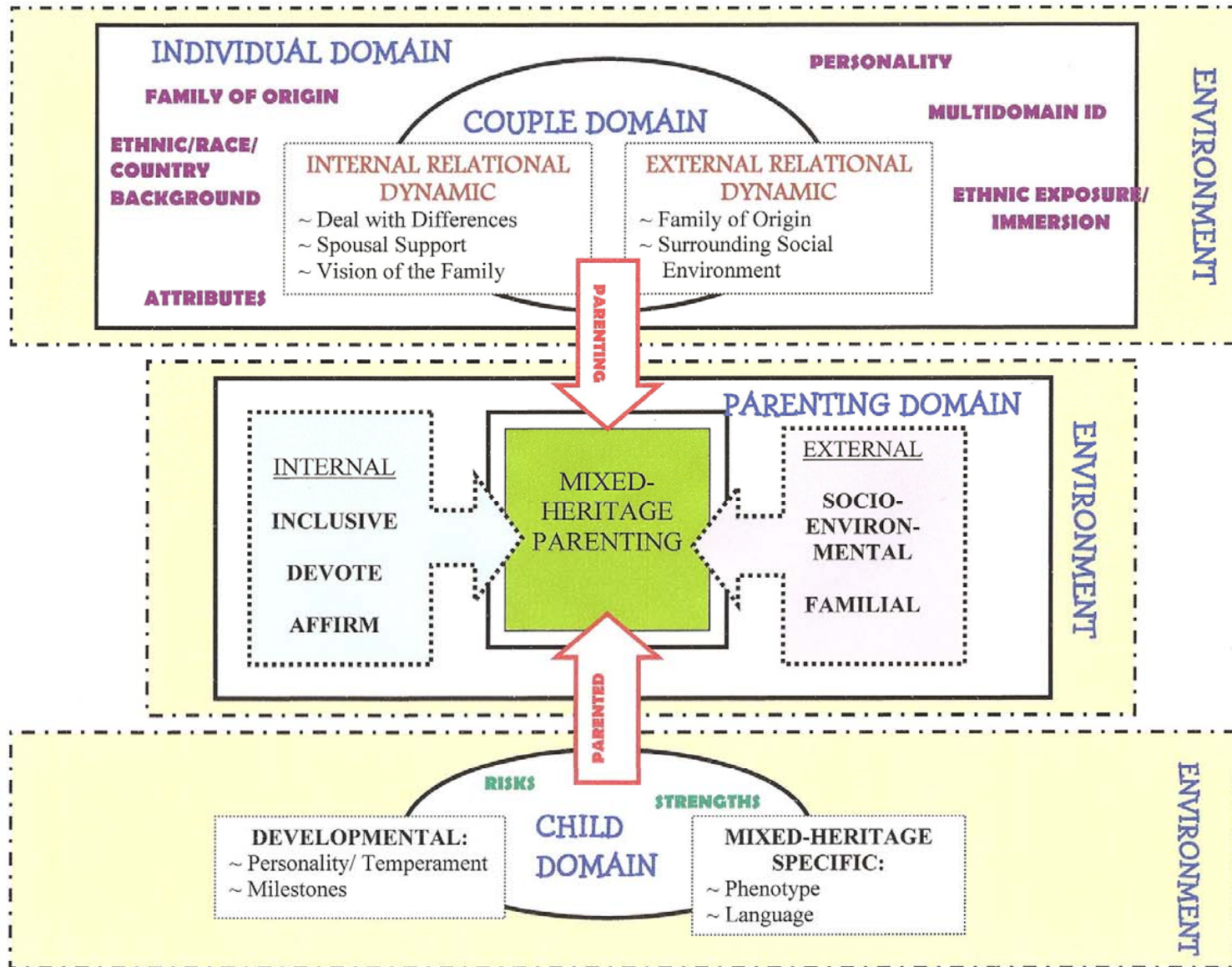
Individual Domain

The individual domain emerged as one of the most fundamental domains influencing one's experience of being in a cross-national relationship both in marital as well as in parenting roles. One's individual domain provides the essential basis for one's proclivity or even the capacity to be successful in cross-national marriage and parenting. As I carefully analyzed the participants' cross-national marital experiences, I started to identify some important patterns. Several key contributing factors that drew the participants into this type of relationship were: *characteristics of one's family of origin, one's personality, one's ethnic exposure/immersion, one's personal attributes, ethnic-religious-racial identity and one's ethnic/race/country background.*

Family of origin had an influence on the participants' interests and reactions about cross-national relationships, both negatively and positively. Family of origin shapes one's perceptions and emotional responses about cross-national relationships. The more an individual witness his or her parents' comfort with diversity, the more open he or she is in considering the possibility of cross-national marriage.

Personality also contributes to one's tendency and readiness to approach cross-national relationship. It appeared that those who possessed adventurous spirit were more likely to be

Figure 5.1 Systemic of Cross-National Parenting Model



attracted to this type of relationship. The more adventurous, spontaneous and flexible one is, the more adaptive he or she will be to be in this type of relationship.

From the data collected, it was obvious that the couples had varying degrees of exposure to ethnic and racial diversity. Diverse ethnic and racial exposure enhances one's worldviews. There is an indication that these couples who entered cross-national relationships with broad and inclusive worldviews, were more adaptive and resilient in their cross-national relationships than those who had limited prior exposure.

One's personal attributes seem to be significantly linked to one's interest in a particular culture. Cross-national couples who see the goodness-of-fit between a culture and their personal attributes were more likely to blend cohesively into each other's cultures than those whose cultural-and-attribute factor clashed with each others. In light of parenting, this goodness-of-it between cultural characteristics and cultural attributes may significantly facilitate cohesion and harmony, which enhances the parenting process.

Multidomain identities consisted of ethnic, racial, and religious. These different aspects of identity are integral to one's experience of self and of the world around him or her. The systemic analysis of the data collected in this study provided some unique information about the potential connections between the participants' multidomain identity and cross-national relationships, whether in the role as a partner or a parent. For example, one participant who apparently lacked of sense of ethnic identity strongly refused his children to assume any ethnic categorization. It is crucial that couples be clearly aware of their ethnic-religious-racial identity.

Because one's clear understanding of these factors will facilitate his or her efforts toward adjustment, cohesion and harmony in their marital and parenting relationship.

Cross-national couples' were apparently influenced by their distinct ethnic, racial and country-of-origin characteristics. Based on the data collected, it is plausible to make an initial argument that there are relationships among these factors within cross-national couples' marriage and parenting experiences. For example, cross-national marriages between couples whose racial and ethnic characteristics were identified as Caucasian might have a different experience from those whose racial and ethnic characteristics were other than Caucasian.

As I examined each of these factors, I found it interesting to see how each of them, to a greater or lesser extent, might have facilitated the development of one's interest in being involved in a cross-national relationship. This individual domain not only affects the development of one's interest in cross-national relationship, but it might also influence one's ability to survive and thrive in marriage and parenting.

Couple Domain

Each person's individual domain influences unique spousal relational dynamics, which I refer to as the couple domain. Many studies have examined and confirmed that the relationship between quality of parenting and the couple's relationship is inseparable. Therefore, parents are unlikely to provide the best quality of parenting environment when there is chronic unresolved marital discord between spouses. Studies about marriage give us a hint that many of the conflicts, which lead a great number of couples to divorce, stemmed from the differences in their

individual factors. Obviously, cross-national couples encounter similar challenges as other traditional marriages, yet they are unique, because there are cultural differences in addition to other individual factors.

To understand the dynamics of cross-national parenting, one must have some understanding about the nature of interactions and the relational quality of the cross-national couples embedded in their couple domain. I divided the couple domain into two relational divisions: *internal dynamics* and *external dynamics*. In my conceptualization, I perceived that these two dynamics consistently interacted and shaped the couple domain, which subsequently had both indirect and direct effects on the parenting process.

The Internal Dynamics

I defined the internal dynamics as the basic factors that create and sustain a couple's unique relational dimension. Couples are normally the actors who establish and design these factors to suit their ideas and preferences. In other words, many of these factors are "within the reach" or "under the power" of the couples themselves. The three important areas that fall within the Internal Dynamic are *dealing with differences*, *spousal support*, and *vision of the family*. An interesting fact that emerged from this study showed that it was not the differences, particularly cultural differences, that were the problem, as many would suspect, but rather how the couples perceived and dealt with those existing differences in their relationships. There was some evidence from this study that suggested that, when the couples overtly acknowledge their differences but perceive them with either neutral or optimistic attitudes, their differences become

their strength rather than their weakness. When the couples could take their focus off of their marital and parenting differences and place more energy on streamlining their differences, couples would likely be more confident in navigating through their marital turbulence.

Many cross-national couples who participated in this study attributed their success or the survival of their relationship to the mutual spousal support they received from their partner. In basic terms, spousal support can be defined as a form of mutual assistance and collaborative partnership the couples offer to each other. In broader terms, support can mean cultural acceptance and understanding. Support also can be a demonstration of loyalty and fidelity. Spousal support that is positively demonstrated within the couple domain will likely manifest itself in the parenting domain. There was initial evidence in the data that couples who were supportive of each other survived their marital crises.

Cross-national couples envision their life very differently from each other. It is the differences in their vision about marriage, parenting, and life in general that influence their overall experience. It appeared that the cross-national couples' lifestyles and parenting styles were closely connected to the objectives and visions they had as family. A couples' vision of what kind of family they would like to establish has broad implications in their lives. Therefore, cross-national couples benefit from having a clear "game plan" of what they would like to accomplish as a cross-national family.

The External Dynamics

I define the external dynamics as the inevitable secondary, yet equally essential, factors that create and sustain a couple's unique relational dimension. While the couples are normally the actors who establish and design their Relational Internal Dynamics, they are, in many cases, the objects of the External Dynamics. In other words, many of the factors that fall within this category are imposed on the couples or parents to varying degrees. These factors greatly influence the overall dynamic of the couple domain. The two important factors within the External Dynamics are *family of origin's attitudes/behaviors* and *surrounding social environment*.

The family of origin is a powerful influence that molds an individual's personality and life experience. As an individual matures and launches into "couple-ship", the influences and effects of family of origin tend to continue to be present in one's life. We often hear an adage that says, "Beware, when you marry a person, you marry the family". In the cross-national context, it may mean that a person does not only marry the family but also, consequently, the culture(s) in which that family is embedded. The goodness-of-fit between one's personality and one's spouse's culture may eliminate some adjustment difficulties. However, there are also other factors that could alleviate some stress or challenges in cross-national context, namely the family of origin's attitudes and behaviors toward the cross-cultural arrangement. The more positive the family of origin is about these factors, the more supportive their contributions are to the couples' marital and parenting experiences, and the less interference the couple will encounter from their family. The lack of family of origin's interference will, consequently, lead to a greater autonomy

that couples have in their marital and parenting experience. The more positives and inclusive the family's attitudes and behaviors, the more cohesive and harmonious the couple's cross-national marriage and parenting will likely be.

The quality of the couple domain is also influenced by the surrounding social environment. There were strong indications from the data collected in this study suggesting that the cross-national couples' experience was primarily contingent on the surrounding social atmosphere. The majority of the couples who participated in this study resided in a diverse international environment. Thus, their experiences were mainly positive. Social environment should be one of the fundamental factors that couples must carefully consider in order to establish a healthy marriage, parenting and family environment.

The Internal and External Relational Dynamics composed the Couple Domain. When couples are able to positively and cohesively integrate these factors, they will likely have and/or generate effective cross-national parenting experiences. However, prior to proceeding on to a discussion about the Parenting Domain, it is important to consider the Child Domain. The nature, the process and the quality of parenting mixed-heritage children also will intricately relate to the Child Domain.

Child Domain

In general, the child's characteristics contribute significantly to the parenting experience. We all agree that parenting a strong-willed child is obviously not the same as parenting a submissive one. In the same way, each mixed-heritage child possesses a variety of traits that can

greatly affect both the parented and parenting experience. Although the child's experience was not the primary focus of this study, this study was able to capture some of the child's essential factors. These unique factors apparently not only have an influence on how the child experiences his or her reality as a mixed-heritage person but also on the parents' parenting experience.

I believe that each mixed-heritage child has both *Risk Factors* and *Strength Factors*. In the previous chapter, I have delineated some of the strength factors that cross-national parents perceived in their children. Some of those strengths, included being multilingual, broader worldview about life and diversity, and multiple citizenships, just to mention a few. As I examined the data, I also discovered that the mixed-heritage child's risk and strength factors can be attributed to the interplay between their *Developmental Factors* and *Mixed-Heritage-Specific Factors*.

Developmental Quality

Each mixed-heritage child was born with personal characteristics that make a unique human being. In addition to this inherent quality, a mixed-heritage child also goes through a universal developmental experience like other mono-heritage kids do. These phases of development further shape their personal characteristics, which can be considered as either their asset or liability. There were two aspects of developmental quality that I identified to be influencing the Child Domain, such as *milestones*, and *personality/temperament*. As each child goes through developmental milestones, changes take place. These changes include physical, psychological, emotional, relational attachment, energy, and hormone level, to mention a few.

These changes also affect the child's self understanding and his or her understanding of others. For example, a four year old mixed-ethnic child will experience himself or herself very differently from one who is twelve years old. The four year old will also understand himself or herself differently socially from the twelve year old. A younger child might not be affected as much about issues related to ethnic or racial differences as an older child, due to their immature developmental process. Therefore, it could be considered as a strength. However, for a teenager, due to the nature of adolescent development, the strong need for validation from their peers combined with their discomfort in turning to their parents when they are emotionally troubled, could be a liability.

Personality will also affect the child's experience of being a mixed-heritage person. The child who is more extroverted, expressive and transparent with his or her thoughts and feelings, will experience and deal with their issues related to ethnic or racial differences differently than one who is more introverted and closed. I assume the extroverted child will likely express his or her emotional struggle about racial prejudice more openly and will be more willing to turn to their parents or others for support than the introverted counterpart. Thus, personality and temperament can be considered an asset or liability in this sense. These factors will not only affect the child's experience of self, but also the child's parented experience, which consequently will affect the parent's parenting experience.

Mixed-Heritage-Specific Quality

Each mixed-ethnic child has distinct characteristics, which I refer to as Mixed-Heritage-Specific Quality. These characteristics are exclusive to mixed-ethnic children. Some of these qualities are *phenotype* and *language*. These specific characteristics can be assets or liabilities to the mixed-heritage child, depending on the nature of the characteristics as well as the socio-environmental context the child embedded. Phenotype (physical characteristics) is known as one of the most unique aspects of mixed-heritage child. The “ambiguous” phenotype often makes the mixed-heritage child distinct from his or her peers. Whether it is the feature of her eyes or the complexion of his skin, the mixed-heritage child often outwardly appears “different.” This statement is not absolutely true all the time since there is certainly a great variation among mixed-heritage children in regard to their phenotype. For example, if the child has an American Caucasian mother and a European Caucasian father, the child might not demonstrate as much phenotype difference as cross-national couples who are also cross-racial. These physical characteristics might contribute to the mixed-heritage child’s ability to adjust intrapersonally and interpersonally. Language also can accentuate the differences between a mixed-heritage child and his or her mono-heritage counterpart.

Language is essential in a relationship. It is also often the heart of a culture. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the most common and ideal expectation of cross-national parents is for their children to master their parents’ native tongue(s). This may mean speaking and understanding several languages fluently. As ideal as this expectation may seem, it is often not realistic. Participants in this study reported how seriously challenging it was for them to

encourage their children to speak bilingually at home with them, despite all kinds of reinforcements. Mixed-heritage children certainly have a different degree of multilingual ability. Some are able to speak several languages fluently like a native speaker. Some children struggle to learn them concurrently. Some children retain their cultural accents as they grow up. Some mixed-heritage children cannot even master one or more of their parents' native languages, which becomes an embarrassment when they are surrounded by a group of people who represent one half of their heritage. This "short-coming," as it pertains to language, can be an issue faced by mixed-heritage children. Yet, at the same time, language competency can also be a confidence-booster. In other words, language can represent both strength as well as a risk factor for a child. One of the most influential factors that impacts the mixed-child's experience of self and his or her relationship with others is the socio-environmental factor.

Environmental Domain

All the experiences of the different domains described previously did not take place in a vacuum. They took place in a specific and distinctive social environment. These socio-environmental factors shape, alleviate, or exaggerate both the couples' and the child's experience. As I stated above, the most influential factor that holds the key to mixed-heritage or cross-national experience is often the socio-environmental domain. To examine in depth the type and the variety of socio-environmental domain is beyond the scope of this study. Perhaps future research in this area would be beneficial. However, for the purposes of this study, there was evidence that the supportive socio-environmental factors positively affected the child as well as

the couples' experience. For example, there was an indication that the mixed-heritage child tended to speak with his or her parents using the language of the country in which they resided. Cross-national parents repeatedly reported that their child refused to speak a foreign language with them despite their strong encouragement. I believe the mixed-heritage child's hesitance or resistance to use a foreign language at home often can be attributed to the environmental factors. It is important to underscore that the two primary environmental factors that significantly impact the cross-national family's experience are *family*, including extended family and relatives, and the *social environment*.

Parenting Domain

The parenting process is not an isolative process. It is also not an exclusive process between parents and the child. It is a *systemic process* that involves a variety of domains and factors that create a web of complex interactions. Cross-national marriages and parenting tend to have more intricate systemic processes than the ones that only involve one cultural or racial characteristic. I also have discussed above that each of the different domains uniquely contributes to the overall process of cross-national marriage and parenting, which are shaped within specific environments. By understanding all the domains, the factors and the systemic interactions among them, cross-national couples will have better insights into "characteristics" of their familial context, including the advantages as well as liabilities of their relationship. To a degree, this insight may have a significant effect on their attitudes and the expectations about their marriage and parenting. The Systemic Model of Cross-National Parenting (See Figure 5.1)

was created to provide a visual representation of these various domains and their systemic interrelatedness.

The Parenting aspect includes the integration of all the Individual and Couple Domains that takes place within the specific environment. *The Parented aspect* will consist of the Child Domain that occurs within a distinct environment as well. Within this parenting domain, couples merge the *parenting* and *parented* aspects together to compose their mixed-heritage parenting experience, which I refer to as *the Parenting Domain*. It is my conceptualization that the more cohesive and harmonious the parenting and parented aspects are, the more effective and favorable the mixed-heritage parenting experience is.

The Internal Factors

I define the Internal Factors as parenting factors that are within the parents' power and ability. This Internal Factor can also mean the parenting attributes or approaches that parents employ in their parenting role. There were at least three attributes that I identified to be important in parenting a mixed-heritage child. Those attributes are *inclusive, devote, and affirm*.

Parents of a mixed-heritage child must demonstrate an inclusive quality. They need to have a wider of view of life and be comfortable with cultural diversity themselves. It is imperative because this attribute will be automatically reflected in their parenting behavior toward their child. As I presented in the Chapter Four, the recurrent wishes and expectations of cross-national parents were for their child to have a broad worldview. Parents wanted their children to be “international” and not prejudice against any ethnic or racial background.

Therefore, I strongly believe that it all starts with the parents themselves. Parenting attitudes and practices that show inclusive quality will likely yield children, who are open, confident, and comfortable with diversity related issues.

The participants' responses about what they expected of their children and what they actually did in order to accomplish those expectations clearly showed that all the cross-national parents were truly devoted in the lives of their children. If the parents see bilingual ability as important, they are more likely to be willing to hire tutor or take their children overseas on a regular basis in order to motivate their children to learn the language. Devotion is the hallmark of parenting. Cross-national parenting appears to require this attribute even more.

Parents show their child by modeling a life that embraces diversity. They guide and invest in their child's life by providing their child all kinds of opportunities for them to know, be interested in and cherish their multiple heritages. Yet, in the end, the parents must affirm the child with the decisions they make about their ethnic and racial identity. Some may grow up and claim their mixed-heritage, others may abandon one or the other. In spite of the end result, parents who constantly love, care and affirm their child as they grow, will likely reap the greatest joy as they see the fruits of their labor.

The External Factors

I define the External Factors as the factors in which parenting activities are embedded. These factors do not only surround the couples' parenting experience, but also, to a great extent, influence the process and outcomes of the parenting experience. Although it is possible that

some families will remove themselves from these factors in their parenting process or experience, it is more likely that parenting activities and experience make sense within the context of these external factors. These External Factors can enhance or complicate the parenting process and experience, depending on the nature of those factors. While cross-national parents tend to have all the power to manage and exercise their Internal Factors, as discussed above, they might not necessarily have much control of these External Factors. These External Factors can be very unique from one context to another. There were at least two External Factors that I identified to be important. They were *socio-environmental and familial*.

The findings of this study demonstrated a recurring theme about the importance of social and geographical characteristics where the cross-national families reside. It was evident in the participants' responses how their environment to a significant degree determined the nature of their social interactions, which seemed to be a primary determinant for their overall quality of life. This study (See Chapter Four) showed that cross-national parents, who raised their mixed-heritage children in an environment where diversity is a common reality and much accepted, tended to have a more positive parenting experiences than those parents who struggled with societal prejudice or ethnic/racial intolerance. I strongly believe that socio-environmental factors do not only directly affect the parenting experience but also indirectly affect the couples' marital quality and satisfaction. Cross-national couples, who face racial/ethnic prejudice from their surrounding environment, tend to experience more difficulties, concerns, and stress, which can seriously add to an already challenging relationship. Therefore, it is crucial for cross-national

couples to prudently and selectively choose a socio-environment which they know is most conducive for their children and their unique family identity.

I mentioned earlier that parenting does not take place in isolation. Parenting is often a communal endeavor. The closest partners of this process are often the grandmothers and grandfathers, as well as other extended families. Although in most cases parents are still the ones who are in charge of parenting their children, it is not unusual that grandparents and relatives contribute significantly to the parenting process and overall experience. It is the same concept I presented earlier that the familial factors can either enhance the parenting and family experience or contribute greater difficulties and stress. As elaborately described in Chapter Four, a family's support is crucial for family life, especially when involving cross-nationality, where the couples tend to must face more hurdles in building social networks. Many of these couples are frequently required to go beyond their comfort zones in order to reach out socially. Therefore, family support becomes more important for these couples. When the extended families have negative beliefs and attitudes toward the marriage or unresolved feelings of a lack of acceptance to the spouses, cross-national marriage and parenting can be in jeopardy.

Granted this, I believe that it is very important for cross-national couples to work on building solid relationships with their extended families. Cross-national couples may need to consider initiating this bond of relationship from the beginning of their relationship, possibly even prior to marriage. Obtaining the "blessings" and approval from their "in-laws-to-be" may be a wise thing to do, in order to build the future relationship on fertile ground. Cross-national parents may want to offer their in-laws "opportunities" to contribute and be part of their lives.

Some in-laws may contribute more emotionally, while others may through financial means. Cross-national parents must determine what is right for them in this matter. Although this process of strengthening the bond with extended families is crucial, it is also important that cross-national couples define who they are as couples. The establishment of clear and healthy boundaries within the family relationships will consequently have a strong and positive impact on the marriage and parenting experience. Therefore, cross-national couples need to clearly know and have a “game plan” or vision of what type of family they want to create. Having this clear picture, it gives a sense of purpose, direction and courage for the couples to exercise and maintain healthy boundaries within the family relationship. Cross-national couples, who can *positively* integrate their extended family into their lives, may experience greater fulfillment and satisfaction in their cross-national parenting experience.

The experience of being a parent of mixed-heritage children is composed of a variety of domains and factors. These different domains and factors shape the couples’ parenting experience. Mixed-heritage parenting is composed of the combinations among the *Parenting Factors*, *Parented Factors*, the *Internal* and the *External Parenting Domain*. When cross-national parents are able to embrace their children’s or family’s unique identity, are willing to proactively devote in their children’s lives, and readily affirm their children with the freedom to be who they are as mixed-heritage children, while prudently seeking and building supportive socio-environmental and familial support, they will likely to be able to experience a successful and fulfilling parenting process and experience.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The overarching research question of this study was to investigate the experience of cross-national couples as parents of mixed-heritage children. This study captured in depth not only the participants' experience as cross-national parents, but also as couples in their marital context. This study placed emphasis on the "cross-national" context, which differs from studies involving interracial (e.g., Black-and-White relationship) or intercultural (e.g., Caucasian-and-Asian American relationship) couples or parents that numerous previous studies analyzed. This study provided a foundation for further research and unearthed some new information about the cross-national phenomenon. I believe this study is timely and pertinent to the fields of Marriage and Family, Human Services and Psychology/Sociology/Anthropology as a cross-national phenomenon that has become a more common occurrence in the United States.

The thick data collected, containing the participants' verbatim descriptive information, was the strength of this study. Because the data was very rich in content, further analyses could easily be embarked upon with the certainty that they would produce valuable material to be used in the context of Marriage and Family Therapy.

By reporting more than just a descriptive or qualitative account of the cross-national couples' experience, an attempt was made to explain the systemic processes of cross-national parenting. The Systemic Model of Cross-National Parenting (See Figure 5.1) is a new contribution to the systemic understanding of *cross-national* parenting. This study was also done with integrity and by closely following an appropriate research protocol lending validity and

reliability to the results. Not only the perusal of the material by several checkers but also the comparison with pertinent literature in the field further confirmed the conclusions reached. However, this study also has some limitations. The focus on the depth of the couples' experience makes broad generalization of the findings inappropriate. The small sample size, as well as the homogeneity of the participants, limited the possibility to draw broader conclusions to a certain extent. For example, most of the participants lived in a diverse university town. In addition, seven out of eight couples lived in the husband's home country. Five out of eight couples included the marriages between Caucasian husbands and Asian wives, and three out of these five wives were Japanese.

Another important aspect of limitation of this study is the homogeneity of the participants' socio-economic-status. The majority of the participants was highly educated and considerably affluent. Although all of them mentioned about the common daily challenges they encountered as cross-national couples, only two couples particularly talked about money as an issue. It is my assumption that cross-national couples, who are less educated or are from a lower class, would present different life experience, concerns, and perspectives to this phenomenon. This is obviously a critical limitation to the findings. I believe there were other variations and nuances in regard to the cross-national phenomenon that were not captured by this study due to this homogeneity factor.

Because of these limitations and the small size of the sample, generalizations to the greater population of cross-national parents is severely limited. Therefore, future quantitative studies will be required to build on the foundation that has been laid by this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

As mentioned above, one of the limitations of the study was the small sample size and the homogeneity of the sample. Future studies can build on this project by enlarging the sample size, and the characteristics of the participants. Recruiting more diverse participants with different marital compositions from the different parts of the Midwest might be the ideal. For instance, an Asian wife who married an African husband, who lives outside of the university town in the Midwest would bring a different cultural view to the data to this study. Researchers also can consider comparing the experiences of cross-national couples who live on East Coasts or West Coasts and even those cross-national couples who live overseas. Future studies may want to focus specifically on the experience of cross-national couples where both couples are foreigners and living in a “neutral” country. I assume that this type of cross-national couples will have different life experiences than those couples who live in their spouses’ home country.

This study yielded several key domains that relate to the cross-national parenting experience, such as the Individual Domain, Couple Domain, Child Domain, etc. These domains are open for further investigation. I envision that future research can take one or two factors of each domain and conduct a qualitative or quantitative study. For example, future research can explore the correlations and regressions among one’s specific personality, the spouse’s culture, the couples’ location of residence, and the parenting cohesion. Another idea is to go back to my participants and interview their children. The comparison between the child’s and parents’ responses may yield validating and conflicting findings but also expands the understanding and draws on parenting as a bidirectional process. Future research also can expand and/or test the

validity of the established categories, themes, and concepts by conducting surveys of a larger audience and interpreting the studies from the quantitative analysis.

Implications for Clinical Practice

Implications of a Systemic Approach to Cross-National Parenting

The systemic analyses of this study portrayed the multifaceted dynamics of parenting, especially in the context of cross-national marriage. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cross-national parenting experience, one must take into account the recursive interactions within and among domains. If each factor within each domain shapes the others and the interplays among domains affect the experience, the quality and the outcome of the parenting, some degrees of cohesion and harmony in all of these domains will be required. In other words, the more complementary the cross-national couples' different domains are, the more positive the overall experiences and outcomes will be. This does not mean that couples must always have the natural qualities in order to be suitable in this type of relationship, but it does mean that cross-national couples should strive to create a relationship and/or environment where their sense of fit can be nurtured and amplified. This systemic understanding about cross-national parenting has important implications for both the cross-national couples as well as the helping professionals who work with them.

Clinical Implications

The systemic thinking of cross-national phenomenon, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, can be useful in therapy with cross-national parents. When working with these families, it is important that therapists utilize a systemic perspective to gather a comprehensive assessment about the clients' life experience and the detailed information about the separate domains of their lives. For example, when a cross-national couple reveals a problem in therapy, the therapist can initially explore the nature of the presenting problem and evaluate if the problem is rooted primarily in the parent-child interactions or underlying issues, such as those that are culturally related. If the problem is purely about the negative nature of parent-child interactions, then behavioral strategies, combined with psychoeducational techniques, may suffice to reorganize the family interactions. However, depending on the therapist's therapeutic style and the presentation of the problems, the therapist also may be able to conduct a more comprehensive assessment and intervention by exploring the systemic dynamics among multifaceted domains (e.g., the child domain, the couple domain, etc.) that might possibly contribute to the presenting issues. For example, the therapist can explore with the parents more specifically about their experiences of being a cross-national family and how it may impact each member of the family. The systemic framework can serve as *a map* for the therapist, as he or she facilitates open discussions about each individual's experience. The therapist may invite the parents to share about their fantasies, wishes and expectations about their marital relationship as a cross-national couple. By creating a safe holding environment, the therapist may be able to talk openly about the family's cultural assumptions, unmet fantasies, and expectations. They also may be able to share about how those

fantasies and expectations are shaped by the different factors within their Individual Domains (e.g., family of origin, personal attributes, multidomain identity, etc). Although it is important for a therapist not to assume that the clients' problems must be rooted in their cultural differences, therapists may need to be sensitive and attuned to how issues related to ethnic, racial, and cultural differences may underlie more generic problems the cross-national couples encounter (Poulsen, 2003).

Therapists can guide their clients to identify some possible stressors that might strain their couple relationship, which potentially have effects on their parenting. If the parents identify issues related to cultural differences, the therapist can engage in questioning how they could deal with their cultural differences as couples, parents, and families. As part of the discussion, parents also can share how they perceive and understand each other's cultural idiosyncrasies, attributes, and practices. A discussion about how particular cultural behaviors or parenting practices have essential cultural meanings may be necessary for some parents. Therapist also can help the parents explore issues related to the social environment and the familial relationship and how they might affect their well being as couples and their parenting role/process. Essentially, therapist can teach couples effective tools of transparent communication in which they can remain engaged with each other in sharing, learning and growing, despite of their personal and cultural differences. The findings of this study provided some specific factors within each domain and helpful concepts, which can be useful for the therapists as they help their clients explore their cross-national marriage or parenting experiences. For example, the therapist can help the parents to examine their attitudes toward their own ethnic identity and how it may affect

their parenting attitudes, roles, and the expectations of their children. Therapists can integrate some of the information in this study in their psychoeducational approaches. By utilizing the findings from this study judiciously and sensitively, therapists can normalize, encourage, and empower the clients. For instance, parents in this study discussed the different strategies they used in dealing with their cultural differences. Therapists who work with young cross-national families can use some of the ideas described in this study to enhance their own sensitivity to cross-national families' problems and to help their therapeutic approaches to be more targeted and accurate in the pursuit of therapeutic change.

The Cognitive Behavioral, Narrative, and Solution-Focused therapeutic approaches can be utilized integratively in working with cross-national families. Therapists who assume a coach role, rather than expert role, will likely build better therapeutic relationships with their cross-national clients. Given that there is so much variety across cultures, it makes virtually impossible for a person to have full knowledge and understanding of each culture's distinctiveness. Therapists can use the themes (e.g., perceived strengths and challenges, cultural impact, parental wishes and expectations, etc) (See Table 4.1) from the results of this study to guide discussions with the clients. Therapist who is curious, supportive, and yet active is recommended when working with this type of clientele. Therapists, who assume an expert role in their endeavor working with cross-national couples or parents, may come across as being presumptuous, insensitive, and offensive. Some cultural characteristics can be very reserved and communal. People from these cultures can easily feel uncomfortable by an authoritarian and direct relational approach. To err on the side of being sensitive and respectful is the better strategy than to err due

to aggressiveness or lack of sensitivity. From the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy point of view, a therapist can gently coach the clients to identify their irrational or unrealistic beliefs and expectations about themselves or others. For instance, the therapist can examine the couples' "schemas" or negative perceptions specifically about their ethnic, racial, or even mixed-context backgrounds. Therapists also can help the couples and families to uncover their subconscious negative thoughts about themselves, their cultures, or even their surrounding environment. By helping the couples identify how their negative thoughts and perceptions affect their behaviors and relational interactions, therapists can help the family to modify their behaviors and relational interactions toward more cohesion and harmony. Therapist also can guide the couples to deal more effectively with the internalized negative messages imposed on them from their surrounding socio-environment. The thought-stopping and positive self-affirmation are only a few of many Cognitive Behavioral techniques that can be utilized.

Therapists who work from the Narrative standpoint, can help the cross-national clients to understand the deeper meaning of their multicultural experiences. Identifying the clients' "dominant story" that might adversely affect their lives and helping the clients to "re-write their story" or make new meanings out of their experience as a mixed-heritage individual, couple, or family, can be key interventions. Rubalcava and Waldman (2004) suggested that it is imperative that the therapist is aware of the unconscious cultural organizing principles in order to help cross-national clients to understand their differences and co-construct their own unique marital subculture.

Therapists also can work toward the empowerment of the cross-national clients by utilizing the Solution Focused approach. This study provided some valuable information suggesting that cross-national couples face issues that are similar to all couple concerning marital and parenting relationship typically, when the marriage is not arranged. The findings also suggested that, to an extent, cross-national marriage and parenting is “doable” and realistically manageable. The results portrayed the reality of the challenges of being in a cross-national context, yet, by the same token, it also showed some evidence that cross-national couples could survive and thrive in this type of relationship. This information itself can be used to encourage and empower the clients. One of the findings of this study also noted the importance for the couples to have “a clear vision” of what type of marriage or family they want. The therapist, as a coach, can guide the couples and parents to come up with a vision and, negotiate the vision or the goals they want to achieve for their family. In the process of guiding the couples, therapists can walk the clients through, step-by-step, in paving those building blocks toward their goals or vision. This may include giving the clients “permission” and assisting the client to create the “third culture” or “newly integrated family culture.” This goal can be achieved through the therapist’s facilitation of transparent discourses between couples or parents; the negotiation of practical implementation of traditions and cultural values/practices, and the establishment familial boundaries, parenting and relational roles, etc. By assisting the clients to discover the “exceptions” of their problems, while amplifying their cultural and familial strengths, clients may experience changed perspectives in their views of the problems. Focusing on the future and

working on ways to achieve future goals helps the family to transcend a focus on problems and challenges and empowers the family to choose a healthy direction towards which they can move.

Hsu (2001) recommended therapists to consider the following when working with cross-cultural couples: being sensitive to cultural perceptions of therapy held by each partner; considering ethnic matching and therapeutic neutrality; emphasizing positive forces and common ground, promoting flexibility and appreciation of differences, clarifying cultural influences as well as personal factors and avoiding too culturally-specific approaches. Following these recommendations will strengthen the power of the therapeutic relationship.

By incorporating the systemic framework and combining all these different therapeutic approaches appropriately based on the clients' issues and given context, therapists can be effective catalysts for their cross-national clients. Certainly, future studies can investigate more specifically the therapeutic/clinical aspects of cross-national context.

Concluding Remarks

This doctoral dissertation investigated the experiences of cross-national couples in the context of parenting their mixed-heritage children. There are many assumptions and misconceptions about this phenomenon. Western society tends to view cross-national marriages, like interracial marriages, rather pessimistically. One's intention or decision to marry cross-nationally often is questioned and mistakenly perceived to have ulterior motives, such as seeking a superior status, or getting the permanent residency permit, just to mention a few. Others think of cross-national marriages, parenting and families as an "impossible arrangement," due to what

appears to be cultural differences, which may cause added stress in the relationship. It was my desire to objectively understand this phenomenon better that led me to conduct this study. As one who is himself married cross-nationally and parenting two small children as well, I experienced those false assumptions and pessimistic perspectives which were projected onto me and my wife. Undertaking this study was one the ways for me to broaden my understanding, as well as a way to further inform a broader audience that those misconceptions are *not always true*. The participants who agreed to be part of this study had a variety of responses when questioned about their experiences as cross-national couples. If I could sum up the “take home” messages from their life’s stories, there were at least two things: first, *common life challenges and society are still set to create difficulties, making it understandable if relationships falter or fail, but cross-national relationships can be exciting, fun and self-growth-enhancing*; second, *a cross-national relationship is a “do-able relationship” depending on how the couples and parents envision and govern their lives*.

It is imperative to underscore that cross-national marriages and parenting do have inherent challenges and difficulties. Daily life challenges, such as unmet basic needs, financial issues, and time limitations/pressures are as very much a part of the lives of cross-national couples as it is for non cross-national couples. When these essential stressors are sufficient, it will significantly add more challenges to the experience of being in a cross-national relationship. In addition, the potential chasm of cultural differences and misunderstandings may produce additional stress in an already complex marital, parenting, and familial relationship. Although the cultural and heritage differences can be significant factors, they are not necessarily the

determining ones that dictate the quality and the outcome of the relationship. In many ways, the experience and the quality of the cross-national experience is based upon how well a person knows himself or herself, and what he or she wants as individual; how a person who is married clearly knows the vision(s) he or she and they have for their relationship; and how they, as individuals and as a couple, knowing full well the meaning of his/her and their marital choices and decisions and are courageous enough to live with those hopes and expectations.

Parents of mixed-heritage children must be perceptive and intentional in raising their children. Although the winds of change are progressively taking place, societal incomplete acceptance of the phenomenon still exists. Parent's role in the child's life and adjustment is undoubtedly significant. Parents may need to consider a variety of alternatives, which may require a high degree of support, flexibility and creativity, in order to provide their mixed-heritage child the best environment to grow and flourish. For instance, some parents may need to consider relocating to a different living or school environment for the sake of their children's identity development. Some parents may need to consider a different job position, in order to accommodate their family's need to regularly travel overseas as a way to reconnect their child with their other part of his or her heritage. These ideas are obviously the ideal, which many parents might not have the luxury to do. Those couples who are educated and affluent certainly have more options than those who do not. That's a real challenge that many cross-national parents will likely encounter. However, those couples who do not have the resources can still empower and nourish their mixed-heritage children in different ways. Other parents may orient their children of their mixed-heritage by other means than traveling overseas necessarily. They

may use the Internet or library to expand their children's knowledge of their cultures or origin. Whatever their decision is, parents' thoughtfulness, creativity, and encouragement to their children are extremely crucial.

Mixed-heritage children obviously have a greater leverage and tendencies to tolerate and accommodate diversity in their lives. However, it is important to acknowledge that ultimately they will, on their own, determine what kind of person they want to be. It is the parents' privilege and responsibility to love, to nurture, and to provide a variety of opportunities for their children to grow. This role can be joyfully and satisfactorily fulfilled when the parents themselves truly *honor* who they are and each other and develop a relationship in which they evolve a common vision of what they want as individuals, as well as couples. I hope that future studies will continue to further explore this cross-national phenomenon, especially in the U. S. society and, hence, be able to enlighten the helping professions and the society at large to be respectful and supportive of the richness of diversities.

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Appendix A - THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is the lived experience of being parents of mixed-ethnic/race children?

- *Tell me briefly how you met each other*
- *What made it easier for you to marry someone cross-culturally? Or what attracted you to each other? Or Was marrying cross-nationally a “natural” response to you?*
- *How did your family respond to your intention of marrying someone whose race/ethnicity is different from theirs?*
- *Describe your experience of being a cross-national couple?*
 - *How does your environment (e.g., your living neighborhood, workplace, friends) impact your experience of being cross-national couples?*
 - *What challenges or opportunities do you have that mono-national couples may not experience?*
- *How has your experience as cross-national couple changed since you become a parent of mixed-ethnic/race children?*
- *How would you describe your general experience of being a parent of mixed-ethnic/race children?*
 - *How does your environment (e.g., your living neighborhood, workplace, friends) impact your experience of being parents of mixed-ethnic/ race?*

- *With whom do you normally socialize? (e.g., another mixed-ethnic/race couple, majority group or minority group)*
- *Does your status of being a mixed-ethnic/race couple impact your relationships with others? (e.g., family, peers, co-worker, etc). OR _What kind of response have you evoked in others?*
- *Are there other factors that particularly contribute to the complexity of being parents of mixed-ethnic/race children?*
- *What challenges or opportunities do you have that parents of the same ethnic/race may not experience?*
- *I am interested to hear about the conversation you had with each other, related to being mixed-ethnic/ race couple?*
 - *Please describe a parenting situation you have encountered that was especially challenging because of your differing ethnic/race backgrounds?*
 - *Please describe a parenting situation you have encountered that was especially rewarding because of your differing ethnic/race backgrounds?*

2. How does the parents' cultural characteristics influence their parenting approach?

- *How does your ethnic/racial identity influence your parenting approach?*
- *How well do the cultural characteristics of your spouse or his/her host country fit with your personal lifestyles/preferences or personality?*

- *How does this fit or lack of fit impact your parenting roles and practices?*
- *How do you combine these approaches/influences?*
- *What do you do when they conflict?*
- *What individual attributes do you see in your partner that facilitate or enhance the parenting process of your mixed-ethnic/race children?*
- *How do you think your parenting practices would be different if you were to raise your mixed-race children living outside of the U.S.?*

3. What is most important to the parents as they raise their mixed-race children?

- *As parents, what is the most important value to you as you raise your mixed-ethnic/race children?*
- *When you think of your children, how often are you aware of or focus on their “mixed ethnic/raciality”?*
- *Describe the parenting approaches do you use in order to socialize your children? (cultural activities, language, etc). Please provide some examples*
- *Do you feel that you need to take extra steps/efforts in your parenting decisions primarily in order to accommodate your children’s needs?*
- *Do you think it is really a matter for you that your children become “fully” biethnic or embody their mixed-ethnic/race characteristics?*

- *How do you feel if your children seem to embrace only one aspect of their ethnicity or (in case of both parents are international) none at all but the culture of the host country?*

4. How does the parent's unique personal characteristics influence his/her parenting approaches?

- *What individual attributes should parents have in order to raise their mixed-ethnic/race children effectively?*
- *What suggestions would you give to other cross-national couples who anticipate being parents of mixed-ethnic/race children OR those who are contemplating entering into cross-national relationship?*
- *What suggestions would you give to other cross-national parents in order to parent their mixed-ethnic/race children effectively?*

Appendix B - SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview Code # _____

What is your gender ? _____ Male _____ Female

What year were you born? _____

In which country were you born? _____

* If from U.S., which State were you raised: _____

When did you come to the United States? _____

What is your educational background? _____

How do you identify yourself racially? _____

How do you identify yourself ethnically/culturally? _____

How long have you been married? _____

What language(s) do you speak with your spouse? _____

How many children do you have? _____

How old are they? _____

What language(s) do you speak with your children at home? _____

Do you speak your spouse's language/native tongue? _____ yes _____ no

What is your religious affiliation? _____

Appendix C - INVITATION TO RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

May 1, 2007

To: Parents of Mixed-Ethnic/Race Children

RE: Invitation to Research Participation

My name is Andrew Bratawidjaja, LMFT, a doctoral candidate in the Marriage and Family Therapy program. I would like to extend my invitation to you to participate in a research study of *the experience of being parents of mixed-ethnic/ race children*. This study is being conducted by my major professor, Anthony P. Jurich, PhD and I of Kansas State University.

The overall purpose of this study is to better understand the 'lived' experience of being cross-nationally mixed-ethnic/race couple in the context of parenting their mixed ethnic/race children. As the landscape of our demographic continues to change, mixed-ethnic/race couples/families continue to increase as well. There has been growing interest in the field of family studies and social sciences about this mixed-ethnic/race phenomenon during these recent decades. Although there is a host of literature on the interracial and biracial (which is predominantly the relationship between black and white) related topics out there, yet, the study that specifically explores the experience of cross-cultural/international couple is significantly sparse. Based on the literature review as well as personal experience, parents of mixed-ethnic/race children encounter unique life experience, distinct from being parents of monoethnic/racial children. Therefore, this study is intended to explore that uniqueness in a greater depth.

I am very interested about this study is primarily because I am a parent of mixed-ethnic/race children myself. I am an Indonesian person and my wife is Japanese. We have two daughters, who are 3 ½ years old and 11 months old. They were born and are being raised here in the Midwest part of the United States.

I believe that this study will be informative, not only to many couples who are in the pertinent situation and wrestling with these given circumstances, but also enlightening to many singles who are anticipating to be in a cross-cultural relationship. In addition, your participation and contribution to this study will be valuable to the field of Family Studies, Social Sciences and Human Services. Professionals, who work with couples and families in the context of education and/or counseling, will be greatly benefited from this study.

If you are interested in contributing to this study by participating in the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me: Andrew Bratawidjaja at (785) 537-4720 (home) OR email me at drewb77@ksu.edu. I look forward to connecting with you personally.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration,

Sincerely,



Andrew Bratawidjaja, M.A., M.S., LMFT



School of Family Studies
and Human Services
303 Justin Hall
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Appendix D - RECRUITMENT FLIER

You are invited to participate in a research study on **Being Parents of Mixed-Ethnic Child**

The task of being parents is always a unique experience.

However, *the task of being parents of mixed-ethnic children is likely to have additional uniqueness, particularly distinct to mixed-ethnic couple.*

The purpose of this study is to explore the cross-national couple's experience in their context of parenting their mixed-ethnic children.

there are many untold stories about this...

will you please share your valuable stories?

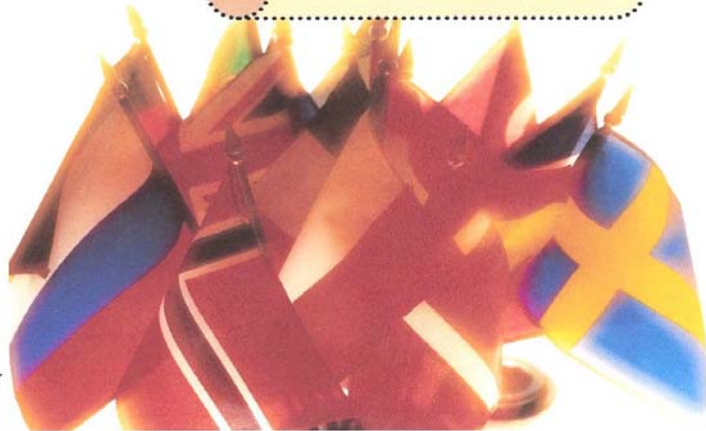
IF YOU MEET **ALL** the following **CRITERIA**, this invitation is **FOR YOU**:

- 1) **COUPLE** who is **CROSS - NATIONALLY MARRIED**
- 2) **PARENTS OF MIXED ETHNIC CHILDREN** (Between the ages of **5 TO 18 YEARS OLD**)
- 3) **AS COUPLE** is willing to participate **TOGETHER** in the study.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING, PLEASE CONTACT:

Andrew Bratawidjaja
Kansas State University
(785) 537-4720 or
drewb77@ksu.edu

You will be asked some brief introductory questions during your initial contact to ensure that you meet the criteria for the study



Appendix E - INFORMED CONSENT

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: Being Parents of Mixed-Ethnic Children: Systemic Analysis

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: 05/09/2007 **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:** 05/09/2008

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR; CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Anthony P. Jurich, PhD

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Anthony P. Jurich, PhD,
785-532-1488
jurich@humec.ksu.edu

Andrew Bratawidjaja
785-537-4720
drewb77@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: Rick Scheidt, PhD , 785-532-3224

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: N/A

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: Dissertation Research

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: This study is a qualitative study. A semi-structured interview method will be used in this study to give you an opportunity to describe your experience of being parents of mixed-race children. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. All safety measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of your responses.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

LENGTH OF STUDY: 6-10 couples will be interviewed. The interview may take about 45 minutes to an hour and a half with the couple.

RISKS ANTICIPATED: You will not be exposed to any known risks. Please feel free to refuse to answer any questions that trigger feelings discomfort presented during interview.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: There might not be direct benefits to your participating, other than the opportunity to express your thoughts and feelings associated with your experience of being a cross-national/cultural couple and rearing your mixed-ethnic/race children. Professionals, who work with couples and families in the context of education and/ or counseling, should benefit from the knowledge produced by this study.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Raw data, gathered from the participants whether it is in the form of audiotape or transcripts, will be securely protected in locked cabinet. Only the Primary Investigator, Dr. Jurich, the Secondary Investigator, Andrew Bratawidjaja and C.R. Macchi, as my research associate, will have access to those sources of information. Interview

transcripts will be identified by a code and all references in subsequent reports will refer to your statement using pseudonyms. Any identifying information, which may be associated with your specific circumstances, will be changed to eliminate any links to you.

As a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, I adhere to accepted professional standards of confidentiality under the State of Kansas guidelines for clinical and professional work. Therefore, no confidential information to be disclosed to those outside without explicit authorization unless:

- 1) there is substantial or immediate danger of physical harm to yourself or others;
- 2) there is suspected physical or sexual abuse or neglect of a child or an adult who is protected by Adult Protective Services;
- 3) there is a court order

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: N/A

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: N/A

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____
Participant Signature: _____
Participant Name: _____ Date: _____
Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____
Witness to Signature: (project staff) _____ Date: _____

VOLUNTARY OPTION FOR ADDITIONAL SUBJECT PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

Please place a check in the space provided IF YOU AGREE with one of both of the following statements:

___ I am voluntarily agreeing to read a written summary of my interview and agree to offer comments verifying whether or not the writing accurately reflects my experiences.

___ I am voluntarily agreeing to receive a call back at a later date requesting clarification of something from the interview or additional information.

If you checked at least one of the statement above, please sign your name below.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

