LOVE ACROSS THE CULTURAL DIVIDE:
PRACTICING INTERCULTURAL COUPLE COUNSELLING

By

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Abstract

In today's world, where media, communication technology, and ease of travel increasingly create opportunity for individuals from different cultures to connect and partner, it is critical that couple therapists are knowledgeable about the unique attributes of intercultural couple relationships, and have critically assessed their therapeutic models for appropriate applicability in working with these couples. Grounded in an ecosystemic framework, this manuscript-style thesis first presents an overview of the factors that contribute to the initiation of intercultural relationships, the challenges these couples might face in adjusting to intercultural partnership, and the unique strengths intercultural couples can experience. Common clinical recommendations for working with intercultural couples are then summarized, and contemporary psychoanalytic theory, emotionally focused therapy, and narrative therapy are evaluated against the recommendations. John Gottman's Sound Relationship House framework is proposed as a potentially appropriate and empirically validated model for the practice of intercultural couple counseling, and implications for clinical practice and future research are discussed.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my husband, Michael Lam, who has navigated the construction

of our family culture with patience, humour, understanding, and unwavering faith. My journey is

more vibrant because you walk with me.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

"If you are not going to marry the boy next door – and if you do you may die of boredom – then you are going to have to work much harder" (Mead, 1968, p. 68). In her seminal chapter, "Cross-Cultural Marriages", Falicov (1995) clarifies that all romantic partnerships involve the coming together of different worldviews and experiences. As increases in immigration and advances in communication technology produce new opportunities for intercultural connection, however, even the literal "boy next door" is increasingly likely to have a cultural background that differs dramatically from one's own, introducing the potential for exaggerated differences in worldview. As Mead (1968) has implied in the opening quote, these cross-cultural partnerships can be rewarding and stimulating, and also bring difficulties. This thesis provides an overview of the factors that bring intercultural couples into romantic partnerships, the challenges they might face in adjusting to these relationships, and the unique strengths the partnerships can experience. Importantly, this thesis reviews recommendations for clinical work with these couples, evaluates contemporary models of couple therapy against the recommendations, and proposes the application of John Gottman's Sound Relationship House framework to the practice of intercultural couple counseling. This introductory chapter outlines the need for and purpose of conducting such a review, defines the scope of the review, and outlines the structural framework for this manuscript style thesis.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the discussion around culturally appropriate and effective intercultural couple therapies by consolidating the literature about the potential challenges and strengths of these relationships, and critically assessing how contemporary

models of couple therapy address the therapeutic needs of this population. This work is intended

to inspire practitioners to evaluate their practices critically, to support the practice of intercultural

couple counselling with the proposal of specific clinical recommendations, and to inspire future

empirical research on the topic.

Significance

The history of intercultural unions in Canada dates back to the first European settlers

during the colonization period of the 17th and 18th centuries, where marriage of the European

traders to Indigenous women was commonplace (France, Rodriguez, & McCormick, 2013). In

the modern world, globalization has increased the opportunity for intercultural partnerships

(McFadden & Moore, 2001). Immigration has increased, at least in part, due to advances in

transportation technology (McFadden & Moore, 2001), travel for work and leisure have

increased opportunities for different cultural groups to interact face to face, and communication

technology is steadily increasing the ability for people in different physical locations to connect

and partner (Katib-Chahidi, Hill, & Paton, 1998). Today, Statistics Canada indicates that the

prevalence of intercultural couples in Canada has been consistently rising in the past two

decades, with a 33% increase in the 2001-2006 period. This increase was more than five times

the 6% growth for all couples (Milan, Maheux, & Chui, 2010). As these numbers grow,

practicing couple therapists are progressively likely to welcome these dyads into their

counselling offices.

As Rastogi and Thomas (2009) explain, all therapy can be considered multicultural

therapy, in that every individual develops within a unique family system that can never

completely correlate to that of another, regardless of cultural background. Therefore,

consideration of diversity should be integrated into couple work as the primary focus, not an

afterthought. Intercultural couples, however, are likely to experience exaggerated differences in multiple areas, as their backgrounds may include less common ground within their world views than culturally similar partners (Crippen, 2011; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Indeed, research on the sources of stress in intercultural couples indicates that these couples have two distinct sources of difficulty that other couples do not (Henriksen, Watts, & Bustamante, 2007). First are macrocultural differences, which range from mild curiosity to blatant rejection of one partner's culture by their partner's family or cultural group (Inman, Altman, Kaduvettoor-Davidson, Carr, & Walker, 2011). The second are microcultural differences, which include the habits, beliefs, values, and customs that each partner brings into the relationship (Henriksen et al., 2007). These microcultural differences may present as conflict around sex-role expectations, parenting practices, attitudes towards work and leisure, holiday traditions, expressions of emotion and affection, and problem-solving strategies.

While an extensive base of literature exists detailing the challenges that can arise within an intercultural relationship, these relationships also present unique opportunities for enriching relationships that challenge and expand individual worldviews (Molina, Estrada, & Burnett, 2004). Recently, an emerging trend has developed towards approaching the topic of intercultural relationships from a more positive, strengths-based stance (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), with researchers shifting focus from the ways that intercultural couples are uniquely challenged to the ways in which they overcome the challenges and develop their unique strengths. These relationships can offer a broadening of experience and perspective, and present multiple opportunities for personal development in thought and behaviour (Perel, 2000). For many of these couples, couple therapy can provide the supportive environment in which to explore their differences and to uncover and nurture their strengths. With a great number of cultures resistant

to receiving professional support (Greenman, Young, & Johnson, 2009), however, the exploration of therapeutic models that are culturally sensitive, accessible, and effective in working with intercultural couples is critical. This being said, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature exploring the application of existing couple counselling theory to intercultural couples (Rastogi & Thomas, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

This thesis is guided by an ecosystemic framework (Inman et al., 2011), which is expanded upon in depth in the following chapter. In brief, the ecosystemic framework highlights the "influence of sociocultural contexts on individuals' daily lives" (Inman, et al., 2011, p. 249). Within this framework, it is assumed that one's sense of self is developed in interaction with multiple systemic factors, including the personal, familial, and cultural, and is influenced by one's position on the various axes of power, such as race, gender, and class. While ecosystemic factors shape all individuals in relationship, intercultural couples are likely to have interacted with and been influenced by potentially similar ecosystems in very different ways. To use a basic example, if only one partner is a visible minority, they will likely have had different experiences with racism and power imbalance than the other. To appropriately support an intercultural couple, then, practitioners must have a sensitive understanding of how ecosystemic factors have influenced and structured each partner's experiences, worldviews, and ways of being in relationship.

Method

The method for this thesis is to conduct a thorough review of the existing literature on intercultural relationships and recommended clinical practices for working therapeutically with these couples, and to perform a critical analysis of the proposed therapeutic frameworks. The

lack of empirical literature on the applicability or efficacy of different models of couple therapy to intercultural couples makes the method of literature review and critical analysis well suited for the topic, as the research topic is only in its infancy, and preliminary analysis is required in order to generate hypotheses for future empirical research.

This research is presented in a manuscript-style thesis, with the intention that chapters 2, 3, and 4 can be read as stand-alone papers. Again, because of the lack of literature applying existing couple therapy theory to practice with intercultural couples, simply conducting a thorough literature review on the theory or practice would have produced insufficient material for a thesis length document. Instead, the topic is being explored from multiple perspectives, allowing readers with various levels of experience working therapeutically with intercultural couples to read only a chapter that applies to their interests and intentions.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions have been adopted to provide clarity and consistency throughout this document.

Relationship/Couple/Partners/Partnership

The literature on both couple counselling and intercultural couples has historically referred to "marital partners", often using the term "inter-marriage" to refer to intercultural relationships (Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998). For the purpose of this thesis, the terms 'couple', 'relationships', 'partners', and 'partnerships' are used interchangeably to refer more broadly to "two people involved in a committed romantic relationship who share a household, a history, and a planned future" (Biever at al,. 1998, p. 182). While the focus is primarily on committed, long-term, cohabitational partners, the concepts and implications may have broader applicability to relationships in earlier stages, such as those who may be determining whether the differences in

their relationship are resolvable or bearable in a longer term or cohabitational relationship.

Similarly, while this thesis refers primarily to dyads, the concepts may also apply to relationships

of different combinations.

Culture

> For this paper, the definition of culture has been borrowed from Falicov (1988):

> Culture is seen as those sets of shared worldviews and adaptive behaviors derived from

> simultaneous membership in a variety of contexts, such as ecological setting (rural,

> urban, suburban), religious background, nationality and ethnicity, social class, minority

> status, occupation, political leanings, migratory patterns and stage of acculturation, and

> values derived from belong to the same generation, historical period, or particular

> ideology. (p. 336)

> In her 1995 chapter, Falicov expands upon this definition, to highlight that cultural

similarity and difference is thus dependent upon contextual inclusion, and that the broad

definition allows for an individual to identify culturally across various dimensions. For example,

assuming that heterosexual partners of the same race and raised in the same community would

share the same worldview would negate the influence of other potential cultural contexts, such as

gender or religious background.

Intercultural/Cross-Cultural

> The terms 'intercultural' and 'cross-cultural' are chosen over the common terms

'intermarried', 'interracial', or 'biracial' to best represent the expanded range of cultural

variables with which an individual may identify, and on which a couple may differ. The term

'multicultural' has also been eliminated in this review as, while accurate in describing partners

from different cultures, the term has also been used frequently in the literature to denote an individual or couple's differing culture from the therapist, which is not the focus of this thesis.

Limitations and Scope

Several limitations exist in the scope of this thesis. First, although critical factors to the success of intercultural couple counselling, this thesis only obliquely addresses an exploration of the practitioner's general cultural competence and self-awareness of one's biases, judgments, and expectation in cross-cultural counselling work. For the purpose of this paper, a general cultural competence of the therapist is assumed. For those wishing to obtain a rudimentary understanding of how respect for diversity can be infused throughout one's general counselling practice, Arthur & Collins (2010) cover the topic extensively in their Canadian text *Culture-Infused Counselling (2nd ed.)*. Second, there are many theoretical models for therapeutic work with couples, and not all are reviewed here. The third chapter of this thesis critically evaluates only those that have been directly proposed in the literature as appropriate for use with intercultural couples. Chapter 4 proposes John Gottman's Sound Relationship House Theory as a potential model for therapeutic work with intercultural partners based on its extensive base of research. However, without empirical support to validate the efficacy of any models of couple counselling with intercultural couples, those models that have been omitted from this thesis should be considered no more or less relevant to the practice. Finally, this manuscript thesis does not conduct original empirical research, and therefore includes no research participants. Again, without empirical research, efficacy conclusions cannot be drawn.

Situating the Author

I identify as a 33-year-old cisgender, heterosexual woman. While my ancestry is a combination of European and First Nations heritage, based on my physical appearance and

cultural influences I identify as Caucasian and Anglo-Canadian. Having experienced several

intercultural relationships, I am currently cross-culturally married. As a counsellor, I have a

particular interest in therapeutic work with couples, and I recognize that doing so in a

multicultural city such as Vancouver, B.C. increases the probability that much of this work will

be done with cross-cultural couples. As such, I have both a personal interest and a professional

obligation to become knowledgeable about the challenges that intercultural couples may

experience and the strengths they may bring, and to assess my therapeutic practices critically for

appropriateness and potential efficacy in working with these couples.

I recognize that my own cultural affiliations do present bias as a therapist and researcher,

and also as a partner in an intercultural relationship. Being Caucasian has afforded me privilege

that is inherent to my being a member of the dominant North American culture, and my

worldview is inevitably impacted by my position on this axis. Also, as a partner in an

intercultural relationship, I have completed this research as a member of the in-group. As such, a

potential for confirmation bias exists in my review of effective or recommended practices. At the

same time, I believe that my inclusion in this group positions me to present the topic from a

strengths-based perspective, as I have experienced the benefits of intercultural partnerships and

am committed to expanding acceptance of these relationships.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Silva, Campbell, & Wright, 2012) as

a theoretical framework, the second chapter of this thesis reviews the literature on the factors that

influence the creation of intercultural partnerships, as well as those that contribute to adjustment

within these relationships. The unique benefits that present in these relationships and the

relational strengths that can develop are also discussed in this chapter. Having explored the

challenges to which intercultural couples are vulnerable, and the unique benefits and

opportunities for relational strength that exist within these partnerships, the third chapter

summarizes the themes that emerge in the literature around clinical recommendations for

conducting therapeutic work with these couples. The existing clinical guidelines from

contemporary psychoanalytic theory, emotionally focused therapy, and narrative therapy are then

critically evaluated against the three recommendations. With very little empirical literature

available regarding the efficacy of various therapeutic models with intercultural couples, in the

fourth chapter, John Gottman's Sound Relationship House is assessed as an empirically

supported therapeutic framework for working with intercultural couples, and suggestions are

provided for the implementation of the Sound Relationship House model in the practice of

intercultural couple counselling. Finally, the thesis concludes with a review of the implications

and recommendations, a discussion of the limitations of this thesis and proposals for future

research, and the sharing of the author's personal reflections on the research process and her

work with intercultural couples.

Chapter 2:

Initiation, Adjustment, and Strengths

Social scientists offer two groups of thought on the factors that bring couples together and maintain successful romantic partnerships (Falicov, 1995). The first is the idea that romantic relationships are most likely to flourish when partners share similarities in background, and that rapport is most easily built between individuals who have a commonality in social and cultural experiences. The second idea, conversely, is based on the adage that "opposites attract", emphasizing the importance of differences to complement and fulfill one another in relationship. For intercultural couples, specifically, Falicov (1995) writes, "the integration of the two complementary backgrounds may produce a richer and more satisfying whole than if each had married a person within his/her own culture" (p. 232). Falicov goes on to explain that this idea of complimentary partners reflects a true biological ecology, where diverse experiences and behaviours create balance in an ecosystem. Therefore, to understand how partners of diverse backgrounds come together, it is important to understand the ecosystemic context that allows them to unite, interact, and relate to each other (Silva et al., 2012). This literature review uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems as a theoretical framework to explore the factors that bring intercultural partners together and the challenges that present in these relationships. The unique benefits and relational strengths of intercultural partnerships are also discussed.

Ecosystemic Theoretical Framework

An ecological systems, or ecosystemic, framework highlights the influence of sociocultural factors in developmental outcomes (Silva et al., 2012). From this perspective, one's sense of self develops within the interactions of personal, cultural, and social factors, including various axes of power, such as race, gender, and class (Inman et al., 2011). Bronfenbrenner

(1986) identified several specific systems that influence the development of an individual. If visualizing these systems as concentric circles, the innermost circle is the microsystem, the system in which the individual lives and with which they are actively engaged. Factors in the microsystem include family, peers, schools and workplaces, churches, and any other direct and immediate influences. The larger circle in which the microsystem is encased is the exosystem. The exosystem represents systems and institutions with which the individual may not interact directly, but which indirectly affect the individual. These may include government or social policy, broader community, media and business, friends of the family, or a family member's workplace. The outermost circle is the macrosystem, or the culture in which the individual resides. The macrosystem includes cultural customs, values, and ideologies. Finally, visualized as a line that cuts through all layers of this concentric circle is the chronosystem, which represents environmental, sociocultural, or life transitional events that happen during a particular time, and which may interact with any or all levels of the ecosystem.

Initiation of Intercultural Relationships

In the current paper, the ecosystemic framework is expanded beyond individual development to explore how intercultural partners develop into relationship. Given the increasing prevalence of cross-cultural relationships, despite potentially exaggerated differences in background and worldview, it is important for social scientists and practicing clinicians to understand the sociocultural contexts that support the coming together of intercultural partners.

Macrosystem

On a macrosystemic level, increases in immigration, globalization, and acculturation in the modern world are producing increased opportunity and likelihood of cross-cultural couples meeting and partnering. National boundaries are blurred with people travelling much more often

and for different reasons than in the past, including work, tourism and study, and technological

advances in communication are creating global pathways for cross-cultural exposure and contact

(Silva et al., 2012). In addition to increased opportunity for cross-cultural contact, however, a

significant macrosystem influence on the initiation of cross-cultural partnerships are the values

within a given culture. As an example, Dodd (1998) presents intercultural trust as a cultural

value that has a significant impact on the likelihood that an individual would develop an

openness to a partner from a different culture, and have the cultural support and opportunity to

explore an intercultural relationship. Many factors can impact intercultural trust, including

political unrest or war with another nation, terrorist acts by extremist religious groups, or

histories of oppression by, or dominance over, other groups. Additionally, cultures that value

freedom, openness, and equality are more likely to support intercultural partnering.

Exosystem

In dominant Western culture, the influencing factors in the exosystem tend to be less

powerful than they once were due in part to the increased cultural value on individuality and

independence, making individuals less dependent on and influenced by extended community

groups (Silva et al., 2012). However, despite a decreased reliance on extended community,

exosystemic influence remains present in ways that are often subtle and difficult to articulate

(Perel, 2000). Organized religion is an example of a possible subtle exosystemic influence. For

active members of the religious group, the influence of that group would occur directly within

the microsystem. If, though, an individual makes a choice in adolescence or adulthood to move

away from the religious group that one was raised in, this group is no longer a factor within the

individual's microsystem. Yet, because the values and messages from that community are

indoctrinated in childhood, or sustained through extended family contact, the religious group

may continue to exert exosystemic influence (Perel, 2000).

Immigration policy is a factor within the exosystem that does have a significant impact

on the initiation of intercultural relationships. Immigration remains the principal way that people

come into contact with intercultural others, with those living in countries with inclusive

immigration policies most likely to marry cross-culturally due to increased exposure, familiarity,

and comfort with different ethnic groups (Silva et al. 2012). Indeed, several studies have

correlated increased knowledge about different cultures and positive cross-cultural interactions

with the increased likelihood that one would consider an intercultural partnership (Khatib-

Chahidi at al., 1998; Romano, 2001). Additionally, intercultural marriages tend to be more

common within one to two generations of immigration to a new country, after a degree of

cultural adjustment and comfort has occurred (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002).

Microsystem

The microsystem is the most directly influential group of factors in the developmental

ecosystem. Of the factors within the microsystem, families are the most powerful influence on an

individual's development, and thus, on the likelihood that the individual will develop an

openness to partnering cross-culturally (Silva et al., 2012). Through families, individuals learn

values, beliefs, and societal roles and expectations. When families value intercultural exchange

through travel, sharing of ideas, and practice of diverse cultural customs, individuals are more

likely to gain respect for diversity, cultural curiosity and openness (Crippen & Brew, 2007). In

the modern world, globalization has impacted families in very tangible ways, with increased

travel required for work, and increased exposure to previous cross-cultural partnerships within

the extended family (Katib-Chahidi et al., 1998). These individuals who have had exposure to

other cultures, and particularly those who have been encouraged by their families to pursue

knowledge from other cultures are more likely to marry interculturally (Katib-Chahidi et al.,

1998).

For many, particularly in dominant Western culture, social groups serve as proxies for

extended family (Molina et al., 2004), making them extremely important influences in mate

selection. Messages received from these communities may either support or reject intercultural

partnering; therefore, the more open or neutral a community is to inter-partnering, the more

likely individuals are to meet and form romantic relationships interculturally. Likewise,

communities that are less open to people of diverse backgrounds are also more likely to oppose

cross-cultural partnerships. These attitudes sometimes occur in cultural enclaves who are isolated

due to racism and discrimination, or who have a desire to retain cultural heritage in a new

country, as well as in long-established communities within the dominant culture who have had

little exposure to immigration and diversity (Silva et al., 2012). Religious groups are also very

influential in partner selection (Silva et al., 2012), as organized religion helps to define one's

social group identity and influences one's perception of intercultural relationships.

Khatib-Chahidi et al. (1998) have researched and discussed extensively the intrapersonal

characteristics that differentiate people who partner interculturally from those who partner with a

culturally similar mate. Generally, individual motives for marrying interculturally mirror those

reasons for marrying within culture. Particularly in Western culture, love, attraction, and

complementary personalities are cited as the heaviest influences on intercultural mate selection.

Alternatively, attraction to an "exotic other" may also facilitate entry into intercultural

partnerships (Kohn, 1998). In their research, Khatib-Chahidi et al. (1998), for example, found

that women from various European backgrounds who were interculturally married frequently

cited their partner's "difference" as an initial attraction. Further, the researchers found a lack of interest from these women in the characteristics of male partners from their own cultures, particularly if the woman felt at all marginalized by her culture. Of course, it must be noted that "difference" is a subjective term, defined differently by each partner, and cultural similarity and difference is, in part, a matter of perception and interpretation (Silva et al., 2012). Khatib-Chahidi et al.'s (1998) research also indicated that individuals who partner cross-culturally tend to come most often from middle-class and culturally diverse backgrounds, and typically have comparatively higher tolerance for ambiguity and a greater appreciation for integrating diverse cultures. They also tended to have personalities that demonstrated more assertiveness, adventurousness, open-mindedness, and were more differentiated from their family of origin.

Chronosystem

Intercultural relationships are much more broadly accepted in contemporary Western culture than in the past. Most notably in North America, prior to 1967, anti-miscegenation laws made it illegal in the United States for Caucasian individuals to marry non-Caucasian partners (Silva et al., 21012). While Canada did not formally implement such laws, the country has its own history of racial segregation that discouraged partnering of culturally dissimilar partners. One of the most striking examples was the1876 implementation of the Indian Act, of which one provision dictated that any First Nations woman to marry a non-First Nations man would be stripped of her identification and rights as a First Nations woman (France et al., 2013). Thus, if a First Nations woman chose to marry interculturally, she was required to conform completely to the partner's culture, disowning her own. While North American culture has passed the period where the state implemented formal legislation on cross-cultural marriage, cultural and political

events will continue to influence the acceptance of other cultural groups, and thus, the

acceptance of intercultural pairings with individuals from these groups.

Challenges to Adjustment in Intercultural Relationships

Relationship adjustment is the process of navigating differences, tensions, and anxiety in

interpersonal relationships to find consensus on important issues, satisfaction, and cohesion

(Silva et al., 2012). As Perel (2000) explains, "all marriages encompass the discovery of and

subsequent discussion about differences" (p. 179) because every individual develops within a

unique ecosystem that can never completely correlate to that of another, regardless of cultural

background. There is, therefore, a degree of cultural difference to be navigated in all couple

relationships. Intercultural couples, however, are likely to experience exaggerated differences in

multiple areas, as their backgrounds may include less common ground within their world views

than culturally similar partners (Crippen, 2011; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006; Henriksen et al.,

2007). The overwhelming majority of the current literature on intercultural couples approaches

the topic with a problem orientation (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), focusing on the multi-

systemic challenges that these couples experience to successful adjustment in their relationships.

Macrosystem

Silva et al. (2012) explain that the "degree of adjustment required in intermarriage is

largely based on spouses' levels of acculturation to each other's' cultures and to the cultural

context in which they live" (p. 861). Individuals who partner cross-culturally are challenged to

become proficient in their partners' cultural scripts. They must understand both their partners'

culture and their own in order to gain awareness of the impact of the macrosystem on their

partner, themselves, and their relationships. A significant macrosytemic factor in intercultural

relationships is that intercultural partners may reside in different locations on the larger axis of

power (Inman et al., 2011). Recognition of differential in privilege, institutional racism, and

discrimination can be profound realizations for partners who developed as a member of

dominant culture, but for many, the impact of such differences in power and privilege are simply

unseen or not understood, creating a profound schism in experience and worldview (Crippen,

2011). Additionally, at any given time, one of the partners may have the destabilizing and

alienating experience of being the "outsider" in their partner's culture. This is often the case

norm for one partner if the couple resides within the culture of the other partner. For the outsider

partner in this circumstance, they will also have experienced the loss of familiar cultural

references, such as holidays, popular culture, food, and humour (Crippen, 2011).

Exosystem

While the exosystem was a less significant factor in the initiation of intercultural unions,

it is likely a more influential factor in the maintenance of long-term intercultural unions, as

adjustment within an intercultural relationship has been shown to correlate to the level of

acceptance within one's broader community (Silva et al., 2012). A community's support of

intercultural couple relationships may range from ready acceptance to blatant disapproval

(Wong, 2009), however, generally, intercultural couples experience more social disapproval and

reduced community support for the union (Biever et al., 1998). Additionally, when two partners

form a relationship, each partner's microsystem becomes an exosystem for the other, adding an

additional layer of exosystemic community influence on the relationship. For example, an

individual's workplace is a direct, microsystemic influence for the partner who exists within that

organizational community. For the partner, this workplace is outside one's direct system of

influence, yet, the culture of that workplace, or events that occur within it, may be felt at home.

The same could hold true for a religious group, or any other community in which only one

partner participates. If one's partner interacts directly with a community that is not supportive of the intercultural union, this will affect the individual's feelings of cultural respect and acceptance, and can lead to increased anxiety, sensitivity towards feeling culturally disrespected, and reactivity within the relationship (Molina et al., 2004).

Microsystem

Families and other primary social contacts can be key sources of support to a relationship, socially, economically, and emotionally (Silva et al., 2012). Again, though, communities and families are often resistant to the romantic pairing of culturally dissimilar partners (Molina et al., 2004). In fact, Molina et al. (2004) argue that a lack of family support is one of the most common and significant challenges that intercultural couples face. This disapproval may come in the form of mild curiosity, social slights, or blatant rejection of one partner's culture by the other's family or cultural group (Inman et al., 2011). For families who have experienced oppression and alienation, rejection of a culturally dissimilar spouse may be an attempt to protect the adult child from re-victimization, and to preserve their cultural heritage (Inman et al., 2011). Choosing a partner from another cultural group may also be seen as a betrayal of one's community, leading to the possibility of direct rejection from one's own family or community. When rejected from one's family or culture of origin, individuals are more likely to adopt the culture of the other partner (Molina et al., 2004), which may initially seem to reduce the amount of intercultural conflict within the relationship (Perel, 2000). In the longer term, however, this distancing can be harmful, particularly at transitional life stages where family connection would be beneficial to support childcare or caregiving needs, or to supply intergenerational health information (Perel, 2000; Silva et al., 2012).

Cultural differences may also exist with regards to the degree of familial involvement in the relationship, depending on whether the partners come from individualistic or collectivistic cultures (Hiew, Halford, & Liu, 2014). Members of individualistic cultures tend to perceive themselves as independent agents, and value independence and the pursuit of individual goals; therefore, individuation from family is accepted and desired. Members of collectivistic cultures, conversely, tend to view themselves as a part of an interdependent social network of relationships. For these individuals, the ability to fulfill one's familial and societal roles and obligations are prioritized, and family involvement in the romantic partnership is expected. Couples may find that conflict develops around the desired level of extended family involvement in childrearing, caregiving, and other day-to-day rituals of family life.

On an individual level, differences may exist in the habits, beliefs, values, and customs that each partner brings into the relationship (Henriksen et al., 2007). These microcultural differences may present as conflict around sex-role expectations, parenting practices, attitudes towards work and leisure, holiday traditions, religious participation, expressions of emotion and affection, problem-solving strategies, and even around ideas about monogamous marriage itself (Wong, 2009). Moreover, cultural traits that are initially attractive to one partner may become undesirable in daily living, or may be attached to a network of other traits or behaviours that are less attractive (Perel, 2000). Perel (2000) gives the example of American servicemen who were attracted to submissiveness perceived in Japanese women. However, with submissiveness came a passivity and lack of initiative that later clashed with American values of assertiveness, competition, and action.

In her seminal chapter on cross-cultural relationships, Falicov (1995) explains that stereotypes and cultural camouflage can also cause conflict at the level of the individual

microsystem. Stereotypes are rigid preconceptions that one holds about all members of a particular cultural group, which lead to oversimplification and limitation in the identity of those from that cultural group. Cultural camouflage is the process of excusing behaviour with a stereotype, rather than accepting personal responsibility for behaviour that is hurtful to another person. To illustrated cultural camouflage, Molina et al. (2004) use the stereotype of Latino people being chronically late as an example: "Honey, I am sorry I am late, but I am Latino" (p. 140). At the same time, Perel (2000) cautions against denying the cultural influence in interpersonal differences, as assigning personal characteristic to a cultural difference may breed animosity or contempt.

With both the possibility that couples may be unaware of the impact of cultural differences in their relationships and that they may magnify cultural difference by over focusing on dissimilarity, it is evident that strong and clear communication is essential in navigating the challenges that may arise in an intercultural relationship (Falicov, 1995). For many though, miscommunication as a result of cultural differences is also common (Molina et al., 2004). For some intercultural couples, lack of language fluency may be a factor that leads to difficulty in relationship adjustment (Sharaievska, Kim, & Stodolska, 2013; Hiew et al., 2013). Differences in tone and word usage may trigger conflict, while cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal expressiveness, the desire and acceptance for shared emotional expression, and norms for acceptable topics of discussion at social events, such as politics and finances, may lead to dissatisfaction in the relationship (Sharaievska, et al., 2013).

Chronosystem

Periods of life transition are likely to amplify cultural differences, particularly if one or both partners have minimized differences earlier in the relationship (Silva et al., 2012). One of

the most significant life events is that of starting a family. Many cultural values can easily

remain dormant until a couple has children and the questions of which values and traditions to

instill are raised, or differing ideas on discipline are presented (Crippen, 2011). Similarly,

differing ideas about caregiving for an aging or ill loved one or conflicting visions for retirement

and older age may breed conflict within the couple. Religious differences that had been

negotiated in everyday life may become more challenging during transitional periods,

particularly those that involve heightened emotion, such as the death of a loved one and the

accompanying ceremonies or customs.

Strength and Opportunity in Intercultural Unions

As evidenced by the previous section, a great deal of literature exists detailing the

challenges that can arise within an intercultural relationship. Despite the hurdles that exist, cross-

cultural relationships present opportunities for enriching relationships that challenge and expand

individual worldviews (Molina et al., 2004), offer a broadening of experience and perspective

that many individuals long for in their lives, and presenting multiple new opportunities for

thought and behaviour (Perel, 2000). For some, partnering interculturally presents an opportunity

to "readjust the undesirable characteristics that they attribute to their background" (Perel, 2000,

p. 186), allowing one to seek balance through complementarity. Further, Biever et al. (1998)

explain that because intercultural couples are likely confronted with exaggerated challenges and

less community support, those who are able to navigated these obstacles early in the relationship

and proceed to choose a long-term intercultural partnering are often more thoroughly prepared

for marriage. The authors also argue that these couples experience a greater degree of

commitment, tolerance, respect, acceptance of difference, and broader opportunities for growth

and learning. In fact, in their respective qualitative studies, both Seward (2008) and Inman et al.

(2011) found that their participants' blended cross-cultural identities were a source of great pride.

In their 2013 qualitative study, Seshadri and Knudson-Martin sought to balance the

literature on intercultural couple challenges with a strengths-based investigation into how

intercultural couples manage to create strong and meaningful relationships despite the potential

difficulties. They interviewed 17 couples in their homes using a series of semi-structured

interview questions, focusing on processes used to navigate each level of ecosystemic influence.

Of these couples, only three fell into what the researchers termed an "unresolved" relationship,

where conflict around cultural difference was actively causing a rift in the relationship. The

remaining "resolved" couples had managed their differences in one of three, equally satisfactory

ways. The "integrated" couples had found a way to meld their two cultures together in a way that

both were celebrated equally and respectfully. The "coexisting" couples retained their separate

cultures and maintained two separate ways of doing many aspects of their lives, but viewed their

differences as positive and attractive. In the "singularly assimilated" relationships, one partner

had assimilated primarily to the other's culture without resentment.

Regardless of which relationship structure the resolved couples fell into, they tended to

similarly use four primary strategies to manage their differences in daily life. First, they co-

constructed a shared meaning in their relationship that transcended difference by mindfully

focusing on developing friendship, commonalities, shared goals, and strong commitment to the

relationship. Second, they found a way to frame the differences that did arise. This happened

differently for each couple, but some methods included reframing differences as attractive or as

something new to learn about, having flexibility and understanding of cultural rules, and

celebrating difference. The resolved couples also attended to emotions and insecurities that arose

in various social contexts, such as a family member's expression of disapproval. They did this by learning to communicate the emotion, making some adjustments to communication style to accommodate cultural difference, and leaning on the social connections that did support the union. Finally, the resolved couples positioned themselves in relation to family and society. They did this by presenting themselves as a united "we", resisting emotionally reactive responses to negativity towards their union, speaking up to challenge prejudice and discrimination, using humour to decrease negativity from others, and giving space and time for social group members to accept their partner. Although small in sample size, the results of the Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) study offer an encouraging and hopeful perspective on adjustment to intercultural couple relationship and a framework that will be useful for future researchers and practicing clinicians to build upon.

Summary

Intercultural couples, like all couples, are diverse in their experiences, worldviews, personalities, and values. While some unite as a result of commonalities in their respective cultural experiences, many others bring differing backgrounds together in an effort to produce a complimentary whole, and likely all will experience exaggerated degrees of difference that will produce unique challenges in relationship adjustment. As these couples increasingly appear in the offices of practicing clinicians, it is crucial that clinicians understand the ecosystemic context in which these relationships unite and develop. At the same time that these couples may experience obstacles, these complex unions provide challenge and opportunity for new learning and growth may provide an antidote to stagnation in long-term, companionate relationship (Falicov, 1995).

Chapter 3:

Practicing Intercultural Couple Therapy

The practice of couple therapy is inherently complex, requiring that the clinician balance the needs, values and perspectives of two diverse individuals who are typically in a great deal of distress. While all relationships are diverse and complex, intercultural couples experience an exaggerated degree of difference in combining at least two distinct cultural reference groups (Wong, 2009). As such, the exploration of a therapeutic practice that is culturally sensitive, accessible, and effective is critical in supporting intercultural relationships. This review of the existing literature summarizes three collective recommendations for clinical practice: clinicians should promote cultural awareness within couples, they should facilitate the co-creation of a new relational culture for the couples, and they must do so while being mindful of one's own cultural biases and how these may impact the couples with whom one works. Existing guidelines from contemporary psychoanalytic theory, emotionally focused therapy, and narrative therapy are summarized and evaluated against the three shared recommendations.

Promotion of Cultural Awareness

Consensus in the literature is that therapeutic strategies with intercultural couples should promote "cultural awareness and knowledge on the part of both the therapist and the clients" (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006, p. 223). As such, the basic goal of therapy with intercultural couples, according to Perel (2000), is to help the partners acknowledge their differences and their complementarity while normalizing each partner's approaches and beliefs that are different from one another. Clinicians are encouraged to begin this process by assisting couples in bringing to light the influence that cultural, social, political, and psychological factors have on their perceptions of interpersonal power and locus of control, their communication patterns, and their

decision-making strategies (Hiew et al., 2014; Inman et al., 2011). Inman et al. (2011) further

recommend that counsellors assess the partners' expectations as they pertain to each other, their

children, and the involvement of extended family. Relatedly, the counsellor should support the

couple in gaining understanding around potential challenges that may arise not only between the

two partners, but also through culturally influenced dynamics with family members and extended

community.

     Hiew et al. (2014) suggest that once the couple gains awareness of the cultural influences

on the relationship, the counsellor can support the couple to "work out how to accommodate the

differences between them" (p. 94). The clinician should look to highlight the areas where there

are similarities and help the couple explore how they can accommodate each other around

differences that have a high importance to one or both partners. This could include exploring

where there may be similar values underlying different cultural behaviours. Hiew et al. (2014)

provide the example of partners who have differing ideas about how much time should be

devoted to working outside of the home. Although the working behaviours differ, both may stem

from a desire to provide stability to the children. When couples can recognize the cultural

meanings underpinning behaviours and identify commonality in values, they are positioned to

develop a new shared culture in the relationship (Inman et al., 2011).

Creating a Co-Culture

Coupling, cohabitating, and marrying are all life transitions, but intercultural couples also

go through a form of cultural transition (Falicov, 1995). In the initial stages of this transition, the

partners may experience confusion or conflicts with the norms, values, and rituals of the other.

Eventually, increased understanding and efforts at mutual adaptation and accommodation lead to

the transformation of the couple relationship into a new relational culture (Wong, 2009).

Through this process, a common ground is created for the couple that incorporates elements of both cultures (Hopson, Hart, & Bell, 2012). In their research that looked at the cognitive, behavioural, and affective process that contribute to satisfaction and stability in intercultural relationships, Gaines & Brennan (2001) agreed that the co-creation of a unique relationship culture is a key contributor to relationship satisfaction.

Seshadri & Knudson-Martin (2013) suggest some pragmatic strategies to support intercultural couples in co-creating a relational culture. They agree that the couple should be encouraged to find common ground in their values, and encourage the clinician to focus the therapeutic work on the couple's commitment, highlighting the strategies that the couple has used to work together thus far. They explain that this process strengthens the sense of partnership, or what they call the sense of "we". Another aspect of building a strong intercultural partnership is "emotional maintenance". This involves supporting clients to develop culturally appropriate skills to communicate insecurities to each other, and to respond positively to one another when one does communicate insecurity. It also involves skills to support one another in their interactions with family, community, and larger society. Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) then encourage clients to communicate actively their "we", or partnership status, to their communities, even when faced with disapproval. The partners may have different expectations about what this larger positioning within their community would look like and may need support in determining where they will accommodate their partner's needs versus drawing a boundary.

Self of Therapist

The literature on intercultural couples widely agrees that it is critical that clinicians be aware of their own cultural biases and those of the research and training from which they draw upon (Hiew et al., 2014; Inman et al., 2011; Molina et al., 2004; Wong, 2009). This

recommendation is grounded in the idea that the clinician is an active member in the therapeutic

relationship and brings into the relationship one's own culture, values, and beliefs. As such, they

have an ethical obligation to understand how these factors may interact with those of their clients

(Wong, 2009). The clinician should be knowledgeable about other cultures and the values that

may drive cultural behaviours, but also balance their knowledge of other cultures with the risk of

making assumptions about a client's behaviour (Hiew et al., 2014). Moreover, "it is imperative

that clinicians use caution when implementing interventions to ensure that the counselling

process does not perpetuate the cycle of oppression" (Molina et al., 2004, p. 143). Finally, Perel

(2000) encourages clinicians to develop sensitivity to the couple's expectations concerning

therapy and the therapist, as culture will also influence one's beliefs about seeking outside

support and guidance, and from whom it is appropriate to do so.

Therapeutic Models

Despite trends towards increasing intercultural relationships and the potential for

increased relationship conflict, there is a noticeable gap in the literature exploring the application

and efficacy of existing couple's counselling theory to intercultural couples (Hiew et al., 2014;

Rastogi & Thomas, 2009). What has been written largely focuses on the application of

contemporary psychodynamic therapy, emotionally focused couples therapy, and narrative

therapy with intercultural couples.

Contemporary Psychoanalytic Theory

Across two papers, Rubalcava and Waldman (2004; 2005) propose an approach to

working with intercultural couples in which "awareness of the unconscious cultural organizing

principles facilitates the therapist's ability to help the individuals to understand their differences

and co-construct their own distinct marital subculture" (Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004, p. 128).

Grounding their recommendations in contemporary psychoanalytic theory, primarily self-psychology and intersubjectivity theory, the authors argue that human experience is fundamentally subjective, and that one organizes their subjective experience of the world through principles that one developed in infancy through relationship with one's primary caregivers. These organizing principles become unconscious schemata into which the individual assimilates one's life experiences (Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004).

The authors further contend that it is also through interactions with one's caregivers that an individual develops one's understanding of self (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). They argue that individuals share a universal human need for understanding, support, and inclusion, although cultural variability may dictate the appropriate relationships for having these needs to be met, and that it is through these affirming experiences with others that one maintains and consolidates one's sense of self; therefore, the desire for validating and reliable connection is the underlying motivation for all people. In satisfactory couple relationships, the partners provide one another with this affirmation and thus support a healthy sense of self.

One of the inherent difficulties in working with intercultural couples, Waldman and Rubalcava (2005) explain, is that one's internal schemata are typically experienced not as subjective experiences, but as the way things truly are. When a couple has two different perspectives on "the way things truly are" that are based on highly divergent early cultural experiences, the increased risk of misunderstanding and disagreement may lead to interactions in which one does not feel affirmed, validated, understood, or supported. Further, the construction of emotion, itself, is significantly influenced by culture, leading those from different cultures to have very different ideas about where, when, how, and to whom it is appropriate to express emotion. Thus, from a contemporary psychoanalytic perspective, to sustain a satisfactory couple

relationship, intercultural couples must learn to enhance their emotional competence by raising their unconscious cultural and relational organizing principles to awareness.

When working from this perspective with an intercultural couple in distress, the role of the therapist is to empathically articulate each partner's experience so that the other is able to understand, and so that the partners will better understand which factors influence their individual ways of interpreting and creating meaning (Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004). Rubalcava and Waldman (2004) recommend educating the partners about the influence that culture has in the relationship in order to de-pathologize the behaviours, reduce shame, and increase understanding. When the therapist can understand the needs of each partner, and how and why the other has failed to meet those needs, the authors believe that possibility for change is created. It is from here, they contend, that the couple can begin to co-construct their new, unique couple culture.

The contemporary psychoanalytic framework clearly addresses the clinical recommendation that a counsellor should support the couple in developing their cultural awareness in the relationship, encouraging the clinician to facilitate this process through psychoeducation and empathic reflection. The self-psychology and intersubjectivity theory in which this practice is based, however, is predominantly focused on microcultural factors, with little discussion of the impact of power dynamics, oppression, or other broader cultural influences in the development of self and on the relationship dynamics. It is also narrowly focused on the interactions between self and caregiver and self and partner, which may be a limiting perspective for those raised in a collectivistic culture where relational connections are more dispersed. Further, Rubalcava and Waldman (2004; 2005) state that increased understanding of the impact of culture on the relationship will lead to the co-creation of a

relational culture. However, the authors offer no further guidance for how the therapist may facilitate this process. Finally, the literature on the contemporary psychoanalytic framework only indirectly addresses the role of the clinician's own cultural biases and influences on the therapeutic relationship, and therefore provides little direction to the clinician on increasing one's self-awareness of these factors.

Emotionally Focused Therapy

In their article "Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy with Intercultural Couples" Greenman et al. (2009) base their recommendations for work with intercultural couples in attachment theory. Similarly to Rubalcava and Waldman's assertions (2004), attachment theory stipulates that:

> *all* people, regardless of their culture of origin, have innate needs for safety, comfort, and emotional closeness; that relationships with significant others provide these necessary emotional connections; and that the need for safe nurturing emotional bonds remains salient across the lifespan (Greenman et al., 2009, p. 147).

Particularly in dominant North American culture where individualism is valued, romantic partners become these primary attachment figures in adulthood. From an attachment perspective, distress occurs in couples when one or both partners are unsure that they will receive the emotional engagement and responsiveness that they require from their partners. Greenman et al. (2009) explain that this attachment distress can be particularly salient in intercultural couples when one partner comes from a collectivistic culture where relational support abounds and then enters a relationship within an individualistic culture that emphasizes independence from community. When attachment distress is present, the authors describe a pattern of pursue/withdraw that develops, where the pursuing partner becomes angry in an effort to

emotionally engage one's partner, and the withdrawing partner pulls away in an attempt to regulate the fear generated by the pursuer's hostility.

Emotionally focused therapy (EFT) is based on a theory of change in which greater understanding of one's unique experiences of themselves and others, including culturally driven norms, values, and expectations, allows the partners to integrate this knowledge "directly and openly in order to encourage a stronger emotional connection" (Greenman et al., 2009, p. 150). Therapy with the couples, then, primarily consists of supporting the couple to identify and validate any culture-specific ways of meeting basic attachment needs, de-construct the ways that some strategies may be undermining the partners' efforts to become close, and then support each partner in turn to deepen and express emotion, while supporting the other partner to hear and integrate what one's partner has expressed. Greenman et al. (2009) clarify that the partners' cultures of origin may dictate the degree of emotional expression, such as tears or voice tone, that one displays through this process, and that regardless of how the emotion is expressed, the underlying process of guiding the partners to seek one another in times of need is the same. Finally, once the partners have re-established security with one another, they are positioned to solve any long-standing microcultural differences around topics such as money, sex, or child-rearing (Greenman et al., 2009).

Greenman et al. (2009) argue that EFT is particularly appropriate for working with intercultural couples because it unites the partners in their universal needs for safety and connection, and indeed, they provide a great deal of empirical support for this position in their article. They also show respect for cultural difference in how emotion is displayed and communicated, and encourage the practitioner to understand relationships as unique cultures in themselves. The process of encouraging secure connection between the couple through increased

sharing and understanding supports the clinical recommendations to both encourage cultural
awareness and to create a strong sense of "we". Through this process of creating a new way to
relate to one another in their relationship, and finding consensus on large topics, the couple is
also supported in co-creating a new relational culture. The authors do, however, caution that this
process will likely need to happen more slowly and cautiously than some clinicians may be used
to with intracultural couples, as too quickly encouraging changes to how one relates risks
invalidating the cultural norms that may be at the root of one's relational patterns. Finally,
Greenman et al. (2009) also stress in their article the importance of recognizing the legacies of
oppression and privilege that impact intercultural couples, and agree that it is critical for the
clinician to understand also one's own biases, prejudices, and stereotypes, to practice ethically
and effectively.

Narrative Therapy

Postmodern narrative therapy has been proposed across several articles as an appropriate
therapeutic framework with intercultural couples (Biever et al., 1998; Molina et al., 2004; Silva
et al., 2012). Postmodernism can be described as a movement away from a "belief in, and search
for, foundational truths" (Biever et al., 1998). One postmodern idea, social constructionism, is
similar to intersubjectivity theory (Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004), in its stipulation that one's
reality is defined in relation to others, that the meaning we assign to a behaviour, interaction, or
event, will be dependent upon the social context in which it occurs, and therefore, no one
interpretation of reality is any more objective or true than another. Instead, the focus of therapy
from a postmodern, social constructivist perspective is on how or when ideas are useful (Biever
et al., 1998).

Narrative therapy first encourages the clinician to adopt a collaborative, curious approach to invite the partners to explore the role of culture in the couple relationship (Biever et al., 1998; Silva et al., 2012). By remaining curious, the clinician is steered away from applying one's own stereotypes or biases, focusing instead on the partners' perceptions of their similarities and differences and of how the dominant culture views their relationship, as well as each partner's worldview, expectations, and relational dynamics (Silva et al., 2012). When reflecting the partners' experiences and worldviews, the clinician is encouraged to take a both/and stance, validating that both partners' positions are equally "right" given their cultural origins (Biever et al., 1998).

Molina et al. (2004) explain that it can be helpful to invite the partners to externalize their problems, particularly where challenges of oppression, racism, or differential power structures have impacted the relationship. In doing so, the partners are better able to see that the relationship is not the problem, nor is either partner individually, but that the problem is a separate entity that is affecting their story. Examples of externalizing questions that the clinician might ask include "How did isolation arrive at your doorstep?" or "How were you inducted into feeling unworthy?" (Molina et al., 2004, p. 144). In narrative therapy, this deconstruction and externalization of the problem are fundamental steps toward creating space for a new story to emerge (Molina et al., 2004).

At this stage, the clinician's primary role is to invite new perspectives on the couple story, thereby facilitating the conjoint re-authoring of this story (Biever et al., 1998; Molina et al., 2004). The couple may be invited to expand upon stories of success and empowerment by sharing times where they both felt competent, empowered, and connected (Molina et al., 2004). The clinician may also search for liberating traditions within each culture (Biever et al., 1998).

Here, the clinician may help a partner develop an alternative meaning for a culturally influenced behaviour that is undesirable to them in their partner. Revisiting a previous example, when one partner feels that another devotes too much time to work, the meaning can be shifted towards the understanding that the working partner is placing a high value on providing stability for one's family (Inman et al., 2011).

The predominant strength of narrative therapy in working with intercultural couples is in promoting cultural awareness within the couple. The model encourages an exploration of how microsystemic factors influence the stories that one creates about one's partner and the relationship, but also heavily emphasizes the impact of the macrosystem, including oppressive histories and power imbalances in broader culture. As such, this therapy may be particularly useful for providing insight and understanding in couples where the partners reside in disparate positions on the macrosystemic axis of power. Narrative therapy also supports the building of a relational culture through the conjoint re-authoring of the couple story. While the model inherently encourages the clinician to remain unbiased and non-judgemental by adopting a curious and collaborative stance, the articles reviewed would benefit from a more explicit discussion around the influence of the self-of-therapist in the intercultural couple counselling relationship.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The practice of couple therapy with intercultural couples is wrought with complexity in the bringing together of two distinct worldviews. To do so, the literature commonly recommends that the couples be encouraged to develop cultural awareness within the relationship and to work towards the co-creation a new a relational culture. At the same time, the clinician is encouraged to develop one's self-awareness of the cultural values and biases that one brings to the

therapeutic relationship, and how these may interact with the couple. Theorists have proposed

contemporary psychoanalytic therapy, emotionally focused therapy, and narrative therapy as

appropriate therapeutic frameworks from which to work with intercultural couples. Although

these modalities can be assessed against the clinical recommendations in the literature, there

remains a complete absence of empirical research evaluating the efficacy of any therapeutic

model with intercultural couples, specifically. It will be important that future research examine

how intercultural couples and minority cultures receive these practices, and whether

supplemental recommendations are required when working with intercultural couples.

Chapter 4:

Intercultural Couples in the Sound Relationship House

All couples therapy can be considered multicultural therapy, in that every individual develops within a unique family system that can never completely correlate to that of another, regardless of cultural background. Therefore, consideration of diversity should be integrated into couples work as the primary focus, not an afterthought. With literature indicating that intercultural couples experience qualitative differences in the issues they address and supports that they receive (Silva et al., 2012), higher divorce rates and a greater tendency towards second marriages (Greenman et al., 2009), the exploration of therapeutic models that are culturally sensitive, accessible, and effective is critical in supporting intercultural relationships. Despite trends towards increasing intercultural relationships and the potential for increased relationship conflict, there is a noticeable gap in the empirical research exploring the application and efficacy of existing couple's counselling theory to intercultural couples (Hiew et al., 2014; Rastogi & Thomas, 2009). This paper proposes John Gottman's Sound Relationship House as an empirically supported therapeutic framework for working with intercultural couples and provides suggestions for the implementation of the Sound Relationship House model in the practice of intercultural couples counselling.

The Sound Relationship House: Empirical Origins

When John Gottman began his research in the 1970's, the empirical literature on couple's therapy was limited, and what did exist boasted little effect in moving couples out of distress and high rates of marital dissatisfaction relapse (Gottman, 1999). At the time, meta-analyses were depicting largest effect sizes in the behavioural marital therapies, which emphasized communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skill acquisition (Gottman, Ryan,

Carrere, & Erley, 2002). However, while these analyses were reporting that up to 55% of couples had experienced improvement in relationship satisfaction after treatment, only 35% of these couples experienced improvement that brought them out of the distressed range (Jacobsen, 1984). Moreover, of the couples who did experience gains, 30-50% relapsed into distress again within two years (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). Perhaps most concerning were the results of Cookerly's five-year follow-up with clients treated by a wide variety of relationship therapies, which found a 43.6% divorce/separation rate at the five-year point, with the highest separation/divorce rate occurring in the first year following treatment (1980). From this literature, Gottman concluded that the field of couples therapy was at an impasse caused by therapeutic interventions having been based on "imagining" what couples need according to abstract theoretical positions, rather than creating interventions from an empirical base of knowledge on what real, long-term couples are doing to create stability in their relationships (Gottman, 1999).

Gottman Research Methods and Results

Over the span of approximately 35 years, John Gottman and his associates researched thousands of couples, including every major ethnic group in the US, both married and unmarried heterosexual couples, and committed same-sex couples (Navarra & Gottman, 2011). Across this prolific body of research, they took a multi-method, longitudinal approach with the goal of identifying the defining variables between happy, stable couples, whom they called "the masters", and unhappy, unstable couples, or "the disasters", under the assumption that doing so would allow them to create a set of principles that could support ailing couples in finding relationship satisfaction and longevity.

Much of this work took place in Gottman's "Love Lab" (Gottman, 1999), an apartment laboratory he built at the University of Washington where researchers observed couples over 24 hour periods interacting as they normally would at home. Their behaviour and emotions were coded and their physiology measured, including autonomic, endocrine, and immune system responses. Additionally, individual perceptions of self and other were assessed through questionnaires, interviews, and video recall procedures. Studies included young, middle-aged, and older-aged couples, newlyweds and longer term pairings, parents of infants, pre-school, or school-aged children, and abusive couples. Gottman's research includes 7 longitudinal studies with a total of 677 couples, following these couples for up to 15 years.

From his "love lab" research, Gottman concluded that couples' patterns of affective behaviour towards one another were highly correlated to functional and dysfunctional marital processes (Gottman, et al., 2002). Specifically, he identified a set of negative interactional behaviours he termed the "four horsemen of the apocalypse", including criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, and pattern of distance and isolation, including "emotional flooding, viewing problems as severe, not wanting to work out problems with the spouse, parallel lives, and loneliness" (Gottman et al., 2002, p. 153), which allowed him to predict marital dissolution with 90% accuracy across three separate longitudinal trials (Buehlman, Gottman & Katz, 1992; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Finally, Gottman's body of research led to his discovery of three types of equally stable marriages: Validating, which are marked by couples who listen well and empathize during conflict, before attempting to persuade each other that their position is correct, volatile relationships, where there is little listening or empathizing and a great deal of immediate attempts at persuasion, and conflict-avoiding couples who rarely attempt to persuade the other at all (Gottman et al., 2002). What is most striking

about these findings is that neither the volatile relationships nor the conflict-avoiding couples are any less likely than the idyllic validating couples to experience relationship dissolution. More importantly, all three types of stable relationships shared a statistically significant ratio of positive to negative affective interactions, indicating that, equally important to the ability to reduce negative affect during conflict is the ability to increase the proportionate number of positive interactions. Gottman later proposed a 5:1 ideal ratio of positive to negative affect in a stable relationship (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

From the research data, Gottman collaborated with his wife, psychologist Dr. Julie Schwartz Gottman, to translate his research findings into the Sound Relationship House (SRH) theory and accompanying therapeutic practices (Navarra & Gottman, 2011). In their theory, the Gottmans describe the characteristics of a long-term, stable relationship in three components: the Friendship System, the Conflict System, and the Meaning System. By moving through these three components, the couple is encouraged to familiarize themselves with the other's internal world, learns to make and recognize bids for connection and to create dialogue around life's perpetual problems, and co-creates shared meaning and a new collective narrative for their relationship, or a "co-culture".

Limitations in Generalizability to Intercultural Couples

While John Gottman's robust research on couples has been critical to the advancement of contemporary couple therapy theory and practice, there are limitations to his methodology and scope of research that counsellors must consider in generalizing his findings to intercultural unions. The first set of limitations pertains to participant sampling. While Gottman and his associates used tremendously large sample sizes and ensured that these groups included a representative sample of the US population at the time of the research, including diverse

individual participants does not confirm a representative sample of intercultural couples. Furthermore, given that intercultural unions are steadily increasing (Milan et al., 2010), it is likely that Gottman et al.'s earlier research, in particular, is not representative of the current numbers of intercultural pairings. Most significantly, there is no research within Gottman's body of literature, nor in the wider relationship literature, that explores relationship satisfaction in intercultural couples specifically, nor comparatively to same-culture couples.

The piece of Gottman's work that has the most potential for generalizability to intercultural unions comes from his findings in researching gay couples. In their 2003 study, Gottman et al. found differences in how gay couples respond to conflict compared to straight couples. The research indicated that gay couples tend to be more positive in the face of conflict, using more affection and humour during the conflict, and more reliably perceiving negative comments as neutral. The researchers hypothesize that this tendency to accept a greater degree of negativity before perceiving it as such may be an adaptive response to historically experiencing the same relationship stressors as straight couples, but without the same level of family or community support. They concluded that tailored workshops for gay and lesbian couples might be beneficial.

Similarly, diminished community support is often experienced by intercultural couples, who typically experience more social disapproval than intracultural couples (Biever et al., 1998), and a lack of family support is cited as one of the most common and significant challenges faced by intercultural couples (Molina et al., 2004). Additionally, in their 2003 qualitative study, Seshadri and Knudson-Martin found that humour was often used by intercultural couples to reduce the negativity received from disapproving others. Given these similarities in challenges and adaptive responses for gay couples and intercultural couples, it is possible that Gottman et

al.'s (2003) recommendation of more tailored resources for gay couples would also apply to the intercultural couple demographic. Additional research comparing the lived experiences of intercultural and gay couples would add support to this recommendation.

Sound Relationship House and Intercultural Couple Therapy

As the numbers of intercultural couples increase, a need has been identified to suggest clinical guidelines to support the intercultural couple in navigating the differences in combining at least two distinct cultural reference groups (Greenman et al., 2009). With its emphasis on increasing partners' knowledge of the other's internal world and the importance of creating a shared meaning system, the SRH model is, theoretically, well suited to support this goal. Additionally, because the SRH model balances the exploration of one's internal world and shared meaning with a sound scientific background and pragmatic practices, it may appeal to couples where different cultural values around the counselling process itself, or the type of therapy or therapist that is sought out, would differ. For example, certain cultures may value the role of an "expert" or "coach" rather than a counsellor or therapist, and may gravitate towards the concrete practices and psychoeducation that are provided in the SRH model. Meanwhile, because the theory also involves the sharing of dreams, feelings, values, and goals, it would continue to appeal to those from a worldview that places higher value on introspection and sharing of inner experiences, providing much sought after common ground in an approach to working with intercultural relationship issues.

The Friendship System

The first component in the application of the SRH model is to develop a solid foundation in the Friendship System (Navarra & Gottman, 2011). In a strong Friendship System, couples benefit from the atmosphere of positive affect that naturally flows from a strong sense of

friendship (Gottman, 1999). The Gottmans recognize, though, how idealistic and unattainable

directives to simply "be positive" are, and have developed three levels of practice within this

system to re-create or strengthen the friendship (Gottman, 1999). The first is encouraging the

building of "love maps", which are one's mental road map of one's partner's inner world of

thoughts, feelings hopes, dreams, and values (Navarra & Gottman, 2011). For an intercultural

couple, this knowledge is crucial, as the possible lack of common ground in upbringing and

worldviews can easily breed a lack of understanding. The primary task of the therapist in

facilitating the building of love maps involves simply introducing the concept, and asking open-

ended questions regarding the partners' individual inner experiences. These questions may relate

to parenting, career, dreams for their later years, beliefs around holiday celebrations, opinions on

having family pets, religious beliefs, current stresses, and innumerable others. After practicing

such speaker-listener conversations in therapy, the couple may be asked to have this same type of

conversation at home during the week, supporting them in generalizing the activity outside of

therapy, but also creating an opportunity for a new type of positive interaction and connection in

the week.

The second and third levels of the Friendship System involve partners recognizing and

expressing what they appreciate about each other, and responding to one's partner's verbal and

non-verbal bids for connection (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Couples who successfully show

appreciation and fondness, and respond to, or turn towards, one another's bids for connection are

theoretically putting positive affect into a bank that will sustain them through periods of conflict.

It is particularly important that the intercultural couple gain skill in these two areas, as both

showing appreciation and recognizing bids for connection are dependent on successful verbal

and non-verbal communication. Because communication style can vary widely between cultures,

particularly communication of emotions and needs, intercultural partners may not intuitively recognize when their partners are communicating appreciation or when their partners are requesting connection.

Amongst several therapeutic techniques to reconnect partners with feelings of fondness (Gottman, 1999), the therapist may ask questions about how the couple met, what attracted them, and how they came to be in a committed relationship with the other, or the therapist may ask the partners to choose three to five positive adjectives about their partner from a list, and recount a story from their shared past where their partner exhibited the trait. Outside of therapy, the couple may be encouraged to write down one thing that they appreciate about their partner every day for one week. Couples may also be encouraged to commit to scheduled time for connecting, such as a weekly date night, or simply greeting each other at the door each evening to connect after being apart for the day.

The Conflict System

The second component of a stable relationship, according to SRH theory, is the Conflict System (Navarra & Gottman, 2011). If the Friendship System is functioning well, and the positive affect bank is full, this creates a state that the Gottmans call "positive-sentiment override", meaning that the positive sentiments about one's relationship will override negative things that one's partner may do or say. Conversely, if the relationship is in a "negative-sentiment override" due to lack of knowledge, appreciation, and connection, these sentiments may negatively colour anything positive that one's partner may do to repair or connect. Therefore, if a lack of commonality in world views and communication styles prevents the intercultural couple from building a strong foundation of friendship, they are at greater risk of losing the resiliency during conflict that the positive-sentiment override provides. Navarra and

Gottman (2011) clarify that conflict, itself, is not negative. It is natural and has positive, functional aspects. However, they also indicate that the Gottman longitudinal research shows that 69% of couple's problems are perpetual, relating to fundamental and lasting differences in personality, worldview, lifestyle, and needs. Because the degree of generalizability of this research to intercultural couples is unknown, it is possible that the percentages of perpetual problems in intercultural relationships could be higher as a result of the greater degree of difference of worldviews that intercultural couples are likely to experience. Further, when partners are unable to create dialogue regarding their perpetual problems, they become gridlocked, and because intercultural couples have an increased probability of having differences in communication style, the potential inability to dialogue about the perpetual problems they will naturally experience may place them at increased risk of such gridlock and relationship dissatisfaction.

Gottman suggests that therapists start interventions in the Conflict System with a solvable problem, rather than a gridlocked issue (Gottman, 1999). In "The Marriage Clinic", Gottman presents a list of likely types of perpetual and solvable problems. The intercultural couples therapist is cautioned, however, that any issue can become gridlocked (Gottman, 1999), and an item selected by one partner as a solvable problem, may quite easily be connected to a deep cultural value for the other. Assuming that the couple is able to identify a mutually agreed upon solvable problem, the therapist would then observe the couple in their own attempt to resolve the issue before providing information and opportunity to practice softened start-ups when raising an issue, tools to repair and accept the other's attempt at repair, compromise, and how to self-sooth.

When gridlock occurs, Gottman suggests a tool for therapists to use with clients, which can then be used at home, called the "Dream within Conflict Intervention" (Gottman & Silver,

1999). Using this tool, the therapist encourages dyadic communication between the partners,

acting only as a guide or prompt when necessary. One partner is the speaker, whose role is to

explain one's position focused entirely on his or her own perspective, without blame or criticism

of one's partner. The listener simply asks the questions he or she is given, which include what

the issue means to one's partner, what the partner's beliefs are around the issue, whether it is

related to the partner's history or childhood in some way, and whether a personal dream

underlies the position on the issue. This style of structured interviewing may be particularly

effective with intercultural couples because it creates a shared style of communication where

both parties are equally heard, so that the subtext behind one's position can be uncovered.

Furthermore, this subtext is often related to long-standing world views and cultural experiences

that may not yet have been discussed in the relationship, or recognized, as such. Once each

party's values and dreams have been communicated, the couple has built the mid-levels of the

Sound Relationship House and is prepared to move towards the attic.

The Meaning System

The top level in the Gottmans' Sound Relationship House is the Meaning System

(Navarra & Gottman, 2011). As Gottman and Navarra (2011) write, "a relationship is about

building a life together…that has a sense of shared purpose and meaning" (p. 333). When a

couple discovers shared meaning in their relationship, it leads to greater stability, helps them

settle conflicts, and allows them to collectively pursue the goals that matter most to them

(Gottman & DeClaire, 2001). Further, Gottman and DeClaire (2001) contend that when a couple

has found a shared meaning, they become more willing to support each other's goals, even for

little or no personal gain. Couples create shared meaning in many ways, including creating

formal and informal rituals, creating shared missions in life, and supporting one another's basic

roles (Navarra & Gottman, 2011).

For an intercultural couple, the Meaning System is perhaps the most important of the

three systems, as it is here that they will consolidate the knowledge they have gained of each

other, create their shared meaning, and move towards actualizing their life dreams as a couple,

resulting in the co-creation of their "couple culture" (Gottman, 1999). This co-creation of a

relational culture is collectively supported across the literature on intercultural couples as a

fundamental aspect of adjustment in intercultural relationships (Falicov, 1995; Wong, 2009;

Hopson et al., 2012; Gaines & Brennan, 2001; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Interestingly,

in their qualitative research, Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) found that when the

intercultural couples they had interviewed reported a sense of shared meaning and had created a

co-culture, or what the authors call a "shared we", the ability to refocus on the shared meaning

became a primary strategy used to manage conflict that arose from cultural difference.

To support the creation of a co-culture, many of the strategies recommended in the

Friendship and Conflict Systems apply. For example, through the creation of "love maps" in the

Friendship System, the couple has shared dreams and values (Navarra & Gottman, 2011).

Through an exploration of those dreams and values, the couple therapist can support the couple

in identifying commonalities and connections in their values and dreams. When conflict is

present in the Meaning System, it typically takes the form of gridlock between "idealists", where

the couple have attached different meaning to the same situation and are unable to compromise

on these deeply held convictions (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001). As in the Conflict System, the

"Dreams within Conflict Intervention" can help the couple to shift their focus from the problem,

itself, to the wishes that underlie each partner's position (Gottman & Silver, 1999). By using this

intervention in session, the couple therapist can encourage the partners to discuss the meaning that the partners' positions hold for them (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001).

Summary

Relationships are inherently complex navigations between two different upbringings, and often cultures. Intercultural couples, however, can face a heightened degree of difference due to the necessity of navigating two separate cultural worldviews. These couples have a unique opportunity, however, to create a new culture based on respect and understanding, by nurturing their friendship, dialoguing about the perpetual differences, and creating shared dreams and meaning in their life together, as Gottman suggests in the Sound Relationship House. However, while the application of the Gottman theory and therapeutic practice to intercultural couples may theoretically result in a more open dialogue and the creation of a new shared culture, the lack of research on relationship satisfaction in intercultural couples, specifically, limits the ability to predict that these outcomes will reliably correlate with relationship satisfaction in intercultural couples. Further research is suggested to compare the data from intercultural couples in the Gottman samples, if available, against those in homogenous relationships. If this data is not available, it is crucial that the research is expanded to examine relationship satisfaction in the intercultural demographic. Without this, all analysis of the potential applicability of Gottman couple therapy is challenged by the same limitations that Gottman sought to rectify: it is practice based on "imagination".

Chapter 5:

Discussion

Through a review of the literature about the potential challenges and strengths of these relationships, and a critical evaluation of how modern models of couple therapy address the therapeutic needs of this population, the purpose of this thesis was to inspire a culturally appropriate and effective practice of intercultural couple therapy. Underlying this review was an ecological systems framework, through which the therapist is encouraged to consider the "influence of sociocultural contexts on individuals' daily lives" (Inman, et al., 2011, p. 249), and the ways through which the various sociocultural systems support and challenge the initiation of and adjustment to intercultural relationships. In this concluding chapter, clinical implications and recommendations are reviewed, the limitations of this thesis and proposals for future research are discussed, and the author's personal reflections on the research process and her work with intercultural couples are shared.

Clinical Implications and Recommendations

In Chapter Three, three specific recommendations for counsellors working with intercultural couples were explored in detail: Clinicians should promote cultural awareness within couples, they should facilitate the co-creation of a new relational culture for the couples, and they should do so while being mindful of one's own cultural biases and how these may impact the couples with whom one works. Several models of couple counselling were then explored for their applicability to work with intercultural couples. Specifically, contemporary psychoanalytic therapy, emotionally focused therapy, narrative therapy, and Gottman couple therapy were evaluated, each with their own strengths and considerations for modification when working with intercultural couples.

Whichever therapeutic model a clinician chooses to work from, however, Falicov (1995) encourages clinicians to purposefully "avail themselves of a conceptual framework to guide therapeutic conversations related to cultural matters" (p. 235), which will help them to distinguish when a couple's conflicts are related to cultural differences versus other types of relationship problems. Falicov (1995) further stresses the importance of clinicians having acquired skill in conducting culturally sensitive inquiries so that questions about culture are personal and nonstereotypic, leaving room to acknowledge within-group differences in enculturation. To ensure that the lines of questioning remain nonjudgmental and nonstereotypic, Silva et al. (2012) encourage therapists to adopt a collaborative, curious stance, and to focus on the couple's own perceptions of their similarities and differences, while assessing each partner's worldviews.

At the same time, particularly if clinicians are working within a community where specific cultural groups have a significant population, it can be useful for the clinician to have some base knowledge of the communities with whom they work, their values, and common practices (Offet-Gartner, 2010). This knowledge can help inform clinicians to areas where cultural influence may be an important factor so that they may inquire further with the client or couple. Offet-Gartner (2010) proposes several strategies for gaining cultural knowledge, including visiting cultural centres, attending cultural events, reading cultural literature, speaking with political and spiritual leaders in the community, researching relevant history, amongst many other strategies. Above all, however, Offet-Gartner (2010) suggests that clinicians' processes of gaining cultural knowledge begin with their own cultures by posing questions to their families about their histories and cultural connections, before turning these same questions to the cultural groups with whom they are working.

Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this thesis is that without the use of human subjects, the review

remains theoretical and the conclusions hypothetical. While psychoanalytic therapy, emotionally

focused therapy, and narrative therapy are theoretically reviewed in this thesis for their

appropriate application to intercultural couple therapy, there remains a complete absence of

empirical research evaluating the efficacy of any particular therapeutic model with intercultural

couples, specifically. It will be important that future research quantitatively address this gap,

particularly in North America where managed health care is increasingly requiring efficacy data

before providing financial coverage for services. Arguably more clinically important will be

research that also qualitatively examines how existing practices of couple therapy are perceived

by intercultural couples and minority cultures, and whether supplemental recommendations are

required when working with these populations.

Of course, to determine whether a particular model of couple therapy is more or less

efficacious in increasing relationship satisfaction with intercultural couples, it is helpful to have

baseline information on the factors that correlate with relationship satisfaction, and yet a similar

gap in empirical literature exists exploring these factors. As explained in Chapter Four,

Gottman's couple research is seminal in the literature on relationship satisfaction; therefore, if

available, it would be beneficial to isolate the intercultural couples in Gottman's samples from

those in homogeneous partnerships and to compare the data between the two groups. If this data

is not available, it is crucial that the research be expanded to examine relationship satisfaction in

the intercultural demographic.

Relatedly, as the preponderance of literature on intercultural couples has explored only

the challenges that present in intercultural relationships, it is recommended that future research

continue a strengths-based exploration of factors that lead to successful relationship adjustment, including broader and more diverse participant samples. Additional research could target measures of relationship satisfaction, quality, and happiness, as well as alternative measures of relationship adjustment, such as the impact of culture on sexual adjustment in intercultural relationships (Seshadri and Knudson-Martin, 2013).

Personal Reflections

The topic of intercultural couples is a deeply personal topic for me given my own involvement in an intercultural marriage and the high numbers of intercultural partnerships in my social group. For this reason, the process of writing a thesis from an in-group position was at times challenging and confronting. The largest barrier to the research and writing process that I experienced was what I came to call a "crisis of confidence" and it hit most strongly when writing the introduction chapter. Because this topic has personal significance for me, sharing my belief in the importance of the topic felt very vulnerable. I felt paralyzed for a short period by fear that the topic would not be interesting to others, that the lack of human subjects in my research would mean that my efforts would not contribute meaningfully to the field, or that my coverage of the topic would lack the depth required to adequately honour couples who struggle and thrive in intercultural relationships. Once I was able to recognize the cause of my block, I was able to continue writing, and did so with increased insight about the vulnerability required to share deeply personal ideas related to our cultural upbringing. When an intercultural couple enters therapy, they may be gridlocked on issues where culturally influenced values seem to clash (Gottman, 1999). In my practice, I commonly hear from clients in conflict that they feel misunderstood, attacked, and even persecuted, so to be asked under such circumstances to discuss topics as charged as one's culture can put the client is a very vulnerable position. I am

reminded by my writing experience to welcome these couples with the same openness and curiosity with which I hope my own ideas are received.

Through the writing of this thesis, I felt compelled as a counsellor to consider myself as the therapist, how I may be perceived by the couples who come to see me, my own cultural biases, and how each of these may cause transference and countertransference in the therapeutic relationship. As a Caucasian female in North America, I expect that heterosexual intercultural couples where the female partner is also the member of dominant North American culture may present the most risk of perceived or actual alignment between that female partner and me. It is likely that my worldview, or at least my known cultural references, will share greater commonality with hers, and I also believe it is likely that the minority partner may be sensitive to that. If left unspoken, I think this could become a barrier to continued work with the couple; however, if openly addressed, I believe it could present opportunity for rich and illuminating conversation about how each partner feels they are perceived by me, and by extension, by dominant Canadian culture. I plan to have early conversation with couples about the role of my own gender and cultural identity in our work together so that, at best, we have brought the topic into the room and can easily revisit it as the need arises, and so that the couple has all of the information that they need to determine whether they believe I am the right fit to work with them therapeutically.

My final reflection pertains to the potential countertransference that can arise for me in working with intercultural couples given my own membership in an intercultural family. From my experiences of witnessing loved ones experience discrimination by others in my dominant cultural group, I am aware that working with clients who display these attitudes has the potential to evoke in me strong feelings of hostility or disgust. This is particularly likely if they convey an

expectation that I will share these attitudes simply because we come from the same culture. I believe that a racist attitude is often a reflection of fear, and of feeling threatened, and that if I can hold this compassion when working with these clients, I will be more likely to be able to maintain a meaningful and potentially transformative connection.

Conclusion

This thesis presented an ecosystemic framework for understanding how a diverse network of sociocultural factors contribute to the coming together of, adjustment to, and strengths within intercultural relationships. While it is likely possible to adapt many models of couple counselling to work appropriately with intercultural couples, the literature consistently encourages couple counsellors to encourage cultural awareness within intercultural couples, to facilitate the co-creation of a new relational culture for the couples, and to continually assess the counsellor's own cultural influences and biases for their potential impact in the counesllor's work with these couples. Just as these cross-cultural partnerships can be uniquely enriching and stimulating, so too can be the therapeutic relationships between open and curious couple counsellors and the intercultural couples with whom they work.

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