

**A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of
Chinese-White Heterosexual Couples within a Canadian Context**

by

Rong-Hsuan (Rosa) Wu

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of six Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual couples throughout their relationship lifespans. Interethnic coupling of this ethnic/racial configuration is on a steady rise, and mental health professionals can expect to find themselves working with this population in increasing numbers. In light of Canada's unique history, ethnic distribution, and official policy of multiculturalism, it adds a much needed perspective to the vast majority of studies that focus on Black-White couples in an American context. Grounded in a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, this study uses narrative inquiry to arrive at six distinctive narratives, each with their central themes and a relationship life map to situate lived experiences in time, place, and forms of interaction. An across-narratives analysis was subsequently performed to identify overarching themes and subthemes across the six narratives. The findings suggest that couples shared similar experiences around their families; feelings of compatibility; and cultural differences around religion, food, and language. Further, they shared their insights on relationship maintenance processes with respect to the maintenance of family cohesion and management of differences. Overall findings in this study were consolidated to generate a co-constructive, contextualized, and strength-based model to understanding the lived experiences of Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual couples. This conceptual model is a response to the

traditionally problem-focused literature on interethnic couple relationships, situates lived experiences in the multilayered contexts in which they are embedded, and highlights couples' innate abilities to co-construct a relational narrative that embodies their shared realities and insights and sense of "we-ness." Clinical applications of the conceptual model are discussed, along with limitations associated with this study and recommendations for future research.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....		ii
Acknowledgements.....		iv
Table of Contents.....		v
List of Tables.....		viii
List of Figures.....		ix
List of Appendices.....		x
CHAPTER ONE	INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE.....	1
	Historical background of racial mixing in Canada.....	3
	Definition of terms.....	7
CHAPTER TWO	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
	Outsiders’ frame of reference.....	12
	Theories regarding motives behind dating or marrying interethnically.....	13
	Social reactions towards interethnic relationships.....	15
	Relationship maintenance in interethnic relationships: An interdependent analysis.....	18
	Insiders’ frame of reference.....	23
	Motives behind dating or marrying interethnically.....	23
	Social reactions as perceived by interethnic couples.....	25
	Challenges faced by interethnic couples.....	27
	Rewards of being in an interethnic couple relationship.....	32
	Summary.....	35
CHAPTER THREE	METHODOLOGY.....	37
	Theoretical orientation.....	37
	Narrative inquiry.....	38
	The physical setting.....	42
	Participants.....	43
	Participant recruitment.....	44
	The consent process.....	45
	Qualitative interview.....	48
	Situating the researcher’s lived experience.....	49
	Data analysis.....	53
	Within-narrative analysis.....	54
	Across-narratives analysis.....	56

CHAPTER FOUR	WITHIN-NARRATIVE ANALYSIS RESULTS.....	58
	1. Janice and Stefan’s story: Love, communication, and communicating love through food.....	59
	Central themes in Janice and Stefan’s story.....	70
	2. Felicia and Boris’ story: Broadening horizons through embracing differences.....	77
	Central themes in Felicia and Boris’ story.....	90
	3. Maggie and Helmut’s story: The meeting of two cultures in a digital world.....	98
	Central themes in Maggie and Helmut’s story.....	110
	4. Debra and Hans’ story: A relationship road less travelled.....	120
	Central themes in Debra and Hans’ story.....	133
	5. Sarah and Jason’s story: Bridging cultures through familial pillars.....	140
	Central themes in Sarah and Jason’s story.....	151
	6. Teresa and Peter’s story: Gambling for desires.....	159
	Central themes in Teresa and Peter’s story.....	169
CHAPTER FIVE	ACROSS-NARRATIVES ANALYSIS RESULTS.....	178
	Part I: Prevalent issues in the relational context (content themes).....	183
	Family.....	183
	Personal qualities.....	184
	Gender role expectations.....	185
	Family involvement.....	188
	Children.....	190
	Compatibility in personalities, interests, and/or values.....	194
	Cultural differences as sources of tension, self-expansion, or harmony.....	198
	Religion.....	199
	Food.....	201
	Language.....	202
	Part II: Relationship maintenance processes (process themes)....	205
	Maintaining family cohesion.....	205
	Openly communicating.....	207
	Sharing food.....	208
	Actively engaging in cultural or religious traditions...	209
	Prioritizing needs.....	211
	Setting boundaries.....	213
	Responding to partner differences.....	215
	Minimizing race and ethnicity.....	216
	Respecting or embracing.....	218
	Focusing on and working towards compatibility.....	219

	Summary.....	222
CHAPTER SIX	DISCUSSION.....	225
	Insiders’ insights into the maintenance of Chinese-White heterosexual couple relationships.....	226
	Situating Chinese-White heterosexual couples’ experiences and insights in multilayered contexts.....	233
	Co-constructed realities in the interethnic/relational context.....	240
	Towards a co-constructive, strength-based, and contextualized model of interethnic couples’ lived experiences.....	251
CHAPTER SEVEN	CONCLUSION.....	258
	Implications for counsellors, psychologists, and psychotherapists.....	258
	Limitations of the present study.....	263
	Recommendations for future research.....	264
	Concluding remarks.....	265
Notes.....		269
References.....		271

List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic background of each couple.....	46
Table 2: Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space approach.....	55
Table 3: Themes, subthemes, and core messages for each couple narrative.....	180

List of Figures

Figure 1: Janice and Stefan’s relationship life map.....	71
Figure 2: Felicia and Boris’ relationship life map.....	92
Figure 3: Maggie and Helmut’s relationship life map.....	112
Figure 4: Debra and Hans’ relationship life map.....	135
Figure 5: Sarah and Jason’s relationship life map.....	153
Figure 6: Teresa and Peter’s relationship life map.....	171
Figure 7: Overarching themes and subthemes in the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples.....	182
Figure 8: Subthemes of ‘Family’.....	184
Figure 9: Subthemes of ‘Cultural differences as sources of tension, self-expansion, or harmony’.....	199
Figure 10: Subthemes of ‘Maintaining family cohesion’.....	206
Figure 11: Subthemes of ‘Responding to partner differences’.....	216
Figure 12: Co-constructive, contextualized, and strength-based model of the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples.....	252

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment script (for paper flyers, email text, and online ads)

Appendix B: Recruitment script in traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese (for paper flyers, email texts, and online ads)

Appendix C: Introductory letter to gatekeepers for community-based and academic settings (including consent form)

Appendix D: Informed consent form for participants

Appendix E: Demographic questionnaire

Appendix F: Qualitative interview questions

Appendix G: Counselling resource sheet

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Rationale

The number of Canadians saying “I love you” to a person from a different ethnicity is steadily increasing. The latest census figures (Statistics Canada, 2006) reported 289,400 interethnic unions-married and common law-between a White person and a visible minority or between two people from different minority groups. When compared to the last census in 2001, this figure shows a 33.1% increase in such unions over a five-year period. And yet, little research on interethnic couple relationships have been done in a Canadian context (Hamplová & Le Bourdais, 2010), particularly with respect to the subjective experiences and perceptions of those involved in such relationships. The dearth of research on interethnic couples in Canada is surprising given that Canada is a country of immigrants and that an increasing number of immigrants are coming from non-European nations. Thus, in a time when interethnic couples are on a steady rise and counselling professionals can expect to find themselves working with this population in increasing numbers, it is timely, perhaps even urgent, to investigate the specific dynamics within these relationships.

This study explores the lived experience of couples who identify as being involved in an interethnic heterosexual long-term relationship where one partner self-identifies as Chinese or Chinese-Canadian and the other self-identifies as a White Canadian of European descent. The Chinese population in Canada has grown substantially in the last five years, increasing from 1,216, 600 to 1,324,700, or 4.19% of Canada’s total population (Statistics Canada, 2011), now representing the second largest minority group in Canada. As the Chinese population continues to increase, there is greater opportunity for Chinese individuals to form intimate relationships

with someone who is not a visible minority group member. Yet, there are virtually no studies exploring the relationship experience of Chinese-White couples within a Canadian context.

This exploratory study provides some in-depth descriptions of how Chinese-White heterosexual couples experience their relationships in a Canadian context. At the heart of this study are the voices of people who have all too often been overlooked. Their stories need to be heard, not only because they reveal unique relational issues but also because they signify much about society and contradict societal stereotypes and presuppositions about interethnic relationships (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). Their insights serve to increase our understanding of interethnic couple relationships and enhance our understanding of intimate relationships in general. Further, studying interethnic couple relationships is important not only because they reflect another aspect of the diversity of families in Canada today, but also because of their potential impact in terms of social inclusion and identification with one visible minority group or more, particularly for subsequent generations. The following research question is posed: What are the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples residing in a major metropolitan city in Canada as they journey from their past to the present and onto an envisioned future?

A deeper understanding of interethnic couples' experiences in long-term relationships is also needed as recent statistics suggest that interethnic marriages are more prone to divorce (Bratter & King, 2008). Their susceptibility to dissolution often contributes to or reinforces the widespread view that interethnic relationships are inherently problematic and that partners of these relationships lack commitment (Gurung & Duong, 1999), when in actuality, there are more complex factors in play, such as strong family opposition, language barriers, negative social reactions, and differences in family of origin functioning. Hence, in light of these complex

factors, what is the “secret” behind *stable* and long-lasting relationships among interethnic couples?

Although one may argue that all therapies are cultural encounters, this study proposes that working with interethnic couples often requires more than just recognizing differences in the individual and couple domains. It involves reflecting on how differences relate to larger social contexts, which are defined by histories of inequity, racism, and colonialism. Findings in this study will hopefully lead to an increased awareness and understanding of the complexities of interethnic relationships, thereby providing important implications for psychologists and therapists working with interethnic couples and their families. Approaching from a strengths-based perspective, this study will provide a much needed updated perspective to the traditionally pathologizing and problem-focused literature on interethnic relationships. Due to the unique set of challenges and stressors that many interethnic couples face in their daily existence, there is perhaps much to learn from these couples and the distinctive ways they maintain long-term relationships. Moreover, findings may also be of value to professionals and scholars who study families, race and ethnicity, and sociology. Finally, this study aims to minimize the stigma that the scientific and scholarly community may harbour regarding interethnic couples and celebrate the success of long-lasting relationships in an era where high divorce rate is a common trend.

Prior to reviewing the literature relevant to the research questions, it is important to first situate the issue of interethnic relationship, or racial mixing, within the historical context of Canada, given that this study is conducted in this country.

Historical Background of Racial Mixing in Canada

Racial mixing in Canada can be traced back as far as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the height of the North American fur trade (Van Kirk, 1980). For many decades,

there was a virtual ban of all European women in Canada, forcing many British, Scottish, and French-Canadian fur traders to marry Native and Inuit women, who not only served as cultural liaisons between the two cultures, but also played an essential role in the development of the fur-trade society. First Peoples had survived in harsh environments for thousands of years, so fur traders benefited greatly from their Native wives' knowledge of the land and its resources. Van Kirk (1980) asserts that one important difference between fur trade and other industrial developments is that "the growth mutual dependent between Indian and European trader at the economic level could not help but engender a significant cultural exchange as well" (p. 12). Out of this cultural exchange emerged the Métis, children of European fur traders and Native women. Although the initial offspring of these mixed unions were individuals who possessed mixed ancestry, the gradual establishment of distinct Métis communities and subsequent mixed unions between Métis men and women resulted in the genesis of a new Aboriginal group-the Métis.

The history of racial mixing in Canada appears to be rather exceptional. In most other areas of the world, sexual contact between European men and native women had usually been illicit in nature (Van Kirk, 1980). In the U.S.A., for instance, the historical illegalization of interracial relationships predates the Declaration of Independence by more than a century (Thompson, 2008). Social changes during the 1960s and the landmark civil rights case of *Loving v. Virginia*¹ finally put an end on state anti-miscegenation laws in the U.S.A. (Gaines & Brennan, 2001). Although anti-miscegenation laws were not officially and blatantly rectified in Canada, it has been argued, however, that the 1876 Indian Act of Canada² is a manifestation of the state's regulation of intermixing. Native women who married non-Native men paid the high price of losing their Indian status, being band from reserve lands, and being denied their culturally established rights. It was not until 1985 that the Act was finally amended to grant Native women

Indian legal status when they marry outside their ethnic/racial boundaries. Thompson (2008) compares the detrimental repercussions resulting from provisions of the Indian Act to the anti-miscegenation laws in the U.S.A. Similarly, Canadian activist Velma Demerson documents in her compelling book, *Incorrigible*, her experiences of being incarcerated in Toronto in 1939 for having been in a relationship with a Chinese man. She was convicted of being “incorrigible” under an 1897 law, the Ontario Female Refuges Act³, and incarcerated for ten months⁴ (Demerson, 2004).

By the end of the nineteenth century, Canada was established by the French and the British and the two groups represented around 90% of the population (Driedger, 1996). Blacks also lived in Canada from the very beginning of the European settlement, yet their history was significantly different from those residing in the U.S.A. Slavery was nearly non-existent in Canada and most of them came to the country voluntarily, often escaping from the U.S.A. or the West Indies (Hamplová & Le Bourdais, 2010). However, this does not mean Canada was free from racism or other forms of oppression. The Chinese, for example, was described by Li (1998) as “aside from the indigenous people, no racial or ethnic group in Canada has experienced such harsh treatment as the Chinese” (p. 5). During the nineteenth century, they were predominantly unskilled labourers living in British Columbia, a province with a history that was marred by a long-lasting anti-Chinese movement (Li, 1998). The first anti-Chinese bill was passed in 1885, coinciding with the completion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway that the Chinese played a key role in building. In 1923, the federal government passed the Chinese Immigration Act (or Chinese Exclusion Act), which prohibited the Chinese from entering Canada and stripped many Chinese Canadians of their civil rights for twenty-four years until the Act was repealed in 1947 (Li, 1998). However, by the 1960s, most of the existing restrictions were lifted, and in

1967, a point-based “colour-blind” system that focused on immigrants’ human capital was implemented (Hamplová & Le Bourdais, 2010). This system allowed immigrants to enter the country if they possessed professional and technical qualities, high levels of education, and financial resources to start new businesses.

Between 1956 and 1976, 63.6% of immigrants came to Canada from Europe, while 11.9% came from Asia. Following the Immigration Act of 1976, the visible minority population in Canada grew threefold between 1981 and 2001 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007). The rapid process of economic globalization further encouraged the migration of people across national borders, to which according to the latest 2011 census, Canada currently holds the highest proportion of foreign-born population among the G8 nations. Furthermore, recent immigrants arriving in Canada between 2006 and 2011 make up 3.5% of Canada’s total population, of which the largest share, 56.9% or about 661,600 individuals, come from Asia and the Middle East (Statistics Canada, 2011). And as the visible minority population grew, the number of mixed marriages also rose exponentially. The number of mixed marriages in Canada rose by 35% between 1996 and 2001 and 33.1% between 2001 and 2006 (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007).

Despite being one of the largest minority groups in Canada, the Chinese have the second lowest rate of mixed unions at 17.4% of the married population (Milan, Maheux, & Chui, 2010). This may be attributed to the fact that a large majority of Chinese are relatively recent immigrants, and foreign-born or first generation immigrants are more likely to have spouses of the same background. While the second generation begins to have mixed marriages, the third generation is the key to see who will intermarry. The growing number of third generation Chinese in Canada may contribute to an increase number of mixed unions in the future. It is worth noting, however,

that though there are a relatively low proportion of Chinese individuals involved in mixed unions, numerically speaking, there are still more Chinese spouses or partners in these unions due to the sheer size of the Chinese population in Canada.

In sum, racial mixing was a central social phenomenon during the fur-trade period and later flourished during massive immigration waves in Canada. The phenomenon of racial mixing in Canada has qualities that set it apart from other nations, due to its unique history, racial makeup, and an official policy of multiculturalism. However, the popular celebratory discourse of Canada being a non-racist society should be critically examined, given that institutional racism and systematic discrimination have been widely documented in Canadian history. The relative openness towards mixed unions at present suggests that policies promoting harmonious interracial interactions are rather successful in this nation. Though intermixing does not necessarily indicate a full acceptance of visible minorities, it does point to a weakening of barriers between divergent groups and suggests a more hospitable environment for minorities. Whether this is the case for Chinese-White couples of today is a point of inquiry in this study.

The discourse on interethnic relationships will begin with a short section defining the important terms used in this study, followed by an extensive overview of the existing literature on interethnic couple relationships.

Definition of Terms

Culture. Culture is defined here as an integrated system of collective knowledge and acquired behavioral patterns which characterize the members of a society and which are not a product of biological inheritance (Hoebel, 1954). Culture is not static; it is a process. It is constantly evolving and responding to shifting environments and circumstances.

Ethnicity. There are infinite ways to define ethnicity. This study adheres to Yinger's (1976) definition of ethnicity, which is described as the following:

A segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients (p. 200).

Yinger's definition of ethnicity is applied in this study due to its emphasis on common culture and an ideology that stresses common ancestry and heritage.

“Race”. Race as a biological concept is generally not supported by scientific evidence and it is asserted that racial differences often become the platform from which one race exerts power over another, thereby impinging on physical, emotional, psychological, and economic well-being (Mutchler & Burr, 1991). Nelson (1992) suggested writing race in quotation marks so as to reinforce its socially constructed nature.

Interethnic vs. interracial. Interethnic and interracial are the most commonly used terms in the literature of intercultural romantic relationships. Terms often used interchangeably with interethnic and interracial are mixed-racial, mixed-ethnic, multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, intercultural, cross-cultural, cross-racial, cross-ethnic, and mixed union. Perhaps worthy of mention is that a great majority of the literature on interethnic couple relationships were generated in the U.S.A., where a set of racial meanings operate in the interactions of daily life and the Black-White color line is rigidly defined; hence the term “interracial” is widely used. In Canada, this color line is not so rigidly enforced. The differences between Canada and U.S.A are attributed to their unique historical experiences and multiculturalism policies (Bibby, 2006). Although Canada's history is not free from troubled race relations, the country never had the

slavery or legally enforced segregation that the U.S.A. had. Furthermore, Canada's official multiculturalism policy encourages new Canadians and visible minorities to maintain their ethnic identity within the context of a strong Canadian identity (Qadeer, 1997).

In this study, the interest lies in interethnic couple relationships, in which the emphasis is on ethnic group differences. While any number of differences (*e.g.*, SES, age, sexual orientation, religious faith) between couples could exist, this study will mainly address differences in ethnicity. Moreover, the term "interethnic" is opted as opposed to interracial in light of several advantages. First, it is noncommittal and somewhat flexible. While emphasizing the fact that one is dealing with two distinguishable groups, this noncommittal phrase leaves the whole question of the precise status of the groups, on physical and other grounds, open for further discussion. Second, it recognizes the fact that the two groups have been subject to cultural influences. Finally, it "eliminates all obfuscating emotional implications" (Montagu, 1974, p.444). Nonetheless, many if not most of the studies cited in this study use interracial in place of interethnic; therefore, when making references to these studies, authors' usage of the term "interracial" will be adhered to.

Narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a specific type of qualitative design in which a "narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). It consists of gathering data through collecting stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences. The purpose of this study is to explore how couples experience their interethnic relationships by locating events and ideas in time and place.

Lived experience. While there are many philosophical treatments of this term, it implies that the essence of any experience lies precisely in its "lived" character. The lived character

consists not only of what is felt in the passage of time but also of what ideas or events are meaningfully singled out and preserved. Furthermore, this study draws upon Dewey's two criteria of experience: interaction and continuity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). First, people cannot solely be understood as individuals, as they are always in relation and must also be understood within their social context. Interaction thus refers to the situational influence on one's experience. Second, the notion of continuity suggests that experiences grow out of other experiences and further leads to other experiences and that "wherever one positions oneself in that continuum--the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Taken together, Dewey's notion of lived experience suggests that one's present experience is a function of the interaction between one's past experiences and the present situation, and the present experience in some way influences all potential future experiences for the individual.

Having clarified some of the terminology used throughout this study, let us now turn to the literature relevant to my research purpose and question.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In the context of intercultural couple relationships literature, “interethnic” is perhaps the most commonly used term (Gaines, Gurung, Lin, & Pouli, 2006). Evidence for the distinctiveness of interethnic relationships is that it represents a specific subset under the umbrella of intercultural relationships. Although the different types of intercultural relationships are not mutually exclusive, it is a discerned fact that the low percentage of interethnic couple relationships contrasts sharply with those of other types of intercultural relationships. For instance, in contrast to the 3.3% of couples in interethnic relationships (Statistics Canada, 2006), the most recent poll of interreligious unions in Canada revealed that 19% of couples involved persons from dissimilar religious backgrounds (Statistics Canada, 2007).

It has been suggested that stigmatization and discrimination against interethnic couples are a result of the statistical infrequency of interethnic couple relationships (Gaines & Ickes, 1997). Despite the steady increase of interethnic coupling, these relationships remain the exception rather than the norm. Research has shown that the 289,400 interethnic unions (marriage or common-law) reported in 2006 composed of only 3.9% of all unions in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006). Among these interethnic unions, 247,600 couples were in unions that involved an ethnic minority person and someone who was White. Furthermore, these couples accounted for 3.3% of all couples in Canada and the remaining 41,900 couples were in unions that involved two different visible minority group members, which made up 0.6% of all couples in Canada in 2006⁵.

The greater stigmatization of interethnic couple relationships versus other types of intercultural relationships can be explained by a combination of factors, one of which is

xenophobia. Levinger and Rands (1985) suggest that xenophobia (*i.e.*, an unreasonable fear or dislike of others who are foreign or physically dissimilar) contributes to the stigmatization and low incidence of interracial couple relationships. Xenophobia exists as long as groups and communities make distinctions, operating with category systems that distinguish “inside” from “outside”, and assigning different values such as good/bad or healthy/unhealthy to each system. Gaines and Ickes’ (1997) analysis and summary of xenophobia serves to illuminate the essential features of what they term the “outsiders’ perspective” of interethnic relationships.

The following sections will present an overview of the literature relevant to the research question posed in this study. Specifically, the selected studies pertain to issues such as motives for entering interethnic couple relationships, social reactions to interethnic couple relationships, relationship issues and coping strategies, and challenges and rewards associated with being in interethnic couple relationships. In reference to Gaines and Ickes’ (1997) analysis, issues will be examined through two frames of references--the outsiders’ frame of reference and the insiders’ frame of reference. Discrepancies between the two may explain why couple members involved in interethnic relationships (insiders) often report feeling stigmatized and discriminated against in society.

Outsiders’ Frame of Reference

The outsiders’ perspective represents the attitudes and theories about interethnic couples that emerge from lay and scientific psychology as well social observers who are not involved in interethnic relationships. Most of the research on interethnic couple relationships has used the outsiders’ frame of reference as a starting point, and not on the perspectives of couple members themselves (Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998). The relevant literature as emerging from outsiders’ perspective can be sorted into three major categories. First, the outsiders’ literature offers major

theories that examine the motives behind dating or marrying outside of one's own ethnic/racial group membership. The predominant theories are caste exchange theory and racial motivation theory. Second, several studies focus on social reactions towards interethnic couple relationships. Negative social reactions are particularly salient in the literature, and they further illustrate the unique set of stressors or challenges that interethnic couples face on a daily basis. Finally, a small portion of the literature touches upon relationship maintenance within interethnic couple relationships. Emphasis is placed on issues such as commitment processes and relationship maintenance behaviours.

Theories regarding the motives behind dating or marrying interethnically. It can be said that many of the theories on interethnic couple formation rely on faulty logic, have been based on studies with small samples, and have a racist element to them (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). The most widespread and well-known theories are the caste exchange theory, a derivative of social exchange theory, and racial motivation theory.

Caste exchange theory suggests that people of the dominant racial group exchange their racially-based social status for another resource (*e.g.*, beauty, novelty) provided by individuals of a minority race (Kalmijn, 2010; Troy et al., 2006). Individuals from the minority race must therefore offer something extra to the relationship to compensate for the higher status of individuals from the dominant race. For instance, Black people are believed to marry White people to escape poor financial and social situation, thereby acquiring a higher social status (McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999). Although some studies support the caste exchange theory in interracial coupling, these studies only *partially* verify it. In fact, more recent empirical tests of this theory, often based on large sets of micro data and highly complicated statistical methods, remain inconclusive, as exemplified by exchanges among Gullickson and Fu (2010),

Kalmijn (2010), and Rosenfeld (2010). Hou and Myles (2013) recently extended the empirical scope of past research to test this theory on Black-White marriages in both Canada and the U.S.A and among the black sub-groups (Caribbean vs. African blacks) in both nations. They found modest support for the theory in the U.S.A. but not in Canada. In Canada, intermarrying and intramarrying couples have similar patterns of educational mating. Further, the generalizability of the thesis was found to be limited not only by historical context, but also by national origin (i.e., Caribbean vs. Africa), and gender.

Based on conventional psychodynamic theories, racial motivation theory suggests that interracial relationships occur *because* of racial differences. Individuals who date or marry interracially are believed to have motives that may be unconscious in nature. These include the need to be unconventional and nonconforming, the need to rebel against one's own family, the impulse to act out negatively, or the need to feel superior or inferior (Okun, 1996). Specifically, the individual from the majority racial group is believed to be rebellious or mentally ill, while the individual from a minority race has an abnormal preoccupation with the majority race. The couple is regarded as exhibitionistic, overwhelmed with sexual curiosity, insecure, self-loathing, and having a deep-rooted pathological deviance (Spaight & Dixon, 1984). Currently, there is no empirical evidence that supports the idea that those who date or marry interracially are psychologically unstable or rebellious (Root, 2001). Regarding charges of exhibitionism, the fact is that many interracial relationships are characterized by secrecy (Brown, 1989) to avoid scrutiny and criticisms from the larger society. Another perspective of racial motivation theory is the idea that one may be consciously or unconsciously attracted to characteristics or practices of a particular race, such as sexuality, spirituality, social status, musical status, and physical

attractiveness. This claim has little or no empirical support (Davidson, 1991/1992; Yancey, 2003).

Generally speaking, the caste exchange theory on interethnic relationships has predictions associated with it and is therefore more easily supported or not supported by empirical evidence. For instance, the caste theory would predict that White people of relatively low socioeconomic status (SES) marry Black people of higher SES in an exchange of racial caste position for economic resources and status. On the other hand, racial motivation theory does not generally lend itself to be directly examined in experimental studies, as motivations are often unconscious in nature. What the two theories do share, however, is that they both harbour negative biases towards interethnic couple relationships, and they in turn reflect the widespread and normative prejudice that exists towards these relationships. To better understand how outsiders react towards interethnic relationships, I will turn to the literature that discusses the various types of social reactions.

Social reactions towards interethnic couples. For several decades, outsider research has relied on surveys to measure the degree of social acceptance towards interethnic coupling. The existing evidence suggests that interethnic relationships continue to be viewed unfavourably by members of all races (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001), although less unfavourably than in the past. Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) found that interracial couples were perceived as less compatible than were intraracial couples, at least when the minority member was African American. When respondents were asked to rate how difficult it was to imagine oneself in an interracial marriage, most respondents indicated that all interracial marriages were more difficult to imagine than any of the intraracial marriages. Similarly, Garcia and Rivera's (1999) survey on

external perceptions of interracial and intraracial coupling found that interracial couples were perceived as less compatible, less attractive, and whose relationships are more likely to dissolve.

Level of acceptance has also been found to be influenced by age and gender. Zebroski (1999) examined the interplay between race and gender, and their influence on the level of support for interracial marriage. Results revealed that White women were perceived as being more supportive of interracial marriages, followed by Black women, Black men, and White men. It was also found that the majority of respondents, regardless of their race and gender, reported that members of their own race and gender were the most accepting of their relationship.

Datzman and Gardner (2000) examined the specific influence of gender on an individual's level of acceptance on interracial marriages among a Black community sample. The results differ from Zebroski's (1999) in that the Black males in general were more in favour of interracial marriage than Black females, as evidenced by the fact that Black males tend to marry outside their race more often than their female counterparts (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990).

Very few studies have commented on the disapproval or acceptance of interethnic relationships in a Canadian context. Reginald Bibby from the University of Lethbridge in Alberta conducted one of the first nation-wide surveys designed to map out the values, attitudes, and beliefs espoused by Canadians. His longitudinal study, called the Project Canada Survey Series, went on for 30 years to which he presented the same set of questions to the baby boom generation every five years, and compared their responses to those of younger or older generations. His data was published in a book called *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, which explores the kind of attitudinal legacy this generation will leave behind. It was found that in the mid-1970s, 55% of Canadians approved of marriage between Blacks and Whites, compared to 40% in the U.S.A. By 1990, 78% of

Canadians accepted interethnic marriage, while just 48% of Americans were accepting (Bibby, 2006). In Bibby's most recent poll in 2006, it was found that an outstanding 92% of Canadians- particularly those under the age of 35-are in favour of interethnic unions.

However, whether someone is accepting towards interethnic relationships does not mean that he/she would actively choose to be romantically involved with a member from another ethnic group/race. In fact, a recent study (Malhi, 2011) examining romantic interracial relationships in Canada from both the insiders' perspectives and outsiders' perspectives found that along with a few positive "celebratory" discourses on mixed race relationships, "outsider" participants often engaged in negative "cautionary" discourses that depicted interracial couples as different and likely to experience more difficulties in their relationships. Childs (2005) and Feagin and O'Brien (2004) also found that the research participants they surveyed tended to support interracial relationships, in principle, but were consistent in their direct opposition to them, particularly for themselves or close family members (particularly for daughters). The sentiment that "I wouldn't but it's okay for others" or "I don't have a problem with interracial couples, but..." was echoed by Herman and Campbell's (2012) assessment of White's attitudes towards dating, cohabiting with, marrying, and child bearing with African Americans and Asian Americans. Results suggested that positive sentiment toward interracial coupling will not necessarily translate in an equal rise in more interracial formation in future years, as positive survey attitudes did not correspond to personal willingness to engage in such relationships. In other words, the White survey respondents accepted interethnic coupling for abstract others while expressing personal preferences that limit their own contact with racial/ethnic minorities.

In sum, existing literature regarding social reactions towards interethnic couples as seen from outsiders' frame of reference suggests that there is still societal prejudice against interethnic

relationships—whatever the biological, psychological, and sociological origins of these biases might be. What is reassuring, however, is that acceptance towards these relationships is on a steady rise. But what do outsiders know in terms of the relationship dynamics within interethnic couple relationships? The following section will present the speculations of social science researchers from an interdependent theoretical framework.

Relationship maintenance in interethnic relationships: An interdependent analysis.

In light of the high divorce rate among interethnic couples (Bratter & King, 2008), a small portion of the outsiders' perspective literature looks into the processes that might contribute to the dissolution as well as the successful maintenance of interethnic relationships. Gaines and Agnew (2003) propose a set of conceptual guideposts derived from interdependence theory for predicting relationships maintenance and stability in intercultural relationships.

Interdependence theory provides an extensive conceptual framework for understanding important relationship processes (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). This theory is regarded as flexible and inclusive, as it can be used to understand not only heterosexual and same-sex involvements, but also in dating relationships, marriages, and friendships (Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012). The notion of “interdependence” implies that couple members influence one another and are dependent on each other to fulfil important needs such as companionship, affection, sexual intimacy, emotional closeness, and intellectual involvement. The state of dependence is in turn subjectively experienced as feelings of commitment.

An extension of the interdependence theory, Rusbult's investment model (Rusbult, 1980) offers an explanation as to how and why some couples are more committed in their relationships than others. Four psychosocial predictors of relationship commitment were proposed by

Rusbult's investment model (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997): (1) satisfaction, (2) alternatives, (3) investment size, and (4) prescriptive support.

First, satisfaction level is determined by the extent to which an individual favourably evaluates a relationship and feels as though a partner satisfies his/ her needs. Drawing on this notion, the investment model predicts that the more satisfied an individual is with his/her relationship, the more committed he/she will be to that relationship (or partner). However, this is not to conclude that satisfaction alone leads to commitment. Rather, satisfaction is a strong contributor to relationship commitment. For instance, why are divorce rates significantly higher among interethnic couples, given that previously mentioned studies reveal no significant differences between interethnic and intraethnic relationship satisfaction? It seems that commitment is affected by factors other than satisfaction. Despite the lack of empirical evidence, we may be able to find answers in the remaining three social-psychological variables that impact relationship commitment.

Second, dependence level is determined by the degree to which an individual relies on a partner to fulfil his/her needs and the extent to which the obtained outcomes in a relationship exceed what the individual believes he/she can obtain from the next best alternative to the current relationship. Individuals who date and marry interethnically generally view their pools of potential partners as larger than individuals who only date or marry within their ethnic/racial group membership (Gurung & Duong, 1999; Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Specifically, individuals who date or marry interethnically perceive their potential partners as including people both within and outside their ethnic/racial group membership. Drawing from concepts in interdependence theory, one would expect that the greater number of alternatives may undermine commitment within interethnic relationships.

However, there is currently no direct evidence indicating that interethnic couples are likely to be less committed in their relationships in light of their larger pool of potential partners.

Third, investment size refers to the variety of resources that are put directly in a relationship, such as time, emotional energy, mutual friends, joint possessions, and home ownership (Rusbult, 1980). Studies have found that interethnic couples generally make fewer investments in their relationship than do intraethnic couples. For instance, Gaines and Ickes (1997) suggest that interracial married couples tend to have fewer children than do intraracial couples. Furthermore, interracial couples often report having spent less time in the courtship process, mainly because they are more likely to be in their second marriages (Gaines & Liu, 2000). However, given the relatively high level of energy dedicated by interethnic couples to maintain their relationship, it seems reasonable to suggest that the couples' investment in effort level may help compensate for the lack of investments in other aspects, such as having fewer children. These speculations have not been empirically verified.

Lastly, a more recent addition to the commitment framework is the notion that the level of support one perceives can have an impact on one's commitment level in the relationship.

Personal prescriptive support refers to personal beliefs that support remaining in a relationship, such as personal values and religious beliefs. In contrast, *social prescriptive support* refers to the beliefs that friends and family members hold in favour of relationship continuation, for either moral or pragmatic reasons (Cox et al., 1997). Although there have not been direct comparisons of personal prescriptive support between interethnic and intraethnic couples, the distinct lack of social prescriptive support from interethnic couples' friends and family members has long been documented (Miller, Olson, & Fazio, 2004; Porterfield, 1978; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Seshadri & Knudson-Madri, 2013; Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998; Smith, 2011). Drawing from previous

research (Cox et al., 1997), we would expect, then, that the lack of social support may undermine individuals' commitment in interethnic relationships. While this may be the case for some couples, Gaines and Agnew (2003) suggest that because interracial couples are faced with the challenge of maintaining their relationship in spite of intense scrutiny and disapproval from others, they most likely rely on their own personal prescriptive support to remain committed in the relationship.

Taken together, an interdependence analysis of couple relationships predicts that relationships persist and continue insofar as the relationship is perceived as more satisfying and rewarding than one's expectations, potential alternatives are perceived as poorer, invested resources increase the costs of ending a relationship, and there is greater prescriptive support (Rusbult et al., 2012).

What is the relationship between commitment and relationship maintenance behaviours? There is considerable literature on the initiation and dissolution processes of close relationships; however, it is only until the last decade that relationship maintenance processes have been the topic of interest (Wenzel & Harvey, 2001). The interdependence theory and investment model posit that subjective commitment not only makes individuals more likely to remain in their relationships, but also promotes a variety of relationship maintenance behaviours, such as tendencies to accommodate rather than retaliate during conflicts, derogation of attractive alternatives, forgiveness, seeing self and partner as a unit and interdependent, positive illusion, and willingness to sacrifice for the good of the relationship (Gaines & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001). However, these positions have not been explored within the context of interethnic couple relationships. Further, critics of the interdependence theory and the investment model noted that Rusbult's conceptualization of the antecedents and consequences of

commitment has tended to favour social-psychological, rather than personality predictors. Scholars have argued the importance of attachment style, cultural value orientations (*e.g.*, collectivism versus individualism), gender-related personality characteristics (*e.g.*, women as caregivers and nurturers), and self-esteem on commitment and relationship maintenance behaviours (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). Hence, although widely used within the field of personal relationships, the interdependence theory has not yet achieved the status of a “master theory”.

In sum, literature on interethnic couple relationships as emerging from outsiders’ frame of reference have touched on motives behind dating or marrying interethnically, social reactions towards interethnic couple relationships, and relationship commitment and maintenance processes in interethnic relationships. Although Rusbult’s investment model has been applied to studies on heterosexual and same-sex involvements, dating relationships, marriages, and friendships, it has not been examined within the context of interethnic couple relationships. Nor does it take into account certain personality variables that may influence one’s commitment in relationships. Furthermore, findings are limited as they may not reflect the actual experience of couple members. This appears to be a major gap in the literature.

The following section delineates what has already been published from an insider’s frame of reference. In line with this study’s points of inquiry, cited studies as seen from insiders’ perspective have also covered issues such as motives behind dating or marrying interracially (Porterfield, 1978; Rosenblatt et al., 1995), social reactions as perceived by couples, and other relational issues (Inman, Altman, Kaduvettor-Davidson, Carr, & Walker, 2011; Lieu, 2009; Malhi, 2011; Porterfield, 1978; Root, 2001; Rosenblatt et al, 1995; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Smith, 2011; Thomas, Karis, & Wetchler, 2003; Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006).

Insiders' Frame of Reference

Outsider observers of interethnic couple relationships-whether they are lay people or social scientists-rarely check to see if their perspectives on these relationships are shared by insiders. Insiders' own accounts of their motives for entering, staying, or leaving such relationships and the experiences that they embark on have traditionally been excluded from theorists and researchers (Gaines & Ickes, 1997). However, with the paradigm shift from modern to post-modern thinking, researchers have become increasingly aware that they do not know the "ultimate truth", and that any fact or belief is embedded within a frame of reference. As a result, we are witnessing an increased use of multiple methodologies (*e.g.*, qualitative studies and mixed methods research) in understanding interethnic couple relationships.

Arguably the first empirical investigation involving in-depth/qualitative interviews with interracial couples (in this case, Black-White legally married couples), Porterfield (1978) embarked on a large-scale ethnographic study on the dynamics of interracial relationships, the couples' intrafamilial and interfamilial relations, and the couples' quality of relationship with the larger society. The study also touched upon issues such as the motives behind dating and marrying interracially, the trends and patterns in Black-White marital combinations, and the achievement of egalitarianism through Black Nationalism. Many studies followed suit, as evident by the rapid accumulation of qualitative studies on interracial relationships over the past two decades. Major topics covered by these studies will be discussed in the following sections.

Motives behind dating or marrying interethnically. As mentioned in the section on outsiders' perspectives, several explanations have been proposed to explain interethnic dating and marriages, most of which are burdened with negative connotations. Interethnic relationships have been perceived by outsiders as resulting from a deep rooted psychological sickness,

idealistic/ liberalistic reasons, rejection of one's own social group, rebellion against parental authority, neurotic conflict, or a "lure of the exotic" (Porterfield, 1978, p. 61). Not surprisingly, interethnic couples' own accounts of their motives behind dating and marrying interethnically often paint a completely different picture. Porterfield's (1978) interviews with couples revealed three general categories concerning motives for interracial marriage. First, motives that are non-race related were "love" (*i.e.*, attraction, attachment, and affection), compatibility in interests and values, and pregnancy. Lewis, Yancey, and Bletzer (1997), Porterfield (1978), Root (2001), and Rosenblatt et al.'s (1995) studies further corroborated that love and common interests were the primary reasons why individuals entered into interracial relationships. Gaines and Ickes (1997) found that despite phenotypic differences and other external cues such as race and religion, the similarity between interracial partners' inner compatibilities are the reasons they enter these relationships. Second, race-related motives include the perception that his/her other race partner possessed qualities that a member from his/her own racial group may not possess, the minority partner's conceptualization that the White partner is a status symbol, and the perception that a person of a different race is more appealing and interesting. Gaines and Ickes (1997) further noted that racial and cultural differences contribute to a sense of novelty and help satisfy a partner's need for self-expansion. Third, the marginal status of an individual in his/her racial group may also be a reason for interracial marriage. In other words, individuals who have grown up in communities with a higher proportion of White people had more White partners available and thus were more likely to date them. This trend is corroborated by Fujino's (1997) quantitative study concerning interracial dating patterns among Asian Americans, in which propinquity was the strongest predictor of interracial dating relationships with White partners.

In Fong and Yung's (1995/1996) qualitative study with Chinese and Japanese American individuals married to White partners, they found that while propinquity was one of the reasons why participants entered their relationships, other factors played a role, such as: assimilation processes; proximity (love and attraction) and aversion to Asian patriarchy; shared values and traditions, particularly with Jewish Americans; upward mobility; and popular media representations of beauty and power. It should be noted, however, that interviewees were born in the 1940s and 50s, limiting the findings to the experiences of that generation, a generation affected by the civil rights movement and anti-miscegenation laws in the U.S.A.

The few studies reviewed are all American based and mainly involve Black-White couples. A gap remains in the literature exploring the experiences of Chinese-White relationships in a Canadian context. Further, it is clear that insiders' accounts of why couples enter interethnic relationships do not entirely support the caste exchange theory and racial motivation theory on interethnic couple formation. Not surprisingly, the discrepancy between outsiders' perspectives and insiders' perspectives often contribute to the couple members feeling stigmatized and discriminated against. In light of the tensions between the two perspectives, close relationship scholars have therefore turned their attention to the influence of outsiders' reactions on the well-being of interethnic couple relationships, as well as other relational issues, such as challenges and rewards associated with being in an interethnic relationship.

Social reactions as perceived by interethnic couples. A portion of the literature explores the influence of race and racial stereotypes in interracial relationships. For instance, Karis (2003) found that despite claims by White women in Black-White interracial relationships that race makes no difference in their relationships, many of them also gave examples of how stereotypes about Black-White interracial relationships influenced their sense of self and/or their behaviour

with partners in public. The following response from Karis's (2003) qualitative study illustrates how racial meanings can be situationally and socially constructed:

Anytime we would go out for dinner, even if I were paying, I would never want to be the one to give the money, especially if we had a Black server. Because I wouldn't want them to say, "Oh, look. She's taking him out to dinner." Even now, we're married. Obviously our money is the same, but I never want to be the one to hand out a credit card... (p. 31)

In this narrative the woman's behaviour was shaped by her awareness of how she, as a White woman and an interethnic couple member, might be perceived. Specifically, she emphasized that she wanted to publicly display that there were no grounds on which others could confirm negative stereotypes.

A couple's relationship is also significantly impacted by the community, which may include their social network, colleagues, the workplace, the government, and the media. Societal intolerance has been found to be a great source of stress for interracial couples (Inman et al., 2011; Malhi, 2011; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Smith, 2011; Usita & Poulsen, 2003). They may be glared at in the street and ignored by neighbours, and their children may be teased by peers at school. One or both couple members may have difficulties fitting in at a work party. Thus, the living environment as a whole can be a constant reminder of the couple's "differentness". The ambivalence society has with regard to interethnic relationships can create a similar ambivalence for the interethnic couple themselves, as those sentiments can be internalized. The following is an excerpt from an interview conducted by Rosenblatt et al. (1995) that highlights the societal disapproval that a White woman experiences in her relationship with a Black man:

If I were to fantasize how the community thinks about us, I think about people see us together and, like if we go out...I notice sometimes people immediately look at my hand, and then they are horrified. They see the ring, and they, “Oh my God. The worst I feared is there (p.121).

This quote is an example of how couple members may become very self-conscious of their obvious differences and expect negative reactions from surrounding people. The frequent attention from others can become extremely stressful, and in extreme cases, it can take its toll on the relationship.

It is important to note that most interethnic couples are cognizant of the biases that surround interethnic couple relationships, and have developed a variety of strategic responses to negative public reactions. For instance, Killian (2003) explored how Black/White couples respond to racism and negative attention in public. He found that strategic responses by interracial couples ranged from open defiance, to voicing desperation and helplessness, to dissociating or avoiding one another in public, to ignoring and de-emphasizing public reactions.

In addition to negative social reactions and societal intolerance, a significant portion of the literature on relationship functioning as emerging from an insider’s perspective has focused on other challenges, such as family opposition, differences in communication and language barrier, misguided expectations based on projected beliefs on other ethnic groups, and differences in family structures and dynamics. Derived from qualitative interviews with interethnic couples, these challenges are elaborated below as a few illustrative examples of what many interethnic couples face on a daily basis.

Challenges faced by interethnic couples. Contrary to outsiders’ perceptions of inherent “differentness” in interethnic relationships, studies from insiders’ frame of reference have found

that many interethnic couples do not perceive themselves as different from any other couple. Inman et al.'s (2011) findings on interethnic couples' self-perceptive labels revealed that several couples fell under the "not having discussed/applied a label" subcategory, as they did not think applying a label to their relationship was meaningful. Killian (2012) and Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) too found that many couples decentralized race and ethnicity, perceived themselves as "ordinary" couples, and instead established a couple identity through shared events, beliefs, and relationship milestones. While there is a certain truth to this, Romano (2008) cautions that it may be naïve to pretend that differences do not exist simply because one does not look at them.

She identified the following potential "trouble spots" for intercultural marriages: values, dietary habits, sex, gender roles, time, place of residence, politics, friends, finances, in-laws, social class, religion, raising children, language and communication, response to stress and conflict, illness and suffering, ethnocentrism, the expatriate spouse, and coping with death or divorce. I will discuss a select few that are commonly reported by interethnic couples.

One of the most distressing issues an interethnic couple often encounters is strong opposition from their families. Family approval and support generally have a large influence on the psychological well-being of a couple's relationship (Inman et al., 2011; Kenney & Kenney, 2013; Malhi, 2011; Smith, 2011; Usita & Poulsen, 2003), as it can impact every phase of their relationship cycle. For instance, when it comes to wedding ceremony or the birth of a child, interethnic couples may forgo a wedding ceremony due to their family's disapproval or lack of support. Research grounded in the words and experiences of interethnic couples have often yielded responses such as the following:

So her aunt gets to the church, and she says "Oh, you must be the best

man,” ‘cause there were only two guys in tuxes, and I said, “No, I’m the groom!” (laughs). Shocked the hell out of her! We didn’t find out until two years ago that one of Linda’s aunts’ husbands saw that I was Black and they walked out of the ceremony (Killian, 2001, p. 2).

Although family opposition to interethnic relationships has been documented in American literature for centuries, the above narrative highlights the fact that even someone who dates or marries interethnically in the present society runs the risk of incurring the disapproval of people closest to them. However, just as a couple’s relationship patterns change over time, the ways in which families of origin relate to the interethnic couple may also be subject to change (Rosenblatt, 2009). Inman et al. (2011), for instance, found that several of their participants spoke of initial disapproval from both sides of the family, but noted a shift in perception as family members got to know their partners better.

Very often, a major issue in interethnic relationships is language and communication barrier (Bacigalupe, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Language functions to strengthen the relationship bond and facilitate the sharing of one’s experience with another. When the partners’ cultures do not share a common language or communication styles, they often encounter communication challenges (Ho, 1990). Research has shown that in the U.S.A., interethnic couples that consist of one couple member whose first language is not English and the other who is a native English speaker, often experience communication breakdown and frustration (Usita & Poulsen, 2003). A couple members’ lack of language skills can reinforce his or her low self-concept and status in the host community (Rosenblatt, 2009). Furthermore, communication between the partners can often be rather superficial and limited. Feelings and meanings behind the words and between the lines are often not well communicated or received, which may then

cause misunderstanding between the couple. However, despite the challenges posed by language differences, it must be recognized that interracial couples and families do work hard to strengthen communication (Usita & Poulsen, 2003).

Some challenges that interethnic couples encounter are a result of misguided expectations based on projected beliefs on other ethnic groups. Individuals, even insiders themselves, often hold certain stereotypical beliefs, preconceived notions, and fantasies about the personality traits and gender roles of members from other racial groups (Cohen, 1982). For instance, there is a common belief that Asian women are subservient and that Western men are romantic and fun-loving (Hsu, 2001). When a Chinese woman and White man enter an interethnic relationship, the woman may expect romance and respect from her partner, whereas the White man may expect being served and pleased. Once they enter such a relationship they may soon realize there is a gap between their fantasies and reality. Conflict, resentment, disappointment, and even anger may arise. Hence, the power of such projected beliefs about other ethnic groups may be a strong factor leading to or ending interethnic relationships. Agathangelou and Killian (2009) noted that in the current context of rapid technological development, international dating through the Internet is a prime example of how words and images exchanged in a cyber-environment propagates “flights of fantasy” and anticipated ideals.

It is also well known that family structures, gender role expectations, boundaries, dynamics, and obligations vary widely from one culture to another (Daneshpour, 2003; Daneshpour, 2009; Forry, Leslie, & Letiecq, 2007; Hsu, 2001; Lande, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2009). For instance, in some patriarchal societies, decision-making is concentrated in the senior male, but in others the female members of the family have the authority. Furthermore, in some cultures, the extended families are the basic family unit and they remain an important part of the nuclear family

dynamic. Extended family members provide support and care to each nuclear family member while not necessarily adopting the authority figures. In many cultures, grandparents offer a unique form of support and assistance to the nuclear family, particularly in the area of child-rearing. The following vignette demonstrates how different family dynamics and obligations may cause problems in an Asian-White interethnic relationship:

Sera, a young mother of Korean background, complained that her German mother-in-law, Helga, travelled often instead of staying home and helping to baby-sit her grandchildren, as a mother-in-law-should do. From Sera's cultural perspective, Helga was acting "selfishly" and failing to fulfil the role of a grandmother. Helga, on the other hand, believed that a mother-in-law must respect the independence of the couple and be "careful not to make a pest [of herself] by being underfoot all the time." By travelling often and visiting her grandchildren only occasionally, Helga felt she was ensuring a good relationship with her daughter-in-law (Hsu, 2001, p.233).

This narrative illustrates how different concepts of family boundaries and role expectations can be a source of conflict and strains not only for the couple members themselves but also for their extended family members. In other words, interethnic marriages bring together individuals with distinct family cultures, thus requiring the couple to engage in a process of determining how they would resolve cultural differences within their extended family relationships (Lieu, 2009).

Lieu's (2009) in-depth interviews with ten Chinese-Caucasian couples revealed that several pre-existing factors rooted in family dynamics in the prior generation influenced the way couples negotiated their relationship with extended family members, such as values their family of origin held about extended family relationships, influences from prior generations, practical realities, and the presence of a strong matriarch or patriarch in the families. Furthermore, Lieu (2009)

suggests that the couples in her study navigated cultural differences between the families by learning to compromise and having the spouse be the cultural guide to their extended family. Finally, the presence of grandchildren increased the desire for family members to maintain connections with each other.

Despite the challenges that many interethnic couples face on a daily basis, there are numerous first-hand accounts of benefits of being involved in interethnic couple relationships.

Rewards of being in an interethnic couple relationship. Contrary to commonly held beliefs about interracial relationships, Troy et al.'s (2006) survey with interracial and intraracial couples revealed that partners in the former relationships reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction compared to the latter, and that no differences were found between the two groups in the following domains: relationship quality, conflict patterns, relationship efficacy, coping style, and attachment.

Several studies have explored the perceived rewards associated with interethnic relationships. Rewards reported by individuals involved in such relationships include, but are not limited to, feeling that one has been personally enriched by being exposed to another culture or worldview, weathering racist opposition, and having children who are likely to be culturally wealthier (Cerroni-Long, 1985; Ho, 1990; Inman et al., 2011; Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Racial, ethnic, and cultural differences between couple members may serve to satisfy their needs for self-expansion (Gaines & Ickes, 1997). They have ample opportunity to learn from each other's culture or subculture—the one that shape their partner's belief system, attitudes, values, philosophies, speech, dress, social customs, musical tastes, and food preferences. Having exposure to another culture or worldview may offer expanded perspectives on one's life

experiences in general, thus promoting personal growth, flexibility, and adaptability. The following is a comment by a White partner in Rosenblatt et al. (1995):

I just feel my life is so enriched. I mean, that whole process I described when I was a child, trying to break down color barriers, trying to get to know...the Black race. I'm still trying to get to know Black people completely in this racist society...But Charles has afforded me the ability to go into all-Black churches...The opportunities are unique (p.257).

The above narrative highlights one of the major advantages of being in an interethnic relationship. Couple members are constantly learning from one another, and it becomes easier for them to see the other side of the coin. Moreover, the cultural disparity between couple members presents an opportunity for exploring worldviews and value orientations different from their own.

In addition to feeling more culturally enriched, partners from the host culture may gain a heightened awareness of their racial privilege and encounter overt or covert racism first-hand. This new awareness can assist host culture partners in becoming an advocate against racism and more empathetic to the experiences of their minority partners (Long, 2003). Heightened awareness can also lead to an open and honest dialogue about race, racism, and any adjustments that might be necessary so as to maintain the couples' relationships. In Killian's (2003) study, a White partner shares her awareness of persistent racist opposition:

There is a lot of prejudice out there. It seems like people are almost accepting that there are Black people in the world, and White people and Mexican and all this, but the bottom line for most people is that you don't get married [to them] and you certainly don't have kids [with them] (p. 8).

Through this woman's narrative we learn that prejudice and strong opposition towards interethnic relationships are still experienced by couple members. Her frustration is evident in this statement,

and it represents a real consequence of racism and bigotry in our society and a genuine, daily consideration for interethnic couples. In Rosenblatt et al.'s (1995) study, it was found that everyone who was interviewed spoke of the need to end racism directed at interracial relationships. They advocated seeing people as individuals, not as racial stereotypes, and seeing interracial couples as any other couples. In fact, several of the participants offered examples of antiracism efforts in public settings. One respondent disclosed her experience in speaking out against racism and stereotypes with her co-workers:

And the fact that they're surprised...people will say, "Well, why didn't you tell me he [her husband] was Black?" I would say, "Well, would you tell me that your wife has blond hair?" And we would talk about it. It would open up a dialogue, and if they're people I care about, we would talk about it a lot, and I would explain to them (p. 286).

Such a proactive strategy illustrates that partners in interethnic relationships have come to acknowledge the potential for outsider-insider conflict and often need to prepare themselves mentally to respond accordingly, though strategic responses to situations such as the one above may vary from couple to couple.

Finally, many couples in interethnic relationships report that their children are likely to be culturally wealthier because of their multi-ethnic backgrounds. A common myth about children of interethnic parents is that they "are born into a racial netherworld, the conventional wisdom continues, destined to be confused, maladjusted 'tragic mulattoes', the perpetual victims of a racially polarized society" (Funderburg, 1994, p.10). While it is true that multiracial children experience unique stresses, many authors have pointed out that if they are raised in a loving, secure family, they are likely to emerge with strong ego strength and resilience (Ho, 1990; Johnson, 1992; Okun, 1996; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Through "inheriting" both parents' racial

and ethnic backgrounds, children of interethnic couples are more likely to have a heightened awareness and a harmonious integration of themselves and their environment. Furthermore, a child of an interethnic couple lives and interacts with differences on a daily basis. He or she is therefore better equipped to accept and react positively to differences in others. One parent from Rosenblatt et al. (1995) comments on his biracial children:

I think one of the special blessings has to do with our kids. I mean, they have a unique look and will have a chance to grow up and get advantaged from different cultures and have a claim to different cultures, not that people who don't have that claim are any less, but I think it's nice they will have that (p. 260).

This quote is an example of how many parents in interethnic relationships celebrate their children's multiethnic heritage and encourage them to embrace all components of their heritage. Studies have shown that multiethnic children forced to choose a single ethnic/ racial identity tend to suffer from an inauthentic expression of the self (Hud-Aleem & Countryman, 2008).

Taken together, scholars approaching the topic of interethnic relationships from a strength-based rather than a stress-based point of view indicate that among the psychological benefits of being involved in such relationships are the increased opportunities for learning and personal growth, the bridging of two cultures, the development of a heightened awareness of racism's perpetual forms, and an opportunity to raise children who are culturally wealthier.

Summary

A direct comparison of outsiders' and insiders' perspectives of interethnic couple relationships not only reveals the tension and conflicts between the two but further calls for the need for more first-person accounts of these relationships. To date, qualitative studies have looked into the motives behind dating or marrying interethnically, social reactions as perceived

by couple members, relational issues and coping strategies, and challenges and rewards associated with being in an interethnic relationship. However, they have concentrated primarily on the experience of Black-White couples in the U.S.A. Given the steady rise of Chinese-White relationships in Canada, my intent is to give voice to these unique couples and allow them to tell their stories of what it has been like to be in a long-term relationship with one another over the years.

The following section will discuss the theoretical orientation and research methods for conducting such an exploration.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Theoretical Orientation

Constructivist-interpretive paradigm. Because it is impossible to come to a research study without any preconceived ideas, qualitative researchers report their theoretical orientation in order to make their biases explicit. This study adhered to a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, which assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (reality is constructed by those who live in it), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It was also an epistemological premise grounded on the assertion that, in the act of knowing, the human mind actively prescribes meaning and order to the situation it is responding to. Constructivists believe that “what people know and believe true about the world is *constructed*—or made up—as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, as cited in Schram, 2006, p. 44) and that understanding of the social world entails seeking out people’s *interpretations* of it. As such, this study aimed to understand the complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live in it. Their meanings and constructed realities were situated within specific social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and other contextual factors.

Given that race is a complex, multidimensional concept that “mutates and adapts across social-historical contexts, and different life-spheres” (Powell, 1997, p.100), a constructivist-interpretive paradigm is sensitive to the insiders’ perspectives and the ways that racial meanings are being constructed and reconstructed by historical contexts and social interactions. From a constructivist-interpretive perspective, an intimate relationship is a major arena for reality

construction, where partners negotiate and redefine past and present experiences to create new relational meaning and experiences. In making sense of the differences and similarities that matter in their lives, those who are interracially partnered may find themselves in an interpretive continuum along which concerns are prioritized. Whereas a couple may consider the racial aspect of a situation to be salient, another couple may interpret it as being about personality, gender, or religious differences. In essence, race and culture are socially constructed ideas that hold no intrinsic meaning, but whose meanings form and evolve through one's interpretation.

Due to an emphasis on descriptive detail, context, process (how events and patterns unfold over time), flexibility, and the lack of empirical research in this area, a qualitative approach was determined to be highly suitable for the research question. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), qualitative research involves “the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and productions; observation, historical, interactional and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives” (p. 4). Indeed, qualitative researchers face a variety of choices related to data collection. Among the various types of qualitative designs, narrative inquiry was selected for this study, given its emphasis on the construction of stories and its unique approach to understanding life experiences through the passage of time and the story-tellers' meaning-making processes.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a specific type of qualitative design in which “narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). Narrative researchers espouse the view that a person is a story-telling animal by nature and therefore close attention should be paid to the

stories people tell. Stories are a primary form of discourse in everyday interaction, thereby serving as natural and authentic windows into how people structure experience and construct meaning in their lives. The storied quality of data enables narrative inquirers to take into account “both *how* social actors order and tell their experiences and *why* they remember and retell what they do” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, as cited in Schram, 2006, pp. 104-105). Thus, the key contribution of narrative is that it allows researchers to analyze not only meanings and motives but also *how* people structure the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. Some orienting concepts of narrative inquiry include the following: (1) time, (2) place, (3) analysis of narrative and narrative analysis, and (4) nature of narrative questions. Attending to meaning and experience through inquiry to these orienting concepts is, in part, what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other methodologies.

Time. Time is an important point of reference to create the experiential quality of a narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Locating people, events, and/or ideas in time is a natural way to think about them. Further, “any event is an expression of something happening over time: it has a past, present, and implied future” (Schram, 2006, p. 105). Hence, narrative researchers are not only concerned with collecting stories and individual experiences in the here and now but also with chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences. Simply stated, they believe that meaning will change as time passes.

Place. Place is where the event occurs, where individuals live out their stories and where social and cultural context play constraining and enabling roles (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative researchers believe that individuals cannot be understood without some knowledge of the specific environment in which they live. Simply stated, our identities are inextricably linked with our experiences in a particular place and with the stories we tell of these experiences.

Analysis of narrative and narrative analysis. The two terms indicate distinct approaches to analyzing stories and narratives. The first is that of a *story-analyst* who conducts an *analysis of narrative* and thinks *about* stories. The second is that of a *story-teller* who conducts a *narrative analysis* and thinks *with* stories. Story-analysts treat stories as “data” and use “analysis” to reach at, for instance, themes, patterns, and concepts that hold across stories or delineate types of stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). In contrast, story-tellers collect descriptions of events from, for instance, interview responses, and configure them into a story using a plotline. As such, “whereas an analysis of narrative ends in abstractions, a narrative analysis results in a story” (Smith & Sparkes, 2006, p. 185).

Nature of narrative questions. Narrative researchers are not only interested in the meaning of certain events but also how the meaning is constructed in the story-telling process. For instance, narrative researchers may ask, “What does X mean to a certain individual?” “What does the story tell us about the individual?” “What is happening in the story?” “How is X constructed in the telling?” “How was the story told?” “Why was a story told that way?” “Why did the individual remember and retold what he/she did?” In sum, narrative researchers ask questions aimed at “connecting people’s meanings and motives to how they structure their experience” (Schram, 2006, p. 106).

Narrative inquiry was selected for this study precisely due to its orienting concepts. First, the proposed research question explored how couples come to understand their relationship by locating events and ideas in time. One can assume that their experience of their relationship, as well as their relationship maintenance behaviours, change over time. Second, a quality that set this study apart from other studies is that it was conducted in a Canadian context. Interethnic couples in Canada deserve attention due to this nation’s unique history in racial mixing, massive

immigration waves, and multicultural policy. Thus, couples in this study cannot be understood without situating them in the specific environment in which they live. Third, the investigator aimed to adopt the standpoint of a story-teller as well as a story-analyst. The interest lies in the construction of a coherent narrative out of diverse thoughts and commentaries contained in each interview. Story-tellers believe that interviewees' stories are told for the sake of others just as much as for themselves. Smith and Sparkes (2006) go on to emphasize that in storytelling,

The ethical and heartfelt claim is for a dialogic relationship with a listener (including the researcher), that requires engagement from within, not analysis from outside, the story and narrative identity. Consequently, the goal and responsibility is to evoke and bear witness to a situation the researcher has been in or studied, inviting the reader into a relationship, enticing people to think and feel with the story being told as opposed to thinking about it (p.185).

This quote suggests that narrative analysis entails that I be immersed in the story, experience what is experienced by the teller, thus becoming part of the narrative. Equally so, I was interested in adopting the standpoint of a story-analyst, as there is likelihood that there will be common elements in the experience of being a Chinese-White couple in Canada. Thinking *about* stories therefore arrives at themes, patterns, and concepts that hold across the different stories. Finally, the nature of the questions posed in this study lends itself to a narrative inquiry. For instance, not only is the interest in the couples' lived experience of their relationships throughout the different stages, but also *how* they come to a shared understanding of it through the story-telling process (*i.e.*, the interview). Further, why were certain events chosen to highlight the major issues? Does the couple's interaction during the story-telling process reveal certain aspects of their relationship? For instance, how does the couple negotiate and come up

with a shared understanding of how the social context constructed by family, ethnic, and dominant communities affect the development of their relationship?

Narrative inquiry, of course, has its limitations. Conducting a narrative research is time consuming, which makes it unsuitable for work with a large number of participants. Ethical issues are some of the most serious concerns. Exchanging personal stories often occurs within a larger story of an emerging friendship, so researchers may find separation difficult at the end of the research project. More seriously, when researchers gather events and ideas from participant's stories and weave them into a coherent narrative, they run the risk of imposing meaning on participants' lived experience. Although good practice demands that no bias enters into the analyses on the researcher's part, scholars indicate that this is an impossibility (Denzin, 1997). The effects of this imposed re-storying⁶ can be powerful. Hence, it is my goal to strictly follow research procedures and constantly obtain *respondent validation*, in which findings and impressions are submitted to my participants in order to confirm that the accounts are in agreement with how they see their world.

Having addressed the limitations of narrative inquiry, the following sections will delineate the specific procedures in conducting this narrative research.

The Physical Setting

Toronto is a unique setting for interethnic relationships, as it is one of the world's most diverse cities by percentage of non-native-born residents and one of the most important destinations for immigrants in Canada. It is also home to 40.1% of the Chinese population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). Statistics Canada (2006) found that 4.6 % of married and common-law couples in Ontario are involved in mixed race relationships, and that people in these

relationships are most likely urban dwellers, young (age 15-30), better educated, foreign-born, and in a common-law relationship.

The City of Toronto is at the heart of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), a metropolitan area consisting of additional regional municipalities such as York, Halton, Peel, and Durham. It is commonly known as “the city of neighbourhoods” because of the strength and vitality of its communities. There are up to 140 neighbourhoods within its boundaries (City of Toronto, n.d.). Considering the sheer size and complexities of the communities in the City of Toronto, I limited the area in which to physically recruit participants to the downtown core (central district), where the interviews will be conducted. Participants residing outside the downtown core will be recruited through online community sites.

Participants

The ethnic diversity in this cosmopolitan city allowed for the possibility of being romantically involved with people from a variety of ethnic/racial backgrounds. To take part in this study, participants had to be involved in a heterosexual Chinese-White marriage (with duration of at least three years) or a common-law relationship. Under most Ontario laws, a couple is considered common-law spouses once they have been living together for three years, or as soon as they have a child together and cohabiting “in a relationship of some permanence” (Common Law Relationships, 2012). The definition of interethnic unions in this study is based on self-declared status; that is, a relationship to be interethnic if one of the partners self-identifies as Chinese or Chinese Canadian and the other self-identifies as a White Canadian of European descent.

Other inclusion criteria included: (1) participants must be at least 18 years of age; (2) participants must live within the GTA (though recruitment will take place in the City of Toronto);

and (3) participants must be heterosexual couples. It was expected that research participants would vary among many factors such as age, socio-economic status, level of education, native tongue, number of children, and years living in Canada.

Participant Recruitment

This study adhered to a site-based approach that is designed to generate a representative or stratified sample for qualitative research in a large community (Arcury & Quandt, 1999). The recruitment process focused on “sites” and consisted of the following five steps: (1) specifying the participant characteristics relevant to sampling, (2) generating a list of sites, (3) estimating the composition of the clientele at each site, (4) recruiting participants, and (5) maintaining a record of the participants’ characteristics.

The first step was to specify and set the boundaries of the sample, as well as reflect the goals of the research. In this study, participants must fit the inclusion criteria outlined in the previous section. Second, a list of potential sites was generated. Sites are “places, organizations, or services used by members of the population of interest” (Arcury & Quandt, 1999, p. 129). They included community centres, churches, community service groups, clinics, as well as residential areas such as apartment buildings or housing projects. In this study, major community centres in the City of Toronto, online community sites such as Craigslist, Facebook, or Kijiji, and university/college campuses were targeted.

Once recruitment was completed, a record of the participants’ characteristics was documented. Trost (1986) recommends creating a table that records the characteristics of the participants in the sample. As this information was accumulated and compared to the desired distribution of characteristics and the time needed to recruit, the next decision revolved around what additional sites to approach and when to begin recruiting. This procedure was considered as

important and strategic in assisting the investigator to make suitable adjustments to achieve the desired final sample in a timely fashion.

In this study, six couples were recruited through word of mouth as well as from the community through English and Chinese flyers/advertisements (see Appendices A and B) posted in community-based centres, university campuses, university listservs, and central networks of online communities such as Craigslist, Facebook and Kijiji. In the case of community-based centres and university campuses, permission to recruit participants was requested. Online communities such as Craigslist, Facebook, and Kijiji are free to the public and do not necessitate a formal request; however, all the terms and conditions set forth by the websites were abided. Recruitment flyers/advertisements explained that the study focuses on couples' experiences of their interethnic relationships and contained information on inclusion criteria, procedures, potential risks and benefits involved, issues around confidentiality, issues around participation and withdrawal, and the investigator's contact information. In addition, those who made contact underwent a quick screening over the phone to determine eligibility. Demographic background for each couple is presented in Table 1 on the following page.

The Consent Process

The consent process entailed two separate routes. In recruiting participants from community-based and academic settings, consent was first obtained from the director or an administrative member (*i.e.*, the gatekeeper of the setting) and then the participants themselves (see Appendices C and D). In recruiting participants from online sources, consent will only be obtained from the participants. When informing community-based settings and academic settings of the study, targeted community-based settings and academic settings received an introductory letter and a consent form (see Appendix C). The introductory letter included information around:

Table 1

Demographic Background of Each Couple

(Female/ Male)	1. Janice/ Stefan	2. Felicia/ Boris	3. Maggie/ Helmut	4. Debra/ Hans	5. Sarah/ Jason	6. Teresa/ Peter
Age	36/38	33/32	36/35	62/68	27/31	54/71
Ethnic origin	Chinese/ Macedonian	Chinese/ Romanian	Jewish/ Chinese	Chinese/ German, Irish and Polish	Jewish/ Chinese	Chinese/ Jewish
Birth place	Hong Kong, China/ Scarborough Canada	Victoria, Canada/ Bucharest, Romania	Montreal, Canada/ Hamilton, Canada	Guangzhou, China/New York, U.S.A.	Toronto, Canada/ Hamilton, Canada	Fujian, China/ Toronto, Canada
Primary and additional language(s) spoken	English and Cantonese/ English and Macedonian	English and Cantonese/ English and Romanian	English, French, Hebrew, and Yiddish/ English	English and Cantonese/ English	English/ English and Cantonese	Mandarin and English/ English
Highest level of education completed	B.A./B.A.	J.D./B.A.	Ph.D./B.A.	Ph.D./Ph.D.	M.A./ B.A.	B.A./J.D.
Relationship status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Common-law
Years together	13 years	6.5 years	5 years	41 years	4.5 years	3.5 years
Number of children	2 (sons)	1 (daughter)	1 (son)	2 (daughter and son)	0	0 (couple have children from previous marriage)
Age of children	7 years and 5 years	7 months	20 months	28 years (daughter) and 26 years (son)	N/A	N/A
Current household income range	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Over \$100,000	Over \$100,000	Over \$100,000	Over \$100,000	\$Over \$100,000

the purpose of the study, inclusion criteria for participation, the voluntary nature of the study, that withdrawal from the study is permitted at any time before data analysis, that the data will be treated as confidential, the potential risks and benefits of participation, and the researcher's contact information. Those who agreed to help with the recruitment process signed the consent form and were subsequently given flyers to post around their institutions. Academic settings also received a copy of an email recruitment script (see Appendix A) that was circulated among students via selected listservs.

When informing users of online communities of the study, the recruitment script, both in English and Chinese was posted on these websites (see Appendices A and B). Although authorization is not required to post an ad, all the terms and conditions set forth by the websites were duly adhered to. Those who expressed interested in the study were asked to contact me at their earliest convenience.

Finally, when obtaining consent from participants, the consent form (see Appendix D) reminded participants of the purpose of the study and that participation is completely voluntary and can be terminated at any time before data analysis, without penalty. They were informed of the time commitment and the steps involved in the study, as well as the potential risks and benefits. Attention was drawn to the counselling resource sheet (see Appendix G) attached after potential emotional and psychological risks were outlined. Participants were also informed that their data is treated with strict confidentiality and that all identities are protected with the use of pseudonyms. The consent form further explained how the information will be used (*e.g.*, conference presentations, symposiums, future publications) and assured participants that the findings will be available to them upon request. Participants were asked to sign two copies of the consent form, one of which they kept and the other remained with me.

Qualitative Interview

Participants underwent two semi-structured interviews, both of which were audio-taped with permission. A semi-structured format allowed for some flexibility and personal input into the direction the interview will take while allowing the couples explore their life experiences more freely. Open-ended questions were designed to cover the relevant themes discussed in the literature so as to gain a deeper understanding of the couples' experiences.

The first interview lasted from one and a half to two hours long. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to provide their demographic information, which included ethnic/racial group membership, gender, age, birthplace of self and parents, highest level of education attained, first language, socio-economic status, marital status, number of children, and years living in Canada (see Appendix E). Although specific queries were prepared in advance, I maintained the flexibility to include material that is considered important by the participants. The first interview explored the couple members' respective cultural backgrounds and dating histories, how they met, their motives for entering the relationship, and experiences that stood out for them throughout their relationship lifespans (see Appendix F). Their stories were situated not only within their personal experiences (*e.g.*, their homes) but also within their cultural (racial/ethnic) and historical (time and place) contexts.

Following the transcription of the first interview, the stories, or *field texts*, underwent a preliminary data analysis (see section on Data Analysis). Couple members were encouraged to keep a journal to document any feelings, pending thoughts, and/or revelations that arose between the first and second interviews. Other field texts included my field notes (both written and voice recorded) and journal entries documenting any observations and reactions of the couple members or personal revelations throughout the research process. Once the field texts were re-storied into

a chronological presentation, each narrative, along with its central themes and relationship life maps, were emailed to the corresponding couple. Validity was verified over the phone, Skype, or via email approximately two weeks after the narratives were sent to each couple. The purpose of negotiating meaning was to create a space where participants' narrative authority was honoured.

The second interview generally lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. During this second exchange, follow up questions were presented so as to allow room for retelling and reconstructing experience and meaning. Questions were shaped by responses in the first interview, reactions or observations the couple members documented between the first and second interviews, and my field notes and journal entries (see Appendix F). This allowed couples the freedom to reconstruct their stories or add any new information. With the feedback obtained in the follow-up interviews, a final analysis of the narratives was conducted to generate a finalized and corroborated account of the couples' lived experiences.

Situating the Researcher's Lived Experience

The credibility of the researcher is especially important in qualitative research, as it is he or she who is the major instrument of data collection and analysis (Shenton, 2004). Scholars argue that it is both impossible and undesirable to claim neutrality, and that the researcher's background, perceptions, and interests would inevitably influence the accumulation of data and the analytic process. It is recommended that any personal and professional information relevant to the phenomenon under study be made explicit so as to help ensure the trustworthiness of the study. My interest in the topic of Chinese-White heterosexual relationships was formulated in the context of my clinical work with interethnic couples, personal experience of being in a long-term Chinese-White heterosexual relationship, and relationship with friends who are also involved in interethnic relationships. As such, my story is situated vis-à-vis the research topic by

bringing into the foreground my personal experiences. They not only fashion my interest in the topic but also my notions of what this journey is like.

When I began working with interethnic couples for the first time, I was highly conscious of how my personal experiences of being in an interethnic relationship may shape the way I conceptualize cases, my modes of interaction, the therapeutic alliance, and the questions posed during the sessions. I had to be very careful not to assume that I was an expert in their relationships and that they faced the same issues as I did. I maintained a stance of curiosity and openness to learning about their lived experiences in order to better understand their reality. In developing a preliminary hypothesis for working with interethnic couples, I would address the issue of their ethnic and racial differences while also considering the possibility that these issues did not contribute to problems in the relationship. I found that the interethnic couples I saw mainly came for help with “generic” couple conflict issues, such as conflict over expectations, lack of communication, financial disputes, and parenting issues; however, it was often revealed through their narratives that a lack of social/family support and issues arising from family of origin were potential concerns and conditions that undermined their relationships. Generally speaking, I believe that working with interethnic couples entails a non-expert stance of knowing, an appreciation of the complex nature of these relationships, and an understanding of the historical, socio-cultural, and psychological context in which their relationships are based. Indeed, as I begin my journey of self-exploration, I realize how complex and multifaceted my own relationship has been throughout the years. There were certain issues, challenges, rewards, and opportunities I felt were unique aspects of an interethnic relationship.

I identify myself as a Taiwanese of Chinese descent, though I lived in various countries throughout my life, namely Spain, Taiwan, Costa Rica, Panama, the U.S.A., and currently

Canada. Culturally, I consider myself Chinese, as Taiwanese culture is primarily rooted in Chinese culture. My experience as a Chinese woman has been dynamic and contingent upon time, location, and the people and institutions with whom I have interacted. Though I claim to be Chinese, speak and write Chinese (Mandarin), and understand the Chinese psyche, my personal worldviews are heavily infused with cultural beliefs and values from North and Latin America. When I was old enough to date, I did not consider ethnicity or race of my potential partner to be a selection criterion. My parents, however, held a different opinion and were not hesitant to express it. Like many traditional Chinese parents, they repeatedly discouraged me and my sister from dating men from outside of our ethnic group. They asserted that language barriers (between them and my partner), differences in values, and having mixed race children would ultimately undermine the relationship. What was not explicitly expressed but implied in their warnings was that my pairing with a non-Chinese man would inevitably undermine my own relationship with *them*. Needless to say I was well aware of my parents' negative preconceptions concerning interethnic couple relationships at a young age. Their strong opposition to interethnic dating or marriage meant I had to justify my selection of a non-Chinese partner.

I met my current partner in Taiwan eight years ago. He identifies himself as a White Canadian of German descent. Being an interethnic couple in Taiwan meant we were stared at wherever we went, frowned upon by many social observers, and spoke in a language (English) that was foreign to the locals. I served as a translator at all times. Our transition from a dating relationship to a committed and long-term one coincided with our move to New York City. For the first time I felt our relationship was accepted by others and I no longer served as the bridge between two cultures. In a multicultural city where interethnic couple relationships are part of a normal trend, we no longer stood out in crowds. No more stares, no more whispers. The new

challenge we faced, however, was my growing sense of ownership of my heritage. My education at Columbia University introduced me to notions such as race, racism, and internalized racism, and I began to experience transformations in my cultural identity. As I became more involved with my ethnic heritage and more polarized around differences, my relationship with my partner began to suffer. Fortunately, my partner took on an active role in understanding my experience. He tried relating it to the five years in Taiwan, where he almost always felt like an outsider. Although he was never a victim of racism per se, he and I witnessed it in both its blatant and insidious forms in New York City. We were able to engage in dialogue that moved us toward more race-cognizance that includes an awareness of structural and institutional inequity. Without this level of understanding he would have perpetuated the sort of racism that would potentially end our relationship.

My experience in an interethnic relationship in Toronto has been generally positive. I am now in my partner's country of origin, and I regard *him* as my bridge to his culture. His family and friends accept me and embrace our relationship, which is something I unfortunately cannot say the same for my family. Within my closest circle of friends are five other couples who are involved in Chinese-White relationships. We share similar stories in that we all met our partners in Taiwan and moved to Canada with them; however, there are several conditions that set me apart from several of my female counterparts. I was predominantly educated within the North American school system and hence quite Westernized; I speak English as my "other" native language; and I am comfortable with moving from one environment to another, in light of my childhood experiences. My female counterparts left Taiwan for the first time in their lives, are now living in a foreign country where they no longer have family/social support, speak the language they feel most comfortable speaking, and have the same freedom to advance in their

chosen fields. The high cost of living in Canada and the exceptionally long winters are other hardships that both they and I have to continually overcome. Needless to say our friendships have been particularly important for us because essentially, we are now each other's family.

Now in the eighth year mark of our relationship, my partner and I soon face a new set of challenges. When will marriage take place and where will the wedding be held? What would happen when my parents meet his parents for the first time? Should my partner learn Chinese so he can communicate with my family? Do we give our children English names, Chinese names, something in between, or both? Again, should my partner learn Chinese so we can speak Chinese at home with our children, in addition to English? Where do we reside in the future?

As I embarked on this research project, I was well aware that my own personal experiences and knowledge gained through witnessing others' interethnic relationships would shape the way I handle the subject matter. As such, a self-reflective journal was used to document any feelings, thought processes, and/or revelations throughout the research process. Further, I was closely supervised by my thesis committee, whose purpose was to improve the quality of my research and to act as my mentors and guides. Finally, to enhance the credibility of my research I employed a triangulation of analysts; that is, I had at least one additional person assist me in analysing the same qualitative data so as to reduce bias resulting from one person performing the entire data analysis. In the following section, I will delineate the process in which the data was analysed in this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with transcription of audio-taped interviews. The interview transcripts included verbatim accounts with pauses, silences, and changes in voice tone, along with a commentary detailing personal observations and reactions at the end of each interview. I

decided early on that I did not want to just talk about the couples' stories; I wanted to tell them. In doing so, two levels of data analysis were performed in this study: within-narrative analysis and an across-narratives analysis.

Within-narrative analysis. This level of analysis was first performed to re-story the transcribed interviews and other field texts into chronological presentations (*i.e.*, Narratives 1 through 6 in Chapter Four) and to generate a broad perspective of the central themes and emerging foci *within* each couple story, thereby preserving the richness of each narrative.

Re-storying. The couples often conveyed pieces of stories in a nonlinear fashion with limited chronology, thus by re-storying, I provided a sequential link among ideas. The re-storying method applied in this study was that of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space approach, which draws upon John Dewey's criteria of continuity and interaction as well as his notion of situation in lived experience. As shown in Table 2 on the following page, their approach involves three orienting concepts: (1) personal and social (the interaction); (2) the past, present, and future (continuity); and (3) place (physical places or the storyteller's places). Simply stated, this model suggests that to understand people, researchers must examine their personal experience as well as their interactions with others. In this study, interaction was an important feature due to the interactional process between the couples and the dialogic process between me and the couple members. An analysis of this interaction was further strengthened when paralinguistic features of interaction like pauses, interruptions, tone of voice were also included.

Continuity relates to looking at past and current experiences and looking forward to possible experiences and plot lines. By exploring the couples' experiences in five year intervals (see Appendix F) I was able to gain insight into the ways the couple members as well as their

Table 2

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Approach

<i>Interaction</i>		<i>Continuity</i>			<i>Place/Context</i>
<i>Personal</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>	
Observe inward for internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral values	Observe outward for existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view	Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view

Source: Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002)

relationships have changed with the passage of time. Generally speaking, issues that couples face are attributed to life course transitions and developmental tasks (McGoldrick, Carter, & García-Preto, 2010). Couple relationships tend to go through the following stages of evolution and development, each of which presents its own unique challenges and rewards: dating or courtship phase (6 months-2 years); early marriage or early commitment phase; couples with infants and preschool children; couples with school children; couples with young adolescent children; launching children; and empty-nest, post-retirement, and aging families (Keitner, Keru, & Glick, 2010; McGoldrick et al., 2010). During data analysis, distinct family and individual life cycle stages were identified for each couple. This method allowed for comparison of couple

experiences at similar stages of their relationship regardless of the total length of the relationship reported. Hence, while it was expected that a couple who have been together for twenty years experienced various transitions in their family life cycle, their recollection of the dating/courtship stage of their relationship was compared to the dating/courtship phase of a couple who have been together for only five years.

The third orienting concept relates to place. Experiences and interactions occur in a place or context, such as the home, workplace, community, city, or a country at large. Narrative researchers often describe the setting or context in which the participant experiences the central phenomenon. This is based on the notion that our identities are inextricably linked with experiences in a particular setting or settings and with the stories we tell of these experiences.

Beyond chronologically configuring the couples' lived experiences in the re-storying process, I detailed central themes, tensions, and patterns based on key issues that arose from each couple's story to provide a more detailed discussion of the meaning of the story. I also provided a visual representation of each story in a "relationship life map" (see Figures 1 through 6 in Chapter Four), where themes and tension points were situated in time, place, and interaction based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space approach. In essence, the within narrative analysis in Chapter Four is a description of each couple's story and the central themes that emerge from it. By reading and rereading through the field texts; considering interaction, continuity, and place; identifying themes, tensions, and patterns; and collaborating and negotiating information and impressions with participants, a narrative text that promoted an account of each couple's lived experiences was generated (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Across-narratives analysis. A second level of analysis--an *across-narratives analysis*--was subsequently performed to identify overarching themes shared by all the couples who

participated in the study. It involved the *reduction* of the six narrative accounts to identify common elements in the couples' experiences of their interethnic relationships. Overarching themes and subthemes were generated through re-listening to audiotaped interviews, referring back to old field notes (written and voice recorded), re-reading and re-coding interview transcripts for significant words and phrases, comparing and contrasting across all six stories in search of shared and non-shared experiences, and clustering salient themes in Chapter Four into various domains of meaning.

A combination of an inductive approach utilizing the raw data and a deductive approach based on my a priori understanding of interethnic couple experiences guided me through this process. The latter approach constitutes Strauss and Corbin's (1990) notion of "theoretical sensitivity," which refers to the researcher's ability to give meaning to data based upon previous reading and experience with the area of interest. In the present study, my sources of theoretical sensitivity included the research literature, professional experience working with interethnic couples, and personal experience of being in a long-term interethnic relationship.

In sum, the two levels of analyses allowed me to not only adopt the standpoint of a storyteller but also of a story-analyst that aims to discover shared experiences among the six couples interviewed. The following chapter re-tells each couple's story along with important themes arising from it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Within-Narrative Analysis Results

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: Chapter Four and Chapter Five. Following a *within-narrative analysis* of each couple interview, Chapter Four presents the stories of the six Chinese-White couples interviewed in this study with the intention of preserving the richness and uniqueness of each narrative. A second level of analysis—*across-narratives analysis*—was subsequently performed to identify overarching themes shared by all six couples; these are discussed in Chapter Five.

The narratives in Chapter Four are generally presented in a consistent format. Couple members were first invited to share their socio-cultural backgrounds and brief accounts of their relationship histories prior to meeting their loved ones. Their responses shed light on the differing forms of cultural and family upbringing that shaped their individual identities and on the determinants that may have motivated the participants to enter and remain in their current relationships. Participants were then invited to share their lived experience as a Chinese-White couple by identifying the major milestones and stages in their relationship and recounting any issues, events, challenges, and rewards that emerged during those stages, particularly those associated with being in an interethnic relationship. The couples in this study identified similar stages of evolution and development, beginning with the initial encounter and dating phase, and gradually transitioning into the commitment phase that led to cohabitation, marriage, having children, empty nest, and retirement. Lastly, in an era where a high divorce rate is a reality, the couples were invited to share their insights and reveal their “secret” of a long-lasting and successful relationship. While most couples suggested that the secret applies to all couple relationships--interethnic or not--a few individuals highlighted relationship qualities that they felt were particularly essential in an interethnic relationship.

At various points in the re-storying process, direct quotes from interviews and any follow up interactions were provided when certain experiences were best captured in the participants' own words. These quotes offer insight into the meaning-making process either on the personal or social level, with the latter reflecting the relationship dynamics between the couple.

Following the researcher's rendition of each couple story, the within-narratives analyses generates a broad perspective of the salient themes and emerging foci *within* each narrative, thereby highlighting its unique narrative threads. Figures 1-6 are relationship life maps that situate these central themes within time, place, and experiences on the personal or social level (i.e., Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space approach). Validated by the participating couples in this study, the following section presents the stories, interpretations of salient themes, relationship life maps, and the proposed story titles to capture the essence of each couple's lived experience. As Narratives 1 through 6 are re-storied into a chronological presentation, the couples are presented in the same order that they were interviewed in to maintain chronological consistency. Finally, given that all six female couple members were the first to initiate contact upon learning about this study, their personal stories will be introduced first.

1. Janice and Stefan's Story: Love, Communication, and Communicating Love through Food

Janice's socio-cultural background. Born in Hong Kong originally in the mid-1970, Janice spent some of her childhood in Vancouver and a few years in a predominantly White neighbourhood in Philadelphia. At age 13, her family made a permanent move to Toronto. Janice's experience of her ethnic identity was very much influenced by the context in which she

was living. In the U.S.A. she felt she “needed to be White” and that people were very “pro-American.” She once asked a young Asian girl at school where she was from, to which the girl responded, “I’m American.” Janice recalled feeling shocked and perplexed by this response, as it “didn’t answer the question.” According to Janice, her family’s move to Canada was a refreshing one, as she felt people had more pride in their ethnic backgrounds and less pressure “to be White.” She felt as though she could be Canadian while retaining her ethnic identity.

Janice briefly commented on the role of gender in her upbringing, stating the following: My dad is from a village that is male dominant and male chauvinistic, but at the same time he never pushed me to be a certain way...like he never limited me. He never went, “You can’t do this ‘cuz [sic] you’re a girl.” And even in the way that he’s male chauvinistic, he would never limit me.

Despite her father’s traditional past, Janice felt she was raised in a household that was liberal-minded and unrestricted by Chinese cultural gender roles. It was within these family dynamics that Janice’s strong bond with her parents was fostered.

Stefan’s socio-cultural background. Stefan was born in the mid 1970’s to Macedonian parents and raised in Toronto. Unlike Janice, Stefan recalled growing up in a multicultural community where throughout public school and high school he made friends from different races and nationalities. While he does not identify himself as a Macedonian-Canadian per se, he does find meaning and value in his cultural upbringing, particularly as it revolves around food, cooking, and the celebration of traditional holidays such as Easter. Earlier in his life he also took Macedonian dance classes and participated in a wide range of Macedonian events in the community. When asked what these traditions mean to him, Stefan indicated that they helped shape his identity and instil a sense of pride around having a culture that is rich in history and

that values family. He hopes to pass these traditions onto his children so they too can develop a strong identity.

By comparison, Stefan was raised in a more religious and conservative household than Janice's. Janice's impression was that there were more "written rules" in his household, to which he responded:

See...it's almost like the way I grew up. We just...we grow up thinking that this is the way things are. And you don't bother thinking that, "Maybe they're not always like this"...you just assume that ...that's where it stems from...

Stefan would later mention instances where his beliefs and assumptions were challenged by Janice, experiences that would help him develop a much more flexible outlook on certain matters.

Janice and Stefan's relationship histories. Relatively speaking, Janice's parents seem to be more liberal than Stefan's parents, which Janice attributed to her family's migratory history. She believes their moving from one place to another contributed to her family's adaptability to change and flexible attitudes about certain things. Consequently, the fact that Janice dated mostly White males prior to meeting Stefan was never met with any family opposition. Additionally, Janice believes that her family's acceptance of her selection of White partners may also be due to her strong personality and the perception that traditional Chinese men would have a difficult time accepting it. Janice described her past relationship experiences as being "stifled" and having to fit "a certain mould of a female gender role." Until she met Stefan she felt she was involved in relationships constrained by expectations.

Stefan's parents, in comparison, were more traditional in terms of partner selection. Prior to dating Janice they would encourage him to participate in Macedonian events so as to meet a Macedonian woman, which he suggested is a reflection of his parent's own upbringing and

worldviews. Stefan had fairly little to comment on his past relationships, which were all short in duration and involved women of the same race. He talked about being “young and immature” and taking them quite casually until he met Janice.

The couple’s first encounter and the early stages of their relationship. Having dated women who were consistently White, Stefan entered the relationship with Janice (they met through Stefan’s cousin) with the following impression of their ethnic/racial differences:

You know what? Well, my first impression was like, and I don’t know, I didn’t really have any expectations, I guess, but this is the first Chinese girl I’ve dated. The first thing I thought in my head was “she was just like the rest of them...like the rest of any girl of any race...oh...there is really no difference”.

Ethnic/racial differences were never an obstacle in the beginning stages of Janice and Stefan’s relationship and the two felt very comfortable in each other’s company. Stefan found that in Janice’s company the “conversation just flows” and was instantly attracted to her outgoing personality. Stefan talked about the importance of having a partner he can communicate with easily, as he considers himself more of an introverted individual. Janice shared the same experience, indicating that their early experiences with each other felt “comfortable” and non-dramatic. Reflecting back on their communication style, Janice gave Stefan credit for the way she resolves issues at present. She described him as a communicative partner that is patient, understanding, and always willing to talk and work through issues.

Three months into their dating relationship, however, Janice decided to break up with Stefan as she was not ready to settle down. At 19 years of age, she felt it was too soon to commit to a long-term relationship. Even though she knew he was a suitable long-term partner, she was

not ready to pursue the relationship further. It was not until four years later that they reconnected through ICQ instant messenger and rekindled their relationship.

Families' reception to the couple's relationship. Before Janice and Stefan's parents met, their families would regularly "send food back and forth" as a way to show support for the couple's relationship. Stefan made sense of this behavior in the following excerpt:

I think both cultures came from, like, a village type of culture, right? So I think back in the day that's what each side did...before you kind of meet. [...] So a long time ago I think when you start getting closer your families' start to send each other food and parents are getting involved, and after a while, it's like, OK, I start coming to family dinners and you start coming to family dinners, and eventually the parents meet.

Stefan believes both families' histories can be traced back to similar village-type cultures, where inter-familial food sharing was common practice and often carried out before parents met. In the couple's experience, food sharing between their families marked the beginning of family involvement in their relationship, followed by Stefan attending Janice's family dinners (and vice versa), and the eventual meeting between the two families.

Stefan suggested that family support helped facilitate the transition from a dating relationship to a committed one in that it "made things so much easier." He noted that given that both he and Janice are close to their families, family support was viewed as a blessing and served as a pillar that strengthened the couple's relationship.

Commitment. As the couple entered their early to mid-twenties, they transitioned into a committed relationship and naturally began contemplating what their next milestone would be. After a year the couple decided to buy a condo together, a decision that led to a discussion about

marriage. Here we experience a minor tension in the story surrounding each couple member's beliefs about marriage. Janice stated that:

I don't believe in having a piece of paper to be committed because people get divorced all the time. It's not very important to me, but then you [referring to Stefan] said like it was important to you...so I mean obviously, I'm not against it, but I don't have to get married. [...] I know a lot of people go have a wedding and then maybe they don't have money for a house. No...I want my own place first before spending money on a wedding, so I want to make sure we have a place to live.

Stefan's response was:

In my head I thought, "Ok, this is what people do." You go to school, meet somebody you like, you get married, you have kids--that's what I thought that's the way it is...so when she said "Oh well, I'm not interested." I'm like, "No, that has to be...that's the way it is," right? That's all I ever expected. I guess if it ever came down to it and you resisted and you said "I don't really want to get married." Then I would have been "OK, that's fine...then we won't have to," but I'd still want to be together.

Stefan's beliefs about marriage were challenged by Janice at this stage of their relationship. For Stefan, the natural progression of a committed relationship must include marriage. Marriage is an important milestone in a committed relationship that, in his eyes, is followed by having children. Janice, on the other hand, is not convinced that marriage is a necessary milestone; for her a ring, a wedding ceremony, and a marriage certificate are not artifacts of a committed relationship. Their contrasting beliefs were worked through fairly easily, given that Janice did not have strong objections towards marriage. Looking into the future, Janice would support her children through their committed relationships, regardless of whether they chose to marry or not.

When Janice and Stefan announced their engagement, they received support from both the families. At that point all sorts of foods were sent back and forth, a sign that both families offered their blessings. Shortly following their engagement the two families met for the first time through a dinner party. Despite some language barrier, the two cultures bridged through food, some harmonica playing, and laughing and singing. When asked about the language barrier between the two families, Janice indicated that it is a blessing in disguise, given her father's eccentric personality. Thus, although one would expect language barriers to be a source of frustration, miscommunication, and awkwardness between the two families, it is interesting to hear the couple reframe it as a positive thing. In their experience, as long as conversations remain somewhat superficial, there will be peace.

The wedding. Janice and Stefan's wedding was a good blend of both Macedonian and Chinese cultures. Stefan commented that there are so many traditions from each culture that they could not possibly acknowledge and practice every tradition. Through a process of open communication and negotiation, the two families were able to reach a consensus as to how the wedding would take place. The ceremonious event was held at a Western style banquet hall but most of the food items were Chinese. The couple selected cultural elements they liked about each culture and incorporated them into their wedding. Chinese dishes were more prominently represented in the menu as the social act of eating is the highlight of most traditional Chinese weddings. The couple incorporated the Macedonian pig dance and bread dance as the entertainment segments of the evening.

Behind the scenes, Janice and Stefan did face some challenges in planning the wedding. Here we experience a second tension in the couple's story as they talk about the families' involvement in the wedding planning. For instance, there was pressure from Janice's aunt to

have a roasted suckling pig sent to her parent's house as a symbol of virginity. Janice was amused by what she described as a "ridiculous" tradition, as it was clear by their cohabitation that she was evidently not a virgin. However, for the sake of tradition, Janice consented to the idea. She also recalled that during the planning of her bridal party, Stefan's mother had suggested that she include Stefan's cousin as a way to involve more family members. However, Janice was not comfortable with the idea because his cousin was merely an acquaintance. Although Stefan's mother was not intrusive enough to create a problem, Janice did have to maintain her position and refuse her suggestion. Overall, however, the couple attributed the stress of planning their wedding to generic wedding issues, as opposed to those stemming from cultural differences. Through open communication, any tensions during the wedding planning phase were successfully diffused by the couple.

Parenthood. Following the wedding, Janice and Stefan identified the birth of their first child as the next milestone in their relationship. The baptism of their son leads us to the third tension of the story. Having been brought up with strong religious roots, Stefan's mother had encouraged Janice and Stefan to baptize her grandson as a Greek Orthodox. To do so, a child is traditionally taken to the priest on the 40th day following his birth (girls, however, cannot go to the altar). Janice and Stefan accommodated to the extent that they took their son to a Greek Orthodox church on the 40th day; however, they were reluctant to baptize him as a Greek Orthodox for practical reasons. Greek Orthodox baptism would be administered in Greek, a language neither Stefan nor Janice can understand. It was important for Janice and Stefan to be able to fully participate in the ceremony. A process of open communication once again transpired between Janice and her mother-in-law, who eventually yielded to the couple's decision to baptize Daniel as a Catholic. According to the couple, several reasons may have

accounted for this. For one, the two religions are both Christian-based religions. Janice jokingly remarked that tensions would have been more pronounced if they had decided to raise Daniel in the Buddhist tradition. Further, Janice's mother-in-law once attended a Catholic school and her own sister was baptized as a Catholic. She also may have realized that she stepped over the line because she is Daniel's grandmother, not his mother.

Present-day: Balancing couple and family time. Janice and Stefan's story then reaches the present-day mark. They were asked to comment on any issues that currently stand out in their relationship. In terms of child-rearing, Janice and Stefan both value languages and try their best to expose their children to Chinese; however, practical challenges remain insofar as one parent speaks the language, but the other does not. Macedonian is not taught in the household as Stefan has gradually lost his ability to speak it over the years. The couple further commented that their children's bi-cultural identity is not a source of concern, mainly because the community they live in is highly diverse and composed of many mixed race families.

Janice talked about the challenges of attending to two children and her marriage. She had quit her job around the time of the interview for several reasons. Not only was the job unrewarding, the commute was also too long and took away much of the time that she could be spending with her two young ones. Janice talked about her decision to quit her job:

I feel like a lot of times people work so hard in our age and do all this stuff and then they're never with their family or then they go back and, "Oh, for what?" [...] So I'll try my best to, when the time arises, to balance my work and family life...because for me it's very important. I want to be there for the children, I want to cook for them. I think food is very important for me and I always try to...one of my things with the children is I want

to cook a good meal for them...it's important, because I want them to value food. I think they appreciate it...just to bring the family together.

In the above statement, Janice clearly indicated that her commitment to her two young children during critical periods when their values and identities are being shaped supersedes any career aspirations. It is her hope that by spending time with them and cooking healthy meals for them that they would grow up valuing family time and food.

Moreover, there is the challenge of nurturing the couple relationship while raising two young children. Stefan took pride in the fact that he and Janice are fairly “in tuned” with their needs as a couple and maintain a healthy balance between family time and couple time. On a daily basis, the couple makes an effort to communicate with one another. During periods where they feel they need some time for themselves, they would make sure they made time and plan for it. The couple's decision to move next door to Janice's parents has made this option a lot more feasible.

The couple's envisioned future. In the years to come, the couple intends to maintain family traditions and focus on raising their sons. Janice emphasized her desires to “keep the tradition of coming home for dinner,” even when her sons reach adolescence.

Stefan added that maintaining a balance between their family life, couple relationship, as well as their personal growth would be a major challenge. Having quit her job at the time of the interview to attend to her children full-time, Janice hopes to find a job she loves down the road, when their children are older. Stefan shares a similar sentiment. His current work arrangement allows for quality time with his wife and children; however, he is not excluding the idea of searching for other work opportunities when his children are more independent.

The couple's secret to a successful and long-lasting relationship. The interview ends with an invitation for the interethnic couple to share their secret of a successful, long-lasting relationship. The couple suggests that because they have not encountered significant problems with their families of origin, their "secret" applies to all couples in general. Janice identified humour, laughter, and communication as important aspects of a successful relationship. Stefan further elaborated on the importance of *open* communication in their relationship. He suggested dealing with conflicts right away so that the issues do not grow and build up to the point where they would later become triggers for past resentments. Stefan also made the following realization towards the end of the interview:

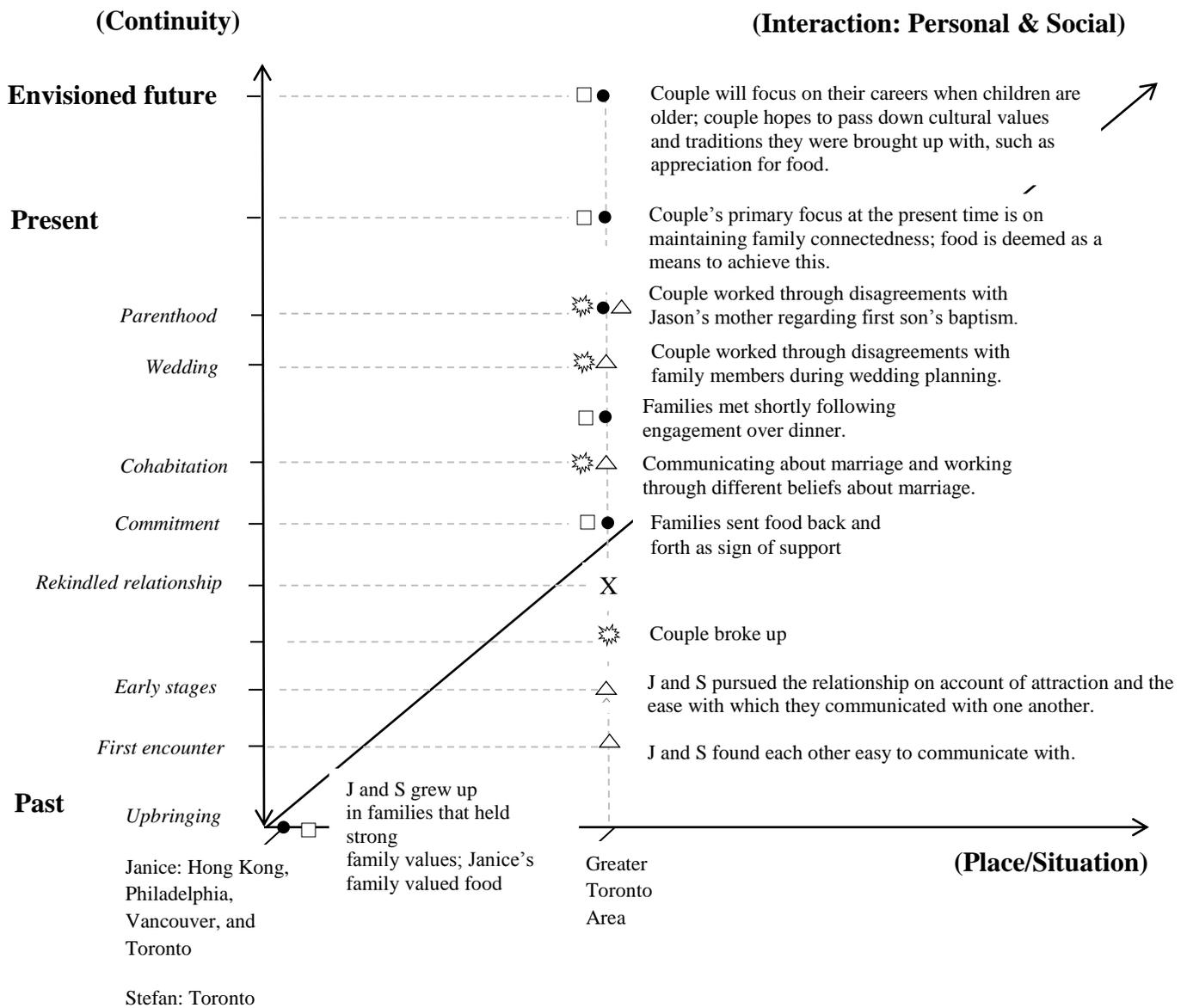
And I think even looking through our whole relationship, one of the things that made things easier to deal with is that all the--if you want to call them difficult times or challenging times--were all spread out. I mean like moving out, moving in together is one major thing, getting married is one major thing, having a child is another major thing. So we did *that* first and that's fine...and after we got used to the change in lifestyle *then* we got married and had the wedding, and then after we got married for a while then we have a kid after that. I think that made it a lot easier...you're able to grow and mature...and not kill each other [laughs].

Although not consciously and deliberately planned, a smooth transition from one family lifecycle stage to another could perhaps be considered as an additional "secret" to Janice and Stefan's long-term relationship. It appears as though the successful completion of one stage (*e.g.*, married without children) provided a strong foundation for the development of the next stage (*i.e.*, married with first son).

Central Themes in Janice and Stefan's Story

During Janice and Stefan's interview, their complementary personalities were easy to discern. Janice came across as energetic, forth-coming, outspoken, warm, and with a tremendous amount of charisma. It was also apparent that Janice is not someone who would conform to the gender roles dictated by traditional Chinese culture. Stefan was more soft-spoken, though highly thoughtful and conscientious, and revealed his caring and dependable nature throughout the interview. Their story was indeed a product of collaborative effort. There were hardly, if any, disagreements between the couple as they shared their story and charted the different milestones of their relationship. Their story suggests two major recurring themes which represent the uniqueness of their tale: (1) *family connectedness* and *food* as a pertinent subtheme and (2) processes of *communication, accommodation, and working through*. For Janice and Stefan, food was experienced by the couple as a means to bridge cultures and maintain family cohesiveness. Figure 1 on the following page provides a visual summarization of the recurring themes and points of tension across the couple's relationship life map, oriented by relationship milestones (time), context, and experiences on the personal or social levels. It serves to highlight patterns in the couple's lived experience.

Family connectedness. As suggested in Figure 1, the theme of family connectedness first took form as Janice and Stefan shared with the interviewer their socio-cultural backgrounds. They posited that a strong relationship with their respective families of origin had heavily influenced their personalities, value systems, and relationship templates. For Janice, she attributed her flexible attitudes and adaptive personality to her family's migratory history. She described her parents and grandparents as "modern," "liberal," and as espousing progressive



Central themes:

- △ Communication, accommodation, and working through
 - Family connectedness
 - Food (subtheme)
 - ✱ Tension point
- X Central themes were not prominent in this particular relationship milestone

Figure 1. Janice and Stefan's relationship life map

worldviews when compared against many Chinese of the same generation. Perhaps, in the context of such family dynamics, Janice's out-going, unpretentious, and assertive nature was able to blossom over time. Janice's early dating practices were shaped by her being given the liberty to be who she aspired to be without the confines of traditional Chinese gender roles. She mentioned that she dated predominantly White males due to an underlying sentiment that many Chinese men "expect women to be a certain way," such as being "submissive." She felt that most Chinese men would shy away from her "loud and crazy" personality.

Stefan's family upbringing in many respects stood in contrast to Janice's. He was born and raised in the same home in a community in Scarborough, a district within the eastern part of the city of Toronto. Stefan's parents were comparatively more conservative, religious, and had initially encouraged him to attend Macedonian events with the hope that he would settle down with a Macedonian woman. His close relationship with them meant that values espoused by his family of origin were deeply ingrained in him. For instance, contrary to Janice's beliefs about marriage, Stefan felt that it was a necessary milestone in a long-term, committed relationship. While being raised in a more conventional household, Stefan indicated that since being with Janice he has grown substantially and is more open to new ideas and possibilities. He owed his expanded worldview to being with someone who approaches life with a more flexible outlook. His statement also implies his belief that values and worldviews are subject to change later in life.

While family connectedness did not appear to be a salient theme during the early stages of Janice and Stefan's relationship, it certainly surfaced as a prominent feature in their lived experience once they transitioned into a more stable and committed relationship, as indicated by Figure 1. Stories of the first joint family gathering and the couple's experiences as first-time parents all underscore the importance of family in their narrative.

Support from the couple's families of origin was crucial in the sense that it promoted stability in the couple's relationship. They felt that family blessings were present on account of shared family values between the two cultures. Stefan remarked that: "Both cultures [Chinese and Macedonian] take their families seriously, they respect the elderly, all the grandparents." Janice agreed with this assertion and noted that spending time with one's family was important in both cultures. Stefan's mother found comfort in the fact that Janice is a "family person" and a skilled cook. Janice felt that there was no reservation on her family's side, due to their perception that Eastern Europeans and the Chinese shared values such as active engagement in "traditional" activities, family connectedness, and a sense of responsibility to "take care of your parents." It should be noted, however, that family support can at times translate into strong family involvement, which can be intrusive and threaten the stability of a healthy boundary between the couple and their extended family members. This was the case between Janice and her mother-in-law, as discussed later.

Lastly, the couple's decision to relocate to the same suburban community as Janice's parents not only provided free childcare, but it also brought the three generations closer together. Their decision to move away from friends and more central areas in Toronto meant that family superseded all other preoccupations.

Food. Food emerged as a subtheme under family connectedness in the sense that it has consistently played a central role in maintaining family cohesiveness in the couple's lived experience. This may not be surprising, as both couple members talk about food as a defining feature of their cultures of origin. In both Janice and Stefan's upbringings, family connectedness was highly valued and often maintained around the dining table. Holiday celebrations were seldom missed, as they were reasons to "get together and eat." Family members in Janice's

family were expected to reconvene for dinner at the end of the day, and she recalled coming home to her mother's "crazy Chinese meals." For Stefan, food represents an intangible cultural heritage in his family. In both cases, mothers, grandmothers, and aunts were reported as the key figures nourishing their families and cultures through cooking. Food's cultural meanings in relation to gender are thus illuminated in the couple's narrative.

Janice and Stefan's narrative suggests that food served an important purpose in their relationship as it transitioned into a committed one. In the process of becoming "closer" and more committed, inter-familial food sharing was experienced as their families' initial attempts to connect with one another. Hence, the notion of food as a means to achieve family connectedness extends beyond Janice and Stefan's relationships with their own families of origin. It would later play a significant role in bridging the two families and cultures. And while language barriers are clearly present during joint family gatherings, the couple's narrative suggests that the act of eating is universal and communicates affection in a delectable way.

Currently, both couple members highlighted their roles as parents and expressed a strong commitment to their couple relationship, as well as to the family as a whole, which they attributed to family values instilled in them by their families of origin. As demonstrated in Figure 1, it remains a crucial aspect of their relationship with their children at the present time and will remain so for the years to come. Janice expressed that cooking healthy meals for her sons is extremely important to her and it is her hope that even as they enter their teens and gain a sense of autonomy, that they would grow to value food and the time spent around the dinner table. To reiterate, Janice stated that, "I want to be there for the children. I want to cook for them...it's important because I want them to value food. [...] I think they appreciate it...just to bring the family together." For Janice, the significance behind gathering around a dinner table

goes beyond bringing family members together. It is the time of the day where the family is adequately nourished and an ancestral tradition that she strongly values and hopes would be successfully passed down to her sons just as it was passed down to her by her parents. Food, in essence, fuels life, joy, and family connectedness.

The experience of food as a meaningful aspect of one's family and culture, and its role in bridging two cultures, are evident throughout the couple's narrative. Looking into the future, the couple expressed a desire to watch their children grow up in a family environment that values connectedness and the joys of sharing food.

Communication, accommodation, and working through. Time and time again, the theme of communication, accommodation, and working through prevailed as the couple shared the various milestones and experiences that stood out for them in their relationship, particularly as they pertain to working through differences and conflicts. This is a theme that not only manifested itself within the *content* of their story, but it was also experienced in the *process* of their story-telling during the interview.

This theme first emerged when the couple recounted the first encounter and early stages of their relationship (see Figure 1). The ease with which they were able to communicate with each other was reported as a major incentive to pursuing the relationship, particularly for Stefan, who found his fluid conversations with Janice a refreshing experience. Further into the relationship, the couple's ability to communicate, accommodate, and work through differences became increasingly vital when it came to managing conflicts. Minor tensions were present in the story as Janice and Stefan talked about their respective beliefs about marriage, their family's interference with the planning of the wedding, and their decision to go against Stefan's mother's wishes to baptize their son as a Greek Orthodox.

The couple attributed their differing attitudes about marriage to how they were raised. Janice's attitude about marriage veered towards indifference, whereas for Stefan it was a natural progression following their long-term relationship. Janice's indifference meant she could "go either way" and that they were able to work through their differences fairly quickly. In the end Janice chose to marry Stefan, given the importance and high value he placed on marriage. Stefan mentioned that had Janice been adamant about not getting married, he would be willing to accommodate her and remain in the relationship. In both cases, the couple expressed a willingness to forgo their own interests for the good of the relationship.

Major occurrences of communication, accommodation, and working through transpired between Janice and her mother-in-law during the planning of the wedding and the baptism of the couple's first son (see Figure 1). As Janice shared these experiences, it became clear that in managing unsolicited advice from extended family members and negotiating differences with them, a process of communication, accommodation, and working through needed to take place so as to set healthy boundaries. Without such boundaries, couples may feel the need to overextend themselves in order to accommodate extended family members. In both instances--wedding planning and their first son's baptism--Janice openly communicated the rationale for her decisions and the importance of following through on these decisions. In the process of doing so, she felt her mother-in-law realized that she had "stepped out of line," particularly in regards to her parenting approach.

Not only are processes of communication, accommodation, and working through essential in negotiating differences between extended family members, Janice and Stefan identified open communication as one of the "secrets" to their long-term relationship. Interethnic or not, the couple believes that all couples would benefit from humor, laughing, and

open communication. Stefan believes that conflicts are best worked through in the here-and-now, as it prevents matters from becoming progressively worse if left unattended. He stated that, “As hard as it is, it’s a lot easier than letting it grow and dealing with the big explosion that will happen later on.” His statement was reflected in Janice’s handling of disagreements with her mother-in-law and her ability to openly communicate her concerns at the outset of any conflict.

Summary. Janice and Stefan’s story is one about familial love, communication, and communicating love through food. Perhaps it also serves as a commentary on the shared values of distinctive cultures, the benefits of strong family relationships, the significance of food as a means to strengthen the family bond, the importance of open communication in a couple’s relationship, as well as their relationships with extended family members, and the need to set healthy boundaries with influential family figures. Despite the present challenges in balancing their roles as parents, life-long partners, and professionals among other responsibilities, Janice and Stefan’s story suggests that as long as the couple remain in tune with their personal needs and their family needs; allow their values to guide their actions; and rely on their superb ability to communicate, accommodate, and work through problems, they will have little trouble maintaining this balancing act.

2. Felicia and Boris’ Story: Broadening Horizons through Embracing Differences

Felicia’s socio-cultural background. Born in the late 1970’s, Felicia grew up in a small Chinese community in Victoria, British Columbia. Originally from Hong Kong, her parents met in Victoria, B.C., and separated when Felicia was 8 or 9. Felicia mentioned that prior to her parents’ separation, she predominantly spoke Cantonese in the household, as her father had instilled in her very early on the importance of speaking in one’s native tongue. In addition to

language proficiency, Felicia noted other Chinese values that were instilled in her at an early age, such as the importance of strong academic performance and the value of saving face.

Felicia talked about being raised in a superstitious household. She described her mother as “extremely superstitious,” who for instance would not buy or rent a property unless it is first inspected by a Feng Shui master. Although Felicia considers herself as a Westernized “CBC” (Canadian-born Chinese), she noticed she has adopted many of the superstitions over the years and practices them without being fully aware of doing so. Felicia realized as she spoke that she has progressively come to embrace her “Chinese-ness” in her adulthood. She felt that during her formative years she wanted to fit in and “be like everyone else,” which meant forgoing anything Chinese, such as Chinese food, attending Chinese school, and so forth. Felicia also felt there was a bit of dichotomy in that she had to choose to be “either Asian or White.” However, as Canada opened its doors to more immigrants and became increasingly multicultural, she gradually realized she can be a “Chinese Canadian.”

During a later exchange on dating preferences, Felicia shed light on her family dynamics, one that was patriarchal in the traditional Chinese sense. She recounted her parents’ relationship, indicating that her mother was forced to marry her father because her maternal grandparents discovered they were living together. In an effort to save face and prevent shaming the family, her mother consented to marrying her father. Felicia described her mother as a “dutiful daughter” who remained in the marriage for 18 years, despite being extremely unhappy. She was expected to fit the prototype of a traditional Chinese wife—dutiful, subservient, reticent, and obliging. She was told she must bear a son. When she finally voiced her need to file for a divorce, her grandfather disapproved of this decision for the same reason she was forced into the marriage. The divorce happened in spite of her grandfather’s opposition. Felicia added:

The reason why my mom's so liberal, and she told me several times, is because of the upbringing she had. She didn't want to force that life onto me, which was why she gave me a lot of freedom to make my own choices and do all that stuff. And knowing what she went through I guess I subconsciously did not choose men that were of Chinese descent because I was worried that that would be kind of life that I would end up in. Felicia's aversion towards Chinese patriarchy was experienced during the interview. She wondered if there was a subconscious effort to marry a non-Chinese man in light of what her mother endured over the years.

Like many traditional Chinese families, Felicia always felt her younger brother was favoured in the family while she and her mother were "second class citizens." One of her earliest recollections involved her brother receiving special treatment when being served cake. He was served *first* (despite being younger) and given the "best piece."

Boris' socio-cultural background. Boris was born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1980 and immigrated to Canada with his parents at age 6, shortly before the onset of the 1989 Romanian Revolution. He has never returned. Boris has very few memories of his birthplace, which was under communist rule when his family left, but he did recall spending a significant amount of time with his maternal and paternal grandparents. Those days were extremely difficult for the family and his parents seized any opportunity they could to earn a living. Boris noted that their move to Canada was an arduous one, although as a child he was unaware of this fact. His parents provided him a life that spared no expense, allowing him to participate in the sports he loved, including swimming, tennis, and skiing. Boris realized later as an adult that his parents had shielded him from their financial woes throughout his childhood and adolescence.

Boris is an only child. Both Romanian and English were spoken in his household. When questioned about Romanian values, traditions, and customs he grew up with, Boris indicated the following:

I guess name days kind of stuff. Some of the traditions, yes, but a lot of traditions in the cuisine I suppose. Aside from that it wasn't... I actually am not like Felicia...full awareness...but I do have an understanding and appreciation...and I'm very happy to be Canadian as well. [...] Our family motto is "Don't be lazy." That's our family motto, not necessarily a cultural thing. In terms of values, they...I guess they've tried to instil "be a good person" type values. Take care of yourself, stuff like that.

Through the above statement one can begin to discern the differing levels of cultural orientation between Boris and Felicia with respect to their cultural roots. With the exception of the name day tradition and his familiarity with Romanian cuisine, Boris' knowledge of Romanian traditions and customs remains fairly limited compared to Felicia. Boris attributed this to the sense that his parents are an "anomaly" when compared against typical Romanian parents, who upon immigrating to Canada have steadily integrated into mainstream culture.

Boris responded to Felicia's account of Chinese patriarchy in her family by suggesting that in his impression, males and females are treated more equally in Romanian society. He stated that when pregnant with him, his mother had in fact hoped for a daughter whom she would name "Esmeralda."

Felicia and Boris' relationship histories. Felicia entered her first serious relationship at age 17 with a young Jewish man, a relationship that lasted for a decade and nearly led to marriage, though it ultimately dissolved on account of distance and time. Their relationship had run its course while Felicia was finishing law school in Queens and her ex-partner worked in

Montreal. The aftermath of the breakup was a tumultuous one. Felicia came to see a different side of the man she was once engaged to – a side that was unfamiliar and disconcerting. For a long time Felicia blamed herself for her relationship loss. She wondered if the relationship would have survived had she made more effort. Felicia recalled feeling “jaded” after the breakup; she lost a significant amount of weight, along with her self-confidence and confidence in men in general. When she did begin to heal, she experienced an increased sense of self-worth and gained a deeper awareness of what she was willing to tolerate within a relationship, both of which she felt were positive outcomes of the breakup.

Boris had never been involved in an interethnic relationship prior to meeting Felicia. Felicia, on the other hand, had dated people both outside and within her ethnic group. Both Boris and Felicia reported one serious, long-term relationship before their lives intersected. Boris was in a 4-year relationship with a Polish woman whom he went to primary school with. The relationship had devolved into a “dysfunctional” one during its final stages, and Boris said he held on to it longer than he had intended. The course of this relationship taught him about tolerance and what he is “willing to put up with” in a relationship.

The couple’s first encounter and the early stages of the couple’s relationship. Felicia entered the dating scene again with the intention of remaining non-committal for a while, though her encounter with Boris led to a change of heart. The couple met on an online dating site under fortuitous circumstances. Felicia initiated contact because she was drawn to Boris’s good looks. Boris recalled being impressed with Felicia’s profile content, namely a statement about her lifelong dream—running away to Mexico and opening up a dive shop. The couple soon learned that they had attended the same elementary school for over a year and lived a block away from

each other without knowing who the other person was. They revelled in the thought of passing the same hallways in school and crossing paths as children and strangers.

Felicia and Boris's first face-to-face encounter took place at a rainforest cafe inside a mall. Upon meeting one another, they were relieved to see that the real life version of the other did not diverge too much from their virtual counterparts. Conversations carried on smoothly throughout the evening, owing to Felicia's conversable nature and Boris' attentive listening.

When asked if any of the couple members had reservations about the relationship in its early stages, Felicia indicated that she was "extremely worried" about meeting Boris' parents, based on her beliefs about Eastern European families. Given that Boris is an only child, Felicia suspected that his parents would expect him to "carry down the family name" and date within his ethnicity.

Families' reception of the couple's relationship. Felicia's preconceived notions of an Eastern European family were challenged after meeting Boris's parents; however, Felicia mentioned that she was taken aback by his mother's overwhelming bluntness, at one point about her weight gain. The couple shared their opinions on this matter in the following excerpt:

Boris: Ironically you're very blunt yourself. Um...the thing is she doesn't necessarily come out to be a warm person. You have to get to know her to know that is her normal behaviour. That's due to all the stress she's been under. I mean, she's had problems at work and all that so she's--

Felicia: But I think it's also inner nature. Like she doesn't tiptoe around anything. If she thinks something, she'll say it. At times I'm just like, it's so tactless. She doesn't even think and sometimes it can be extremely, extremely hurtful. [...] And it took me, I would have to say, it took me like a year, at least a year, almost two years, that she didn't hate

me. [...] Her bluntness was very new to me because I'm not used to that. Because I mean Asians are very polite when they speak about anything, about anybody. So I was kind of taken back by this whole different kind of attitude that she had. And Boris would say, "No, she's just like that, she's just like that." And why would I believe you? Of course you're gonna protect your mother. After a couple of years I realized, oh, she does this to *everyone*.

The above statement reflects Felicia's reservations about Boris' mother in the early stages of their relationship. Boris, on the other hand, did not share similar concerns as Felicia regarding her family's opinion of him, though Felicia noted that her mother was in fact slightly hesitant about Boris in the beginning. Boris bore many similar traits as Felicia's former partner, whom her mother and brother had come to love, trust, then feel "betrayed" by, as Felicia described it. Boris understood why it was difficult for them to accept him whole-heartedly in the beginning.

As Felicia's father resides in Victoria, the couple's meetings with him have been relatively infrequent. Boris first met Felicia's father three years into their relationship. Boris described the experience as being "extremely casual," first meeting over hot pot, then for dessert at Dairy Queen. Generally speaking, the couple felt both sets of parents have been supportive of their relationship. Boris' sense is that both families had experienced significant hardships (*i.e.* Boris' family fleeing the harsh conditions of Communist Romania and Felicia's mother's 18-yr marriage), that resulted in their open-mindedness and ability to adapt to changes.

Commitment. The couple shared what they appreciated about each other and about the relationship itself. Felicia admired Boris' modesty, sense of humour, and genuineness – qualities she wanted her children to possess. Further, she added:

He comes from a background where, you know, they didn't have very much, and he's really made something of himself. And at the same time he's not, like, flashing it around. And he really appreciates the little things in life. That was one of the main things. [...] I find it extremely endearing that he doesn't have to put on a show in front of me. [...] Like what I saw was what I got and he didn't need to do anything else. And I just absolutely adore that. [...] All and all, it was, I felt that everything about him loving me was completely unconditional. And, I just...that was it.

Boris also expressed high regards for Felicia, particularly around her intelligence. He values learning about Chinese culture and has made significant efforts to participate in its traditions. Exposure to the cuisine of their respective cultures was mentioned as one of the many rewards in the relationship. Boris mentioned that he has expanded what he is willing to eat since meeting Felicia, though his interest in Chinese food remains somewhat lukewarm due to his adverse reactions to monosodium glutamate. Over the years, Felicia has developed an appreciation for not only Chinese and Romanian foods, but in food in general. She talked about food being an extremely important and defining aspect of one's culture, a belief that was once absent in her life.

The couple further mentioned that their complementary personalities played a significant role in achieving a "good balance" in their partnership. Felicia described herself as a "drama queen" constantly jumping to conclusions and needing to "plan every second of her life," while Boris was characterized as "logical," "extremely rational," and a "grounding" presence in her life.

The couple's relationship was not without hardships and tensions. At the 3-year mark of their relationship, Felicia felt the natural progression pointed towards marriage. Boris thought otherwise. His reservations stemmed from having had two long-term relationships in succession, with the previous falling apart after having invested significant time and energy. The logical part

in him discouraged him from acting with haste, despite his strong emotional attachment to Felicia.

The couple frequently found themselves re-evaluating their relationship during this period, often with Felicia “ending up in tears.” At 30 years of age, Felicia was ready to settle down and start a family. Readiness on Boris’ part later set in upon realizing that marriage is the ultimately the direction he wants his life to head and that he would not be happy if it did not.

The wedding. Felicia noted another clashing point in their relationship when the wedding talk ensued. Boris had wanted their wedding ceremony to be sanctioned at his Christian Orthodox church, but their request was turned down based on the fact that Felicia is a member of the Anglican church. Felicia talked about a reconnection to her faith in recent years and took offense to the idea that Boris’ church would view their children as “bastards.”

The couple’s wedding took place at an inn in Mississauga and was ordained by a non-denominational minister. Their reception was split into two days as the venue they selected was not big enough to hold 200 guests. There was no blending of cultures during the two day celebration. The first reception was, as Felicia described it, a “White” and “waspy” (short for White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant) celebration that mainly catered to the couple’s friends. The second reception took place in a Chinese banquet hall and was entirely Chinese, which meant a large portion of guests consisted of Felicia’s extended family members and family friends whom the couple did not know personally. Felicia wore her mother’s traditional “qua” (traditional Chinese wedding gown), as well as four other dresses throughout the event. They incorporated the tea ceremony, Chinese wedding games, and they served guests traditional wedding dishes such as roasted suckling pig, abalone, and shark’s fin. The couple reluctantly consented to adding shark’s fin to the menu at Felicia’s grandmother’s insistence, which Felicia saw as her

family's efforts to save face. Boris' reaction to an all-Chinese arrangement was highly positive. He stated that he "loved it" and found that the cultural elements incorporated at the wedding had expanded his knowledge on Chinese culture.

As newlyweds the relationship eased into a more harmonious chapter where expectations and feelings of uncertainty played a much lesser role, though deciding when to have their first child was a major source of stress. Felicia had a vision of when she would like to start whereas Boris was, again, reluctant to "rush" things. During this period of contemplation they had the following thoughts about child rearing:

Felicia: I want to speak Chinese to them [their children] all the time because that was the way I was brought up so I can be completely fluent. And you know, I wanted my kids to go to Chinese school.

Boris: From my perspective, if you wanted equality on the matter then you get the kids to speak Romanian and go to Romanian school. I thought well, I want them to understand their culture, yes, both sides where they're coming from. But at the end of the day, I just want them to be fitted for life as best as they can. I want them to be involved in various activities maybe to discover what they're talented at.

Felicia: I want to force them into Chinese school. [...] I feel extremely strongly about that. Because quite frankly, I speak fluently, but the minute you give me the menu to me I don't know what it says. It's like I'm in a complete loss. And sometimes I just wish my mother was a little bit more strict, and maybe stay there, I can write more than my name, do you know what I mean?

Boris: Yeah, but my parents, they do the approach of, you make them try it, right?

Don't let them quit right away obviously because that's not called trying, so you push them a little bit but you don't go over the edge.

Through this exchange the couple begin to touch on cultural awareness and to what extent they should instil it in the next generation. Felicia feels strongly about cultivating a strong Chinese identity in her children through language acquisition, as over the years she has begun to see the value of her culture and the importance of upholding certain traditions and customs. Boris, on the other hand, believes that the focus should be placed on the children's strengths, whatever they may be. On their children's cultural identity, the couple agreed that inheriting two distinctive cultures make way for an enriching experience; however, the couple differed in their views on mixed race identity. Boris favoured the melting pot ideology in the U.S.A., where if you "live in the states, you're American," thus promoting a "strong culture." Felicia disagreed with his sentiment that Canada has a weaker culture and highlighted the fact that Canadians have a "fantastically strong culture" in that they can possess dual cultures and still be Canadian. Felicia attributed their disparate views to her status as a visible minority and having learnt to embrace her dual identities of being Canadian and Chinese over the years.

Present-day: Parenthood. Felicia and Boris are currently parents to a 7-month old baby girl. As first-time parents, this undoubtedly comes with its own set of rewards and challenges, and the couple find themselves propelled onto a path of constantly gaining new experiences and skills. Specifically, in the face of unsolicited advice from family members on both sides, Felicia noted that they have learnt to do things their own way, rather than "blindly following whatever it is that their parents tell them." They argued that things have changed significantly since their

own parents brought them up and having to “weed things out” and develop their own parenting plan.

Cultural issues have arisen since the baby was born. Traditional Chinese customs dictate that during the one month period from childbirth, postpartum women cannot leave the house, cannot wash their hair, and must drink restorative herbal concoctions, among other traditional rules. Pickled pig’s feet and hard boiled eggs were handed out to friends and relatives to proudly announce the arrival of a newborn baby, and on the baby’s 100-day birthday, the family hosted a big party. Felicia’s mother was adamant that she abide by the rules and customs. Felicia dutifully followed them with the exception of confining herself in her home and leaving her hair unwashed for 30 days. She felt these customs were somewhat shocking to Boris and his family, who do not follow such traditions.

On Boris’ side of the family, there was a sense of urgency to baptize the baby as early as possible, though Felicia and Boris felt somewhat indifferent about it. The couple ultimately yielded to this decision and baptized the baby in a Christian Orthodox church. Felicia recounted the experience in the following excerpt:

The ceremony itself was *horrid* to me and shocked Boris *plenty*. It included immersing our daughter into a huge tub of water—including her face—cutting her hair, feeding her wine, and putting her on the ground soaking wet and naked. I was in tears at the baptism, and Boris was plenty mad at his parents. Neither of us was told beforehand what to expect, and [baby’s name] was so upset.

Felicia pointed out, however, that the baptism has been the only “cultural shocker” on the Romanian side thus far. It is mainly the Chinese traditions that baffle Boris and his parents.

The couple suggested that currently, it is still too early to discern differences in childrearing between her and Boris; however, they noticed that they have begun to integrate their respective cultures in the baby's daily life. For instance, Felicia's mother speaks to the baby in Chinese, Boris' parents speak to her entirely in Romanian, and the couple speaks to her in English. They hope that early exposure to all three languages will carry far-reaching benefits.

The couple's envisioned future. In the years ahead, the couple expect to fulfill a set of "filial duties" that may impact their parenting approach. Felicia brought up a recent situation where, upon hearing that her 90-year-old grandmother was dying of cancer, felt it was her duty to fly to Hong Kong to visit her. Her departure coincided with Chinese New Year, and she felt it would be meaningful to bring her baby with her, as it might be the last chance her grandparents have of seeing their grandchild. Boris had difficulties understanding the notion of "dropping everything to take care of your elders" and the level of importance placed on Chinese New Year, thus insisted that Felicia leave the baby at home. She stated:

I was always brought up with the sense of "filial duty" ingrained in me—no matter what happens, children have to respect their elders, treat them well, and take care of them. [...] Needless to say, there was *a lot* of tears and discussion, and finally he gave in and told me that I have to do what I have to do. I feel if I had been married to a Chinese man, it wouldn't have been such an issue—that this "filial duty" would have been inherently ingrained.

The above statement reveals clashes resulting from culturally-grained attitudes. Likewise, Felicia admitted underestimating the significance of the name day in Boris' culture. She was astonished to find his parents "descending" upon their home with food and presents on Boris'

name day. The couple expect the same treatment when their baby's name day arrives, as Boris' parents are adamant that it be celebrated.

The couple foresees more cultural clashes as they continue their journey through parenthood, but they are confident that they will be resolved through a process of compromise and accepting traditions that are dear to each of them. In addition, Felicia mentioned her recent purchase of Rosetta Stone Romanian and spoke of her desires to learn Romanian as a way to connect with some of Boris' extended family members and not feel "left out" during family gatherings.

The couple's secret to a successful and long-lasting relationship. The couple felt that race per se has very little to do with the secret to a successful interethnic relationship. They attributed it to personality compatibility, resilience in the couple relationship, mutual respect and love, understanding of each other's values, willingness to explore the unknown, and a couple's ability to embrace differences. On differences, they noted the following:

Felicia: The little differences don't really have that much of an impact. I mean, it's actually some of the little differences that I find so endearing that I love about him.

Boris: It's nice to try new things...

Felicia: Different things. It broadens your horizons and I feel more worldly, and just more sophisticated I guess. Just to know a lot more...

The above sentiments indicate that despite their differences, the couple experience them as a source of self-expansion and a gateway to new possibilities and an enriching life.

Central Themes in Felicia and Boris' Story

Throughout the interview, Felicia and Boris were experienced as being extremely candid and open with one another. They are both tenacious, though in very distinctive ways; Felicia's

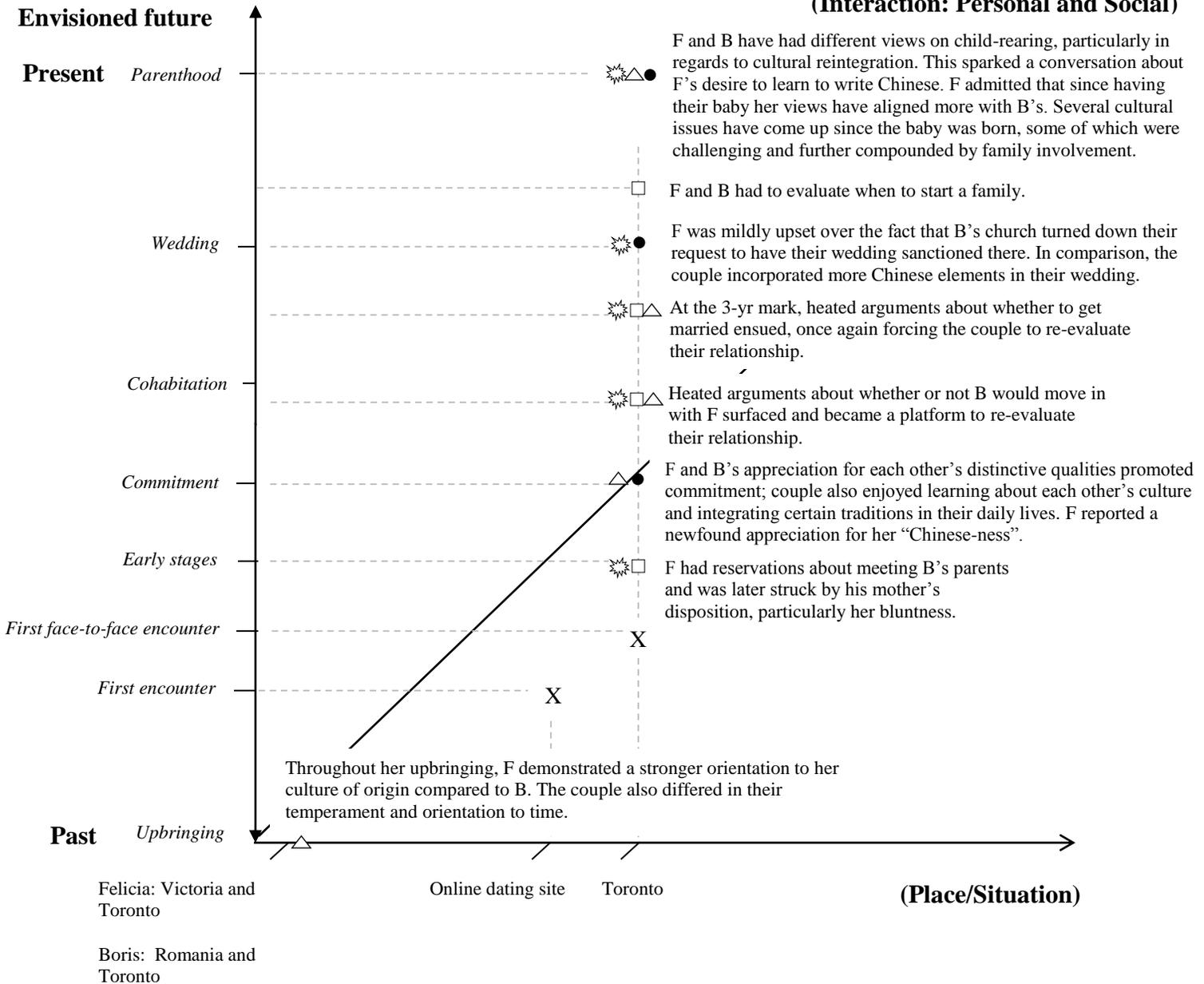
viewpoints were often expressed with emotional vigour while Boris was analytical with humorous undertones. The couple often held strong and disparate opinions on certain matters and were not reluctant to lay them out and openly discuss them. Though not always coming to a shared consensus, Felicia and Boris were consistently able to make peace with their differences. There was also a light-hearted energy in the room, with humour, and playful jabbing characterizing their style of interaction.

Three themes emerge as important foci in Felicia and Boris' story: *Differentness as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or conflict; cultural integration and reintegration; and relationship stages as platforms for re-evaluation.* These recurring themes, along with moments of tension, are situated in time and place and mapped out in Figure 2 on the following page to reveal patterns in the couple's lived experience.

Differentness as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or conflict. As suggested in Figure 2, the theme of differentness as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or conflict permeated throughout the couple's story, most discernibly during the couple's description of their personal attributes, of what makes their relationship rewarding, and on their parenting styles. It must be noted, however, that underneath their differences the couple do share similar fundamental values, such as the value of education, a strong work ethic, and beliefs and attitudes embedded within certain political viewpoints.

Differences in Felicia and Boris' upbringings and family dynamics were made apparent as they shared their socio-cultural backgrounds (see Figure 2). Felicia talked about the patterns

(Interaction: Personal and Social)



Central themes:

△ Differentness as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or conflict

● Cultural integration and re-integration

□ Relationship stages as platforms for re-evaluation

☀ Tension point

X Central themes were not prominent in this particular relationship milestone

Figure 2. Felicia and Boris' relationship life map

of male dominance being passed down in her family from one generation to the next and the impact it had on her parent's marriage and her early experiences as the female, albeit older, sibling in the household. Chinese patriarchy was not only enforced by the male members of her family (*e.g.*, grandfather and father) but further perpetuated by key female members. Felicia's mother had been preached to by her own mother on the responsibilities of a "dutiful wife"; for instance, having hot tea and slippers ready when her husband comes home, being obliging, being quiet, and giving birth until a son is born. Felicia insinuated that these internalized messages may have played a subconscious role in her averting attention from Chinese men and seeking relationships that were more egalitarian in nature. Boris, on the other hand, was the only child in his family, and it is difficult to say how gender roles would be treated had there been a female sibling in the household, though Boris' impression is that both the female and male genders are treated relatively equal in Romanian culture. In essence, the gender role ideology that Boris has come to ascribe to may have compensated for what was lacking in Felicia's family dynamics and to some extent served as a harmonizing force in Felicia's lived experience. We can infer that her daughter's upbringing will play out quite differently than Felicia's and those of her female ancestors'.

One of the major harmonizing forces in Felicia and Boris' relationship stems from complementarity personal attributes, which the couple asserted promoted relationship commitment. Whether their disparities originate from differences in personalities, gender, culture, or a combination of all three is perhaps of less importance than the couple's appreciation of these disparities. Felicia talked about the tendencies of being a "drama queen" who often "jumps to conclusions," though Boris' "grounding" presence allows her to think more sensibly, rationally, and logically. Moreover, the couple's orientation to time varies significantly, with

Felicia needing to “plan everything down to the last minute” and Boris with a more present-focused approach. In Boris’ view, planning inevitably grinds to a halt once there are “too many variables” in place. Generally speaking, the couple have been able to utilize their differences to strengthen the relationship, though when discussions around cohabitation, marriage, and parenthood ensued, their orientations with regard to time became a source of conflict, as illustrated in Figure 2. Felicia’s “10-year plan” was clearly at odds with Boris’ mentality not to “rush” things.

Throughout the couple’s narrative, Felicia and Boris associated their cultural differences with sources of self-expansion. To put it in other words, venturing into unknown territory where perceived differences are appreciated has been personally enriching for the couple, and in fact was noted as a “secret” to their long-term relationship. As previously mentioned, Felicia and Boris varied significantly in their awareness of their cultures of origin. For Boris, Felicia’s familiarity of Chinese traditions, customs, rituals, food superstitions, fixed hierarchical relationships (*e.g.*, respect for elders), language, pop culture, and distinctive cultural facets such as “saving face” paved the way for a unique learning experience. He stated that over the years, he has participated in various forms of traditions, rituals, and even superstitious practices because of his love for learning. He jokingly remarked on the joys of waking up to find gold coins underneath the corners of the couple’s bed. Felicia, similarly, talked about the gains of being involved with someone of another culture. She has come to appreciate Romanian holidays and cuisine, and has in fact “perfected” certain dishes, such as cabbage rolls.

Currently, major sources of conflict have been associated with Felicia and Boris’ parenting styles, some of which are rooted in cultural differences. Prior to the birth of her daughter, Felicia shared her convictions about exposing her children to the Chinese language

through Chinese school, though following her birth her views have somewhat softened and are more aligned with Boris' emphasis on the child's strengths. Felicia realized that as she continues to embrace her "Chinese-ness," her parenting approach will at times be informed by the set of "filial duties" and cultural values deeply ingrained in her. For instance, against Boris' wishes, Felicia felt it was a necessity to take their newborn back to Hong Kong to visit her dying grandmother during Chinese New Year, the most important Chinese holiday of the year. Further down the road, the couple anticipate more conflicts to arise and they hope to manage them through the art of "compromise" and by "accepting each other's traditions that are dear to them."

Cultural integration and reintegration. Despite being "white-washed" and "very Canadian," as Boris described himself and Felicia, cultural integration and reintegration was evident throughout the couple's story. As demonstrated in Figure 2, this theme appeared to be of high relevance when Felicia talked about her newfound appreciation of her "Chinese-ness" as a Chinese-Canadian, the couple's integration of Chinese elements at the wedding, Felicia's desires to reintegrate Chinese language in her life, and the couple's willingness to visit aspects of both Chinese and Romanian cultures and reintegrate those they find meaningful in their daughter's life within a context (Canadian) that embraces multicultural identities.

Integration of new cultural norms and practices was apparent in both Felicia and Boris' personal narratives, though the manners in which it was manifested differed between them. Felicia's integration of Romanian culture manifested in her cooking, in her desires to learn Romanian and communicate with Boris' extended family members, in her consent to baptize her daughter as a Christian Orthodox, and in her openness to exposing herself and her daughter to the Romanian language and traditional holidays, such as the name day and Easter. Boris' integration of Chinese culture was reflected in his active participation in certain Chinese

traditions and superstitions, such as not showering and sweeping the floors on Chinese New Year's Eve, giving out red envelopes on Chinese New Year's Day, and following Chinese child-rearing customs which can be "baffling" and "strange" in the beginning. Further, reflecting on his experience at the second wedding reception, Boris expressed having a high regard for the various Chinese traditions and customs that were incorporated. In sum, while the forms of cultural integration were manifested differently by each couple member, Felicia and Boris approached them with congruent attitudes of curiosity, openness, and appreciation.

In the context of this discussion, cultural reintegration refers to Felicia and Boris' re-visiting aspects of their cultures of origin which they left behind in the process of assimilating into mainstream Canadian culture and re-integrating these aspects in their daily lives. This theme is increasingly apparent for Felicia as she "embraces her Chinese-ness" the older she becomes and the growth in pride she has in her Chinese-Canadian identity. "Why run away from it?" she asked herself during the interview. Felicia's yearning to reintegrate the Chinese language (namely written) in her life, her newfound appreciation for Chinese food, and the passing down of traditions and values she was raised with and now finds meaningful all speak to Felicia's willingness to re-position cultural features to centre stage. Boris, on the other hand, appeared somewhat lukewarm about reintegrating Romanian culture as his life unfolds, though since becoming a parent there have been instances of cultural reintegration and imparting Romanian traditions he grew up with to his daughter, such as baptizing her as a Christian Orthodox.

Relationship stages as platforms for re-evaluation. Figure 2 reveals tensions in the couple's story at major transitional points in their relationship. The third theme, relationship stages as platforms for re-evaluation, emerged as a consequence of such tensions. In essence, the

couple's relationship stages became platforms for re-evaluation and points in time where they found themselves re-examining meaning, needs, and desires, often times with the involvement of their families of origin. Felicia in particular recalled, at various stages of their relationship-- meeting each other's parents for the first time, co-habitation, marriage, and entrance to parenthood—wondering, “Where is this going? What is happening with us? What is going on!” and having “the talk” to resolve this dilemma. While Felicia, who is future-focused with respect to time orientation (and Boris who is more present-focused), found these talks often frustrating, the couple have always come to a place of understanding and in most cases resolved their differences.

Felicia and Boris' narrative illuminates the inevitable developmental processes and often predictable steps or patterns that all couples experience over time. Successful transitions from one relationship stage to another require couples to complete specific developmental tasks and adapt to the changing needs and demands associated with each stage. For instance, in the early stages of an intimate relationship, couples are faced with the tasks of exploring one another; building trust; and relating to one another as whole people who embody both strengths and vulnerabilities. Down the road, couples may face the tasks of forming relationships with each other's extended families, negotiating roles and responsibilities as a cohabitating couple, getting married, deciding whether or not to procreate, developing a mutually agreed parenting approach, only to name a few. In Felicia and Boris' lived experience, the challenge was not if and how they will attend to these responsibilities, but *when*. As the couple puts it, “timing” has consistently been their challenge, with Felicia wanting to transition into the next stage more readily than Boris. Thus, the successful completion of tasks at each relationship stage became

platforms on which the couple had to re-evaluate their needs and desires and arrive at a decision as to *when* to enter the next phase of their relationship.

Summary. Taken together, Felicia and Boris' story is a story about differences and how they can "broaden one's horizons" and worldview insofar as they are embraced and learned from. Their story also suggests that equilibrium in a relationship can sometimes be attained through the interaction of seemingly opposing forces. In the couple's view, differences can often coalesce in harmony and complement one another to provide a balance in their relationship. In other words, differences become strengths so long as they complement one another and allow couples to view matters from various angles. Felicia and Boris each entered the relationship with his/her own set of personality traits, cultural backgrounds, and attitudes and beliefs around cultural integration and reintegration, and it is through their complementary qualities that they can strengthen each other's strengths, improve on each other's vulnerabilities, and uncover each other's blind spots. And although opposing forces in their relationship may collide at times, Felicia and Boris demonstrate a willingness to step up onto the platform, re-evaluate their personal needs and desires, and seek common ground.

3. Maggie and Helmut's Story: The Meeting of Two Cultures in a Digital World

Maggie's socio-cultural background. Maggie's grandparents were Eastern European Jews who escaped to Canada during the Holocaust. Her mother and father were born in Israel and Canada respectively. Maggie was born in the mid-1970s in a tight knit Jewish community in Montreal. Maggie described her parents as being extremely active in the Jewish community. In terms of religiosity, she noted that they are not religious per se but remain "culturally Jewish,"

which Helmut describes as “secular Judaism.” This meant they are involved in Yiddish theatre and celebrate holidays more for the tradition than for the religion. Maggie’s sense was that neither of her parents would necessarily say that they believe in God.

Maggie further described the community in which she was raised as tightly knit, very warm, welcoming, and loving. As many family members were killed during the Holocaust, friends in the community essentially became her family. She recalled having at least 15 people at her family dinner table on any given Friday. Maggie described a strong connectedness to her family and culture, an important value instilled in her as a child. She also spoke of her family’s strong social justice orientation, support for women’s rights, involvement in volunteer work and acts of altruism, as well as “living life to the fullest.” Maggie used two Hebrew terms to capture the essence of her families’ beliefs and values. One is called *Tikkun Olam*, which suggests humanity’s shared responsibility “to repair the world,” particularly in response to the tragedies of the Holocaust. The second term, *Tzedakah*, highlights the importance of righteousness and charity work in both time and money. Maggie suggested that her family values and social justice background have shaped who she is today and the career path that she has chosen (*i.e.*, academia).

Helmut’s socio-cultural background. Helmut was born between mid to late ‘70s and raised in a small town in Hamilton, Ontario. His parents moved to Canada from Hong Kong in the late ‘60s or early ‘70s. Few Chinese people or other ethnic minorities were visible in the community. Being the only Chinese student at school, he looked and felt different, and was continuously subject to racism and discrimination. Even as an adult living in a multicultural city such as present-day Toronto, Helmut recalled incidents in social situations where racist remarks had been directed towards him. He recalled reading articles where people claimed to be open

and tolerant, but in reality they socialized with people who look like themselves. He noted that a popular dating website provided a statistics blog, in which data on their 6 million members was analyzed to explore the trends of the online dating world, and specifically referred to an article that revealed interracial dating trends.

Helmut describes his upbringing as one steeped in Christian values, from the kind of music and movies his parents approved of to beliefs around premarital sex. Although there was the “stereotypical kind of Chinese values,” like excelling in school and learning a musical instrument, Helmut felt his upbringing was shaped more by his parent’s religious beliefs than Chinese values or traditions. However, he noted that sometime in his 3rd or 4th year of university as an undergrad, he began to feel disconnected from his faith. Going to church no longer seemed meaningful. Helmut felt somewhat adrift as he alienated himself from Christianity, given that his housemates at the time were people he met through Chinese Christian groups. After graduating from university, Helmut moved back in with his parents for a year. He initially attended church to appease them, but soon found it hard to hide his sentiment. He recalled his mother being “very upset” the first time he announced he was not attending church on Sunday. Over the years Helmut and his parents have come to an unsaid agreement or comfort level regarding the path he has chosen, though he senses that deep down his mother is still disappointed.

Maggie and Helmut’s relationship histories. Maggie and Helmut’s dating experience prior to their virtual encounter was also strikingly different. Maggie had an active dating life and at certain periods cohabitated with a few of her boyfriends. Early on, most of them were Jewish, but as her social circle expanded over the years she began dating non-Jewish men. During graduate school she moved in with a man who was of Irish or Scottish descent. This caused a

“blow out” with her parents, due to his non-Jewish background. Marrying someone from the same faith was clearly important to her parents. However, Maggie maintained that her selection of partners was ultimately her own decision and informed her parents that she would resort to discontinuing communication with them in the event that they did not support her decision.

Helmut, relatively speaking, had limited dating experience prior to his relationship with Maggie, which he attributed to his “intense shyness” and his conflicted feelings around his religious upbringing. While growing up, much of his life was dictated by religious moral codes, including that it was “wrong to talk about sex.”

The couple’s first encounter and the early stages of their relationship. Maggie and Helmut’s story now leads us to their first encounter. The couple met on a popular dating site in 2007. The two signed up carrying very different attitudes. Helmut invested time and effort in writing up emails to women he was interested in. He would feel quite defeated when there were no replies. Maggie, on the other hand, took it rather casually. She described it as a “hobby,” a means to meet interesting people and come home with “outrageous” stories. Helmut recalled sending Maggie a virtual smile and emailing her expressing his interest in her profile. He was looking for someone that was intelligent, who was interested in music and food, and who had a good sense of humor. He mentioned that there were certain ethnicities he did not include in his filter. Maggie had specifically and purposely mentioned in her profile that she has a Ph.D., as she felt many of the men she went on dates with were intimidated by her level of education and professional success. It appears as though Helmut had no such insecurities and was rather drawn to Maggie’s intellectual nature. On their first date, Helmut did a thorough research on restaurants in Maggie’s neighborhood. He impressed Maggie with his selection of the restaurant, handmade chocolate, intelligence, and meticulous attention to detail.

Families' reception of the couple's relationship. Generally speaking, the reception of Maggie and Helmut's relationship by their families of origin has been a positive one. Helmut recalled that his parents and relatives were very appreciative of Maggie's warm and out-going energy since meeting her. Her high intellect was also looked favorably upon, as Helmut's parents, like many other Chinese families, place special value on education.

Maggie commented on the fact that Helmut's mother often compliments her on her intelligence, which she found somewhat surprising given their limited interaction. Helmut believes it may stem from a generational or cultural mindset around gender roles, in that women who are able to leave the confines of traditional professional roles are regarded as intelligent. Hence, Maggie's high level of education and professional success are perhaps viewed by Helmut's mother as surpassing certain gender roles and an indicator of high intelligence, an attribute she prizes and looks upon favourably. The only disapproval expressed by Helmut's parents was related to the couple's premarital cohabitation, a practice that violated their religious moral codes. Maggie's Jewish background, however, was not a source of tension. In fact, the fact the Maggie came from a family with faith is somewhat of a comfort to Helmut's family. Maggie sensed that for Helmut's parents, "it's better to have a faith than to be Godless," which Helmut finds humorous due to his awareness that Maggie's family practices secular Judaism. He added that his mother had become increasingly interested in Judaism over the years and reads up on Jewish holidays and traditions.

Conversely, Maggie described her parents' reception of Helmut's non-Jewish identity in the following excerpt:

I think they've come a long way. Like, they still – like every time my dad sees Helmut he still makes...he always makes some kind of comment...it's like his way of dealing with

his discomfort. Like he said things like [thinking]...what did he say last time we were there? “I never thought I'd have a Chinese grandson but I can't believe how much I love him.” You know like weird stuff like that...that's just racist and obnoxious, Dad. You need to stop saying this bullshit...[chuckles] But at the same time [turns to Helmut] he's been extremely loving and kind of generous to you, like he's never been a jerk to you...but he's still kind of getting over his...By the same token my brother married a White woman who wasn't Jewish and he made a big fuss about her too and it's not race based, it's more religion based.

Though not blatantly expressed, one can sense that there are residual discomfort between Maggie and her family regarding Helmut's non-Jewish identity. However, due to the matrilineal system in Judaism, Maggie's children would be Jewish irrespective of Helmut's background. Hence, in comparison, Maggie's parents would be much more concerned about their son marrying a woman who is not Jewish.

Religion aside, Helmut was generally accepted by Maggie's family. They remarked on how much better he was than boyfriends Maggie had brought home in the past. Not only was he “smart, sweet, thoughtful, [and] had good table manners,” but he possessed dessert-making skills that quickly won her family over. Hence, any reservations Maggie's family had about their relationship had more to do with religion than with race.

Commitment. There were two major milestones as Maggie and Helmut's relationship transitioned into a more committed one. First, there was a trip to South Africa. Before they met, Maggie had made plans to live in South Africa for eight or nine weeks. She invited Helmut to join her without the slightest expectation that he would say “yes.” Maggie expressed how shocked she was by the fact that someone would “fly half way around the world for her,”

especially having dated for approximately a month. She described this as a turning point where they transitioned from casually dating to being in a serious relationship.

The second milestone also occurred while Maggie and Helmut were away on a trip. A year after they met they travelled to New York City to celebrate Maggie's parents' 60th birthday. During this trip Maggie declared her first "I love you," a moment that stood out for Helmut, for it was realization that they were truly in a serious and committed relationship.

In early 2009 Maggie and Helmut purchased a home and moved in together. There was not much adjustment involved, with the exemption of practical matters such as sharing the same bathroom, sleeping in the same bed, and having less solitary moments. Occasionally Maggie found certain Chinese or non-vegetarian foods in the kitchen distasteful (she is a vegetarian). Further, she felt that differences in relationship dynamics in their families of origin were even more palpable upon entering the cohabitation stage. The couple elaborated in the following exchange:

Maggie: My family is extremely overbearing with their love. Like, I talk to my mom every day. She's a huge personality. When she comes and overtakes our whole house and tells us how to live and what to do. Like the day we moved in...that was like perhaps the biggest stress. The day after we moved in my mother showed up to be our house guest and told us how we need to unpack things. So...um...I think it's partly cultural. Very family-oriented, very close and like the stereotypes of a Jewish mother. You can imagine them loud and overbearing...lots of guilt, lots of love, you know, cooking...enormously generous but always kind of like...

Maggie painted a lively picture of her mother in this exchange. The power of stereotypes allows us to easily imagine what it must be like to have Maggie's mother in the room with us. Helmut commented that he deals with his mother-in-law's "overbearingness" by simply complying.

Helmut described his relationship with his parents as being almost the complete opposite. His mother, unlike Maggie's mother, has mostly taken a more hands off approach to the point where they do not talk for an entire week. And she prefers emailing him over calling. Having experienced two extreme situations, Helmut felt that the ideal level of family connectedness would fall somewhere in the middle.

The wedding. Maggie and Helmut's story now brings us to their wedding day. They incorporated both Jewish and Chinese traditions and blended them the best they could. No Rabbi in the city would do an interfaith wedding, save for one, who belonged to a humanist Jewish tradition and specialized in doing interfaith and intercultural marriages. Within this tradition, all texts used in religious services are devoid of God and are essentially reinterpreted in non-theistic language. The female Rabbi they approached had over the years assembled a very large set of translations of some of the traditional Jewish blessings recited at a wedding. Using a script that incorporated various traditions, she had seven blessings translated into Chinese. She also proposed having different members of the couple's family read the blessings in different languages. And as a way to honour Helmut's parent's religion, the Rabbi included a reading about love in the Book of Corinthians, the seventh book of the New Testament of the Bible.

Other forms of cultural blending at the couple's wedding were the *huppah* and the *ketubah*. The *huppah* is a canopy under which a Jewish couple stand during their wedding ceremony. Maggie's late aunt designed it and incorporated different symbols, colors, and figures from both Jewish and Chinese traditions. She sent blank pieces of cloth to the couple's friends

and asked them to generate a design that reflected one of the four seasons. The square patches were then arranged and sewn together in a beautiful way. As for the *ketubah*, it is a traditional Jewish wedding contract that was also incorporated into the wedding. It was translated into Chinese and the art work was designed in a way so as to include a dragon, a phoenix, the well-known Chinese ligature, “double happiness,” a *huppah*, and other Jewish symbols.

Finally, Jewish elements that were incorporated on their own included the breaking of the glass and the *Shabbat* (Jewish day of rest) ceremony. On the Chinese side, the couple chose to include the tea ceremony, little red lanterns hung from trees, table confetti made with “double happiness” ligature, and Chinese almond cookies and other baked goods. However, “much to everyone’s chagrin,” the couple had a vegetarian wedding. Maggie felt it was important for her to be able to eat everything at her own wedding. She added that having a vegetarian wedding also solved a lot of the “pig problems,” as the Chinese are known to be pork enthusiasts while restrictions on pork consumption is a defining Jewish tradition.

Maggie and Helmut found blending the two traditions at their wedding to be rewarding. Helmut, in particular, offered detailed and informative explanations on the aforementioned cultural elements and remarked on how well they incorporated the two traditions when compared to other Chinese-Jewish couples he researched online.

Present-day: Parenthood. Between the wedding and welcoming their first baby, Maggie and Helmut encountered several losses as well as new beginnings. During this time frame they coped with two miscarriages and the loss of Maggie’s late aunt (who made the *huppah* and with whom Maggie was very close to). Many loved ones got married, including Maggie’s brother.

Maggie gave birth to her son around the time of the interview. The couple had chosen a name for the baby that was meaningful in many ways. The couple explained in the following excerpt:

Maggie: He's named after my aunt who passed away, but he has a Chinese middle name.

Helmut: So we'd always thought we would have his English name, Hebrew name, which is the Hebrew version of [baby's English name], and a Chinese name. [...] So for the Chinese name we came up with a couple of ideas but then at some point in the week after he was born—because we didn't name him until a week later—we decided to use sort of the Romanization of his Chinese name as his English middle name, which a lot of people do. Like my parents' official documents have that. And so we thought that would be a nice way to sort of incorporate and make part of his name. [...] And it's nice because his middle name is “[Chinese middle name]” and the G sound is similar to [baby's English name] as well...and my dad was thinking of all these things when he was coming up with a Chinese name. You know it had to be meaningful...It had to reflect our values but at the same time it was clever to incorporate that sound.

Names are important in many cultures. This was no exception with respect to Maggie and Helmut's backgrounds. Their baby's name had to be meaningful. The chosen English and Hebrew names were not only named after Maggie's aunt as a sign of respect and a means to perpetuate her memory, they also cleverly incorporated a Chinese middle name that was phonetically similar to the English name while selecting Chinese characters that reflected important values possessed by the family. Needless to say the couple chose a name that embodied two distinctive cultures and reflected the couples' connectedness to their families and cultures.

The couple's son is the first grandchild for both sets of grandparents. To keep them apprised of the baby's development, Maggie and Helmut created an online blog where they regularly posted pictures. For Helmut, it was interesting to observe how his parents, particularly his father, reacted to a newborn. There had not been a baby on his side of the family for 25-30 years. During a trip to Montreal, Helmut learned that his father had been checking his blog on a daily basis, as he commented that there were no new photos. Helmut's mother attempted to help out in the beginning by staying with the couple for a week. Unfortunately, her stay added more stress in the household, mainly due to her tentative nature and apprehension about doing things incorrectly. One can sense that the two women in Helmut's life—his wife and his mother—are fairly dissimilar individuals and that over the years Helmut had become much more accustomed to and appreciative of Maggie's overall assertiveness and way of being in the world. Nonetheless, it is Helmut's hope that affection for their newborn will bring all members of the family closer, regardless of any tensions that may exist.

The couple's envisioned future. Looking into the future, Maggie and Helmut envision what it would be like to raise their children in an intercultural and interfaith household. Given their appreciation for knowledge and intellect, they took a class offered by the Jewish Community Centre to learn about approaches to best incorporate holiday traditions when one couple member is Jewish and the other is not. The class addressed questions such as: How do you deal with a kid asking you about certain cultural things? How do you deal with the issue of the Christmas tree? How do you deal with having to go to somebody else's house who celebrates a different holiday? The couple learned that it was important for intercultural parents to explain things to their children and show them that they are strongly rooted in different traditions or

cultures. It is also important to teach them that their parents come from “different races and cultures” and that the family celebrates both of them.

The couple’s secret to a successful and long-lasting relationship. Lastly, Maggie and Helmut were invited to comment on their secret behind a successful and long-lasting relationship based on their own experience. Helmut revealed the following:

Personally, I think the attitude of both parties has to be one of openness and tolerance and understanding. And wanting to know and to sort of be supportive of your partner and be accepting of differences. I think...I didn’t know I would end up marrying a vegetarian but I completely respect Maggie’s choice. You know, I didn’t know I would end up marrying someone who is Jewish but, you know, I’m learning about Judaism, I’m learning about Maggie’s family...um...how they practice their flavour of Judaism. In terms of a secret though. I think it’s to be open-minded and I’m not sure that’s something you can change that easily. So maybe the secret is that if you’re starting perhaps an intercultural, interracial relationship and you’re very close minded or if you’re very resistant to change or intolerant it probably won’t work out.

As for Maggie, she noted the following:

I don’t think the advice I have would be particular for a Chinese-White situation. [...] I think it’s important to be a team...and be on the same team...you know. And you know, all those sort of cliché things that are so important. Like a foundation of love and respect and caring. I mean, I think part of what makes us work is a genuine respect for each other and despite the fact that the cultures are so different there’s a lot more similarities actually than you would think in terms of like, a respect for family, a respect for tradition, and engagement with culture. And so even though we come from different cultures, we

share a lot of the values around, you know, learning and working hard, being engaged with our families. They're in some ways more similar than they are different. So the way we express those things may be different. Like, you know, Helmut's family might do Chinese New Year, Christmas or the new moon ceremonies, mine might do Passover or Rosh Hashanah...but they're all reasons why our families get together and we share big meals, you know, we prioritize them because it's important to have time with family. And I don't know, one of the things that's really nice is we don't have to actually decide where we're going this year for Passover. You know, we'll always go to my house for Passover...we'll always go to his house for, you know...

For Maggie and Helmut, any successful couple relationship is built on a solid foundation of respect, love, care, and support for one another. Helmut pointed out, however, that a successful interethnic relationship also requires an attitude of openness, tolerance, and acceptance of differences. Not surprisingly, given the couple's appreciation for knowledge and intellect, they welcome differences due to the unique learning experiences provided. In their eyes, their children will have the advantage of inheriting a rich set of cultures and traditions. Lastly, Maggie added that despite salient differences between her culture and Helmut's culture, particularly in terms of customs followed and holidays celebrated, similarities are also prominent. Shared values around work ethics and connectedness to the family and culture are harmonizing ingredients in their relationship.

Central Themes in Maggie and Helmut's Story

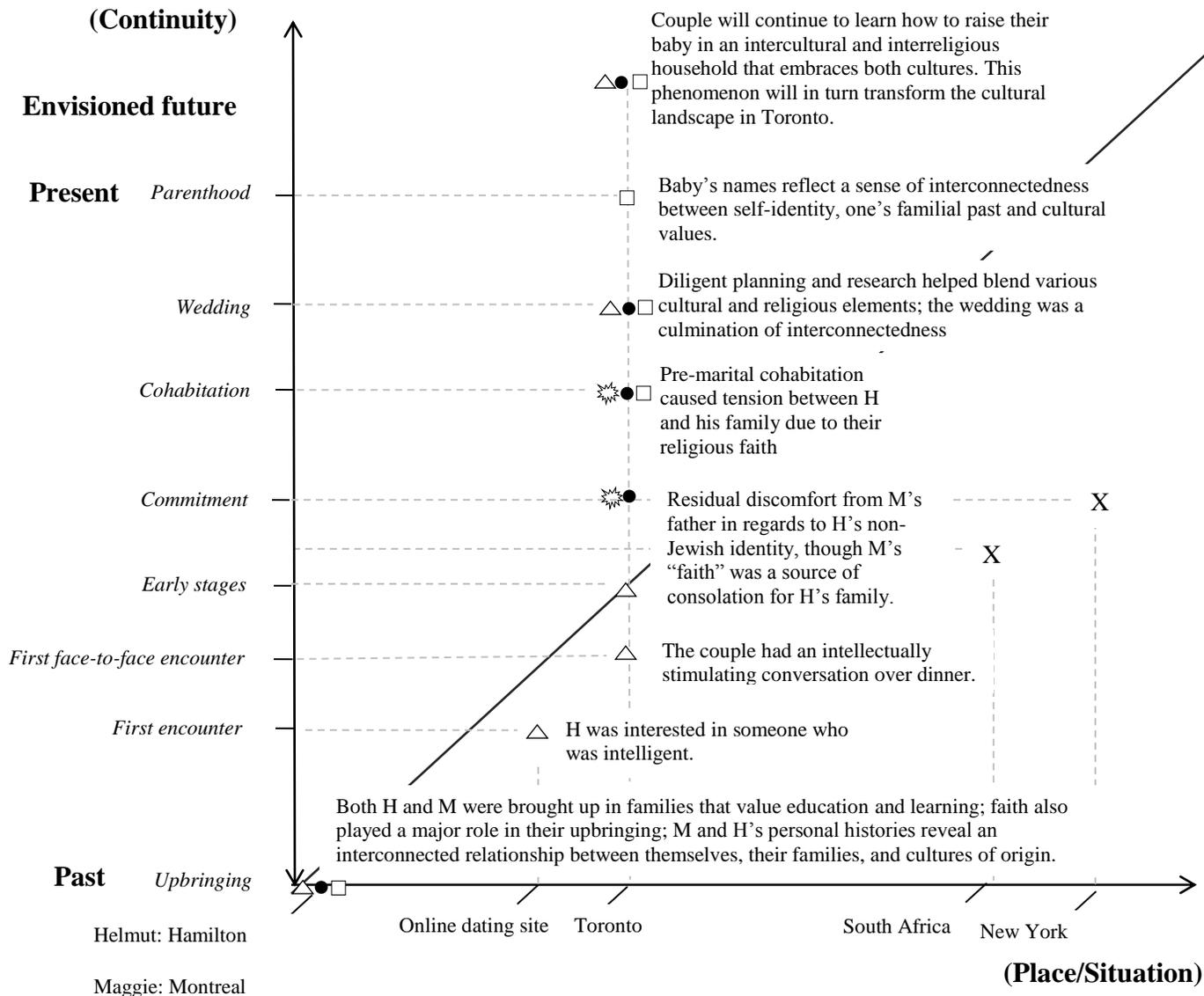
Maggie and Helmut's interview took place in their home located in a vibrant Toronto neighbourhood, where their relationship dynamics and recent entrance to parenthood were briefly experienced. At the time the couple consented to participate in the study, Maggie was

due to give birth. Veering towards the side of pessimism, there were doubts that the interview would actualize given the arrival of a new baby and my departure for Vancouver in several weeks. Evidently this was not the case. Maggie and Helmut agreed to be interviewed just five weeks after the baby was born. During the interview, one can easily sense a style of interaction characterized by respect for one another as Maggie and Helmut took turns attending to the baby.

Overall, the couple was very much aligned in their values and perception of things. They both took the lead in the conversation, although perhaps there was slightly less input from Maggie as she was attending to her baby's needs. Also apparent was the level of understanding the couple had for one another and their acceptance of each other's differences. Their disclosure of some very personal information (*e.g.*, Maggie's multiple miscarriages) was a reflection of a profound resilience in their relationship.

It is interesting to ponder that a few clicks on the computer when filtering a search on a website can bring two individuals with completely different histories (and who were unlikely to have met in real life) together. It may have been that their *appreciation for knowledge and intellect* (with Helmut being drawn to Maggie's intelligence) played a significant role in their match-making success. This form of appreciation becomes a central theme in the couple's story, alongside others such as *religion as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or tension* and *interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture* (see Figure 3 on the following page).

(Interaction: Personal and Social)



Central themes:

- △ Appreciation for knowledge and intellect
- Religion as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or tension
- Interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture
- ☀ Tension point
- X Central themes were not prominent in this particular relationship milestone

Figure 3. Maggie and Helmut’s relationship life map

Appreciation for knowledge and intellect. It goes without saying that Maggie and Helmut's high level of intellect and appreciation for knowledge permeated throughout the interview and were reflected in their responses to the interview questions. Not only were they able to draw upon their own unique experiences, they made references to other sources of information, such as journal articles, online blogs, a documentary, and information gathered from a course they took together. Further, the successful blending of two cultures at the couple's wedding, as compared to other couples they researched online, once again attests to the couple's meticulous nature and ability to apply knowledge in a meaningful way. It is worth mentioning this inquiry sparked Helmut's own interest in this area of study, prompting him to do some research prior to the interview and read up on the experiences of people who are also involved in interethnic relationships. Upon encountering something novel, he noted that his tendency is to approach existing resources so as to arrive at an informed opinion.

On a deeper level, the couple's appreciation for knowledge and intellect reflects their compatibility in values, values instilled in them by families that encouraged active learning. As illustrated in Figure 3, their appreciation for knowledge and intellect would contribute to their matchmaking success online. In the world of internet dating, users can form an impression of a potential partner's interests and values without having a face-to-face encounter. Generally speaking, they are likely to initiate contact with those whose profiles made them appear to be physically attractive, to have similar interests and values, to be in the same general age, and/or to have similar levels of education. After a series of face-to-face encounters with men who were clearly intimidated by Maggie's level of education, she decided to purposely mention the fact that she has a Ph.D. in her profile so as to fend off men who "cannot deal with the fact that you might be professionally successful." Helmut did not harbor such insecurities. Among other qualities,

intelligence had precisely been what Helmut was looking for in a partner, and Maggie's profile content understandably drew his attention. When it came to meeting face-to-face, their experience of their "successful" first date would further reveal the couple's appreciation for knowledge and intellect. Maggie was impressed by Helmut's "in depth research" of reputable restaurants in her neighborhood and their dinner would last nearly four hours, fueled by interesting conversations.

Throughout the couple's narrative, Maggie and Helmut's appreciation for knowledge and intellect are often translated in their ability to rely on their own inner resources (*e.g.* intelligence, knowledge, experience, openness, and tolerance) as well as external resources (*e.g.* family, online resources, media, and courses in the community) to navigate unfamiliar territories as their relationship progresses. For instance, the couple's successful arrangement of an intercultural and an interfaith wedding depended on their ability to apply the resources available to them (see Figure 3). Choosing the cultural elements that were deemed meaningful and deciding the best way to incorporate them was experienced as a unique learning opportunity. In fact, Helmut found that when compared to other Chinese-Jewish couples online, they had done a "much better job." Further down the road as the couple began to contemplate parenthood, they once again demonstrated their thirst for knowledge and ability to utilize resources upon sharing their experiences attending a course offered by the Jewish Community Centre called "Jewish Issues for Interfaith Couples" and the various insights they gained on raising children in a household where one parent is Jewish and the other is not. They also spoke of their desires to expose their child to Hebrew, Chinese, and a wide range of extracurricular activities offered in the community.

Religion as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or tension. Maggie and Helmut repeatedly touched on religious themes throughout their interview, beginning with their accounts of their socio-cultural backgrounds (see Figure 3). Maggie made the distinction between traditional and secular Judaism and clarified that her family practices the latter, in which Jewish holidays are celebrated as cultural traditions and not as religious events. Given that Maggie's family is "extremely culturally Jewish," her involvement with someone who is not Jewish had become a minor source of tension between her and her family, which she managed by setting clear boundaries of what she was willing or not willing to tolerate from them. Perhaps this form of union was perceived as a dilution of culture and a threat to Jewish survival. Although Maggie's parents have "come a long way" to accepting Helmut into their family, Maggie continues to sense lingering discomfort from her father in light of his comments. Fortunately for the couple, the matrilineal system of Judaism meant that the couple's children will be Jewish, regardless of Helmut's background. Had the genders been reversed, such in the case with Maggie's brother and his non-Jewish partner, family tension would have been much more palpable.

Contrary to Maggie's experience of Judaism as a cultural system and not a purely religious one in her family, Helmut's upbringing was steeped in religion. In his experience, his parents had a much stronger affinity to their Christian identity than their Chinese identity, and actions and choices were strongly dictated by religious values. Helmut's religious upbringing can be interpreted as a source of tension in his personal narrative, manifesting both within his psyche and outwardly in his relationship with his family of origin. Religion, with its set of moral codes and values, had gradually lost its meaning during Helmut's university years, leaving him feeling "adrift" and "conflicted." As his narrative suggests, his loss of faith would become and

continue to remain a source of tension between him and his parents. Though his disengagement from Christianity transpired many years ago, Helmut can sense “deep down” that his mother is still disappointed. Helmut vividly recalled the day he announced he was not going to church and how his mother reacted. He further recounted his mother’s reaction upon learning of the couple’s decision to cohabit before marriage (see Figure 3).

When Maggie and Helmut’s lives intersected, so did their religious backgrounds. As previously hinted in the couple’s narrative, Maggie’s Jewish background was a source of consolation for Helmut’s mother, given her sense that being with someone with *a* faith is better than being someone with *no* faith at all. To some extent, Helmut’s involvement with someone who has a faith had become a harmonizing agent in his relationship with his parents.

Religion as a source of self-expansion was most apparent when Maggie and Helmut recounted their wedding and their experiences as first-time parents (see Figure 3), points in time when the following questions arose: Who will solemnize our wedding? Will God be mentioned—and if so, whose? How do we harmoniously blend the religious and cultural elements we each find meaningful? And more importantly, how will our children be raised? While these questions can be uncomfortable to address, Maggie and Helmut have consistently been able to utilize their inner, as well as outer, resources to answer them. In the process of making meaning and seeking resolution, not only are the couple’s knowledge and awareness of these key issues expanded, but so is their capacity to accept and tolerate differences.

Interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture. In Maggie and Helmut’s sharing of their socio-cultural backgrounds, the self in the couple relationship became an important focus in their narrative. Plainly speaking, to fully capture the richness of their relationship, one must begin with an understanding of Maggie and Helmut’s personal journeys

before their lives intersected, as their strong sense of selves was apparent. Though coming from very distinctive backgrounds, their personal narratives shared a sense of interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture.

Regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, all individuals have one thing in common: they are all born into some type of family and culture. The development of the self is influenced by family dynamics and structures and the set of values, beliefs, customs, and traditions reflective of one's larger socio-cultural context. As Maggie and Helmut's narrative demonstrates, transformations in the self can also have an inverse effect, shifting family dynamics and the social order of one's cultural context. The self, family, and culture are thus interconnected; each has implications for the others. In Maggie's case, it can be said that her story came full circle. She shared how being raised by "extremely culturally Jewish" parents in a "tightly knit" Jewish community in Montreal shaped her strong Jewish identity and the career path she has chosen, one that involves extensive community work and reflected the social justice and altruistic values instilled to her as a child. Moreover, in our discussion of relationship histories, Maggie mentioned that as she "went out to the world" and was exposed to a diversity of people, she began to date men who were culturally different. This would stir up tension with her parents and push the family towards a different equilibrium.

Helmut's personal narrative also revealed certain interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture. Before he entered university his identity was largely shaped by his religious upbringing and the Chinese Christian community in which he was raised. Sometime in his third or fourth year of undergraduate studies Helmut's worldviews underwent a major transformation. He began "having doubts" and no longer felt his faith was a meaningful resource in his life. Inevitably, this led to a shift in his relationship with his parents, his friends, and the Chinese

Christian community he was heavily involved with. When he met Maggie several years later, his involvement with someone who has a faith would create yet another relational shift between him and his parents. Their gradual exposure to Jewish culture would develop into an active interest and respect for the various Jewish holidays and traditions.

Maggie and Helmut's wedding was a culmination of interconnectedness between the selves, families, and distinctive cultures (see Figure 3). The prefix "inter" is significant here as the couple proudly described their arrangement of an "intercultural" and "interfaith" wedding of 250 people, from the readings, blessings, and ceremonies integrated to the fine details incorporated in the *ketubah* (Jewish wedding contract) and wedding decorations. The *huppah*, or wedding canopy, hung in the couple's living room during the interview further serves as a visual embodiment of interconnectedness in the couple's relationship, with its various symbols and colors representing distinctive Jewish and Chinese traditions and its squares meaningfully crafted by close family members and friends.

As illustrated in Figure 3, interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture continues to be a central theme as the couple talk about raising their son in an interfaith and intercultural household. The selection of their son's name was a striking example. Maggie and Helmut decided on three names for their son--an English name, a Hebrew name (Hebrew version of his English name), and a Chinese name. His English given name was named after Maggie's late aunt and his English middle name is the Romanization of his Chinese name. With the help of Helmut's father, their son was given a Chinese name that reflected their family values and cleverly emulated the sound of his English name. Thus, to answer the popular Shakespearean question—What's in a name?—Maggie and Helmut's narrative suggests that a name contains

significant aspects of the self-identity, such as one's familial past and the values rooted in one's culture(s) of origin.

Lastly, Maggie and Helmut's future visions of raising a multiethnic child entail exposing him to the various holiday traditions, teaching him that his parents are of "different races and cultures and that the family celebrates both of them" (see Figure 3). Their parenthood experiences reveal a sense of interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture: their son's self-identity will be formed in the context of an intercultural and interfaith family, a phenomenon currently transforming the cultural landscape of Toronto. Their insights will be invaluable to future mothers and fathers of multiethnic children and further build on the existing resources.

Summary. Maggie and Helmut's narrative is a contemporary love story set in an era where online dating is ubiquitous. Whereas the choice of a partner once relied largely upon the individual's intuitions, the internet promises to create matches between suitable partners using tools and algorithms that draw upon data provided by millions of users. Such tools proved fruitful for Maggie and Helmut, and their matchmaking success was due in large part to their appreciation for knowledge and intellect and other areas of compatibility. Though differences in faith and culture exist and can become a source of tension between the couple or between the couple and their family members, the Maggie and Helmut have consistently utilized this form of appreciation alongside other inner and external resources to counter challenging situations, transforming them into self-expanding opportunities.

4. **Debra and Hans's Story: A Relationship Road Less Travelled**

Debra's socio-cultural background. Debra was born in Guangzhou, China in 1950 and immigrated to the United States with her family during her early childhood. Until age 10, Debra lived in an essentially all-Black neighbourhood in Cincinnati. As a Chinese family, this made them an exceptional case. Even upon relocating to New York many years later her father chose to steer clear of Chinese communities by moving to Long Island, a prominently White upper class region. There was a sense that her father looked down on the Chinese residing in Chinatown and did not want to be "smothered" by them. Debra mentioned that during her years in Cincinnati her English was characterized as "Black English"; in fact, she noted that if placed among a group of Black Americans she would still be able to "do black very well." Contrary to Hans' childhood experience, Debra recalled having only one White friend growing up.

At age 10, Debra's family moved from Cincinnati to Columbus to a mixed-race neighbourhood. While there was no official segregation, there were two communities clearly delineated by race with few mixed friendships. Debra and her sister "understood intuitively" that as the only Asians they would form friendships with either "the White or Black kids," and they chose to identify with the former. Naturally, Debra's way of speaking began to change as her "Black English" quickly receded.

At home, Debra and her two sisters spoke Cantonese with their parents. When conversing with one another, however, they would quickly switch to English. Debra indicated that her parents followed Chinese traditions as much as they could, particularly when they were founded upon superstitious beliefs. Debra described her mother as "full of superstitions," having practiced not only Chinese superstitions but also adopted American ones following their move to

the U.S.A. Debra felt she was constantly being “invoked” in terms of things she was transgressing and would often get “wacked on the head for doing something she had no idea was the wrong thing to do.”

Lastly, Debra characterized her family system as governed by patriarchal rules. Her parents were raised in traditional households and schooled in the “old Chinese way.” Although her mother was a strong, outspoken, and highly capable woman and a well-respected teacher, she would always defer to Debra’s father at home. What he believed in and stood for was always accepted as the “right way.” At times, Debra’s mother would try to soften his attitude about certain matters, but she always refrained from countering him. The strong patriarchal ideology in Debra’s family would later become a leading cause of Debra’s estrangement from her family.

Hans’ socio-cultural background. Hans was born in Yonkers, New York, in the mid-1940’s. He grew up in an almost all-White neighbourhood with only one Black kid in a school of 800 students. His ancestors had immigrated to New York around 100 to 200 years prior; hence, while his father’s side of the family were originally from Germany and mother’s was from Poland, Hans grew up in a household where family members self-identified as “American.” No one he knew in his family spoke their original language and rarely were customs or cultural traditions followed. Hans mentioned, however, that his family was rather religious, which Debra seemed to have strong feelings about. Hans’ grandfather and uncles were gifted musicians and church organists in Catholic churches, and during his late teens he considered attending a seminary. What changed his mind a few years later was a summer job he took working in a home for troubled youth. It was a multi-religious environment where he was required to participate in other religious observances. This experience weaned him away from the strict,

old-fashioned Catholicism he grew up with. Hans has over the years become rather agnostic and now sees Catholicism as a “cultural system” as much as a religious one.

Debra and Hans’s relationship histories. Debra had gone on dates with a number of men from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Given the miniscule pool of Chinese men in Columbus, she and her sister naturally assumed that it was acceptable and reasonable to marry someone outside their own racial and ethnic group. It became clear to them that this was not the case when Debra’s older sister announced her engagement to a Jewish man. Debra recalled her father’s reaction to their engagement as one of “apoplectic rage.” In fact, her father proceeded to phone the fiancée’s side of the family and “gave them a long harangue.” The same treatment would be directed to Debra’s sister on a daily basis, often times in the form of instilling guilt and shame. The strong opposition expressed by Debra’s father (as well as her fiancée’s side of the family) eventually dissolved her sister’s relationship. Debra and her sister came to the realization that marrying someone outside of their racial/ethnic group would result in strong family tensions. Perhaps a little too late, Debra had already started dating Hans during this period.

Hans’ dating history was somewhat limited prior to meeting Debra. He had a semi-serious relationship with an Italian immigrant, but due to differences in their levels of education and future aspirations, as well as his sense that his mother would not give them her blessing, Hans ultimately made the decision to end the relationship.

The couple’s first encounter and the early stages of their relationship. Debra and Hans met at Columbia University in New York City in 1969. The couple’s first meeting took place at a “bagel bash” at Barnard College, where Debra attended. Debra had spilled coffee on herself, and as any gentleman would do, Hans immediately offered his handkerchief. In Debra’s

recollection, it was a “ratty handkerchief.” She intended to wash it and return it to Hans, but given the state of “rattiness” she chose to discard it. This did not deter Hans’ from pursuing her. He recalled being rather charmed by Debra during their first encounter. Debra, on the other hand, treated the encounter rather casually. She recalled going on casual dates with two or three other men around the time she and Hans met.

Over time, Debra found her dates with Hans to be particularly interesting and intellectually stimulating. Having worked as a repairman for IBM throughout New York City, Hans was well-apprised of the events that took place in the city. Their aesthetic sensitivity took them to the ballet, the theatre, a dance competition, only to name of few. For a couple who have a preference for variety and a keen interest in the arts, New York City was no doubt their oyster. Debra further recalled meeting Hans’ “interesting,” “weird,” and “highly eccentric” friends during their dating days, whom she likened to characters on the modern day hit TV show *Big Bang Theory*. For Debra, meeting this “unlikely crew of people” through Hans made for an interesting experience and story. And as Debra and Hans became emotionally closer, Hans mentioned that they began reading books to one another, not as a “mushy romantic” gesture but because “books were so interesting.” Debra added that it was more like a “journalistic” kind of hobby.

Families’ reception of the couple’s relationship. Both Debra and Hans’s families did not receive their relationship warmly. In Hans’ case, although his mother (Hans’ father passed away when he was 13) did not openly express her disapproval, it was clear to Debra and Hans at the time that his mother harboured resentment over the fact that Debra was not Catholic and refused to convert. Hans maintained that the disapproval did not stem from Debra’s Chinese

background and that in fact, both his parents had great respect for Chinese people, partly because his father had worked in a setting where several Chinese scientists won the Nobel Prize.

Debra's impression was that everyone in Hans' family liked her with the exception of his mother. The couple stated the following:

Debra: It was really clear that, you know, I had certain values and principles, and becoming Catholic was definitely not one of them. [chuckles] And she... I mean Hans was ok about it, you know? It wasn't like he took sides. But it was clear from *her* point of view that the real barrier was my not being Catholic. But on the other hand I think she pretty much respected the fact that Hans kind of made a choice and respected that at the end of the day, you know, I was not going to become a Catholic...so she was either going to have to—

Hans: I always had the feeling that she had talked to other people in the family and the rest of the family said, "Don't stick your nose in. Keep out."

It is clear from the above statement that in response to Hans' mother's silent objections, personal and family boundaries were made to protect the integrity of their relationship. Debra's family, on the other hand, did not find out about their partnership until just prior to the wedding. Debra chose to conceal it from them because she was not ready to endure the same pressure her older sister had endured.

Commitment. Debra and Hans shared a deep level of intellectual curiosity that took them beyond conventional ways of living. Both were raised in families that valued education. In Debra's case, her father had been well-educated and highly respected within the Chinese community. He believed education helped raise one's stature, as it was clear to him that as Chinese they were viewed as "second class citizens." Debra was raised to believe that to gain

any status in society, she had to be better educated, more articulate, and try harder than others because she was “starting from so far behind.” Hence, the notion of gaining prestige through education was instilled in Debra from an early age.

In addition to shared values, Debra and Hans have had the deepest respect for one another since the early stages of their relationship. Qualities Debra and Hans each possessed contributed to the couple’s strong commitment to their relationship, with Hans’ maturity, high intellect, kindness, generosity, and willingness to forgo his interest on other’s behalf, and Debra’s vivacious and dauntless nature, sharpness, and genuineness being their salient traits. As a couple, they also shared a willingness and openness to doing things quite spontaneously and not be tied down by responsibilities and conventionality, a trait in their relationship that would become a major theme in their story. The couple made meaning of this in the following exchange:

Hans: Debra had more genuine openness than I did for sure. I mean—

Debra: I mean he was willing to be dragged along. [laughs]

Hans: Yeah yeah.

Debra: It’s like “Ok, I guess this is a good idea. Why not, eh?”

Hans: But if I was left to my own devices I would have been much more conservative and not necessarily—

Debra: Probably, but you know you were pretty willing to and it kind of worked out. I mean, you also tried a bunch of things though. I mean I think growing up out of a fairly working class background, part of it is though I think they were old fashioned European in the sense that even though many of their family were working class, they really had aspirations to be much more. You almost sort of solved that old country gentility that was there. [...] Like your family actually read a great deal and they actually knew the arts—

Hans: There were musicians—

Debra: Your uncle was a musician...they painted. You know, his aunt painted, painted quite well. Both uncles were musicians, so they actually had quite a background. So even though, it was sort of like “Ok, we can be working class people but we actually have something that was much broader than that.” So it was kind of interesting. And I think you also embodied that a lot more for them by being able to step out of...and just being very smart...it was easier for you to kind of get out of that environment.

The above dialogue is exemplary of the couple’s respect and positive regard for one another. In many instances throughout the interview they would consistently credit each other for the success of their 40-year marriage.

The wedding. When Debra introduced Hans to her family for the first time it was to announce their engagement. Her father’s reaction was, again, one of “apoplectic rage,” which Debra made sense of in the following statement:

I think one of his underlying beliefs--cuz [sic] he’d been in the war and lived over here-- and he said to me, “I know that many times is that American men they only use Chinese women. These marriages don’t last. After a while they’ll just use you and leave you. You know what the rate of divorce is...[...] American men have no real interest in Chinese women.” And I think it was a little bit reflecting kind of his knowledge and his experiences and the whole bad kinds, war time stereotypes. In fact he’d gone back to live in China and only came back to the U.S. because he was forced to because of political situation. So I don’t think he ever had any sense of wanting to really live in America. I don’t think he ever felt sort of acculturated in American culture, so he was still very much Chinese, even though he had lived here since he was about 13 years old.

The above excerpt reflects Debra's well-rounded understanding of her father's loyalties to China, his acculturation challenges, and sentiments about interethnic marriages based on war time stereotypes.

Debra and Hans followed through with the wedding plans despite her father's disapproval. They pride themselves on having had a "marvellous wedding" that was arranged rather efficiently. Debra's father forbade her mother and sisters to attend the wedding and virtually cut off all relationships with them. Debra talked about this quite indifferently, indicating that she had expected this outcome all along. All of Hans' close family members, on the other hand, attended the couple's wedding. It took place in a Catholic church "for Hans's mother's sake." As Debra's family did not attend the wedding, there was no need to incorporate Chinese components.

Married life. The couple's story now takes an interesting turn as they begin to experience life as a married couple. In an act of spontaneity, they "got in the car, started driving and ended up in Alaska" immediately after the wedding. The couple had no specific trajectory in mind. According to Debra, they drove to Pennsylvania, then Ontario, where Hans' aunt resided at the time, and "kept driving west" until they reached Alaska. The move to Alaska was an important turning point in the couple's relationship and was meaningful in various ways. Instinctively, they knew that remaining in New York would mean being subjected to "smothering" on Han's side of the family and tensions on Debra's side. They felt they needed to break away from their families in an effort to nurture and preserve their relationship. Further, Debra felt that Alaska provided a lifestyle that further consolidated their personalities and their willingness to "take things on as they came."

Debra and Hans stayed in Alaska for two and a half years, much longer than they had intended to stay. The couple genuinely liked it there and experienced it as a “nice adventure.” They appreciated its seclusion, the mountains, the “granola culture,” and the lifestyle the environment had to offer. The couple quickly developed a passion for outdoor activities such as camping, climbing, and hiking, and established relationships with fellow mountaineers, climbers, and travellers. As an interethnic couple, they faced very little difficulties fitting into a community where most of the people they met were essentially outsiders. The couple met people from all walks of life whom they instantly formed a familial bond with. During this time frame Debra had no contact with her father and fairly limited contact with her mother and sisters.

Debra and Hans moved back to New York from Alaska when Debra’s sister got married. They both finished their degrees at Columbia and held jobs in the city for a short period of time. Their return marked a point of reconciliation with Debra’s father. His own niece had married a White man at the time, and Debra felt that her father had come to accept her relationship with Hans, as he was no longer “the only person going through this.” From that point onwards, the couple experienced a major transformation in their relationship with Debra’s family.

Debra and Hans’s families met for the first time at Debra’s sister’s wedding. The two families remained distant and cordial, which Debra attributed to major differences in their respective cultures and customs.

The couple’s story continues to take us beyond borders and contexts. Shortly after they moved back to New York City they realized they “hated it.” They felt the city advantages were no comparison to the opportunity for skiing, climbing, and access to the outdoors. The city felt congested, with too much traffic and too many people, despite the availability of interesting job

opportunities. The couple left New York City for a second time and returned to Alaska in 1974 and remained there for nearly four years.

Sometime in the late '70s Debra and Hans “wandered into Canada, drove across the country and parked themselves at McGill,” where the couple eventually pursued their doctorate degrees. Debra graduated first and accepted a job offer in Oklahoma that aligned with her research interests. Hans too obtained a position in the same academic institution while finishing up his dissertation. Debra spoke of Oklahoma in the following fashion:

Someone once described it as the best explanation. It was like right smack dab between Bible belt and red neck country. Just north of us was Kansas, which was like the total Bible belt and just below us was red neck. These were like your most down-to-earth Americans that you could ever get. Half of them were gun toting and half of them were Bible toting [laughs]. And between the two of them it was like, yes! This is the heartland of America! [laughs]

Oklahoma was clearly not the most enchanting place for Debra and Hans. They were unimpressed by its culture and the thought of giving up cross-country skiing was rather displeasing. Debra was also keenly aware of the racial prejudice in Oklahoma, particularly against African and Native Americans; however, being immersed in a university environment and working in cross-cultural studies meant that she and Hans were sheltered from it.

After three years of what Debra described as a “strange” experience in Oklahoma, the couple made their way to Windsor, Ontario, where they both obtained positions at an academic institution. Both partners felt Canada was a good place to reside and start a family. At the time, Bush Senior was running for re-election in the U.S.A., and his campaign tagline was “a kinder and gentler nation,” and the couple realized that was Canada. They felt that Canada had much

less prejudice and racial discrimination, more concern for the social welfare of all people, a smaller gap between the rich and the poor, and was overall less “competitive and outrageously materialistic.”

Parenthood. The couple opened themselves for adoption and by the late ‘80s they had adopted a Chinese girl and a Vietnamese boy. Due to certain medical conditions, both children had initially been held out from adoption. Once stabilized, the adoption agency approached the couple and asked if they were interested. Debra and Hans, being consistently open-minded, flexible, and undeterred by the potential health implications, happily accepted the offers.

According to the couple, starting a family was another turning point in their lives. Although their children became the focus of what they did, parenthood did not take away their couple time. In fact, during the early years of parenthood, Debra and Hans did joint teaching together, collaborated on research projects, and at one point shared a large office where a crib was set up so their children could sleep in it. When asked about social reactions to the couple’s transcultural adoption, Debra made the following comment:

There used to be. I mean [daughter’s name] would talk about the fact that number one, Hans was older, and his hair went white fairly early, they would sort of look at her very odd. And a few people thought maybe he was sort of like her grandfather. And I remember we sort of had some people that we’ve known from before were saying to someone else, they said, “Yeah, we saw Debra and Hans and their kids and the girl looks a whole lot more like Debra than Hans.” [Hans laughs] Ok! Well, that makes sense. People were sort of, you know, very sensitive about the whole thing.

Hans: Exactly.

Debra: But I think more and more now because there's so many interracial couples that it's not so... but in the beginning obviously a lot more, kind of, you know, reaction, but I think we kind of ignored it. And I think our kids kind of learned how to ignore it. Yeah, they really pay no attention—I remember [daughter's name] came home one day and she said somebody was teasing her about being Chinese. She says, "I'm not Chinese, I'm a Canadian." She was very insistent that she was Canadian. We tried to send them to Chinese school, a language school, they would have none of it. [chuckles]

The above excerpt touched on issues such as transcultural adoption and social reactions as perceived by the couple. It also addressed the issue of ethnic/racial identity among children raised in multicultural families.

Similar to many Chinese families, Debra and Hans tried to expose their children to different languages (Chinese and French) and piano, both of which their children hated and eventually gave up for more "Canadian" activities such as hockey, figure skating, and riding. The couple described their children's social circles as predominantly "White" and that most of the activities they engaged in as fairly "mainstream." Finally, they added that despite being "workaholics," the couple would consistently make efforts to go on holidays with their children.

In terms of religious upbringing, the couple baptized their children when they were very young, which they felt was more of an appeasement to Hans' mother than a true religious ceremony. The children also went to a Catholic church in their early years more as a social activity and were never confirmed. They were later transferred to a Lutheran school as better educational opportunities were presented.

Debra and Hans noted a series of professional milestones in the last 20 years. In the early '90s the couple did their sabbatical in France, where Hans would end up teaching for several

summers. And in the following decade or so, Debra travelled extensively for her own consulting and volunteer work while Hans undertook much of the primary childcare responsibilities.

Present-day: Empty nest. Debra and Hans remain active in their professional realms, travelling regularly between Toronto and Windsor where they work, respectively. Although their adult children no longer live with them, Debra noted the following:

And we, quite frankly, we do a lot as a family. Like we don't think we take any holidays without the kids. We drag them along too...I think we always did things. I mean I noticed a lot of my friends who do like separate holidays, for instance. It just never would have occurred to us.

Work and family are the couple's primary focus at the present time. Unlike many couples, the couple were married with no children throughout the first 13 years of their marriage. To date, they have settled in the same home for over two decades.

The couple's envisioned future. Debra and Hans anticipate their lives to revolve around similar themes in the near future. Hans will likely retire in two years and do some side teaching so long as he is in good health. Debra has no plans to retire in the near future, though if she did and Hans was healthy, the couple would ideally relocate to Quebec or another "snow environment." On death and dying, Hans is wholeheartedly supportive of Debra being cremated despite his Catholic upbringing.

The couple do not foresee any major cultural issues arising in the years ahead. While neither of their children is particularly drawn to dating Asians, they also do not reject identifying with them. As Debra would state about her family, "We have never relied on ethnicity to give us an advantage, and we definitely have not felt hampered by it."

The couple's secret to their successful and long-lasting relationship. At the end of the interview the couple was invited to share their secret of a successful and long-lasting relationship. Debra asserted that all couples need to share things in common, though culture does not need to be one of them. Hans extended this by highlighting the importance of shared values, such as values around commitment and “being in a relationship with one another.” Lastly, the couple suggested that while a lack of family support evoked a sense of isolation, they sought refuge in shared values, interests, and pursuits.

Central Themes in Debra and Hans's Story

Generally speaking, Debra took the lead in recounting the various events in their relationship, which was perhaps a reflection of their particular relationship dynamic. It was very clear during our time together that they have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for one another. It was astounding to see that after 40 years of marriage the couple showed no signs of jadedness. Debra and Hans not only remain active in their own professions but continue to engage in activities as a family and couple. What is Hans and Debra's secret to a successful and long-lasting relationship? How does a relationship remain unscathed when surrounded by “stormy family disruptions?” Debra and Hans's story encourages couples to hold on to shared values, interests, and pursuits, allowing these to act as anchors in their relationships.

As one can imagine, uncovering the full story of Debra and Hans's relationship would have been unlikely, due to the usual time and space constraints associated with dissertations. Nonetheless, the couple was able to capture the essence of their relationship experience within a two-hour time frame. Their story spans an impressive four decades, undergoing major shifts in time, culture, and context. Within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), context and time are major orienting concepts in the couple's

story, with the former playing a crucial role in shaping Debra and Hans's personal identities as well as their identity as a couple. In spite of numerous contextual and temporal transitions in the couple's story, several themes have been an undying constant --*courage, openness to experience, and family connectedness and separation* (see Figure 4 on the following page).

Courage. Taking a relationship road less travelled requires courage. Debra and Hans' tenacity was first made apparent when they talked about weathering their families' disruptions with respect to marriage (see Figure 4). Debra had witnessed the dissolution of her sister's engagement with a Jewish man as a result of family opposition. She had been told by her father that "American men only use Chinese women" and that "these marriages don't last," statements which Debra believe reflected the wartime stereotypes harbored by Chinese men of his generation. Yet, despite being raised in a household where her father always "had the final word," Debra made a firm decision that she would not defer to him. As for Hans, he had undertaken the role of a parental figure for his younger brother after their father passed away at age 13. When his loyalty to his mother and brother conflicted with his relationship with Debra, Hans chose to take measures to preserve the latter. Hence, in an effort to protect their relationship from interference in Debra's family and enmeshment in Hans' family, the couple ventured into Alaska, where they essentially isolated themselves for nearly three years. This decision reveals the couple's courage to disengage from their families of origin for the sake of the relationship. It further reflects their courage to withstand emotional pain and loss.

Alaska was an important chapter in Debra and Hans' lived experience. Moving away from New York City to a remote region in the U.S.A. meant they no longer had access to family resources, their former support systems, and the various activities readily available in big cities.

(Continuity)

(Interaction: Personal and Social)

Envisioned future

Present

Empty nest

Parenthood

Wedding

Commitment

Early stages

First encounter

Past *Upbringing*

Hans: Yonkers (New York)

Debra: Guangzhou, Ohio, and New York

New York

Alaska

Montreal

Oklahoma

Ontario (Windsor & Toronto) and various contexts where the couple travelled for work

(Place/Situation)

△ Lifelong commitment

H and D continue to engage in activities as a couple and with their children, albeit busy work and travel schedules.

Couple open themselves for adoption and were undeterred by their children's potential health implications. There were shifts between family togetherness and separation as the couple travelled for work.

Couple "wandered" into Canada and are once again separate from their families.

X Back to Alaska

□ Reconciliation with D's family

△●□ Couple ventured into Alaska in an act of spontaneity and isolated themselves from their families for 2.5 yrs.

Couple got married despite family disruptions. Marriage marked the beginning of couple's separation with their families.

H's mother was upset that D was not Catholic and D's father disapproved of couple's engagement.

● Couple went on interesting dates and were open to trying new things together.

D's dating history and H's family background reveal openness to experience.

Central themes:

△ Courage

● Openness to experience

□ Family togetherness and separation

⊛ Tension point

X Central themes were not prominent in this particular relationship milestone.

Figure 4. Debra and Hans' relationship life map

Alaska thus tested the couple's ability to rely on their inner resources to pave the way for a new lifestyle (see Figure 4). One major resource was their courage, one of "doing things spontaneously," letting go of familiarity, and being open-minded. Looking back, the couple likened their three-year experience in Alaska to an "adventure," and owing to Debra's young age and Hans still being "malleable enough," the couple felt it "consolidated that ability to take things on as they came" and defined their couple identity.

Perhaps it was this "consolidated ability to take things as they come" that propelled Debra and Hans into a lifelong path of courageous living. Throughout the couple's 40-year relationship, they consistently demonstrated the courage to shift contexts and not be tied down by a specific setting, as illustrated in Figure 4. New York, Alaska, Oklahoma, Montreal, Windsor, Toronto, France were among the many places the couple called "home." Even after settling permanently in Canada and starting a family, the couple would frequently travel for work and take turns undertaking childcare responsibilities. Further, the couple's willingness to adopt two children who were not newborns and who had health complications attests to the tremendous resilience of their relationship and their courage to face challenges head on (see Figure 4).

Debra and Hans' 40-year marriage reflects their courage to commit to a lifelong partnership. Early on in their relationship Debra had told Hans that she wanted to be "permanently married." The couple's views on marriage is absent of the contemporary mentality that "Oh well, if this didn't work out we'll move on to something else," as Debra put it. Running away from challenges was not an option. The couple believed that marriage is a lifelong commitment, maintained by strong family values and of placing great value on "being in a relationship with each other." More importantly, as their narrative suggests, the couple has been

able to withstand hardships and weather conditions that might have undermined their relationship on account of their ability to live courageously and “taking things on as they came,” qualities in their relationship that developed early on in Alaska.

Openness to experience. During the interview, it became clear that Debra and Hans share a similar personality trait--openness to experience. In the context of this narrative, it meant they have high aesthetic sensitivity, strong intellectual curiosity, and a preference for novelty and variety. It is worth mentioning that the word “interesting” was cited 25 times throughout the interview to describe the various events, situations, and people the couple have come across over the years. The fact that they found so many of these experiences “interesting” meant that many life occurrences arouse their interest and curiosity, thus reflecting a shared attitude of openness to experiences old and new.

Openness to experience was first apparent when the couple discussed their personal histories (see Figure 4). Debra mentioned that prior to meeting Hans she had dated men from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Hans indicated that despite coming from a working class family, his family members were generally well-read and understood a great deal about the arts. Several members of his family were musicians and painters. During the relationship’s earliest stages, Debra and Hans suggested that they were drawn to each other’s openness to experience (see Figure 4). Debra found Hans to be “intelligent and knowledgeable;” he knew “a lot of nifty places” in the city which resulted in a long series of “good dates,” whether it was going to the ballet, the theatre, a dance competition, or reading books to each other as a journalistic hobby, only to name a few. Hans was charmed by Debra’s sharpness and high energy: “It was just wonderful to be around her, and she’s just, wanting to experiment to do things.” He further credited Debra for having a more genuine openness than he did, and suggested that if he had

been left to his own devices he would have led a much more conservative lifestyle, to which Debra responded: “He was willing to be dragged along.” Aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual curiosity, and a preference for novelty and variety were thus areas of compatibility that would help build a solid foundation for their future relationship and later constitute a defining feature of their couple identity.

Debra and Hans’ life as a married couple would not take so many twists and turns had they not been open to new experiences. The various contexts to which they called home and the diversity of jobs they each held over the years are exemplary of their openness and adaptability to change. Although spontaneity was a major driving force in their moving from one place to another, the experiences gained throughout their journeys uncovered what the couple liked and disliked, such as their passion for cross-country skiing, their strong distaste towards big cities such as New York, the socio-cultural and political dissimilarities between Canada and the U.S.A., and their preference for “snowy environments.” Their adventures across time and context were not lost in vain. Each chapter had a meaning and purpose. New York City gave birth to their relationship and sparked intellectual momentum; Alaska was an unexpected adventure where the couple’s personalities and value systems were consolidated; Oklahoma marked a period of reflection and reaffirmation of their shared values; and, Canada became the country where the couple ultimately planted their family roots. Experience, in essence, played a vital role in shaping Debra and Hans’ lives.

The couple’s narrative suggests that in the face of changes or new opportunities, they do not ask themselves why they ought to undertake them, but “why not?” Time and time again Debra and Hans have demonstrated an openness to step out of their comfort zones and venture into unknown territory. Perhaps an additional “secret” to the couple’s relationship endurance can

be attributed to their openness to experience. As all experiences present an opportunity for further growth, Debra and Hans' active engagement in life means their relationship undergoes constant growth and evolution, weathering the sense of stagnation that plagues so many long-term relationships.

Family togetherness and separation. Family togetherness and separation can be visualized as a pursuit/withdrawal cycle in the couple's story. As indicated in Figure 4, family connectedness was compromised when Debra and Hans both pursued a relationship that transgressed their families' comfort zone. The couple resorted to withdrawing and separating from their families in an effort to preserve their relationship and relieve themselves from ongoing tensions and interference. Interestingly, Debra's father had chosen a similar path decades prior when he insulated his family from being "smothered" by Chinese communities. Upon returning to New York from Alaska, Debra and Hans reconnected with their families, with Debra's reconciliation with her father marking a major turning point in their story. However, given their distaste for big cities and nostalgia for the great outdoors, the couple withdrew once again from the context where their families resided, this time moving away permanently.

The continuous pursuit/withdrawal cycle in family dynamics is also evident in the couple relationship itself. Debra and Hans had made a conscious decision to not have children during the first 13 years of their marriage. When the desire to become parents did emerge, the couple pursued it by opening themselves up for adoption. In the years to come, Debra and Hans would travel extensively for work and take turns taking on primary childcare responsibilities. The "normal" family routines such as picking up the kids and having dinner together were replaced by regular adjustments to new schedules and shifts between togetherness and separation as a

family. Though challenging at times, the couple managed to achieve a workable rhythm in this way of life.

As illustrated in Figure 4, they currently travel regularly between Toronto, where Debra works, and Windsor, where Hans, works. Debra continues to travel abroad extensively for work, yet the couple still manage to make time for themselves and their adult children. Debra remarked that they “do a lot as a family” and it would never occur to her and Hans to go on holidays without their children, something she noticed many of her friends do. Hence, insofar as the couple remain active in their professional realms, their relationship will be marked by recurrent shifts between family togetherness and separation.

Summary. Debra and Hans’s story is one that reflects the constant growth and evolution of a relationship through courageous living, the ability to persevere in the face of obstacles and challenges, a genuine openness to the wealth of experience that life has to offer, and the dynamism of family relationships. It is a hopeful testament to the notion that a relationship can remain resilient even in the face of scarce family resources, insofar as it is founded upon shared values, interests, and pursuits, and a firm commitment to the relationship, for better or for worse.

5. Sarah and Jason’s Story: Bridging Cultures through Familial Pillars

Sarah’s socio-cultural background. Sarah was born in the mid-1980s and raised in Thornhill, a prominently Jewish community in the Greater Toronto Area. She is one of three daughters. Her mother’s side of the family is from Canada for the last two generations whereas her father was born in Israel to Holocaust survivors and immigrated to Canada as a young child. Sarah grew up with a large circle of friends that were predominantly Jewish, though she did have friends of different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Sarah described her cultural upbringing as one that valued family and humanitarianism, and holidays were viewed more as family time than religious commemorations. An ongoing joke in the family is that Sarah's mother has been on maternity leave since the oldest daughter was born. It was important for her mother to be fully involved in her daughters' lives, whether it was taking on the role of a homemaker or volunteering at her daughters' elementary school. Sarah's father worked hard during the week, communicating the value of strong work ethics, but weekends were devoted to family time. Her mother made consistent efforts to involve the family in community events.

Religion has never been a salient feature in Sarah's family culture. Her father would shed light on the atrocities committed in the name of religion and encourage his three daughters to "treat others the way they want to be treated." In recent years, however, Sarah has developed a newfound interest in learning about Judaism, which was sparked by a Jewish experience course she took in high school. She found there was significant value and meaning in many of its religious teachings. Several years later Sarah embarked on her 10-day Birthright trip (*i.e.*, a free 10-day heritage trip to Israel for young Jewish adults), an experience she described nostalgically as "amazing," "interesting," and "unique." A highlight experience was her group's visit to the Wailing Wall, where they danced and people would join in. There was a strong sense of community and interconnectedness, an experience Sarah has only experienced in Israel. According to Sarah, it is a well-known fact that young adults who go on their Birthright trip either "love it or hate it." Sarah belonged to the former group, having developed a profound respect for Judaism and gained a newfound pride in her Jewish heritage.

Jason's socio-cultural background. Jason was born in the early 1980s in Hamilton, a predominantly White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant community in Ontario. His mother, who is

originally from Canton but moved to Hong Kong as a child, met his father, a Chinese descendant from Macau, in Ontario in the late '70s. Jason is the first of two children. During his early childhood his family relocated to Burlington, as his parents felt it was a more ideal environment to raise children. Being the only visible minority in his elementary school of approximately 500 people, Jason recalled being teased about his physical appearance and speaking Cantonese to his parents, which he recognizes is a product of ignorance and lack of cultural sensitivity.

During the first four years of his life, Jason spoke entirely in Cantonese in the household. His exposure to English at the time was mainly through Sesame Street and other children's shows. Through kindergarten and grade one Jason took English as a Second Language and by grade two he learned the language quickly enough such that he was placed in the advanced class for English. Jason's mother had been fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English since before he was born. As he became more proficient in English, his conversations with his mother developed into a mixture of English and Chinese. To this day Jason speaks exclusively in Cantonese with his father, and like many first generation Chinese Canadians, Jason went to Chinese school one day a week until grade 12 as an extracurricular activity. He mentioned that his Chinese reading and writing have remained limited to the most basic characters, such as those found on a menu.

Over the years Jason's social circle expanded to include more Chinese peers, beginning from Chinese school. He noted a major distinction between his relationships with his Chinese friends and those with his White friends in that the former allows for the parents to establish friendships with each other, as they share a common language.

Jason also talked about being "ethnically Chinese" but not necessarily being "culturally Chinese." He admitted possessing limited knowledge on Chinese culture, a fact that came to

light during the planning of the wedding. Regarding values upheld in the family, Jason mentioned strong work ethics as something instilled in him at a young age, though he views it as more of an “immigrant, hard-working” value rather than one that is exclusively Chinese. Furthermore, Jason suggested that high social status is something his mother’s side of the family looked upon favourably, and which ultimately created a rift between his mother and her family, perhaps given the fact that Jason’s father is a welder and his mother comes from a “well-to-do” family. As a result of several incidents where Jason felt he was poorly treated by his extended family members, he decided against extending wedding invitations to them, with the exception of an aunt whom he is relatively close to.

Sarah and Jason’s relationship histories. Sarah dated White men prior to meeting Jason, two of whom were Jewish. These relationships taught her more about herself than any other lesson. She gained a fuller awareness of what she desires in a relationship and would not hesitate to terminate it if there was a lack of connection in its early stages.

Prior to Sarah, Jason dated predominantly White women, with the exception of one American-born Chinese girl and one Canadian-born East Indian girl. He did not recall any significant differences in relationship dynamics based on culture. Women he dated tended to be westernized like he is and with whom he shared similar interests, values, and belief systems. One trait Jason noticed he has difficulties tolerating is strong religiosity, particularly when beliefs embedded within the religion are restrictive and rigid in nature. He recalled dating someone who was “very Catholic” and whose family was blatantly racist and did not believe in such things as evolution. Jason found their beliefs “troubling” and quickly became aware that the relationship would not be worth pursuing.

The couple's first encounter and the early stages of their relationship. A lack of connection was certainly not something Sarah experienced in her first encounter with Jason at their mutual friend's wedding. Leading up to the event Sarah spent the summer telling her female friends that she planned to meet her future husband at the wedding, without having the slightest expectations that it would actualize. At the wedding, the bride's sister asked Jason to hold her "sequin-y, sparkly purse" momentarily, a sight that Sarah found humorous. She asked Jason if she could take a photo of him holding the purse in a "nice, girly way" [Sarah demonstrates the gesture as she speaks]. Later in the evening, the couple engaged in a lengthy conversation while dancing the evening away. A week later they went on their first date, to which Jason was late for due to a delayed flight. Sarah still agreed to meet up, despite the lateness of the hour. Jason had left a lasting impression on her the week prior, but most importantly, one of their mutual friends whom she considered trustworthy had assured her that Jason was a "good guy."

Sarah and Jason continued to see each other on a weekly basis for one month before opening up the "so-what-are-we" conversation. In light of Sarah's past dating experiences, she admitted that her attraction towards a Chinese male somewhat "caught her off guard." Prior to meeting Jason, she felt that of the three daughters in her family, she would have been the most likely to marry someone who was Jewish, given her burgeoning interest in Judaism.

Families' reception of the couple's relationship. Sarah and Jason's respective families were generally supportive of their relationship since its inception. During her younger years, Sarah's father had suggested that as long as his daughters were treated well in their relationships, their partners' cultural backgrounds would be irrelevant.

Jason denied any experiences of parental aversion towards his partner's racial backgrounds. For one, the dating pool for Chinese partners in the communities he grew up in were extremely small. Secondly, Jason suggests that his mother's support stems from her own struggles with her family. Given the ill treatment subjected to Jason's father by his mother's side of the family, there has been a conscious effort on his parents' part to not put Jason in the same situation. In fact, during one of Sarah's exchanges with Jason's mother, the latter has expressed her joy over the joining of the two families and described their occasional gatherings as having a "nice family atmosphere." Jason added that during these family gatherings, despite language barriers between Jason's father and Sarah's family, there is a sense of ease on his part and his mother's part to play the role of a translator and serve as bridges between two cultures. Sarah, on the other hand, admitted that language barrier between her and Jason's father has been somewhat challenging. She expressed a desire to form a stronger bond with her father-in-law. Aware of the fact that he will unlikely learn English at this point in his life, Sarah has taken the initiative to learn Cantonese, an effort that has thus far been unsuccessful.

Commitment. The couple was invited to comment on aspects of their relationship that promoted commitment. Both members talked about the level of comfort experienced since their first encounter and envisioning one another as life-long partners very early on in the relationship. Both shared the sentiment that they could "spend the rest of their lives together." The couple share a few common interests, such as athletic sports and outdoor activities; however, Sarah noted that many of their conversations revolved around differences, uncovering mysteries of the other, and learning about each other's culture. One memorable account was Jason's first Passover with Sarah's family and learning about the differences in dining etiquettes between Chinese and Jewish cultures. Jason felt the need to eat everything on his plate given the Chinese

tradition to eat “some of everything,” even if there were eight or nine dishes. After exceeding his capacity and needing to lie down, he was relieved to learn that it was not impolite in Jewish tradition to leave food on his plate.

Jason shared his experience of becoming a member of Sarah’s family:

Jason: I look forward to the Jewish holidays.

Sarah: He just likes the food.

Jason: The food’s good, but it’s also, it’s cool hanging out with your family, like there’s parts of my family, like the one side of my dad’s side and like one set of my aunts and uncles, I like hanging out with, but they’re all older than my dad. My dad is one of the younger ones. And my mom’s side, I don’t know, but all their kids are in their late forties now. I didn’t have as much of a relationship with my cousins, for example, as you do. And like it’s fun, you know, like going to Rosh Hashanah, your whole family is there. Like it’s something which I look forward to. And everybody’s really been very...not that they actively had to do it, but like they’re very inclusive. I don’t feel, like even the first time I went, I didn’t feel like I was out of place.

Throughout the couple’s story, they talked about the support and inclusiveness both families have demonstrated since their relationship began, which in their eyes has been a major “benefit,” given Sarah and Jason’s close relationships with their respective families. The couple felt that any tension or apprehension experienced on any side would have undermined their commitment for one another.

Sarah moved in with Jason one year into the relationship. She had been accepted to do her Master’s at the University of Toronto and the commute from Thornhill and back would be extremely time-consuming. From a logistical standpoint, it made sense for Sarah to move

downtown, but she would not have done so unless she and Jason felt they were in a committed relationship.

Present-day: Newly weds. Sarah and Jason's engagement took place in England. They recalled the early stages of their wedding preparation being somewhat stressful, as cultural differences imposed certain restrictions on the wedding venue, date, and food options at the reception. The couple could not get married in a synagogue, nor did they want to get married in a church. Further, Sarah and her family believed in the continuation of family traditions and customs, vehicles through which their Jewish identity can be carried on. Marrying in a church would stand against these beliefs. Finding the wedding date in the autumn was complicated by the fact that certain dates are considered inauspicious by the Chinese and that traditionally, Jewish people do not marry on Friday or Saturday because they fall on the Sabbath day of rest. Holidays such as Yom Kippur also took place in the fall, making it an unsuitable date for a wedding. The couple ultimately settled on a Saturday to hold the wedding, which none of the family members objected to. Lastly, a clashing point during the wedding preparation involved major cultural differences with respect to pork. Sarah recounted the manner in which they negotiated their differences in the following excerpt:

Sarah: He's [Jason] supposed to present the bride's parents with a full-roasted, suckling pig. And I kind of said to Jason, you know my parents aren't religious. My parents eat pork. I don't think it's right to present my Jewish parents with a pig. Like I have great aunts and uncles that are in their nineties... And I know if my grandmother was still here, that's something that would bother her.

Jason: Like, even the older like aunts and uncles, like I've met them before and they're very nice. But, yeah, the pork...the big, roast pig...

Sarah: Like putting a big roast pig isn't, it isn't nice.

Jason: Yeah.

Sarah: I talked to his mom a little bit about, you know, I don't really think we can do the pig thing, like can we do an alternative or is there something else we can do? And she said, "Well, I think you should know that it's a big dishonour to you if the pig's not there, because the pig's to represent the purity of the bride. And if she's not a virgin, you cut off the pig's ears, like so if the whole pig's not there, it looks really bad on you." And so I kind of said to Jason, like we need to do something, because I don't want your family thinking I'm a prostitute. And I don't want my family to be morally offended. And so, our kind of compromise, we decided we'll do our rehearsal dinner at a Chinese restaurant, and then we can have the full traditional whatever there. We can have the pig there. My parents aren't offended.

The above statement is an example of how cultural clashes were resolved by the couple through open communication and compromise.

In the end, the couple's wedding ceremony and reception were held in a golf club in the Toronto area and incorporated a blend of both Chinese and Jewish cultures. Within the Jewish tradition, the couple married under the *huppah* (canopy under which couples stand at a Jewish wedding), provided all groomsmen with *kippahs* (traditional Jewish head covering for men) to wear, were walked down the aisle by both sets of parents, signed a *ketubah* (traditional Jewish wedding contract), and incorporated the *Horah* (a traditional Jewish dance) and breaking of the glass. As for Chinese elements of the wedding, the couple held the rehearsal dinner at a Chinese restaurant, the tea ceremony prior to the wedding ceremony, and gave away personalized chopsticks with their names and double happiness calligraphy as wedding favours. Sarah wore a

white wedding dress for the ceremony and changed into a red *cheongsam* (traditional Chinese wedding gown) later in the evening.

The couple's envisioned future. The couple anticipate having children in the near future and expressed a desire to nurture them in a warm and inclusive environment. Recently, they moved from downtown Toronto to a detached house in North York, a community that is fairly multicultural and where they encounter mixed race families on a regular basis. The couple hopes that by moving to a heterogeneous environment their children can be exposed to both Chinese and Jewish cultures and celebrate certain holidays with other children of mixed heritage. On what holidays and customs to follow, the couple noted that it would be an ongoing learning experience where they have the freedom to “pick and choose” those they find meaningful and reasonable. For instance, the couple mentioned celebrating the *moon-yut* (“full-month”) when the baby is one-month old. Sarah also knows for certain that if they have a son she would want to have a *bris* (Jewish ceremonial circumcision) performed, though Judaism dictates that Jason, who is non-Jewish, would not be permitted to hold the baby during the ceremony. Jason noted that he is not offended by this exclusion, given that it is what the tradition dictates. Perhaps a major source of consolation is that the couple's children will be born into two families whose relationship is founded upon mutual respect, appreciation, and positive regard. The couple elaborated in the following exchange:

Sarah: And there's going to, I think she's [Jason's mother] happy that there's going to be that family atmosphere, like there's not going to be a problem when we have kids birthday parties, and holidays. There can be everyone together and it's going to be, it's a nice atmosphere. Where there's no tension, there's no...

Jason: Like even with the language difference between my dad and her family, like, we all went for dinner at Christmas and we all went out, like I guess, I sit there and translate between everybody, but it's like...there's no weirdness to it.

Jason later alluded to the possibility that there may be language barriers between his father and his grandchildren, but he remains hopeful that the issue will naturally resolve of its own accord, whether it is the children learning Cantonese or Jason assuming the role of the family translator.

Lastly, Sarah once again touches on the issue around identity as she contemplates the potential issues that may arise for a parent to mixed race children. Given that Sarah and Jason do not have first-hand experience of what it is like to be of mixed races, Sarah wondered if it would be worthwhile to connect her children with a close friend of hers, who is also multiracial and may serve as a potential mentor.

The couple's secret to a successful and long-lasting relationship. Sarah and Jason both believe in the value of open communication and perceive it as a key to any long-term relationships, interethnic or not. Sarah feels that in negotiating differences couple members need to have a willingness to clarify their motives for wanting something a certain way and when necessary, practice the art of compromise. She talked about the importance of sharing "where you're coming from" as well as actively understanding the other's standpoint. Sarah proudly stated that this way of being in a relationship is a life lesson that was passed down to her from her grandmother. Jason placed more emphasis on how arguments should be handled, as described in the following excerpt:

Jason: If you are in a serious relationship with somebody...even if you get into an argument or something, you still want to be with the person. And if you let it get to a point where, like we've had arguments and you're obviously upset at the other person,

but it's not...the argument isn't the relationship. But I don't think that all relationships are meant to be. Like if in a relationship where you're having arguments to the level where you're saying "I hate you" or "I don't want to be with you anymore," well, then, maybe you shouldn't be together. But if you know even at the heat of the argument you still feel like you want to be with that person, than make an effort to not get into those arguments.

Jason's advice suggests that commitment to a relationship entails sticking by one's partner even in the heat of an argument or making efforts to avoid an argument from erupting in the first place. Sarah added that when an issue cannot be resolved in those heated moments, couple members need to "take a step back," "collect their thoughts," and reflect on what is really upsetting them.

Central Themes in Sarah and Jason's Story

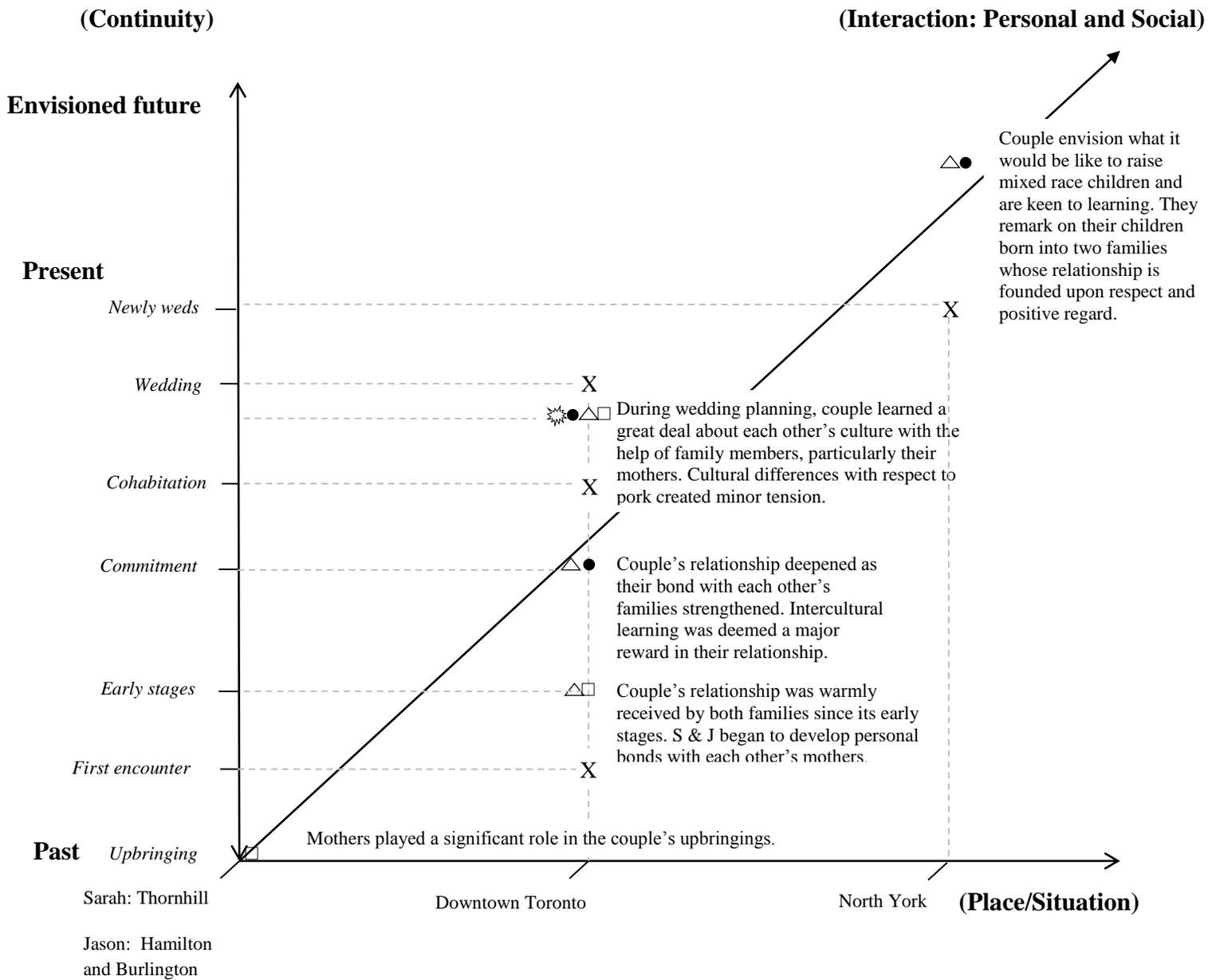
Among the six couples interviewed, Sarah and Jason were the youngest in age and in the process of establishing themselves as a family unit and as working professionals. While their relationship is fairly young compared to the other couples in this study, Sarah and Jason seemed to have a solid understanding of who they are as individuals and what they value (*i.e.*, family, open communication, strong work ethics) and envision for themselves as a couple. Sarah and Jason's interaction was rather courteous throughout the interview, as evidenced by the rare incidents of interruption and their refrainment from making interpretations about each other's experience.

The manner in which Sarah constructed her experiences evolves in the interpersonal rather than the intrapersonal realm. Her narrative is predominantly a relational one, constantly referring to key people in her life, such as Jason, her family members, friends, and Jason's parents; perhaps this is a reflection of her family-oriented upbringing. Of note was Sarah's

strong affection for her late grandmother, whom she spoke of with strong sentimentality. Jason's responses are less relational by comparison, though when references about others *were* made, they frequently involved his mother and Sarah's family. *Family as strengthening pillars* in the couple's relationship thus becomes a central focus in their narrative, with *mothers as influential figures* emerging as a subtheme. The second theme, *intercultural learning*, constitutes an additional perspective to reading the couple's story as a whole (see Figure 5).

Family as strengthening pillars. Family support has served as pillars strengthening Sarah and Jason's relationship since its early stages (see Figure 5). It has significant implications on the well-being of their relationship as both couple members claimed to be close to their parents. The couple did not think their relationship would have progressed if either set of parents expressed apprehension or disinterest. Their narrative suggests that family support promoted relationship satisfaction, brought forth a sense of consolation, and strengthened the belief that their long-term partnership is valued. Family support is thus experienced as an external resource that produced a positive influence on the couple's commitment to the relationship.

It appears as though the couple's relationship flourished as their relationship with each other's families deepened (see Figure 5 on the following page). Participating in family gatherings and holiday celebrations allowed Sarah and Jason to experience each other's cultural origins first-hand and uncover the mystery and meaning behind certain Jewish and Chinese traditions, paving the way for an enriching relationship. As stated in the interview, Sarah has consistently made an effort to nurture her personal relationship with Jason's mother through regular phone calls and attempts to learn Cantonese in order to strengthen her bond with Jason's father. Over time, Jason's family will undoubtedly become a new extension of Sarah's support system. Likewise, Jason shared his experiences participating in Sarah's family gatherings. He



Central themes:

- △ Family as strengthening pillars
 - Mothers as influential figures (subtheme)
- Intercultural learning
- ✱ Tension point

X Central themes were not prominent in this particular relationship milestone.

Figure 5. Sarah and Jason's relationship life map

talked about looking forward to holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and the company of a large family consisting of Sarah's parents, two sisters, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and close cousins. There was a sense that his growing attachment to these in-laws compensated for the lack of close relationships Jason had with his own extended family members.

As the couple's narrative implies, family support can also translate into family engagement in the couple relationship. The fact that the two families have united through joint family gatherings and are somewhat "involved with each other" can be interpreted as the families' active engagement in Sarah and Jason's relationship. Family support is thus palpable as the couple recounted their joint family gatherings, in which a "nice family atmosphere" was present. Jason's mother had once expressed her contentment over the joining of the two families, and in spite of a language barrier between Jason's father and Sarah's family members, the couple indicated that there is "no weirdness to it."

The couple anticipate having children in the near future. They foresee their children being born into families characterized by a positive family atmosphere (see Figure 5). The couple further envision involvement from both sides of the family and engagement in specific ceremonies and traditions that their parents find meaningful, such as the *Bris* and the *Moon-yut*. Although their parents' role as cultural guides are appreciated, Sarah and Jason noted that it ultimately comes down to "parenting the way they want to parent." The couple's ability to set healthy boundaries with their extended family members as first-time parents will be a new learning experience in the years to come.

Mothers as influential figures. Among the many family members mentioned in Sarah and Jason's narrative, mothers carried a significant amount of weight. The couple talked about the profound influence mothers have had on the formation of their characters and values as well

as the quality of their couple relationship since its early stages (see Figure 5). Their roles as strengthening pillars in family relationships cannot be underestimated.

Sarah and Jason's narrative extends beyond the couple dimension. Given their close relationship to their parents, stories were often interwoven with family narratives of critical significance. As their narrative suggests, stories of one's familial past are meaningful insofar as they shape present experiences and inform future ones. In making sense of his relationship with his extended family, for instance, Jason made the natural progression of sharing his mother's story, a story of how she and her own siblings had become estranged since her marriage to Jason's father. As this story unfolded, it became increasingly evident that Jason's mother was a resilient woman who remained committed in her marriage in spite of harsh treatment from her family of origin. Disapproval from her own family became the incentive for her to support her children's selection of partners and to prevent the family wound from passing down to the next generation. Further, her resiliency, engagement with multiple jobs, and strong work ethic are qualities reflected in Jason's own lived experience.

Sarah also made frequent references to her mother when sharing stories of her upbringing (see Figure 5). Her mother's "28 year mat-leave," active involvement in her school life, and ongoing efforts to take the family on cultural outings reflected the strong family values that Sarah would come to adopt. As a future mother, she hopes to cultivate similar family bonds with her own children. Sarah's late grandmother was also mentioned sporadically throughout the couple's interview. Her influence on Sarah's life is palpable, revealing the legacies mothers leave behind that continue to live through the subsequent generations. These legacies are the teachings on familial bond, interpersonal relationships, and cultural traditions shown to them through words and actions. For instance, Sarah's grandmother taught her about the value of

open communication and clarifying the intent behind one's actions, an interpersonal skill which she considers as one of the "secrets" to her relational success with Jason.

Sarah and Jason's relationship with each other's mothers are worth noting. Sarah's close relationship with her own parents perhaps served as a subconscious incentive to form a strong bond with her in-laws. As illustrated in Figure 5, early experiences as a committed couple and accounts of wedding preparations suggest that Sarah's relationship with her mother-in-law grew increasingly closer as the couple transitioned from one relationship stage to another. Jason's mother had been an invaluable resource in the wedding planning stage, imparting cultural knowledge that was necessary in planning an intercultural wedding. Sarah stated that: "I sit and talk with his mom all the time, and I think her and I have a great relationship. I always find myself on the phone with her." Hence, not only was open communication reported as the couple's secret to their relational success, it appears to have a similar impact on Sarah's relationship with her mother-in-law. In Jason's case, he talked about watching hockey games with Sarah, her mother, her grandmother, and her cousin, family bonding experiences which he found meaningful.

The subtheme of mothers does not suggest that fathers are inconsequential figures in the couple's families of origin. On the contrary, their stories were frequently shared and reconstructed through the eyes of the couple. Their stories are less relational in nature, and given the purpose of this study and its emphasis on relationships, mothers appear to have a stronger influence on maintaining and strengthening relational bonds.

Intercultural learning. Intercultural learning lends itself as an additional perspective to examine the couple's narrative as a whole. Its pertinence was first apparent when Sarah and Jason's relationship transitioned into a committed one (see Figure 5). As they grew closer as a

couple, so did their relationships with each other's extended family members. This would mark the beginning of immersion in cultural practices and traditions different from their own. Sarah and Jason experienced first-hand the differences in dining etiquette between Chinese and Jewish cultures. A polite gesture in one culture would be deemed as impolite in another. In addition to learning about the different dining etiquettes, Jason indicated that reading about the story of Passover led to interesting discussions between him and Sarah. At times he would direct his inquiries to his mother, who possesses a great deal of knowledge on Jewish culture through her work in a Jewish nursing home.

Comparatively, Sarah appeared to have a deeper interest in learning about cultures, whether it is her own or Jason's. In recent years she has not only developed a newfound interest in Judaism but has also begun to proactively learn about Jason's cultural background, though mainly through doing her own research and conversing with Jason's mother. She stated during the interview that she is learning that "Jason doesn't know so much [about Chinese culture]," to which Jason responded by clarifying that although he is "ethnically Chinese," he has, for the most part, assimilated into Western culture. As suggested by Figure 5, Sarah's frequent consultations with Jason's mother during the wedding planning stage are exemplary of her active approach to learning about Chinese culture. She has even taken the initiative to learn Chinese in order to better communicate with her father-in-law, though her attempts have been less fruitful than hoped.

Several issues that surfaced during the course of their relationship thus became important sources of inquiry. For instance, what are inauspicious dates for marriage in Chinese culture? What would be the impact of serving a roasted suckling pig at a wedding where the majority of guests are Jewish? What ceremonies or rituals will the couple select in welcoming their first-

born into the world? How do parents raise mixed race children when neither of the parents is of mixed heritage? To which neighbourhood should they move to so their children can be raised in a heterogeneous community with Jewish and Chinese influences? Should the couple's children learn Cantonese to better communicate with their paternal grandfather? And where will the couple be buried if Judaism dictates that non-Jewish individuals cannot be buried in Jewish burial sites? These questions are crucial areas of reflection as they represent the set of developmental tasks that many Jewish-Chinese couples have to complete as they transition from one family life cycle to the next. Sarah and Jason's narrative suggests that during this learning process, the couple will not only gain a deeper cultural awareness and insight into their own cultures of origin but also each other's. On rewards associated with being in an interethnic relationship, the couple indicated that intercultural learning has been and will continue to be a rewarding experience throughout their partnership.

Summary. Sarah and Jason's story is one that is interwoven with their family narratives. Their union is not only a bridging of two cultures but a peaceful merging of two families that have served as strengthening pillars in their relationship. Mothers, in particular, carry the weight of family matters willingly and unquestionably, discerning how to best support and nurture relationships within the family. The couple's story further sheds light on the myriad of learning experiences present in Jewish-Chinese couple relationships and the set of developmental tasks that need to be resolved in order for the couple to successfully transition from one relationship stage to another. Looking into the future, Sarah and Jason's story will be passed down to children of their own, forming new stories woven by their personal lived experiences and the remnants of their cultural fabrics.

6. Teresa and Peter: Gambling for Desires

Teresa's socio-cultural background. Teresa was born around 1960 and grew up in Fujian province in a family of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution (a period that took place from 1966 to 1976). Her father was an officer in the army and her mother a physician. The Communist Party at the time empowered women to work outside the home and pursue their own careers, and while women were able to improve their status and gain more freedom over their lives, it meant children grew up without their parents. Parents therefore entrusted their children's education to the school system and the society at large, systems heavily rooted in communist ideologies. Teresa recalled teachers dedicating their time and energy to instilling and developing in students the communist virtues of "selfless devotion" and "absolute obedience to the party."

Teresa's exposure to western culture was virtually non-existent throughout childhood and adolescence. She had heard stories of family members who went to missionary training schools in the West (Teresa's paternal grandfather was a missionary before the Cultural Revolution), but were forced to renounce their roles when the Cultural Revolution effectively banned all forms of religion. It was not until the onset of the economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 that Teresa's curiosity in western culture finally sparked. China's economy had opened to international trade, giving people access to foreign goods. Teresa recalled receiving novel gifts from family friends living in the West, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Further, as part of the drive for economic advancement and opening to the West, it was common practice to send students abroad to further their education. Teresa had graduated from university (majoring in Meteorology) around this time and had aspirations to learn more, though it was not until nearly two decades later that she finally immigrated to the Canada and continued her education.

Peter's socio-cultural background. Peter was born in 1942 and spent his entire life in Toronto. His family were Jews from Eastern Europe, east of the Oder River. Peter's father and mother were, respectively, Polish and Ukrainian immigrants who met in Toronto. Peter recalled growing up in "abject poverty" with his parents and two brothers on College and Montrose. The neighbourhood had previously been the centre of the Jewish community which gradually developed into the city's original Chinatown and Italian community. Peter recalled seeing his first Black person and meeting his first Chinese classmate sometime between the late-1940s and early-1950s.

Peter felt he grew up in a household that did not differentiate itself from the "rest of Canadian society," with the exception of religious differences between his family and his Christian counterparts. At home, English was spoken with the children, and between his parents they alternated between English, Yiddish, and Russian. Peter did not recall growing up following any specific Eastern European customs and traditions, though his parents felt strongly about retaining their Jewish roots and wanted their sons to marry Jewish women. They also valued "good education, honesty, and staying out of trouble" and instilled these values in their children very early on in life. Generally speaking, Peter has led a secular life since his parents passed away.

Teresa and Peter's relationship histories. Teresa's relationship experience was relatively limited. Prior to Peter she had only been with her former spouse, a Chinese man whom she met through an arranged marriage at age 26. They were married for 22 years, 10 of which were spent in Canada.

Despite their contrasting personalities, Teresa's marriage to her ex-husband had been stable and satisfactory when the couple resided in China. Their families of origin had been close

friends since the Cultural Revolution and both couple members were fairly successful and “high ranking” in their respective fields. Teresa’s aspirations to leave China and explore the West became a topic of discussion between the two, and in the early ‘90s they initiated the immigration process. Teresa felt her ex-husband had always harboured a pessimistic outlook on their move to the West. Emigrating meant they would lose their support systems, well-established professions, and lives within their own cultural comforts. Teresa stated:

He [ex-husband] never felt grounded here and did not regard Canada as his home. There was never a sense of security in what he was doing here and he was always under a lot of pressure, even though we made a decent living. When the business he helped me finance failed, he became even more resentful of the fact that he immigrated here at my instigation (translated from Chinese).

Teresa indicated that her ex-husband’s increasing resentment and unwillingness to develop a more positive outlook on their future became the breaking point in their relationship. She suggested that this may have been cultural in nature, as she feels many men of her generation who immigrated from China have a more difficult time adjusting to a foreign environment than their female counterparts.

As for Peter, family discussions around intimate relationships never transpired between him and his parents, as they passed away when he was a child. However, given his parents’ strong attachment to their Jewish identities, Peter speculated that they would have preferred him to wed a Jewish woman. Perhaps due to the lack of parental pressure when he did begin dating, Peter’s partners in his early life were all non-Jewish Caucasian women.

Peter noted three significant relationships prior to meeting Teresa. In retrospect, these relationships taught him about modesty and helped him cultivate self-awareness. In his early 20s,

Peter married a White woman of European descent with whom he had a son and daughter. Ten years into the marriage his wife committed suicide, for reasons that were not elaborated during the interview. Peter did allude to the fact that his former wife had been abused by her own father and it may have “caught up to her.” Following this tragedy, Peter entered the dating scene again and found himself in another long-term relationship, this time for 15 years. In its final stages, this relationship was submerged by a wave of staleness and lack of intimacy, which Peter likened to “living with your sister.”

More recently, Peter was involved with a Chinese woman for two years prior to meeting Teresa. This relationship was significant in the sense that it was his first interethnic relationship. Peter had entered the relationship “by chance” and in many respects found being with a Chinese woman a “very good experience.” He talked openly about “being in love” and feeling disheartened by the loss of this relationship due to insoluble financial disagreements.

His relationship experience with a Chinese woman was overall positive and marked the beginning of his understanding of Chinese culture. Peter stated:

I learned that there is a learned misconception. We always believed that Chinese people were dirty. And I learned that—now that I've lived with two Chinese women—that you can eat off the floor in a Chinese house. So that was a big thing. And I was telling that to a friend of mine at my club. And he said to me his father was in the chicken business...selling chicken to restaurants. And his father would only eat in a Chinese restaurant [chuckles]. So that was one prejudice dispelled. And they're...the females...my generation [Chinese] females are more like...their relationship with their men is more like my mother's generation, my father's generation. Not like today.

Peter felt that the way he related with Chinese women near his age felt similar to the relationship dynamics of his parent's generation, where "rules and gender roles were clearly defined."

Women would "make the nest" while men provided the resources to build a nest. Peter liked the notion that "the man was the boss but the woman was the leader" and that the woman deferred to her husband and did what had to be done whether she agreed with him or not. Having experienced this relationship dynamic and found it to his liking, Peter became open to seeking Chinese women as potential partners.

The couple's first encounter and early stages of their relationship. Teresa and Peter met online shortly after Peter and his former girlfriend broke up. The couple had signed up for a dating site with a clear and shared motive. First, both members felt that meeting people through conventional methods (*i.e.*, at bars, social gatherings, through friends and family, etc.) would be unlikely. Second, given where they were in their life cycles, Teresa and Peter both stated that they were not in pursuit of romance or passion but "security" and a suitable lifelong companion.

Peter initiated the first contact online; Teresa, being relatively inexperienced with the inner workings of online dating, responded a few weeks later. She was also unaware of the fact that users can filter out certain ethnicities; hence coming across someone who was White was purely coincidental. Several things in Peter's profile stood out for her: his age (68-years-old), profession (lawyer), and a clear indication that he was seeking a long-term partner. Among the several profiles she encountered, Teresa felt Peter's was honestly written to reflect his true age and intentions for pursuing a relationship. Thus, the first meeting was arranged.

Peter was late picking up Teresa at the subway station. Teresa recalled feeling slightly discontent and perturbed by the filthiness of the vehicle. Peter's reaction upon seeing Teresa was that he "saw nothing negative." And as they made their way to a coffee shop, Teresa was taken

aback by his slight walking impairment, wondering if Peter needed caring for. Despite negative first reactions on Teresa's part, she felt their conversation was marked by "complete transparency," with Teresa openly discussing her financial woes following her divorce and Peter sharing what led to the dissolution of his last relationship. Neither of them mentioned language barriers as hindering this conversation. On what transpired during their discussion, Peter stated the following:

You know exactly what you want and you gotta [sic] be clear about two things when you're young and one thing when you're old. The two things when you're young are money and having children and when you're old it's just money. Be clear about that. [...] We agreed that ok, she buys the food and I pay the rent. I want to live with somebody. I'll pay the rent.

Teresa moved in with Peter four days after their first encounter. Teresa assured me that she had a close inspection of his living space before she agreed to move in. The couple talked about "knowing exactly what they wanted" and trusting that their first conversation was one that came from a place of "complete honesty." Teresa also joked that they were both "gamblers" at heart.

Families' reception to the couple's relationship. The couple shared how their respective families reacted to their relationship. Peter's family and friends were initially worried about their immediate cohabitation. They thought he was "crazy" and joked that Teresa may be an "axe murderer." He also felt there was an element of surprise when they learned that Teresa is Chinese.

Worries were soon assuaged as the couple introduced each other to their respective families and friends. The couple recounted their first joint meeting with Teresa's son who was living in Montreal at the time:

Peter: We went out to a really nice and expensive Japanese restaurant and met her son and her nephew, because her son was living with her cousin and nephew and then as we were eating, Teresa leaned over and said, “You pay.” [Peter laughs]

Teresa: Yes, because you met my kids. You have to pay.

Peter: Why? You invited me! [laughs]

Teresa: In Chinese culture you have to pay so I asked him to pay.

Peter: The dinner was excellent and her son and I got along fine.

In this exchange, we not only learn that there are cultural differences in dining etiquettes around payment, but that money-related matters are significant in the couple’s story. Further, Teresa indicated that given her strong mother-son bond, her son was fully supportive of her relationship since its early stages. She felt that her son had grown up witnessing endless arguments between her and her ex-husband and was genuinely happy that she entered a relationship that was no longer plagued by resentment, disappointment, and insoluble financial disagreements.

Commitment. Unlike other couples in this study, Teresa and Peter had already experienced various personal and family life cycles prior to meeting each other. Both are nearing retirement age and have no desire to start another family. Time and time again throughout the interview the couple described their relationship as founded upon transparency, financial security, and a need for companionship; it seems as though Teresa and Peter are committed to one another by virtue of their commitment to live by those values.

The couple was invited to share aspects of their relationship that promote commitment.

Teresa stated the following:

For one, being in a relationship with a White man has been a very different yet positive experience. In addition to feeling safe, protected, and as though I can tell Peter

everything, I feel more respected by him in that he would consult with me about matters. My ex-husband would let me make all the decisions but when things do not meet his expectations he reprimands me and takes no responsibility. He would also narrow in on my faults and never encourage or compliment me. He is the same way with our son and I believe there is a cultural component to this (translated from Chinese).

Teresa further elaborated on the rewards in the relationship, indicating that since meeting Peter her English has improved significantly, the repertoire of Western dishes she can make has expanded, and she now finds enjoyment in watching movies. She also talked about learning a great deal about basic dining and dress etiquettes in Western culture, at which point Peter interjected and inquired if changes Teresa has made in her attire and dining habits were to please him or part of an organic adaptation to being in an interethnic relationship. Teresa indicated the latter and seemed genuinely grateful to have had these learning opportunities. One example she provided was the etiquette around soup eating. Until she met Peter, Teresa followed the Chinese custom to slurp, as it is a sign of compliment and an expression of enjoying the food. Peter had informed her that this was considered impolite in Western cultures, an advice Teresa took to heart. Further, she found differences in food preferences to require the most adjustment. Teresa comes from a region in China that most would consider as a haven for seafood enthusiasts. Much to her chagrin, Peter finds seafood extremely unappetizing and cannot tolerate the smell of it lingering in their home. Fortunately, the couple has solved this dilemma by placing a cooking device on the balcony where Teresa can cook her favourite seafood dishes. Her brother has also taken note of this situation and welcomes Teresa with seafood delicacies during her visits.

On conditions in the relationship that promote commitment, Peter indicated that a sense of security and having shared values were imperative. His experience of the home he and Teresa

created is that it is “a comfortable and nice place to come to...no stress at all.” Here Teresa interjected by stating that three months into their relationship they did face some challenges. Peter’s ex-girlfriend had wanted to reconcile, and he found himself making a choice between romantic love and stable companionship. He chose the latter. The couple agreed that this decision served to consolidate their commitment towards the relationship.

The couple was invited to share their experience of being in an intimate relationship where clear language barriers existed. Peter stated the following:

Well we don’t sit around discussing Faust or Kant. We sit around discussing what we’re gonna [sic] have for dinner. We want to watch this movie. And you don’t need a huge vocabulary to do those things. It’s a woman and man relationship. We’re not buddies...

Peter is consistently transparent about what he seeks in a relationship at this stage in his life—a domestic partner with whom he can live comfortably. He went on to remark on how “unbelievable” the two and a half years have been with Teresa, stating that Teresa “lets me be me and I let her be her, and so we get together when we want to get together. We stay apart when we want to stay apart.” Peter feels they give each other the liberty to be who they are and personal space when it is needed. He noted that despite cultural differences, their relationship is founded upon shared values and interests such as food, movies, internet and travelling.

Present-day: Preparations for retirement. Currently, Teresa and Peter are gradually transitioning into the retirement phase of their careers. When asked what life is like as a couple, Peter half-jokingly stated that they are assessing how much Teresa should contribute to rent. Peter indicated that they are “comfortable and living life as it is.”

It is fair to say that over the course of two years Teresa has adopted a fairly Western lifestyle. She no longer celebrates Chinese holidays and cooks predominantly Western food at

home, though occasionally she would leave Peter behind and go out with her Chinese friends. Teresa denied this as a loss of her cultural identity and suggested that she has evolved into a “better person” since meeting Peter.

The couple’s envisioned future. Teresa and Peter find themselves in a stage in their lives where they are generally in good health and are not tied down by family responsibilities or heavy work demands. They recently purchased a home in Florida and intend to spend six months of the year there, hoping to escape the harsh long winters in Toronto. Peter had also promised Teresa he would take her to Europe. In essence, the couple will continue to relish the simple joys of life, such as food, movies, internet, and travelling in the years to come.

The couple’s secret to a successful and long-lasting relationship. The couple was invited to share their key to a successful relationship. Both members felt “honesty” superseded all other qualities. Peter stated the following:

Honesty covers everything, because when you’re honest you’re clear about what you like and what you don’t like. And the other person can say, “Oh, you don’t like that, I like that.” Is it important enough that it’s a deal breaker? If it’s important enough that it’s a deal breaker then “nice to meet you, goodbye.” If it’s not then you change and you accommodate. And I don’t think it’s got anything to do with mixed race couple. It’s about any two people who are 100 per cent honest with each other...

Teresa concurred with this statement and shared how open communication, a quality lacking in her previous marriage, has been the key to maintaining a healthy and stable relationship with Peter.

Central Themes in Teresa and Peter's Story

Teresa was clearly unique in the sense that she was the only interviewee in this study who was born and raised in mainland China and immigrated to the West as an adult. Her background sets her apart from other interviewees based on her mother tongue, level of acculturation, and major life experiences on the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. Given her unique life circumstances, a series of questions came to mind. Is this a second marriage? How did the couple meet? How do they manage language barriers? *What is their story?*

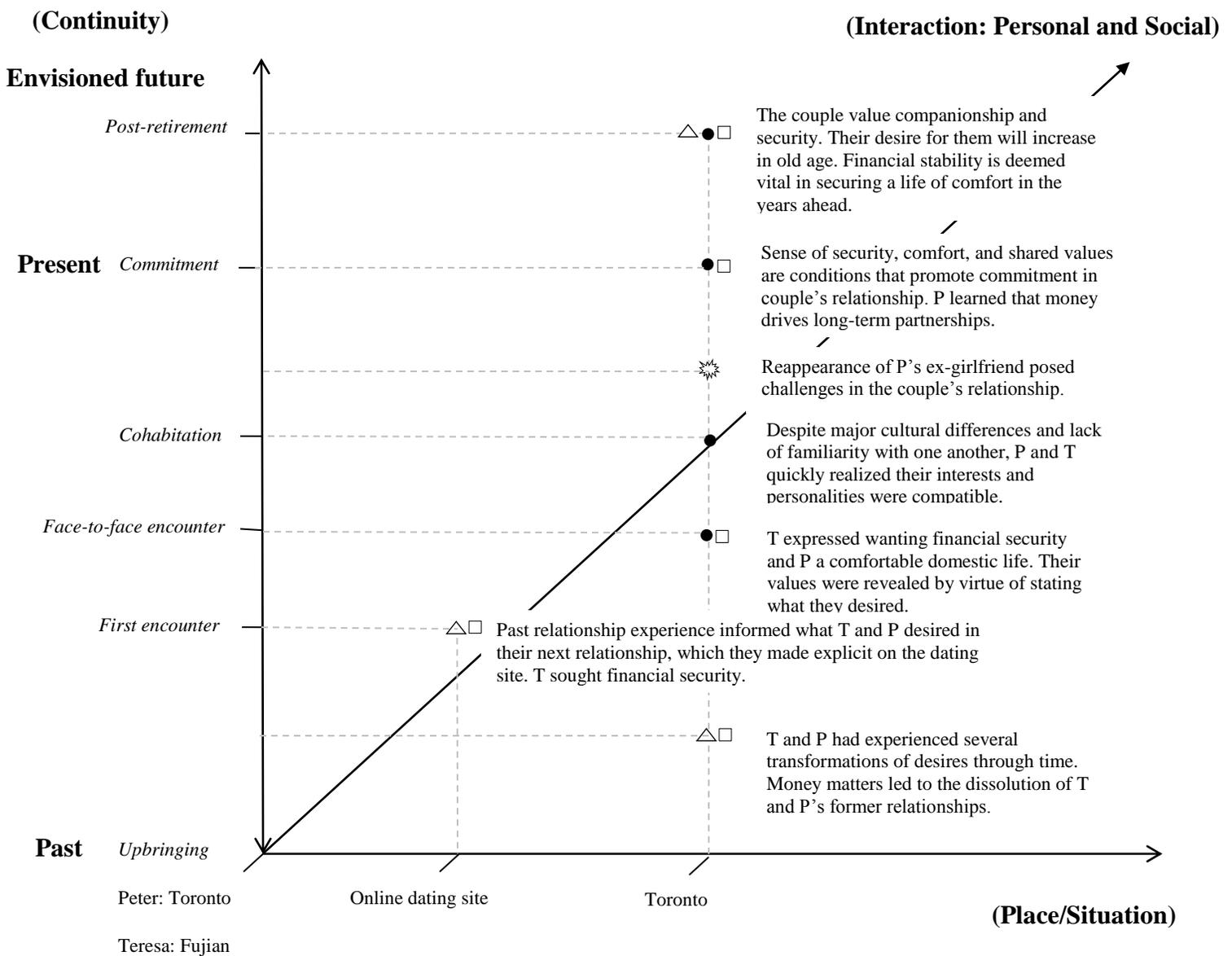
The interview was conducted in Teresa and Peter's home. Peter was seated comfortably in a reclining chair. Teresa immediately prepared tea as traditional Chinese etiquette dictates. It was indeed a comfortable home, as Peter would repeatedly indicate throughout the interview. Teresa and Peter's form of interaction reflected clearly defined gender roles, with Peter responsible for providing for the couple and Teresa managing their domestic life. Although their relationship dynamic retained qualities found in most Chinese marriages of their generation, Teresa indicated in the interview that she feels more respected and heard by Peter, perhaps pointing to a more egalitarian partnership than her previous marriage. The couple's style of interaction was also one of complete transparency and honesty, which was particularly evident when they stated their motives for entering the relationship (*i.e.*, financial security for Teresa and a comfortable domestic life for Peter).

One must wonder if an expeditious partnership such as Teresa and Peter's would have been possible without the existence of online dating sites, a unique context where social, cultural, and even spatial barriers are broken down. Many would be shocked to learn of the couple's cohabitation after having known each other for a mere four days, yet amazed that they were able to establish a two and a half-year relationship that was characterized by comfort and stability.

Their partnership resembles traditional arranged marriages, where priority is placed on financial security and good living conditions. Throughout their story, three themes emerge as important foci: *transformation of desires through time*; *compatibility in values, interests, and personality*; and *money matters*, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. Figure 6 on the following page is provided to illustrate the thematic trends across time and context in the couple's narrative.

Transformation of desires through time. Under the first theme, transformation of desires through time, both couple members talked about the changing of desires as they transition from one life cycle stage to another. In his young adulthood, Peter desired financial security and a family; when these were attained the former became his main pursuit (see Figure 6). More recently, Peter spoke of a desire for not only financial security, but also a lifelong companionship with a female partner who can provide a comfortable domestic life. In finding a suitable companion, Peter's positive experience with his former Chinese girlfriend resulted in a desire for another Chinese partner following the breakup. In fact, shortly after Teresa moved in with Peter, Peter experienced conflicting desires when his former girlfriend asked for reconciliation. Though his heart desired his former partner, he felt he ultimately made a rational decision to remain with Teresa, as he could envision a stable and "stress-free" companionship with her.

It was made apparent that Peter desired a relationship that adopted clearly-defined gender roles, a dynamic found in many Chinese marriages of his generation. When asked to elaborate on what constitute "clearly-defined" rules in the household, Peter indicated that the woman is "in charge at home," "runs the household," "makes the nest," and maintains family relationships, whereas the man is the "boss," and "makes sure there are enough resources to have a nest." This



Central themes:

- △ Transformation of desires through time
- Compatibility in values, interests, and personalities
- Money matters
- ✱ Tension point

X Central themes were not prominent in this particular relationship milestone.

Figure 6. Teresa and Peter's relationship life map

description clearly reflects Peter's current desire to maintain financial security and domestic comfort, a balance of efforts between a man and a woman, respectively. In fact, Peter remarked on the wonders of nature, stating that "nature made it so men and women could get along." In this period of shifting gender role expectations, some might disagree with Peter's perception of an ideal household; however, the couple's narrative suggests that perhaps there is nothing inherently wrong about traditional gender roles in a relationship between two sexes, provided that both parties desire to place themselves into such roles.

Teresa also talked about her desires as undergoing major transformations through time. Teresa's early past in communist China can be interpreted as a forgoing of desires, as values such as "selfless devotion" and "absolute obedience to the party" were strongly instilled in her (see Figure 6). With the advent of political, economic, and social transformations in China, Teresa experienced a budding desire to migrate to the West, which eventually came to fruition in the mid-'90s. Over the course of her marriage, many desires surfaced then faded, some were fulfilled and others went unfulfilled. Her desire to maintain a marriage that could endure financial and cultural hardships was one that she had to surrender, though it is through this process that a new desire emerged—a desire for financial security and a relationship characterized by less criticism and resentment. A risk-taker at heart, Teresa trusted her own intuition to decide whether or not to pursue a partnership with Peter following a mere four "dates." She took a chance on account of the level of transparency Peter demonstrated, his clear specification of what he wanted and did not want in a relationship, and a candid description of what led to the dissolution of his previous relationship.

The couple share the belief that "if you know what you want you can live your life with some degree of satisfaction." In essence, while "honesty" was reported as the "secret" to the

couple's long-term relationship, it can be inferred that possessing a clear understanding of their own desires is its precursor. Peter is able to provide the financial stability and communicative interaction that Teresa desired and Teresa the comfort and companionship that Peter sought in a relationship. As Teresa and Peter transition into retirement and elderly stages in the years to come, their desire for a sense of security, comfort, and companionship will become all the more significant (see Figure 6). The communicative nature characterizing the couple's relationship will undoubtedly be of critical significance in their elderly years, as later stages in life tend to be a period of reflection on past experiences. During this reflective process, Teresa and Peter will draw conclusions from their lived experiences and communicate them with one another so as to seek closure. As Teresa stated in the interview, "Going into this relationship, Peter and I were not seeking passion or romance, but preparing ourselves for old age." Peter added the following: "I have a great relationship with Teresa. No stress. We're friends. We can talk to each other." The couple's narrative suggests that companionship is vital to maintaining emotional and mental well-being in old age.

Compatibility in values, interests, and personality. Another lens through which the couple's story can be viewed centres on the notion that inner compatibility can surpass major cultural differences. Desires, it seems, are not limited by cultural boundaries in Teresa and Peter's story, as they are shaped by similar values and interests. The couple rarely spoke of the impact of cultural differences and not once suggested that English communication is a form of barrier between them. In fact, Peter indicated that he and Teresa "don't sit around discussing Faust or Kant" but daily matters such as what to have for dinner and what movies to watch, which do not require much vocabulary. He further distinguishes a "woman and man relationship" from a "buddy" relationship between two males, and suggests that he seeks intellectual

conversations in the latter. Peter's clear delineation of gender roles is once again made apparent in this statement.

As early as their first encounter in a coffee shop, Teresa and Peter candidly revealed their backgrounds and what they desired in a relationship. It can be said that their values were uncovered by virtue of explicitly stating what they each wanted and did not want in their next relationship (see Figure 6). On account of shared values such as financial security, honesty, open communication, and traditional gender roles, the couple made the decision to pursue the partnership. In the couple's opinion, honesty supersedes all other values and forms the foundation of any long-term relationship. It provides clarity, builds trust and respect, instills a sense of safety, and promotes a deeper connection between the couple. Teresa described her experience of honesty in her relationship, indicating that she feels "stress-free," "natural," "safe," "peaceful," and as though she can "tell Peter everything." This relationship quality stood in contrast to her experience in her previous marriage, one characterized by closed communication. It seems ironic to think that a couple whose primary languages are different communicate better than a couple who shared the same native tongue. Teresa and Peter's narrative suggests that expressions of honesty do not entail intellectual discussions; it is an attitude embodied within the relationship and expressed both nonverbally and verbally through basic vocabulary.

It appears as though Teresa's interest in movies, learning about Western culture, eating Western food, and travelling were *products* of her relationship with Peter, which in turn promoted relationship satisfaction for both couple members. Hence, unlike the remaining couples in the study whose shared interests or compatibility in personalities served as initial motives for pursuing the relationship, Teresa and Peter entered their relationships on account of shared values. In other words, most of the couples in this study did not discover what their

shared values were until their couple identity was consolidated. This may be due in large part to the life cycle stages Teresa and Peter were situated in at the time of meeting (*i.e.*, nearing retirement) and the fact that both members have been previously married and thus possess clear conceptions of their values.

It was not until cohabitation and the beginnings of sharing a life together that Teresa and Peter developed similar interests and hobbies and discovered that their personalities were in fact compatible (see Figure 6). Teresa's keen interest in Western culture and openness to adopting a fairly Western lifestyle helped alleviate any friction associated with cultural differences. For instance, there was no sign of resentment or disheartenment as Teresa talked about forgoing Chinese cooking and customs, perhaps suggesting that her "self-less devotion" has not yet run its course. In fact, Teresa perceived these adjustments as learning opportunities and sources of self-expansion. She expressed a genuine gratitude for the many things Peter has taught her over the years. Further, many of the couple's statements suggested a strong compatibility in personalities. They talked about their relationship as devoid of conflict, "peaceful," and "comfortable" since the first day Teresa moved in, as they dedicate themselves to allowing each other the personal space and outside interests they need. Peter added that, "Once you've settled the money there's nothing to fight about." His emphasis on money matters in the couple's narrative constitutes the third theme, which will be discussed next.

Money matters. As illustrated in Figure 6, money matters were already an important feature of the couple's narrative prior to their first face-to-face encounter. Teresa indicated during the interview that she had selected Peter from a pool of potential partners online on account of his occupation (a lawyer) and his level of education. When her self-reported intention was translated back into English for Peter, he, in a half-joking manner, gestured the hand signal

for money, to which Teresa responded with a chuckle. Perhaps her chuckle signified a bashful agreement to his statement. As the interview progressed, it became increasingly apparent that money matters *do* matter in the couple's relationship and will continue to be of critical significance in the years to come.

The title of this narrative—*Gambling for Desires*—symbolizes the couple's courage to pursue their desires, although risks were involved. However, the word 'gambling' in the traditional sense (*i.e.*, wagering money or something of material value to gain a desired outcome) can also be applied in the context of this narrative. During the couple's first meeting at a coffee shop (see Figure 6), Peter disclosed his desire for a domestic partner who would take on household responsibilities in return for financial security. Teresa indicated that she was comfortable being the homemaker, provided that she does not have to worry about finances. Although the couple were extremely candid about their positions, Peter was essentially using his financial means to bet on the potential success of a relationship with Teresa. To reiterate his intentions in pursuing a relationship, he stated that, "You gotta [sic] be clear about two things when you're young and one thing when you're old. The two things when you're young are money and having children and when you're old it's just money." This statement elucidates why money matters is a recurring theme throughout the couple's lived experience.

As the couple became more committed to their living arrangement, Peter learned through his experience with Teresa that "it's all about the money" (see Figure 6). In his view, money is a powerful force in any couple relationship, because whether you have a lot of money or very little of it, it is always present. Couples cannot escape the power that money holds in a relationship. Perhaps the couple entered this relationship with a heightened awareness of money matters, as both their former relationships had dissolved on account of irreconcilable disagreements and

emotional ties associated with money. And given that the couple is nearing retirement and old age (see Figure 6), Peter emphasized the importance of maintaining financial stability so as to secure a comfortable life in the years ahead. With money being one of the most emotionally charged topics for many couples, Teresa and Peter's ability to discuss them openly can be interpreted as their valuing financial communication.

Summary. Teresa and Peter's story follows a trajectory that is dissimilar to many love stories in the modern era. It is one that dispels the belief that couple relationships are solely driven by the desire for love and finding one's soul mate. It teaches us about the evolving nature of desires throughout the life cycle and the value of listening to them and honestly communicating them in a committed relationship. And given that life is a series of gambles, Teresa and Peter's narrative sheds light on the virtue of financial communication in driving a long-term partnership and serves as a reminder to couples to unreservedly lay their cards on the table.

CHAPTER FIVE

Across-Narratives Analysis Results

An across-narratives analysis involved the reduction of the six narrative accounts to identify common elements in the couples' experiences of their interethnic relationships. Table 3 on page 180 provides a summary of the themes and subthemes generated in each couple's narrative in Chapter Four with their respective core messages. It served as a primary aid to clustering salient themes in Chapter Four into various domains of meaning.

In answering the research question, it was found that two thematic categories characterized the livelihood of the couples' experiences throughout the course of their relationships: prevalent issues in the relational context (or content themes) and relationship maintenance processes (process themes). Figure 7 provides a bird's eye view of the two thematic categories, along with their respective common themes and subthemes. Subthemes are important as they not only provide additional support to the overarching themes, but also carry unique aspects that are distinct in themselves.

The first set of themes relates to *content themes* (or the *what's*), and refer to key issues the couples widely discussed throughout the interviews and perceived as having a lasting impact on the quality of their relationships. The second group belongs to *process themes* (or *how to's*), which respond to the patterns of interaction and behavioural processes that the couples engage in to maintain their long-term relationships. Under content themes, three overarching themes were identified: family; compatibility in personalities, interests, and values; and cultural differences as sources of tension, self-expansion, or harmony. The overarching theme on *family* is a pervasive one throughout the narratives, and can be further broken down into four subthemes: personal qualities, gender role expectations, family involvement, and children. These subthemes cover a

wide range of family issues that pervade not only in the couples' stories themselves, but also in those of past generations as well as the generations to come. The second overarching content theme, *compatibility in personalities, interests, and values*, discusses the couples' areas of compatibility and their shifting experiences of compatibility throughout the course of their long-term partnerships. The third and final overarching content theme, *cultural differences as sources of tension, self-expansion, or harmony*, uncovers major cultural dissimilarities associated with religion, food, and language, each constituting a distinctive subtheme.

Process themes covers two overarching relationship maintenance mechanisms or processes: maintaining family cohesion and responding to partner differences. It can be said that these processes explain *how* the couples in this study manage the overarching content themes previously mentioned. In *maintaining family cohesion*, its subthemes refer to a set of maintenance behaviors that serve to sustain a sense of cohesiveness in the family: openly communicating, sharing food, actively engaging in cultural or religious traditions, prioritizing needs, and setting boundaries. In *responding to partner differences*, the couples here were found to manage differences in a variety of ways: minimizing race and ethnicity, through a process of respecting or embracing, and/or focusing on and working towards compatibility.

Findings in Chapter Five will be discussed under two major parts: Content Themes (Part I) and Process Themes (Part II).

Table 3

Themes, Subthemes, and Core Messages for Each Couple Narrative

Themes and subthemes	
1. Janice/ Stefan	<p>- Family connectedness</p> <p>Early family influence on personality, values, and choice of partners; gender roles; family blessings promoted stability; two cultures shared strong family values; move to suburbs to be close to J’s mother; S quit his downtown job to spend more time with family</p> <p>- Food (subtheme)</p> <p>Food to maintain family bond; interfamilial food sharing; bridging cultures through food; raising children to value food.</p> <p>-Communication, accommodation, and working through</p> <p>Incentive to pursue relationship; vital to managing conflicts between themselves and with extended family members; vital to setting boundaries; secret to couple’s relationship; vital to preventing matters from becoming lingering resentments</p>
2. Felicia/ Boris	<p>-Differentness as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or conflict</p> <p>Differences in upbringings and family dynamics; gender roles; F’s aversion to Chinese patriarch influenced selection of partners; complimentary personalities; conflicts around time orientation; cultural differences as broadening experiences; differences in parenting styles rooted in culture</p> <p>-Cultural integration and re-integration</p> <p>F’s newfound appreciation in her “Chinese-ness”; integration of Chinese elements at wedding; couple’s integration of each other’s cultures; re-integration of cultural aspects left behind during assimilation process; integration of both cultures in daughter’s life</p> <p>-Relationship stages as platforms for re-evaluation</p> <p>Tension points; differences in time orientation; re-examination of needs, wants, desires; “timing” a consistent challenge</p>
3. Maggie/ Helmut	<p>-Appreciation for knowledge and intellect</p> <p>Resourcefulness; appreciation reflects compatibility in values; appreciation contributed to match-making success; resourcefulness contributed to wedding success; took interfaith course in community to prepare for parenthood; exposing child to different languages and extracurricular activities</p> <p>-Religion as a source of harmony, self-expansion, or tension</p> <p>M’s “extremely culturally Jewish” family and H’s religious upbringing; M’s family’s initial opposition to non-Jewish partner led to boundary setting; matrilineal system of Judaism; H’s strained relationship with parents due to loss of faith; M’s faith a comfort to H’s parents; differences as broadening perspectives</p> <p>-Interconnectedness between the self, family, and culture</p> <p>M’s upbringing led to current profession; H’s loss of faith led to relationship shift in family; wedding a culmination of interconnectedness; son’s name a reflection of familial past and diverse cultures; raising a multiethnic child in Toronto</p>

Themes and Subthemes	
4. Debra/ Hans	<p>-Courage</p> <p>Weathering opposition and patriarchy in D's family and enmeshment from H's family; moving to Alaska to set boundaries and preserve relationship; Alaska as "adventure" and consolidating couple's ability to "take things as they come"; context shifts, adoption of children with health complications; lifelong commitment to marriage</p> <p>-Openness to experience</p> <p>Aesthetic sensitivity; intellectual curiosity; preference for novelty and variety; D's dating history; H's cultured family; H drawn to D's openness to experiment with new things; H's openness to be "dragged along"; openness as area of compatibility and defining feature of couple's identity; openness led to major move to Canada, where they felt was more ideal for a family; openness weathers stagnation in relationship</p> <p>-Family togetherness and separation</p> <p>Continuous pursuit/withdrawal cycle; family togetherness compromised when couple pursued a relationship that transgressed families' comfort zones; withdrawal from families to protect relationship; reconciliation with D's family; pursuing parenthood through adoption; togetherness/separation as normal family routine</p>
5. Sarah/ Jason	<p>-Family as strengthening pillars</p> <p>Family support important; family support as external resources and promote relationship satisfaction; active engagement in each other's family gatherings; S's desire to strengthen bonds with J's parents; in-laws as new extensions to couple's support systems; two families' engagement with each other; family involvement in future children's lives; boundary setting</p> <p>-Mothers as influential figures (subtheme)</p> <p>Influence on formation of characters, values, and relationship quality; J's mothers past as incentive to support couple's relationship; legacies left behind on relationships and culture; couple's relationship with each other's mothers; female roles in couple's families of origin</p> <p>-Intercultural learning</p> <p>Families as gateways to learning about each other's culture first-hand; dining etiquettes; S's active engagement in Chinese culture with help from S's mother; wedding planning exemplary of intercultural learning; S's desires to learn Cantonese to better communicate with J; parenting mixed race children and integrating both Chinese and Jewish traditions will be important sources of inquiry</p>
6. Teresa/ Peter	<p>-Transformation of desires through time</p> <p>Desires transform from one life cycle stage to another; P's current desires for financial security, lifelong companionship and comfortable domestic life; clearly defined gender roles are desired; T's early past as foregoing of desires; couple's clear delineation of what they desired upon meeting; clear understanding of one's desires promotes satisfaction in life; lifelong companionship as desire to secure well-being in old age</p> <p>-Compatibility in values, interests, and personalities</p> <p>Desires shaped by shared values and interests; language differences not a barrier; couple shared values such as financial security, honesty, open communication, traditional gender roles; honesty supersedes all values; shared interest in movies, food, and travelling; unlike other couples, T and P entered relationship on account of shared values; T's openness to adapt to Western lifestyle; cultural adjustments as learning opportunities</p> <p>-Money matters</p> <p>Important at outset of relationship; gamblers at heart; clear specification of money matters during first encounter; in old age "it's all about money"; former relationships dissolved on account of financial disagreements; couple value financial communication</p>

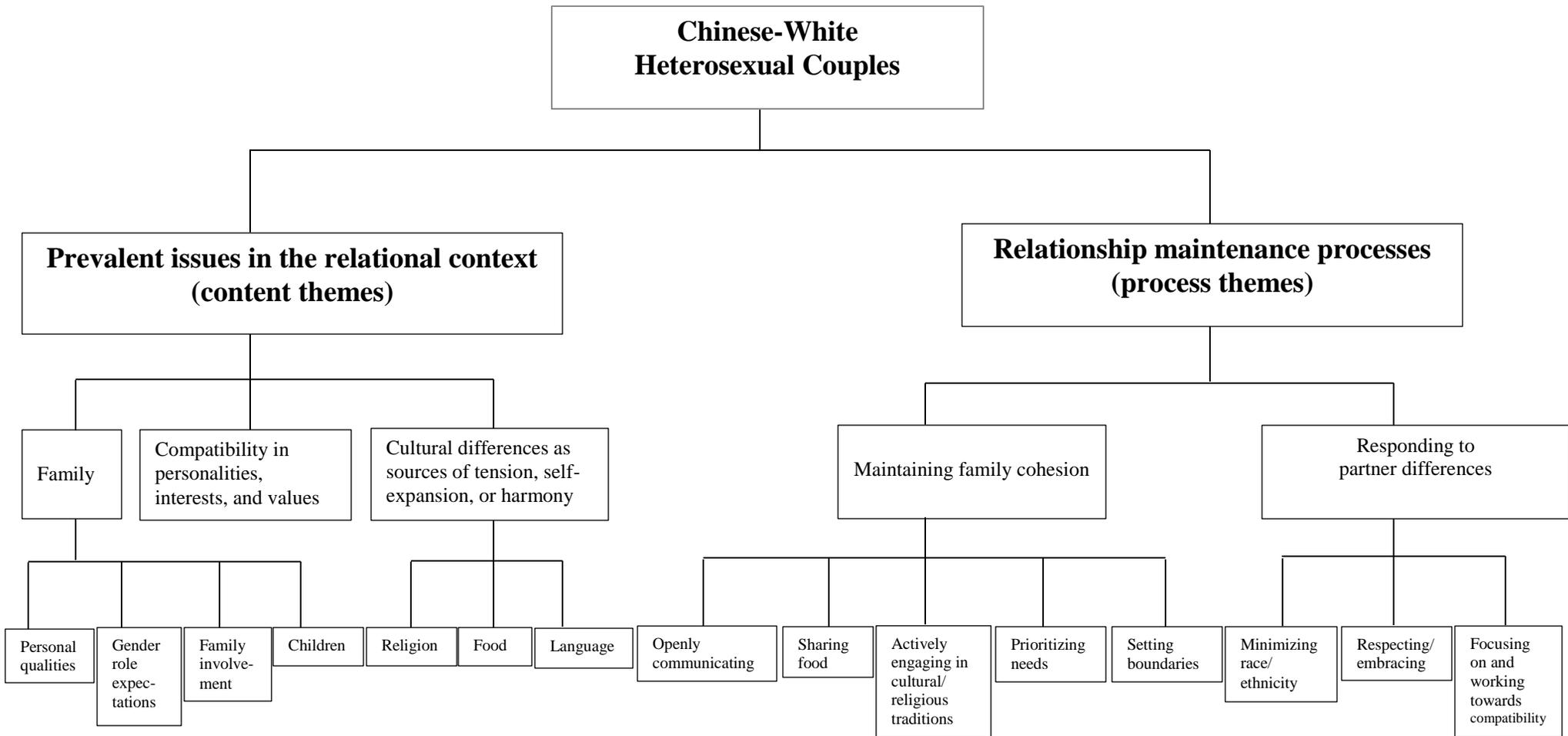


Figure 7. Overarching themes and subthemes in the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples

Part I. Prevalent issues in the relational context (content themes)

While each couple narrative contains both unique and rich content, all six couples talked at length about three key issues that appear to constitute the defining features of their lived experiences across their relationship lifespans: family; compatibility in personalities, interests, and values; and cultural differences as sources of tension, self-expansion, and harmony. The following sections will discuss these overarching themes and their respective subthemes in detail.

Family. The importance of family in this study cannot be underestimated. The six narratives presented in Chapter Four suggest that couples do not exist in isolation. Their lives and experiences are influenced by others, be it by parents, relatives, friends, or the society at large. From birth to death, families remain a constant theme in these couples' lived experiences. From the families the couples were born in, to the families they create, to the families their own children form as adults, families constitute these couples' basic, foundational social units, though family structures and dynamics may vary from culture to culture.

Much of the content in the couples' narratives centred on family imprints, or early family experiences that have left a lasting imprint on the participants' lives. Family imprints form the narrative threads in the couples' stories, reminding us of the variety of ways the past shapes the present and informs the future. Notably, family imprints were revealed as participants make sense of their personal qualities, of their expectations around gender roles, and of what constitute their childrearing practices.

Under the overarching theme of family, four subthemes were identified to capture its distinctive contents across the six narratives: personal qualities, gender role expectations, family involvement, and children.

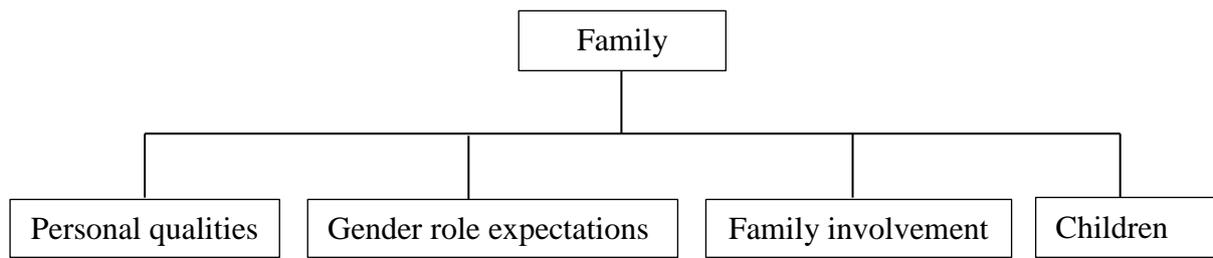


Figure 8. Subthemes of ‘Family’

Personal qualities. The development of the self is influenced by family dynamics and structures and the set of values, beliefs, customs, and traditions reflective of one’s larger socio-cultural context. All intimate relationships, to varying extents, are impacted by the couple’s respective family imprints. As suggested by all six stories, family upbringing was a major determinant in the formation of the participants’ personalities, beliefs, value systems, worldviews, and the relationship templates which they inevitably bring with them upon entering their current relationships.

Many of the personal qualities that couple members reported as attractive about their partners had been a product of their upbringing. Janice talked about her family’s migratory history and progressive worldviews contributing to her flexible attitudes and out-going personality. Stefan found her personality alluring and had entered the relationship with a more conservative template, which he acquired from his parents, though over the years his outlook on issues has softened as their couple identity took shape. When Felicia met Boris she found his genuineness and modesty particularly “endearing,” qualities he developed having been brought up by a family with humble beginnings. Felicia had inherited a set of Chinese superstitious beliefs and practices from her mother which Boris enjoyed learning about and was open to incorporating in his life. A strong social justice background in Maggie’s family led to her chosen career path in academia, which Helmut was drawn to when

the couple first met online. Debra and Hans both came from families that played a role in honing their intellectual curiosities, qualities that would later define their relationship and take them on a relationship road less travelled. Both Jason and Sarah credited their mothers for their work ethics and strong family values, respectively, and suggested that women in their families played and will continue to play a central role in their lives. When Peter met Teresa, he desired to settle in a relationship that was founded upon clearly defined roles reminiscent of his parents' relationship dynamic, in which his father was the "boss" and his mother a "leader" who managed the relationship but always deferred to him. Teresa, having been raised in a cultural and family context that encouraged selfless devotion, was experienced by Peter as an ideal match.

Character development is a vital part of story-telling and must be actualized before the story unfolds. What are the personal qualities of each character that set him/her apart from all other characters? And what impact do these qualities have on their relationship experiences? This study asserts that in understanding a couple and their lived experiences, one must begin by stepping into the shoes of the two members involved, seeing the world through their separate points of view, and discerning what personal qualities they bring to the relationship. In doing so, one inevitably comes across their family histories and the ways they underpin the couple's relationship experiences.

Gender role expectations. The majority of the couples in this study challenge the traditional rules around gender-based roles, both at home and in the workplace. In fact, many of the women in this study are extremely successful in their careers and demonstrate a high level of assertiveness in the relationship. Three Chinese female participants in this study-- Janice, Felicia, and Debra—shed light on how Chinese patriarchy in prior generations played a role in shaping their assertive and forward-thinking personalities. Janice, for instance, described her parents and grandparents as espousing "progressive worldviews," an anomaly

when compared with many Chinese of the same generation. The experience of never having been “limited” by her parents meant she was not confined by traditional gender roles in Chinese culture. She felt her “crazy and loud” personality would have been unacceptable to many Chinese men who expect women to “fit a mold of a female gender role.” Felicia’s familial past stood in contrast to Janice’s. She openly shared how her parents’ marriage dissolved on account of Chinese patriarchy and the strict gender roles her mother was prescribed. Felicia was riled with a sense of injustice during the interview as she revealed the types of statements her mother would be subjected to by her own mother, such as the following: “When you come home you should have hot tea, you should have the slippers, oblige, be quiet, you’re gonna have a baby, do it until you have a son.” Felicia’s mother left her marriage with the mindset of never repeating the past and giving Felicia the liberty to make her own life choices, such as in her selection of partners. As for Debra, she noted that although her mother was a “strong and capable” individual and successful in her career, she always “deferred” to her father at home. Whatever her father believed or stood for was “the way it is.” It was clear during the interview that Debra had no interest in accepting the set of gender role expectations prescribed to her mother. Taken together, Janice, Felicia, and Debra all understood the inner workings of a Chinese household defined by traditional gender roles and made a conscious decision to not be dictated by them. Their relationships with Stefan, Boris, and Hans, respectively, allowed them to be “who they want to be” without conforming to gender-based expectations.

The perception that Chinese men tend to expect traditional gender roles does not support the stories of Maggie and Helmut and Sarah and Jason, relationships involving a Chinese male and a White female. Perhaps their stories reflect contemporary gender role ideologies in the West, shifting away from the conventional expectations depicted by Janice, Felicia, and Debra when discussing their family histories. Maggie indicated that she came

from a family that “strongly believed in women’s rights” and social justice, which she felt propelled her into pursuing her current career (i.e., academia and community work). Though her professional status may be intimidating for some men, Helmut was rather drawn to it. Discussing his mother’s compliments on Maggie’s intelligence, despite not knowing exactly what her work entails, Helmut noted that it is either a “generation or culture thing.” He added, “In her mind these gender roles are very real to her in that women traditionally don’t do certain jobs, whereas me, we’ve grown up to know that men and women can do whatever they want.” Thus, gender-based expectations in prior generations no longer left a lasting imprint in Helmut’s life. Further, stories of Helmut being an avid cook and dessert maker challenge the traditional notion that cooking is a responsibility assigned to women. A similar relationship dynamic is found in Sarah and Jason’s relationship. There was a sense that Jason looked up to his mother, whom he indicated has consistently been the primary breadwinner of his household. While Sarah’s mother remained a homemaker since the birth of her first child, gender roles were not clear cut in the household. Stories of Jason watching Sarah’s hockey games with her mother and grandmother (Sarah’s father is not interested in hockey) conjure up images that once again contradict conventional gender role expectations.

In Teresa and Peter’s narrative, traditional gender roles were not construed as something negative or restricting. In fact, a relationship reminiscent of his parents’, where roles were “clearly defined,” was precisely what Peter was seeking upon meeting Teresa. Discussing Chinese women of his generation, such as Teresa, he stated that, “their relationships with their men are more like my mother’s generation, my father’s generation...not like today.” Teresa was very willing to assume the role of the homemaker, provided that financial stability was secured. The couple’s narrative reminds us that traditional gender role expectations are not inherently problematic insofar as both couple members are willing to fulfill them.

Family involvement. Family involvement (particularly parental) in the couples' relationships also emerged as an overarching content theme since their early stages, with the exception of Teresa and Peter's narrative, as both sets of parents had long been deceased when they met. The level of family involvement differed from couple to couple and often evolved over time as couples transitioned from one relationship stage to another. Its expression also varied, ranging from a strong supportive stance to outright disapproval, the latter evident during the earlier years of Debra and Hans' relationship.

Contrary to Debra and Hans' story, two couples (Janice and Stefan; Sarah and Jason) regard their positive family involvement as strengthening pillars in the early stages of their relationships. For instance, Janice and Stefan viewed the fact that their families exchanged food back and forth during the dating stage as an indication of the growing attachment between the couple themselves. In four of the stories, a key figure--a mother in the family--exerted significant influence on the overall relationships with the extended families. As participants were introduced to their partners' families, their experiences with their partners' mothers seem to have been a crucial feature. In the case of Sarah and Jason and Maggie and Helmut, mothers served as strengthening pillars in the couple's budding relationship. Felicia's early experiences with Boris' mother, however, were characterized by a sense of reservation and intimidation which took nearly two years to resolve itself when she realized his mother did not "hate" her. Debra experienced similar tensions with Hans' mother, as she was resentful of the fact that Debra was not Catholic and expressed no intentions in converting. Despite his mother's resentment and silent objections to their partnership in its early stages, the couple's relationship persisted and continued to flourish on account of shared interests, values, and a strong commitment to their relationship.

For nearly all the couples in this study, family involvement tended to intensify as their lives became progressively intertwined. There was a sense that family members held back

their involvement as much as possible until the couple's relationship was well-cemented and had the potentials for a long-term future. For instance, Stefan felt his mother began to take an active interest in Janice when he seemed "serious about Janice" and would make efforts to not quickly dismiss or judge her. Maggie's mother invited Helmut to meet her entire family for the first time after learning of his plans to fly to South Africa to visit Maggie. Debra and Hans were not as fortunate. Upon announcing their engagement and commitment to one another, Debra's father reacted disapprovingly and essentially broke off all relations with her until their reconciliation several years later. While family involvement from Debra's side was one that was highly contentious, involvement from Hans' family was experienced as a form of "smothering."

Once in committed relationships, family involvement played a central role at the onset of two relationship milestones—marriage and parenthood. The ubiquitous influence of mothers is once again apparent. In preparing for the wedding, family involvement was more than a mere division of labor. The couples' families served as cultural informants, imparting their knowledge and wisdom of the various wedding customs so they could be appropriately and respectfully incorporated. Generally speaking, most couples spoke of cultural blending at the wedding as a reflection of respect for their families and cultures of origin. A few consented to include cultural components they disliked (e.g., roasted suckling pig or shark fin) to placate their families.

Involvement from extended family members also has a significant impact on the couple's parenthood experiences. Janice, Felicia, and Debra all spoke of baptizing their children at the insistence of their in-laws, instances in their stories that revealed minor tensions. Janice, for logistical reasons, disagreed with her mother-in-law's suggestion to baptize her son as a Greek Orthodox; Felicia and Boris were flabbergasted by the rituals involved in the ceremony and upset they were not forewarned by Boris' parents; and Debra

consented to baptizing her children as an appeasement to Hans' mother. In an email exchange, Felicia and Boris shared their experience of being parented on their own parenting skills and commented on the impact of "filial duties" on their parenting approach. This is especially the case for Felicia, who over the years has come to "embrace her Chinese-ness" and the virtue of respecting her elders.

Lastly, many of the couples in this study described their parents as invaluable resources when help with childrearing was needed. Grandparents were deemed as exemplary role models and cultural influences, as they can expose their grandchildren to their native tongues (i.e., Chinese, Romanian, Hebrew, and Macedonian) and provide a sense of cultural heritage and family history.

Taken together, this study suggests that couples do not exist in isolation from their families unless they chose to sever ties with them (as in the case of Debra and Hans during the first few years of their marriage). Whereas the couples are central characters in their stories, influential family members play the supporting roles. At the heart of their involvement is their love for the central characters and a desire to make a meaningful contribution to their lives, though whether this is experienced by the couples is yet another story. As their narratives suggest, family involvement can perhaps be interpreted as having a life of its own, often varying from couple to couple and ceaselessly morphing throughout the course of their relationships. *How* these couples manage family involvement while maintaining the integrity of their relationships will be discussed in Part II of this chapter.

Children. The subtheme of children in this study revealed several issues of critical significance: the extent to which the couples' childrearing practices are informed by their own upbringings, the couples' opinions about their children's racial/cultural identities, and the couples' perceptions of social reactions towards their mixed race children.

The six narratives in this study revealed a strong connection between the couples' upbringings and their own parenting styles. Family dynamics and rituals in prior generations had major influences on the couples' relationships with subsequent generations. Particularly, as first-time parents, the couples in this study have had to recall their parents' childrearing practices and "pick and choose" which approaches were meaningful and integral in shaping who they are today. For Janice and Stefan, the strong family values instilled in them as children by parents, grandparents, and other extended family members formed the basis of their own parenting style, in which food was deemed as a means to maintain family cohesiveness. Stefan further indicated that the Macedonian traditions he engaged in as a child helped shape his identity and instill a sense of pride around having a culture rich in history and that values family. He hopes to pass these traditions onto his children so they too can develop a strong identity. Similarly, Maggie and Helmut spoke of exposing their son to the various Chinese and Jewish traditions that they were exposed to as children so he understands his cultural origins. Sarah and Jason also envisioned themselves doing the same with their future children, out of respect for their parents, their cultures, and the traditions themselves. Felicia and Boris differed in their views on what skills their daughter should acquire and attributed their differences to their own upbringing. Her insistence that their daughter learn Chinese stems from regrets and overall disappointment that her own parents were not strict enough about her language acquisition. In Debra and Hans' story, there was little indication that their childrearing practices were modeled after their parents', perhaps due in large part to their disengagement from their families early on in the relationship and their decision to adopt children 13 years into their relationship at a time when their strong couple identity had surpassed family influences.

While the couples' early family influences are significant, they also spoke of "learning as they go" and developing their own parenting plans that are contextualized and

tailored to the beliefs of the couple and the needs of their children, given that “a lot of things have changed” since they were brought up.

The issue of raising children of mixed heritage was discussed by several couples in this study. Although they generally face the same types of parenting decisions and challenges that same-race couples face, several issues require additional consideration. One aspect of parenting mixed race children is the issue of racial and cultural identity, which generated three types of responses among the couples interviewed. In other words, the couples were found to differ in their beliefs about what constitutes the best path towards a healthy racial/cultural identity development.

The first response was expressed by two couples and one participant (Janice and Stefan; Maggie and Helmut; and Felicia), who hope their children can develop a strong Canadian identity while retaining the collective backgrounds of both parents. Generally speaking, all three female participants expressed a stronger determination to incorporate the various cultural components (or at least those from their own cultures of origin), perhaps given the fact they all demonstrate a stronger orientation to their cultures of origin as compared to their male partners. It was very clear during the interviews that Janice and Felicia embraced their Chinese-Canadian identities and Maggie her Jewish identity.

The second type of response centred on the formation of a strong Canadian identity. In a discussion about Canada’s cultural mosaic and the ‘melting pot’ ideals of the U.S.A., Boris (Felicia’s partner) saw the advantage in the latter, as it “creates a strong culture.” His belief is that if you live in Canada you should identify as a Canadian. For Debra and Hans, the issue is somewhat complex. The couple decided to adopt, first a girl of Chinese descent and then a boy of Vietnamese descent. Although their children were not of mixed heritage at birth, they grew up in a household that was. Debra and Hans ultimately made the decision to take a hands-off approach and allow their children to find their own path with respect to

racial and cultural identity development. The indicated that both their adult children grew up gravitating towards predominantly White social circles and “White activities” such as hockey, figure-skating, and riding. Their daughter, for instance, had been teased in school about being Chinese and would respond, insistently, “I’m not Chinese, I’m a Canadian.”

Finally, the third type of response came from Sarah and Jason, who are not yet parents, but anticipate that “the identity piece” will come up and wonder how race-related matters will be addressed given that they themselves do not have first-hand experience of what it is like to be of mixed race. Sarah mentioned that a friend of mixed heritage offered to talk to their children if issues around identity become a struggle.

Another consideration that revolves around mixed race children relates to social reactions. One couple (Debra and Hans) indicated that issues around appearance were brought to their attention when their children were very young. People would assume that their children are their biological children and be bewildered by their appearances. They would comment that their daughter (adopted daughter of Chinese descent) resembled Debra much more than Hans, a reaction which the couple felt was a reflection of how “sensitive” they were about mixed relationships, though they noted that over the years these reactions have diminished. None of the remaining couples in this study reported exceptional or negative reactions from outsiders. They also attributed this to the fact that interethnic marriages are a growing trend in cities such as Toronto. Indeed, Canada (particularly Toronto) as a unique context to raise mixed race children was brought up by three couples (Janice and Stefan; Felicia and Boris; and Debra and Hans). Janice reflected back on her own childhood experience as a visible minority in her community and felt she was able to retain her Chinese identity while still being Canadian (unlike her experience in the U.S.A.), a sentiment which Felicia also shared. They take pride in being both Chinese and Canadian and find comfort in knowing that their children will be able to embrace their mixed race

identities in light of Canada's inclusive environment. Debra and Hans, having lived extensively both in the U.S.A. and Canada, experienced Canada as demonstrating more concern for the social welfare of all people, "less difference between the top and the bottom," less competitive and "outrageously materialistic," and as being a less prejudiced and racially discriminatory environment to raise their children. The fact that community classes such as "Jewish issues for interfaith couples" exist (in Maggie and Helmut's narrative) may reflect an increased sensitivity towards the escalating trends and complexities of mixed relationships.

In sum, the overarching theme of family in this study works like a pendulum, with its ongoing oscillations that take us to the participants' familial pasts and the present and future (envisioned) circumstances that are shaped by those early experiences. We come to understand that an intimate relationship is the product of two unique characters whose personal qualities, gender role expectations, and childrearing practices are, to a large extent, molded by their family imprints and ongoing involvement from extended family members. Hence, our journeys into the couples' lived experiences must entail frequent visits to the participants' family narratives.

Compatibility in personalities, interests, and/or values. This is an important theme in this study as it reveals what the couples' motives were for pursuing and remaining in their current partnerships. Over time, this content theme becomes one of the major grounding forces as they journey from one lifecycle stage to another.

All six couples in this study talked at length about their areas of compatibility, such as personalities, interests, and/or values, and the ways they surpassed racial, ethnic, or cultural differences. Although they attributed their relational success to inner compatibility, their narratives suggest that compatibility is not something granted to them at the outset of their relationships, but something they have to constantly work towards, particularly as it pertains to interests and values. Personality appeared to be a more fixed construct that was less

susceptible to change. Debra and Hans may have been the only exception, as they met very early in life. They noted that during their first adventure in Alaska, being young and “malleable enough” helped form “the kind of personality” they are and helped consolidate “the ability to take things as they came.” The following section discusses how the experience of compatibility for the couples in this study morphed over the course of their relationships.

It is fair to say that race and ethnicity *did* play a role in the couples’ sense of compatibility during their initial contact. With the advent of modern technology, three of the six couples in this study (Felicia and Boris, Maggie and Helmut, and Teresa and Peter) sought love and compatibility through online dating sites, by stating their interests and hobbies, displaying an attractive photo, and completing a screening process where certain genders, races, and other demographic traits are filtered out. In other words, initial compatibility, to some extent, was contingent upon the racial/ethnic/cultural background of their potential love interests. The remaining three couples--Janice and Stefan, Sarah and Jason, and Debra and Hans--however, crossed paths inadvertently at social gatherings and reported being drawn to each other’s personality and/or appearance. Again, it is fair to assume that attraction may have been influenced by visual cues commonly associated with a particular race or ethnicity. Understandably, couples who met face-to-face differed in their experience of first encounters when compared to those who met online; the former reported being drawn to aspects of each other’s personality and appearance while the latter focused their attention on their partners’ written profiles or profile photo. However, what these couples shared in common was a sense of compatibility--partially based on racial/ethnic preferences--that compelled them to pursue their relationships, which I describe here as *ostensible or surface compatibility*, given that such compatibility during the initial encounters were not informed by substantial evidence and may be clouded by feelings of novelty, excitement, or strong physical attraction.

As the couples entered the dating stages, compatibility turned inwards (*inner compatibility*) and were based on cumulative experiences of spending significant amounts of time together. However, a relationship in its early stages can be fragile and unpredictable. Janice and Stefan had broken up once as Janice was not ready to commit to a long-term relationship at such a young age; Felicia was enraged by the fact that Boris had not fully terminated his relationship with his previous girlfriend when they met; Debra was casually dating other men when she met Hans; and at the three-month mark, Peter's former girlfriend reappeared in his life, forcing him to choose between her or Teresa. In the midst of such uncertainties, all the couples in this study reported compatibility in personalities and interests as anchoring them in their budding relationships, often using the words "comfortable," "easy," and "non-dramatic" to describe their early experiences. For instance, Janice and Stefan's extraverted and introverted selves, respectively, were experienced as a "gel in personalities." Felicia attributed her "drama queen" and future-oriented personality and Boris' rational and "grounding" presence to precursors of a balanced relationship. Maggie found Helmut's consistent thoughtfulness and sweetness particularly endearing, while Maggie's unconditional acceptance of Helmut was particularly meaningful for him. Debra and Hans' relationship "clicked" due to Debra's dauntless nature and Hans' willingness to be "dragged along" on their series of adventures. Their interests were boundless on account of shared intellectual curiosity and aesthetic sensitivity. Sarah and Jason indicated that a sense of "comfort" was experienced as their main incentive for remaining in their relationships during their fragile periods.

Whereas compatibility in personalities and interests were more representative of the couples' experiences during the early stages of their relationships, similarity in core values played a more salient role in their entrance to committed, long-term partnerships. The term "core" is emphasized here if we visualize compatibility as progressively turning inwards to

our core selves as the relationship deepens. Although couples do not generally sit and discuss what their core values are per se, it is clear from the six narratives that the foundation of a long-term and committed partnership is built upon a set of shared values that guide the couples' daily life choices and actions. The shared values embodied in the couples' lives together can be seen as intrinsic to their couple identity, and from the couples' point of view, their "we-ness." Indeed, when asked about the conditions that promote commitment and their secrets to their long-term partnerships, all six couples articulated the importance of shared values and qualities that make their relationships unique. For instance, Teresa and Peter suggested that compatibility of values is a necessity if a couple chooses to live together, especially as they contemplate a lifelong companionship. Their narrative implies that shared values such as honesty surpasses any cultural differences that may exist between an interethnic couple, a sentiment Maggie and Helmut also voiced in their interview. Maggie added that Jewish and Chinese cultures share a lot more similarities than one would think, such as a respect for family and tradition, active engagement with culture, learning and working hard. Perhaps they appear so different on the surface because those values are expressed differently through distinctive customs.

Indeed, while certain core values are universal and may be shared among the couples interviewed, the forms of expression and interpretation may vary depending on the person or culture. To illustrate this point, many of the core values reported in this study were "family relations," "honesty," "high academic achievement," "hard-working," "active engagement," "open communication," "respect," "love," and "commitment," to name a few. A deeper probing of what some of these core values meant to each couple generated different meanings and interpretations, such in the case of family core values. Like Maggie and Helmut, Janice and Stefan believe that their cultures, Chinese and Macedonian respectively, "take family seriously," "respect the elderly," and value family time. Felicia indicated that as a Chinese,

her family values are reflected in her filial piety and culturally-ingrained inclinations to “respect her elders,” “dropping everything to take care of them,” and fulfill her filial duties, which she feels Boris does not comprehend. Debra and Hans’ conceptualization of family values highlighted the importance of commitment towards family and “sticking by” them for better or for worse. And as parents to adult children currently in the empty nest stage, they continue to carve out family time amidst busy work schedules. As for Sarah and Jason, their family values are reflected in their respect for family members and traditions and their ongoing efforts to unite the two sides of the family.

Taken together, compatibility in this study is revealed as having a transformative and multi-layered nature, beginning from a sense of ostensible or surface compatibility based on physical cues and initial impressions, to a growing sense of inner compatibility in personalities and interests, followed by a deeper compatibility between the core selves that are founded upon shared values. Several couples in this study suggested that many core values are universal, but the ways they are interpreted or expressed may be subjected to cultural or individual variances. Further, as aforementioned, compatibility in interests or values was not something granted to the couple at the outset of their relationships, it entailed a process of working towards it. In Part II of this chapter (Process Themes), the process in which the couples work towards attaining compatibility will be discussed.

Cultural differences as a source of tension, self-expansion, or harmony. While the couples in this study suggest that their relationships do not revolve around cultural differences, they did highlight distinguishable dissimilarities in cultural artifacts such as religion, food, and language (see Figure 9). They shared how these differences impacted their relationship quality at various stages of their relationships and to what extent their family and social networks were involved in bridging or widening these cultural gaps. Notably, such differences were most palpable when couples moved in together, during the

planning of the wedding, as well as the couples' transition into parenthood. These differences were at times experienced as challenges, at times as opportunities for self-growth, and in some instances as harmonizing forces in the couple's relationship.

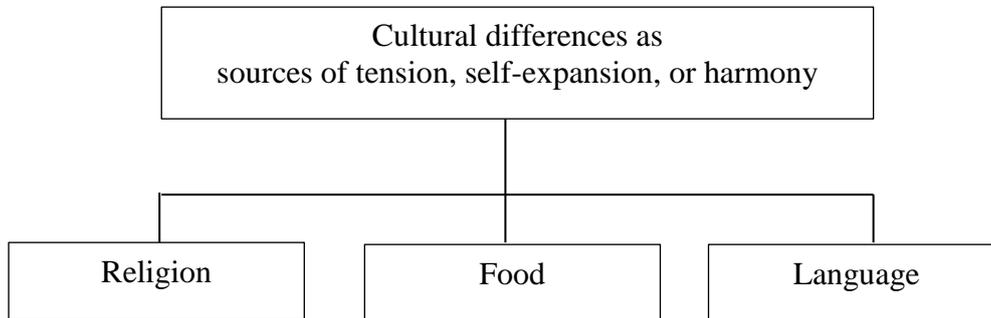


Figure 9. Subthemes of ‘Cultural differences as sources of tension, self-expansion, or harmony’

Religion. Religious affiliation can often be a point of difference within Chinese-White couple relationships by virtue of the couple's dissimilar ethnic backgrounds. The six narratives suggest that embedded in religious differences are disparities in values, belief systems, moral codes, customs, and traditions that can sometimes be challenging to reconcile.

Comparatively, religious faith has had a stronger presence in the lives of the White participants in this study, particularly for those who have a strong attachment to their families of origin. At times their filial obligations became a source of conflict either between the couple or between couple members and their families of origin. Stefan, for instance, was baptized as Greek Orthodox, and while he does not consider himself “religious” per se, he and Janice noted that his mother's relatively strong attachment to her religious faith caused minor tensions when discussing the baptism of their first child. Felicia was upset when her request to wed in a Christian Orthodox church was denied based on the fact that she is a member of the Anglican Church, and the idea that Boris' church would view their children as

“bastards” was also disconcerting. Further, the couple found their recent experience at their daughter’s baptism highly upsetting and wished Boris’ parents had provided them ample warning. Debra often alluded to her contentious relationship with Hans’ mother and attributed it to her non-Catholic background, not their racial/ethnic differences. For Maggie and Helmut, religion was a central theme in their lived experience, beginning with their personal upbringings. Helmut’s conflicting feelings towards his religious upbringing has long been a source of strain between him and his parents. His premarital co-habitation with Maggie was further upsetting news for Helmut’s mother. And although Maggie’s parents “have come a long way” in accepting a son-in-law who is non-Jewish, she noted that one of her father’s recent comments clearly reflected his lingering discomfort.

Religious differences as a source of self-expansion and harmony in the couples’ relationship were also evident. Despite Helmut’s personal struggles with his religious background, his involvement with someone who was Jewish (Maggie) became a harmonizing force in his relationship with his parents. To reiterate Maggie, she stated that despite being of a different faith from Helmut’s family, in their view it was “better to have a faith than to be Godless.” Over the years Helmut and his parents have developed a keen interest in Judaism and have actively read up on its holidays and traditions. The couple’s impressive blending of cultures and religious faiths at their wedding could not have been possible without their families’ genuine respect for each other’s religious backgrounds.

Similarly, a rewarding aspect of Sarah and Jason’s intercultural learning experience revolved around religion. It seemed fitting for Sarah, who developed a newfound appreciation for Judaism, to introduce Jason to her cultural heritage. Jason mentioned his experience in Sarah’s family gatherings as personally enriching, inclusive, and something “he looks forward to.” More recently, the planning of a Chinese-Jewish wedding provided yet

another unique intercultural learning experience whereby the couple incorporated cultural elements they found particularly meaningful.

Food. As the six narratives suggest, the importance of food in a couple's lived experience cannot be overlooked, particularly at the onset of cohabitation. As Peter noted, "If you're living together you've got to eat every day. You generally eat three times a day plus snacks so it's pretty important." It was often described as a defining aspect of one's cultural profile, marking cultural differences as well as strengthening family bonds.

Food customs are often associated with particular religious and spiritual rituals, births, weddings, and funeral ceremonies and can be a source of tension if two belief systems contradict one another. Take pork for instance. The Chinese have long been known to be pork enthusiasts, eating essentially any part of the pig that can be consumed. In traditional wedding ceremonies, a roasted suckling pig is presented to symbolize the bride's purity. As pointed out by Maggie and Sarah, both of Jewish descent, this gesture would have been offensive to them and their families.

Teresa and Peter noted that their main differences revolved around food. Teresa comes from a region in China where fish is a common staple. Since living with Peter she has had to give up cooking fish at home due to his strong distaste for the smell. She further noted the differences in dining etiquettes between Chinese and Western cultures. Despite initial challenges, Teresa's adaptability to changes makes it possible for the couple to overcome major differences around food. A similar scenario is evident in Maggie and Helmut's story with regard to Helmut's response to Maggie's vegetarianism.

Challenges aside, the cultural significance of food and eating were prominently expressed by all six couples. Janice and Stefan talked about the role of food in bridging their extended families. Any discomfort around language barriers between their parents have been mitigated by their mutual appreciation for food and lively family gatherings around the

dinner table. Further, the couple hopes to impart this appreciation to their children, as it informs them about their cultural roots (Chinese and Macedonian) and helps build “strong identities.” For couples like Felicia and Boris, Sarah and Jason, and Teresa and Peter, exposure to cultural foods brought not only joy but it expanded their experience and knowledge of each other’s culture. An adventurous eater such as Felicia had no difficulties embracing Romanian foods; in fact, she noted that she has perfected some of her favorite dishes, a statement Boris attested to. Boris further mentioned that the repertoire of foods he is willing to try has expanded since being with Felicia. Sarah and Jason learned about traditional differences in dining etiquette between Jewish and Chinese cultures when Jason was invited to spend Passover with Sarah’s family, conjuring up the memorable dining scene in the film *The Joy Luck Club* where cultural differences in dinner etiquettes were humorously depicted. Lastly, Teresa often described her relationship with Peter as a continuous learning experience, particularly where food is concerned. Not only has she learned a great deal about Western dining etiquettes, she listed steak, lamb, chicken curry, and cheese as a few of the many food items that Peter has taught her to cook or appreciate. With such gains, it is no wonder that giving up seafood was not considered a great sacrifice on Teresa’s part.

Language. The third cultural artifact that was frequently mentioned in the six narratives relates to language. All six couples use English as their common tongue. With the exception of Teresa and Peter, none of the couples in this study experience language differences in their relationships by virtue of cultural assimilation and identification with mainstream culture.

Overall, the Chinese participants in this study have a stronger grasp of their native languages as compared to their Western partners. There is the exception of Maggie, who was taught Yiddish by her father and grandparents and who is, to this day, able to communicate in

Yiddish. Most of the Chinese participants speak Chinese fluently, a few of them can read basic Chinese characters, but only Teresa is fluent in all three forms of communication (i.e., speaking, reading, and writing). This is understandable in light of her entrance into Canadian culture much later in life. For first or second generation immigrants like Janice, Felicia, Helmut, and Jason, their stories suggest that their families of origin and weekly Chinese schools helped counter the loss of their native tongue brought on by cultural assimilation into Western culture.

Given that the couples in this study share English as their common tongue, what impact does language have on their relationship experience? First, language as a theme was not salient in the early stages of their relationships but would emerge as a common narrative thread when the couples entered a more committed stage. Second, with the exception of Teresa and Peter, language had minimal, if any, relevance to the couples if solely looking at the day-to-day communication between the couples themselves. When the couples talked about communicating with their extended families, however, language became an important feature. This theme would re-emerge as the couples entered parenthood and begin to contemplate whether or not to expose their children to multiple languages. Finally, similar to previous commentaries on cultural artifacts such as religion and food, language encompassed a variety of interpretations: a source of challenge, self-expansion, or a means to strengthen family bonds.

Challenges posed by language barriers were evident in several of the couples' experiences. During joint family gatherings, Janice and Stefan's parents have difficulties communicating with one another. While this may be perceived as a challenge in the eyes of many, Janice perceived this as a blessing in disguise, as her father's quirkiness and sometimes "harsh" attitude are contained so long as conversations remain somewhat superficial. Upon meeting Teresa and Peter, it was clear that one of their major differences

revolved around language; however, in light of what they currently desire in a relationship, language differences were not experienced as a form of challenge or barrier. In fact, they asserted that honesty and transparency surpassed any cultural barriers such as language differences. In Sarah and Jason's narrative, the challenge mainly lies in Sarah's communication with Jason's father. Although there is no indication that language barriers undermined their relationship, Sarah did express a desire to deepen their communication. As for potential language barriers between Jason's father and his future grandchildren, the couple remain hopeful that the issue will be resolved through the children learning Cantonese or Jason assuming the role of the family translator. Felicia and Boris's challenges revolved around their communication with each other's extended families during family gatherings. They disclosed their discomfort and frustration in family gatherings where the "common language" (English) is not spoken. Felicia and Boris remind us again that interethnic relationships are not only unions of two individuals with distinctive cultures, but also the merging of extended family members from diverse cultures. More often than not participants described their parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts as being more "traditional" and speaking primarily in their native tongues. Hence, cultural divides across generational gaps are palpable across all six narratives, particularly where language is concerned.

Language as a source of self-expansion was a subtheme that frequently surfaced when the couples shared their parenting experiences. For most of the couples, there was a belief that exposure to multiple languages would connect their children to their cultures of origin and carry far-reaching benefits and opportunities. If immersed successfully, many of the children in this study would not only speak the common tongue in the household (English), but also the respective native tongues spoken by their interethnic parents. There are clear challenges, however, given that many of the participants have essentially lost their mother tongues as part of the assimilation process into mainstream culture. In light of these

circumstances, exposure to native tongues often fell into the hands of grandparents. Where aid from grandparents was unavailable, such as in the case of Debra and Hans, they sought alternative routes such as enrolling their children in Chinese and French immersion schools, though they noted that their children “would have none of it” and “hated” Chinese school in particular.

To summarize, the overarching theme of cultural differences revealed where the major disparities lie and what the range of experiences were on account of those differences. We learn that cultural differences in the couples’ relationships do not always represent challenges or areas of deficiencies, but often serve as gateways to broadening perspectives and experiences. *How* the couples in this study manage these perceived differences in their daily lives will be a topic of discussion in Part II.

Part II. Relationship maintenance processes (process themes)

In addition to content themes that elucidate some of the prominent issues and concerns that the couples in this study reported as having had a lasting impact on their relationships, a detailed re-reading of narratives revealed another facet of their lived experiences—relationship maintenance processes. By definition, ‘lived experience’ implies that the essence of any experience lies precisely in its “lived” nature, which the couples in this study managed to sustain via a set of relational maintenance behaviours or processes. In other words, these process themes correspond to the “*how to*’s” and the variety of ways the six Chinese-White heterosexual couples respond to many of the issues presented in Part I. Two distinctive types of maintenance processes were identified: maintaining family cohesion and responding to partner differences. Each maintenance process can be further broken down into distinctive types of behaviours and will be discussed in the following sections.

Maintaining family cohesion. With family constituting a prominent content theme in this study, it is no surprise that maintaining family cohesion has been a central goal for the

majority of the couples. Across the six narratives, family cohesion was constructed as the emotional bond family members have with one another. Nearly all the couples suggest that healthy family cohesion is not only a strength, but also a resource that assists them in facing daily challenges, in maintaining a healthy relationship with their extended families, and in providing a nurturing environment for their children.

The maintenance of family cohesion is born out of the belief that such an endeavour is important in the family context. In other words, having strong family values is the precursor to maintaining cohesiveness in the family. Nearly all the couples in this study suggested that they come from families that value family connectedness. The fact that nearly all of the participants' parents (11 out of 12) remain committed to their marriages (or remained committed until the time of death) may confirm this assertion.

How did the couples in this study manage to maintain family cohesion? Many talked about the value of open communication in strengthening the relationship or managing conflicts; the notion of sharing food as a means to maintain family ties; the importance of actively engaging in cultural traditions that are meaningful to their families of origin; prioritizing needs; and setting boundaries (see Figure 10).

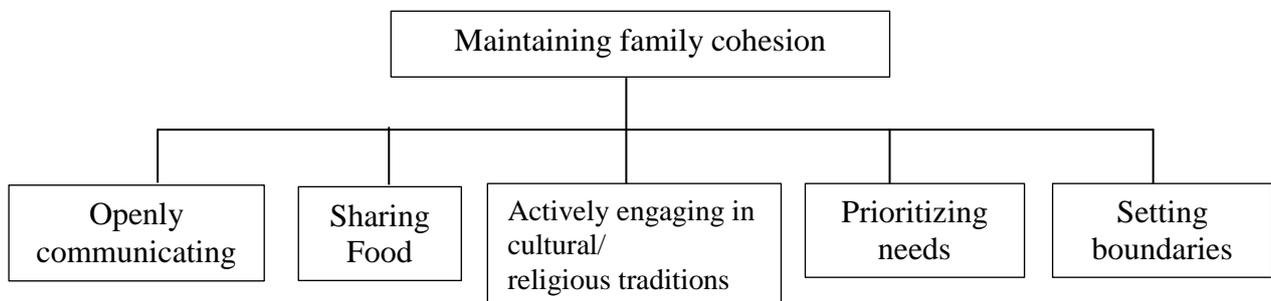


Figure 10. Subthemes of 'Maintaining family cohesion'

Openly communicating. Arguably, communication constitutes the most primary process of relational maintenance, as all couples must communicate to sustain a long-term relationship. In the present study, the value of *open* communication was voiced by the majority of couples and experienced as an important behaviour in maintaining emotional bonds with each other or with their extended families. The word “open” was emphasized by a few couples as embodying the qualities of honesty, understanding, respect, open-mindedness, and willingness to express thoughts and emotions. In fact, several couples indicated that open communication has consistently been the “secret” to their relational success, though their experience of which of the aforementioned qualities were imperative varied from couple to couple.

Janice and Stefan, for instance, focused on maintaining connection and resolving conflicts. Amidst busy schedules, they consistently make an effort to “talk to each other every day” to maintain their strong marital bond, and when faced with conflicts, the couple stated that they tend to “just deal with it, talk about it” and share their feelings “right then and there” so that issues do not become lingering resentments in the relationship. They further noted that this form of communication applies not only in their marriage but also in their negotiations with their extended families, particularly in instances when family members have crossed boundaries. For Felicia and Boris, open communication was crucial in negotiating their needs and desires. Their transitions from one relationship stage to the next entailed a series of lengthy, often tearful discussions about their future and constant re-evaluations of their relationship. Maggie and Helmut spoke of remaining open-minded and respectful when different opinions are being expressed and noted that this quality is essential in maintaining an interethnic relationship, as major cultural differences may result in divergent viewpoints. In Sarah and Jason’s case, they centred on the communication of opinions. Sarah’s late grandmother had taught her that in taking a position, it is crucial to

clarify why the position was taken, as it is easier to make compromises if one understands where the other “is coming from” and how much the position means to him/her. Lastly, Teresa and Peter asserted that honesty is the cornerstone of open communication. In their experience, honesty is a universal value; it supersedes all other values and does not require fancy vocabulary to convey. Their narrative suggests that maintaining family cohesion entails having one’s personal needs and desires met, but to have them met, one must first openly communicate with his/her partner and be transparent about what they entail.

The saying that “communication is the key to a successful relationship” appeared to be echoed by the majority of couples in this study, though they stressed the importance of *open* communication. Indeed, during the interviews, the process in which the couple members interacted with one another often mirrored the qualities they asserted as being characteristic of their processes of engagement. However, as the findings suggest, open communication alone does not lead to successful maintenance of family cohesion. The following sections will address additional processes that have been experienced as equally critical.

Sharing food. Sharing food as a process to achieving family cohesion was well noted in this study. Two White participants in this study mentioned that despite their limited contact with Chinese people during their childhoods, exposure to Chinese food marked their first entry point to this ancient culture. As Chinese food is ubiquitous in the North American landscape and a defining feature in the lives of Chinese people, it is not surprising that the act of sharing food took centre stage as many couples shared their experiences as cohabitating partners.

How is family cohesion maintained by sharing food? Several couples suggested that at the dining table, parents and elders act as role models, teaching life lessons, traditions, and values to subsequent generations. Couples such as Janice and Stefan, Felicia and Boris,

Sarah and Jason, and Teresa and Peter shared their experiences around food sharing, underscoring the numerous ways emotional bonding in the family can be maintained and enhanced: engaging with family members through conversations, expressing trust and acceptance (such as Janice and Stefan's interfamilial food sharing behaviours), sharing feelings of togetherness and joy, sharing nutrition, learning about each other's personal qualities (e.g., food preferences and eating styles), learning about each other's culture through exposure to ethnic foods and different dining etiquettes, teaching their children about their mixed heritages, and celebrating traditions and holidays. Not only was there an overarching sense that time spent with family is time well spent, but that it is best spent around the dinner table. A few couples suggested that their joint family gatherings almost always revolve around food. In their experience, the act of sharing food mitigates some of the discomfort around language barriers given that eating is a universal, authentic, and primal behaviour that is powerful enough to connect a table of strangers.

Despite the emerging trends in eating habits, such as eating in isolation or in the company of TV personalities, eating and texting when dining with others, prizing convenience over conventional means of cooking, and the fact that food has become such an ubiquitous commodity that is so readily available, the majority of couples in this study appreciate the historical significance behind sharing food and regard it as a necessary means to building family cohesiveness. Mindful of the fact that her sons' eating habits will be influenced by these emerging trends, one participant (Janice) makes ongoing efforts to institute the family policy of "we have to come home for dinner."

Actively engaging in cultural and religious traditions. Throughout the six narratives, cultural and religious traditions such as baptisms, the bris ceremony, name day celebrations, the *Moon-yut*, Chinese New Year, Chinese Moon Festival, Christmas, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Chinese taboos and traditions following childbirth were among the many

ceremonies, holidays, and even superstitions that the couples mentioned during their interviews. The findings in this study suggest that actively engaging in these traditions helped maintain family cohesion in the following ways: it creates meaning; it honours family imprints and continues the legacies of prior generations; and it produces a strong identity.

Meaningful family traditions have always been a valuable tool to ensure that the warmth and closeness of family bondage is maintained and strengthened. Similar to the process of sharing food, actively engaging in cultural and religious traditions was experienced by many couples as a meaningful way to spend quality time with each other, with their extended families, and with their children, given that traditions and ceremonies are saturated with meaning and almost always involve celebrations around the dining table. It must be noted, however, that the historical meaning and origins behind certain Chinese holidays such as Chinese New Year and Chinese Moon Festival have perhaps faded into the background for the Chinese participants in this study. Janice felt these “special holidays” were “just an excuse to get together and eat.” A few couples seemed to have a deeper understanding of the historical significance behind certain religious celebrations. Helmut and Jason, for instance noted that they have learned a great deal about their partners’ (Maggie and Sarah respectively) Jewish heritage as they gradually blended into their families. Jason shared his experience reading the story of Passover with Sarah’s family and indicated that it led to interesting discussions.

The process of honouring traditions as a sign of respect or filial piety for one’s family and culture was voiced by the majority of the couples. It served to continue the legacies of their predecessors and maintain harmonious relationships with extended family members. The couples’ wedding stories were particularly exemplary of their efforts to incorporate traditions that were deemed important to their extended families. During the planning of the wedding, Janice and Stefan recalled that there were “so many traditions from each side of the

culture” that it was “impossible” to incorporate them both. They resorted to selecting those that were particularly paramount for their families, as excluding them would be greatly offensive. Despite Boris’ objections, Felicia insisted on taking her newborn baby to Hong Kong during Chinese New Year, which she attributed to a strong sense of “filial duty” inherently ingrained in her. These are two of the many examples the couples in this study provided to illustrate how family cohesion can be maintained by virtue of honouring and respecting meaningful family traditions.

Lastly, parents such as Janice and Stefan, Felicia and Boris, and Maggie and Helmut have commented that by actively engaging in cultural and religious traditions, they can develop a strong family identity and teach their children what makes their family unique. Given that the racial and cultural identity of mixed race children is one of the major content issues that these couples have been contemplating (as presented in Part I of the findings), they discussed how exposing them to elders in the family, ethnic foods, holiday celebrations, the languages of both cultures, the significance behind their names, attitudes, norms, and behaviours and teaching them that “they are strongly rooted in the different traditions and cultures” can help their children develop a strong identity based on the collective backgrounds of both parents.

Prioritizing needs. Many couples in this study suggested that prioritizing needs was vital to maintaining or enhancing satisfaction in their relationships. Simply stated, the central question was: *How do I satisfy my partner or family’s needs so they can be happy?* While balancing one’s personal needs and the needs of others are important, the findings in this study suggest that prioritizing others’ needs over one’s own is sometimes a necessary relationship maintenance process that communicates one’s affection for the other(s). The narratives further suggest that it is a process that is action-based, strategic, consciously driven, guided by one’s values, and often takes place during critical transitions in the couples’ lives.

Take Janice and Stefan for instance, who moved from their condo to a barely developed suburb in the Greater Toronto Area with the intention of starting a family. While Janice preferred to live downtown or at a location that was more subway accessible, the couple felt it was most ideal to raise their children in a house that was in close vicinity to Janice's mother, whom they could rely on for child caring needs. Janice had quit her job at the time of the interview as she valued family time and wanted to "be there" for her two young sons during a critical developmental period of their lives. Stefan had also given up a job downtown for one closer to home so that he could spend more time with his children. Putting a family's needs before the couple's was also evident in Sarah and Jason's narrative. They recently moved from downtown Toronto to North York with the desire of starting a family and raising their children in a diverse community. A year into the relationship, Felicia grew increasingly frustrated with Boris "sleeping over" every night and felt as though he was using her home as a "hotel." Sensing that cohabitation would communicate his commitment to the relationship, Boris consented to moving in with Felicia, which he admitted during the interview was the sensible thing to do. Shifting contexts to fulfill couple and family needs was particularly prominent in Debra and Hans' story throughout their 40-year relationship. In hindsight, the couple viewed their move to Alaska as an effort to steer clear from family disruptions while their personalities, value systems, and couple identity found the fertile ground to thrive and consolidate. They had clearly prioritized their needs as a couple over their extended families'. The couple's subsequent moves back to New York and Alaska, and then Montreal and Oklahoma all served the purpose of fulfilling their needs, primarily professional in nature. A major context shift took place when the couple planted their roots in Canada, a place they felt was ideal to raising a family.

In sum, it can be said that couples will invariably find themselves in critical periods in their lives where difficult decisions have to be made. The narratives in this study suggest that

successful transitions from one relationship milestone to the next often entails a deliberate process of prioritizing needs so as to arrive at a decision that would maintain cohesion in the relationship. As Felicia and Boris' narrative in Chapter Four illustrated, we can view relationship stages as platforms where couples re-evaluate their needs, desires, and values to maintain or regain their sense of direction.

Setting boundaries. Consistently throughout the interviews, the couples spoke of boundary setting as a necessity to forming *healthy* relational bonds. Boundaries can be interpreted as a set of implicit or explicit rules that define what individuals will and will not tolerate and form the parameters within which a relationship operates. The couples in this study often found themselves establishing personal boundaries, couple boundaries, and family boundaries over the course of their relationships, whether they pertained to physical contact, verbal communication, geographical distance, time, emotional distance, or role expectations.

An intimate relationship is a merging of the couple's personal boundaries. A successful merger requires the couple to acknowledge their differences in what constitutes acceptable behaviours and work towards developing what is acceptable for both members. Just prior to the birth of Janice and Stefan's first son, Stefan was working downtown and endured long train commutes to and from work. Given that the couple value family time and "seeing the kids grow up," Stefan quit his job to pursue something more local. Stefan, in essence, had set personal and professional boundaries with respect to the geographical distance and commute time he was willing to tolerate. In Felicia and Boris' narrative, one of their major differences lies in their orientation to time. Felicia indicated that she is much more future-focused than Boris, "plans every second" of her life, and has a "ten year plan." Their transitions from one relationship stage to the next were interjected by heated arguments and re-evaluations of their relationship. In many instances, Felicia felt compelled to set

boundaries around how much time she was willing to wait. For Teresa and Peter, clear boundaries around gender roles and money matters were established at the outset of their relationship. Teresa agreed to manage their domestic life so long as Peter provided the financial resources to do so. As Peter would say, “Once you’ve settled the money there’s nothing to fight about.”

For nearly all the couples in this study, setting boundaries with parents and in-laws was an important process to maintaining cohesion within the couple relationship. This subtheme responds to how family involvement, a major content subtheme in Part I, is managed. Janice, for instance, found herself setting boundaries with her mother-in-law with respect to her bridal party and the baptism of her first son. Through responsibly standing by her beliefs without being overly rigid or confrontational, Janice communicated to her mother-in-law that she felt she had “stepped over the line” and that these decisions were ultimately for Janice to make. As first time parents, Felicia and Boris learned that when faced with advice from parents, both solicited and unsolicited, they must “weed things out” and develop their own parenting approach by means of setting healthy boundaries with their parents. Maggie described her family, particularly her mother, as “extremely overbearing with their love,” which she feels is characteristic of Jewish families. During her mother’s visits from Montreal she would “overtake the whole house” and instruct the couple on “how to live and what to do.” As a son-in-law, Helmut admitted that he too experiences his mother-in-law as overbearing, though given his tendency to avoid conflicts, he indicated that he “just do what she says.” With Maggie’s parents residing in Montreal, it can be said that a certain boundary is maintained by virtue of their geographical location.

Unlike the other couples in this study, Debra and Hans took a more extreme measure in setting boundaries with their parents. The couple’s move to Alaska was due in large part to the “ongoing tensions” they experienced from Debra’s family and “smothering” from Hans’

family. Their decision to physically remove themselves from these family disruptions allowed their relationship to survive, thrive, and ironically, to *push* the boundaries of what is possible. Further, contrary to her mother-in-law's wishes, Debra was explicit in the fact that she would not convert to Catholicism based on her own values and principles. This can be interpreted as Debra's attempts to set boundaries around expectations of religious conversion.

Taken together, many couples in this study illustrate how creating healthy relational bonds entails a process of setting personal, couple, and family boundaries. While this may be challenging for some, the couples here suggest that it is best conducted through a process of open communication and being firm without being overly confrontational. In managing excessive family involvement, there was a sense that couples must work as a team and support each other with respect to boundary setting, even if this leads to removing themselves from their families of origin.

In the following sections, the second process theme--*responding to partner differences*—and its subthemes will be discussed in detail (see Figure insert 11 on the following page). The processes in which the couples respond to partner differences appear to address the content themes on compatibility and cultural differences in Part I of this chapter. In other words, in light of the major areas of compatibility and cultural differences presented in Part I, Part II reveals *how* the six couples in this study work towards sustaining that sense of compatibility and managing their dissimilarities in their daily lives.

Responding to partner differences. A major facet of the couples' lived experiences involved how they respond to partner differences. The types of differences discussed during the interviews include, but are not limited to, differences in race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender, personality, religious faith, norms, childrearing style, attitudes, beliefs and worldviews, and time orientation. Across the six narratives, the couples provide some interesting clues as to how a resilient and meaningful partnership can be constructed in spite

of major differences operating within the relationship. Three distinctive types of behaviours were identified: minimizing race and ethnicity, respecting or embracing, and focusing on and working towards compatibility (see Figure 11).

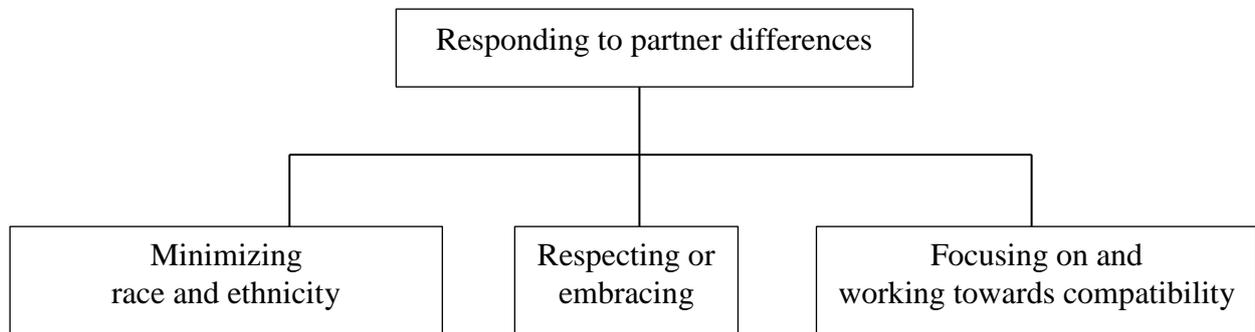


Figure 11. Subthemes of ‘Responding to partner differences’

Minimizing race and ethnicity. When describing their first encounters, the Chinese participants in this study made no references to race or ethnicity. With the exception of Teresa, they reported growing up in communities with a significantly higher proportion of White people. This was particularly true for Janice, Debra, Jason, and Helmut, who all recalled being one of the few Asian students in their schools.

Nearly all the White participants in this study reported having never dated a Chinese person prior to their current relationship for the same reason their partners dated predominantly people who were White (i.e., having been raised in predominantly White communities); hence initial reactions upon meeting their Chinese partners were by comparison more race-conscious. Stefan, for instance, was conscious of the fact that Janice was his first Chinese girlfriend, but would soon learn that “she was just like the rest of them...like any girl of any race. There is really no difference.” This sentiment was shared by several White couple members as their relationships progressed.

In the process of deciphering where their major differences lie, several couples in this study directed their attentions to differences other than race and ethnicity, such as in gender, religious affiliation, and personality. There was a sense that within the privacy of their homes, constructs such as race and ethnicity had very little impact on their lives on a day-to-day basis when compared to gender and religious faith. The impact of gender lies in the ways gender roles are played out and how they are negotiated in the household. During Teresa and Peter's interview, for instance, Peter frequently de-emphasized the role of race and ethnicity in his relationship and mainly acknowledged differences along gender lines. With respect to religious faith, its impact on lived experience lies in its teachings and ethical and moral codes and the extent to which they shape people's behaviours. Maggie, for instance, indicated that the concept of *Tikkun Olam* in Judaism, or responsibility to repair the world, led her to her current profession. Hence, in responding to partner differences, Maggie and Helmut highlighted religious differences as exerting a stronger influence in their lived experiences. Maggie justified this by illustrating how her parents' opposition to her brother's relationship to a White non-Jewish partner was an indication that their initial disapproval of her relationship with Helmut was religion-based, not race-based. She found this "interesting" as "in a lot of ways race is a lot more visible than religion." Similarly, in Debra and Hans' case, Debra stated that the barrier between her and Hans' mother was "never an ethnic issue", but a "Catholic issue."

Lastly, minimizing racial and ethnic differences in the relationship was most salient when couples shared their "secrets" to sustaining their long-term relationships, suggesting that their insights do not pertain to interethnic couples but to couples in general. Janice and Stefan and Sarah and Jason emphasized the importance of open communication. Felicia claimed that "race has nothing to do with the secret to a happy relationship", but mutual love, compatibility of personality, respect, and understanding each other's values. Her partner

Boris concurred, and added that what matters is “how you’ve been brought up or your personality and your willingness to explore the unknown.” In Teresa and Peter’s narrative, honesty was reported as a value they had in common and asserted as being irrelevant to race or ethnicity. Peter further emphasized that in his life experience, “it all comes down to personality and the person involved.”

Respecting or embracing. Part I of this chapter covered cultural dissimilarities in domains such as religion, food, and language among the six couples interviewed. In light of these differences, how do the couples manage to reconcile them?

Many couples respond to these differences with an attitude of respect, which they suggested does not develop overnight. First, couples indicated that respecting differences requires one to be curious, “open-minded”, “flexible”, and “adaptable” to differences. A few participants suggested that these may be innate personality traits. One must wonder if these traits are pre-conditions that opened the door for these couples to enter an interethnic relationship in the first place. Boris, for instance, indicated that personality and an innate willingness to adapt to change and “explore the unknown” have been protective factors that contribute to resiliency in his relationship with Felicia. Stories of Janice, Debra, and Maggie’s pasts strongly suggest that they have engaged life with openness and flexibility since childhood. Debra, in particular, stated that when faced with new opportunities throughout her life, her approach to them has consistently been one of “Why not?” Second, with a foundation of these personal qualities, respecting partner differences entails actively learning and understanding about the differences. Felicia and Helmut, for instance, have relied on their resourcefulness to learn about each other’s cultures through researching online or taking a community course on “Jewish issues for Interfaith Couples.” In preparation for her wedding, Sarah regularly contacted her mother-in-law and consulted her about the traditions and etiquettes in Chinese culture. Teresa welcomed any teachings on Western

dining etiquettes and food preparations by Peter. Finally, when differences were de-mystified through a process of learning and understanding, the couples spoke of learning the art of accepting and respecting partner differences. They noted that those who remain “intolerant” and “resistant” to accepting differences would be in “serious trouble.”

In addition, “embracing” was reported as a form of response to partner differences. The narratives in this study appear to form a distinction between respecting and embracing. Embracing signifies a process to positively reframe differences and go as far as celebrating them. Hence, while embracing differences *requires* one to be respectful of these differences, respecting does not necessarily result in embracing. The majority of the couples in this study not only respect partner differences but also make efforts to embrace them. Exemplary of this process is their active engagement in each other’s cultural traditions. Felicia stated that it is in fact some of the differences that she finds so “endearing” and which she loves about Boris. Boris agreed, noting that cultural differences “broadens your horizons” and increases one’s worldliness and sophistication. In Teresa and Peter’s case, however, there was a sense that while Peter remains respectful of their differences, he was not necessarily interested in embracing them in ways that were celebratory.

Focusing on and working towards compatibility. As mentioned in Part I of this chapter, compatibility is not something that is granted to the couples at the outset of this relationship, it is something that they need to work towards and maintain throughout the course of their relationships. Given that all six couples in this study deprioritized or minimized the impact of differences, cultural or not, they focused their discussions on areas of compatibility and how they work towards maintaining that grounding force in their relationships. Their narratives provided insightful ways such as utilizing effective communication patterns; using values as compasses; re-examining values to maintain a sense of direction; learning as a means to de-mystify differences and uncover similarities;

experimentation; making personal commitment as a major driving force; and using transparency to sustain mental and emotional attunement.

Janice and Stefan's narrative suggests that effective communication patterns encourage collaboration, foster teamwork, and prevent the same issues from surfacing and re-surfacing. Their approach to resolving differences "right then and there" meant that these differences would not fester as time goes on and that they can focus on their areas of compatibility. Further, the couple talked about revisiting their shared values (e.g., strong family values) and allowing them to serve as compasses that guide their present and future actions. Values remind them what they want their lives to mean, and the qualities and tendencies that they want their lives to align with.

Felicia and Boris' narrative cautions us that values may change over time and that it may be necessary to re-examine what they entail over the course of a relationship. In the couple's case, these re-evaluations occurred in the midst of transitions from one relationship stage to another. Maintaining compatibility entailed an ongoing process of re-evaluating their needs and desires so as to gain or re-gain a sense of direction. Felicia mentioned that numerous conversations transpired where she and Boris were forced to examine their relationship and ask themselves, "Where is this [relationship] going?"

Maggie and Helmut consistently relied on their resourcefulness to educate themselves about the sources of differences (e.g., taking a course on Jewish issues for interfaith couples) and their implications. Perhaps in the process of de-mystifying these differences was the couple able to detect areas of compatibility. Maggie, for instance, asserted that although Jewish and Chinese cultures are distinctively different, she realized that they are in some ways "more similar than they are different." She noted that they share similar values around learning and working hard and being engaged with their families, but the *way* these values are expressed may vary. Her family might express their strong family values through Passover

or Rosh Hashanah whereas Helmut's family will express them through Chinese New Year or Christmas.

Debra and Hans indicated that differences are inevitable in all relationships, thus "building on what you have in common" is vital to maintaining a meaningful partnership. Their narrative teaches us that in the earliest stages of an intimate relationship, a couple would benefit from regularly "experimenting" with new activities, hobbies, and lifestyles so as to explore what their shared values are. During this process of experimentation, the couple found their passion in outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, climbing, and cross-country skiing. Their series of "adventures" led to the realization that they "hated New York" and that Canada was a more ideal environment to raise their children. Moreover, the couple spoke of a lifelong commitment to their marriage. The determination to be "permanently married," as Debra called it, would serve as a major driving, emotional force to bridging differences and strengthening their common grounds.

As for Teresa and Peter, their extreme honesty during their first encounter meant that sharing a strong sense of compatibility was promising, given that they were transparent about what they desired in a relationship. To put it differently, Teresa would not have moved in with Peter four days following their first encounter if they had not sensed a certain level of inner compatibility. To this date, the couple asserted that truth-speaking and daily conversations are the keys to maintaining their compatibility, as they contribute to mental and emotional attunement.

Taken together, in responding to partner differences, the couples in this study suggest that issues of race and ethnicity have very little impact within the privacy of their own homes and that they can be rather "boring and mundane." There is a shared consensus that they do not see themselves as "interethnic" couples per se, but as ordinary couples who struggle with the same issues all couples face. Many couples commented on the changing demographic

landscape of Toronto and the growing trend of Chinese-White relationships diluting the perception that they are different from any other couple. As Debra put it, she and Hans, “never relied on ethnicity to give us an advantage” and “definitely have not felt hampered by it.” Further, discourses on partner differences often centred on gender, religious faith, and personalities, which the couples experienced as exerting a stronger influence in their daily existence than constructs such as race or ethnicity. In the face of cultural differences, all six couples manage through a process of developing respect and the majority found it meaningful to extend this attitude to embracing differences, celebrating them, and framing them as opportunities to broaden their horizons. Given that all couples invariably encounter differences over the course of their relationships, the couples in this study focus their attention on areas of compatibility and provide interesting clues as to how to sustain them.

Summary

What are the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples residing in a major metropolitan city in Canada as they journey from the past to the present and onto an envisioned future? The sequential unfolding of the six stories in this study revealed two thematic categories: prevalent issues in the relational context (or content themes) and relationship maintenance processes (process themes). The interplay between the two was illustrated in this chapter, elucidating what major content issues were of critical significance to the couples and how they were managed over the course of their relationships.

The first encounter marked the union of two individuals whose personal qualities and outlooks on relationships were heavily influenced by family imprints. It also marked the couples’ initial impressions of each other, in which a type of ostensible or surface compatibility was reported as a major incentive to pursuing the relationship. In responding to partner differences during the first encounter, the White participants in this study were much more race-conscious than their Chinese counterparts, due in large part to the fact that it was

the first time they dated someone who was non-White and not from the dominant culture. Constructs such as race and ethnicity would quickly lose its saliency, however, and couples would see themselves as any “ordinary couple.”

During the early stages of the couples’ relationships, the stories begin to extend beyond the personal and couple dimensions, often making reference to their families of origin and their impact on the couple relationship. Couples are introduced to their partners’ extended families, initiating the process of blending into them. Of note are the ubiquitous influences of mothers and their involvement in the couples’ partnerships. Moreover, during the relationships’ early, less stable stages, there was growing sense of inner compatibility, which the couples reported as being important motives for remaining in the relationship.

Cohabitation appeared to mark an important transition point in the couples’ lived experiences as their partnerships transitioned into a more committed one. During this transition, gender roles begin to take form as couples negotiate their responsibilities in the household. Compatibility in personalities and interests not only remained vital but shared core values took on an increasingly central role in promoting relationship commitment. Cultural differences around religion, food, and language became increasingly palpable once the couples share a home together and are experienced variably as challenges, sources of self-expansion, or harmonizing forces in their relationships. In responding to partner differences, couples attributed saliency to socio-cultural variables other than race and ethnicity, such as gender and religion. They begin developing an attitude of respect and appreciation, and going as far as celebrating them.

Once the couples were wed, family involvement increased in intensity and sometimes frequency, often impacting the couple’s relationship quality either by widening or bridging cultural differences around religion, food, and language. During this stage and prior to the birth of their first offspring, the married couples would begin to rely on processes of open

communication, prioritization of needs, and boundary setting to maintain the integrity of their partnerships. Partner differences were continued to be countered through an attitude of respect.

Parenthood experiences suggest that all overarching themes and subthemes require significant consideration. The couples' experiences shared various commonalities, illuminating Canada (particularly Toronto) as a uniquely welcoming home to interethnic couples and their mixed race children, the impact of early family influences on child-rearing practices, issues of racial/cultural identity of mixed race children, the necessity of maintaining family cohesion while setting appropriate boundaries with extended family members, the importance of maintaining shared values when couples act as co-parents, and the couple's communicative processes with respect to religious traditions and languages they intend to pass down to the next generation. Finally, with Debra and Hans as the only couple in the empty nest stage, their lived experience continues to revolve around maintaining their areas of compatibility and spending quality family time with their adult children. And for Teresa and Peter who are nearing retirement, their relationship sheds light on relationship maintenance behaviours and areas of compatibility that form necessary conditions to a lifelong partnership.

Taken together, the findings in Chapter Five reveal a constellation of themes that the couples in this study experienced as they transition from one relationship lifecycle stage to the next. Themes emerge, then fade, and may re-emerge at a later stage alongside new themes, thus reflecting the dynamism of intimate relationships and their evolutionary process. How these findings may aid helping professionals in their work with Chinese-White heterosexual couples will be discussed in the Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

This study explores the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples throughout their relationship lifespans. I specifically focused on couples who reside in Toronto and who have been cohabitating partners for at least three years. Although each couple's story was unique and embodied distinctive themes, there was considerable thematic overlap across all six narratives. In Chapter Five, the process of clustering domains of meaning generated two thematic categories: prevalent issues in the relational context (content themes) and relationship maintenance processes (process themes). Goldman (1954) presented a method of analysing counselling—in terms of content and process—which offers a framework for talking about counselling, practicing counselling, conducting counselling research, and for counsellor training. Whereas content is the substantive aspect of counselling, process tells *how* the counsellor and the client work with the content. Comparably, I understood the various overarching themes and subthemes in terms of what issues were talked about and how they were managed by the couples in this study.

In carrying out this qualitative research, I consistently reflected on my positionality and how it influences the way I interpret the overall data. As an insider of Chinese-White heterosexual relationships like my participants, my own interethnic experiences have been reflected in many of the responses reported in this study. I am aware that my experiences might have created some biases in understanding the six couples' relational narratives. Nonetheless, as a postmodernist qualitative researcher, I do not believe in an objective reality. This chapter simply provides my interpretation and understanding of the lived experiences of the couples who participated in this study. In the following sections, major findings in my study are interpreted in the context of the whole research process and their significance is discussed in light of previous research. The constructivist-interpretive paradigm which I

adhered to throughout the research process guided me in the conceptualization of the overall data. Findings will be discussed under three interpretive lenses: (1) insiders' insights into the maintenance of Chinese-White heterosexual couple relationships, (2) situating Chinese-White heterosexual couples' experiences and insights in multilayered contexts, and (3) co-constructed realities in the interethnic/relational context. These would form the basis of the conceptual model through which Chinese-White heterosexual couples' lived experiences can be understood.

Insiders' Insights into the Maintenance of Chinese-White Heterosexual Couple Relationships

A constructivist-interpretive paradigm is sensitive to insiders' perspectives; that is, it explores the complex and constructed reality from the points of view of those who live in it. The findings in the present study not only build on the existing insiders' literature on interethnic relationships and focuses on an important yet understudied population, but takes on a strength-based approach to understanding the process-oriented issues and "how to" questions that are missing in previous research. In other words, one of the major contributions of this study is it elicits the lived nature of Chinese-White heterosexual couples' experiences. Relationships are not a static concept; rather, they are dynamic, constantly evolving, and requiring ongoing maintenance. In essence, relationships are not something we *have*; they are something that we *do*.

Canary and Stafford (2001) defines relationship maintenance processes as "actions and activities used to sustain desired relational qualities" (p.134). Such behaviours were prominently discussed by the couples interviewed and at times exhibited through their interactions during the interviews. These findings add to the widely discussed behaviours in Harvey and Wenzel (2001), with a specific focus on the experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples. In this text, Rusbult et al. (2001) posit that subjective commitment not

only motivates individuals to remain in their relationships, but also promotes a variety of relationship maintenance behaviours. They identified several behavioural and cognitive maintenance mechanisms: accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, forgiveness, cognitive interdependence (seeing self and partner as a unit and interdependent), positive illusion, and derogation of attractive alternatives. While this list may seem comprehensive, it has not been applied in the context of interethnic couple relationships. Further, the authors construe relationship maintenance behaviours as solutions to *problematic* situations and interdependence dilemmas, which by definition exclude behaviours directed to situations that are not inherently problematic or those meant to enhance a relationship. The findings in this study fill in the gaps and uncovered important behavioural processes that are not necessarily directed to dilemmas and are intended to maintain healthy functioning in the couples' relationships.

Given that family is a meaningful aspect in the lives of Chinese-White couples, maintaining family cohesion is a central goal to ensuring well-being in their partnerships. The present findings shed light on cultural values regarding family connections, interdependence, and loyalty and how they shape the nature of relationships. They further reveal the importance of maintaining family cohesion by means of openly communicating, sharing food, actively engaging in cultural/religious traditions, prioritizing needs, and setting boundaries.

In terms of communication, Romano (2008) suggests that *good* communication is perhaps “the most essential ingredient in a successful marriage, and it is probably the most difficult to achieve” (p. 126). Distinctive from language barriers, Ting-Toomey (2009) discussed communication decoding problems that may undermine satisfaction in an intercultural relationship. When partners use different communication approaches, such as low-context, direct verbal approaches versus high-context, indirect approaches, they may

carry very different relationship expectations and experience a breakdown in communication. Although Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism and high-context communication (i.e., means and intentions are inferred through subtle nonverbal, hinting matters) and Western cultures emphasize direct verbal approaches, the majority of the couples of this study value *open* communication—the latter mode of expression—to navigate their relationships. A reason that may account for this is that nearly all the participants have assimilated into Western culture. However, it is important to point out that there are no right or wrong modes of expressions, simply different ones. This study suggests that sharing similar communicative styles may be an asset in a relationship. While this does not preclude couples from conflicts, it does signify a similar outlook and management of conflicts.

The notion of sharing food as relationship maintenance behaviour has scantily been documented in the counselling literature. The present study adds to the existing literature and found that regular family meals can be a proxy for connectedness as well as a ritual that reinforces the importance of family and its members. While this notion appears to be common-sense, I argue that the process of sharing food has additional meanings for interethnic couples. Romano (2008) asserts that sharing food requires intercultural couples to work out mutually agreed upon house rules in terms of what food is served, who prepares it, how it is prepared and eaten, where and when it is served, and who cleans up. Indeed, the present study found that by virtue of sharing meals, Chinese-White couples are learning not only about each other's culture of origin, personality, lifestyle, and values and imparting this knowledge to subsequent generations, but also the skills of experimentation, compromise, and negotiation of roles. Further, this study adds that food sharing is a meaningful way to bring both sides of the family together, particularly in the absence of a shared language. As James Beard once quoted, "Food is our common ground, a universal experience" (BrainyQuote, 2013).

An *active* participation in a partner's cultural and religious traditions was reported by several couples in this study as a crucial relationship maintenance behaviour. While many couples in Inman et al. (2011), Romano (2008), and Seshadri and Knudson-Martin's (2013) study reported practicing this, the authors overlooked why this process may be important or meaningful. In the present study, I looked deeper into why actively participating in traditions appeared to contribute to relationship satisfaction. It was found that this form of participation enhances family connectedness, creates meaning in the relationships, honours one's family and continues the legacies of prior generations, and produces a strong couple identity and identity for their children. However, it must be noted that active participation is not always reciprocal. For one couple in this study, for instance, one partner was much more inclined to integrate the other's traditions into her life than he was to hers, a relationship structure which Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) calls a *singularly assimilated* relationship. The authors found that partners who have assimilated are not resentful of the fact their cultures have taken a back seat in their relationships. Rather, the assimilated partner sees the partner's culture as the "right" way. To better understand a Chinese-White couple's relationship structure, the present study suggests looking at the preparation of the wedding or how other rites of passage are celebrated. These events are very telling of how engaged couple members are in their own cultural traditions and those of their partners'.

Although the term *prioritizing needs* has not been documented in previous studies, its process is closely related to Rusbult et al.'s (2001) notions of accommodation and willingness to sacrifice and relational strategies such as *prioritizing issues*, *efforts to compromise*, or *focus on the couple's relationship* found in other studies (Inman et al., 2011; Lieu, 2009). This relationship maintenance behaviour, while applicable to any couple, may have additional implications for Chinese-White heterosexual couples. It is known that Western societies tend to embrace individualism or independence, while Eastern societies promote

collectivism or interdependence (Sue & Sue, 2013). The process of prioritizing needs can result in conflicts and misunderstandings if couple members are adopting different worldviews. A White partner who prioritizes his/her needs over the partner's may be interpreted by the Chinese partner as a selfish act. Similarly, a Chinese partner's decision to prioritize the couple's relationship over members of his/her family of origin may be experienced by the family as transgressing family norms. On the other hand, a Chinese partner's reservations to put the couple's relationship first may be experienced by the White partner as a lack of commitment to the relationship. Taken together, this study proposes that the ease with which a Chinese-White couple prioritize their needs depends on where they lie along the spectrum from autonomy to interdependence and cultural beliefs espoused by their families of origin.

Due to strong family influence in the lives of Chinese-White heterosexual couples, boundary setting is perceived as a necessary measure to maintaining the integrity of their relationships. Previous studies such as Foeman and Nance (2002) and Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) found that this is a protective strategy interracial couples engage in to buffer from outside influence and communicate the "we" to outsiders. They found that the majority of the couples interviewed discussed having to set boundaries with family members and society at large around cultural prejudice and racial discrimination. In the current study, for instance, one participant resorted to setting such boundaries with her parents in light of their opposition to her selection of non-Jewish partners. In a more extreme case, another couple moved away geographically in order to avoid family disruptions. While both cases exemplify ways boundaries are set to counter cultural prejudice and discrimination from family members, this study uncovered additional forms of boundaries that were set, such as personal boundaries, professional boundaries, gender role boundaries, temporal boundaries, and much-needed family boundaries with key family members that balance a sensitivity to

the couples' needs as well as their filial loyalties to their families of origin. For instance, it is often a necessity for Chinese-White couples to differentiate their own childrearing styles from their parents' and to negotiate the roles they want their in-laws to play. Because boundary styles are mainly formed within the context of the family of origin, at times culturally ingrained, and differ in how much they encourage individuality and autonomy versus conformity and interdependence, setting boundaries and maintaining them takes time, practice, and persistence.

This study uncovered valuable insiders' insights into how interethnic couples respond to partner differences, a popular source of inquiry in recent interethnic/interracial couple research. Gaines and Brennan (2001) identified three relationship maintenance behaviours in fostering multicultural relationships: appreciating differences (and similarities) between the self and other, building relationship cultures, and being open to divergent viewpoints. Killian's (1998) study with Black-White couples found that differences were negotiated by minimizing them, accepting them, or by creating new rituals. Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) also found that the interracial couples in their study framed differences in a variety of ways, including decentralizing racial and cultural differences, perceiving differences as attractive, being flexible and having respect for differences, learning about differences, and celebrating differences.

In the present study, the extent to which couples felt race and ethnicity were relevant issues in their relationships was looked at. The overall findings suggest that the impact of race and ethnicity were minimized. Further, differences were framed in cultural rather than racial and ethnic terms and saliency was attributed to other axis of power, such as gender and religious affiliation (Killian, 2012; Wehrly et al., 1999), which exerted much more impact within the privacy of a couple's own home. This is understandable, given that gender and religious upbringing determine accepted behaviours, roles and responsibilities in the

household, beliefs about child-rearing, and are often linked to or associated with one's cultural upbringing. Previous studies (among others, Karis, 2003; Killian, 2003; Killian, 2012; Lieu, 2009; Root, 2001; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999) have also found that many couples frequently commented that their experiences did not centre on race and perceived themselves as being like any other couple. Killian (2012) noted that one way to understand this assertion is to consider it as a defensive response to negative racial stereotypes associated with the discourse of homogamy and/or to comply with the discourse of history's insignificance (i.e., constructing history as a series of unexceptional and insignificant events devoid of narratives on racism, exploitation, and other forms oppression). Whether this is the case for the couples in this study is difficult to discern, though several Chinese participants did allude to personal experiences with racism. Perhaps race was not discussed to so as to avoid painful memories and emotional discomfort being triggered for themselves and/or for their White partners (Killian, 2012). Further, because interethnic couples live in a culture that historically pathologized their relationships, they have good reason to resist the notion that race matters in their lives.

This study also highlighted the importance of fostering a relationship culture that respects or embraces differences; however, the findings suggest that respect does not develop overnight. Unlike previous studies that discuss this as a relationship characteristic (Gaines & Brennan, 2001; Killian, 1998; Romano, 2008; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), I probed deeper into *how* this relationship culture comes to fruition and uncovered precursors and stepping stones that may be necessary for couple members to develop respect or a desire to celebrate their cultural differences. Thus, what sets this study apart from the existing literature on interethnic couples is its emphasis on process and its conceptualization of relationships as something that we *do*.

Lastly, the present study builds on the existing research that identify compatibility as a motive for entering an interethnic relationship (Fong & Yung, 1995/1996; Romano, 2008; Root, 2001; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Wehrly et al., 1999) in that it recognizes that compatibility is not granted to a couple at the outset of their relationship, appears to evolve with time, and requires ongoing maintenance. Again, an emphasis on process in this study revealed how compatibility is attained and maintained in a Chinese-White heterosexual relationship, though it is important to mention that what this process entails differs from couple to couple. The theoretical framework and interview questions designed for this study opened up a space where couples were invited to co-construct a narrative reality that transcended differences and embodied valuable insights into how this critical relationship quality is maintained throughout the course of their relationships. It is my belief that such an invitation contributes to couples' experience of "we-ness" and further strengthens their sense of compatibility.

Situating Chinese-White Heterosexual Couples' Experiences and Insights in Multilayered Contexts

The constructive-interpretive framework recognizes the impact of specific social, cultural, political, economic, and other contextual factors will shape the way meanings and "realities" are constructed by insiders of interethnic relationships. The findings in this study cannot be interpreted without situating them in the multilayered contexts in which the couples exist. Identifying and discussing the full range of contextual issues for interethnic couples would be nearly impossible, though the findings in the present study reveal several key contextual influences that helped shape how realities are constructed by the couples in this study: the interethnic context within the couple system; the interfamilial contexts; and the larger historical, political, societal, and geographical contexts.

First, within the couple system is the interethnic context, where gender relations, power dynamics, beliefs, and values between two distinctive cultures interact to shape a couple's identity. Rosenblatt (2009) notes that each intercultural couple is positioned within "a complex array of shoulds, limits, interactions, competing pressures, expectations, and models of how to be a couple" (p. 4). For instance, what it means to be a married couple between a Chinese female and Romanian male who are both second generation immigrants is very different from what it means to be a cohabitating, non-married couple between a first generation Chinese female immigrant and a second generation Jewish immigrant. In both cases, a union has formed, but what this union means to each couple depends on the combination of factors embedded in the interethnic context.

Within the interethnic context, Rosenblatt (2009) suggests that it is not simply the union of two distinctive cultures. He notes that that the circumstances of the couples' coming together also carry different meanings. For nearly all the Chinese participants in this study, propinquity, a major contextual influence, was found to be a primary reason for entering relationships with a White partner. Nearly all the Chinese participants in this study recalled being one of the few Asian students in their schools while growing up; thus one may deduce that a lack of availability of Chinese partners in these contexts played a role in shaping their dating practices and racial preferences. With respect to gender differences, several Chinese female participants suggested that their aversion towards Chinese patriarchy may have partially contributed to their avoidance of Chinese partners. Similar to the present study, Fong and Yung (1995/1996) and Fujino's (1997) research with Asian Americans suggests that propinquity was found to be a primary reason to enter a relationship with a White partner. However, these studies primarily focused on the minority members' motives and not their White partners'. In this study, we also hear the voices of the White participants and understand what circumstances led to their current partnership with someone who is

ethnically Chinese. The majority of White participants in this study grew up in prominently White neighborhoods and thus dated exclusively within their racial/ethnic groups in their younger days. They suggested that as their social circles began to expand upon entering university, the workforce, or the world of online dating, their pool of potential partners also began to diversify, and they no longer limited themselves to dating individuals with similar ethnic backgrounds. With the exception of one participant, none of the White couple members in this study specifically sought out Chinese partners, though they were clearly open to the possibility.

For half of the couples in this study, internet dating provided a unique context where interethnic romance can be initiated. It is fair to assume that their initial encounters carry very different meanings from the remaining couples who met face to face. For the couples who met online, internet dating facilitated the process of including or excluding potential love interests based on racial/ethnic preferences and other selection criteria, elucidating some of the interesting outcomes Agathangelou and Killian (2009) identified as resulting from internet marital trade in the 21st century. Perhaps unconscious to the three couples who relied on the Internet to fulfill their romantic desires, the authors commented on the risks, noting its modality as a “mere moratorium on the serious engagement and negotiation of differences, eventually necessary between would-be partners” (p. 138) and often an environment that “facilitates flights of fantasy” (p. 133). Further, initial positive communications online are likely to propel these couples toward the illusion that an intimate relationship is imminent, thus creating a distorted reality about the other person. Indeed, the couples in this study admitted having encountered a series of unsuccessful matches before meeting their current partners.

Second, the interfamilial contexts in which the couples in this study are embedded have a profound impact on their lived experiences. Chapter Four reveals how the couples’

narratives are in many ways inextricably linked with their family origins'. Goodall (2005) uses the term *narrative inheritance* to describe stories and family lore that parents and elders pass on to their children. The author notes that “what we inherit narratively from our forebears provides us with a framework for understanding our identity through theirs” (p. 497). Indeed, many couples in this study have, at various instances during the interview, arrived at meanings around their personal and couple identities through the process of sharing their families’ narratives. In essence, each participant has not only married an individual, but a distinctive culture and his/her partner’s family of origin. For example, consider the Chinese male participant who participates in Jewish traditions with his partner’s family of origin and is warmly received by them. Undoubtedly, the positive—both spoken and unspoken—messages the couple receive from her family of origin with respect to their interethnic partnership will shape their own interpretations of their relationship. Further, his successful integration into her family perhaps signify that he is now part of her family’s narrative inheritance, which will be passed down to the couple’s and their families’ subsequent generations.

Other key contextual influences on the lived experiences and shared meanings of Chinese-White heterosexual couples are the particular historical, societal, political, and geographical contexts in which they are rooted. The six stories presented in Chapter Four are part of a larger story of interethnic couples in contemporary Canada. Beginning in 2001, Statistics Canada began looking at mixed unions as an additional indication of Canada’s diversity and the way in which different ethnicities are integrating. It has become an interesting topic as it serves as a barometer of social tolerance and social relationships between different ethnic groups. In Canada, the increase in interethnic relationships seems to be moving in near-perfect unison with rising visible minority populations.

Unlike previous studies which were predominantly carried out in the U.S.A. with Black-White couples (among others, Childs, 2005; Kalmijn, 2010; Karis, 2003; Killian, 2001; Killian, 2003; Killian, 2012; Lewis et al., 1997; Porterfield, 1978; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Tubbs & Rosenblatt, 2003; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990), this is the first to explore the experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples in a major Canadian metropolitan city. I argue that findings from these studies are not necessarily applicable to Canadian society, due to the fact that Canada's demographic distribution and history of race relations are significantly different from the U.S.A. Further, given Canada's official policy of multiculturalism (i.e., a policy that ensures that all members of Canadian society can retain their own unique cultural and religious identities and take pride in their ancestries) and Toronto being the home to 40.1% of the Chinese population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011), the political and environmental context in which this study was conducted makes Toronto a unique setting to study Chinese-White interethnic relationships.

In his comparative surveys examining the acceptance level of intermarriage between Canada and the U.S.A., Bibby (2007) noted that Canadians are more likely to not only "endorse intermarriage but also to embrace immigration and to be more accepting of a wide range of controversial activities, including same-sex marriage, the legalization of marijuana, and abortion on demand. The mosaic ideal is being expressed everywhere" (p. 1). Other societal indicators of acceptance of interethnic relationships in Canada are evident in the lack of controversy around the interethnic partnerships of well-known Canadian politicians, such as the late New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton and his wife Olivia Chow (The New Canadians, 2012) and the increasing number of interethnic couples appearing in the media. In the present study, one couple who spent a considerable amount of time in the U.S.A. made a similar comparison between the two nations and indicated that Canada's socio-political context played a major role in their relocation to Canada. Other couples also described

contemporary Canada (namely Toronto) as an inclusive environment for immigrants, interethnic couples, and multiracial families by virtue of its openness to cultural pluralism. Under the current socio-political environment in Canada, many couples talked about the formation of strong pluralistic cultural identities, the increasing availability of dating partners from other ethnicities, the ubiquity of interethnic couples in their communities, an increased societal acceptance of such relationships, and implications for their mixed race children.

What *are* the implications for interethnic couples and their children who reside in Canada? On mixed race children, Childs (2005), Kenney and Kenney (2013), and Root (2001) noted that the key question, “What about the children?” is frequently posed to oppose interracial relationships. The central concern is that these children will struggle with the psychological impact of being multiracial, confusions around their identity, and a lack of social acceptance. To reiterate Funderburg (1994), she stated that the common myth associated with multiracial children is that they are “born into a racial netherworld, the conventional wisdom continues, destined to be confused, maladjusted ‘tragic mulattoes’, the perpetual victims of a racially polarized society” (p. 10). In this study, none of the couples indicated that the above statement is a primary concern for them and implied that the environmental setting may play a factor. It was insinuated that given Canada’s more inclusive environment, mixed children can retain their diverse cultural identities while simultaneously identify as “Canadians.” Many have indicated that interethnic couples are now “everywhere” in their communities, instilling a sense that their families do not stand out amid other families. However, one couple did note that a shift in context—perhaps a community north of them—may warrant more concern about social acceptance of their mixed children.

Although Canada and the U.S.A. differ in distinctive ways, can one assume that race, racism, and societal intolerance of interethnic relationships do not exist in Canadian society?

The findings in this study suggest that there were mixed messages. While the couples in this study generally engaged in a celebratory discourse of multiculturalism in Canada, they did reveal instances where they were subjected to societal intolerance. One White male participant, in fact, admitted harboring racist attitudes towards the Chinese prior to dating his first Chinese partner. His relationship with his former and current Chinese partners dispelled the misconception that the Chinese were “dirty.” The two Chinese male participants in this study indicated that they were subjected to racist treatment growing up in prominently White communities. One of them noted that he continues to encounter subtle, albeit racist, comments to this day. One Jewish female participant indicated that her father opposed her interethnic partnerships due to religious reasons. Similarly, Malhi’s (2011) found that while participants asserted that Canada was a better place for interracial couples than some nations, many of them provided examples of various forms of negative reactions they encountered either personally or as a couple. The author argues that while societal reactions in Canada may appear benign, they still have insidious psychological effects that cause undue hardships for interracial couples in this nation.

The mixed messages are not surprising, as like American interethnic couples, interethnic couples in Canada also violate the norm of homogamy. Canada is not free from the negative and often cautionary discourses that view interethnic relationships as problematic and transgressive; however, Malhi (2011) notes that given that societal norms tend to promote Canada as a tolerant and multicultural society, Canadian interracial couples would readily adopt socially acceptable discourses, even when those discourses contradict their own negative experiences and historical evidence of systematic and institutional racism in Canada, such as the 1876 Indian Act and the 1897 Ontario Female Refuge Act which restricted and penalized those who engaged in interracial sex and marriages. The implication is that if racism and societal intolerance are denied or not discussed, it renders them invisible.

I argue that while legal restrictions of racial mixing are no longer present in the modern era and discussions of blatant acts of racism or discrimination did not transpire in my interviews, several incidents reported by the couples in this study were consistent with “modern” forms of racism, where intolerance was expressed in subtle, indirect, and more socially acceptable ways (Mahli, 2011). In fact, “subtle” was a description that pervaded in race-related conversations with poll experts, according to the 2007 Leger Marketing poll (Song, 2007). The poll results indicate that nearly half of the Canadians polled admit to being at least slightly racist, yet the majority respondents also felt that multiculturalism enriches their lives. Further, 10% of respondents admitted that they would react negatively if their child married interracially, while 16% responded it would depend on the race (Song, 2007).

The positioning of the six couples’ lived experiences and shared insights in a Canadian context thus stimulate a reflection on the history of race relations in Canada, a critical examination of the popular discourse that Canada is a non-racist society, and an exploration of the implications of being in such relationships in this nation’s current socio-political environment. Given the steady increase in intermarriage in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006) and the changes to its cultural mosaic over time, this study also encourages us to look into the future, envisioning how the lived experiences of such couples will be transformed and re-transformed in the decades to come.

Co-constructed Realities in the Interethnic/Relational Context

Constructivist-interpretivists believe that what people perceive as reality is constructed through social interactions and that the understanding of the social world entails seeking out people’s *interpretations* of it. In the present study, the six couples and I engaged in a process of co-constructing stories, meanings, and identities based on their lived experiences either on the personal level or relational level. We arrived at “realities” that

became a perceptual consensus that defined for the couple the nature of the world in which they live as well as their own place and identity within that world.

This section focuses on the co-constructed realities within the interethnic/relational context. It must be emphasized again that this context does not exist in isolation; rather, the realities that Chinese-White heterosexual couples arrive at are invariably influenced by the constructed realities in the larger socio-cultural contexts. Their realities are defined by the unique relational aspects in each couple's narrative, such as the salience of identities and intersectionality in their lived experiences, their socio-cultural backgrounds, family histories, personality similarities and differences, relationship histories, levels of acculturation, common tongue(s), joint socio-economic status, years together, major milestones, and where they are currently situated in their relationship lifespan.

The co-construction of individual narratives, as presented in Chapter Four, served to give voice to those couples whose relationships were historically silenced or overlooked. It is my contention that without an immersion in these unique narratives we run the risk of oversimplifying the complex realities of their lives and contribute to further stereotyping and pigeonholing. For instance, although half of the participants self-identify as Chinese or Chinese Canadian, their experiences of their cultural identities vary significantly. Likewise, a co-construction of unique narratives helped prevent an oversimplification of "whiteness" and a reduction of the White couple members to a mere color metaphor of race.

Furthermore, the findings clearly indicate that every couple is in some respects like no other couples at all; they are, in other respects, like all other couples and like some other couples. Such conceptualization is analogous to Sue's (2001) tripartite framework of the personal identity, in that a couple's lived experience can be understood as comprising universal, group, and individual levels of experience. In the following sections, I discuss the co-constructed realities shared by Chinese-White heterosexual couples (i.e., group level of

experience) in relation to my research questions and existing knowledge from previous research.

The milestones identified in this study suggest that couples tend to experience shared realities in terms of the stages of evolution and development in their relationships, each of which has its own unique set of issues and developmental tasks (McGoldrick et al., 2010). Throughout their relationship lifespans, three overarching themes pinpointed shared realities in these couples' personal and relational narratives as they pertained to family; feelings of compatibility; and cultural dissimilarities in religion, food, and language.

First, this study is significant in terms of identifying the myriad ways *family* is meaningful in the lives of Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual couples. These couples represent a generation of families that was formed as a result of changing economic and political forces in Canada, Europe, and China. Whereas their parents, grandparents, or other family predecessors immigrated to Canada in search of a better life, these couples were afforded the opportunity to seek love and companionship across racial/ethnic boundaries in this diverse nation. Family connects couple members to their cultures of origin and to their partners'; it serves as a window through which cultural variations with respect to family structure, dynamics, and gender roles can be explored. For instance, for a White couple member, being intimately involved with a Chinese partner may mean being exposed to traditional family values in Chinese culture, such as strong intergenerational influence, Chinese patriarchy, filial duty, and reverence for the elderly (Lee, 1997).

Talking about family of origin deepens a couple's understanding of who they are as individuals, who their partners are, and what it means to be parents of mixed race children. Through reconstructions of family histories, we come to understand that the lives of their early caregivers are deeply influenced by their ethnic roots, and it is through these roots that each couple member's personal attributes, attitudes and beliefs, and patterns of relating rise in

full bloom. This study suggests that human beings are not sole masters of their own identities, and that the influence of family imprints is always present. This message supports Lieu's (2009) findings, where expectations, values, and interpersonal patterns in her sample of ten interracial couples reflected those which were passed down to them from prior generations. However, the present study indicates that intergenerational influence is much more extensive than Lieu (2009) implies, and that the influence of family imprints extends further into subsequent generations, particularly as it pertains to childrearing practices.

Another way family is meaningful in the lives of Chinese-White heterosexual couples is the ongoing involvement of influential family members. This study revealed key players that helped foster family relations. Couples' mothers appear to act as gatekeepers to one's family of origin and are often the carriers of tradition for the family. They were often described as having strong personalities that had a ripple effect on relationships with the extended family, in either positive or negative ways (Lieu, 2009). There was also a strong indication that grandparents served as cultural guides to their grandchildren, introducing them to their native tongues and rich traditions. Moreover, contrary to studies that discussed the impact of family disapproval (Childs, 2005; Inman et al., 2011; Killian, 2001; Porterfield, 1978; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Smith, 2011; Usita & Poulsen, 2003), nearly all the couples in this study reported receiving their families' support since their relationships' early stages. A reason for this may be that such studies focus on different interracial pairings (namely Black-White), which have historically been more controversial. A Chinese-White partnership involves ethnicities that are relatively less stigmatized by the couple's families (Lieu, 2009). Where there was a lack of family support, as in one couple's case in this study, they resorted to isolating themselves in efforts to preserve their relationship. Their story appear to align with the outsider speculations of Gaines and Agnew (2003), that in spite of intense scrutiny and family disapproval from others, interethnic couples can remain firmly grounded in their

relationships so long as they rely on their own personal prescriptive support; that is, personal beliefs that support remaining in a relationship, such as core values and religious beliefs.

In the context of an interethnic couple's own nuclear families, Root (2001) asserts that "nowhere is the active construction, negotiation, and enforcement of the fiction of race more clear than in the racial assignments of mixed heritage children" (p. 137). Indeed, the present study sheds light on how the birth of mixed race children provokes reflection on racial/ethnic socialization and the varying ways interethnic couples negotiate a healthy racial/cultural identity development path for their mixed race children. But what is healthy for one couple may not be in the eyes of another. And despite a couple's best intentions, would their children follow the path that they paved for them? For instance, one couple in this study indicated that despite early attempts to send their children to Chinese school, they "would have none of it" and opted for more "mainstream" or "White" activities such as hockey and figure skating. Thus, the findings imply that parents of mixed heritage children encounter additional challenges in childrearing and parenting given that they have limited understanding of what it means to be of mixed race and have had no parental models to emulate (Wehrly et al., 1999). Their construction and negotiation of race-related matters may not mirror how their children come to construct the meaning of race and racial identity as mixed race individuals. In fact, Root's (2001) interviews with adult children from mixed race families revealed that invariably, they felt their parents were not fully equipped to raise mixed children.

As a man and woman engaging in dialogue, the familial context serves as a major arena where gender role realities are co-constructed. The present findings are significant in that they fill the research gap on gender relations between Chinese-White heterosexual couples and reveal a generational shift in gender roles and the potential impact of cultural and gender stereotyping. The scarcity of research in this field, particularly as it pertains to the

designated population, is surprising given the historical prevalence of male dominance (i.e., Chinese patriarchy) in Chinese society and culture and the potential impacts it may have on gender relations between these couples. Crohn (1995) stated that: “Of all the contrasts that affect mixed matches, perhaps none has greater impact than differences in the cultural rules that defines men’s and women’s roles” (p. 93). Gender role ideologies vary widely across cultural contexts and variations may lead to major differences in expectations regarding household and child-rearing tasks.

Shared realities constructed by the Chinese female participants in this study point to a significant generational shift in gender-based roles both at home and in the workplace. In their experience, traditional gender roles were associated with Chinese patriarchy, a social reality which they witnessed from prior generations and had come to develop an aversion towards. Whereas their mothers and grandmothers unreservedly deferred to their husbands, these female members felt they found a voice in their marriages. Fong and Yung’s (1995/1996) study with Chinese and Japanese Americans involved in intermarriage with White spouses found that aversion to Asian patriarchy was reported as one of the main incentives to avoid partnerships with individuals within their own ethnicities. In the present study, the White female members, both of Jewish descent, came from families where their mothers were a driving force in their lives. Their aspirations to be similar driving forces in their own marriages were respected and appreciated by their Chinese partners, who clearly contradicted stereotypes of a dominant Chinese male. Hence, the perception that Chinese men are patriarchal and dominant appear to be informed by evidence from past generations, but need to be critically re-examined in the modern context. If it goes unexamined, it constitutes a stereotype or preconceived notion that poses as a significant barrier to being romantically involved with a Chinese male. In essence, just as common stereotypes associated with Chinese women (e.g., passive and submissive) need to be critically evaluated,

it is crucial that Chinese men not be stereotyped as dominant or patriarchal, particularly in the current socio-cultural context.

It is important to note that in spite of major generational shifts in gender roles, there are still Chinese-White heterosexual couples that adhere to more traditional and strictly delineated gender roles and perceive them as conditions promoting relationship satisfaction. This may depend on the couple's age and level of acculturation (Rastogi, 2009). As such, the present study proposes that as interethnic couples co-construct gender role realities in their relationships, what is important is being in *agreement* about the roles, and not in how they are actually divided.

In their co-construction of realities, another focus which Chinese-White heterosexual couples arrive at shared meanings relates to their areas of compatibility, areas that represent the couples' sense of "we-ness" and relational identity. The current study revealed different yet interesting findings regarding these couples' motives for dating interethnically, using evidence provided by internet dating sites. While previous studies such as Lewis et al. (1997), Porterfield (1978), Root (2001), Rosenblatt et al. (1995), Wehrly et al. (1999), and Yancey and Yancey (1998) have all found that interracial couples date for the same reasons as same race couples, such as shared interests, love, and compatibility, I argue that theories such as caste exchange theory and racial motivation theory, as posited from outsiders' frame of reference (Kalmijn, 2010; Okun, 1996; Troy et al., 2006), cannot be entirely excluded from the discussion. These theories are to some extent supported if one looks at the world of online courtship. Internet dating, as this study found, is becoming increasingly ubiquitous, and it provides a convenient means through which couples can include or exclude certain races, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses when screening for potential love interests. For example, using internet dating, one White male participant in this study had seemingly exchanged his socio-economic status and membership in the dominant culture for a

relationship dynamic that clearly delineated gender roles, which his Chinese partner was able to provide. In essence, the world of online dating has become a platform where caste exchange theory and racial motivation theory can be actualized.

Another shared reality co-constructed by Chinese-White heterosexual couples is their compatibility of values, a relationship quality that promotes commitment and helps them overcome differences in age, race, ethnicity, and religion (Romano, 2008). This form of compatibility is meaningful as it is a prerequisite for living together, to becoming a wedded couple, to developing effective parenting skills, and to sustaining a lifelong companionship. Although it may be difficult to differentiate between personal and cultural values, the present findings suggest that a successful partnership between a Chinese individual and a White Canadian of European descent may be in large part due to compatibility of values between the two cultures involved. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that half of the couples in this study were between someone who was Chinese and someone of Jewish descent. In Fong and Yong's (1995/1996) study, 18% of the Chinese and Japanese participants interviewed were married to Jewish partners. Several individuals discussed their cultural affinity with their Jewish spouses, particularly around shared values such as strong family ties and educational achievement (Fong & Yong, 1995/1996).

Lastly, this study is significant not only in highlighting specific cultural domains that are meaningful in the lives of Chinese-White heterosexual couples but it also explored how these differences were experienced. The findings indicate that these couples experience major differences around religion, food, and language, which are often made salient by people with whom the couples interact. They are discussed individually in the following sections given that they have distinctive functions in a couple's day-to-day life.

Religious upbringing, for instance, was found to have a significant impact on one's philosophies of life, values, and attitudes about what is right and wrong (Crohn, 1995;

Daneshpour, 2009; Romano, 2008). Religious beliefs are deeply personal and are reflective of one's core identity. The religious difference between a Chinese-White couple appears to be one of the most contentious; due to pressure from family members and in-laws, there will be periodic returns to certain practices. Being with someone who was religiously different often raises the issue of religious conversion (Danesphour, 2003; Danesphour, 2009). Glenn (as cited in Gaines et al., 2006) too commented on the phenomenon of religious conversion and explored how compatible partners feel they must be on a spiritual level in order for the relationship to succeed. Daneshpour's study (2003) of multicultural Muslim couples, for instance, revealed that the majority of the female partners who were interviewed converted to Islam at some point in their marriages. In the present study, however, none of the participants forsook their own religious beliefs in favor of their partners'. A reason that may account for this is that none of the couples in this study felt that religious compatibility played an essential role in the stability of their relationships. Had it been essential, the couples perhaps would not have pursued their relationships in the first place.

The findings in the current study imply that religious differences do not pose a threat to a couple's relationship insofar as (1) both couple members have already distanced themselves from their cultural heritage and were no longer actively participating in the religions of their childhood or (2) one of the couple member is not actively religious and does not interfere in the practices of the other. In some cases, the partner who is not religious may even enjoy learning about the other's faith. Further, the findings also revealed a certain relationship between religious conversion and gender. For Chinese-Jewish couples, the issue of religious conversion would be much more contentious if the male partner is Jewish than if he is Chinese, given that traditional Judaism uses matrilineal descent to determine Jewish status.

Food was co-constructed by Chinese-White couples as a powerful force impacting the quality of their relationships on a day-to-day basis. Renowned gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin made the famous aphorism, “Tell me what you eat and I’ll tell you who you are.” Indeed, what we consume, how we prepare it, with whom we eat, and when we eat it is a form of communication that is rich with meaning and can be very revealing of the essence of who we are and where we come from. From the dining and cooking utensils used, to the ingredients selected, to the various dining etiquettes observed, food serves as a window into different worldviews and cultures. More importantly, food brings to the surface the male-female relationship and roles; the importance of family and religion; and the lifestyles, values, and personalities of the interethnic couple (Romano, 2008). In fact, the author revealed that “No other single cultural difference was cited so often by couples as a problem as food” (p.41). However, findings in the present study suggest that dietary dissimilarities are not as contentious as religious differences, perhaps due to the fact that food options in the modern era are ample and it is fairly simple for a couple to meet halfway. Many couples experience food differences as opportunities to broaden one’s palate and to engage with their partners’ extended families in a culturally meaningful fashion. I argue that dietary habits in interethnic relations are not trivial matters, as cohabitation is made up of day-to-day trivia that are deeply rooted in personal or cultural values.

Finally, language is intimately linked to one’s construction of self-identity and experience (Llerena-Quinn & Bacigalupe, 2009). A common language becomes an essential vehicle for couples to co-construct stories and negotiate meanings. The majority of couples in this study suggested that while they are ethnically and visibly different from their partners, they remain culturally similar by virtue of their strong identification to mainstream culture. One major indicator of this is that they all speak English as their primary language. Indeed, Waters and Jiménez (2005) assert that language assimilation has consistently been one of the

primary benchmarks which social scientists rely on to assess assimilation into a dominant culture.

Furthermore, the current study sheds light on the relationship between language and power in an interethnic relationship. When a couple does not share the same dominant language, whose language is used in the couple's life? What implications does this have on the couple's ability to resolve conflicts, make decisions, and self-disclose? As this study is conducted in an English-speaking nation, the one who speaks English as a first language may gain in many ways. Rosenblatt (2009) noted that "it is probably no accident that the language that comes to be the couple language is more likely to be the language of the partner who has more power," which he indicated is often an older man who has more economic resources than his female partner. This was apparently the case for one of the couples in this study. Rosenblatt (2009) further stated that the choice to gain fluency in a partner's language (in this case English) can be perceived as "a symbol of willingness to give up one's own culture and language-based self" (p. 14); however, this study raises the question of whether it is always a choice, in light of the fact that the English language plays a powerful and dominant role in today's world.

For Chinese-White couples, talking about the plurality of languages in their relationships stimulates their thinking about the role language plays in intimacy. At times, linguistic differences may pose challenges when communicating with a partner's extended family members (Llerena-Quinn & Bacigalupe, 2009). When family members speak in their non-English, native tongue, the other partner may feel excluded. Acquiring the language can have a positive impact in connecting more intimately with the partner's family, though this comes with its own set of challenges. In addition, the findings suggest that intergenerational intimacy can be fostered when family members communicate in the same language. For instance, couples have expressed that exposing their children to Chinese would help them

connect more intimately with their Chinese grandparents. Again, such exposure and socialization processes can be challenging if the parents themselves do not know the language well enough to teach it to their children (Kasuga-Jenks, 2012).

Towards a Co-constructive, Contextualized, and Strength-Based Model of Interethnic Couples' Lived Experiences

The overall findings of the present study were consolidated to generate a conceptual model through which the lived experiences of Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual couples can be understood. In light of the research question and this study's theoretical framework, the findings in this study suggest moving towards a co-constructive, contextualized, and strength-based model of conceptualizing interethnic relational experience (see Figure 12). This conceptual model is a response to the traditionally problem-focused literature on interethnic couple relationships; highlights the process-oriented nature of intimate relationships; emphasizes couples' strengths and innate abilities to co-construct a relational narrative that embodies their shared realities, insights, and sense of "we-ness"; and situates lived experiences and meanings in the multilayered contexts in which they are embedded. It also takes a holistic approach to understanding couples' lived experiences, recognizing them at three levels: the unique, the group, and the universal levels (Sue, 2001). This model can be used to understand the experiences of virtually all interethnic couples, though this section will focus on the experiences of the designated population of this study in order to illustrate how this model may be applied.

As illustrated in Figure 12, the formation of such a relationship is represented by the two overlapping circles labelled "Partner A" and "Partner B". The union of a self-identified Chinese or Chinese Canadian and a self-identified White Canadian of European descent forms the interethnic/relational context where the couple system begins to develop and where

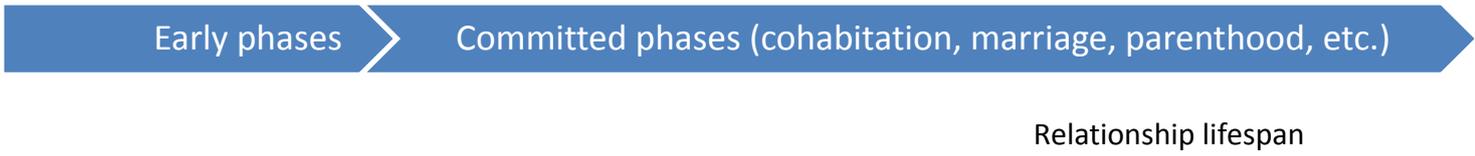
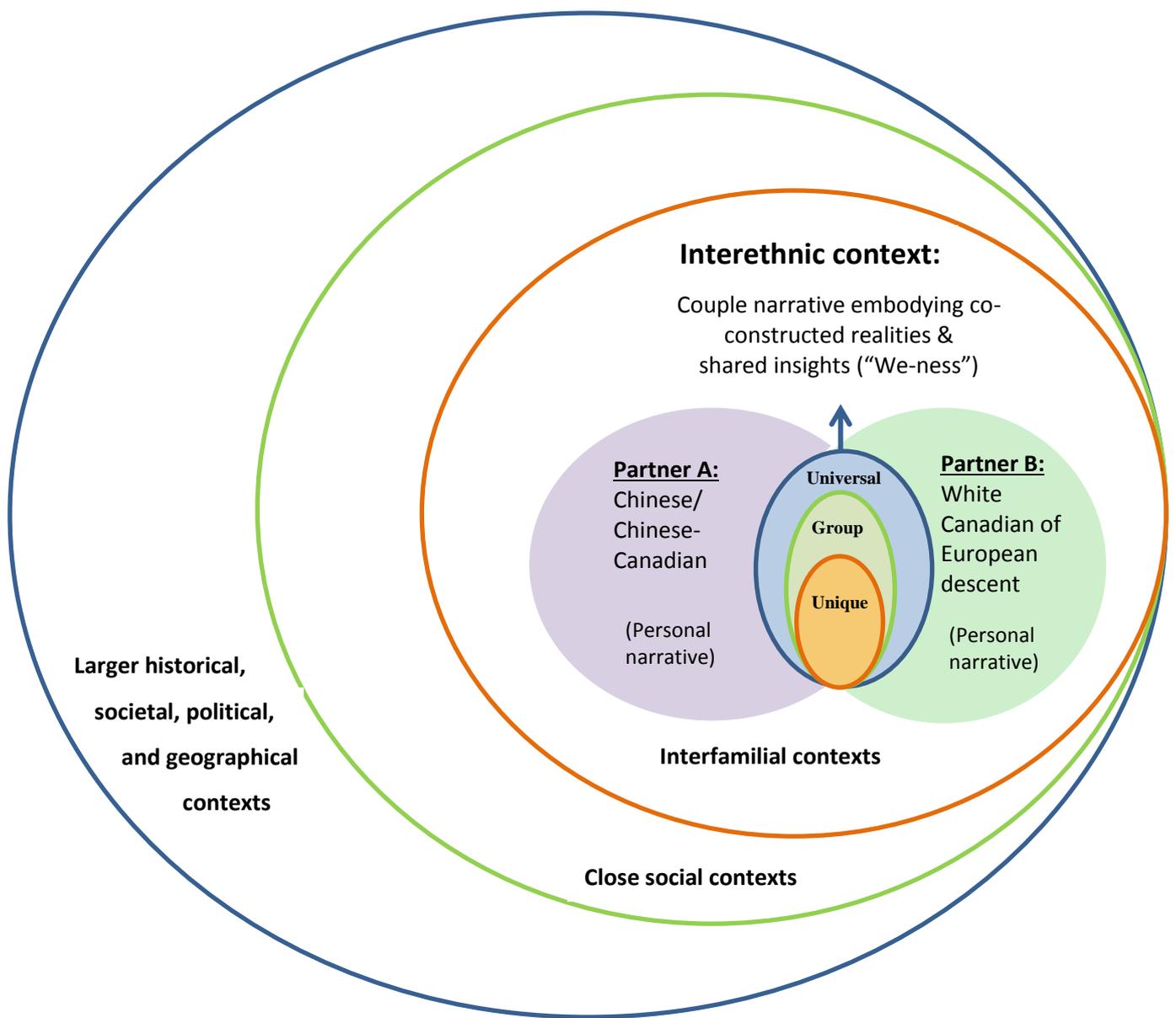


Figure 12. Co-constructive, contextualized, and strength-based model of the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples

gender relations, family and power dynamics, beliefs, values, customs and traditions between the two cultures begin to interact. Within this interethnic context, the Chinese-White heterosexual couple are seen as story-tellers who have an innate ability to co-construct a couple narrative that embodies realities and insights that represent their mutuality, “we-ness”, and understanding of their lived experiences; however, given that a couple relationship is composed of two separate entities, of equal importance is the personal narrative that each couple member constructs over time. The personal narrative represents each couple member’s individual identity, interwoven by narratives of familial pasts, personal pasts, and present experiences and future aspirations regarding his/her sense of individuality. As for the couple narrative, it is illustrated by the largest oval in Figure 12, where the two individuals (circles) intersect; the six stories presented in Chapter Four are examples of such a narrative.

How this relational dynamic will unfold varies from couple to couple; however, based on this study’s findings, the following are a set of guiding questions that can facilitate an understanding of the dynamics operating within the interethnic context of a Chinese-White heterosexual partnership:

- **Family:** What are the family structures and dynamics in their families of origin? What personal qualities does each couple member bring to the relationship and to what extent are they associated with his/her family or culture of origin? What are their gender role expectations? How involved are their families of origin in their lives? What are the couple’s parenting styles and to what extent are their practices associated with their own upbringings? What do they think constitutes a healthy racial/ethnic identity developmental path for their mixed race children?
- **Compatibility:** What makes the couple compatible? How compatible are their personalities, interests, and values? Are there shared values between the two cultures involved?

- **Cultural differences:** Are there differences in religion, language, and food operating within the relationship? Are there additional differences? What do these differences mean to them? How are they experienced?
- **Maintenance behaviours:** Through what means does the couple maintain family cohesion? What form of communication do they rely on, particularly when managing conflicts? How do they manage language barriers if they exist? How engaged is the couple in the traditions of their own cultures of origin as well as their partner's? What forms of boundaries are set in their relationships and how do they maintain them? How do they perceive the impact of race and ethnicity in their relationship? How do they show flexibility, respect, and appreciation in each other's race, ethnicity, and culture? How do they work towards being compatible?

Moreover, analogous to Sue's (2001) tripartite model of personal identity, the model illustrates that every Chinese-White heterosexual couple has three levels of experiences; that is, they have unique experiences that no other couples share, collective experiences that other Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual couples share, and universal experiences that any long-term intimate couple would share, which are represented by the three concentric ovals in the couple narrative in Figure 12. The following are a set of guiding questions that illustrate how the three levels of experiences can be conceptualized:

- **Unique level:** What sets this couple apart from all other couples? What are the embedded plot(s), tones, tension points, and central themes in the couple's story that makes them unique?
- **Group level:** In what ways are their experiences similar to other Chinese-White heterosexual couples? In what ways are their experiences similar to other Chinese-White heterosexual couples in Canada? In what ways are they similar to other interethnic couples of different racial/ethnic configurations?

- **Universal level:** What are the common life experiences that this couple share with all other couples in long-term intimate relationships?

As previously discussed, a Chinese-White heterosexual couple's lived experiences and shared meanings must be contextualized. Their meaning-making processes are impacted by the multilayered contexts in which they are embedded, including their families, close social networks, and an assortment of the larger historical, societal, political, and geographical contexts (Kenney & Kenney, 2013; Rosenblatt, 2009), which are represented by the three outer concentric circles in the model. Each of these levels influences and is influenced by the others. Put differently, the couple's co-constructed realities and shared insights will invariably be influenced by a myriad of constructed realities in the larger context and the messages and stories they internalize from the outside world. They develop their relations with, and understandings of, each other through the media of social norms, practices, and exercises of power. In addition, a relational narrative is also embedded within a certain temporal context, as illustrated by the arrow below the circular diagram. It morphs and expands over time as a couple accumulate lived experiences and transition from one relationship lifecycle stage to another. Taken together, an exploration of lived experiences must be contextualized and situated within the social and temporal environment in which they play out in order to understand their meaning. The following guiding questions can enhance one's understanding of the ways experiences and meanings can be contextualized in a Chinese-White heterosexual partnership:

- **Interfamilial contexts:** What messages do they receive from their extended families about their interethnic relationship? What messages do they receive from their families about their ethnic origins and general notions of race, ethnicity, and culture? What family narratives are often told and re-told by the couple and how do they impact their identities as individuals and as a couple? (e.g., how do narrative

inheritances around Chinese patriarchy in previous generations impact a Chinese female partner's understanding of her partnership with a White man?) How do their families shape their experiences as an interethnic couple?

- **Close social contexts:** What messages do they receive from their close social networks about their interethnic relationship? What messages do they receive from them about their ethnic origins and general notions of race, ethnicity, and culture? How do their close social networks shape their experiences as an interethnic couple?
- **The larger historical, societal, political, and geographical contexts:** What are past and present messages they receive from the larger contexts about their interethnic relationship and how do they shape their experience as a couple? (e.g., how do the common, celebratory discourses of multiculturalism and interethnic coupling in Canada shape a Chinese-White heterosexual couple's experience of their relationship?) What messages do they receive from the larger contexts about their ethnic origins and general notions of race, ethnicity, and culture? Does the normative discourse of homogamy silence this couple in their discussion of race-related matters in their relationship (Killian, 2012)?
- **The temporal context:** What family lifecycle stage is the couple currently situated? What developmental tasks are they currently undertaking? How do these tasks impact their experience and identity as an (interethnic) couple? What challenges/rewards are experienced? How do past stages shape their experiences in the current stage and inform future ones?

Lastly, why is this model a *strength-based* model? I argue that couples have an innate ability to tell stories, to make sense of their experiences through story-telling--whether it is to themselves or to others--and to be the *experts* in their own lives. Further, co-constructing couple narrative entails a collaborative approach to arrive at shared realities and insights.

These mutually-constructed understandings and stories of “we-ness” serve as crucial resources that encourage continued interaction, strengthen the very experiences of togetherness, and help couples through difficult times, reminding them that despite their struggles, they share something that connects them to one another, to their joint history, and to their envisioned future (Rogers, 2012). This study thus adds a much needed, updated perspective to the traditionally pathologizing and problem-focused literature on interethnic relationships.

In the following chapter, I discuss how the research findings and the proposed model can be applied in the field of couples counselling with Chinese-White heterosexual couples. I further discuss the limitations associated with this study, make recommendations for future research, and conclude with my final remarks.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

This study is the first of its kind to explore the lived experiences of Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual couples throughout their relationship lifespans. It not only reveals a unique constellation of experiences that this understudied population encounter over time, but also represents a critical step toward the evolution of research-informed practice that takes on a strength-based, process-oriented, and contextualized view of interethnic couple relationships. In the following section, I will discuss how the conceptual model proposed in the previous chapter can be applied in the therapeutic context with couples in distress.

Implications for Counsellors, Psychologists, and Psychotherapists

Given that the couples in this study did not comprise a clinical sample, caution must be taken in drawing conclusions to a clinical population. Nevertheless, the overarching themes and subthemes that emerged at specific relationship stages indicate that there may be particular couple and family dynamics and life cycle transitions that increase the possibility of stress for Chinese-White heterosexual couples.

First, the conceptual model in the previous chapter suggests that an interethnic couple's co-constructed narrative will be influenced by the messages they internalize from the outside world. Thus, in working with interethnic couples, interventions are more likely to be effective if therapists are "aware of and sensitive to their own racial and ethnic identity (ies) and to their beliefs about interracial relationships" (Killian, 2003, p. 16). Given that the counselling sessions are a collaborative effort between the couple and their therapist to co-construct a coherent narrative reality within a social context, the therapist must examine his/her own assumptions, biases, and stereotypes associated with interethnic couples (Kenney & Kenney, 2013; Wehrly et al., 1999). When they go unexamined, the therapist may run the

risk of overlooking cultural differences (colorblind approach) or overemphasizing them to the extent that the couple's unique relational story is undercut. Similarly, the therapist should clarify whether the couple has internalized certain messages and constructed realities from the larger socio-cultural contexts. A strength-based clinical model such as the one proposed in this study encourages couples to co-construct their own relational narrative based on shared meanings of what is important in their lives. By doing so, the therapist is utilizing the strength of both partners and the strength of the partnership to empower the couple in the therapeutic process (Wehrly et al., 1999).

Within the couple system is the interethnic context; however, many Chinese-White heterosexual couples assert that their lived experiences are not centred on race or ethnicity. Hence, when working with such a couple, the therapist should refrain from assuming that issues around race, ethnicity, and culture are any more significant than they are in same race couples. However, one should not assume that these issues are irrelevant or insignificant. During the initial co-construction of narrative realities, the therapist should pay attention to any overt statements or references to race, ethnicity, and culture by one or both partners and invite the couple to clarify the extent to which these issues are relevant to the presenting problem (Tubbs & Rosenblatt, 2003). In essence, it is important that the therapeutic space is inclusive enough to explore the shifting ways in which race, ethnicity, and culture matter or do not matter in the couple's lived experiences.

This study further suggests that it might be beneficial to inquire about the contextual circumstances in which their relationship was formed (e.g., met online, at a social event, or through family introductions), and gently probe their motives for entering the relationship. Questions about the formation of the relationship may provide vital information about any unconscious motives for entering the relationship and the couple's sources of social support (Davidson, 1992). For instance, if the White couple member reported having searched

exclusively for Chinese partners online, it might be worth exploring whether there is a presence of stereotypical beliefs, preconceived notions, and fantasies about the personality traits and gender roles of his or her Chinese partner and whether they contributed to conflict and misunderstanding.

Target intervention areas will often depend on what co-constructed realities are present in the sessions and the temporal context (i.e., relationship lifecycle stage) in which the relationship is situated at the time of seeking help. It is important to note that unique variances do exist and that not all couples go through the same relational stages. Each stage presents itself with unique developmental tasks that couples need to accomplish in order to successfully maintain their relationships. For interethnic couples, the transitions from stage to stage may be prone to cultural conflicts insofar as they coincide with certain cultural rituals and symbols and rites of passage.

Family of origin issues may be a highlight in working with Chinese-White heterosexual couples. The findings for this study suggest that possible sources of stress may stem from a lack of compatibility and opposition from extended family members. With respect to incompatibility, the therapist can explore the couple's family, attachment, and gender socialization histories with early caregivers and help them gain a deeper understanding of how their perspectives, cultural/racial identities, personality/relationship templates, emotional expressiveness, boundary styles, and gender role expectations came to be and where the sources of incompatibility lie (Romano, 2008).

This study further implies that a Chinese-White couple's experiential past, present, and future are often mediated by an allegiance to family, particularly upon settling into a committed relationship. As family involvement intensifies over the course of a couple's relationship, the distressed couple may find it increasingly difficult to negotiate differences with extended family members in such a way that family obligations begin to interfere with

the couple's sense of well-being. The therapists can help the couple members explore their personal narratives regarding their attitudes toward family obligation and whether filial duty is a culturally ingrained value. This discussion encourages couple members to examine their personal identities in relation to their families' and to what extent their core identities contribute to varying levels of filial piety. From a place of empathic understanding, the couple can begin to seek innovative ways to set family boundaries and fulfill their couple needs without completely forgoing their allegiance to their families. If deemed necessary, providing a therapeutic space that can include influential family figures (e.g., the couples' parents) in the discussion can be useful in negotiating differences (Davidson, 1992).

Family support and acceptance, as I found in this study, are social conditions that promote relationship stability. In cases where family resources are scarce, it might be worth exploring whether there are unresolved issues in one or both families of origin (Tubbs & Rosenblatt, 2003) that existed prior to the relationship. Assisting a couple in reconnecting with key family figures may be of critical significance in reconnecting them with each other. If this not a viable option, the therapist can help the couple connect with supportive networks outside of their families and/or increase their personal prescriptive support and resources by strengthening their couple identity. Disengagement from certain family members may be part of such relationship maintenance processes.

Childrearing styles and practices are deeply rooted in cultural contexts and finding a middle ground can often be challenging for interethnic couples (Ho, 1990). Distressed couples may experience disagreement and conflicts over childrearing practices at the outset of parenthood, which in turn undermines the quality of their relationships. Culturally loaded issues that may arise include where the couple should live to raise their children, what names to give them, what religious upbringing they should have, how to discipline them, what types of food are served in the household, how to discuss issues regarding their multiracial identity,

how much involvement from respective families of origin is deemed appropriate, and how to select and teach them their primary and secondary languages. The role of the helping professional here is to function as “a cultural broker both to encourage the couple in their appreciation of an adaptation to their cultures and to liberate them from rigid cultural restraints” (Hsu, 2001, p. 239). In essence, promoting flexibility and appreciation to cultural differences may be vital when helping a distressed couple develop a mutually agreed-upon parenting approach that represent their “we-ness.”

Working through incompatibility may be a central goal in working with interethnic couples in distress. Essentially, when two individuals from different cultures enter a committed relationship, the two cultures co-exist side by side. In helping a distressed Chinese-White couple work through incompatibility, it might be worth exploring how they construct differences, such as those stemming from culture, religion, dietary habits, and other lifestyle choices. Are they constructed as deficits, learning opportunities, or balancing/harmonizing forces in the relationship? If differences are regarded as deficits in the relationship, therapists can help determine whether there is room for acceptance, change, compromise, accommodation, or a willingness to sacrifice for the good of the relationship.

Of equal importance is the therapist’s ability to help distressed couple revisit their common grounds and strengthen their areas of compatibility, such as shared values (Davidson, 1992). As values play an important role in guiding one’s actions and lifestyle choices, focusing on shared values can help the couple generate similar goals and make relationship decisions that are more aligned. This intervention may help the distressed couple co-construct a “we-ness” narrative or couple identity that strengthens their experience of togetherness and transcends differences.

Lastly, it may be imperative for the therapist to explore and decipher what relationship maintenance processes distressed couples engage in during the counselling

sessions. Posing pertinent questions and observing the couple's verbal and nonverbal communication processes in the counselling session may uncover their strengths and whether they can be enhanced to work through deficiencies in other areas. While relationship maintenance behaviours such as conflict resolution apply to all couples, this study suggests that the following questions may require additional consideration when working with Chinese-White heterosexual couples: How do they communicate and what language(s) do they speak in? How do they negotiate gender role expectations that are rooted in culture? How do they set healthy boundaries with their extended families? How do they integrate each other's cultural and religious traditions? How do they raise mixed race children in a multicultural household? How do they respond to partner differences? How do they seek common ground? A co-constructive and strength-based model of understanding couples' lived experiences may help them arrive at shared insights into how these processes can be fostered.

Limitations of the Present Study

As in all qualitative studies, the findings in this study are not generalizable and are limited to the experiences of six Chinese-White heterosexual couples residing in Toronto. Their experiences may differ from Chinese-White couples, for instance, in same sex relationships or those living in more remote and less diverse communities in Canada. Furthermore, all the couples in this study are fairly educated and considered to be of medium to high socio-economic status. Their resilience may be due in large part to their income levels, higher education, and access to resources to support their relationships. Hence, the results in this study are limited in the sense that they may not reflect the experiences of couples of lower socio-economic statuses.

The current study may have been strengthened by focusing on the same ethnicity to gender configuration across all six couples or balancing the number of pairings. Four couples

had been recruited in which the female partners were Chinese and their male partners were White, whereas only two couples comprise a male Chinese member with a White female partner. Focusing on one type of configuration would help rule out the impact of gender in the couples' lived experiences. Alternatively, the recruitment of two additional couples of the Chinese male-White female configuration would have balanced the discourse and allowed for a comparison of differences based on gender.

Time limitations posed an additional challenge to understanding a couple's lived experiences from their past to the present and onto their envisioned future. Given the short time frame allocated for data collection and a natural tendency for couples to feel more at ease as the interview progresses, the breadth and richness of the couples' lived experiences and their family histories were undoubtedly compromised. Debra and Hans' 40-year relational story, for instance, would have required a much longer interview or multiple interviews to cover the countless highlighting experiences in their relationship.

Finally, the researcher's subjectivity is unavoidable within qualitative research. Given that I am in a Chinese-White heterosexual relationship, potential biases and assumptions may have contributed to or hindered the findings in the current study. Although there were ongoing efforts to enhance the credibility of the research through self-reflective journaling, triangulating the data, and (re) negotiating meaning with participants, data analyses and information presented in the final chapters will, to some extent, be processed through my own experiences and cultural biases.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study suggests that certain issues are more prevalent at specific relationship stages for Chinese-White heterosexual couples. Future studies can concentrate on specific relationship milestones (e.g., dating, marriage, parenthood, empty nest, and retirement) so as to attain a deeper and richer understanding of the more complex issues and

developmental tasks that underlie these milestones. For instance, for couples who are parents, how do they raise multiethnic children and address race-related matters in the household? What happens if one child looks more Asian but another looks more White-European? How are shared values imparted to the couple's children? These would be interesting points of inquiry in studies that centralize their discussions on parenthood experiences.

Future research can expand their narratives to exploring the experiences of Chinese-White same-sex couples, those residing in rural and relatively less diverse communities in Canada, or those comprising a clinical sample. Each of these samples is unique and targets domains of influence such as gender, environmental context, and stress, respectively, thus providing a wealth of information for helping professionals working with Chinese-White couples in a therapeutic context. Additionally, there are distinct differences in life experiences among first, second, third, etc. generation immigrants in Canada. Acculturation and assimilation influences what traditions and customs are followed, what language is primarily spoken, and what values are espoused. Future studies can focus on the experiences of first generation Chinese immigrants involved in intimate relationships with a White Canadian of European descent, as in the case of one couple in this study. This area of research may be of great importance with immigration continuing at its rapid rate.

Lastly, although this study identified certain behavioural processes that the six couples engage in to maintain their relationships, the interviews were not designed to assess marital satisfaction, quality, or happiness. Future studies can examine the long-term relationship between the identified behaviours and these outcome measures.

Concluding Remarks

This study is highly appropriate for its time and the epochs to come. The couples in this study reflect another aspect of diversity in Canadian families, with important commentaries on social inclusion and identification with one visible minority group or more,

particularly for the subsequent generations. Making up the second largest visible minority group in Canada, the Chinese population is gradually, albeit consistently, transforming the cultural mosaic of this nation. High rates of intermarriage between Chinese and White Canadians represent a process of assimilation and social integration, as they suggest intimate and profound relations between the two groups. Thus, in a time where couples of this racial/ethnic configuration are on a steady rise, counselling professionals can expect to find themselves working with this population in increasing numbers.

While research on interethnic couples from insiders' frame of reference has proliferated in the last three decades, the present study is unique in the socio-cultural context in which it is situated as well as in its purpose, methodology, and findings. First, very few studies have focused on Chinese-White heterosexual couples, let alone those residing in Canada. To this researcher's knowledge, this study represents the first of its kind to gain an in depth understanding of such couples' lived experiences situating their stories in the current socio-political context of Canada. Second, most studies either apply a deficit model or aim to identify challenges and differences experienced by interethnic couples and the processes in which they manage them. The present study, though not overlooking the challenges and differences, takes on an explorative and perhaps a more strength-based approach, inquiring about experiences that the couples deemed meaningful and memorable throughout their relationship lifespans and the insights they have gained in maintaining long-term partnerships. Third, the data in this study underwent two levels of analyses—a within-narrative analysis in Chapter Four and an across-narratives analysis in Chapter Five. Many studies omit the first level of analysis and focus on the latter, reaching at abstractions or reductions of narratives and discounting the holistic content of each story. In the present study, the six couples were invited to co-construct their unique stories, and meanings were derived in the context of the story as a whole. This perspective allowed for a broad view of the central themes and

emerging foci for each couple, thereby preserving the integrity and richness of their stories. It is my belief that the co-construction of a holistic story with its central characters, key events, tensions and harmonies, timelines and context, as well as immersion within that story, is the essence of what all counsellors and helping professionals alike do in the therapeutic context. Lastly, the findings in this study revealed two thematic categories in the couples' lived experiences—content themes and process themes. Previous studies have covered one or the other and do not make a distinction between the two. This distinction is important as it reflects the livelihood, complexity, and the *doing* of relationships. Further, congruent with the core skills of counselling, counsellors are trained to attend to two primary sources of information in their sessions—the content (e.g., what is being said) and the process (e.g., how the content is conveyed and interactions between client and counsellor).

In answering a highly subjective research question as the one proposed in this study, it is vital that we obtain the point of views from those who are involved in Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual relationships and conceptualize them through a co-constructive, contextualized, and strength-based model of interethnic relational experience. The six couples' lived experiences throughout their relationship lifespans revealed a multi-dimensional nature, comprising not only key events and issues but also ongoing relationship maintenance processes that are situated in time and place. Further, the six Chinese-White heterosexual couples are to some extent like all other couples, like some other couples, and like no other couples at all. Like all other couples, they undergo various lifecycle stages and encounter distinctive developmental tasks as they transition from one stage to another. Often in contrast to outsiders' perspectives of interethnic coupling, they all experience the ebb and flow of love, life, and commitment and strive to maintain stability and equilibrium in their relationships. To some extent, the lived experiences of the six couples interviewed mirrored one another. By virtue of being in similar racial/ethnic configurations and residing in

Toronto, they share a constellation of experiences that may be unique to this type of coupling, particularly as they relate to culture and context specific traditions, customs, artifacts, and attitudes. Finally, these six couples are in many ways like no other couples. Each couple had a unique tale worth telling, interwoven by narratives of their ancestral and familial pasts, personal idiosyncracies, relational journeys with their twists and turns and their aspirations for the years ahead.

NOTES

¹ Mildred and Richard Loving were a Black woman and a White man who were arrested and banished from Virginia for the crime of being married. In 1963, the Lovings took their case to the U.S.A. Supreme Court, and in 1967 it was declared that Virginia's anti-miscegenation statute was unconstitutional. The Loving vs. Virginia case finally overturned the laws against interracial marriage for not only the state of Virginia, but for all American states.

² The Indian Act, passed in 1876, is the legislation that gave the Canadian federal government the power to manage Indian affairs and lands reserved for Indians. The Act also defined the conditions for being an Indian under the eyes of the law. Essentially, the Act governed most aspects of status Indian lives, both on and off reserves.

³ The Ontario Female Refuges Act allowed the government to arrest and target women between the ages of 16 and 35 for behaviours such as promiscuity, pregnancy with illegitimate children, and public drunkenness. It was not repealed until 1964.

⁴ Upon her release, Velma Demerson lost her Canadian citizenship under the 1946 Canadian Citizenship Act, in which a woman who married a non-Canadian was deemed to have taken her husband's citizenship. She remained stateless until 2004.

⁵ Among the interethnic couples in 2006, Japanese had the highest proportion of mixed unions (Statistics Canada, 2006). Of the 29,700 couples that involved at least one Japanese person, 74.7% of these couples included a non-Japanese partner. Latin Americans (47.0%) and Blacks (40.6%) made the list as the second and third visible minority groups most likely to form a union outside their racial group. South Asians and Chinese were among the least likely to be involved in mixed unions. Of the 327, 200 couples that involved at least one South Asian person, only 12.7% of them were either in a relationship with a White person or with a member of a different ethnic minority group. Among the 321, 700 couples involving Chinese, only 17.4% were interethnic.

⁶Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, and Morales (2007) defines re-storying as “the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting them to place them within a chronological sequence” (p. 244).

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

(for paper flyers, email texts, and online ads)

PARTICIPANTS WANTED FOR RESEARCH STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE-WHITE COUPLES WITHIN A CANADIAN CONTEXT

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Principal investigator: Rosa Wu (Adult Education and Counselling Psychology Dept.)

Findings will contribute to the investigator's understanding of the subject matter chosen for her doctoral dissertation.

Eligibility for this study: You **AND** your partner (1) are currently involved in a heterosexual marriage (with duration of at least 3 years) or a common-law relationship where one partner identifies as Chinese and the other identifies as a White Canadian of European descent; (2) must be at least 18 years of age; and (3) must live within the GTA.

Procedures: If you **AND** your partner are interested in participating, please contact me through email or telephone. A short screening will be conducted over the phone or via email to confirm your eligibility for the study. Once confirmed, we will set up a meeting date/time. Interviews will last from 1.5 to 2 hours and will take place at the University of Toronto. A second interview (30 minutes to 1 hour) will be scheduled 2 to 3 weeks later.

Possible risks: Questions may be perceived as sources of emotional/psychological discomfort.

Possible benefits: Findings will increase mental health professionals' awareness and understanding of the "secret" behind committed and long-lasting interethnic couple relationships, thereby facilitating their work with couples in distress. By the same token, interethnic couples, their children and family members will benefit from more culturally-sensitive practices when seeking mental health services.

Confidentiality: Your anonymity will be secured. Original names will NOT be used.

Compensation: There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation is ENTIRELY voluntary. Withdrawal from the study at any time will not result in any penalty or negative consequences.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT **ROSA WU** AT 647-400-5015 or rosawu@hotmail.com

**Investigator can speak English and Mandarin Chinese

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE & SIMPLIFIED CHINESE

(for paper flyers, email texts, and online ads)

誠徵華裔與白種人夫妻生活經驗研究的受試者 **多倫多大學安大略教育研究所**

主要研究員：吳容軒（成人教育和心理諮商系）

研究中的發現有助於研究員吳小姐進一步瞭解所選定的博士論文主題

資格：您和您的伴侶必須具備下列三項條件（1）至少三年以上的異性婚姻關係，或者基於當地俗成的同居伴侶關係；夫妻中一位是華裔，一位是歐裔白種加拿大人（2）18歲以上（3）居住在大多倫多地區

方式：倘您和您的伴侶願意參與入，請以電話或電子郵件與本人聯繫，以便透過電話或電子郵件的簡易篩選確認您們是否符合資格。一旦確認，我們會安排晤談的日期和時間，晤談大約需時一個半至兩個小時，地點在多倫多大學。第二次的晤談將安排在兩至三星期後，大約需要半小時至一小時。

可能的風險：若干問題可能讓人在情緒上或心理上不舒服。

可能的好處：研究的發現可增進對隱藏在不同族群間認真而長期性伴侶背後的心理健康和隱密思維的專業認知與瞭解，使研究員日後得以協助陷入苦悶憂慮的夫妻們。同時，不同文化背景的夫妻以及他們的子女和家庭成員在尋求心理建設時可以從文化層面切入而獲益。

保密：匿名處理，您的真實姓名絕不會被引用。

報酬：您的參與沒有金錢的回饋。

參與和退出：您的參與完全基於自願，任何時候退出都不需有受罰或負面結果的顧慮。

如需進一步瞭解請與吳容軒小姐聯絡。手機：647-400-5015 或電子郵箱：rosawu@hotmail.com

**吳研究員諳英語及華

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT IN SIMPLIFIED CHINESE

诚征华裔与白种人夫妻生活经验研究的受试者

多伦多大学安大略教育研究所

主要研究员：吴容轩（成人教育和心理咨商系）

研究中的发现有助于研究员吴小姐进一步了解所选定的博士论文主题

资格：您和您的伴侣必须具备下列三项条件（1）至少三年以上的异性婚姻关系，或者基于当地俗成的同居伴侣关系；夫妻中一位是华裔，一位是欧裔白种加拿大人（2）18岁以上（3）居住在大多伦多地区

方式：倘您和您的伴侣愿意参与入，请以电话或电子邮件与本人联系，以便透过电话或电子邮件的简易筛选确认您们是否符合资格。一旦确认，我们会安排晤谈的日期和时间，晤谈大约需时一个半至两个小时，地点在多伦多大学。第二次的晤谈将安排在两至三星期后，大约需要半小时至一小时。

可能的风险：若干问题可能让人在情绪上或心理上不舒服。

可能的好处：研究的发现可增进对隐藏在不同族群间认真而长期性伴侣背后的心理健康和隐密思维的专业认知与了解，使研究员日后得以协助陷入苦闷忧虑的夫妻们。同时，不同文化背景的夫妻以及他们的子女和家庭成员在寻求心理建设时可以从文化层面切入而获益。

保密：匿名处理，您的真实姓名绝不会被引用。

报酬：您的参与没有金钱的回馈。

参与和退出：您的参与完全基于自愿，任何时候退出都不需有受罚或负面结果的顾虑。

如需进一步了解请与吴容轩小姐联络。手机：6474005015 或电子邮箱：

rosawu@hotmail.com

**吴研究员谙英语及华语

APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO GATEKEEPERS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED AND ACADEMIC SETTINGS

Greetings,

My name is Rosa Wu and I am a PhD student working under the supervision of Dr. Roy Moodley, Dr. Niva Piran, Dr. Suzanne Stewart, and Dr. Kenneth Kwan in the Adult Education and Counselling Psychology Department at the University of Toronto. The reason I am contacting you is that I am conducting a study (as part of my doctoral dissertation) that explores the lived experience of Chinese-White couples in a Canadian context. Knowledge and information generated from this study may help mental health professionals in their work with interethnic couples of this specific ethnic/racial combination. By the same token, Chinese-White couples, their children, and family members will benefit from more culturally-sensitive practices when seeking mental health services. As for potential risks, participants may perceive certain questions as sources of emotional/psychological discomfort; however there are several ways to mitigate this. For instance, participants may refuse to answer any question they deem as inappropriate; they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty; and they are encouraged to refer to a counselling resource sheet should they need any further assistance with emotional difficulties.

I am currently seeking volunteers from (*insert name of setting*) as participants in this study. During the course of this study, I will be conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals to explore their experiences of being in a Chinese-White heterosexual relationship in a major metropolitan city in Canada. Interviews will last from 1.5 to 2 hours and audio-taped with permission. A second interview (30 minutes to 1 hour) will be scheduled two to three weeks later. There is no monetary compensation associated with this study. At the end of the study the findings will be shared with other researchers and mental health practitioners.

To respect the privacy and rights of (*insert name of setting*) and its participants, I will not be contacting anyone directly. Instead, I will provide you with paper flyers and an email recruitment script to be posted or circulated at your discretion. My contact information will be contained in the flyers and email notifications. If an individual is interested in participating, he or she will be invited to contact me to discuss participation in this study in further detail.

Participation is completely voluntary. Each participant will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time in the study. They will also be asked to sign informed consent forms.

To secure confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants, all original names will be replaced with pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves.

If the *[insert name of setting]* wishes the identity of the organization to remain confidential, a pseudonym will be given to the organization. All recordings and research materials will be locked in secure cabinet in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the University of Toronto. Further, all audiotapes and research materials will be destroyed after three years.

Finally, I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and approved by the Office of Research Ethics at University of Toronto. However, the final decision about participation belongs to the *[insert name of setting]*. If you have any comments or concerns regarding the ethical issues involved in participating in the study, please feel free to contact

Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto

McMurrich Building, 2nd Floor

12 Queen's Park Crescent West

Toronto, ON, M5S 1S8

Email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca

Telephone: 416-946-3273

Fax: 416-946-5763

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 647-400-5015 or by email (rosawu@hotmail.com or rwu@oise.utoronto.ca). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Roy Moodley, at 416-978-0721 or by email (roymoodley@oise.utoronto.ca)

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Rosa Wu
PhD Candidate
Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Consent Form for (insert name of setting)

We have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Rosa Wu of the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the University of Toronto, Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Roy Moodley at the University of Toronto. We have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, and to receive satisfactory answers to our questions.

We are aware of the potential risks/benefits and procedures associated with this study.

We are also aware that results from the interviews may be presented to other researchers and mental health practitioners, provided that the participants in the study will be identified using pseudonyms only.

We were informed that participants may withdraw consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

We were informed that this project has been reviewed by and approved by the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto and that questions we have about the study may be directed to the Office of Research Ethics, the principal investigator, or her supervisor.

We understand all the information provided to us by the investigator and we agree to participate in this study.

Yes____ No____

We agree to help the investigator recruit participants who are part of *[insert name of setting]* by posting information flyers and distributing email notifications.

Yes____ No____

We agree to the use of the name of the *[insert name of setting]* in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

Yes____No____

If NO, a pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of the organization.

Signatures

Director Name: _____ (Please print)

Director Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(for participants)

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Rosa Wu from the Adult Education and Counselling Psychology Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Findings will contribute to the investigator's understanding of the subject matter chosen for her doctoral dissertation.

Title of research project: A narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of Chinese-White heterosexual couples in a Canadian context

Purpose of the study: To explore the experiences of Canadian Chinese-White heterosexual couples from past to present and onto an envisioned future

Procedures involved in this study: As mentioned in the information flyer/ email notification/ online ad, interviews will take place at the University of Toronto and will last from 1.5 to 2 hours. You may be asked to disclose information that is personal in nature. Audio-taping is required as all interviews need to be transcribed and analyzed. In addition, a second interview (30 minutes to 1 hour) will be scheduled two to three weeks later.

Access to research results: All participants have access to the research information. Please indicate whether or not you would like to receive a copy of the results.

Yes ____ No ____

If YES, please indicate whether you would like to receive it via email or regular mail:

Email ____ Regular Mail ____

Email/Mailing address:

*Please note that results will be mailed to you by _____

Possible risks: Due to the personal nature of the research topic, you may perceive certain questions as a source of psychological and emotional discomfort. In the event that you experience emotional discomfort, you may stop the interview process and return to it at a later time. You may also withdraw from the study with no penalty or negative consequences. A list of counselling resources is attached to this consent form in case you need further assistance with your emotional difficulties.

Possible benefits: You and your partner may come to a shared understanding of what commitment means to you and the unique behaviours you have engaged in to maintain and preserve your relationship. There are also potential benefits to the community as well as the

scientific/scholarly community. Potential benefits to the community include: (1) Findings will increase mental health professionals' awareness and understanding of the "secret" behind stable and long-lasting interethnic couple relationships, thereby facilitating their work with interethnic couples in distress; (2) interethnic couples, their children and family members will benefit from more culturally-sensitive practices when seeking mental health services; (3) divorce and separation have serious negative consequences on an individual, his/her family, and the society as a whole. In light of the higher divorce rate among interethnic couples, this study may aid mental health professionals who specialize in couple counselling or premarital counselling. Therapists will be more attuned to the conditions that promote or undermine relationship commitment and maintenance behaviours; and (4) this study will hopefully minimize the stigma that the scientific/scholarly community may harbour regarding interethnic relationships.

Confidentiality: All research data will be treated as confidential. Your anonymity will be maintained during data analysis and publication/presentation of the results by the following means: (1) You will be asked to provide a pseudonym of your choice; (2) the original names and other identifying information will not be used during meetings with supervisors, discussions with other students and colleagues, conferences, presentations, and future publications; (4) any recordings or files will be stored in a secured location accessed only by me; and (5) any recordings or files will be stored for 3 years, after which they will be destroyed.

Compensation: There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from the study at any time will not result in any penalty or negative consequences. Also, you may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. As soon as you inform me of your decision to withdraw from the study, I will immediately destroy any recordings and research materials associated with you.

*However, please note that your data cannot be withdrawn from the project once data analysis has begun, as the type of data analysis associated with this study is a lengthy and complex one. Therefore, your decision to remove any data associated with you must occur no later than _____.

Your rights as a research participant: You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this study. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Toronto's Office of Research Ethics. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please do not hesitate to contact:

(1) Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto

McMurrich Building, 2nd Floor

12 Queen's Park Crescent West

Toronto, ON, M5S 1S8

Email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca

Telephone: 416-946-3273

Fax: 416-946-5763

OR

(2) Rosa Wu

Email: rosawu@hotmail.com or rwu@oise.utoronto.ca

Telephone: 647-400-5015

Signature of research participant:

I have read the information provided for this study and agree to participate. I give the principal investigator, Rosa Wu, the permission to present this work in written and/or oral form provided that my name or identity is not disclosed. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant (please print)

Date

Signature of witness:

Name of Witness (please print)

Signature of Witness (please print)

Date

APPENDIX E
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

- **AGE**

What is your age? _____

- **GENDER**

What is your gender? _____

- **RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

How would you describe your racial/ethnic group membership?

- **NATIVE TONGUE**

What is your primary language?

What other languages do you speak?

- **PLACE OF BIRTH**

Where were you born? _____

- **PARENTS' PLACE OF BIRTH**

Where was your mother born? _____

Where was your father born? _____

- **YEARS LIVING IN CANADA**

How many years have you lived in Canada?

- **MARITAL STATUS**

What is your current marital status? _____

- **NUMBER OF CHILDREN (IF APPLICABLE)**

How many children do you have? _____

- **EDUCATION COMPLETED**

What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?

____ Grammar school

____ Grades 1 through 8 (Elementary)

____ Grades 9 through 11 (Some high school)

____ Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate or equivalent)

____ Vocational/technical school

____ College 1 year to 3 years (Some college)

____ Bachelor's degree

____ Master's degree

____ Doctoral degree

____ Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)

Other: _____

- **INCOME RANGE**

What is your current household income range? (you and anyone living with you combined)

____ Under \$10,000

____ \$10,000-\$19,999

____ \$20,000-\$29,999

____ \$30,000-\$39,999

____ \$40,000-\$49,999

____ \$50,000-\$74,999

____ \$75,000-\$99,999

____ Over \$100,000

____ I would rather not say

- **PSEUDONYM**

Please provide me with a fake (first) name for purposes of protecting your identity:

If you prefer that I assign you one instead, please check: _____

APPENDIX F

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview #1

“The purpose of our meeting today is for me to hear about your experiences of being in a Chinese-White heterosexual relationship in Canada. I’m particularly curious of the events and experiences you find as meaningful and the ways they have shaped who you are today. I will begin by asking you questions concerning your backgrounds and proceed to questions that explore your lived experiences as an interethnic couple from past to present and onto an envisioned future. There is no right or wrong way to tell your story...just tell me in any way that is most comfortable...each of you can talk, and I hope to hear from both of you...you can agree about the story or disagree...any way that seems comfortable for you.”

- **Background questions**

1. *Tell me about your cultural backgrounds.*

Participants are invited to engage in a narrative exploration of their experiences. Probing questions may include the following:

- How would you describe your cultural identity and why?
- What experiences have shaped who you are today?
- What has your relationship been like with your respective extended families, social circles, and community growing up?

2. *Briefly tell me about your dating or relationship history prior to this relationship.*

Probing questions may include the following:

- What was your experience like?
- What were your attitudes and beliefs regarding interethnic couple relationships prior to this relationship and what shaped them?
- What were your attitudes and beliefs regarding your partner’s ethnicity/race prior to this relationship?
- What did you learn from your previous relationships?

- **Meeting**

3. *Tell me the story of how you two met.*

Participants are invited to engage in a narrative exploration of their experiences. Probing questions may include the following:

- When and where did you meet?
- What was the experience like?

- Do you recall of any feelings, thoughts, and/or reactions that arose during the encounter?
- What made you think this was a relationship to pursue?
- Were there any reservations?

- **Romantic/Courtship Phase**

4. *Tell me about the first two years of your relationship.*

Participants are invited to engage in a narrative exploration of their experiences. Probing questions may include the following:

- What experiences, issues, and/or events stood out for you during this period and why? In particular, I am interested in any experiences you perceive as being unique to interethnic couples.
- How have they impacted you, others, and the relationship itself?
- What role(s) did your extended families/social circles/community play in your relationship during this period and how did they impact you?

- **Commitment Phase**

“I am curious about how your relationship has changed with the passage of time. As such, I would like to explore your ideas and experiences in five year intervals.”

5. *Tell me about the next five years of your relationship (this question will be asked continuously until the discussion has reached the present status of the couple's relationship).*

Participants are invited to engage in a narrative exploration of their experiences. Probing questions may include the following:

- What made you stay in the relationship?
- What experiences, issues, and/or events stood out for you during this period and why? In particular, I am interested in any experiences you perceive as being unique to interethnic couples.
- How have they impacted you, others, and the relationship itself?
- What role(s) did your extended families/social circles/community play in your relationship during this period and how did they impact you?

- **Present day**

6. *Where are you now in your relationship?*

Participants are invited to engage in a narrative exploration of their experiences. Probing questions may include the following:

- What issues, challenges, and/or opportunities do you face at the present time and how are you handling them?
- How has your current relationship shaped your view of and interethnic relationships and intimate relationships in general?

- **Envisioned future**

7. *What issues, challenges, and/or opportunities do you anticipate might arise in the future in your relationship? How would you handle them? In particular, I am interested in any issues you perceive as being unique to interethnic couples.*

- **Hypothetical question**

8. *If a Chinese-White heterosexual couple in distress came to you for relationship advice and asks you what the secret is behind a successful, long-lasting relationship, what would you say?*

Interview #2

1. *Within the new story that we co-created through the re-storying process, what other information is missing?*
2. *Were there any thoughts, feelings, and reactions that emerged between the first interview and this interview?*
3. *How has your understanding and experience of your relationship altered since we last met?*

APPENDIX G

COUNSELLING RESOURCE SHEET

- 1. The Counselling and Psychoeducational Clinic at OISE**
Suite 7-296
252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, ON
416-978-0620
Website: <http://clinic.oise.utoronto.ca>

- 2. Counselling and Psychological Services at the University of Toronto**
Room 111
Koffler Student Services Centre
214 College Street, Toronto, ON
416-978-8070
Website: <http://www.caps.utoronto.ca>

- 3. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Services**
1001 Queen Street East, Toronto, ON
416-535-8501/1-800-463-6273
Website: <http://www.camh.net>

- 4. Family Service Toronto**
355 Church Street, Toronto, ON
416-595-9618
Website: <http://www.familyserVICEToronto.org>

- 5. George Hull Centre for Children and Families**
3rd Floor
600 The East Mall, Toronto, ON
416-622-8833
Website: <http://www.georgehullcentre.on.ca>

- 6. Hong Fook Mental Health Association (for East and Southeast Asian communities)**
Suite 408
260 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, ON
416-493-4242
Website: <http://www.hongfook.ca>

- 7. Jewish Family and Child Services**
6th Floor
4600 Bathurst Street, Toronto, ON
416-638-7800
Website: <http://www.jfandcs.com>

