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Omer Astar Mendelson
Lovers Without Borders:
Self-Reflections On The
Relationships Of Cross-
National And Cross-Cultural
Couples Of Korean Women
Partnered With North
American Non-Asian Men

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how couples, composed of a Korean woman and a non-Asian North American man, who are in long-term relationship, perceive the challenges and benefits of their relationship, and to gain an understanding of how they negotiate, interweave and construct their relationship. Six intermarried couples, where the female partner had been born and was raised primarily in Korea, and the male partner came from the United States were interviewed. Special emphasis was placed on how the woman's experiences of migration, including loss and adaptation to a new culture, have affected her and have impacted her partner. Other issues explored were how the national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and gender role differences between partners are viewed and handled in these relationships. Additionally, strategies for coping and supporting each other through the experience were considered, and their recommendations for other couples were discussed.

The study identified both the obstacles and the sources of strength and support that have contributed to the couples' adaptation. The couples received a mixed reception initially from their families and friends in regards to their relationship, but this became more positive over time. The experiences of migration were mixed, and included feelings of loss, dislocation and isolation, but also feelings of opportunities, independence and

empowerment. Important cultural differences were highlighted, especially around communication, but also similarities and shared values were noted. The couples found that with patience, understanding, acceptance and flexibility, they were able to traverse the obstacles.

LOVERS WITHOUT BORDERS:
SELF-REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIPS OF CROSS-NATIONAL AND
CROSS-CULTURAL COUPLES OF KOREAN WOMEN PARTNERED WITH
NORTH AMERICAN NON-ASIAN MEN

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2009

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Preface

Sitting at my grandmother's kitchen table, fully set for breakfast (silver cutlery, *milkhig* [kosher dairy] placemats, and bread plates on the side), my paternal grandmother, Savta as we called her, would recount the story of how she came to Canada on the boat, having met my grandfather - a Captain in the Canadian Army- while he was stationed in London and needed a place to stay. My Savta would explain the shock of arriving in Canada, and the painful separation from her family who was a very long boat-ride away. She was a War Bride, among the many other wives who were wooed and wed within the short time-span of World War II, and who arrived in North America to try to make it on the new continent. My Savta's arrival was challenging; made more challenging by the severance of close family ties that the distance necessitated. But whatever her obstacles and challenges, and there were many, she and my grandfather spoke the same language, had the same religion, and were living in an English speaking area (at the time). But the pain and deep sense of loss that my Savta felt were transmitted to the next generation and to the one after that as she recounted her stories at the kitchen table.

The experience of leaving your country, leaving your culture, acclimating to a new nation, ethos, traditions and customs was not experienced solely by my paternal grandmother, in fact, almost every member of my family had been an immigrant at one time, whether from Poland to Israel, Israel to Canada, Canada to the United States, Canada to Israel, Canada to Korea and Korea to the United States; every branch of my family has left their home at one time and moved to another place. Sometimes, it was by force like my grandfather's imprisonment at Auschwitz concentration camp and then rescue and recovery at an American base in Germany. Sometimes this was by choice—as

in Zionist ideology inspiring moves to Israel. Other times, it was for practical reasons— jobs and study and opportunities seeming better brighter and more promising on the other side of the migration. And sometimes and often in my family, oceans were crossed and lives left behind for love. But whatever the reason, the experience of being a migrant is something that forever changes the course of a life.

The couples discussed here (Korean wives and non-Asian North American husbands) shared pieces of their lives with me, both their pain and their happiness, and for that, I am forever grateful. They told stories of immense difficulty, challenge, the struggles they endured and their success. Every couple I met had a different story, as unique and personalized as the different pictures and wall-hangings in their homes where I interviewed them. Although my grandmother faced many challenges in her move, these couples also had to deal with language barriers, major cultural differences, national suspicion, and family disapproval in ways much more complicated than my Savta's experiences. Listening to stories of their endurance and love, I am certain that these stories will also be passed on from generation to generation. This is my small attempt to give voice to these 'kitchen table stories' of lovers without borders.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study explored how couples, composed of a Korean woman and a non-Asian North American man, who are in long-term relationships, perceived the challenges and benefits of their cross-national and cross-cultural relationship. The intention of the project was to gain an understanding of how they negotiated, interwove, and constructed their relationships. Special emphasis was placed on learning how the woman's experiences of migration, including loss and adaptation to a new culture, have affected her and have impacted her partner. Other issues that were explored included how the national, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences between partners were viewed and handled in these relationships. Additionally, the couples' beliefs concerning their gender roles, were explored to understand its possible impact on their relationship.

In this exploratory study, other pertinent questions included: the reaction of families to this relationship; whether the couple had been able to develop social, religious, ethnic community support; if the couple had language differences, how were they handled; and whether their-cultural differences contributed to conflictual gender role expectations and ways this has played out in their lives.

Globalisation has irrevocably transformed our world in many ways; it is inevitable that it has extended to the interpersonal realm of relationships, including those involving love and intimacy. The rate of intermarriage among various ethnic, racial,

religious, cultural and national groups in North America has been increasing according to the 1990 and 2000 census (Qian, 2001; Crippen & Brew 2007). In particular, Japanese, Filipino, and Koreans were the most likely to intermarry, and most commonly, they married white partners (Lee & Fernandez, 1998; Lee & Boyd, 2008). Despite the increasing trend of cross-cultural and cross-national couples, research suggests that these relationships have a higher attrition rate, and are more likely to end in divorce (Gaines & Brennan, 2001; Reiter & Gee, 2008).

If globalisation continues at its current pace, it is likely that the numbers of cross-national relationships will continue to rise. And yet, there has been a striking dearth of studies exploring the issues that may be relevant for cross-national and cross-cultural couples. Thus far, most of these studies-tended to have been confined to specific issues, such as race or culture, generating a need for studies to provide a deeper and more comprehensive exploration of how cross-national couples interweave their lives. Also, studies of Korean women in these relationships have focused primarily on the women; this study is concerned with both members of the couple. As a growing number of Korean women and non-Asian North American men meet, partner and marry, studying these relationships may offer insight into how cross-national couples knit together their lives.

This study can contribute to the field of social work by potentially offering not only greater understanding of the obstacles that American-Korean couples face, but also by providing a better understanding of successful ways that these couples have been able to adapt and construct their relationships. As social workers increasingly serve a more diverse group of clients, the need to become familiar with both the challenges and

rewards of these cross-cultural and cross-national couples becomes vital. The information contained in this study may also be a resource for couples' counsellors, and family therapists, among others who may encounter such couples.

The inspiration for this study is grounded in some of my own experiences, and was an offshoot of hearing the stories from my grandmother's own transnational marriage as a War Bride from England, who made the journey to Canada to be with my grandfather. In fact, almost every member of my family has experienced immigration at different times, and I was deeply impacted by learning about their struggles and successes. I was further affected by my own personal experience of being in a cross-cultural relationship with a Korean man, which led me to live in Korea for five years. As I experienced my own migration for love, I wondered how others' faced and persevered despite the great challenges that come from a cross-national and cross-cultural relationship.

This study was conducted by interviewing six intermarried couples, where the female partner had been born and was raised primarily in Korea, and the male partner came from the United States. During each interview, lasting between one and one and half hours, the couples shared their stories and discussed their ups and downs as a cross-cultural and cross-national couple.

A note on terms and definitions: I have chosen to use "cross-national" and "cross-cultural" as the descriptive of these couples' experiences. The literature uses many other variations: multiple-heritage, intercultural, interracial, interethnic, exogamous, transnational, international, intermarried, mixed marriage, are just some of the many examples. While each of these terms may have a different set of assumptions and

implications, they are used interchangeably in the literature. For this research, I have tried to use the constructions of “cross-national” and “cross-cultural”, as I feel they best convey not just that these couples’ cultures and nationalities are different (as the term exogamous implies, for example), but that this study is interested in the ways that the different cultures criss-cross, intermingle, interweave and the points in the “cross” where they meet.

The selection of the subjects, and the interview procedures, are discussed in Chapter III on methodology, the findings are discussed in Chapter IV, and the discussion of the major findings and conclusion of this study are presented in Chapter V. Current trends in immigration and intercultural and cross-national marriages, the psychological impact of the migration experience, and relationship and gender roles are among the subjects addressed next, in Chapter II, the Literature Review.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative study focuses on how couples, composed of a Korean woman and a non-Asian North American man perceived the challenges and benefits of their cross-national and cross-cultural relationships. This chapter reviews the literature relevant to this inquiry, first discussing the increasing intermarriage trends in the United States, and in particular, the trends for Korean exogamy and endogamy.. As the cultural identity of each partner has an important impact on their relationship, literature relating to cultural identity is presented, followed by a discussion of the impact of the migration experience itself, including the woman's experiences of loss and adaptation, and its effect on the couple. Studies of gender roles related to cultural expectations are then discussed. Finally, as this qualitative study interviews each couple together, there will be a discussion of qualitative studies using the methodology of couple interviewing.

Background and Demographics

In most societies, endogamy is the marital norm, with people tending to marry within their social group or someone who is close to them in socioeconomic status (Kalmijn, 1998). Yet, scholars have offered a number of recent studies examining the intermarriage rates of Asian Americans, analyzing the data gathered from the 1980, 1990, and 2000 censuses and found some interesting trends (Lee & Fernandez, 1998; Qian, Blair & Ruf, 2001; Lee & Boyd, 2008). In one study, the authors calculate that among

Asian groups in the United States, Korean exogamy was the third largest (20.3%), preceded by Japanese (41.3%) and Filipinos (28.5%) (Lee & Boyd, 2008). Additionally, Korean Americans are one of the most recent and fastest growing Asian immigrant groups in the United States (Park & Bernstein, 2008).

Despite the figures and trends described above, Qian, Blair and Ruf (2001), in an earlier study, suggested that Koreans were less likely to intermarry than other Asian groups because they “maintain a high level of ethnic attachment, higher than other Asian ethnic groups, related to the fact that Korean Americans share the same language and many go to Korean ethnic churches”. (p.563). Interestingly, Lee and Fernandez (1998) point to a significant drop in Korean out-marriages between the 1980 and 1990 censuses, where the Korean exogamy rate fell from 31.8% to 6.5% in the span of ten years, ostensibly due to the factor of a larger pool of Koreans being available for selection of marriage partners. At present, the Korean exogamy rate for the United States is currently calculated to be at 20.3%, but there has yet to be research that accounts for its sharp rise to its present level of 20.3%. According to Lee and Fernandez’ (1998) study, in the 1990 census, (67.9%) of Koreans who intermarried were more likely to marry people who were white of European heritage, (67.9%) than any other group.

The figures that compare Korean female exogamy rates with their male counterparts are more striking. The percent of Korean women versus men who intermarried is 30.5% and 6.8% respectively (Lee & Boyd, 2008). The authors note that there is a similar gap between male and female exogamy rates for all Asians, and call for additional research to

...evaluate the effects of subjective factors in marital partner choice, the role of popular culture in shaping notions of femininity and masculinity and relative attractiveness of men and women from different ethnic groups, and gender roles in initiating relationships is needed to complement census-based research. (Lee & Boyd, 2008, p. 327)

Further research is essential to deepen our understanding of the “subjective factors” that impact the variance between the male and female exogamy rate, and to examine how social, historical, cultural factors affect the individual partner choices of intermarried Koreans men and women. Though studying what influences Korean male’s partner choice is beyond the scope of this study, it is my aim in this study to explore what might be some of the “subjective factors” for Korean women in choosing relationships with white American men.

Cultural Identity and the Relationship

There is a potential pitfall in treating a particular culture as monolithic, absolute or fixed, rather than constructed, fluid, and composed of “imagined communities” (Anderson, B. 1990, rev. ed.). While culture may be constructed and is as Laird (1994) describes culture as “ephemeral, a movable feast” (p. 124), nonetheless, the belief that culture is immutable can produce compliance, reinforcement, and at times, subversion. That is, though culture may be constructed, it is often attributed to have great weight in people’s feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. Many cross-national couples are also from different cultural, ethnic, and/or religious backgrounds, and in particular, couples where one spouse is Korean and the other white American have a particularly daunting task; they must negotiate racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, national and sometimes religious differences. McFadden and Moore (2001) emphasize that this negotiation occurs within the greater context of the individual’s negotiation with their own racial and

ethnic identity. The authors cite the Cross Model (1971) of Black identity (pre-encounter, encounter, emersion, internalization) to argue that, for example, engaging in cross-cultural dialogue in the emersion stage provides the ability to sustain a cross-cultural relationship in the face of possible family and societal pressure.

McFadden and Moore (2001) encourage couples to understand where they enter the pyramid of individual, family and societal acceptance, and to work together to ascend the pyramid. The authors posit that the way cross-cultural couples respond to, and negotiate stereotypes, prejudices or racism, can affect the strength of their relationship. The exploration of how couples negotiate their cultural understandings and misunderstandings of each other is an important goal in this study.

One salient aspect of understanding individual, family and societal acceptance requires the couple to become more aware of how their cultures, values and mores have been constructed and influenced by their socializing network. One way this may be accomplished is to see culture as a spectrum of internalised beliefs, and although they may change, are *perceived* as constant. Domokos-Cheng Ham (2003) explores the use of narrative therapy with multi-cultural couples to examine the internalized messages her clients have received about their own race and culture, as well as their partners' race and culture. She further encourages partners to share how their racial identity has developed, thus ensuring that race or culture are not seen as fixed but also not minimizing their influence on the couples' lives. However, the applicability of this approach (of tracing their cultural identity development) for those who were raised as part of the majority population (i.e. Korean in Korea, and white European in the US) has not yet been

examined. This study aims to explore how in the interaction between partners, their awareness of their cultural development may be stimulated for the first time.

Perel (2000) takes this approach one step further by asking couples to rate themselves high or low on a cultural spectrum, which includes their perceptions of such issues as individualism, time, nature of the universe and attitude toward life, family structure, emotional expressiveness and communication, thinking, and power and gender roles. Perel encourages the couples to see the messages and values they have internalised and how the ambivalent nature of their differing cultural values both attract partners (initially), but can also become the source of misunderstandings and conflicts.

Similarly, Henriksen et al. (2007), created the Multiple Heritage Couple Questionnaire (MHCQ) for the purpose of providing couples “the opportunity to share their thoughts and emotions with each other as sources of strength and cooperation” (.p. 405). Henriksen et al. argue that in exposing and sharing these internalised cultural values the relationship will be strengthened, while Perel posits that it is not enough to share, but to reconstruct an alternative “third reality” (Perel, 2000, p. 200).

One issue not addressed by Pearl’s “third reality” is the way that the couple handles the migration experience and the “mourning” for the country of origin. The pain experienced by leaving your country behind is often further complicated by both the expectations and hopes people place on the newly adopted country, and whether these are realistic.

In his seminal research on migration, Akhtar (1999a) elucidates the pain of leaving behind a country of origin and migrating to another as a series of losses: the loss of familiar language, sights, smells, foods, music, family and friends, etc. He further

parses out the idea of loss in his discussion of nostalgia, (Akhtar, 1999b), and the bitter-sweetness of nostalgia; reminiscing can recapture and connect immigrants to their home country, but also reawakens the pain from the “awareness of separation from the now idealized, lost objects” (p. 129).

How couples negotiate these two contradictory feelings, pain from the loss and joy from the connection to the home country can greatly impact the experience of migrants. Ataca and Berry (2002) found that marital adaptation of Turkish immigrants in Canada was closely related to their psychological adaptation, marital support being one of the most important sources for adaptation for the couples. Further, Cheung (2004) points to three areas that determined immigrant couples in Canada’s successful acculturation:

“(1) adjustment to the changing gender role relationships in the couples’ marriages after immigration, (2) increased intimacy and mutual reliance in the couples’ marital relationships, and (3) management of conflict and compromise of differences.” (p. 12).

However, to date, no study has examined how these aspects are negotiated by a cross-national and cross-cultural couples; this research will address these issues.

Further, of particular interest in this study is how couples cope with having one migrating partner, who must leave their country and support networks, linguistic knowledge, potential opportunities for jobs, and in general lose much of her cultural currency (Kim, 1998). It has been argued that couples where the man is the “tied stayer,” that is, he is tied to staying because of the power of his job, the woman becomes the “tied mover”, moving where her partner’s job takes them.

When a couple have multiple differences, including culture, national origin, ethnic identity or religion, it is to be expected that these differences may have greater relevance and impact on their relationship, that is different from that facing couples who share a similar background. This is especially true of couples where one partner comes from a dominant (agent) background and the other from a minority (target) population (Killian, 2003). When one spouse has moved from his/her country in order to be in the relationship, elements of power, gender, cultural imperialism, language and isolation *may* become even more prominent concerns. For example, partners, despite having different mother tongues, may use one common language with which to communicate for the sake of convenience, etc. Yet, there might also be an expectation that the woman follow the man's language and cultural practice (Kim, 1998). The issue of communication and the importance of language is explored in this study.

This might be especially true of men from the US who are coupled with foreign women, as the US's cultural hegemony might trickle down to the relationship, and the cultural assumptions, power and influence that come with that hegemony may play out in the relationship (Kim, 1998). Therefore, how the role of language and power are negotiated between the partners, and their impact on the quality of the relationship is a crucial aspect explored in this study.

Other important differences in cultural values, can include family influence, attitudes towards money, place of residence and/or child-rearing practices, etc. And if this asymmetrical power within the relationship dyad exists,, more traditional gender roles within the couple may be reinforced (Smits, et al. 2003). While Smits et al.'s (2003) study examined the impacts of gender in the long-distance job move, it does not include

an examination of the cross-cultural layers which also may affect power and gender dynamics within the couple. Therefore, understanding how being the “tied-mover” and the “tied-stayer” while having to deal with the loss of cultural currency, social connections, and familial support and how this impacts the couple, is explored in this research.

Gender Roles in Korean and White Relationships

It is necessary to understand not only the way culture and race might impact the partners’ beliefs around gender roles, but how these gender roles may be impacted by the cross-national relationship. This may be especially relevant where one partner’s cultural and national background may rate high (more fixed) in Perel’s (2000) cultural spectrum while the other may be from a low-rated (more flexible) background. Couples where the female partner is Korean and the other partner is North American from European descent (white) offer the opportunity to explore whether their cultural attitudes are fixed or flexible, and how this affects their reactions to gender role expectations.

Traditionally, researchers have explored the place of traditional Confucian values and their prevalence in modern Korean society. For example, Lim (1997) depicts Korean patriarchal society intensifying during the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910), where the Confucian ideology espoused the Rule of Three Obedience: women had to first obey their fathers, then their husbands, and finally their sons. The question then arises as to the role of Confucian beliefs in current Korean culture.

In their study of Confucian values and the childless couple, Yang and Rosenblatt (2008) found that Confucian values of “filial piety, family hierarchy and strong ties between generations” are still relevant today (p. 572), and may continue to “dominate in

the future” (p. 588). Expectations that the husband will work and be the breadwinner and that the wife will raise the children are still prevalent amongst both younger and older generations (Kim & Hurh, 1988; Lee, Um & Kim 2004; Lim, 1997). The traditional gender roles, were commonly seen as ideal, even when this option is not economically viable, or when they may not be culturally relevant, as when Korean couples migrate to the US or Canada (Lim, 1997).

Despite the adherence to traditional Confucian values by many Korean women and men, some scholars have argued that there is both a subversion of traditional values and a shift of gender roles, both in Korea and in the Korean immigrants to North America. A number of studies have explored ways that Korean women wish for more egalitarian partnerships. Park’s (2000) research points to the fact that more Korean American women than Korean American men declared that marriage was not necessarily a preferable option. These women reconceived traditional marriage ideals, emphasizing “political comradeship,” “partnership,” “companionship,” “compatibility” and “self-development.”

Park (2000) posits that Korean American women conceive “marriage as less of an ‘institution’ and more of a ‘relationship’” (p. 163). In his study of immigrant Korean women, Lim (1997) found that all but one of the 36 women interviewed perceived that they “had a right to demand their husbands’ participation in family work” (p. 42), though this was tempered by the fact that few participants in his study stated they “defended this right”. Nevertheless, through her more recent interviews with both Korean and Korean immigrant women, Nadia Kim’s (2006) discussion illuminates the women’s wishes for

more equal relationships with their male partners, and describes how the women connected shared housework as “a proper expression of love” (p. 527).

Another relevant characteristic of an idealized egalitarian partnership revolved around greater communication and a woman’s right to be more assertive and expressive with her partners (Nemoto, 2006; Lim, 1997;). In these important ways, there appeared to be a shift from adhering to traditional Confucian values that emphasized a hierarchy in the marital relationship to preferring a more egalitarian, communicative relationship ideal. For the participants in these studies, the turning away from Confucian hierarchical prescribed relationships meant a turning towards Western ideals. Attitudes towards egalitarian partnerships are explored in this present study.

While on the surface the rejection or subversion of traditional Confucian values appears positive for greater equality in male-female relations, they also prove problematic due to their idealization of white men as the arbiters of these equal relationships. That is, for many of the women interviewed in these studies (Kim, 2006; Nemoto, 2006), rather than attempt to renegotiate gender relations within the Korean community, the women were idealizing white Western men and choosing them as their partners. This is a phenomenon Tseng (2001) calls “projected beliefs about other cultures” that are based on ethnic gender stereotypes. This may be seen as problematic for two reasons: both the white men and the Korean women become involved in relationships within the global context of U.S. hegemony and within the national context of a white privileged U.S. society. US hegemony speaks to the power and spheres of influence the United States has over political, economic, social and cultural spheres globally, while the white privileged

society reflects racial norms in the US that are disseminated through American hegemonic influence.

One way this may be seen is in the way Asian, and specifically Korean women have been stereotyped through the White “narcissistic male gaze” (Nemoto, 2006). This gaze, the respondents explained, resulted in their feeling exoticized, othered and sexualized, just because they were Asian. Just as the women in Nemoto’s (2006) research describe often feeling that their individuality was overshadowed by the fetishisation of Asian women, Kim (1998) discusses how white American servicemen misunderstand Asian women’s gender role enactment.

Kim (1998) suggests that while Asian women appear docile and submissive, this is, in fact, a coping mechanism to “conceal their own ideas about what they want for themselves and their families, and they use the very system that oppresses them to achieve some of their goals” (Kim, 1998, p. 310). In this way, Kim suggests, the American partners of the women are blinded by the “narcissistic male gaze” and the women experience what Nemoto (2006) calls the lumping of Asian cultures, and promoting their own “projected beliefs about other cultures” (Tseng, 2001).

Participants in Pang’s (1998) study on attitudes of Korean American university students on intra- and interracial marriages reveals the participants’ concerns that white men view Korean women in the stereotypical gender roles: submissive, passive, and subordinate to white men. Yet, the same participants were propagating these stereotypes in their characterizations of Korean women who dated white men as feeling inferior, needing to be accepted by US society (Pang, 1998).

A similar dichotomy is discussed by Yuh (2002) of Korean wives of American servicemen who are often automatically assumed to be former prostitutes, connoting the “dirtiness” associated with international marriages of Korean women and US servicemen. Moreover, while women who have “international marriages” are seen as “invaded, taken or possessed” (Yuh, 2002, p. 161), Korean men in international marriages would not be denigrated as such in Korean society. In these ways, the subordination of Korean women is reinforced, both by the American white male gaze and the Korean derision of the “conquered woman”.

Korean and US Historical Context

There is no shortage of scholars who have elucidated the United States’ global hegemony in political, economic and even cultural spheres, but American involvement in recent Korean history has meant that Korea is particularly and uniquely embroiled in these asymmetrical power relations. Following 20 years of annexation and 35 years of Japanese colonization, Korea was liberated only to be shortly subsumed by the global powers in “proxy wars”, quite literally as the US and the former Soviet Union divided the country along the 38th parallel (Cummings, 1990, 2nd ed.). Even following the 1953 Armistice, the American military remained in (South) Korea and continues to maintain a military presence in the country.

The implications of this presence are felt in the political, economic and cultural spheres and their intersection with issues of gender and power are paramount. Yuh (2002) argues that the relationship between Korea and the United States is gendered in the way that the US played the role of “the masculine superior and guardian”, while Korea took on the feminized role of a damsel in distress (p. 10). The involvement of US servicemen

with local Korean women has reinforced further asymmetrical power relations, and the glorification of White American masculinity (Kim, 2006). And though the relationships between American servicemen and Korean women may be based on individual choices, they reflect the larger context of American domination, as the military presence has cemented the contrast between American wealth and Korean poverty (Yuh, 2002). Kim (1998) argues that this affluence and technology has both consciously and unconsciously been confused for cultural superiority, thus reinforcing the superiority of the heroic white male (Kim, 2006).¹

In this way, American influence in Korea extends far beyond economic and political realms, influencing the way masculinity is conceptualized and re-enacted in Korean society. In discussing relationships between Asian women and white men of European descent, Nemoto (2006) speaks of the myth of the “white knight”, a concept that may imply two different ideas: the *Whiteness* and the *Knighthood* of the idealized male.

The “knighthood” refers to the egalitarian idealized Western man, that both the Korean and Korean American women in Kim’s (2006) study link to “progressive gender norms” (p. 527) and Nemoto (2006) calls “egalitarian knighthood” that were seen as idealized by Western men; notions that are reinforced by Hollywood stereotypes, according to Kim’s subjects. Beliefs that Korean and Korean American men would not be as accepting of Korean women who were more outspoken, assertive, or career-oriented

¹ It is important to note that there have been and continue to be counter-hegemonic anti-American and anti-colonial sentiments that cast the American soldiers as “low-class cogs of imperialists and as abusers of Korean women.” (Kim, 2006, p. 523) Kim’s article is an eloquent elucidation of these themes, and though a discussion of the idealization and subjugation of the gender “ideal” (white American masculinity) plays out in Korean society is beyond the scope of this paper, it merits further exploration.

were contrasted with idealized white men who are “secure enough to handle” the possible assertiveness of Korean women. (Pak, 2006, p. 102). But more than “egalitarian knighthood”, relationships with white men were linked to economic empowerment and modernization (Kim, 2006; Yuh, 2002) and were seen as a means of accessing the dominant group, middle-class status, and what Nemoto (2006) calls “hypergamy”, the practice of marrying into a more prestigious social group. In relationships with white men, the higher socioeconomic and cultural status would mitigate any familial or community disapproval (Pang, 1998).

The second part of the “white knighthood” construct refers to the whiteness of the idealized man, which has implications for both the masculinities of other non-white Americans, as well as for the conceptions of indigenous masculinity, that of Korean men. For one thing, the idealized Western man is usually an American man (Kim, 2006) and rarely, if ever, men who are not white (Pang, 1998; Kim, 2006; Nemoto, 2006).

Reinforced by the gendered national power dynamics (US as the male guardian, Korea as the damsel in distress) discussed above, Korean masculinity has been weakened and “derogated as patriarchal in addition to being feminized, neither of which makes them ideal types” (Kim, 2006, p. 521). Nemoto (2006) quotes a Filipina participant’s response to why she did not choose a Filipino male partner: “I chose somebody who’s higher standard” and later, “I like tall guys and I like American standards” (p. 38). For the various women in these studies, indigenous masculinity is at once subordinate and inferior when compared to the white idealized masculinity as reinforced by US’ global influence through politics, economics, and cultural imperialism.

In Pang's study, all of her informants (college students and their parents), uniformly rated Black Americans as lowest on the racial desirability hierarchy (Pang, 1998). This has some historical roots in the impact of the American troops who arrived in Korea while the US was still segregated, and the prejudice against Blacks was promulgated by the soldiers themselves and internalized by Korean society (Yuh, 2002).

But, it is also to connected Korean readings of the white supremacist system in the United States, a system that privileges whites today differently but no less significantly than in the 1950s. The Korean American participants in Pang's study expressed concern that relationships with black people would result in constant "scrutiny and ostracism because of the low social, economic, and racial status of blacks as a group" (Pang, 1998, p. 132).

Contrasting these Korean American preconceptions of black American men with white American men, suggests what may be the expectations of white American men by their Korean partners: high social, economic and racial status. This study emphasizes the ways in which the expectations of both partners play out in their relationship pertaining to each other's racial, socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Additionally, since this study interviews couples living in the US, their experiences as an interracial couple living in a system that privileges white people are explored.

Summary

Though the studies examined above (especially Kim, 2006 and Nemoto, 2006) provide a rich description and discussion of issues of masculinity, femininity and gender roles, they are somewhat limited. The studies that explore cross-cultural relationships tend to focus on the cross-cultural aspect of the relationship solely, while those exploring

issues of migration for couples assume that the couples move together and come from the same cultural and national background. While Kim (2006) explores issues of gender and the impact of US hegemony on gender ideals for Korean women, her study does not include the perspectives of men themselves (Korean or white American).

Nemoto's (2006) research also examines issues of gender in interracial Asian (not solely Korean) and white couples, but this study only focuses on the women's perspectives. Though Nemoto's participants are in interracial and sometimes cross-national relationships, her sample includes women who were brought to the United States when very young ("1.5 generation"), women who moved to the United States for their relationship ("1st generation"), and Asian women born in the US (2nd generation), and thus does not explore the experiences unique to those *couples* who are cross-national and cross-cultural. The lack of such a study highlights the imperative for research that focuses on the experiences of couples, composed of a "1.0 Generation" Korean woman in a relationship with a non-Asian man.

As reviewed, the research has tended to dichotomize the issues for couples, bifurcating matters of culture separately from migration, or have focused on the experiences of military brides, or only on the experiences of the women. This study attempts to overcome this apparent lacunae in the literature, by interviewing cross-national and cross-cultural couples to explore the experiences of the cross-national and cross-cultural couple, and the multiple layers involved at the intersection of intimacy, gender, culture, nationality and the migration experience.

The following chapter discusses the methodology utilized in this research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design

This qualitative exploratory research studied ways in which couples composed of Korean women and white North American men perceived and negotiated their attitudes and feelings related to culture and migration, and its impact on their marriage.. Unlike previous studies in which only one of the partners (typically the woman) has been interviewed, and which have not included the men’s perspectives, both members of the couple were interviewed in this research,, in order to explore both their individual *as well as* their joint views on this process..

Semi-structured interviews with both members of the couple, were conducted in English, and were conducted in an open-ended manner in order to engage the couple in discussions to enable them to bring up different issues or new ideas. This is an essential component of interviewing couples, as it is “the interaction of the couple as they create their accounts that provides the researcher with material he would not otherwise obtain.” (Allan, 1980, p. 206). Further, Seymour et al. (1995) suggest that this joint interview format may be more culturally appropriate than an individual interview style. Due to the personal and sometimes sensitive topics of discussion, the longer interview times allowed for greater elaboration, enabled the couples comfort to increase, and for the discussion to deepen.

The information gathered was then analyzed and coded for themes by this researcher.

The Recruitment Process

For this study, couples where the female partner is originally from (South) Korea and the male partner is non-Asian from North America were recruited through a snowball sampling technique. While couples were recruited from Montreal, Canada, Providence, RI, and Massachusetts, the final research participants were all from Massachusetts. I initially thought that the universities and colleges could potentially attract such cross-cultural and cross-national couples, but in the end, I did not need to recruit from there. Additionally, a letter was sent out to friends and family for participants, and a few referrals resulted, though these were located in too far away to interview in person.

As couples were recruited in a snowball fashion, they were found through a number of different methods: Advertisements [see Appendix D] were placed in five different locations including: Supermarkets, a YMCA, Korean Restaurants, and the Boston Korea online “community” website. (www.bostonkorea.com).

Through the Boston Korea online community message board, it was recommended that I contact (a faith-based national group that works with inter-cultural Korean women, Amerasian children, and their families.(One chapter invited me to meet their members and explain my research project. I joined their meetings twice, explaining my research, and gathering participants. As in most snowball samples, the participants provided me with different names and contacts for other possible participants. Finally, three couples were found through this connection. Through one of the restaurant connections I was invited to visit another church group, which I did and through this

contact, two additional couples joined the research. The final couple was recruited through a chance encounter at a Korean supermarket. In order to insure anonymity of the subjects, the names of specific referral sources such as restaurants and churches are not mentioned. This information was however, shared with my Research Advisor who felt the recruitment process and sources were appropriate.

It was explained to all the couples that this study was part of a master's thesis, and that its purpose was to explore the challenges and rewards of being in a cross-national and cross-cultural relationship. The criteria for participation were explained, along with the research procedure, including having a joint interview for one to one and a half hours. Once the initial contact was made and interest in joining the research study was expressed, the participants were contacted through email (see Appendix C) or by phone (Appendix C). Once both members of the couple had agreed to participate in the research, the Informed Consent was mailed or given out and completed, and was returned to this researcher at the time of the interview.

Criteria for Sample Selection

Participants sought for this research included couples where the woman is originally from Korea, and lived there at least until she was 18 years old, while the man is from the United States or Canada, whose primary (though not necessarily only) form of communication is English. The women, to be eligible, were required not to have moved to North America with their families before the age of 17. Women who moved to the United States to attend university (undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate) or for work, and met their partners during this time were included. This criterion was selected to insure that the woman had early experiences being acculturated into her Korean culture

so that the issue of adaptation to her husband and acculturation to life in the United States would be prominent.

As the interviews were conducted in English, another criteria was that the women could converse in English. For the men, religion (Catholic, Jewish, etc.) or national group affiliation (Polish, Irish, etc.) was not a criteria for exclusion, as long as they identified as non-Asian. For the purpose of this study, Asian men included men from East Asia (China, Korea, Japan), Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and East Timor), and South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Tibet). Additionally, it was important that the men spent a majority of their lives in the North America or on American military bases in order to explore how the migration experience of just *one* of the partners impacts the relationship.

The criteria for the couples as a unit was that they be currently living in North America and that they have been in a committed relationship for at least six months and have English as their *primary* (though not necessarily only) form of communication.

Procedures

Before the interviews began, the Informed Consent form was reviewed, and the signed Informed Consent forms were collected, and referral resources distributed. Any questions regarding the Informed Consent, confidentiality questions, or the use of the data were explained prior to the beginning of the interview. Once settled, the interviews began with some demographic and warm up questions, continued to the history of the couple's relationship, and explored their experiences as a couple, challenges and rewards, etc. in following the Interview Guideline (Appendix F).

Though the interviews typically followed the question order, as the participants touched upon issues, they were asked to expand further. At times, certain questions were not asked if the relevant content had been addressed earlier. At other times, issues the couples discussed that were not explicitly addressed in the Interview Guideline were expanded; this is congruent with the semi-structured question format of the research design. Moreover, the couples commonly responded to each other's responses, agreeing, disagreeing, clarifying or asking for clarification. This back and forth between the partners is one of the advantages of joint interviews in that it “generates *expanded information*. Such expansion, in turn, may lead to the *validation of agreement between husband and wife, or result in the clarification of differences* (Bennet & McAvity, 1994, p. 5).

At the same time, Radley (1988) expressed concern that joint interviews may “stir up antagonisms between interviewees (as cited by Morris, 2001), but this was not the case in the interviews I conducted. The interviews resembled more closely Babbie's (2004) description of how the interviews allowed the couples to co-create meaning, challenge responses, and recall and recount incidents that might not have otherwise emerged from single interviews.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through couple interviews, which took place between March 2009 and May 2009. All the interviews were conducted in a previously agreed upon location, mostly commonly at the participants' houses that allowed for uninterrupted and quiet interview locations. Due to the flexibility of the semi-structured design, the interviews typically lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, with the longest

interview lasting 110 minutes. The length of time was entirely dependent on the couples' narratives and desire to expand on their responses.

The interviews were recorded on Sony ICD P620 Digital Audio Recorder, and following each interview were downloaded onto the computer, where they were converted into an MP3 format through the supplied Digital Voice Editor software. Once converted, the MP3 file was appropriately coded with the respective coding number. Using these MP3 files, the interviews were transcribed in their entirety. At the completion of the research, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants the digital voice recordings (MP3s) and the transcribed files were then all saved onto discs, and all traces were removed from the computer. The disc was put in a locked filing cabinet and will be kept for three years, along with other confidential data information.

The interviews were conducted in English, which did present some limitations as the Korean women's participants' English abilities varied. However, as a criterion for participation included English as the *primary* language of communication between partners, the language of the interviews proved a minimal impediment. Further, conducting the interviews in English allowed for greater consistency and ease of transcription and analysis.

Participants were offered the opportunity to have their own copies of the Interview Guide, though all declined this option. Additional care was taken during the interviews to be aware of the speed of the questions and to provide alternative wording and/or to clarify the questions if their meaning was not fully understood. Finally, during the interviews, notes were taken that considered the interaction between the couples in how they responded to the questions as a unit. Notes on non-verbal included factors such

as who spoke first, whether the men confirmed that their partners understood the questions, or corrected their English, etc. Attention to these communications helped to gauge whether English was a barrier and to understand the influence of language on the couple.

The data was collected through semi-structured open-ended questions that allowed for maximum flexibility and for the themes and experiences relevant to each couple to emerge. Most questions were addressed to both members of the couple, though a few were targeted specifically to one or the other partner. The questions followed the interview guide: (see Appendix F for full Interview Question guide)

- A. DEMOGRAPHICS
 - Age
 - Place of Birth/Country raised
 - Children
 - Occupation
 - Education
 - Religious/spiritual preference
- B. HISTORY OF THE COUPLE'S RELATIONSHIP
 - Couple's Meeting/Getting together
 - Family/Friends' Reactions
 - Current relationship with family/in-laws
- C. IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE
 - Choice of current location
 - Immigration experiences
 - Language and impact on relationship, family/friends, work
 - Current social life
 - Social supports/sources of community
- D. CROSS-CULTURAL
 - Cultural differences
 - Challenges and rewards of different cultures
 - Couple's co-construction of current cultural practices
 - Gender roles and expectations
 - Household chores and Child-rearing
- E. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS
 - Any wish to have had knowledge about being a mixed couple prior to marriage
 - Greatest challenges/rewards

- Recommendations for other couples'

The combination of the semi-structured interview guide with the open questions allowed for maximum discussion between the couples, and resulted in a rich discussion and consideration of the questions. To ensure the clarity and increase the validity of the interview questions, the questions were reviewed by my thesis advisor, a licensed clinical social worker with a PhD in Social Work, and were approved by the Human Subjects Review Board of Smith School for Social Work.

Ethics and Safeguards

The thesis proposal was submitted and approved by the Human Subjects Review (HSR) board at Smith School for Social Work, to ensure all possible efforts to maintain confidentiality. The HSR further reviewed the proposal to certify that all efforts were taken to consider and minimize the risks of participating in the research.

All written material excluded identifying information, and designated coding numbers were used. Any names or identifying information was removed or disguised during the transcription. The transcripts were listened to in private, and this researcher served as the sole transcriber.

The Informed Consent forms are being kept separately from all notes, and at the completion of the thesis, all the data collected (MP3s, notes, transcripts, etc.) will be kept in a locked file cabinet for three years, as mandated by federal regulations; after which time they will be destroyed. My research advisor will have access to the interview data after identifying information has been removed. Anything that I elect to present or write about the research will not include any reference to the subject's identity. If illustrative vignettes are presented, they will be in a disguised form. If I should need these records

beyond three years, I will continue to keep them secure until they are no longer needed, at which time I will destroy them.

As this study explores challenges and obstacles faced by the couples, there was a possibility that the retelling of painful memories could potentially causing disagreement between partners or pain and anguish. Therefore, resources for licensed social workers or psychologists were provided, including Korean speaking clinicians, a couple's counsellor and a mental health clinic.

Finally, the Human Subjects Review examined the thesis proposal to approve that all procedures were conducted within the parameters of the NASW Code of Ethics and Smith College's obligations under Federal research regulation. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and the participants were reminded that they could withdraw their participation from the research. Each couple was provide with an Informed Consent form to keep for their own records.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed in full in Excel files and were then analysed using content and theme analysis. Following the transcription of the interviews, the responses were reviewed and were inductively assigned labels, themes or contents most salient to the respective responses through an open-coding method.. The selection of themes reflected their pertinence to the study, their commonality, and/or their frequency in the replies of participants. Both negative and positive experiences were coded, along with conflicting accounts or descriptions of events. As the coding progressed, connections and relationships between themes naturally emerged and allowed for the data to be organized under appropriate categories.

The coding was done in the Excel file of the transcripts, where for each response, the emerging themes were noted and colour-coded in the corresponding column. These themes were then used to explore the experiences of Korean women partnered with non-Asian American men and the impact of being both a cross-national and cross-cultural couple, their methods of interweaving their lives, their sources of strength and support in overcoming the obstacles presented through their differing cultural and national backgrounds.

Limitations and Biases

Research bias was considered carefully in both the data collection and data analysis. There is potential for researcher bias in the data collection, as the questions and the follow-up questions may be influenced by my own experiences in a cross-national and cross-cultural relationship with a Korea man, as well as my five years' experience living in Korea and speaking with many such intermarried couples. These factors may also impact the data analysis, as themes that emerge may be influenced by this personal experience. Every effort was made into phrasing the interview questions in an open way that does not assume or impose my views and allows for the possibility for the participants to agree or disagree with the questions. Further, the interpretation of the data (as described above) was done inductively, so that themes are analysed based on their emergence from the participants' words.

This study is limited in its generalisability for several reasons. The sample of participants is a small number (six couples) and therefore represents their personal experiences and cannot be generalised to the greater population of cross-national and cross-cultural couples. Additionally, the couples were recruited through a snowball

sample and are not randomly selected, which means that there may be some similarities that are unique to this participant sample. For example, the sample in this study was composed of late-middle aged couples in long-standing, successful relationships, and who were active in their churches. Other groups, such as college students, parents of pre-school children, couples not involved in a religious life, and those in problematic marriages were not interviewed.

Further, while the focus of this study is the managing of the cross-national and cross-cultural experiences of couples, these experiences are not only unique to the participant sample, but to the Korean nationality of the women, and cannot be generalised to other cross-national and cross-cultural couples.

The strength of this study is that it contributes to the literature about cross-cultural and cross-national couples from Korea and the United States, by broadening the focus of the research to include not only cross-cultural, military bride experience, interracial, transnational experiences, etc. of the couple, but ways that these intersect. Further, this study explored not only the challenges, but also the strengths and resources and successes of this unique pairing.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to investigate how couples, made up of a non-Asian North American man and a Korean woman, negotiate the migration of one of the partners, as well as their cultural and ethnic differences and other obstacles that may be inherent in a cross-cultural and cross-national relationship. But more than just examining the obstacles, the intention of this research was to explore how couples are able to *overcome* the obstacles, interweave their lives, and find sources of strength and support as a couple and as individuals. In order to explore these issues, the interview guide was divided into five sections, 1) Demographics, 2) Couple's History and Relationship with each other and with Family/Friends, 3) Cross-national Experience, 4) Cross-cultural Experience, and 5) Concluding Questions.

In the first section, *Demographics*, couples were asked about their ages, occupation, education level, family composition, and religious preference in order to gather information about their backgrounds.

The second section explores the history of the couples' relationship and the nature of their relationships with family and friends. This section also explores whether these relationships have changed over time.

Cross-national Experience, the third section, explores issues related to the migration experience of the female partner, and its impact on her spouse. Its purpose was to understand what kinds of challenges emerged from the migration and its impact on the individual partners and on the couple.

The fourth section, *Cross-cultural Experience*, refers to ways that that issues of culture (cultural assumptions, cultural thinking, cultural practices, etc.) may affect relationships when couples have different cultural backgrounds. This section also explored ways that couples parsed out what was “cultural” and what was “personality” in their values, practices, beliefs, agreements and disagreements.

The fifth section, *Concluding Questions*, asked couples to think about their overall experiences together, sharing their impressions, beliefs, feelings and experiences as cross-cultural and cross-national couples. Questions about the greatest challenges and rewards of being in a mixed couple, advice to other couples, and final thoughts about their relationships allowed the couples to synthesize the themes and overall experiences as a couple and as individuals. This final section offered the couples a chance not only to share with this researcher, but with each other, ways in which they have felt challenged and supported in their relationships.

Demographics

The couples interviewed for this study had a number of similarities. All the couples belonged to at least one church, and a number of couples belonged to several churches, including Korean, Korean-American mixed families’ church, Catholic and Christian congregations. Further, the couples’ ages ranged from 37, the youngest, to 68, the oldest; the average age was 57, while the average age at marriage was 29.67.

Additionally, the couples had all been together for significant length of time, ranging from 10 to 46 years, with the mean being 24 years. This sample represents couples in stable, long-lasting marriages-which can yield important information- but does not take into account young couples or those in unsuccessful relationships.

The demographic information of the couples is summarized in the following chart: W signifies Woman and M signifies Man of each couple; W1, for example, is the first wife in the sample, and M1 is her husband, and so forth. In the illustrations given, people will be referred to by these designations.

Chart I: Demographics

	Current Age	Age at marriage	Years Together	Met Spouse	Children together	Education	Military	In US prior to marriage
W1	66	20	46	Korea	3	High School		No
M1	68	22				High School	Yes	
W2	62	27	35	US	1	2 yrs college	Civilian employee	Yes
M2	64	29				High School	No	
W3	53	40	13	US	0	College		Yes
M3	58	45				College	No	
W4	37	20	17	Korea	2	Middle school		No
M4	38	21				High school	Yes	
W5	44	32	10	US	2	Post Graduate		Yes
M5	56	44				Post Graduate	No	
W6	51	28	23	Korea	2	High School		No
M6	51	28				Post Graduate	Yes	

What follows are brief sketches of the six couples; some identifying details have been changed, and the designated letters and numbers noted above have been used in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Couple #1: M1 and W1

M1 is 68 and W1 is 66. The couple has been married for 45+ years, have 3 children and 3 grandchildren. M1 served in the US military in Korea where he met W1. Both attended high school, and are now retired. W1 has sponsored her siblings' immigration to the United States, where they all still reside.

Couple #2: M2 and W2

M2 and W2 are 64 and 62, respectively. They have been married for 35 years and have one son. W2 worked for the US military in Korea, and then moved to the United States, before meeting her husband. They met while W2 was working as a waitress. M2 graduated from high school, and W2 attended two years of college but was not able to complete it for financial concerns. W2 has sponsored several family members to come over to the United States and many of them currently reside here.

Couple #3: M3 and W3

M3 is 58 and W3 is 53. They have been together for 13 years and have no children together. M3 and W3 were both formerly married (M3 had two prior marriages) and divorced; M3 has one daughter from a former marriage. W3 met first husband (non-Asian) in Korea and moved with him to the United States. Following their divorce, W3 was attending college in this country, when she met M3. Both M3 and W3 completed their college degrees.

Coupled #4: M4 and W4

M4 and W4 are 37 and 38. The couple has been married for 18 years and have 2 children. M4 joined the US military and was stationed in Korea where he met W4. They lived together in Korea for 1 year, before moving to the United States. M4 graduated from high school, and W4 graduated from middle school.

Couple #5: M5 and W5

M5 is 56 while W5 is 44. They met 10 years ago, were married in 2001 and have two daughters. W5 had come to the United States for graduate work and stayed on to continue working in the US where she met M5. Both M5 and W5 have several graduate and post-graduate degrees.

Couple #6: M6 and W6

M6 and W6 are both 51 years old and have been together for 24 years, have been married for 23 years, and have 2 daughters. M6 joined the US military and had been posted in Korea for the second time when he met W6. They married in Korea and moved to the United States. W6 completed high school and M6 has his graduate degree.

Cross-Coupling: Couple's History and Relationship with their Families

The First Encounter

Of the six couples, three met in Korea and three met in the United States. In the situation of the couples meeting in Korea, the male partner was or had been part of the military. Of the three couples who met in the United States, the participants reported meeting through friends, at a museum, and at work. In describing what attracted them to their partner, the couples gave different explanations:

W2: And after I see him about a week, I knew he's going to be my future husband. (Laughter) The reason was, he was the most handsome man I ever see, at that time. (Laughter)

W4: Everything with God's help... How [did] I see him [on that day]? How [did] I [get to] kn[ow] him? How [did] I know her, my friend [and her sister]? So, I think, everything God make a plan: you marry, [and then you will start] going to Church. Maybe [if] I [had] stayed in Korea, [I would never have started] going to church, I know [myself]!

As the couples shared their stories of their first encounter, they emphasized their romantic attraction, their immediate connection, their similar values and beliefs. They did not focus on the cultural, ethnic or practical dimensions of their attractions, but on the personal connections they formed.

In discussing their families' reactions to their relationships, the couples' responses typically fell into three different categories: reactions from—the woman's family/friends; the man's family/friends; and from each partner's in-laws and family members. Each person generally reflected both on their own families' responses and on responses of their in-laws and partner's relatives.

The Korean Women's Families' Reactions: From the Point of View of the Women

In regards to the reactions of the women's families, all the couples described that initially there was concern or mistrust of the relationship. Sometimes, it was the mother who expressed concern:

Even my mother told me, she said, "How are you going to live in another country?" And I thought nothing about it, and I said, "What?" And she said, "You know the customs are different, food different, the language is different" and even then I wasn't scared of anything.

While others had brothers, uncles or other family members who expressed concern or disagreement with the relationship:

W4: My mom she trusts me, so [I] don't care. My brother, was little bit upset. And uncle, and uncle, [was] *really* upset. First, that's why we couldn't have wedding [ceremony in Korea].

Although all the participants experienced some initial disapproval from the Korean families regarding their relationships, the concerns were not always for cultural or national reasons. The age difference between the partners, the different religions between partners, stereotypes of Americans (especially about the high divorce rate), financial concerns, and not having their older sibling married yet were some of the reasons the families gave in articulating their worries. Still, there were concerns about the cultural and nationality differences as well.

Of the six couples, three described having to "sneak around", "lie a little," or hide the relationship from their families for at least a little while. Two of these couples were in Korea, while one of these couples met in the United States. One couple recalled this story of having to secretly get her parents' stamp (used in Korea for official documents for a person's signature) in order to have the marriage validated. The couple explained that at that time in Korea, you were still considered a minor until the age of 21, and your parents' consent was required to marry as a were a minor.

M1: In fact . . . she wasn't quite twenty-one, so one of her brothers went down to the village, and I went down there, and I stayed there...

W1: and I wanted to get permission from my parents, so I told my brother, and he said, I'll be back, and he went to get my father's special stamp.

M1: And her mother's stamp too.

W1: And [a co-worker] wrote, "I give my daughter permission to marry" and they [my parents] didn't even know it... Well, they knew we got married, but they didn't know we stole the stamp...

Another husband described his experience in the US with his wife's family:

M2: We had to sneak around for a little bit, before we got married, we had to, like, hide... if they knew, then there'd be a big war... Finally we just go to the point where we just had to tell them, and you know... they accepted it...

While the degrees of disapproval or concerns expressed varied among the participants, to some extent, all the couples reported coming up against the Korean families' reactions and worries about their relationships.

As a result of the concerns expressed, the couples recounted different ways they attempted to confront, understand and overcome these concerns. One participant described how she reassured her family in this way:

W5: They were concerned, but I told them I'm not going to marry him without their permission... I think that made them really relaxed.

Further, two other couples indicated that the fact that the male partners were Christian helped to quell some of the fears and worries of their families, while two others mentioned that despite their families concerns, the fact that they were getting married at all at their age satisfied their families.

W5: My age is, pretty late for marriage, so my dad and my mom, I guess kind of were glad, or kind of sad because he's not a Korean guy, I couldn't tell, it was hard to see their expression from them.

However, by far, the most common method to alleviate concerns of their families was to introduce the male partner to the family. For those who met their partners while in North America, this meant flying to Korea with their boyfriends, fiancés, or husbands. It was described in this way by one woman:

W3: I think that, that trip made [my husband] to understand our culture, and meet my family, made him, like he said, understand more about my background, how I grow up, my family, and very respected... and they live good life, and all the children are educated, they all like him, they all love him...

Another couple savoured the experience of proving the family wrong, when they returned to Korea after ten years of being together, still married, and a happy family despite the family's original concerns. The woman happily recalled:

W4: There, we saw everybody, and I tell them, even my uncle, "This is my husband," and everybody was surprised, everybody think so, Maybe she's divorced, she's coming to Korea... Everybody think so, we're not together a long time. And we come there, with [our children], and we look, so good, you know? Everybody was surprised, everybody was happy, so nice family...

A final method that helped in changing the Korean relatives' minds was related to the couple's ability to sponsor or support their families. For example, one woman explained that she chose her husband exactly because she knew he would be encouraging of her support for her family, in spite of his seeming initial reluctance.

W2: For me, it was my sisters, if I married, I was dating with [my husband], and I said, "You know I have sisters, I'm worried about them..." He don't seem like real serious about that. I told him that some day I'm going to have to bring them here... He was not, I could see it...his heart was not 100% there.

But I was staying with him [motions to husband], he was so sincere I will marry somebody who can support me and help me by backbone. When I came back [from a visit to Korea], I married him right away, and I didn't have a dime. And then, I started bringing over my dependents to the United States. And I think, God was good to me, I think he saw what I was intended to do. Both my sisters are married, both are happily married.

This support was indispensable not only in her choice of partners, but also in how she felt her family could benefit from the support provided by this relationship. . In these ways, the couples were able to alleviate some worries, and some, far more rewardingly, were able to prove the families' concerns wrong. Having their families get to know their spouses, financially supporting their relatives, or demonstrating the endurance of their relationships were all methods used to cope and overcome the objections of the families.

The Korean Women's Families' Reactions: From the Point of View of the Men

In discussing their in-laws' reactions and their relationships with their wives' families, the men described their experiences with the first encounter and the relationship that has *since* developed. Only four men directly addressed their feelings about their partner's families and the reception they received from them. Two of these men spoke about the tense initial reactions of the families. One husband stated:

M2: Probably what she was saying, sometimes people judge you, because you are mixed race, like she was saying. Sometimes the Koreans are like that. Even some of her family members didn't like the idea, initially that she's getting married to an American. They were saying, "Your heritage is all Korean, and now you're going to break that by marrying an American." So a lot of people were against it.

M4: It was tough, it was tough...Yeah, you could just feel it, it was, there didn't seem to be a whole lot of acceptance, it seemed like both families were waiting for the other shoe to drop.

But the man goes on to say that he understands their hesitation and a reason why they might be uncertain about the union by stating:

M4: I guess the odds, somebody quoted me, that 80% of Korean and American marriages, end in divorce...in the first two years.

Empathising with the family's concerns enabled this participant to mitigate the pain of the cold reception from his wife's family, and he became more understanding of their worries. While two men specifically addressed the cold or lukewarm reception they received from their partners' families, three other men spoke about their appreciation for the warm welcome they received from their partners' families.

M5: Fortunately, her parents are extremely nice people, so I was just extraordinarily fortunate that [I] had such wonderful . . . godparents, [says Korean words for mother-in-law and father-in-law] as you know, . . . it does not just mean just "in-laws" it is much deeper. In-laws is a kind of legalistic term, but "*changironim*" "*changmonim*" the terms... [means] you are part of the family now, it is very deep and powerful. So I realised very quickly on that I was extremely blessed, and even at our wedding, gave a little speech, because I was

the unknown quantity of this wedding of 800 people, and unfortunately my family wasn't able to make it. And [in this] speech I basically [said:] In my time here in Korea, while preparing for our wedding, I've come to realise that, in getting involved with [my wife] I was not simply, taking a wife, I was actually being incorporated into a family, and not even a family in the American sense of the word, but a very deep extended family. And I saw that as a very kind of weighty, conferral of a kind of component of my identity, I really . . . saw this immediately as something that was changing me, as an individual.

Another man described how meeting his wife's family opened his eyes

But I knew that her bringing up was very solid. Especially when I went to Korea and saw her family, that opened up my eyes 300% more than I ever envisioned, so, thank god! . . . never had the opportunity to meet her mother, but I met her father before he deceased . . . but I knew that they were good people. And when I met her brother[s], her sisters, I was more comfortable.

If we consider the earlier finding where all six women described their families' and relatives' concerns, these positive experiences told by the men may indicate that the families' concerns were alleviated or assuaged as they welcomed the husband into their families. This is indicated by the fact that the men who initially described a tense or difficult reception by their families reported improved relationships with their partner's families.

The Men's Families' Reactions

Unlike the reactions of the women's families where all expressed concerns, the men and the women described mostly a mixed reception from their husbands' relatives, with more positive responses than negative ones. Three identified a positive response from their families, two identified negative response from their families, and one described a mixed response. Unlike the Korean families where the women's initial experiences with their relatives' reactions sometimes differed from their husband's

experiences with those families, in the men's families both partners would agree in their depictions of the families' reactions.

Positive Response of Families

Three couples noted a positive familial response, which were generally described as accepting, loving, and welcoming the women into the families. One husband explained that it was only because of his father's support that he even considered the relationship seriously:

M3: Well, I can answer that quickly for you. My father really loved [her], I mean, he says, "She's the daughter that I never had," and "You're going to marry this girl."

In fact, this participant explained that one of his hesitations was exactly his uncertainty about his father's reaction, yet it was the father who encouraged the relationship. This was felt not only by the husband but also by his wife who exclaimed about her father-in-law, "He is, he is a wonderful man!"

Others described their positive experiences:

W5: I just immediately love his family, he's one of seven, and five of them live in this town, right?

M5: Four, including me.

W5: Yeah, including him, and one is like two towns over, so he's local, so they just accept me whole-heartedly. His father passed away when he was young, he was ten, and [his] mother I met her, and she was, uh, everybody accepting and accommodating, so I just like them at first instance... you know? And very fun, too! Yeah, so it was very good introduction.

Of these three couples, it seems that there were fewer concerns expressed, which sometime stood in contrast to the reactions of the wives' families. One participant compared her family's over-involvement and objections to the attitudes of her husband's family:

W2: My family was a lot more involved, a lot more involved. His family was American, everybody was easy, everybody loved me. My in-laws, they liked me, I always liked them.

In discussing these positive reactions of the American families, the men and women's responses would mirror each other, describing their welcoming reception from the husband's relatives.

Of the three other couples who depicted the responses as negative or mixed, race was an issue in two of the cases, while in the third couple, race was less of an issue than fear of the intentions of the daughter-in-law.

M1: I think my mother was dead-set against it [the relationship]... Well, my mother's an old Yankee, and Old Yankee do things only one way...

M6: Well, half the relatives in my family are racist, you know, and the other half just don't care. But I have a kind of mixed bag of family, so, they were fine with it. They didn't really have a problem with it, or anything. I was 28 and I knew what I was doing, so they didn't have a problem with it.

M4: My parents thought that she was just marrying me to come over to the States, that as soon as she got over here she was going to leave me. So... Yeah, my sister said, over two years ago, she said, [to my wife] "You did something wrong... you were supposed to hurry up and leave, you forgot! You forgot the leave part..." (Laughter).

Interestingly, despite these negative reactions, both the men and the women would sometimes explain or dismiss the negative reactions. For example, when her husband stated that his mother was "dead-set against it [the relationship]", his wife responded, "Well, but that's kind of understandable thing, you know?" Or, after explaining that "half the relatives...are racist," the man explains that in general, his family was somewhat removed:

But we didn't have a lot of support there, you know there's a lot of families like who when you have your first kid, mom and dad are right there on your doorstep. That didn't happen with us. We were pretty much on our own, raising the kids,

doing things, we didn't get a lot of financial or emotional support or anything, we were pretty much on our own, it was just the two of us.

In these ways, both the men and the women who experienced more of a negative response from male partners' families either found ways to understand the reasons behind this, or found the responses to be congruent with their relationships with their relatives.

As illustrated by the examples and anecdotes shared above, the response of families to the relationships was neither all bad nor all good, but in general expressed elements of concern, disapproval, support, and love. Sometimes, these came from the same families at different times, and sometimes these were expressed to one partner and not the other, or they were experienced differently by the partners. These varying and diverse experiences exemplify just how nuanced and complex the reception was by the families and what obstacles, barriers, supports and strengths the couples received from them.

Leaving for Love: Cross-National Experience

Exploring issues of migration and the cross-national experience were central to these interviews. The discussion of the migration experience was divided into four sections: 1) Location, Location, Location 2) Social Supports, and 3) Language Learning. Originally, section two and three were addressed only to the women, but it became apparent that sometimes the men also had feelings about (not) living in Korea or living in the US, which enriched the discussion.

Location, Location, Location

Choosing in Which Country to Live

All six couples interviewed lived in small to medium-sized towns in Massachusetts some near large urban centres. However, all the participants had previously lived, either as a couple or individually, in other states and sometimes in other countries.

Three couples had lived with each other in one other state, one couple had lived together in Korea in addition to several states in this country, one couple had lived in three states, Korea and another country. Only one couple had lived in different countries or states separately but had lived only in one state when together. As the husbands of three couples had previously been in the military, the moves were not always the choice of the couples, but five couples had chosen their current location. One couple had moved to Massachusetts for the military but then had chosen to remain.

Having experienced living in different locations, the choice of where to live was both more complex, and at the same time, much simpler. Only the three couples' where the husband had been in the military had spent any time together living in Korea; they lived in Korea together for two months, six months, and two years. Paradoxically, one husband was stationed in Korea while his wife and children had to stay back in the United States. For those couples outside the military system, two of the three husbands had visited Korea for vacation or to meet their spouse's relatives. However, none of the couples reported that they had considered living or remaining in Korea, although one woman described the dilemma of being in a cross-national relationship in this way:

W4: ...Korea [is] my favourite place... My husband and my family [are] here, so I can stay here, [but] I really want to go to Korea. He [does] not!

Another woman described her innocence in making the decision to move across the world to live in another country:

M1: Well, first I was young, young and stupid I guess. I didn't know anything about [it]. Even my mother told me, she said, "How are you going to live in another country?" And I thought nothing about it, and I said, "What?" And she said, "You know the customs are different, food different, the language is different" and even then I wasn't scared of anything. Nothing even then.

While these two women expressed some regret and a sense of loss at having left their home country, three other women described both the practical and personal reasons for deciding to live in the United States. One such reason was to bring their family members over to the United States, which two participants were able to do (two others described a wish that their family might join them but that this had been difficult or not possible). The wish to bring their families over is illustrated by this woman's story:

W2: After I came to the United States, I realised...what my goal was, [why] I came here...I really wanted my family [to join me here], because most of all...I was the first child. Because first child means...you gotta do for your sisters, you gotta do better [for them], I'm supposed to be strong. So, I feel that I get very emotional, I don't know, maybe because...it is so important, and I was young... I don't know, my sisters, I have two [half] sisters, two twin sisters, and one of my younger [half] brothers, and uh, it was in my mind...it's not because of financial stuff, because they are born [to the] second father, so they are not 'genuine', you know that? ... When they're going to get married, I was so worried about them, because, I know you know what is the second wife's kids? ...So naturally they are going to have a real hard time to get married the right person, unless they're crazy about them.

Due to cultural conventions, customs and discrimination towards blended families, W2 felt that it would be better for her family if they could join her in the United States, which she finally was able to do with the help of her husband.

Another common reason for living in the United States were the available job prospects and career choices. Perhaps, not coincidentally, this was mentioned by the three women who met their husbands while already working in the United States.

W5: I don't think I can find a job in Korea. Korea is really age conscious, so unless you start your own business, you cannot work for somebody because you are not the right [age bracket]...you should be born a certain year, after [that age, it's too late to apply for jobs]... very strange. Yeah, so it's practical thing to do, living here.

W3: [W]hen I met him I was already educated, I had been in this country long enough and I had become Americanized, so it's not like a person who just came from Korea who struggled with language and culture and all that...

W2, described how getting a job at the American army base in Korea introduced her to the idea of coming to the United States for work, as she saw her friends move to the US and getting jobs. She explained:

W2... That turns my life around. So, anyway, you talking about the life change. So that's what it was, my life was changed...

For these three women, living in the United States meant not only job prospects, but it afforded them the opportunity to support their families and develop their career opportunities that might have been unavailable to them in Korea.

Choosing in Which State, Town and Neighbourhood to Live

As noted, the couples were living in smaller cities and towns. The interviews highlighted how the couples made these decisions; they discussed their individual preferences (e.g. urban vs. suburban or rural, etc.) as well as their preferences as a couple (e.g. proximity to family members, etc.) These personal preferences had changed or had been modified over the years.

One important consideration was living near other Koreans or near a Korean community. Two participants indicated directly that a major factor in deciding where to

live was a connection to a Korean/American families' church. For example, M4 describes how they tussled between staying in the Northeast or returning to her husband's original home state. Originally, she did not want to stay in her current location, but "now, the [Korean] church [is] here, so I'm comfortable." Another woman described the most important factors in an earlier move included proximity to family members, but also proximity to the Korean church:

W6: That is totally God's will! When he retired, he sent his resume to pretty much every state, wherever a job is...[the] only [serious] respon[se] [was from this area] and our church is an hour and a half away from[our home].

One husband, who had been part of the military, noted that the army provided a community and access to other Korean wives who were experiencing similar things.

M6:...When you're in the military, you're like a family. And we lived in the military housing, so we had military families around us that were pretty much going through the same experience as us. So she could go right to next door and get a babysitter, or she could walk across the street and there was a Korean lady right there that she could go and have coffee with...

Another couple did not choose a location close to a Korean community, but the wife expressed her wish to be closer in this way:

W5: I want to look into one Korean school, every Saturday they have this, uh, in [a nearby city], and I'm thinking of sending both of [my daughters], after [the] summer, I think it would be really nice. Even that would be a long commute, you know, every Saturday, -- it's about 45 minutes drive, but I think it's worth it. And I really want them to, hang out with Koreans... in [a] Korean community.

For three of the six women, having access to a Korean community nearby was either part of how they decided where to live, or was part of what was missing from their current location.

One factor that proved more salient than a Korean community per se in the decision where to live was proximity to family members, something that five of the six

couples indicated had been part of their decision-making process. This factor often related to the husband's family. In fact, two of the four couples currently resided in the houses where the male partners had been born, while two others lived in the same or a nearby town to where they were raised. Two couples had chosen to live with the husbands' families while they got acclimated.

M2: And we stayed in my mother's house in fact, when I was still living there, because when we came back from [the west coast], before we had some place to live, we stayed at my mother's house. And she [my wife] knew my brothers and sisters very well. And my mother's an easy-going person, and she and my mother got along fine.

W1: Boy, I was a hard time in your mother's place, no food to eat, she doesn't cook much. I don't know anything about that. You know, she cooked very small amount, feed your father when he came from work. And I had two babies in there, and I was just so hungry. And I remember many times, your mother go to bed at 8 o'clock, she goes to bed early, and I just boiled the noodles, you know that smells, just put soy sauce and nothing else, and just eat it. I remember many many times I did that. It's a good thing I don't know many things, but at that time it was the best I can.

While this last woman reported a challenging time spent living with her in-laws, this couple still remains nearby to their mother/mother-in-law so that they can care for her. The centrality of family and being near family was described by this participant:

W5: While, it would be nice [to stay in a bigger city and live near a Korean community], relatives are important when you are raising your children in Korea, [so] I want to raise them with aunties and uncles.

Four of the women indicated the importance of being close to their families as a core value in Korea, and one that they felt very strongly about. Two of the women who brought over their siblings from Korea lived near most of them. One woman, comparing it to her husband's Italian culture, expressed the value of family-orientation,

W3: And Italian culture, I think it's a lot like Korean culture, they're very home-oriented and family oriented, more than other American families. Italian families

are closer knit, like, Koreans too. Like, Koreans would die for their families, you know?

For these five couples, living near their families, siblings and/or their partner's siblings was central in their decision where to live. For the wives, this was important, whether the family was her own or her husband's. Further, in their descriptions, the women and men expressed a preference to live near the men's families as the families were described as a good source of support. When possible, two women brought over their families from Korea, but for those who did not or could not, having the husband's families nearby was described as important and sustaining. The men in this research also expressed the desire to live near their families, a value that both the spouses shared.

Leaving Korea, Living in the US

As described above, the decision to live in the United States as opposed to Korea was not always an easy one, but it was one that seemed to fit with most of the couples' goals and practical objectives. Yet, this in no way means that the move was without pain, nor that the couples did not experience stress. Three women specifically spoke of the difficulty and pain of leaving Korea behind. Here are two poignant examples:

M1: And you know, a lot of girls couldn't make it [here] and go back. I understand a lot of people, really tough to get used to, or tough to survive. . . And some of them do bring money to come back [to Korea]... Good thing I didn't have money... (laughter)

M4: Like, the first month's phone bill we got was three hundred dollars...

W4: Yeah, I really really miss [Korea]... I don't coming out [of the house], I just stay[ed] in house. I don't see other people. So my country is city, and his country is, ya know, [rural] country, oh, so for the first time I cried, "I want to go to Korea, I want to go to Korea!" I just [watch for] him, all day I wait for him, all day!

Yet, the women and the couples found supports for overcoming the pain of leaving Korea behind; this included their partners, their families and other community supports.

W6: I don't remember much, but I wasn't sad, that's one thing that's sure. One thing that makes me really sad is that I could not see my family often, that is the bad...but other than that, for some reason, somehow, makes me feel really comfortable with him.

W4 stated that she if it hadn't been for her church to support her, she may not have been able to stay in the United States. For the three women who were already here when they met their husbands, all had either family, friends, and community involvement with their respective churches, or Korean clubs at school, thus mitigating the pain of leaving their families.

M5: Since graduate school, [where] there have been pockets of Korean students, I haven't been involved in Korean [community], it just wasn't there. So I miss them...

In these ways, the women found support from their partners, their families, and their friends as they overcame the pain of leaving their country behind.

In addition to speaking of the pain of leaving Korea, the women also shared their connection with their country by describing their wishes for retirement or for future settling down in Korea. In fact, two of the three women who were had met their partners while in the United States indicated that they wished to retire to Korea, at least partially.

W3: [to her husband] Promise, you're going to go to Korea after we retire, two months out of the year...

One woman spoke of the difficulty of not seeing her friends and family in Korea.

W5: ...And now, you start to [think about], after you get old and retire...I often think if [my husband] goes, you know, usually man lives shorter than women, and he's older than me, if he goes first, I think that I would go back to Korea,

In response to these comments, the husbands' responses were different. As one couple discussed learning about Korean culture, this was their exchange:

W3: Thank you. I wish there is not that much obstacles, but I wish he knows a little bit more about the real Korean culture in Korea. When I went to Korea with him, I wanted him to -- learn, experience some real Korean culture, but he didn't.

M3: But she means is that, when I retire, she wants to spend three months there...

W3: No, no, no, it's not that.

By contrast, M5 expressed his wish that there was a way for them to live in Korea somehow and discussed its impracticality for them now at this point.

M5: Yeah, if I were younger, I would probably love to go and live in Korea for a few years, maybe quite a few years, but unfortunately, I'm just getting going and trying to establish a career in my mid-fifties now, and so, um, I got a very late start, and I can't afford to just bop off to Korea for a few years, because I don't think it would really contribute to my career development, and I don't think I have that many years left [to develop my career].

Interestingly, another three women did not indicate any wishes to retire in Korea, and in fact, one specifically noted that she prefers to stay in the United States.

W6: Sometimes when he ask[s] me, do I want to go back to Korea and living in there, but honestly, I don't want. I don't know why, but here it's more relaxed. There it's always busy, especially these days. So busy, everyday busy, so many people, in small country. And also, these days Korea is totally different from when I grow up [laughter].

It is interesting to note two of the three women who had moved to the United States prior to their relationships were the ones who expressed a wish to perhaps return there someday, while two of three of those who moved here as military spouses had either moved their families over or did not want to move back, as illustrated by the comment above.

Living in the US

The challenges of *leaving* Korea for the women and their partners are not the same challenges as *acclimating* to the US. That is, leaving Korea may have been challenging or painful for some of the women, but living in the US presented its own challenges for the couple. The three women, who were military wives, discussed specific challenges of moving to a new country, while the three others did not address this issue directly. The military wives discussed the challenge of learning to deal with the small practical matters of living in the States, as well as some more philosophical differences to which they had to become accustomed.

W1: Well, I was young. I [wasn't] really was scared of anything then, that sort of thing, but after we came here, I realised, it's pretty hard. (Laughter). That's why I got hives breaking out many different times. I was sick here, and you [husband] left [to go to Vietnam], and I got hives again. Yeah, it was hard.

For this woman, the acculturation process had to happen alone. Breaking out into hives is not an uncommon somatic symptom of adjusting to a new country. While no one else described a similar experience, they did detail the different things that they had to get accustomed to including customs to learn. One couple illustrates this:

M6:... As soon as she got here, I immediately started the process of getting her acclimated and getting her a driver's license, all these things that she needed to be, and balance a chequebook, so that she could be completely independent. Which I think is real important. There were guys who didn't do that, and they regretted it...

W6: We have different culture [here] than in Korea, we don't use a chequebook [there], and also, driver's license, we don't need it, it's all public transportation...I [am] really thankful [to] M6 about that time, what [he did for me] . . . he didn't ask me, he push[ed] me that way, that [was] much in my mind [then], (Laughter), but, after several years, that was a real good thing[he did]. I was comfortable, independent even when we were living [here] [and] he got [an] assignment to Korea, [and I couldn't go with him].

However, the process of ‘pushing’ the wife to learn was experienced differently by another couple who similarly spoke of having to learn to go to the bank, the doctor’s office, etc. W4 described a time when she was forced to handle a situation by herself:

W4: So I take [my children] to the hospital, so I don't understand really good, so I'm stressed, make[s] me stressed. First time he take[s] me every time, I don't go by myself, so one day, post office, maybe bank, everything, he do that. I don't want to go, maybe I try. And they say, "What? I don't understand what you said." I'm shy, so that's it, I say, "Never mind," And I coming out right away. And whenever he says he doesn't want to help, he say[s], "You're going to learn it yourself" so now I can do that myself.

First time, I look at teller, I'm right, and she [said], "I don't understand," [but] she understand[s], I think so! And she said, "I don't know, I don't know what you're saying!" "You know what I'm saying! Why [do] you change your mind now?" I fight her, one time, I fight her, office woman, Korean people do-- do! And then she said, "Sorry!" she lied to me...So, I don't want to [get to know] American people...

W4'S husband also discussed his own challenge of knowing when to step in and help and knowing when to hold back and encourage his wife.

M4: Uh, it's been stressful, how much help to give. You know, like, if you give too much help, and you do everything for her, and she's not learning, and not enough, and she's going to struggle too much. So it's hard to find good balance, to help, but not do everything...It's different from day to day. (Laughter). So sometimes it's just reminding her, "You can do that." She'll call me and say, "You call the doctor's office and change the appointment," and I say, "You can do that!"

For these three couples, acclimating to North America meant more than just learning how to balance a chequebook; it meant learning how to balance the wish to help, encourage, teach, support and increase independence, even when faced with obstacles like language barriers, forced separations, and cultural differences.

Supporting Your Spouse

As may be expected, the husbands of the three women who had discussed the greatest difficulties in adjusting to North American society were the three husbands that

discussed the challenges and the efforts in supporting their wives' transitions. And again, we see a split here between the military families and the non-military families; those women who were came to the US *after* marriage expressed the greatest difficulties in acclimatizing to the US, thereby providing greater challenges for their spouses as well. For their parts, the husbands spoke of going to great efforts to help their wives feel more comfortable in their new countries, as exemplified in this part of the interview:

W1: ...A lot of people came here, and their family sent them food stuff, I never even thought about it I never even asked them to. I thought I wouldn't want to bother them to send all those things from far away, but a lot of people did, I understand. To me, it was kind of non-sense. A package from Korea, it's expensive to send all that stuff. Some people did, actually, but I never asked.

M1: There weren't any Korean stores here, there were a few Chinese stores if you went to Boston.

W1: The first one [Korean store?] came in 1978, to B.

M1: 1978?

W1: Yeah, and after that, they started, but before that, nothing.

M1: And even when we lived in the southwest, the closest store was about 80 or 100 miles away.

W1: Japanese store.

Interviewer: Would you drive there?

M1: We did.

Another husband explained that he tried to help his wife initially, and then supported her to do things herself:

M4: So, like, she said, if she's going someplace different, or someplace completely new, I will go with her, or try to go with her, and fill out all the paperwork, and get everything all set, and then usually after that she can start doing stuff.

As a result, his wife expressed both her gratitude and frustration for his balance of help plus encouragement. She recalled a visit to the doctor:

W4: ... [I say to him] No, you do that! So he do that, you know? I don't want to call, he do[es] everything. I don't want to call... Maybe we take [our daughter to the] emergency room, or something, he don't know what happen now, so I'm scared, [the] first time, I try, I don't really want to do, "You do that!" [I say to him], but then I try one time, and then, I think, Oh, I can do that! and I say, "Honey, you're right! I can do that! She's a little bit better!" First time, first trying thing, I'm really upset, I do myself, I'm scared, I'm nervous, and one time I try later, it's okay!

In this way, W4 was able to validate her husband's efforts as she tried to manage daily life. The two other husbands discussed how they could empathise with their wives' transnational adjustments.

M1: Well, this was my country, don't forget. So I was trying to acclimate her to the way things are done here... I think the biggest problem for anyone who comes to this country from a foreign country, and especially if you're not married to the person from the same nationality, is communication, no matter what.

M6: It's funny, the two of us went to Germany, we were stationed in Germany with the kids, and here we are, we were both out of our cultural waters there, we had the time of our lives there. We loved the German culture, we loved the German language, we just had a ball there! We just really regretted we couldn't stay longer.

To this latter response, the wife explained how her husband's understanding attitude had always helped her through the transitions of living away from Korea, despite her husband's frequent absences due to the military demands.

W6: ... It wasn't really bad, because he's [a] pretty kind husband, but he wasn't there [all the time because of the army], but I don't have much relatives to stay, and I don't have much close friends that time either, so, if, I had a real jerk husband then I might be different, but it wasn't like that, it wasn't bad at all.

As W6 explains, her husband's attitude, understanding, and help in learning to acclimate to the United States made the move easier and more tolerable.

Social Supports

The participants experienced the acclimatizing process in different ways both as individuals and as couples. One significant help for all couples in dealing with their

transitions were the social supports in their lives. Friends, family, church and community groups were essential parts of their supports and sources of strength. Four relevant sources of support are addressed below: 1) Women's supports 2) Men's supports 3) Couples' joint supports, and 4) Community Organizations/Church Groups.

Women's Supports

In emigrating from Korea the women lost some of their former social supports, and in turn, had to create new ones; this was done in a variety of ways. Four women did not directly address the loss of their friends and social network in Korea, but instead, focused on the friendships and supports that they have gained since moving to the United States. One woman noted that she didn't miss her social support system when young, but now that she is older, "I feel more, I wish I had more Korean friends in this area." One husband, M5, observed that when they go back to Korea he can see that his wife "immediately falls into a network of friends that she's established over a lifetime, and she has in fact, a social happiness that I don't see here in the United States". In order to be able to marry her husband and move to the United States, another woman described the process of leaving the closed-knit Christian sect to which she had previously belonged. Their disapproval of the union outside of their church meant she had no other choice.

W6: I walked out from there, pretty much. I asked them to ex-communicate me. It wasn't bad, I'm really glad that I was involved with them. That is part of my life that grow[s] to more spiritual life, and later on, that part is actually bring me to more, next level.

Three women reported that their friends were primarily other Korean women married to American men, usually women, they met through their Korean/American churches.

W4: I like Korean style, I don't want to learn American style. American style, is a little bit, some [of it] is okay, but not really. So, that's why I don't want to [meet with American] people. Only [go to] church, home, church, home.

Another participant wished to be more connected to Korean friends:

W5: I'm hoping that when I bring my child to the [local] Korean [language] school, I hope that I will reconnect with the Korean community.

All but one of the women described having connections in the Korean community.

Sometimes, these friendships were balanced with the couples' joint friendships, or other individuals they had met along the way. Nonetheless, the centrality of the Korean network in the women's lives extended beyond just their church attendance, into their social lives and social supports. The men's experiences, however, were somewhat different.

The men often shared their feelings and experiences with their wives' social network. Most of the men expressed understanding why their wives sought mostly the company of other Korean women as friends.

M6: And I just feel like, we Americans, are very easily dis-rooted, we'll plop ourselves down in one city or another but it doesn't have . . . the same sense of [permanence] that Koreans' have. So I respect it, I admire it, very much.

Another husband reported that it took him time to become comfortable with Korean-style socializing; he came to understand it better after he returned home one day to find a pile of shoes at the door (as is customary in Korean homes), indicating a large gathering of his wife's friends inside. One husband spoke of returning home and finding his wife in the midst of a prayer meeting:

M3: They were praying, and I saw that, and I like[d] that, and I'd rather see that here, than outside somewhere else. In the beginning I had a problem with that, but then I said, "Thank god now I have upstairs [spare apartment], so I have my own domicile, and they can, whatever they want down here."

One woman commented that her husband felt comfortable knowing that when she went out she was with people from her church group, which she explained gave her a sense of freedom and support from her spouse.

The Men's Social Supports

The men described having various forms of social networks. For some, their families were their major supports. Others described the ways that their social lives differed from their wives, through clubs, veterans' groups, church or childhood friends. One wife discussed her husband's busy social life:

W1: He belongs to tons of [groups]. He's got clubs, and veterans clubs, and different things are always going on.

W6 discussed her husband's involvement with the church and the social support that's provided him:

W6: Then he came to know [the men from the church], [he started to] come to our church, and he studied more and more formally the Bible, so we are here. And [he] became more and more closer with American men, when they study Bible together, and worship together, and they become more like brothers, it's not just like friends, [they] become more and more like brothers.

Two husbands described challenges they faced in connecting with their friends and social supports: M6 emphasized the importance of his wife to him as a social support.

M6: Yeah, in the military you don't get to keep good friends for very long, you're always on the move, you're always going somewhere, the only friend I've always had all along through thick and thin, has always been my wife. And she's the only one who's been through it all with me, so she's the only one who can understand, where I come from, where I've been.

M2: Most of my friends, are kind of scattered right now...And we don't get home until after 7, 7:30. I already do 120 miles every day, driving. And we come in one vehicle, so it's hard for me to go out with any of my friends because [of the time and the travel involved]

Though the couples described the husbands' separate social life, all the couples reported that much of their social lives were not separate but had joined over the years.

The Couples' Joint Supports

All the couples stated that much of their socializing was done together, and many of their sources of support came from their joint friends. M1 and W1 described their rich social networks that were centred in their neighbourhood while their children were growing up, where children and parents were all friends with each other. Another couple described how they commonly would invite up to four couples over to their house for dinner on the weekends; their friends were usually mixed couples-Korean women and American men.

W3: ...I would say, [we choose] to spend time with each other's friends, we used to entertain in this house, like four couples almost every weekend, but after a couple of years just giving and giving and giving, that was a little too much, so... we downsized a little bit, we minimized a little bit, a few [closer friends]... meeting less. And after he become ill, we cut down more, right?

One woman described their mutual social life:

W5: Most of [our] friends in town, as I said, he's one of seven and all the siblings are here, . . .so we spend a lot of time [with them].... [And] we have shared friends through the church... And I don't think we have particularly separate friends...mostly, we have shared friends.

Despite these positive experiences sharing their friends and social supports, two participants experienced some stress in interacting with their partner's friends. One husband spoke of his disappointment that they do not share as many friends and social supports as he might wish:

M2: So, of course she kind stays with her Korean heritage, and I'm kinda more, my American side, but we still mix, with each, as opposites. I see the Korean, sometimes, and she sees some of my family and once in a while my friends, but not too often.

W4 discussed her reluctance to spend more time with her husband's friends, which continues on today:

W4: He want[s] to try [going] to friends' house, and I say, "No, [I'm] not going, you want to go, [but I'm] not going!" I don't want to be friends with American people. See, he want[s] to try to [help] me learn American style, right? So, [that my] English is better... Well, [the] first time I go [with] him, and his friends wives [were] talking, so I stay[ed] by myself, on the couch, I don't want [sit] together. I'm shy, and maybe my English, [is a] little bit no good, and I'm nervous, and I don't really want to...later, I'm tired, I had [my son], so, now it's okay, [I said,] "You go yourself. I [will] stay [by] myself, I don't want to go." He wants [me to] try [and] go with Americans, you know, friends, make my friends, right? [When] he tries, I say, "Stop!" I don't want it. My family, church, home, that's it. I don't want to learn.

In contrast to the above opinions, one couple shared how their own relationship, companionship and friendship was the most important source of support.

W6: You know, one thing, is I'm pretty sure, M6 and I we talked a lot. Till three or four in the morning. [One day,] he call[ed] me, [he said] I'm his best friend, and also I'm his best lover, well, hopefully that is. [laughter]...

M6: Well, you are, at least the top three... [laughter]

W6: And I'm his wife, that's pretty much it. And so when I heard that [I'm his best friend], that makes me very very happy. ... it's not just husband and wife, pretty much he [tells me] about everything.

M6: Yeah, we don't have any secrets or anything, pretty much everything and anything we tell each other. We don't hold any secrets from each other.

One recurring theme was evident in all of the participants descriptions: the centrality of their churches in their social lives and social supports.

The Couples' Connection to Church or Community

All the couples described a deep commitment to their faith, but more importantly to them, a great involvement with their church; some belonged to two or three churches. Five couples attended mixed American and Korean churches, four specifically churches for Korean women intermarried with American men (among others), while one couple

attended a local church. The women described this as an immense source of social support, especially the group camaraderie that these churches provide. One couple discussed their involvement in the Senior citizen's group at their Korean church.

W1: Sometimes we get together and go out all together... I'm in the senior citizens' group now, twice a month. So we have about, almost forty [members], and anybody can come. They keep them busy. . . people look forward to that.

M1: And I'm the only non-Korean there...Even I have to have a nametag now, so, in Korean...

One woman described her involvement in many church groups.

W3:.. I'm involved with [many different church-related groups], because you have so many people who's working, who help, . . . but not everybody is [as] involved as much as a [small group of] people,. . . plus I do not have children, so I was more involved.

One man emphasized how the Church helped his wife adapt to this country, as well as helping them enhance their relationship.

M4: [Watching my wife struggle with the transition to the US] is stressful, like I said, the church helped her, and in one way it gave her other social interaction, with other Koreans, which helped, and then, it also, helped us to try to love each other, and forgive each other when we got upset and angry, in that way.

Appreciation for the support of the church community was described by one couple who belonged only to non-Korean churches.

M5: I go there because I'm interested in having a relationship with God, but um, interestingly, the church where I go with W5, the community is extremely important. And they make a point of, when you go there, to talk to you...And I immediately loved it, I was really very impressed by that, and they would invite us over for dinner, and little by little, we've made a lot of friends there, so, they, have become a circle of friends of ours that are very important to me and to W5... and that's been very fortunate...

Two couples explained that at they beginning they were not members of the same church.

One woman described how her husband, joining the Korean American church came to be accepted there.

W6:.. So he [came with] me to my church, which is the Korean American church, [where] the wives [are] Korean, and the husbands [are] American. Then he came to know [the men from the church], [he started to] come to our church, [now they] become more and more like brothers.

Another woman described how going to church improved their marital relationship.

W4: So [now] he's coming to church too, before he [did] not come to church, that's why we [were] fighting a lot, so now, we [go] together, go to same church, so... now we fight less.

Two women expressed their initial uneasiness with belonging to the Korean community.

The women explained that this was because they had faced denigration, and discrimination for having married non-Koreans.

M2: Actually, . . . for a while, I was hiding [from the Korean community], I didn't really talk to Korean people too much, I was just so... if I'm on the street, I don't want to talk to [other Koreans], because [I thought], they're going to look at me down because I married an American, you know? . . . So I usually walk[ed] away from the...Korean society. . . . [He] didn't care, but I did. Society's changed now, but before, yes, that's what they did.

Couples generally joined Korean/American churches where they would no longer be the minority, and where they could feel supported.

Language Learning

The support of their spouses was a critical element for the women in managing their transnational migrations. Yet, perhaps the most challenging aspect of this experience was language and communication. Language differences could prove a barrier to communication between the husband and wife, extended family members, children, and could present problems as the wife acclimated to life in North America

The following four sections discuss the way language was experienced by the individuals, the couples, their families and friends: 1) Women's experience with English, 2) Couples' communication, 3) Men's Experience with Korean, and 4) Communication with the children.

Women's Experience with English

In their stories, the women illustrated the nuances and complexities of not being a native English speaker in an English speaking country, living with an English-speaking partner, with English-speaking families and friends around them.

Five of the wives reported having learned English in high school, which they found was helpful, and equipped them with some knowledge of English but the content, quantity and quality of the English instruction varied greatly; most of the education was focused on reading and writing, not speaking. One woman explained:

W6: I didn't have any information about American culture... And back then, our English teacher taught us about America -he studied in England, and he's been studying in America, so he taught us the English [in] two different ways - actual English and American English...so when he taught, it made [it] more complicated [for us].

One woman described that she felt she had had an advantage with knowing some English in contrast to those women who had no knowledge of English.

W1: Yeah, so it was a little bit easier [for me because] I could read a little bit, some writing, a little bit. But some women [who hadn't gone to school] have a hard time, they still get along fine, but they have a very hard time.

In the interviews, there was great variety in how the couples evaluated the woman's English abilities; some explained that their English was sufficient, while others pointed out that their lacking English skills ability to communicate posed the greatest

challenge for them as a couple. One woman described her difficulty with English in this way:

W4: I don't speak English good... Not good English... I [have things I] want to tell you... [but] I don't know how to, because I don't know English [well]... You know, sometimes my English [is a] problem, I want to tell [my husband] something, I [want to] tell you everything right here, [holding heart], but...[I can't]. But he's such [a] nice guy, so we stuck together...

W4 then explained how her English had improved:

W4: But now [because] I work [outside the home]... before I couldn't talk to people, but now I can talk this much. Before, really! I didn't open [my] mouth.

Some husbands and wives had different assessments of the women's English capabilities.

For example, one woman quipped:

W5: Even I don't speak decent English, and I've been such a long time, [laughter] in America.

M5: You speak great English, it's not perfect, but you certainly know how to communicate, but you have been here for 19 years.

Overall, the men interviewed tended to encourage their wives and estimate the women's language abilities higher than the wives did.

Sometimes both partners mentioned experiencing concern when others did not seem to understand what the wife was saying. In one situation, a wife expressed her apprehension about whether other people would comprehend her English:

M4: And number one [thing that] bothers me, is at [my daughter's] school or something, [a place where] parents come, you know, a lot of parents coming, so guess what? I don't want to go there. Maybe somebody [will] ask me, "Hi?"... She [motioning to daughter] she says, "She's my mom..." I say, "Hi how are you? My name's W4..." [And] that's it. [The parent] asks me something, I'm nervous, I understand what she said, and I'm nervous, maybe [if] I talk and she don't understand, what am I going to do? This is key problem.

M5: What's funny sometimes, [laughter], I'll be sitting with W5, and we'll be talking to somebody, and W5 is talking, and I'll look at her, they completely don't

understand what she's saying, and it sounds so clear to me, I don't know what they don't understand.

When language problems existed, both the men and the women focused primarily on communication difficulties between the *couple*.

The Couples' Communication

All in all, only one couple stated that English proved to be a barrier to acclimating to life in North America, two couples indicated that it sometimes proved to be a challenge in their relationship, while the other three couples stated language was rarely a challenge for them. As can be expected, two of the three couples who felt that language abilities were rarely a challenge, were couples' who met their partners while in North America.

One couple who expressed that language was an obstacle in their relationship, described their difficulties:

M4: What was the hardest part... of being married to me? [speaking to W4]

W4: Language...

M4: Language barrier.

M4: Sometimes we argue, sometimes we get the dictionary...

W4: I have [a] dictionary, Korean dictionary...

M4: And try to work around that, and keep up bringing words until someone can figure out [what the other is trying to say].

Another husband described how he responded to the language problem:

M3: . . . when she has a hard time explaining, I'll just sit and soak it all in, and if I find difficulty and try to understand it, and I'll say, "What do you mean?" How many times... I'll always get to the bottom of the issue.

On the other hand, for those couples who expressed the relative lack of language difficulties between the partners, they explained:

W5: We know each other so well...even body language...he just... he knows, we know each other so well.

M6: Oh, she's, she's always had a good grasp of English...fortunately, she knew English well enough for the both of us. So we could communicate, and she's very intelligent, and she learns things very very quickly. She just hears things one time and she remembers it and stuff, so that was a blessing for me.

W2:... We never have a problem between us, because, I'll be able to communicate. My problem is, after 30 years, I don't speak perfect English, and I don't speak perfect Korean either. I'm, like, [in] between. Everything is mediocre. That's what I am. Um, [laughter], they [my family] laugh about me.

Two husbands remarked that had English been a greater barrier for them, they might not have made it as a couple. One man stated:

M6: We wouldn't have gotten as far as we did where we actually engaged and married . . .if there was this big communication barrier there... We've seen couples that [can] barely speak to each other, and they can barely understand each other, and it wasn't a very nice relationship, that's all I can say.

W3: ... When I met him I was already educated, I had been in this country long enough and I had become Americanized, so it's not like a person who just came from Korea who struggled with language and culture and all that. I had overcome most of it. when I met you [M3], but if you met me when I first came from Korea...

M3: ...oh, I probably wouldn't have gotten married then!

Though the participants placed great importance on communication between the spouses, they spoke not only of communication in English, but also the men's abilities to communicate in Korean and with their wives' family and friends.

Men's Experiences with Korean

Communication also focused on the men's abilities to communicate while in Korea or with Korean-speaking family and friends. Only one husband was able to speak more than a handful of words in Korean—five others expressed that their Korean language abilities were quite lacking. Three men had attempted to learn to speak Korean:

M2: Well, at first when I was going out with her, [I worried] that it wouldn't work, so I was learning how to write, more than I can talk, but then I thought, It's my wife and she speaks English, so what do I have to worry about?

W4: My husband learned [it] by himself. You know he stay[ed] in Korea, and he [met] me, and [he met] Korean guys there, GIs, "*ajashi*" [Korean= old uncle] teach him, so, little by little [and] I speak in Korean a lot, so he [is] learning. He can read in Korean, he can write down, [his] writing down is broken, anyway, he can read. Better than me! Maybe [if we] go to Korea, we use Korean...

M4: I'm not better than you, you're still better... I spend a lot of time speaking Korean to her, and she spends a lot of time speaking English to me... which is weird.

Though efforts were made by some of the men, the five husbands who felt they could not speak Korean spoke of time constraints or having difficulty with the language.

M5: Of course everyone would love it if I could speak Korean, but it's such a gap, I think the only way I would get to make progress in Korean, is if I went to Korea, say for a few months and really buckled down,... But I don't have a few months time, unfortunately. It's not like when I was in undergraduate, or even a graduate student when I could take on a new language. I don't know if I'll ever have the time. That's too bad, but that's the way it is. So, it's a barrier...

M6: I am the worst student of languages, I failed out of Russian school and that's after the army was teaching me, and if the Army can't teach me, I don't think anybody can. She tried, she keeps trying, you know, even she has to think, "Oh god, this guy's an idiot! He just doesn't learn!"

M3: [If] somebody calls and speaks Korean, I'm not going to try to match that, because it will never happen.

Further, the men expressed regret that they could not speak better Korean. For some, they regretted that over the years they had not picked up more Korean earlier, or studied it instead of studying other languages.

M2: ... Now I look back over all the years, it would be nice if I did kinda learn a little bit more, I know a couple of little words,. You would think after all these years of me being around Koreans I would be able to speak it fluently, [but] I [only] know a few words.... [laughter]

M5: You know, here's the ironic thing, I graduated from a French high school, I studied Chinese for quite a number of years, I speak basic Indonesian, but I don't speak any Korean at all... except for a few [words], but unfortunately I just have not picked up the language at all... so that has been a problem.

Another even stronger regret expressed by the men and the women was the trouble the men had in communicating with the family and friends of the Korean women.

M2: The [Korean friends] the old timers' that don't know too good English, so we just say hello... . . . that's the only thing that bothers me, but I just put it aside

M3: . . . But you know, not understanding the language, was the toughest part for me. . . . Like, if she had to listen to my father, who speaks fluent Italian, [speak Italian all the time, it] would be difficult for her.

M5: I do feel bad, I'm always forced into a passive observer role while in Korea, when I'd rather be a much more engaged, participant, in the social life there. And I just can't do it. I love We'd family, I would never want her not to be fully engaged with her culture. . . but unfortunately, I'll never have the same kind of involvement in the culture [as I would if I spoke more Korean].

It was not only the men who regretted their lack of Korean fluency, the women too discussed the experience of translating and mediating between their husbands and families or friends.

W3: I always provide translation, he doesn't talk to them directly, I'm the only one who talks. . . [I] call them a couple of times per week in Korea to talk to different family members and I tell them what's going on with us and his family, you know? I do the communication part, all the communication part.

M1: And of course when we went to Korea, we went four years ago, she was my interpreter,[she] and her sister.

M5: I would talk with her parents, and they would ask her a question and I gave a thoughtful reply, and sort of try to. . . you know, tease out the various nuances in my responses, and speak with great earnestness and W5 would somehow boil this down to one second. . . [big laughter from both]. . . I know there's something lost in that translation, I don't know what was skipped, but you know. . .

W5: [laughter] I don't get to see my family very often, and they ask something, and then this guy's there. . . [he] understands nothing, and sometimes, I get carried away in the conversation with family. . . [laughter]

Communicating with the Children

Even more common than regret about the impediments to communicating with the women's families, was the women's regret that their children did not speak much

Korean. Five couples had had children together; three of these women expressed deep remorse that they did not speak more Korean with the children.

W1: I tried, in the beginning, they giggled and laughing and they didn't do it [speak Korean]. So that's why [they don't speak much Korean]... Some [people] actually go to school, [at the] Korean Church, they have a Korean school, some do send their kids, They go a little while, they can talk a little and then they stop and forget about it.

W5: I try to, . . . I want them growing up speaking Korean, , he [my husband] doesn't speak Korean, so if he's around I have to speak English, and all their friends speak English. So for me, it's getting easier to just say it in English, otherwise in Korea, I talk to them in very rudimentary Korean, you know, "Wash" "Go upstairs" stuff like that. I find it more and more difficult right now to communicate in Korean, which is quite a shame.

W6: Ah, that is the biggest regret I ever had. Our kids, both of them, [started to] talk late [the] older one [started] when she was three, she didn't make a sentence, just [used single-] words, and I was afraid, maybe [if] I speak the Korean so she will get more confused, and she's not [going to] learn fast like other kids. So I speak [mostly] English and I didn't teach them to [speak] Korean, both of them, but later what I heard, if you teach the kids when they are young, then they never forget. [Now] they understand sometimes what I say, but usually when I speak the Korean is when I'm upset or mad.

The couples went on to explain what the children were able to understand, and the limits of their children's Korean capabilities.

M5: But, from the time they've been young, you threw out Korean here and there, but typically when you talk to them you still talk to them in English. We've had several Korean Au Pairs, we always ask them to talk in Korean, I would love for the kids to be totally bilingual, I know how hard it is to learn a language and I want to give them a leg up when their young. And we ask the Au Pairs, "Okay sure, sure," and they never do. I don't get it. I find it very disappointing. I would really like the kids to speak Korean, but that hasn't happened so much. They can understand basic things, but they don't speak it.

M4: [My daughter speaks] more than [my son].

W4: [My son] understands. He['s all] grow[n] up, as a teenager, he doesn't want to [speak Korean, but] he was young, he could speak Korean a lot, but now, he's shy, like me! Shy. [When we went] to Korea, two years [ago]... I [was] speaking Korean, [and] it was too easy! I was comfortable, [and my daughter] saw me, [she thought:] Oh, my mom's speaking Korean, and she's not nervous, and happy,

right? ...She told me, "Mommy, if I speak Korean you [would be] more comfortable, right?" so I said, "Uh huh!" So she tried to talk to me in Korean... So she tried learning Korean more, than [my son].

Four couples with children had tried teaching them Korean, but most had struggled to accomplish this.

M1: I think if you have two parents that speak that language. . . But when they are bombarded all day by a different language by their friends and their school, it's very difficult for them, to try to keep up two languages.

W1: They might hear you, and understand, but it doesn't come out Korean, they just talk English to you...the kids. That's so sad.

While the degrees of Korean language comprehension and ability varied from couple to couple and even from child to child, most of the couples felt that passing on Korean to their children proved to be a great challenge, one that was not easily resolved, despite various efforts to address it.

For the couples interviewed, language meant the communication within the immediate family, with extended family, with friends, and in the community. Each of the couples and families interviewed had found different ways to negotiate the language differences; for some this was easier than for others. But none of the couples could escape some language and communication obstacles, either with each other or with others. Moreover, while we use language is the literal method to communicate, language also holds shortcuts, symbols, and culturally understood meanings that may get lost in translation. The following section deals how the couples navigated those values, symbols and cultural traditions of the spouses.

Considering Culture: Cross-Cultural Experience

Considering the impact and role of culture in the couples' lives was challenging; discussions were very personal and tended to be idiosyncratic. However the following

four themes emerged: 1) Shared Culture of the Couples 2) Considering Personality versus Culture 3) Discrimination & Racism 4) Gender Roles.

Shared Culture of the Couples

In becoming a couple and a family, couples generally negotiate the construction of their values, beliefs, practices and culture. This negotiation can be challenging for cross-cultural cultural partners as they learn about their spouses as individuals, in the context of a different culture. Four major themes arose in their discussions of negotiations: 1) Negotiating the Spouse's Participation in the Other's Culture, 2) Shared Values and Cultural Norms, 3) The Children's Cultural Connection, and 4) The Culture of Food.

Negotiating the Spouse's Participation in the Other's Culture

One necessary component for the men was learning about Korean practices and traditions; this was not usually done through books but through trial and error, improvising as they went along. For example:

M6: oh yeah, definitely, huge difference. . . there still [are]-our ways of thinking aren't the same. . . . [sometimes] when we go to church. . . the Korean pastor will do or say something that I just don't get and she'll say, "That's a Korean thing," and I'll say, "Okay." [Another time] I'll say something, and she'll say, "We don't have that in Korea."

M4: . . . it's always little things that get you up[tight], that you're not expecting. . . usually it's like, "Oh you're not supposed to do that!" or there's no problem of doing that from an American perspective. . ." . [For example,] Korean society is very age conscious, like, even if the person's a year older than you, you're supposed to be very respectful, and [in] America, we're respectful of age, but usually [people have to be] like ten years [older than you [for this to matter].

It wasn't only the men who had to learn of the differences between "Korean ways of thinking" and American ways; one woman explained her own learning about "American ways of thinking":

W6:... [The American culture that I knew] was all what I watched in movies and I figured, that is America. And when I came here, it really shocked me. . . ., [the thinking] was different, American [way of thinking] and Korean [way of thinking], [are] still different. Sometimes he and I still [have a] difficult [time], a little difficult. . .

M6 responded that the learning didn't stop; they were *still* learning about each other's ways of thinking.

The men generally spoke about their choice of active or passive participation in their partner's culture; how much they would adopt of Korean cultural practices and values. All the husbands adopted some of the Korean culture; some more fully embraced the culture, while others were more reluctant or passive participants. Whereas M1, M2, and M3 focused more on the *boundaries* between their cultural practices and their wives' cultural traditions, M4, M5, and M6 focused more on the similarities in their practices and beliefs. M2 and M3 explained their preference not to follow some Korean customs, but both discussed their efforts to understand and respect Korean customs and culture.

M2: She's Korean, she's used to her traditions, then if that's what she's going to do...she should do it, I shouldn't be able to tell her you can't do it, but don't expect me to do it, if I don't care for that... And I think that works on both sides... these cultural differences...you should do yours and I should do mine.

M3 spoke of learning about Korean culture through observing another Korean-American cross-cultural couple, his awareness of the difference between the two cultures, and of the need to be broad-minded.

M3:... There's a big difference[between Asian and American cultures], your mind has to be broad, you can't be narrow-minded... [For example,] I know that they

[Koreans] dedicate a lot of their time to doing church things. And now with some American people, no [they wouldn't do that]! But I do respect their space, you know?. And I'm pretty good [at respecting their culture]. So I got to understand her, she got to understand me.

Shared Values and Norms

The couples discovered more than just differences: they discovered they shared values and beliefs; in fact, having some shared values was stated as a necessary component to their happy union. Belief in God, the value of education, importance of family, politeness, and some conservative family values were among their shared core beliefs.

M4, M5, and M6 focused on their agreement with Korean values and traditions.

M5: Yeah, I agree. I think that fortunately we have very similar views on [raising our children], I think that we are very much in sync, I think that only, there's some superficial differences, W5 does tend to be a bit more strict than I am. . . [but] I don't like bad behaviour, so I don't like the children to act impolitely, and I think we're in completely in agreement in this. We both want them to have an appreciation for education, . . . to grow up with a presence of God in their life, I think that in many respects W5 is the more religious one of the two of us, but interestingly, I'm the one who won't let our children go to bed without praying...

M6: ...We wouldn't have gotten as far as we did. . . if there was this big communication barrier there. Or if we didn't have shared values, you know? We're both very conservative in our values, very old fashioned in the way we thought and everything...

As these men indicated, their shared values and beliefs often came out in the decisions and core beliefs that guided the couples in raising their children (for those couples who had kids together).

The Children's Cultural Connection

Five of the couples had children together, and many of their negotiations over culture and beliefs occurred in relation to the upbringing of their children. Questions concerned: raising their children with Korean values; celebrating North American

holidays (or celebrating them in North American ways); amount of freedom to give the children, and whether to connect the children with their Korean and North American heritages.

Two couples with grown children focused on their happiness in raising happy and well-adjusted children, with less attention paid to cultural identification with their Korean heritage.

W2: Well, we have a beautiful son; people call him really handsome. So that's good.

M2: So, I don't know how that would have been . . . if she had had a son with someone else, or if I had had a son with an American girl, would I have a son who would look the same? Probably not, just one of those things that happened to be a perfect mixture, to have a beautiful son that's good all around.

W2: He's a gentleman. [Not like] the young men and the kids you see around here He's very gentlemen, and I like that.

W1 discussed her regret in not talking to her children more about their Korean heritage; her son had some problems about this, but her daughter today is proud of this heritage.

W1: You know what, we really should [have talked with the children about their mixed heritage], when we were young. And now, my daughter talks about it all the time. And they're very proud of what they are. I think my son [had] a little bit more, problems, than girls' [had]... Boys hold in more things. . . .

The two couples (described earlier) who tended to 'participate' in their cultures separately also did not focus on their children connecting to their Korean heritage.

Conversely, M4/W4, M5/W5 and M6/W6 spoke more of the harmony of the husband's values with Korean values, and raised their children, with these values:

M5: I would much rather see our children brought up with Korean style parenting than American style parenting, and I feel like I lucked out in that respect. I admire that the Koreans, are very devoted parents, and very strong in education, and they tend to be quite religious...so three things that are very important to me are all in the Korean culture, and I lucked out in that respect, but common parenting philosophy...is very important.

M6: Yeah, it was more, Korean values were a lot closer to my values than the modern American values were...so it's funny that I had to go half the world away to find somebody who had the same shared values and opinions that I had, Even today, I still can't relate to American women much, and I found that that was the experience of several of the American GI's and Koreans, because a lot of times GI's were looking for women just like dear old mom, and you couldn't find women like dear old mom, because they were all free, liberated, with this independent and totally different way of looking at things, and so, in Korea, they're very old fashioned, you know?

For these couples, raising children with 'Korean values and practices seemed not only compatible with their beliefs, but preferable to following "American-style parenting'.

All the couples felt it was important for their children to feel at least some connection to their Korean heritage. For example, one couple discussed their celebrating of their children's first 100 days' celebration, a traditional celebration, still currently followed, where the babies are given different objects (pencil, money, book, etc. to choose from to symbolize their future paths). For another couple, the son's connection to Korean culture through food was important, and when their son expressed that he missed Korean food while studying in England, his mother sent him homemade Korean *Kimchee Chigae* (*Kimchee* stew). For two other couples, their children's connection with Korea, and desire to visit Korea was important. For one couple, their daughter's connection to Korea was a point of pride, while for another, their son's rejection of Korea was a painful point.

In various ways, the couples expressed their wish that their children feel connected to their Korean heritage, although, each couple negotiated, defined and constructed this connection in different ways. The same was true of the connection with Korean food.

The Culture of Food

The couples commented that the type of food they ate—whether it was Korean-style, American-style or a hybrid of the two—took on symbolic meaning in their negotiation of cultures and traditions. Three women proclaimed with pride that their husbands (and children) ate and *enjoyed* Korean food. One husband explained proudly that he enjoys *cooking* Korean food.

On the other hand, some women expressed disappointment that their husbands were not big fans of Korean food.

W3: No, when I first met him, I was like, "Aw, so much in love, everything's going to be perfect, [etc.]" and then after we got married, he [was] not into Korean food, at ALL...

None of the families ate Korean food exclusively, most reported having some kind of hybrid mixture; at times the women would even cook several versions of the same meal to adjust for their families' tastes.

W6: My family, these days they can have a little bit hot spicy food, but they don't really like much, not spicy food, most of Korean food is hot, and spicy...so sometimes I cook for them, I cook for myself, two different dishes [laughs]

M6: [quoting his wife] "Ready, I'm opening the *kimchee*, everybody please leave the room..." [laughs]

The husband's joke about the *kimchee* is in reference to the Korean staple dish of fermented cabbage and its pungent smell. In a sense, the importance the couples attached to their eating and how the couples negotiated their food choices—whether they cooked separately for their individual meals, alternated between Korean food and other food, or ate exclusively one kind of food at home—seemed to symbolize their family's negotiation and construction of a *family culture*.

Constructing Culture

Questions about culture frequently had the spouses disagreeing with each other; this may be related to the constructed nature of culture and the difficulty of pinning down its sphere of influence: where does culture begin and personality end and vice versa? Many couples grappled with this question.

M5 recalled an incident where his job prospects were still unsettled, and where he felt pressure from his wife and his wife's family to find a way to provide for his family. W5 responded that this is not a cultural value, but a universal value.

M5: I think [this] has been a cultural thing, because ...in the United States we're more willing to give people a certain kind of credit for having attempted to invent their lives, I think in Korea, there's much more standard views that your job is what you make money with . . . whether you do it as X, or Y or Z is not important, just bring home that bacon... we in the United States have... maybe a greater liberalness in terms of redefining our life path than the Koreans do.

W5: I disagree...Korea is more, is a very conformative [sic] society, so you have a path. But I think you know, universally, wherever you go in the world, if you have a family, if you have kids, and wife, so guys expect to do major [work], provide for family.

In discussing being romantic—two couples explained that the wife was not romantic; the husbands were more sentimental, saying “I love you” or making romantic gestures. W4 chalked up the difference to culture; W6 implied it was her husband's personality.

W4: You know, Korean people not really tell you, "Oh, sweetheart I love you!"

W6: [laughs] He's the romantic person, I am not. So that is the rewards of our marriage, he's very romantic and kind and gentle, I am kind of yelling person, [laughs].

For these participants, in general, the distinction between personality and culture was not easily delineated. This debate was most prominent in the discussion of communication and communication styles between the spouses. The couples struggled wondering

whether the women's initial hesitation to share their thoughts and feelings was more of a reflection of a cultural mores or connected to the idiosyncratic personality of the participants. The women tended to fall more towards the personality explanation, while the men focused on the possible cultural impacts on these themes.

Four of the couples described the husbands as being more open to communication and sharing of experiences, thoughts and feelings; sometimes, the wife did, over time, and with her husband's encouragement, became more comfortable with open communication.

M3: Yeah, I always believed in communication, you know? Uh, to express yourself is communication, you have to talk in order to understand.

W3: I wasn't really a good communicator at first, but he just leads me to be, to communicate more and more. . . He knew what I meant, and all that. But we don't talk all that much, Korean people don't communicate. Korean people are not that much talkative, not all the time, talk talk talk...

These couples also agreed that the women were less comfortable with openly expressing their feelings, especially when they felt unhappy with a situation.

W6: . . .about that, my personality, if I'm mad, I just [keep my] mouth shut, I don't talk, two days three days, it's driving him nuts, really driving him crazy, so he try to make me talk, that is the real important to communicate. Even though your personality is don't want to talk, if you find way to talk, then it will work out somehow. He's really good.

W3: Probably because you had some Italian temper, and I was probably afraid that you would not understand, all those factors, made me like that, but after so long, I said, You know what? Too bad, if he doesn't understand, . . . I have to say it. So I said directly, you know, this, this and that. Now I don't have a problem, but uh, before some time, I did.

W3: ...It's not just American culture, it's about personal, as a person, as you... because you're different from everybody else.

Discrimination and Racism

For the most part, the couples did not express having faced racism or much discrimination from their families and from the wider community. The experiences of discrimination that the couples discussed were divided into two types: discrimination from the Korean community and discrimination from North America. One couple experienced rejection and intolerance towards their relationship when they initially participated in the community, which led them to withdraw somewhat from joining Korean community events.

W2: ...For a while, I was hiding, I didn't really talk to Korean people too much, well, they're going to look at me down, because I married an American, you know? ... Society's changed now, but before, yes, that's what they did... I was afraid that they're going to—I [didn't] want to hear nothing [of their recriminations].

Discrimination and racism from people in the US was only mentioned by one couple; they experienced relatively mild discrimination in various locations where they had lived. However, they did feel that their son (referred to earlier) suffered from taunting by children in their street, which appeared to have happened regularly:

W1: ... I remember one time, my son was young...I happened to look outside, and he [was] running. And a couple of boys, they were older than him, chase[d] him around, you know? And I noticed that they were picking on him. I knew who it was, one day I was waiting for him, and I told the boys, "Why don't you leave him alone. . .? He's younger than you." After that, they stopped it. Luckily.

These two couples were the only ones who reported having *directly* experienced racism; these two had gotten married at least 30 years ago. The contrast between these reports, and the lack of discrimination reported by others may be due to changing cultural mores.

M1: I think it's a lot easier for couples today...in getting acclimated into today's society. Because everything is so wide open and liberal, compared to what it was years ago.

Gender Roles

The negotiation of gender roles was not much of an issue for most of the participants. Three issues related to gender roles were discussed: 1) Culturally-based Gender Roles 2) Working Women 3) Sharing the Chores.

Culturally-based Gender Roles

Some of the participants shared the ways that their cultures view the roles of men and women, including different expectations and role assignments. Three couples discussed the fact that at times Korean women are treated in a somewhat subordinate manner. W1 explained the old tradition limiting a daughter's education, and spending that money on the son's schooling.

W1: Years ago, some families, in back of mind, women doesn't have to go to school, as long as she knows how to sew and cooking and take care of the man.

M6 (discussed earlier) had commented that the more traditional gender roles valued in Korea were congruent with his own traditional values. The couples also discussed the Korean expectation that women raise their children full time rather than work. The more traditional gender roles valued in Korea, and sometimes by the couples themselves, impacted their relationship and role negotiation in varying ways.

Working Women

All the women were working or had worked at some point over the years in North America; working was a financial necessity, though there were other reasons for the choice to work.

W5: Also, my mom's [an]other influence. . . she was a highly educated woman, she was a teacher, which was highly respected, in Korea, and she quit that right after my younger brother was born, and she totally regret[ed] that. So she really encouraged me. . . to have a career, so I think my parents were totally supportive. I think. . . it was a good choice for my future.

W6 explained the influence of her own mother's working in her choice *not* to work and to stay at home with her children.

W6: I strongly believe [in staying home] because I remember because I was young, [we had] financial problems... so my mom worked. When I came home from school, [and called,] "Hi mom, I come back home!" ... and nobody [was] home, it [made] me feel empty. I want my mom at home to greet me... Then when I was pregnant, I [didn't] want my kids to go through that.

Three women spoke of the dilemmas of being a working mother, and some ways they managed the guilt of being away from their family.

Three couples discussed the husband's wishes that their wives would spend more time at home with the families, in particular with their various obligations on top of work (church groups, socializing, etc.) M6 explained his appreciation for his wife's work at home, caring for him and the children.

M6: ... There were many times when I came home exhausted, and I fell asleep in bed and she would polish my boots for the next morning, so that I would have polished boots when I'm up for work. So, little things like that, you remember, about your wife's... always being there, always taking care of me.

Yet, he also explained that he would be willing to remain at home while his wife worked:

M6: Absolutely, it didn't even matter which one of us, but one of us had to be with the kids. And in fact, I used to say, "I'll retire from the military, you go back to work, and I'll stay home with the kids." It didn't work. [laughs].

Making the decision to work or not to work, and managing that choice and its consequences differed from couple to couple; the couples also discussed managing household chores and duties and the negotiation that it requires.

Sharing the Chores

Whether the couples held traditional conservative values, or more progressive values, they had all managed to negotiate the household duties with relatively little conflict. Only two couple indicated that there had been any conflict over household

chores, and these conflicts were relatively minor. So while conflicts did arise, the couples expressed that they were mostly minor and were usually easily solved. Moreover, they had all found ways to contribute to the household duties; they “did what needed to be done” in various forms.

M1: ... Whatever had to be done was done.

W1: We got pretty good for that. I do, I don't tell him what to do. I do whatever is supposed to do, and he does whatever else, after.

All the couples proudly reported that the husbands participated in the cooking, cleaning, sewing, raising children, etc. In so doing, very little conflict or difficulty negotiating gender role conflicts were discussed.

Concluding Questions

The couples were all asked about their overall impressions and feelings about the challenges and rewards of being cross-cultural and cross-national couples. Most of their responses have been discussed earlier; however, additional responses concerned: 1) Challenges of the Relationship 2) Rewards of the Relationship, and 3) Advice to Other Couples.

Challenges of Relationship

Three women and two men mentioned communication barriers posing the greatest challenge. W3 wished her husband knew more about Korean culture: "When I went to Korea with him, I wanted him to experience some real Korean culture, but he didn't." Two men felt that adjusting to Korean culture was an obstacle, while one man explained that dealing with the negative responses from the family was the most challenging aspect of being in a mixed marriage.

Rewards of Relationship

In their replies to the question of rewards, the couples' responses were individualised and unique... Some couples mentioned their children, the kindness of their partner, and their in-laws and extended family. Additionally, two couples felt that having made it this far, having stuck with their relationship proved a reward in itself. M1 commented: "...We made it this far! We got married 46 years ago this year, so that's something, isn't it?" M5 explained that in having a cross-national and cross-cultural relationship, he appreciated that it allowed him to be "...bi-cultural, or multi-cultural... I mean that you have the ability to move between cultures with facility." M6 and W6 discussed enjoying each other's company over the years:

M6: And the rewards? Good sex. That helps. I think fun, even when we've had, really bad times, some of the most fun we've ever had were really bad times. We've had flooded apartments. . . fires in our backyard, . . . javelinas, . . . black snakes. . . we've had all kinds of things. . . [but] we've had a really good time, just experiencing things together. We just laugh about it with each other.

The general sense was that the couples appreciated the other person's company and the "gifts" and "blessings" the relationship had brought.

Advice for Couples

The couples shared some advice for other couples who are in similar relationships, which focused on learning from the other person, both individually and culturally.

M1: Well, the only thing I would say is try to understand your partner's needs.

W1: I think that's the thing...you have to listen, you have to understand...That's the only way to survive, I think.

This theme was reiterated over and over:

M2: . . . you have to respect . . . the other person, and respect their beliefs, and the biggest thing is, like or dislike their thoughts or what they're doing, you have to compromise, if you try to hold on to one side, you're going to split, there's no way...So the main key, is that there's gotta be balance, that's probably one of the common factors, is balance and compromise. Otherwise, I would think that it's not going to work.

M5: . . . I think that, if you don't really appreciate the other person's culture, then you're bound to run into problems...it's really important to respect the other person's culture.

The couples' stories and anecdotes about their long-lasting, happy relationships demonstrated over and over just how powerful and necessary patience, respect, listening, and understanding are to successful marriages, and are especially necessary in cross-national/cross-cultural relationships.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of an exploratory qualitative research study of six couples composed of Korean women and non-Asian North American men who were in long-standing stable relationships. It was found that these cross-national and cross-cultural couples had a myriad of ways of negotiating the challenges and obstacles that emerged from their differing national and cultural backgrounds.

The participant narratives revealed that couples encountered both initial rejection and initial acceptance from their families and communities. All the couples shared that regardless of any of the original objections or concerns, eventually most of their families came to support their relationship. Other strategies used to deal with negative reactions in the community included joining mixed families' churches and social groups, and avoiding places where they may face discrimination (i.e. Korean churches).

Though the Korean community represented a place of potential discrimination, it was also a source of great support and strength for the women as they struggled with the experiences of migration and/or isolation. All the couples found that belonging to a church together not only provided opportunities for them to experience Korean culture (many of the churches were Korean or served mixed Korean-American couples), but also a place where they couple could fit into a community, form connections and establish a network of support. The participants felt that in attending church with their families, their sense of companionship was strengthened. And companionship, fun, and enjoyment of each other's company was another element that couples mentioned as having strengthened their relationship and helped overcome some of the consequences of a major migration such as loneliness and isolation.

One major challenge experienced as a result of the women's migration from Korea, was the couple's need to work out the appropriate balance between the wife's independence and dependence on her husband in a new country. This was not a major issue for those three couples in which the wife was already living in the United States, but presented a problem for those coming here for the first time with their husbands. All the husbands were basically supportive of their wives, but needed to find ways of supporting, encouraging and challenging their partners to become more independent. The couples also discussed the importance of the learning process, and the resulting empowerment the women experienced once they became more independent.

To temper some of the pain of leaving behind their countries, the women attempted to remain connected to Korea in various ways, such as through the sponsoring of family members to the United States, while others spoke of the attempts (both

successful and unsuccessful) at having their families visit their homes in the United States. More commonly reported by the participants were the return visits to Korea by the women, sometimes alone, while at other times accompanied by their spouse and/or children. The women highlighted the importance of their husbands' support of these visits for their own connections with their families, and expressed appreciation for the impact the joint visits had on the men's appreciation of Korea and Korean culture.

Further, they pointed to the importance of their children feeling connected to Korea, and visits were one way to nourish this connection. However, all the women (who had children) spoke of their deep regret that they had not spoken Korean to their children, and noted it as a lost opportunity.

Another important aspect of the immigration experience was the role of language in the couples' relationship and out in the community. Half the couples (where the women came here with their husbands directly from Korea) expressed that language was initially an obstacle and barrier in their relationship—but they also found ways that they were able to manage and overcome some of their language differences. Although they still face some language challenges, over time they have become more adept at overcoming this, as they have grown to know each other better.

On the other hand, half the couples described not having had many if any language difficulties with each other, as these women had already been in the United States, or had sufficient English abilities prior to meeting. For these couples, English could sometimes be a challenge in the larger community in the United States, but was not a factor for them as a couple.

Communication and communication-styles differences were discussed as ongoing challenge for the couples. According to four of the couples' stories, the women were less likely to share their thoughts, feelings and opinions, especially negative ones, with their spouses, while the husbands in this group were perceived by their wives as well as reporting themselves to being communicative, and sometimes more affectionate. However, three of the four couples who shared this experience agreed that the process of learning to communicate more and its positive influence on their relationship.

In discussing cultural influences, there was a divergence of opinion in regards to whether certain behaviours were a result of Korean or American culture, or of the spouses' personalities. In this study, the men tended to suggest that this was a function of culture, while the women felt it was more closely related to personality.

While the discussion around communication highlighted some of the differences between the spouses and the possible cultural differences, the participants also spoke of the many ways that their values overlapped or complimented each other. These common values were in connection to their gender role expectations, their emphasis on education and politeness with their children, the centrality of church and God in their lives, and the importance of the family. Couples spoke both of the initial similarities and the ongoing overlap and conflation of their beliefs, values and mores as time passes.

Finally, understanding, flexibility and patience were named as crucial elements that formed the basis for the couples' relationship. The couples identified these attributes as the ways in which they were able to face and overcome any obstacles that emerged as a result of their different cultural and national heritages.

The participant narratives revealed that these couples had drawn on many strengths, supports, flexibility, understanding and respect in their attempts to negotiate the obstacles that appeared in their relationships. Implications of these findings are discussed in the Discussion chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored the marital experiences of six couples composed of Korean women partnered with North American (non-Asian) men. The aim was to explore how couples with these differing cross-national and cross-cultural backgrounds negotiated the challenges and difficulties facing them, including the migration of one partner, cultural divergences, language differences, raising children, and establishment of social and familial supports. Their perspectives relating to the satisfactions and rewards they gained from these relationships were also discussed.

The narratives of the six couples revealed both similarities and differences in the obstacles they faced, their negotiation process, coping strategies, and sources of their strength. The major findings are discussed in this chapter and compared and contrasted with previous scholarly research. The following key findings are discussed:

Characteristic of Participants; Reactions, Rejections and Relationships; Migration Experience; and Considering Culture. The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications for social work, critique of methodology, study limitations, and recommendations for further research.

Characteristic of Participants

Although the participant sample has similarities to other intermarriages of Korean women and non-Asian men from North America, certain unique features stand out. These

participants were all in long-lasting and stable relationships. The fact that these were relatively happy couples may speak, in part, to the self-selection process: those couples agreeing to participate, were in more stable relationships, and may have been more comfortable discussing their relationships with this researcher, than couples might have been who were not satisfied with their relationships.

All the participants in this study met the criteria for long-standing relationships. The fact that they were also married, which was not a criterion is both surprising and unsurprising. The United States requires that women in long-standing relationships, in order to acquire American citizenship or permanent residency, be married. This was especially true for the couples whose spouses were in the military, as getting married was the only option for obtaining their visas to the United States. Further, for those three other women who were already in the United States, two specifically mentioned their more conservative values and/or their desire to be married.

Although not part of the research design, it evolved that couples were divided equally, three and three, into couples where the man was a former GI and those where the men had not been part of the military. Lee (1997) remarks that based on his demographic research, most of the 100,000 Korean women who moved to the United States for international marriage, did so through relationships with US military men. While only three of the women in this study married American servicemen, one other woman, in fact, had been previously married to a GI, (whom she subsequently divorced) which had brought her to the United States.

Another wife was employed on the American military base while in Korea before meeting her husband, coming to the United States where she met him, working as a

waitress. Yuh (2002) describes this as a natural progression towards foreign marriage, since “working on a base, especially a PX of an office, puts Korean women into a primarily American environment which inevitably leads to an opportunity to make comparisons between Korea and America” (p. 40).

So while only three of the couples had a spouse who was a GI when they met, two of the other Korean women had come into contact with the military prior to their move to the United States. Although only one woman met her husband while completing her post-graduate studies in the United States, it is interesting to note that there are increasing numbers of Korean students who come to the US for their education; Korea ranks number three among countries sending their students to the US, after India and China (Altbach, 2004).

The age at marriage of the participants of this study varied slightly from Lee’s (1997) research. He found that the Korean women’s mean age at the time of marriage was 24 years old with a range of ages of 15-42 (p. 98), and the participants of this study had a mean age of 29.7 years of age and a range of ages 20-45. Further, Lee finds that only 34% of the woman completed high school and 16% had higher education.

In the present study, 34% of the participants had also graduated from high school, however, the percentage who had two years or more college education was much greater: 3 (50%) of the women had attended college. It may be significant to note that all three of the women who had some college education were also the three women who had been in the United States prior to meeting their (current) spouses. All these women had already begun or had graduated from their studies when they met their partners.

Reactions, Rejections and Relationships

Reactions of family and friends

One key issue for couples in cross-cultural and cross-national relationships is the reactions that they received from their families and friends towards their relationship. All the women described their families' reactions as ranging from uncertainty and concern to outright objection and rejection, most (4) falling in the former category and only two experiencing outright objection to the relationship. This is aligned with previous research. For example, McFadden and Moore (2001) state that "families and society are involved in determining degrees of appreciation and assimilation for the emerging couple" whose responses may express "oppression, hostility, conflict" (p. 266).

Another critical element of the family's reactions was the notion of change and acceptance over time. Two couples described having had "to sneak around" initially and hide their relationship from the women's families to avoid conflict. However, all the couples reported that the women's families eventually came to accepting the relationships. For some of the participants, the very transformation of their families' reactions was not only an affirmation of their relationship, but of the struggles they experienced. While McFadden and Moore (2001) explore the impact of family and social acceptance on the couple's reckoning with their own cultural and ethnic identity, they do not explore the possibility for how the transformation and evolution of family and societal reactions impact the couple.

Social Rejections

As a relatively homogenous and historically somewhat insular country, (Cumings, 1997), it may be expected that the reactions of the Korean families may be more negative

than those of the US families, a country where cross-cultural or interracial dating and relationships may be more common. The national narrative of a being part of a “unique, homogenous bloodline back some five thousand years” still rings true for many Koreans, despite its historical inaccuracy (Cumings, 1997, p. 11). The participants in this study reported some different reactions from the men’s and women’s families. Three couples reported positive initial responses from the men’s families, two mixed reactions, and one experienced a more rejecting response (as compared to the initial negative response from all the female participants’ families). Additionally, two women and one man spoke of experiencing some discrimination within the Korean community to them as a mixed couple.

It is important to consider both the geo-political and historical culture, as well as the personal implications for the Korean families, which may have impacted their reactions to the couple. Kim (2006) refers to the ambivalent nature of Korean attitudes towards the United States, seeing Americans and American GI’s as “humane rescuers and imperialist invaders” (p. 522). On the other hand, the presence of the US military was often connected with “shadow camptowns” (where the prostitutes were located) and women who associated with servicemen were assumed to be former prostitutes. And the knowledge of these “shadow camptowns” act themselves like “a shadow over...the lives of Korean women who marry American soldiers, even if those marriages began in locales other than camptowns.” (Yuh, 2002, p. 13).

While only two couples referenced this association, (and one of these couples was not even composed of a former GI husband), it is possible that some of the initial (spoken and unspoken) resistance of the women’s families was related to these negative

perceptions. Additionally, some Korean families may have expressed an initial negative response because in the reality of the cross-national relationships it is the woman who generally leaves Korea; the family be experiencing feelings of loss.

“M1: ...Even my mother told me, she said, "How are you going to live in another country?" And I thought nothing about it, and I said, "What?" And she said, "You know the customs are different, food different, the language is different" and even then I wasn't scared of anything. Nothing even then.”

For the family and friends who are left behind, the impending move may stir up feelings of concern and fear of its impact on their relationship, the woman's ability to survive in a new country, and the great distance and separation from their loved one.

Social Relationships

My examining the impact of the relationships between these couples and their friends, family and support networks was based on the belief that the strength of the couple's relationship with each other, and the strength of their support networks would work to mitigate the challenges of being in a culturally and nationally mixed relationship. As previous literature focused heavily on the problems of cross-cultural couples (e.g. Markoff, 1977; Lee, 1997; Kim, 1998; Crohn, 1998) this research attempted elucidate the strengths and methods utilized by these couples in understanding, confronting and overcoming obstacles due to their diverse backgrounds.

The couples' narratives reiterated my assumption that the relationship with each other and with their social network were key elements of their successful marriages. Couples spoke of three different aspects of their relationships that they felt were sustaining and central to their overcoming obstacles: the importance of their

companionship, their social supports from the Church and Korean groups, and their communication with each other (discussed later under migration experience).

The place of companionship, humour, mutuality and amiability between partners were reported as essential to these successful relationships; all the couples felt their strong relationships sustained them despite many obstacles. Words like “each other’s backbone”, “best friends” “supports” and “fun” were mentioned by the couples as necessary and vital to their relationship. These attributes are also indicated in the literature as contributors to family resiliency in general (Walsh, 1998); however, these factors are rarely addressed in the literature concerning cross-cultural and cross-national relationships.

Having strong community and social supports are further critical elements in surviving the transition of the migration and the challenges of being a cross-cultural couple. All the couples had strong ties to at least one church, and oftentimes to several churches. Further, the fact that five of the couples belonged to a *Korean* church for Korean American families highlighted the importance of the support these churches and the ensuing social networks provided.(Yuh (2002) states that

the socializing of Korean military brides seeking familiar companionship in a strange new world created spaces where the women could define themselves and their worlds, provide critical assistance to each other, and affirm self as they affirmed one another. (Yuh, 2002, p. 191)

However, one point not addressed in the literature but mentioned by the participants in this study was the significance of the men joining their spouses in attending the Korean churches. The couples felt that in attending the churches together, their relationship was bolstered and their bonds strengthened.

Leaving for Love

In the literature regarding mixed couples, the experiences of migrating and its impacts on the couple have tended to be the most commonly neglected subjects. Or, if these experiences are addressed, they are discussed in the context of both members of the couple migrating from the same country. This research explored whether there were any unique challenges and strengths that came from having only one member of the couple leave their home country. Three main findings revolved around the couples' negotiation of dependence versus independence, their ties to Korea, and the communication and language within the relationship and out in the community.

Depend On Me

Any relationship will require some negotiation between the spouses to find a balance between dependence and independence, but the need is even greater for cross-national couples as they acclimate to a new country. From the participants' responses, the division between those who had been in North America prior to meeting their spouses and those who moved here because of their spouses proved critical, as it shaped the couples' narratives of the adjustment process to North America.

The couples whose Korean wives moved to North America for the relationship, expressed the challenge of negotiating their inter-reliance both logistically and emotionally. For example, husbands teaching their wives how to drive, deal with doctors, or balance chequebooks were some of the logistical challenges of adjustment to living in the States. Discussions of these challenges are typically mentioned in articles dealing with immigrant couples, but not in studies of cross-national couples (Ataca & Berry, 2002; Cheung, 2004; Ahktar, 1999a, etc.)

Moreover, even in studies where the authors specifically addresses the concerns of cross-national couples, (e.g. Seto & Cavallaro, 2007), they do not address the emotional toll the struggle between dependence and independence can take on the couples. For instance, the three couples where the women moved here with their spouses spoke of feeling like their husbands were pushing them to acclimate, while the husbands spoke of trying to help their partners get used to the US. This was described as a trying and sometimes painful process for both partners, which is exemplified by this husbands statement:

M4: Uh, it's been stressful, how much help to give. You know, like, if you give too much help, and you do everything for her, and she's not learning, and not enough, and she's going to struggle too much. So it's hard to find good balance, to help, but not do everything...It's different from day to day.

Yet as the women learned and became more independent, this proved to empower the women and provide them with a sense of independence. This is congruent with Ward and Styles' (2003) contention that for many women, as they experienced an increase in confidence, and strength, the perception that they had grown "a new identity was beginning to emerge" (p. 360). This is further reinforced by many of the women's feeling that their migration had provided them with career opportunities while in the United States. that may not have otherwise been possible.

The ability for the couples to engage in the negotiation process between dependence and independence, to give and receive support, and to allow space in the relationship to grow along with the new identities (discussed above) as they developed, speaks to the strengths of these participating couples. Cheung's (2004) contention that for immigrant couples "a satisfying, long-term marriage is a major protective factor for the

resilience and adjustment of immigrant couples” (p. 13) appears to be true of cross-national couples as well.

Connected to Korea

Following a major immigration, another protective factor and aid to the adjustment process is the ability to remain connected to one's country of origin. As the findings demonstrate, this had two components for these couples: the women's ability to remain connected to Korea, and the men's ability to understand and support this connection.

Previous researchers (Yuh, 2002) have reported that the challenge of returning to Korea for the women was a complicated and painful return, as they are “cut off from kith and kin because of a shameful marriage, reduced to the family skeleton in the closet” (p. 154). However, this was not reflected in the women's narratives. The couples in this study all discussed their various trips to Korea (as well as phone calls), sometimes with the women going back to visit her family alone, and other times with the husband and/or children accompanying them. This can be understood as a principal way that helped the women to cope with the “emotional distress associated with the physical distance with one's family” which limits “the opportunity to share important life events (e.g., wedding, births, illnesses, and deaths) together as a family” (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007, p. 261).

From a different perspective, Akhtar (1999a) focused on the salience of return trips home for immigrants. He remarks that immigrants who are able to visit their home country regularly may “fare much better in adjusting to their new circumstances” (p.11). While some scholars have discussed the importance of return trips for immigrants, there

has been no discussion of the significance of the return trip with their spouses for cross-national couples.

Not only did the participants in this study explain the importance of their trips to Korea and close contact with the women's family as contributing to their adjustment to immigration, but the women experienced their husbands' support and understanding of their connection to Korea and wish to remain connected as a major source of strength in their marital relationship. The importance of this understanding was underscored by one couple's discussion:

W1: ... And then when I go to visit in Korea, he understands very well. And some people are like, some [other] husbands are like, "Oh, that's too long, 2 weeks, or 3 weeks" but he's not like that. He's like, "You spend money, go far." I'm sure he's lonely, but he understands. Some people wouldn't.

M1: She always went for six weeks to two months... Otherwise it's not worth it! Not only did the women describe the support of their husbands when they visited Korea with them as being an essential part in their handling of the immigration, but the women also highlighted how these trips helped their partners better understand their cultures, backgrounds and families. The participants' emphasized that in addition to being avenues of support for the women, the trips back to Korea allowed the husbands to engage with Korean culture, language and with the family of their wives. Further, these findings suggest that how willing the men were to engage in the culture and families impacted the women's feeling of satisfaction; the more open and flexible the men were, the more the women felt understood and supported in the relationship.

Talk to Me

An assumption that drove part of this research was that the differences in language would present the couples with challenges in communication that may not be experienced by other immigrant couples whose primary language is the same. This is supported by previous literature that focuses on the importance of language in cross-national couples (Youakim, 2004), as well as the asymmetrical burden placed on the women to learn the English to communicate with their husbands (Lee, 1998). Thus, this researcher assumed that not only would the women feel burdened by the language difference, the men would feel burdened by the need to deal with their spouse's language barrier. However, the interviews suggest that this assumption is too simplistic to capture the full experiences of the couples.

The challenges around language proficiency were related to two experiences: difficulties with language between husband and wife, and difficulties with language with the family/the community. More importantly, unlike previous expectations, according to the participants in this study there was weak correlation between those women who moved to the United States prior to their relationship and their comfort with English. This is due to the fact that only two of the three couples who felt that language was a significant barrier had met in Korea, and one had met in the US; conversely, of the couples who felt language was not significant, one met in Korea and two met in the US. Educational attainment did appear to have some correlation, but it was a factor in only a few, not all, of the cases of difficulties. However, of greater concern was the men's lack of knowledge of Korean, and in general, few serious attempts to learn the language. This appeared to be a place in which the men set a boundary for their ability and/or

willingness to participate in the women's world, which seemed to be a source of disappointment for some of the women interviewed.

What was even more striking was the repeated regret of the women that their children only spoke limited if any Korean, which appeared as an unresolved issue. While Youakim (2004) suggests that what language to teach the children may become a source of strain between partners, these interviews did not support this view. Instead, the women spoke of other reasons why their children did not speak Korean (e.g. the mother's fear of overloading the children, not needing to translate for their spouses, challenge of "switching gears" from one language to the next, etc.). Kim's (1998) contention that the reason English is the primary source of communication is due to the message to the wife that "her own heritage of language and culture is unworthy of her husband's attention or respect" (p. 311) was not reflected in the participants' interviews.

However, there was only one man who had made any significant attempt to learn Korean and one man who expressed a wish that he could learn Korean, so it is possible that the internalised message of cultural superiority is so embedded that it is unconscious, but without a way to measure this, this remains pure conjecture. More importantly for this study, was that the women who had children did feel a sense of loss that their children did not have the connection to Korean language. I would argue that the feeling of loss was related not only to Korean communication, but to a lost connection between mother and child(ren), between Korean culture and US culture, and between the maternal family and the American family.

Considering Culture

Marrying someone with a different cultural or ethnic background could become a source of conflict, but this need not always be the case. This study attempted to look at how couples negotiate their differing cultural heritage and the ways in which they were able to interweave these together. The interviews revealed three essential findings: the question of personality versus culture, the overlapping and shared values between the couples, and the negotiation of partner involvement and participation in the other's culture and community.

Personally Speaking

How people communicate in a relationship may be a function of their personalities, their family experience and example, and/or their social or cultural contexts. Teasing out which one of these impacts the communication styles is rarely possible or fruitful, but when partners have different cultural and national backgrounds, the couples are forced to consider this question. Many of the couples in this study noted that the women tended to prefer more restraint in their communication and did not always share their feelings or thoughts with their husbands, while the men preferred a more open and ongoing dialogue. Further, the couples diverged in their understanding of these differences with the men connecting it to culture, while the women felt it was more related to their personality. Scholars seem to also be conflicted as to the impact of culture versus personality in cross-cultural relationships. Youakim (2004) cites Kahn's (1997) conclusion that despite cultural differences, personality was still the major influencing factor on the couple's relationship, while others place more weight on the impact of culture on people's values and cultural standards (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006).

In teasing out just how much the women's and men's different communication styles can be attributed to their cultures, Crippen and Brew (2007) examine the use of the transcultural therapy model (as suggested by Ho, 1990) for the couples to identify and sort out "which aspects of the conflict are attributable to cultural factors rather than family of origin or personality traits" (Crippen & Brew, 2007, p. 112). The fact that people generally internalize significant cultural ideas, meanings, and feelings, suggests that there is a strong interrelationship between culture and personality.

However, it is not entirely clear that it is possible to decipher the true origin of the communication differences, and for what purpose and to what effect this could be done. It may be possible that in finding a cultural basis for the difference in communication styles, the couples may become more understanding of each other, or it may have little effect. But what the couples' narratives reveal was not so much the importance of distinguishing the origins of their communication differences, but the importance in *how* they negotiate these differences. The interviews revealed that over time, the women tried to communicate more their feelings with their spouses rather than holding back, which was seen as a contributing factor to their marital success. This suggests that if communication styles are different for Korean women and North American men, noticing this difference may be a first step towards negotiating the difference.

Something Shared

Though the couples were asked about their differing cultural values, mores and traditions, the similarities of values and beliefs also emerged in the interviews. Over and over, the participants pointed out ways in which their values overlapped or were similar.

This was related to issues of gender roles, education, child-upbringing, importance of family, the centrality of God in their lives.

Cheung (2004) found that “immigrant women’s acculturation experience in the host country, especially if they participated in the labour force, can lead to changes in their gender attitudes” (p. 25) and could be a potential source of tension (Kim & Hurh, 1988) and even result in violence (Kim & Sung, 2000) with the increased stress of migration. Despite these previous findings, the fact that the couples did not report major conflicts around issues of gender roles may speak to the differences between the gender roles expectations for Korean immigrant couples and for mixed couples where the women are from Korea. Thus, the findings seem to support Kim’s (2006) finding of the idealised gender roles with white men as compared to Korean men, but unlike Kim’s (2006) study where many of the women spoke of their disappointments with the imagined ideal, the couples in this study focused on their compatible gender roles and gender role expectations.

In fact, some couples indicated that what had originally attracted them to each other was the discovery of shared values, especially around family values, gender roles and upbringing of children. This is illustrated in this husband’s comment: “It’s funny that I had to go half the world away to find somebody who had the same shared values and opinions that I had.” Earlier scholarship that focused on the couples’ differences and their effects on marital dissatisfaction (Tseng, 1977) asserted that as the relationship deepens, the couples uncover differences and conflicting values and beliefs (Kim, 1998; Shute & Spitzberg, 2003). However, the findings of this study suggest that perhaps the longer the couples remain together, successful couples manage to have the emphasis shift back to

their shared and similar core values and beliefs; couples also seem to modify, their values and customs as their understanding of each other deepens. These abilities appear to be a strength developed by the participants of this research.

Balancing Act

The interviews uncovered that in order for couples to strengthen their similarities and overcome their differences understanding, flexibility, and compromise were essential components. While a few women expressed some disappointment in their husband's lacklustre participation in their culture, such as not partaking and enjoying Korean food, and not developing minimal Korean language skills. While the women wished that their spouses would join them more in their expressions of culture, the men tended to see the limits to their participation.

Nonetheless, the couples expressed deep respect and understanding of the other's culture, and worked to find ways to enjoy both the Korean and US cultures. This was relevant in the couples' negotiation of the spouses' involvement in the Korean culture and community. As all but one woman belonged to Korean churches and/or clubs, the centrality of these associations in providing support for the women was apparent through their interviews. These organisations work as a social support and a Korean oasis, which counteracts with the "forced Americanization and subsequent cultural deprivations that many women undergo" (Yuh's, 2002, p. 204). In fact, attending the Korean churches and organisations for men, women and their children, was typically the one place where Korean culture and language were dominant. Although there were some conflicts about just how much the women participated in these organisations, most of the husbands

understood and supported their partners involvement in their organisations. Even more meaningful was the husband's participation in the Korean churches and organisations.

Strengths and Limitations of Study

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of couples in cross-national and cross-cultural relationships by posing the following question: What are the experiences of cross-national and cross-cultural couples in relationships between a Korean woman partnered with a non-Asian North American man? The couples who participated in this research discussed their self-reflections through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for rich and full responses from the participants. The open-ended questions also allowed for the participants to share their stories and experiences, while still addressing the central question of the research. Further, the research was able to bridge the gap found in previous studies that had focused solely on the experiences of intercultural couples, cross-national couples, Korean women married to US military servicemen, or only focused on the experiences of the women in the relationships. The data collected from the interviews, therefore, was able to address the missing information and to discuss the issues as they intersect. As such, this study does provide a strong beginning for future research on the experiences of this population and suggests various questions to be further explored. Many of the strengths also reveal limitations of this study.

There were a number of factors contributing to the limitations of this research. As discussed in the methodology chapter, this study's findings are limited in generalisability because of its restricted empirical support, sample size, and snowball sampling method.

One limitation of this study concerns the sample, as previously mentioned in the methodology section. Though there was a mix between couples with a spouse in the military and those who were not, and couples who had met in North America and those who had met in Korea, most of the couples were settled in their relationships and had been with their partners for significant amounts of time. As such, it is possible that many of the issues of being in a cross-national and cross-cultural couple had mostly been resolved at the time of the interview.

Had there been more couples who were only now trying to negotiate these issues, the responses may have been different. Furthermore, the fact that all but one participant had been a Christian at the time of meeting their partner (and had later become a practising Christian) means that religious differences were not represented in the sample. The recruitment process focused on subjects in church groups, which would skew the findings in the direction of people with strong religious affiliations. Although Korean church-going is generally popular within this population, people without church affiliations and without strong religious convictions could shed light on different characteristics.

Finally, all the couples were living in smaller communities in Massachusetts, which could potentially colour their experiences, as compared to couples who lived in either rural areas where few if any Koreans were located or lived in urban centres or places with large Korean populations such as New York, LA, Chicago or New Jersey. These sample characteristics further limit the generalisability of the research findings.

Further, while the breadth of data may be one of this study's strengths, it may also be seen as one of its limitations, as both the cross-national and cross-cultural elements of

the study are substantial in and of themselves. The amount of data collected may also have limited the ability for couples to delve deeper into their experiences with each of these topics. Additionally, the number of questions meant that not all the questions could be attended to equally, especially as the couples became comfortable and started sharing their anecdotes and stories.

While the interviewing of both the man and woman in the couple is mentioned as a possible strength, it may also be a limitation of this study, as it may restrict the time for each of the partners to talk, and would sometimes mean that only one partner would reply to a question that was meant for both partners. Additionally, there may be responses and experiences that are censored and not shared because the spouse is present; the topic may be difficult to discuss in front of their partner.

Another limitation may be my collection and analysis of the data, which is grounded in my own experiences being in a cross-national and cross-cultural relationship with a Korean man, as noted in the Methodology section. Further, my time spent living in Korea, meeting with others involved in cross-national and cross-cultural relationships with Koreans means that I have formed my own thoughts and feelings about many of the issues discussed. Though I attempted to remain neutral in the interviews, checking unclear points by rephrasing and asking confirming my understanding, and asking questions based on the narratives of the participants, some biases may have affected the data collection.

Additionally, in my analysis of the data, I attempted to counter any bias by using themes that emerged from the participants' own words and experiences, yet it would be impossible to account for all bias in the analysis. I purposefully did not interview couples

where the women were non-Asian North Americans and the men were Korean so that the participants' experiences would be slightly removed from my own experiences. It was my belief that Korean culture has strong gender role assignments, that many of the experiences as a woman partnered with a Korean man are quite different than those of a Korean woman partnered with a North American man. The gender differences in my own experience and those of the participants does not and cannot account for all differences and biases, but I hope that it provides a small, though sufficient, buffer.

Possibilities for Future Research and Implications for Social Work Practice

The intent of this study was to explore the experiences of cross-national and cross-cultural couples made up of a Korean woman partnered with a North-American man. The aim was to explore how couples faced the challenges from this unique pairing, and ways that couples used to negotiate, interweave and co-create their lives together. These interviews revealed the strengths and ways the couples overcame the obstacles and made meaning of their experiences.

This study used qualitative and narrative exploration methods, but a future study may be able to widen the scope of the research by surveying more participants, perhaps through the use of a quantitative survey. Future research is also needed to explore those couples who had been in relationships that ended or were unsuccessful; this may be fruitful as complementary to this research. Additionally, it would be useful to study the experiences of the children of these cross-national and cross-cultural couples, to understand how the children conceive, negotiate and understand these varying identities.

A future study that explores issues specifically for the population of Korean and US couples who met while pursuing their studies merits further exploration, as well as an

investigation of couples who currently live or lived for a significant time together in Korea, which explore issues of migration and cross-cultural experience in a different context.

The findings of this research have relevant implications for the field of social work and for professionals in the mental health field. For those working with intermarried couples, and particularly with Korean and US couples, the findings highlight some of the challenging areas, as well as the sources of strength and support. In clinicians' work with couples and families made up of cross-national and cross-cultural Korean and non-Asian North American couples it would be neither therapeutic, nor respectful of the couples if the focus of the treatment was solely on the problems or solely on the strengths of being in intermarried relationship.

As a professional working with such couples and families, then, it would be important to be able to hold their contradictions along with their range of experiences. Unlike some of the earlier studies (Tseng, 1977, Lee, 1997, Kim 1998, Yuh, 2002, etc.) that enumerate mostly the various challenges, tensions and problems that arise in cross-national and cross-cultural couples, the sources of strength and support, coping abilities, and successes of interweaving should not be overlooked and devalued.

Further, as the narratives of these couples indicate, any investigation into the impact and role of culture and nationality on the couple or family should include a place for both differences and similarities in the couples' values and beliefs. Counsellors should foster joint and individual exploration of the partners' cultural, ethnic, religious and moral values, beliefs, and worldviews on the major issues can help sharpen the couples' understandings of their differences and similarities. Moreover, rather than

attempt to impose the clinician's understanding of the Korean or North American culture, allowing for the individually constructed and meaning-imbued understanding of culture and the role of culture in their lives is crucial. As the interviews demonstrate, what was "Korean culture" for some was not seen that way by others; imposing a fixed view of Korean or North American culture is therefore strongly discouraged.

Another implication for counsellors and clinicians working with couples and families is to give sufficient credence to both the challenges and rewards that come with migration. For some of the women, the migration process posed a painful and difficult move, however, the migration experience was not the sole jurisdiction of the women. The husbands in these couples also share some of the migration experience, as they negotiate their level of support, encouragement and teaching, a balance that is not easy to achieve for both the person in the giving and receiving position.

Moreover, the importance for clinicians to explore with the couple the community, social and/or religious supports that may be in place for the spouses together and individually cannot be overstated. As the interviews illustrate, having a sense of community and feeling of belonging was a critical element of mitigating some of the stress of the migration for the individuals and jointly as a couple.

If the clients do not already have connections with a community or social groups, helping the couples seek out such supports and explore their options may be an important part of the treatment. This can include groups or affiliations such as all-Korean religious groups, groups for mixed Korean and American couples, groups for Korean wives of GI's (or former GI's), parents groups for intercultural couples, non-Korean religious affiliations, etc. It is wise to also keep in mind the possible discrimination and rejection

the couples may face in the different community groups, which may greatly impact the connection to a community.

Finally, it is important to allow a place to experience both the feelings of loss and gain that the partners may experience individually and as a couple, while holding and honouring the complications, challenges, rewards, strengths, and all that comes with the interweaving of lives, cultures and nationalities for cross-national and cross-cultural couples.

Conclusion

The self-reflections of the couples interviewed in this study illustrate the varying experiences that cross-national and cross-cultural couples from Korea and the US may confront. What these narratives reveal are both the obstacles and the sources of strength and support that have contributed to overcoming these obstacles. In their stories, the couples shared some of the initial objections they encountered from their families and communities, but also the ways they were welcomed and accepted. The women spoke of some of the pain involved in leaving behind their countries and former support systems and its impact on their relationships, but they also highlighted the ways in which their partners' support and understanding not only helped with the adjustment, but strengthened their relationship. Others, especially those who left Korea before they met their partners, also emphasized the importance of marital and community support.

More than anything else, these stories reveal not only the great challenges that these couples face, but that with patience, understanding, acceptance and flexibility, the couples were able to traverse the obstacles; all the couples found a way to understand,

share and support their partner. In so doing, they were able to strengthen their bond and commitment to each other, as lovers without borders.

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Appendix A

HSR Approval Letter

March 7, 2009

Omer Mendelson

Dear Omer,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and all is now in order. We are glad to give final approval to your interesting study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project. By the way, as an aside, are you by any chance related to the brilliant classicist and critic (and author) Daniel Mendelson? Among other things, he wrote *Lost*, a brilliant and heart breaking book about his search for his family members that disappeared in the holocaust. He spoke last year at the American Philosophical Society and was fantastic.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee
CC: Esther Urdang, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

My name is Omer Mendelson and I am a master's level graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research study to learn how couples, composed of Korean women and non-Asian North American men, who are in long-term relationships with each other, experience being part of both a cross-national and cross-cultural couple. Koreans marrying non-Asian North Americans represent a high proportion of the many intermarriages in North America today. Your viewpoints about the challenges and benefits of your own relationship will be helpful to both professionals and to other couples in adapting to intermarriage. This study is being conducted as my thesis for the Master of Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work and its subsequent use may include presentation and publication.

If you and your partner agree to participate in our study, the requirements are that you meet with me for one interview, which will last approximately 1.5 hours, during which I will ask you questions regarding your experience being a cross-national and cross-cultural couple. If you are interested in participating in this study, you should currently be in a long-term relationship of at least six months, and should both be conversant in English. The man should be of non-Asian descent from the United States or Canada; the woman should be from Korea, where she lived until she was at least 17 years old.

I will take notes, and interviews will also be tape recorded, which I will later transcribe myself; all identifying personal information will be disguised to ensure your confidentiality.

Discussing your experiences may raise some uncomfortable feelings, but you are free to decline-answering any questions during the interview and can leave the interview at any time. I will also provide a list of local counselling resources that include both Korean clinicians and clinicians specializing in counselling interracial couples and families, in case any feelings are stirred up which you might wish to discuss further.

I cannot offer you any compensation for your participation, but I am hopeful that you will benefit from sharing your experiences with me as well as with each other. Your participation will also contribute to-knowledge highlighting the unique experiences of Korean and North American couples that will be relevant for clinicians and care providers working with other cross-national couples.

Your names and identifying data will not be included in the tapes or transcriptions; my notes, audio-tapes of the interview and transcriptions will be stored in a locked file cabinet for three years as mandated by federal regulations; after which time they will be destroyed. My research advisor will have access to the interview data after identifying information has been removed. This informed consent that you are being asked to sign will be kept separate from the tape/transcriptions. Anything that I elect to present or write about the research will not include any reference to your identity. If illustrative vignettes are presented, they will be in a disguised form. If I should need these records beyond three years, I will continue to keep them secure until they are no longer needed, at which time I will destroy them.

Participation in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion. If you decide to withdraw, all data pertaining to you will be immediately destroyed. However, withdrawing from the study should be done before the results section has been prepared, which will be by May 09, 2009. If you have any questions you may contact me at the information listed below. You may also contact Ann Hartman, PhD, Chairperson of the Human Subjects Review Committee at Smith College School for Social Work at 413-585-7974.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study.

PLEASE KEEP ONE COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Recruitment Materials

Email to Family & Friends:

Dear Family and Friends 안녕하세요 & Hello!

I hope you can help me.

As you know, I am in my final year of the Masters of Social Work program at Smith, in Massachusetts. As part of the program, I am currently working on my Masters Thesis, entitled, “Lovers Without Borders: Self-Reflections On The Relationships Of Cross-National And Cross-Cultural Couples Of Korean Women Partnered With North American Non-Asian Men”.

I am currently looking for participants, and I think you might be able to help me! Do you know any couples who might be willing to participate?

Do you know any couples that could fit this criteria:

1. The couple should be of a Korean woman in a relationship with a non-Asian man.
2. The woman should have grown up primarily in Korea, moving to North America no earlier than age 17,
3. The man should identify as a non-Asian North American,
4. Both should be able to converse in English (fluency is not a pre-requisite)
5. The couple should have been together for a minimum of **six months** (but it isn't necessary that they are married).
6. They should be living in the North-eastern United States or Canada (this can include Boston, Northampton, Rhode Island, Montreal, etc.)

If you think you know people who might meet this criteria, then here's what I need you to do:

1. Call, or email and ask them whether they would be willing to participate in this research.
2. Ask them if they would allow their contact information to be passed along to me, and for me to contact them.
3. Explain to them they do not need to agree to anything yet, but can get more information on the research from me provided they agree to be contacted.

4. Accept my sincere and ever-lasting gratitude for your effort, but understand that I cannot tell you whether they've joined the study due confidentiality.
5. And finally, look for your name mentioned in my Acknowledgements and Thanks section in my thesis for your kind and generous efforts!

Thank you in advance,
Best wishes!
Omer

Recruitment Letter to Possible Participants:

안녕하세요! Hello!

I appreciate your interest in participating in my research. _____
referred your name to me.

As you may already know, my name is Omer Mendelson and I am a **master's level graduate student** at the **Smith College School for Social Work**.

My research is titled, "Lovers Without Borders: Self-Reflections On The Relationships Of Cross-National And Cross-Cultural Couples Of Korean Women Partnered With North American Non-Asian Men". I want to learn how couples, composed of Korean women and non-Asian North American men, who are in long-term relationships with each other, **experience being part of both a cross-national and cross-cultural couple**.

I hope you will agree to participate, I believe your viewpoints about the challenges and benefits of your own relationship will be helpful to both professionals and to other couples in adapting to intermarriage.

You are eligible to participate if you:

1. Are a Korean woman in a long term relationship with a Non-Asian North American man
 - a. you grew up primarily in Korea
 - b. you moved to North America AFTER the age of 17
 - c. you can converse in English
2. Are a non-Asian North American man partnered with a Korean woman
 - d. you can converse in English

I am hoping you will join my research. If you do, I would like to interview you and your partner (together). The interview will last an hour to an hour and a half, and can be at a place of your convenience. The interview will follow a semi-structured format, which allow you and your partner to talk about your relationship, your life together, and tell your story.

If you are interested, you can reply to this email. I will then arrange to send you the Informed Consent form and we can set up a time for the interview. The time can be arranged at your convenience (during the afternoons or evenings, on a Friday morning, during the weekends, or by other arrangement), and at a place of your convenience. If you find it more comfortable to meet at a public place, we can arrange to meet at a library nearby, or if you prefer at your home or some other place of convenience, I am flexible. The only real criteria is that it should be relatively quiet.

Please provide me with **an email address** and a **phone number** with which I can contact you.

If you, or your partner have any other questions concerning this research, you can reach me at this email or you can call me.

Thank you for helping me with the research,

Sincerely,

Omer Mendelson

Follow-up Email to Participants

안녕하세요! Hello!

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my thesis research. I am certain that your story and experiences will enrich the understanding and support for others in similar situations.

I will phone to answer questions about your participation and set up an appointment. My schedule is somewhat flexible, and I can work around what is most convenient for you. During the week, Fridays I am available all day, and Saturday and Sunday are possible as well. Also, I may be able to meet another day with enough advanced notice.

We can also make arrangements for a place to meet. If you find it more comfortable to meet at a public place, we can arrange to meet at a library nearby, or if you prefer, we can meet at your home or some other place of convenience. The only real criteria is that it should be relatively quiet.

I will be sending you the Informed Consent form by mail. Please make sure you have a look at it, and have both you and your partner sign the consent form. You can send it back to me in the envelope provided, or you can bring it with you when we have our interview.

Please let me know what is best for you at your earliest convenience. You and your partner may call me or email me.

I look forward to meeting you,
Sincerely,
Omer Mendelson

Phone Call #1 to Potential Participants:

This is an outline of what my preliminary phone call will look like with all potential participants of my study. Please note that this will be my second form of contact with all individuals and this phone call outline is subject to change depending on the response from the potential participant.

- 1) I will call and introduce myself (my name; Smith SSW).
- 2) Briefly re-acquaint individual with my thesis topic and reason for contacting him/her & mention referral source.
- 3) Ask questions to gather more information about this potential participant (e.g. Are both you and your partners conversant in English? Have you and your partner been together for at least six months? Did the female partner live in Korea until she was at least 17 years old? Is the male partner non-Asian North American man? etc.)
- 4) Ask individual if he/she is interested in participating in my study.
IF NO-- Thank the person for his/her time; maybe ask for referral to another potential participant and end phone call.
If YES-- Move onto Question 5
- 5) Ask individual if their partner would be willing to participate in my study.
IF UNSURE--
 1. Offer to call back after they speak with their partner
 2. Offer to speak with their partner if they should have any questions or concerns.

IF YES-- Move onto Question 4-7 the “Recruitment” Phone Call #2 (Phone Call #2, below)

Phone Call #2 Follow-up

This is a brief outline of what my phone conversation will look like when talking with an individual who has agreed to participate in my study. Please note that this outline is subject to change depending on the response from the participant.

- 1.) Greeting (if this is the call-back to the individual who has agreed to participate in my study, or the subject's partner.).
- 2.) Explain in further detail the requirements of the participant in my study, including having both partners of the couple, the time, audio-recording of interview, and note taking.
- 3.) Ask participant if there are any questions about the study at this time.
- 4.) Schedule interview date, time, and location
- 5.) Request mailing address from participant where a confirmation letter/email along with a copy of the Informed Consent Form (See Appendix B), will be sent for their review and records. Ask participant to fill out Consent Form and bring it with him/her to the interview.
- 6.) Ensure participant of my protecting confidentiality throughout the entirety of his/her participation in this study.
- 7.) Ask participant if there are any further questions or concerns at this time.

Thank participant and end conversation.

Appendix D

Recruitment Poster:



안녕하세요! HELLO!
HELP A
**SMITH SCHOOL FOR
SOCIAL WORK MSW STUDENT
WITH MASTER'S THESIS...**

**ARE YOU A:
KOREAN WOMAN
& NON-ASIAN MAN
IN A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP?**

**“LOVERS WITHOUT BORDERS:
SELF-REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIPS
OF CROSS-NATIONAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL
COUPLES OF KOREAN WOMEN PARTNERED
WITH NORTH AMERICAN NON-ASIAN MEN”**

I want to learn how couples, composed of Korean women and non-Asian North American men, who are in long-term relationships with each other, experience being part of both a cross-national and cross-cultural couple.

Your viewpoints about the challenges and benefits of your own relationship will be helpful to both professionals and to other couples in adapting to intermarriage.

IF YOU AGREE TO JOIN MY RESEARCH, YOU AGREE:

- To participate in 1-1.5 hr interview
- That both members of the couple participate in the interview together
- That the interview will be conducted in English

For more information please contact
Omer @
Tel # 413-695-1320
Email: omersswthesis@gmail.com

Smith School
for Social
Work
Thesis

Omer @
413-695-1320
omersswthesis@gmail.com

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omersswthesis@gmail.com

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413-695-1320
omersswthesis@gmail.com

Recruitment Poster Text Only

ARE YOU:

KOREAN WOMAN & NON-ASIAN MAN IN A LONG TERM RELATIONSHIP?

My name is Omer Mendelson and I am a **master's level graduate student** at the **SMITH COLLEGE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL WORK**.

I am conducting a research study titled:

“Lovers Without Borders: Self-Reflections On The Relationships Of Cross-National And Cross-Cultural Couples Of Korean Women Partnered With North American Non-Asian Men”

I want to learn how couples, composed of Korean women and non-Asian North American men, who are in -long-term relationships with each other, experience being part of both a cross-national and cross-cultural couple.

Your viewpoints about the challenges and benefits of your own relationship will be helpful to both professionals and to other couples in adapting to intermarriage.

You are eligible to participate if you:

2. Are a Korean woman in a long term relationship with a Non-Asian North American man
 - a. You grew up primarily in Korea
 - b. You moved to North America AFTER the age of 17
 - c. You can converse in English
3. Are a non-Asian North American man partnered with a Korean woman
 - a. You can converse in English

If you agree to join my research, you agree:

1. To participate in 1-1.5 hr interview
2. That both members of the couple participate in the interview together
3. That the interview will be conducted in English
4. No compensation can be provided
5. All interviews will be confidential

For more information:

Tel #

Email: omendels@smith.edu

Appendix E

Referral Sources

Northampton Area

1. Elena Volpe

Marriage & Family Therapist, MA, LMFT

221 Pine Street, Studio 424, Florence, Massachusetts 01062

phone: (413) 584-1492 (Korean available)

2. The Relationship Counseling

Center - relationship-counseling-center.com

200 Main St., Northampton (413) 587-0444

3. Jane Seidlitz

Clinical Social Work/Therapist , LICSW

94 King Street, Northampton, Massachusetts 01060

phone: (413) 582-1480

Boston Area

1. Tapestry Counseling

Information call (617) 661-0248 or

E-mail: Information@TapestryCounseling.org

2. Cambridge Health Alliance Family and Couples Therapy

Central Street Health Center

Intake: 617-591-6033

3. Im, Nakyung, LICSW

308A Harvard St Ste 2, Brookline, MA 02446

(617) 738-9622 [Korean Available]

Rhode Island Area

1. Lisa S Schachter

Clinical Social Work/Therapist , MSW , LICSW

335 Angell Street

Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Contact Information

phone: (401) 751-1923

2. Psychological Centers

765 Allens Ave

Providence, RI 02905,

Phone: (401) 842-0428

Montreal Area

- 1. The Argyle Centre**
215 Redfern, Suite 305 Westmount, Québec, H3Z 3L5 CANADA
Tel: 514.931.5629
- 2. The Montreal Therapy Centre - Counselling Services**
Queen Elizabeth Health Complex
2100 Marlowe Suite 539, Montreal, Quebec, H4A 3L5
Tel: 514.244.1290

Appendix F

Interview Guide

- A. DEMOGRAPHICS [BOTH PARTNERS WILL BE INTERVIEWED TOGETHER. THESE QUESTIONS (EXCEPT WHEN INDICATED) WILL BE ASKED OF EACH PERSON].
1. Age
 2. Where were you born? Where were you raised?
 3. Where do you live now?
 - a. Are you married or living together? How long have you been together?
 - b. Do you have children?
 - c. [Does anybody else live in your home]
 4. What is your occupation?
 5. What is the highest level of education you received?
 - a. Where did you go to school?
 - b. What did you study?
 6. What is your religious or spiritual preference?
- B. HISTORY OF THE COUPLE'S RELATIONSHIP
1. Could you tell me how you two met and got together?
Family Relationships
 2. How would you describe your relationships with your family and in-laws?
- C. IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE
- Immigration
1. How did you make the choice of where to live? (country, city, neighbourhood, etc.)
 2. **TO THE WOMAN:**
 - a. What has it been like for you to leave your country?
 - b. How have you found the experience of living in a new country?
 3. **TO THE MAN:**
 - a. How has your partner's reactions to all these changes affected you?
- Language
1. What language or languages do the two of you primarily speak?
 2. Do you think that your language skills impact your relationship and daily life?
 3. Is there a time when you need help with your partner's language (English or Korean)?
- Friendships
1. Can you describe your social life with friends?
 2. Has developing a social life with friends created any difficulties for you?
 3. Do you feel you have any other social supports? Please describe.
 4. Have you ever experienced reactions (positive or negative) to you as an inter-racial couple when out in the community?
- D. CROSS-CULTURAL
- Culture

1. Have you and your partner had discussions about each other's culture and ethnic backgrounds? If so, can you describe this?
2. Do you find there are some differences in your cultural/ethnic backgrounds? If so, can you explain what they are? Have they presented any difficulties?
3. Would you say that you come from similar socio-economic backgrounds?
4. Was there anything new, surprising or appealing for you about your partner's culture?
5. Are there any ways in which your culture and cultural practices have changed together as a couple?

Gender

1. How would you say your culture views the role of men and women?
 - a. Are there differences and similarities between your cultures' views?
2. In regards to the roles of men and women, how is this for you in your relationship?
3. How do you divide up the household chores? Has this changed over time? How do you feel about this?
4. TO THE WOMAN: Do you work outside the home? How was this decision made? ADD TO THE MAN: How do you feel about this decision?
5. If the couple have children: Do you find you have differences in how to raise them? Are there any specific cultural values or practices you attempt to transmit to them?

E. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. Is there anything you wish you would have known about being in a mixed couple before you got together with your partner?
2. From your experience, what would you say are the greatest challenges and rewards for couples in similar situations?
3. Would you have any recommendations for other similar couples?
4. Is there anything we've left out that you think is important?