Intercultural Couples in Iceland

A pilot study

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Félagsvísindasvið

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Abstract

As the population of intercultural couples and multicultural individuals rises in Iceland, counseling professionals can increasingly expect to work with this population. For the purpose of this Master's thesis, an Intercultural Couple's Workshop was created as a pilot study with the aim of developing family life educational material that might be of value to intercultural couples in Iceland. The workshop placed emphasis on issues and challenges that intercultural couples often face. With this thesis, the author hopes to bring awareness to the challenges that family therapists face when working with intercultural couples and to benefit the couples involved. Although the participants' sample was small, certain conclusions can be drawn from the results. The product of this work may have value in understanding intercultural couples in Iceland and creating a comprehensive program for this population. Moreover, it is hoped that this work affords valuable suggestions to family therapists in Iceland working with culturally diverse individuals.

Keywords: Intercultural couples, family life education, multicultural families, and immigrants.

Útdráttur

Hér á landi hefur orðið aukning á þvermenningarlegum (e. intercultural) pörum, sem og einstaklingum með fjölmenningarlegan (e. multicultural) bakgrunn. Fjölskyldumeðferðarfræðingar geta nú í auknum mæli átt von á að vinna með þessum tiltekna hópi. Hluti af þessu meistaraverkefni var að setja saman námskeið fyrir pör með ólíkan menningarbakgrunn með það að markmiðið að búa til fræðsluefni sem gæti komið að notum fyrir pör af ólíkum uppruna á Íslandi. Í fræðslunni var lögð áhersla á þau vandamál og þær áskoranir sem þvermenningarleg pör standa frammi fyrir. Með þessu meistaraverkefni vonast höfundur eftir að vekja athygli á þeim áskorunum sem fjölskyldumeðferðarfræðingar standa frammi fyrir í vinnu með pörum af ólíkum uppruna. Þrátt fyrir að úrtakið hafi verið lítið má draga nokkrar ályktanir út frá niðurstöðum. Afrakstur verkefnisins gæti jafnframt aukið skilning á þvermenningarlegum pörum á Íslandi og verið grunnur að umfangsmeiri fræðslu fyrir þennan tiltekna hóp. Ennfremur er vonin sú að þetta verkefni gefi fjölskyldumeðferðarfræðingum á Íslandi þýðingarmiklar ábendingar um vinnu með fjölmenningarlega einstaklinga.

Lykilorð: þvermenningarleg pör, fræðsla um fjölskyldulíf, fjölmenningarlegar fjölskyldur, og innflytjendur.

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Foreword

This work is a Master's thesis in family therapy from the department of social work of the University of Iceland. The supervisor of this thesis was Dr. Sigrún Júlíusdóttir professor of social work and to her I owe my sincere gratitude for her valuable guidance and support. I would also like to express my appreciation to the assistant supervisor of this thesis, family therapist Ragnheiður Sigurjónsdóttir and director of the *Family Therapy Centre*, for her support and assistance and for allowing me to run the workshop at the center. Also, I express my gratitude to the participants of this pilot study for their sincere comments and for trusting my judgment. Additionally, I would like to thank my children Líf Ísabel and Sebastian and my husband Arnór for their unconditional love and patience. To my unborn child I apologize for the long hours that I spent sitting while writing this thesis. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge my parents Sonia and Jorge for teaching me the value of education and giving me the opportunity to grow up in a culturally diverse home, explore the world, and connect with family abroad.

Introduction

In the past ten years there has been a rapid growth in the immigrant population of Iceland. In 2000, for instance, the percentage of foreign citizens in Iceland was 3.6% but 8.06% in the first quarter of 2011 (Statistics Iceland, 2011a). Together with this increase, more Icelanders are establishing intimate relationships with people of foreign backgrounds. As the population of intercultural couples and multicultural individuals grows in Iceland, counseling professionals can increasingly expect to work with these groups. This paper is a Master's thesis that focuses on intercultural couples primarily because there is little research available on this subject thus far in Iceland and few services are provided to this particular population.

For the purpose of this thesis, an intercultural couple's workshop was created as a pilot project with the aim of developing family life educational material that might benefit these couples in Iceland. The objectives of this workshop are threefold; the first objective is to provide family life education to participants regarding issues that the author supposes might be useful for intercultural couples in Iceland. The second objective is to collect information from the workshop participants that could be of value in creating a more comprehensive program for couples of multicultural background in Iceland. That is, gather participants' feedback and comments regarding the workshop's content and usefulness. The third objective is that this work will benefit the couples involved, by strengthening their relationships, and even benefit their families.

The workshop places emphasis on issues and challenges that multicultural couples often face as well as the positive aspects about being in an intercultural relationship. Among the issues discussed in the

workshop are: the impact of the immigrant experience; the myths and advantages of intercultural relationships; the family life cycle with an emphasis on the new couple, families with children, and the impact of culture; the marriage contracts; multicultural children; and intercultural differences in parenting style.

With this thesis, the author hopes to bring awareness to the challenges that family therapists face when working with intercultural couples. Family therapists need to be able to provide relevant services to diverse populations while being aware of the cultural biases and stereotypes that they might hold. They can benefit from having a heightened sensitivity to the role that culture plays in family conflict and therapy. In this respect, culturally aware therapists tenaciously seek new ways of thinking about common and infrequent events and ideas and are not subject to common prejudices or conventions. Additionally, they are aware of the fact that one style of interviewing is not necessarily transferable to all clients. It is important for family therapists not to assume that intercultural couples are less stable than endogamous ones since the struggles that intercultural couples face might even strengthen their relationships. For these reasons, it is essential that family therapists take a curious stance and treat every couple as unique, only then can they put their biases and stereotypes aside.

The pilot study referred to in this thesis is based on qualitative methodology and only descriptive data is used to present the study findings. In social sciences, qualitative research seeks to understand behavior in a natural setting. Additionally, this type of research attempts to study an occurrence from the perspective of the research participants' as well as to understand the meanings individuals give to their experience.

In quantitative research, naturalistic methods are sometimes used; for instance, interviews, direct observation, ethnography, and focus groups. In the present pilot study, an intercultural couples' workshop, a questionnaire, and a workshop satisfaction form were the methods of choice. Additionally, the observations of the workshop facilitators are also taken into consideration.

Qualitative research provides information on the sample studied and does not necessarily offer possibilities of generalization from this sample to the general population. However, the results of qualitative research can be applied to other settings; as long as limitations have been identified. Thus, the results of this study may have value in understanding multicultural couples in Iceland and in creating a comprehensive program that will help these couples better cope with the challenges that they might face. Furthermore, this work could serve as a guide to practitioners working with this particular population in Iceland.

This thesis is divided in sections and begins by providing a brief description of studies conducted on immigrant issues in Iceland, particularly about the attitudes of Icelanders towards immigrants. This is followed by a report on the statistics concerning the populations referred to in this thesis.

Following this section, a review of the literature specifically on issues concerning the intercultural couple is provided. It begins by examining the different stages of the experience of migration (Sluzki, 1979) and the process of adaptation into a new culture. Next, the family life cycle is introduced and a few cycle stages are described; namely, young adults' life cycle phase at time of migration, becoming a couple, families with young children, and families with adolescents.

Next, the parenting styles defined by Baumrind (1989) are briefly described. After this description, a review of some of the literature concerning cultural influences on parenting styles, and parenting styles in Iceland, is presented. This section is followed by a brief discussion of the uniqueness of multicultural children.

The subsequent section provides a description of the marriage contracts defined by Sager (1976) and discusses the particular importance of these contracts to the intercultural couple. After this section, the methods of this study are explained.

The methods section describes in detail how the pilot study (i.e. the workshop) was conducted. This section provides a description of the participants in the pilot study, the materials used to conduct the study, and the procedures (or summary of the steps used in the execution of the study). Next, the results section summarizes the observations made my the participants of this study regarding the workshop. At the close of this thesis a summary of the sections previously described is provided, alongside a discussion of the literature, and an evaluation or critique of the pilot study. The thesis concludes with a discussion about the great responsibility that counseling professionals have when working with intercultural couples, and in general with clients of different cultural backgrounds.

Definitions of concepts

Intercultural couples

Interracial marriage, mixed marriage, or intermarriage, are terms commonly used to describe couples of different ethnic and racial backgrounds that are joined in matrimony. For the purpose of this thesis, the term *intercultural couple* will be used instead to refer to a relationship

were partners come from different cultural backgrounds. The author of this thesis has chosen to define the term *couple* as two people joined by marriage, cohabitation, engagement, or otherwise involved in a romantic committed relationship and who share a household. The term *intercultural* is used here to represent specific cultural variables on which partners might differ such as ethnicity, race or religion.

Culture

The term is here defined as the whole of the socially transmitted behaviors, beliefs, values, knowledge, arts and all the learned and shared behavior of a community or group of people which may be inherited independent of the biological genes. This definition is constructed from different definitions of culture (e.g. Parsons, 1949).

Multicultural children

The term refers to children whose parents are from different cultural backgrounds.

Immigration in Iceland

There is a growing literature that focuses on multicultural counseling issues but predominantly in regard to the therapist's competence when working with clients who have a different cultural background than the therapist (e.g., Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 1995; Perez Foster, 2001; Ivey & Ivey, 2007). Additionally, the literature in regard to intercultural couples and marriages has primarily focused on a few aspects of intermarriage,

mainly race or religion (e.g., Davidson, 1992; Killian, 2002; Heller & Wood, 2000; and Bratter & King, 2008). No research thus far has been done on intercultural couples in Iceland. One reason for this might be that immigration is quite a new phenomenon in Iceland. Nevertheless, with the growth of the immigrant population of Iceland we have witnessed a parallel increase in the interest for developing programs for this population as well as conducting research on this phenomenon (Jónsdóttir, Harðardóttir, and Garðarsdóttir, 2009; Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, and Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009; Kjærnested, 2007).

Statistics

Immigration

In the past ten years the immigrant population of Iceland has grown considerably. According to Statistics Iceland (2011a), in the year 2000 immigrants accounted for 3.6% of the Icelandic population but only 0.8% of these immigrants had Icelandic citizenships. Ten years later, in the start of the year 2011, immigrants accounted for 8.06% of the Icelandic population with 2% holding Icelandic citizenships. Additionally, in the onset of 2011 the number of Icelanders who were born elsewhere comprised 2% of the total population of Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2011b). According to the same source, most immigrants in Iceland come from a selected number of countries; for instance, from Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Scandinavian countries, Philippines, Thailand, Latin American countries, and Portugal, amongst others. The largest group of immigrants in Iceland is from Poland followed by Lithuanians (Statistics Iceland, 2011b).

Intercultural couples

Many of the immigrants living in Iceland are involved with Icelanders in a romantic relationship of some type. In January 2011, there were 64.656 registered couples in Iceland. These couples were either married, or in a registered partnership or cohabitation. Of these 64.656 couples, 6% were intercultural couples where one individual was a first generation immigrant and the other one did not have an immigrant background. Of these intercultural couples, 57% had children living at home, the majority having one or two children (43% and 40% respectively) and only 14% of these intercultural couples had more than three children living at home (G. Hauksson from Statistics Iceland, personal communication, October 31, 2011). Jónsdóttir et al. (2009), conducted a survey about the attitudes of immigrants in Iceland regarding a variety of issues where 797 immigrants participated. In this survey, 36% of the participants who were either married or involved in a domestic partnership (cohabitation) had an Icelandic partner.

Attitudes towards immigrants in Iceland

Attitudes towards immigrants in Iceland have been generally positive compared to other countries. Nevertheless, as the immigrant population in Iceland increases, and the economic situation of the country deteriorates, the attitudes of Icelanders towards foreigners have become increasingly negative (Önnudóttir, 2010).

A longitudinal research was conducted between 1997 and 2004 that examined the attitudes of Icelandic adolescents towards immigrants in Iceland. The results of this study showed that the attitudes of Icelandic adolescents towards immigrants differ considerably depending on the

gender of participants and their level of adjustment. Adolescent boys in Iceland appear to have a more negative attitude towards immigrants than girls. Additionally, those adolescents that were well adjusted, did not engage in risk behavior, and had a positive attitude towards life, were more likely to have a positive attitude towards immigrants (Kristjánsson, Ásgeirsdóttir, Sigfúsdóttir, and Sigfússon; 2005).

Even though the attitudes of Icelanders towards immigrants are not as negative as in other parts of the world, Icelanders appear to have become less tolerant of foreigners (Önnudóttir, 2010). This change appears to be related to the sudden increase in the immigrant population of Iceland. Unfortunately, it can be expected that this change in attitude might affect immigrants in the difficult task of adapting to a new culture. The process of adaptation can be stressful for some individuals and families and it can also affect intercultural couples.

The Experience of Migration

Moving to another culture is a complex experience that might affect people in a variety of ways. For instance, migrating to a new culture can affect one's feelings, behavior, and thoughts (Vercruysse, 2002). Crossing through international borders is a major life transition that involves considerate physical, psychosocial, and cultural changes. In turn, these changes challenge one's former ability to adjust to a situation or environment and consequently entail new and often difficult adjustments.

Additionally, it can involve many painful losses including the loss of one's home, family, friends, job, primary language, and more (Vercruysse, 2002).

Immigrants often experience feelings of what has been referred to as culture shock that might include helplessness; irritability; and fears of being tricked, hurt, or ignored (Adler, 1975). This phenomenon is a common experience that people go through when they pay an extended visit to a country, or move into a society, that is dissimilar from their own. According to Reber and Reber (2001), the common symptoms of culture shock are feelings of bewilderment and strangeness that could last for a considerable amount of time, depending on variables unique to the person experiencing the shock and the amount of difference between his culture of origin and the new culture. Even though culture shock is most often associated with undesirable consequences, it can be an essential aspect of cultural learning and personal development (Adler, 1975).

Stages of the migration experience

Recent literature on immigrants mental health indicates that complex psychosocial stressors seem to be common to people who have experience migration. However, specific stressors and their cumulative effects have been documented as triggers of the symptoms of distress associated with immigration. Accordingly, it has been suggested that migration alone does not lead to psychological distress but rather the disrupting events that occur prior, during, and after migration (Perez Foster, 2001).

Immigration is a complex experience that might last a long time. For this reason, different perspectives have been offered in an effort to isolate the different stages of this experience. Sluzki (1979) describes a multi-

phase process of immigration that families, and individuals for that matter, go through when they move between cultures. This process, described below, includes: a) a preparatory stage, b) the act of migration, and c) resettlement.

The preparatory stage or departure

For both individuals and families, moving across international borders begins prior to migration when the first concrete attempts are made towards a commitment to migrate. The time span of this stage varies but in most cases it depends on the individual and/or family style (that is, from an impulsive decision to a prolonged contemplation). During this stage, people experience ambivalent feelings that fluctuate from excitement to dismay (Sluzki, 1979).

According to Berger (2004), in the core of this phase are feelings of uncertainty, fears of what is to come, emerging expectations, and opposing decisions.

The act of migration or transition phase

Migration is a transition with modest or no prearranged rituals. Except in the case of refugees coming to Iceland who are welcomed by a reception program that fully supports them as they settle in the country. Unfortunately this is not the case for the rest of the immigrant population coming to Iceland.

Although the act of migration can last just a few hours, in many cases it may take a significantly long time. For people who are displaced by war or who migrate to intermediate countries prior to settling in the country of destination, the act of migration might take a few months and

even a few years. Nevertheless, a quick change in environment does not necessarily mean a stress-free transition. According to Berger (2004), the sudden changes in environment created by a quick move can contribute to feelings of jet lag, leaving people confused and disoriented.

Resettlement

According to Sluzki (1979), the stress associated with migration does not take its heaviest toll in the first weeks or months that occur after the move. In contrast, individuals are usually unaware of the stressful nature of the experience and its aggregate effects. In the period that follows immediately after migration, the main priority for individuals and families is the satisfaction of basic needs; that is, survival.

According to Sluzki, the experience of extreme circumstances and deficient coping skills during this period can prompt a crisis. Nevertheless, many migrating individuals and families manage to establish and maintain conflicts and symptoms at a halt during the first few weeks and months following migration. Following this period, migrant individuals and families might encounter difficulties. This second period within resettlement was refered to by Sluzki as the period of *decompensation or crisis*.

Sluzki (1979) described this time as stormy and afflicted by conflicts, symptoms, and struggles. During this period, the immigrant's main task is that of reshaping his new reality. Part of this task is keeping certain customs and behaviors, even though they differ from those of the new context. In turn, other behaviors and traditions are discarded because they are too different from those of the culture of adoption or because they require an extended family no longer available.

Additionally, during this period, many individuals and families manage to grieve over what was left behind and integrate it constructively into a mixture of old and new rules, models, and habits that become part of their new reality. For them, the positive side of the experience overshadows the upsetting nature of the stress, and they arise from the process some years after migration with new individual and collective strengths (Sluzki, 1979).

During this phase of the process of migration, it is reasonable to introduce the concept of acculturation. According to Berry (2005), acculturation is the double process of cultural and psychological changes that occur as a result of interaction between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the individual level, acculturation involves alterations in an individual's behavioral repertoire. This is a long-term process that entails cultural and psychological changes and is not experienced by all groups and individuals in the same manner. For instance, during this process some individuals maintain a relative preference for preserving their heritage culture and identity, while others prefer having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other different cultural groups.

According to Berry (2005), integration is an option only when individuals show an interest in maintaining their heritage culture while interacting with other groups. In this case, a degree of cultural integrity is maintained while the individual seeks to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. On the contrary, marginalization occurs when the individual has little possibility or shows little interest in maintaining his heritage as well as little interest in having relations with others. Berry warns us that integration can only be freely chosen and effectively pursued by non-dominant groups when the hosting culture is accessible and

inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity. Thus a reciprocal accommodation is necessary to attain integration.

Sluzki (1979) indicates that a long-term interruption in a family's process of adaptation will tend to become evident when a second generation is raised in the country of adoption. Anything that has been evaded by a first generation will emerge in the second one, commonly as a conflict between generations. This clash is particularly clear in families belonging to cultural groups that have been segregated by choice or by force in their country of adoption. Sluzki called this phenomenon the *transgenerational impact* (Sluzki, 1979).

Settling in a new country is a complex and lasting experience and different perspectives have been offered to isolate the various stages of the migration experience. Nonetheless, these different perspectives offer one theme in common; namely, that the process of adaptation into a new culture is multifaceted and that distress is often involved in this experience.

Based on this information one can reasonably conclude that many of the immigrants establishing romantic relationships with natives (i.e. individuals with no foreign background) have at some point in their lives in experienced the stresses associated with migration. For this reason, it is important for therapist to have in mind the complexity of this experience when working with intercultural couples.

Just as the process of migration requires the passage through various stages, the individual as a member of a family system also moves though a series of stages that occur at different periods of the family's life cycle.

Family Life Cycle

The emotional and intellectual stages that individuals go through from childhood to the retirement years as members of a family are called family life cycles. During each stage, individuals face challenges in their family life that help them build or gain new skills. These family life cycles are common for most people but not everyone passes through these stages smoothly. Situations such as illness, economic difficulties, the death of a loved one, divorce, and even migration can have an effect on how well people go through the different cycles. Family life cycle theory proposes that effective transitioning between stages may help to avert disease and emotional or stress-related ailments (Carter and McGoldrick, 2005).

According to Carter and McGoldrick (2005), there are a number of family life cycle stages that occur as the family as a system moves through time. For instance, some of these stages are: leaving home, the joining of families through marriage or cohabitation, families with young children, families with adolescents, launching children and moving on, and families in later life. Other cycle stages that influence the family life cycle are divorce, single-parent families, remarried families, and the lesbian and gay men families, among others.

Cultural factors play an important role in how families transition through the different family life cycles. The breakdown of the family life cycle stages, as well as the tasks at each stage, varies significantly depending of the cultural group. According to Kellner (2009), cross-cultural relationships are in danger of polarization, principally at times of conversion from one life-cycle stage to another. In determining their couple's identity, partners must frequently redefine themselves in terms of their relationship to their family of origin, to their cultural group and to

their children. This process of definition and redefinition is often the ordeal that brings couples into therapy. Sluzki (1979) stated that a major factor affecting families at one time or another is the disruption in cultural and family continuity generated by migration.

At each of the stages and sub stages of the family life cycle, individuals develop as members of a family and help each other reach new stages. Most people that join in a relationship and start a family go through similar stages. Some of these stages will be described below; namely, becoming a couple, becoming parents, and raising adolescents. Firstly, however, the life cycle phase of the young adult at the time of migration will be briefly described.

Young adults: Life cycle phase at time of migration

According to Hernandez and McGoldrick (2005), individuals who migrate as young adults may have the greatest potential for adaptation to the new culture in terms of career and relationship potentials but are also vulnerable to cut-off (i.e. to break ties with and isolate) from their heritage. All young adults must overcome the complicated tasks of defining their identity in relationship to their family of origin, creating close peer relationship, and establishing themselves in work, community, and social settings. However, immigrants coping with this life transition are involved in a parallel process of distinguishing themselves from their families while separating from their country of origin. They have the difficult task of creating a sense of coherent identity while at the same time having to establish themselves in a new sociocultural framework.

According to Berry (2005), when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity but seek daily interaction with other cultures,

assimilation occurs. This could be the case of an immigrant who establishes a romantic relationship with a person from the country of adoption and declines his cultural heritage. Assimilation and integration are distinct concepts involving different attitudes and behaviors; for instance, integration occurs when there is some level of cultural integrity maintained while there is a search for participation in the larger society. Young adults, who cut-off from their heritage, could become emotionally isolated at later stages of the life cycle when the need for cultural support and identification is likely to increase. For instance, Gelfand and Kutzik (1979), state that individuals who migrate at a young age have a greater need to claim back their ethnic roots in latter life (e.g. during retirement years).

Becoming a couple

Couples come in many forms, there are gay and straight couples; married and unmarried couples; couples where women work outside the home and men are more homebody; intercultural couples, and so on.

McGoldrick (2005) states that marriage or cohabitation, more than any other life transition, is often seen as the solution to life's dilemmas like loneliness, work or career insecurity, or difficult family problems. Sometimes, the wedding itself is seen as ending a process, or providing closure, and as a fairytale ending "And they lived happily ever after." However, marriage or cohabitation is a complex phase and it requires the negotiation of a great number of issues that were previously defined individually or in the families of origin, such as when and how to sleep, eat, talk, fight, work or relax. Additionally, the couple must decide on more complex issues like where to vacation, and how to use time, money and space. Moreover, partners need to decide which family traditions and

rituals to keep and which ones to develop for themselves. Partners will also need to renegotiate their relationship with parents, relatives, friends, and colleagues in view of the new bond.

The joining of partners in marriage or cohabitation is also the joining of two enormously complex systems as it involves the formal joining of two families. Sometimes the issues that partners have not resolved with their families of origin tend to be factors in marital choice and might even inhibit the creation of a workable relationship balance. The relationship between the in-laws and partners might also be troublesome. Among the most renowned problematic triangle is the one involving the male partner, the female partner, and male partner's mother. Likewise, marriage and cohabitation might create conflict between siblings and alter friendships and extended family relationships (McGoldrick, 2005).

Monica McGoldrick (2005) explains that the fundamental dilemma in coupling is confusing intimacy with fusion and that there is a great difference between establishing an intimate relationship and using a relationship to complete one's self. Accordingly, there are sex differences in how fusion is experienced, since females are traditionally raised to see *loosing of oneself* in a relationship as normal, whereas men are raised to see intimacy as not manly enough. Because of these differences in upbringing, and cultural values, men are prone to express fusion by maintaining a quasi-differentiated distant position in relationships or by posing selfish demands that their partners submit to their wishes. Likewise, women might express fusion by loosing themselves in a relationship, and ignoring their own views and wishes.

One area that might become challenging in a marriage under stress is the cultural or family style differences. Conflicts could arise when

couples start out with different basic assumptions and have difficulty negotiating their differences (Sager, 1976).

Intercultural couples

Biever, Bobele, & North (1998) provide a description of how cultural differences may affect couples over the course of a relationship. According to the authors, couples might initially face difficulty related to disapproval or social awkwardness with families and friends. For instance, interracial couples often meet negative reactions in their communities such as discrimination and racial hostility. Furthermore, families and friends might speculate that rebellion, inferiority complex, or denial of one's cultural group are the motives behind choosing a partner from a different culture. Moreover, disagreement about culturally based issues such as sex-role expectations; attitudes towards work and leisure; habits and traditions; manifestation of affection; and problem-solving approaches might be possible conflict areas for intercultural couples (Biever et al., 1998). Nevertheless, multicultural couples are not necessarily more at risk of divorce or separation.

Zhang and Van Hook (2009) conducted a study to examine the instability of interracial marriage among Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians (used a sample of 23,139 married couples) and found that interracial marriage per se is not necessarily associated with an elevated risk of marital dissolution. The authors concluded that there is little difference between interracial and endogamous marriages in the risk of divorce or separation. Similarly, Hellar and Wood (2000) found that the influence of religious and ethnic differences does not seem to affect a couple's intimacy or quality of their relationship.

Intercultural coupling has been considered by some to be a strong indicator of the integration of ethnic and racial minorities in society (e.g., Quian and Lichter, 2007). According to Pagnini and Morgan (1990), bi-national marriages are not only an indicator of assimilation but also a mechanism to foster assimilation. Likewise, others have argued that multicultural coupling may be interpreted as a strong indicator of the integration of foreign nationalities in the area of private life (e.g., Thomas, 2001).

Some couples decide not to have children but for other couples having children is a life transition that occurs naturally. According to Carter (2005), the experience of becoming a parent is one of the most definitive stages of our life and once a child is born, the life of the couple changes.

Families with young children

The early months after a baby is born come as a shock to most new parents. New parents have to endure many new challenges with the birth of a new family member: lack of sleep, frequent feeding schedules, endless responsibilities, worries about the baby, constant vigilance, and doubt about their competence as parents. All these changes put a lot of stress on novel parents and on their relationship, since the job never seems to be completed no matter how much it's done (Carter, 2005).

Mythology paints a rosy picture of a mother and a child, a dominant image in cultures and religions from ancient time and women rarely escape the culture's view that a woman without children is not an authentic woman. For both women and men, parenthood seems to offer the ultimate ticket to adulthood with the woman becoming a mother and the man becoming a provider. Carter (2005) suggests that society plays an

important role in how parenthood is viewed as it romanticizes this life transition and generates false expectations in new parents. Society seems only to relate to the gratifications that life with the new baby ought to bring and criticizes any departure from this customary view.

Once the baby is born or adopted into an extended family system, emotional and relational shifts occur in order to create a space for the new member of the family. The birth of a child is also an important occasion for grandparents and it sometimes provides an opportunity for the resolution of old grievances between themselves and their adult children, and even their children's partners (Carter, 2005).

Many families choose to rejoice the birth of a child with a ritual; like a christening, baptism, or a naming ceremony, frequently followed by a gathering with family and friends (Carter, 2005). Among the many tasks facing couples is the creation of rituals. Partners coming from different cultural backgrounds often encounter differences in favored and habitual rituals of everyday life, such as meals, family traditions, holiday celebration, and the way of behaving in different situations. Multicultural couples might experience conflicts over rituals but are not necessarily aware that these struggles are rooted in their cultural differences. Imber-Black (2005), argues that therapists working with bicultural couples have the task of helping these couples examine each other's history with rituals and negotiate significant rituals for their life together.

One common issue for new parents is the work-family dilemma. In Iceland, for instance, women and men are equally active in the workforce and as a result some adjustment in work schedule is required when children are born. According to Statistics Iceland (2011c), in 2010 85,3% of women between the ages of 25 to 54 were employed and many mothers in Iceland manage both work and motherhood. However, it is still expected

both in the workplace and by the couple themselves that the problem of juggling work and family is solely the mother's dilemma. Carter (2005) describes that in many households, women unfairly perform more housework than their partners even if both parents work outside the home.

The unfair share of household work might create conflict between partners. According to Hochschild's (1997) study of work and home life, working parents feel that the home has become such a time-deprived hassle that women as well as men have begun to seek for an scape from the pressures of home by willingly spending more time at work than at home. Hochschild (1997) found that this total dedication to work has led to an increase in parental guilt and that this guilt leads to parents trying to compensate for their absence by giving their children toys and spending more "quality time" with them.

The power imbalance can also create tension in the home as the new couple transitions towards more old-fashioned arrangements of the domestic mom and the providing dad. This in turn might make the mother become increasingly resentful, while the father feels unappreciated. Exceptions, to the tendency of couples to shift towards more traditional roles after children are born, are couples where the woman makes more money than her partner (Carter, 2005).

The power imbalance might be more complex in countries, or between cultures, were the gender equality disparity is greater. In Iceland, for example, there appears to be greater gender equality than in other countries around the world. The European Value Studies hold statistics (2008) that indicate a balanced level of gender equality in Iceland. For instance, the majority of Icelanders who participated in the survey believe that household chores should be shared between partners, both husband

and wife should contribute to household income, that fathers are equally suited than mothers to look after children, and that men should take the same responsibility for home and children. In this regard, it can be assumed that conflict might occur in romantic relationship between Icelanders and people from countries where there is more power imbalance.

In light of the complexity of the gender role conflict and the economic pressures on families with small children, it is not difficult to accept the fact that this is the phase of the family life cycle with the highest divorce rate; particularly for couples with financial difficulties who are twice as likely to divorce (Carter, 2005).

Families with adolescents

As children get older, the family transforms from being a system that protects young children to one that prepares children to enter the world of adult responsibility and commitment. The family transformation involves great shifts in relationship patterns across generations. This life cycle adjustment is in part signaled by the physical changes that adolescents go through and by changes that occur as their parents enter midlife and their grandparents enter old age (Garcia Preto, 2005).

For parents, the experience they have during adolescence in their families and communities, affect significantly the way they teach and guide their adolescent children. Additionally, cultural values and gender role attitudes in society are also factors that influence the formation of adolescents' identity. Now a days, adolescents values and beliefs about life; attitudes towards gender roles; and their way of dressing, walking and talking are highly influence by TV, music, and the internet (Garcia Preto,

2005). As teenagers develop, they are influence by societal pressures that shape their views about what it means to be female and male in society.

According to Pipher (1994), the instability of feelings that adolescents experience at this stage leads to changing moods and unpredictable behaviors that confuse parents who try as they can to reason with their children. As teenagers mature emotionally, they try to move towards independence prompting the relationship with their parents to change. In turn, this need for independence might be complicated by the fact that although adolescents long to become independent they still want parents to take care of them.

Physical development makes adolescents eat and sleep more. Additionally, adolescents experience spurs of physical energy trailed by periods of tiredness that appear as laziness. These changes lead to struggles between adolescents and their parents in most families as parents are accused of nagging and adolescents are considered by their parents to be inconsiderate, lazy, and disobedient (Garcia Preto, 2005).

Sluzki (1979) stated that in some cases an intercultural clash could occur between immigrant parents and their adolescent children who are raised in the country of adoption. These adolescents interact actively with the larger society through school, mass media, and friends and in some cases clash severely with their parents in terms of values, norms, and traditions.

Child rearing and discipline can also create strain between parents as conflicts over discipline emerge. The imprint of parents' own upbringing, their levels of maturity, and their own philosophies about their roles as parents make this a potentially difficult issue for many couples (Carter, 2005). Likewise, different parenting styles between partners can also pose challenges for intercultural families.

Parenting Styles

Differences in parenting styles within a family can be a source of conflict between parents. Baumrind (1989) commonly used typology defines parenting styles as varying along two independent dimensions of demandingness and responsiveness that, when crossed, yield four distinct parenting styles. These discrete parenting styles are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting. According to Baumrind (1989), authoritative parents are both responsive and demanding and have a talent to set clear and sensible standards for responsible behavior that are in accordance to their children's developmental capacities. Authoritative parents are firm in their enforcement but are also caring, warm, and reactive to their children's needs, and competent in negotiating their expectations. Authoritarian parents, on the other hand, tend to be demanding and are less approachable. These parents highly value children's compliance with rules, discourage negotiation between parents and children, and neglect taking their children's needs into consideration. Permissive or indulgent parents are responsive to their children's needs but fail to be firm or demanding and avoid the use of punishment. Permissive parents are warm, compliant, and tolerant of their children's impulses but make few claims on their children for age appropriate behavior. Similar to permissive parents, rejecting-neglecting parents make few demands on their children but differ in that they are emotionally detached and as a result are neither firm with the children nor emotionally responsive to them (Baumrind, 1989).

Baumrind's research indicates that authoritative parenting is most effective in leading children to healthy adjustment. Authoritative parenting consistently has been associated with a wide range of positive adolescent

outcomes including, superior academic performance; increased competence, autonomy, and self-esteem; appropriate ethical development; and good social skills. Baumrind has proposed that authoritative parenting is most effective because of parents' high expectations and support for mature behavior (Baumrind, 1989). Much of the research on parenting styles in relation to child and adolescent adjustment has been conducted on white middle-class families, but since the start of the 1990s, researchers have become increasingly interested in ethnic and cultural variations (e.g. Ruby and Grusec, 2006; and Trawick-Smith, 2010).

Parenting styles in a multicultural perspective

Some multicultural researchers have noted that parents of various cultural groups are more likely to abide by an authoritarian parenting style. For instance, parents of Latin American, Turkish, Indian, and Asian families, among others, have been found to display a controlling pattern of behavior (Ruby and Grusec, 2006). To some level, parenting styles may reflect cultural value systems. For example, differences in parenting styles have been observed between collectivistic cultures and individualistic cultures. In more collectivistic cultures, emphasis is given to dependence on others. These cultures place value on the importance of attending to others needs while inhibiting the expression of ones own desires. In order to achieve these outcomes, collectivist parents have been described as being more authoritarian and expecting more obedience. In some cultures, more submission and dependence is expected from daughters than from sons, which leads to more external control on daughters as compared to sons. On the contrary, in more individualistic cultures, self-interest and

independence are more valued. Parents from these cultures are reported as being more authoritative as they endorse independence and autonomy and put less stress on being obedient and sociable (Ruby and Grusec, 2006).

Recent studies have proposed that Baumrind's parenting styles have different effects on children from different cultures. For instance, Ruby and Grusec's (2006) study findings suggest that authoritarian parenting behaviors might have a differential impact on various cultural groups. According to the authors, parents of Western European backgrounds are less likely to practice an authoritarian parenting style. Nonetheless, those in this group who do adhere to an authoritarian approach are more likely to hold feelings of anger, aggression, and frustration, resulting in their children exhibiting low levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, Ruby and Grusec's (2006) study findings were contradictory for parents and children of collectivist cultures. According to the authors, collectivist mothers exhibit more authoritarian parenting behaviors than individualist mothers but are less likely to hold negative feelings and thoughts towards their children; and their offspring does not score lower on measures of self-esteem. These results suggest that for individualist parents, negative thoughts and feelings associated with authoritarianism might be more detrimental for their children's self-esteem but not for collectivist groups. In conclusion, it appears that authoritarianism in and out of itself is not detrimental for all children but only for children with more individualist parents.

According to Trawick-Smith (2010), parenting behaviors might have different meanings in different cultures. For Western parents (i.e. from individualist cultures), authoritarian parenting may be an indication of emotional distress. Therefore, parents' authoritarian behaviors in this

cultural group can be delivered with more anger, and therefore lead children to suffer low self-esteem. On the other hand, for parents from collectivist cultures, authoritarian parenting strategies may be used to attain cultural goals; such as being respectful to authority and maintaining families together. Therefore, children with collectivist cultural backgrounds are likely to give a different meaning to these behaviors; unlike their Western peers. In conclusion, since authoritarianism seems to be customary for children from non-Western cultural groups, it might therefore be viewed more positively by these children; and for instance confirms to them that their parents actually care about them.

Parenting styles in Iceland

According to the 2008 European Value Studies survey information, Icelandic participants believe that independence is something that children learn at home where as for instance, survey participants in Portugal and Spain do not seem to share this same view. Similarly, more participants in Spain and Portugal, than in Iceland, mentioned that children learn obedience at home. In this regard, parents in Iceland appear to be more individualist than parents in Spain or Portugal.

Aðalbjarnardóttir and Garðardóttir (2004), conducted a long-term study in Iceland about the effects of parenting styles on adolescents' depression. The authors used Baumrind's theories (1965; 1971) regarding the parenting approaches of involvement, behavioral control, and psychological autonomy granting, and investigated how these approaches were associated with adolescents' adjustment at age fourteen and later in life (at age twenty-one). In this respect, involvement refers to whether parents provide their children with support and spend quality time with

them. Behavioral control refers to whether parents control the behavior of their children by setting clear boundaries. Psychological autonomy granting refers to whether parents encourage their children to express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings, and whether they welcome their sentiments and treat them with respect. Aðalbjarnardóttir and Garðardóttir (2004) concluded that the adolescent participants of the study (i.e. 491 individuals who participated at age 14 and age 21) who rated their parents as granting them psychological autonomy and involvement had the least symptoms of depression at fourteen. In contrast, at fourteen years of age, participants who rated their parents as practicing psychological control (i.e., who undermined their thoughts and opinions), while showing little involvement in their lives, had the most symptoms of depression. These were the more authoritarian parents. Seven years later, participants who rated their parents as granting them psychological autonomy at age 14 appeared to have the least symptoms of depression at age 21; regardless of parental level of involvement. On the contrary, participants who rated their parents as exhibiting psychological control had the most symptoms of depression at age 21; regardless of parental involvement (Aðalbjarnardóttir and Garðardóttir, 2004).

Multicultural Children

Children of intercultural couples are not unlike other children but to some degree they have certain characteristics that make them somewhat unique. In some cases, this children are for instance more open-minded

than their peers. Furthermore, a research was conducted in the Netherlands that focused on the social integration of two black minority immigrant groups; namely the Antilleans and the Creole Surinamese. The authors were interested in estimating the effects of mix race and compared children who had one black parent and one white parent with children who had two black parents. The results of this study indicate that children of interracial marriages are more prone to have contact with white persons than children of endogamous marriages. The authors concluded that their analysis provides strong support for the integrative effects of intermarriage on children (Kalmijn, 2010).

Being exposed to different languages might make children of intercultural couples more aware of different cultures, other people, and others points of view. Moreover, children who speak more than one language might benefit from being able to access immigrant social networks and communicating with a wider number of people. For children of intercultural families, speaking the language of their immigrant parent is a clear advantage as it gives these children the opportunity to communicate more effectively with their immigrant parent and with family living abroad who does not speak the language of the other parent.

For instance, Icelandic is a new language for all immigrants moving into the country. Many of these immigrants speak to their children in their mother tongue providing their children with the opportunity of becoming bilingual (i.e., the ability to speak two languages).

Pearl and Lambert (1962) were among the first researchers to find a positive relationship between bilingualism and cognitive ability and argued that bilingual children have more cognitive flexibility than monolingual children. Other scholars have also argued that bilingualism encourages

academic achievement and leads to higher academic expectations (Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

As individuals grow and develop, they transition from being children to having a family of their own. As new families emerge, old family ties remain stable connecting families together. This complex multisystem web requires negotiation between partners. One way of negotiating might be by creating a marriage contract.

Marriage Contracts

According to psychiatrist Clifford J. Sager (1976), the central reason why some relationships don't work is that each partner brings to their relationship an individual relationship contract, or set of expectations and promises, that are not always verbalized to partners. These individual contracts, according to Sager (1976), can be modified during the course of the relationship but will remain separate contracts unless the couple arrives at a single mutual contract that is understood and agreed on by both partners. Sager states that the essence of a relationship is that its members have not negotiated a contract but each partner performs as if his or her agenda has been approved upon and signed by both mates. Therefore, each partner has thought of their own contract, but is in some way unaware of all of its parts.

According to Sager, these are not real contracts at all, but two distinct sets of expectations, wishes and responsibilities, each set occurring only the mind of one partner. Consequently, each partner functions on a different set of theoretically predetermined terms, while the other partner remains uninformed of these terms. Additionally, the contractual terms

change as the relationship evolves, different family life cycles are reached, and outside influences intrude on the couple as a pair or on either mate. Sager (1976) introduces two types of marriage contracts; these are the individual contract and the interactional contract.

The individual marital contract

According to Sager (1976), the term refers to an individual's spoken or unspoken, conscious or unconscious concepts of his or her duties within the partnership. Furthermore, it also refers to the benefits that he or she assumes will stem from the relationship and from the other partner. Contracts deal with a wide variety of aspects of life: friends, power, children, sex, family, money, leisure time, gender roles, and more. The terms of each of the partner's individual contract are affected by deep needs and wishes that each partner anticipates the relationship will satisfy for him or her. These will include realistic, healthy, and reasonable wishes and needs, as well as irrational and overanxious needs. In many cases, an individual might assume that there is a mutual agreement on a contract when in fact this is not the case. As a result, when a partner expects something from his or her spouse (or from the relationship) but does not get it, the disappointed partner might react with anger, depression, violence, isolation, or by creating a conflict by acting as if a real contract has been broken.

According to Sager (1976), contractual terms can be divided in three distinct categories: parameters based on expectations of the marriage; parameters based on intrapsychic and biological needs; and parameters that are the foci of problems rooted in the other two categories. These categories will be described below.

Parameters based on expectations of the marriage

When people marry, they do so for certain reasons and with specific goals in mind. Partners bring to their relationship their individual expectations of how a marriage should be and usually not all of the purposes and goals are completely conscious. That is, each partner has certain expectations of what a relationship will give him or her and what he or she is prepared to give to the relationship.

The intrapsychic and biological Determinants

These are parameters founded on the needs and desires that rise from within the individual. They are determined greatly by intrapersonal and biological factors instead of by the relationship per se. Therefore, these parameters arrive from the individual as a subsystem that is expected to fulfill the needs of the other subsystem. Each individual in a partnership is a subsystem that forms part of a marriage or relationship (Sager, 1976).

Parameters that are the external focus of problems

The external focus symptoms often appear to be the center of the marital conflict, but they are usually secondary manifestations of problematic areas originating in the other two areas described above.

Sager (1976) also suggests that there are three levels of awareness of the contacts. That is, individual contracts can be conscious and verbalized, conscious but not verbalized, and beyond awareness. Conscious and verbalized awareness includes what partners tell each other about

their expectations in a clear and comprehensible language. Even though a partner might express him or herself to the other partner, the second partner might ignore the message and not hear or agree to register what has been said. The reason for this might be that the later has a different set of expectations in mind. For this reason, it is important for partners to listen carefully to each other and express themselves openly and honestly. Conscious but not verbalized awareness refers to each partner's expectations, strategies, views, and dreams, which are not verbalized to the other partner. Typically not expressed because of fear of anger, rejection, or embarrassment at this disclosure. The last level of awareness described by Sager is that beyond awareness or unconscious. This level of awareness comprises desires or needs, often inconsistent and unrealistic, of which the individual has no awareness.

Apart from the individual contracts that partners hold, Sager introduced the concept of the interactional contract to describe the operational aspects of the partners' individual contracts.

Interactional contract

According to Sager (1976), the interactional contract is the operational one in which both partners are trying to attain the needs stated in their individual contract. The interactional contract is a set of conventions, guidelines for behavior, moves, and approaches that have developed in dealing with each other. This contract is composed of elements that are both positive and negative. It is the how of how partners try to fulfill their separate objectives and purposes. It is what each individual considers to be the *correct* behavior. According to Sager, it is important to make this interactional contract and behavior visible and to

create a shared single contract. The author states that “this interactive contract provides the operational field in which each struggles with the other to achieve fulfillment of his own individual contract, including all the realistic, unrealistic, and ambivalent clauses that it contains” (Sager, 1976, p. 28).

Sager (1976) maintains that the marital contract is a lifetime task intended to help couples reach goals and purposes. He recommends placing emphasis on verbalizing the unspoken aspects of the contracts. He goes on to add that as each partner enters a relationship with his or her own contract, it is important to work towards developing a single joint contract that both partners agree on. When creating a single contract, the first task is to work out shared objectives, goals, or functions on areas that prove to be conflicting in the couple’s relationship. Furthermore, it is important to have in mind that these agreed upon contracts might change as new and different needs arise in the couple’s life cycle, for this reason the goals of the relationship have to be adjusted in order to reflect these changes. Sager cautions that if this is not done the relationship might suffer.

Marital contracts are important for all couples but might prove essential for intercultural couples, as partners might have to negotiate issues that are rooted in cultural believes and values. For instance, partners might find it unnecessary to express issues that might seem obvious to them and not worth acknowledging but to their partners of a different cultural backgrounds are fundamental and worth discussing.

Method

This chapter provides a description of the pilot study. It begins by identifying the workshop participants and then briefly describes the materials used and their function in the study. Lastly, in the procedure's section of this chapter, a summary of each one of the steps in the execution of the pilot study is provided.

The workshop was held in cooperation with the *Family Therapy Centre* located in Reykjavik, which is run by the Reykjavik Red Cross in collaboration with the Welfare Division of the Municipality of Reykjavik. The goal of the *Family Therapy Centre* is to provide counseling to parents or guardians and children and adolescents undergoing various difficulties related to: communication difficulties; stepfamily relationships; divorce and custody issues; depression and anxiety; drug and/or alcohol abuse; child behavioral, conduct and/or developmental disorders; amongst others. Ragnheiður Sigurjónsdóttir, family therapist and director of the centre collaborated with the author of this thesis in running the workshop. Ragnheiður Sigurjónsdóttir is also the assistant supervisor of this thesis.

Participants

Six multicultural couples registered for enrollment in the workshop but only four couples actually participated. Participants' recruitment process is described in the procedures section that follows below. All six couples were composed of one individual who was a first generation immigrant and an individual who was born and raised in Iceland. The two couples that did not attend expressed their regret for not being able to participate in the workshop. One of these couples could not attend

because two of their three children were sick and the other couple could not participate because the wife had an obligation that she needed to attend to.

The four couples participants in the study will be referred to, for ethical purposes, as couple I, couple II, couple III, and couple IV. The couples are randomly assigned to this classification. Participants background information and information concerning personal experiences and views comes from a questionnaire that participants were asked to fill out at the end of the workshop (see attachment I).

Couple I is composed of a female of Latin American background in her late-twenties and an Icelandic male in his mid-twenties. Both partners are university students. The female partner of Latin American descent stated that she spoke "good" Icelandic and had been in Iceland for approximately 10 years. She has Icelandic citizenship. The female partner said that she had moved to Iceland because of her family who had migrated before her and that she felt she had a social support system in Iceland (i.e. a network of people that offer support, care, and company and that the individual esteems and values). She stated that she felt good in Iceland because her family was here and she added "… I have very good friends and I have the feeling that Iceland is my home now, [it] is challenging to be here, because of the weather and the language but there is a peace that makes me feel secure and homey." The partners met in Iceland and have been together for less that a year. The couple is in a committed relationship and has no children together, although the female partner has a child who lives with them at home. Both Icelandic and Spanish are spoken at their home.

Couple II is composed of a female of Latin American background in her early-forties and an Icelandic male in his mid-forties. The male partner

is a biologist and the female partner an engineer. The female partner stated that she spoke "good" Icelandic and had been living in Iceland for over ten years. She has Icelandic citizenship. The female partner added that she had come to Iceland primarily as a traveller and that she felt good here because she was able to achieve her personal goals. The partners met in Iceland and have been together for a period of over four years. The couple is in a committed relationship and has a toddler together, although the female partner has a child from a previous relationship who lives with them at home and the male partner has an adult child who lives alone. Both Icelandic and Spanish are spoken at home.

Couple III is composed of a male from a country in the south of Europe in his mid-thirties and an Icelandic female in her mid-thirties. The male partner is a Master's student and the female partner works in marketing. The male partner stated that he spoke "poor" Icelandic and had been in Iceland for a period of over three years. He does not have Icelandic citizenship. The male partner indicated that he had come to Iceland because he was in love and because he needed a new place to live. He added that his experience in Iceland had been difficult but that he thinks he is "… getting used to it." He stated that he felt he did not have a social support system in Iceland. The partners met in the south of Europe and have been together for around four years. The couple is in a committed relationship. Neither partner has children but they are expecting their first child together. Both English and Spanish are spoken at home.

Couple IV is composed of a male from a country located in Africa in his late-thirties and an Icelandic female in her mid-thirties. The male partner works as a freelance artist and the female partner works for a public institution. The male partner indicated that he spoke "poor" Icelandic and had been in Iceland for over seven years. He has Icelandic

citizenship. The male partner stated that he had moved to Iceland for the love that he felt for his wife, and stated that his wife's family was his social support system in Iceland. He added that he felt both "love and hate" in Iceland because "it is difficult to adjust and adapt and I have lived in too many countries and it takes time to accept Iceland." The partners met in the Europe and have been together for over eleven years. The couple is married and has two children together. Both Icelandic and English are spoken at home.

In conclusion, four heterosexual intercultural couples participated in this pilot study; that is, couples were all composed of a partner who was a first generation immigrant and a partner who was Icelandic with no foreign background. The mean age of participants was 36-years of age. Two of the female participants and two of the male participants were immigrants and had lived in Iceland for a mean period of 8,6 years. Three of the couples lived with children at home and one couple was expecting their first child together.

Materials

The workshop was held at the *Family Therapy Centre* in a conference room that had a computer and projector. The room was arranged with chairs facing each other in a half-u-shaped fashion with a low table in the middle. Participants faced each other but were able to observe the projector's image that appeared in the front of the room.

Family life educational material was used to inform participants of the different issues that the author believes are important for multicultural couples to be aware of. This material was communicated to participants by the author herself and power point presentations were used as the

instruction took place. There were two workshop facilitators; one of the facilitators was the author of this thesis and the other facilitator was the director of the *Family Therapy Centre*.

Additionally, at the close of the workshop participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire and a workshop satisfaction form (attachment I and II, respectively).

Procedure

The intercultural couples workshop was promoted in cooperation with the *Family Therapy Centre*. Different organization, individuals, and agencies were contacted (e.g. social service offices and child protection agencies and different immigrant association) through personal phone calls and by sending an introductory letter and/or a publicity flier through electronic mail with the aim of promoting the workshop and gathering participants. Private electronic mails were also sent to either Icelanders or immigrants who the author of the thesis knew were involved in a multicultural romantic relationship.

The only criterion for participation in the workshop was that couples were intercultural couples, where one individual was a first generation immigrant and the other one did not have an immigrant background. The immigrant partner needed to come from a country outside Scandinavia; since it is said that countries in Scandinavia share few cultural differences. Furthermore, partners were required to have children, stepchildren or be expecting children. Additionally, participants needed to be able to understand and speak either English or Icelandic.

The intercultural couple's workshop was held on a Saturday from 10:30 am to 15:00 pm. Six couples registered for participation but only four couples were able to take part in the workshop.

The workshop was divided in to three sections, with a lunch break and a coffee brake between sections. Each section provided different family life educational material presented by the author of this thesis. As the presentations took place, participants were encouraged to ask questions, make comments, or share experiences. Each section was followed by a discussion of the presented material and participants' thoughts and comments. The discussions were led by both facilitators.

Furthermore, participants were sent a consent form and an introductory letter by mail (see attachment III) a few weeks after the conclusion of the workshop. Additionally, participants were sent a description of themselves as a couple (namely, the description provided in the "participants'" section of this thesis). Participants were asked to sign the consent form if they approved of the publication, on this M.A. thesis, of this description or any other information collected during the workshop (namely; from the questionnaire, workshop satisfaction form, and/or the discussions). Careful attention was taken in avoiding the disclosure of any personal information that might be traceable to the workshop participants. All participants signed the consent form.

Intercultural couples' workshop schedule

The first half-an-hour was spent by briefly presenting the workshop's agenda, introducing the workshop facilitators, and allowing participants to introduce themselves and get to know each other. Additionally, during this period participants were asked about their expectations of the workshop. A continuation, a one-hour presentation and

discussion of issues concerning the immigrant experience and the intercultural couple took place. The issues discussed during this section were:

- Immigration and issues concerning the pressures of moving to a new culture; here a brief introduction and explanation of the concept cultural shock and the different struggles immigrants face were presented
- A multi-phase process of immigration that families and individuals go through as they move between cultures (Sluzki ,1979)
- The intercultural couples; myths and advantages

During this section, a hands-on activity had been arranged but it was omitted because of shortage of time. The planned activity was to ask a volunteering couple to "sculpt" individually their social support system in Iceland. The idea was that each partner would use the workshop participants and facilitators to represent their social support system in Iceland. The purpose of this activity was to bring awareness to the fact that the immigrant partner's social support network is often smaller than the network of Icelandic partner.

This first section was followed by half-an-hour lunch break. After this break, a one-hour presentation and discussion of the family life cycle and the marriage contract took place. The issues discussed during this section were:

- The family life cycle; becoming a couple, families with young children, families with adolescents, and culture and the family life cycle
- The marriage contract; individual marital contract, interactional contract and levels of awareness of the contacts

During this section, a hands-on activity has been arranged but was omitted because of time constrains and because it appeared to be too challenging for participants. The planned activity was that couples would take a few moments individually to talk about their individual contracts. Instead, participants were asked to perform the task at home.

This section was followed by a fifteen minutes coffee break. After the break, a one-hour presentation and discussion concerning different issues relating to children and parenting took place. The issues discussed during this section were:

- Multicultural children; why they are unique and a brief introduction of the concept of bilingualism
- Parenting styles (Baumrind, 1989); authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting
- Culture and parenting styles

Following this section participants were asked to take a few moments to fill out both a questionnaire and a workshop satisfaction form (see attachment I & II, respectively). Couples were asked to fill out the questionnaire together but to fill out the workshop satisfaction form individually.

The workshop concluded at three o'clock in the afternoon. Next, the facilitators thanked participants for their involvement in the workshop and encouraged them to share any last comments, thoughts, or questions they might have with the rest of the group.

Results

In general, the topics that were presented and discussed during the workshop seem to have resonated with participants. The topics that appeared to be the most important to participants were the experience of migration, the influence of cultural differences on the intercultural couple, and parenting style differences between partners. For instance, participants stated that the problems they believed were most common for intercultural couples were: the way problems are approached because of cultural differences; "cultural differences and how to approach situations with children;" "parenting;" and the "struggle to fit into Icelandic society and finding new ways to accept their new life in Iceland." Nevertheless, two participants stated that there were topics that they wished would have been discussed during the workshop; namely, the side of the Icelander and more on parenting styles.

In general, participants rated the content of the workshop as being useful and found the pace of the presentations to be overall *just right*. Except that some of the participants mentioned that they wished the workshop had been longer or spread throughout more than one session.

Participants were asked to fill out both a workshop satisfaction form and a questionnaire at the end of the workshop. Here is a description of the outcome of this material.

Results from the workshop satisfaction form

Participants were asked to fill out the workshop satisfaction form individually (see attachment II). This form consisted of only seven questions

that asked participants to rate different aspects of the workshop on a scale from *one* to *five* (*one* signifying *very poor* and *five* signifying *very good*); such as the usefulness of the workshop's content, the hands-on activities, the pace of the presentations, and each one of the topics discussed. That is, the experience of migration and the intercultural couple; the family cycle and marital contracts; and children and parenting styles in a multicultural perspective. Additionally, participants were asked:

- Whether there were any topics that they wished would have been discussed
- If they had any comments they might want to add about the workshop in general
- And if they found something else useful regarding the presentations

In general, participants rated the workshop, the usefulness of the content, and the content of the presentation as *good* or *very good* (that is, gave ratings of *four* or *five*). Additionally, seven participants out of the eight indicated that the pace of the presentations had been *just right*, and only one participant indicated that the pace had been *too fast*. The question asking participants to rate the hands-on activities was skipped since there was not enough time to allow participants to execute these activities. These activities were, a volunteering couple *sculpting* their social support networks individually and couples individually sharing their thoughts and ideas about their individual marital contracts.

Regarding participants rating of the usefulness of the different presentation topics, five participants out of the eight rated the topic of *the immigrant experience and the intercultural couple* as being *very useful* and two participants as *useful* (that is, gave these topics a rating of *five* and *four* respectively) and only one participant gave this topic a rating of *three* (that

is, *neither useless nor useful*). The topic of *the family life cycle and the marital contracts* received a rating of *five* from three of the participants, a rating of *four* from four of the participants, and a rating of *three* from one of the participants. Lastly, the topic of *children and parenting* received a rating of *five* from five of the participants and a rating of *four* from three of the participants.

Only two participants answered the question of whether they found something else to be useful regarding the presentations, one of this participants wrote "It's interesting talking about differences and finding out that there are other couples going through the same;" the other one wrote, "discussions, this workshop would need more time." Additionally, only two participants answered the question regarding whether there was a topic that they wished would have been discussed but was missing. One of these participants wrote, "I would have liked to talk more about parenting styles, this is a very important issue in a relationship." The other participant wrote, "The side of the Icelander more, this was more about the experience of the one coming here."

Only one participant answered the question regarding whether there were any other comments about the workshop. In this regard, the participant wrote, "I would have liked more than one session."

Overall, participants seem to have enjoyed the workshop. They rated the topics of the workshop presentations as useful and appear to have benefited from the discussions that developed.

Results from the questionnaire

Partners were asked to fill out the questionnaire together (see attachment I). The questionnaire's aim was to gather background information of the participants and couples as well as information

regarding the status of the couples' relationships and their opinions concerning common issues or problems that intercultural couples face. The questions regarding the status of the participants' relationships and their opinions were asked as follows:

- Are there any issues/problems that affect how you feel about your relationship? If yes, what issues/problems?
- In your opinion, what are the most common issues/problems that intercultural couples face?
- What information do you think is important for intercultural couples to know?

Here are the couples' answers and opinions:

Couple I stated that they had issues/problems that affected how they felt about their relationship and conveyed that, "sometimes the way problems are approached is different because of the differences in culture." They added that in their opinion, the most common issues/problems that intercultural couples face are "cultural differences and how to approach situations with children."

Couple II stated that they did not have any issues or problems affecting their relationship. They added that "parenting" was in their opinion the most common issue/problem that intercultural couples face.

Couple III stated that the male partner's anxiety was a problem affecting the couple's relationship. They added that the "struggle to fit into Icelandic society and finding new ways to accept their new life in Iceland" was the most common issue/problem they believe intercultural couples faced. Information they thought was important for these couples to know was "that communication is important. Express your needs to your partner."

Couple IV stated that in their opinion the "immigrant experience and language" were the most common issues/problems that intercultural couples face. They added that important information for these couples could come from discussions with other couples in a similar situation.

In general, the couples that participated in the workshop seem to be either affected or cognizant of how cultural differences affect intercultural relationships.

Summary, Discussion and Concluding Remarks

With the sudden growth of the immigrant population in Iceland more Icelanders are establishing intimate relationships with people of immigrant backgrounds. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that family therapists in Iceland might at some point or another work with intercultural couples and families.

This paper is a Master's thesis that focuses on intercultural couples in Iceland chiefly because there are limited services provided to this population and little research is available on this phenomenon thus far. For the purpose of this thesis, an intercultural couple's workshop was created as a pilot project with the aim of developing a program that delivers family life educational material to culturally mixed couples in Iceland. The workshop was held in cooperation with the *Family Therapy Centre*, located in Reykjavík.

The main goal of this Master's thesis is to bring awareness to the challenges that intercultural couples and families face. In this regard, a review of the literature specific to how cultural differences affect intercultural couples is discussed. Another important purpose of this thesis is to bring awareness to the challenges that family therapist might face

when working with people of different cultural backgrounds. Family therapists working with this population need to be aware of the cultural biases and stereotypes that they might have (e.g. regarding race, religion, or value differences) and creatively seek new ways of thinking about common and infrequent events and ideas. For the purpose of this thesis, an intercultural couples' workshop was held as a pilot study to assess the significance of the topics selected by the author of this thesis.

There are three main objectives for this pilot study; firstly, to educate workshop participants on different issues that the author of this thesis supposes might prove useful to intercultural couples in Iceland. Secondly, to gather participants' feedback and comments regarding the workshop's content and its usefulness in order to develop a comprehensive program for intercultural couples in Iceland. Thirdly, to benefit the couples and families involved.

The pilot study referred to in this thesis is based on qualitative methodology and only descriptive data is used to present the study findings. Different approaches were used to gather participants but mainly, electronic mails were sent to different mailing lists as well as to individuals. Six couples enrolled for participation but only four couples actually took part in the workshop. The criteria for participation were the following: that couples were intercultural couples, where one partner was a first generation immigrant (from a country outside Scandinavia) and the other partner did not have an immigrant background; that partners had children, stepchildren or be expecting; and that participants were able to understand and speak either English or Icelandic.

Participants of this pilot study were four heterosexual couples. Two of the immigrant participants where females from Latin America, one male participant was from the south of Europe, and the fourth participant was a

male from Africa; the partners of these participants were all Icelandic. The immigrant participants of this study had been in Iceland for a mean period of eight-and-a-half years. The couples had been together for a mean period of five years; ranging from eight months to eleven years together. Three of the couples lived with children (either their own children and/or step children) and one couple was expecting their first child together. Participants had a mean age of 35.

The Intercultural Couple's Workshop was held at the *Family Therapy Centre* and lasted four-and-a-half hours. Family life educational material was communicated to participants by the author herself and PowerPoint presentations were used as the instruction took place. There were two workshop facilitators; one of the facilitators was the author of this thesis and the other facilitator was Ragnheiður Sigurjónsdóttir, director of the *Family Therapy Centre*. The workshop was held in English, since two of the participants of the workshop spoke little Icelandic but all participants spoke good English.

Different issues concerning intercultural couples where presented and discussed during the workshop; namely, the stresses related to being an immigrant; the challenges and advantages of being in an intercultural relationship; the family life cycle; the marriage contracts and their importance for intercultural couples; and parenting styles and the influence of culture on children and parenting.

The first presentation and discussion was of issues concerning the immigrant experience and the intercultural couple. The subject of the challenging experience that immigrants go through when they move to a new country is worth exploring with intercultural couples since this phenomenon affects immigrants in a variety of ways. Researchers, for instance, have found that migration alone does not lead to psychological

distress but rather the disrupting events that occur prior, during, and after migration. Sluzki (1979) explains that most families, and individuals, on the move go through a multi-phase process of immigration that includes a preparatory stage, the act of migration itself, and resettlement.

For individuals and families, moving across cultures begins prior to migration when the first concrete attempts are made towards a commitment to migrate. During this stage, people experience ambivalent feelings that fluctuate from excitement to dismay. Although the act of migration can last just a few hours, in many cases it may take a significantly long time. Nevertheless, the stress associated with migration does not take its heaviest toll in the first weeks or months following the move. In the period that follows immediately after migration, the main priority for individuals and families is survival but as time passes migrant individuals and families might begin to encounter difficulties (Sluzki, 1979).

Sluzki (1979) characterized this subsequent period as being strongly emotional and afflicted by conflicts, symptoms, and struggles. During this phase, the main task of the immigrant is that of reshaping his new reality. Berry (2005), for instance, describes the phenomenon of acculturation as the double process of cultural and psychological change that result from the interaction between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the individual level, acculturation implicates modifications in an individual's behavioral repertoire. This is a long-term process that requires cultural and psychological changes and is not experienced in the same way by all groups and individuals. Additionally, a long-term interruption in a family's process of adaptation will tend to become evident when a second generation is raised in the country of adoption. Anything that has been evaded by a first generation will emerge in the second one, commonly as a conflict between generations (Sluzki, 1979).

In general, participants rated this section of the workshop as being rather useful. In the discussion that took place during and after this section, participants shared their experiences related to migration and spoke of the struggles they had encountered and the challenges that were still unresolved to them. Participants opened up and shared their feelings regarding their experiences and generally seemed to agree with the issues raised during this presentation. In some cases it was possible to see the participants' "aha!" reactions (that is, their facial expressions as they appear to have recognized or realized something new) as the presentation took place. Three of the immigrant participants' spoke of having gone through this stages exactly the way they were presented.

After this presentation and discussion, a one-hour presentation and discussion of the family Life Cycle and the marriage contracts took place. Similar to the process of migration, individuals as member of a family system also move though a series of stages that occur at different periods of a family's life cycle. Most of the intercultural couples that are the focus of this thesis go through similar stages; namely, becoming a couple, becoming parents, and raising adolescents.

These stages are alike for most people but not everyone goes through these stages smoothly. Cultural factors, for instance, might influence the way in which families transition through the different cycles. According to Kenner (2009), intercultural relationships are prone to conflict principally at times of transition from one life cycle stage to another. In defining their couple's identity, partners must frequently redefine themselves in terms of their relationship to their families of origin, to their cultural group, and to their children. This process of definition and redefinition might prove conflictive to these couples. Moreover, intercultural couples might face difficulties related to disapproval or social

awkwardness with families, friends, and society. Moreover, disagreement about culturally based issues such as sex-role expectations; attitudes towards work and leisure; customs and traditions; exhibition of affection; problem-solving approaches; and different parenting styles might be possible conflict areas for intercultural couples (Biever, bobele, & North; 1998).

However, multicultural couples are not necessarily more at risk of divorce or separation and the influence of religious and ethnic differences do not seem to affect a couple's intimacy or quality of their relationship (Zhang and Van Hook, 2009; Hellar and Wood, 2000). Moreover, Intercultural coupling has been considered by some to be a strong indicator of the integration of ethnic and racial minorities in society (Qian and Lichter, 2007; Pagnini and Morgan, 1990).

Being in a relationship and raising children is not an easy task and for intercultural couples, the complex interplay of a wide variety of issues requires negotiation between the partners. One way of negotiating might be by creating a verbalized or written marriage or relationship contract. Clifford J. Sager (1976) argued that the central reason why some relationships fail is that each partner brings to their relationship an individual set of expectations and promises that are not always verbalized to partners. In this respect Sager introduced two types of contracts; namely, the individual contract and the interactional contract.

The individual marital contract is an individual's spoken or unspoken, conscious or unconscious concepts of his duties within the partnership, and to the benefits he or she assumes will stem from the relationship and from his or her partner. Contracts deal with a broad range of life aspects like: children, sex, family, friends, finances, rituals, gender roles, and more. In many cases, an individual might assume that there is a

shared agreement on a contract when in fact this is not the case. Consequently, when a person expects something from his partner or from the relationship but does not get it, he might feel disappointed and react as if an agreed upon contract had been broken. Similarly, the interactional contract is an operational contract that partners use as they try to attain the needs stated in their individual contracts. The interactional contract is a set of conventions, rules for behavior, moves, and approaches that partners develop in dealing with each other. It is what each individual considers to be "appropriate" behavior.

According to Sager, it is important for couples to make contracts visible and create a single join contract. Additionally, he maintains that the marital contract is a lifetime task intended to help couples reach goals and purposes. He recommends placing emphasis on verbalizing the unspoken aspects of the contracts. Although the creation of a single joint contract might be beneficial to all couples it might be even more valuable to intercultural couples.

The sharing of objectives, goals, or functions on conflicting areas of a relationship might prove essential for intercultural couples since these couples might have to negotiate issues that are rooted in cultural beliefs and values. In some cases, partners might find it unnecessary to voice issues that seem obvious to them and not worth talking about but to their partners of a different cultural backgrounds might perhaps be worth exploring and discussing.

Overall, workshop' participants rated the topics of the family life cycle and the marital contract as useful. Nonetheless, discussions during this section center on the topic of the marital contract. Participants expressed, for instance, that they expected sometimes more than they received from their partners. One participant for example stated that for

him it felt sometimes as if his partner ought to know what he was thinking and what he wanted. Other participants agreed with this statement. Additionally, some participants expressed that they felt that their cultural background influenced the daily routines and rituals that they practiced as a couple or as a family. Participants spoke about having to negotiate as partners a variety of aspects like: rituals and traditions, language, parenting, and division of household roles. Apparently, the workshop participants seemed to be open with their partners, and tolerant and respectful of each other's differences.

Following this presentation and discussion, topics relating to parents and the influence of culture on children and parenting styles were presented. Even though some couples decide not to have children for most couples having children is an essential life transition. With the birth of a child, multicultural couples might experience conflicts over a variety of issues such as the creation of rituals, power imbalance in the relationship, and differing parenting styles. The power imbalance might be more complex between partners coming from cultures were there is great disparity in gender equality. Child rearing and discipline can also pose challenges for intercultural families.

Differences in parenting styles within a family can be a source of conflict between parents. Baumrind (1989) described four distinct parenting styles; namely, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting. According to Baumrind (1989), authoritative parents are firm in their enforcement; are caring, warm, and reactive to their children's needs; and are competent in negotiating their expectations. Authoritarian parents, on the other hand, are demanding and expect compliance with rules, discourage negotiation, and neglect taking their children's needs into consideration. Permissive parents are warm,

compliant, patient, and responsive to their children's needs but fail to be firm or demanding and avoid the use of punishment. Lastly, rejecting-neglecting parents make few demands on their children, are emotionally detached, and are neither firm with the children nor emotionally responsive to them. Baumrind's research indicates that authoritative parenting is most effective in leading children to healthy adjustment (Baumrind, 1989).

Much of the research on parenting styles in relation to child and adolescent adjustment has been conducted on white middle-class families, however researchers have recently become increasingly interested in ethnic and cultural parenting style variations. For instance, researchers have noted that parents of various cultural groups are more likely to abide by an authoritarian parenting style (Ruby and Grusec, 2006). In more collectivistic cultures parents have been described as being more authoritarian and expecting more obedience, whereas in more individualistic cultures parents are reported as being more authoritative as they endorse independence and autonomy and put less stress on being obedient and sociable. Recent studies have proposed that Baumrind's parenting styles have different effects on children from different cultures. For instance, Ruby and Grusec's (2006) study results suggest that authoritarianism in and out of itself is not detrimental for all children but only for children with more individualist parents.

In Iceland (considered an individualist country), Aðalbjarnardóttir and Garðardóttir (2004) conducted a longitudinal study on the effects of parenting styles on adolescents' depression and found that adolescents whose parents had an authoritarian style of parenting had the most symptoms of depression at age fourteen and latter at age twenty-one; regardless of parental level of involvement.

Ethnic and cultural influences on children of intercultural couples appear to have a positive effect on these children. For instance, being exposed to different languages might make children of intercultural couples more cognizant of different cultures, people, and different perspectives. Moreover, children who speak more than one language might benefit from being able to access immigrant social networks, communicating with a wider number of people, and communicating more effectively with their immigrant parent and with family living abroad who does not speak the Icelandic language. Furthermore, a positive relationship has been found between bilingualism and cognitive ability (Pearl ad Lambert, 1962).

In general, workshop participants rated the topics of parenting and cultural influences on children and parenting styles as being quite useful. For instance, one of the participants commented that he wished the topic of parenting styles had been examined more thoroughly. The discussion during this presentation centered generally on the topic of different styles of parenting. Participants expressed having different styles from their partners and how sometimes this created conflict between them. Moreover, one participant mentioned that he strived to have a different parenting style from his own parents who were quite authoritarian and inflexible. Furthermore, one couple talked about their struggle in raising a child who was a stepchild to the male partner. This couple spoke about the difficulties that the male partner encountered in setting limits to this child. He spoke carefully about his concerns and was very honest about his feelings regarding what he found to be most difficult about their relationship. Similarly, one male participant (a stepfather) mentioned that he observed how stepparents were often different with their stepchildren

than with their own children and that he was scared that this might affect his relationship once the couple had a child of their own.

Even though participants appear to have benefited from their participation in the intercultural couples' workshop, the sample size was not large enough to be a representative sample of the target group and conclusions should be drawn with caution. Furthermore, it is important to have in mind that this work is only a foundation for a more comprehensive program designed for intercultural couples in Iceland. For this reason, setbacks will also be identified and explored.

One setback of the workshop is that it was arranged in only one session. Participants commented that apart from the family life educational material, the discussion part of the workshop had been useful. From this it can be assumed that more time should be dedicated to the sharing of participants' experiences and thoughts on the different issues presented. The original idea for this pilot study was to conduct a group therapy program for intercultural couples. The plan was to assemble a group of five to six intercultural couples that met for a period of six weeks for one-and-a-half hour weekly group therapy sessions. The group therapy program for intercultural couples was promoted during the end of the summer of 2011 and then again during the early fall months of the same year. Although many individuals and couples showed interest in participating in the group therapy program, few couples were ready to commit to meeting once a week for a period of six weeks. As a result, a half-day workshop was arranged instead. A group therapy program for intercultural couples would have been ideal since a workshop does not leave enough time to discuss issues on a deeper level. A more therapeutic approach would have been a group therapy format since the setup of these sessions would have been more informal (for instance, without PowerPoint presentation), and issues

that are considered to be important by both the therapists and couples involved would have been explored. Moreover, a group therapy program would have allowed more time to practice hands-on activities during the sessions as well as to assign task for couples to be practiced between sessions and latter discussed in group therapy.

Another setback of this pilot study is that not enough time was allotted to executing the two hands-on activities that had been planned. One of the activities that had been planned during the first section of the workshop was to ask a volunteering couple to "sculpt" individually their social support system in Iceland. The idea was that the partners separately would use the workshop participants and facilitators to embody the members of their social support system in Iceland. The purpose of this activity was to bring awareness to the fact that immigrant's social support network is different from that of Icelanders and in many cases quite scarce. The second activity that had been planned but omitted, because of time restrains and because it appeared to be too challenging to participants, was for couples to take a few moments individually to talk about their individual relationship contracts and then share their experience with the rest of the group. This activity would have been beneficial to couples since it could have initiated a dialogue between partners that might otherwise be avoided.

An additional critique of this workshop is the fact that it was largely focused on the side of the immigrant. One participant commented that he felt that this workshop focused more on the experience of the immigrant and not on the experience of the Icelander in the relationship. From this comment it can be deducted that the Icelandic participants of this workshop might have felt somewhat ignored. Consequently, more time should have been spent allowing the Icelandic participants to share their

experiences in relation to living with an individual from another culture since they are also afflicted by difficulties triggered from living in a multicultural home. In Iceland, for instance, a common issue that seems to afflict some Icelandic partners involved in an intercultural relationship relates to the financial obligations that the immigrant partner has with his/her family of origin (i.e. having to send money to family abroad). Another common problem that intercultural couples complain about is that of different parenting styles between partners. In this regard, Icelandic partners might find it difficult to understand certain parenting approaches that are not commonly practiced in Iceland and vice versa. Furthermore, Icelandic partners sometimes express feeling ignored by their partner and child/children when the immigrant partner communicates in his/her mother tongue with their child/children. This is often a problem when the Icelandic partner does not speak the native language of his/her partner.

One topic that the author believes should have been further explored in this thesis, and conveyed to the workshop participants, is that of cultural values. This is a very important and generally abstract concept that reflects the beliefs and attitudes of people and touches on a wide variety of aspects of life. The customs and values of immigrants often conflict with those of the country of adoption and this can create conflicts between Icelandic and immigrant partners as they try to negotiate their differences. Family therapists working with clients of different racial and ethnic minority populations must also examine their own personal values. Therapists need to be able to respect and value cultural differences and support clients in using their own traditions for personal recovery.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that the author of this thesis is an immigrant herself, and a partner in an intercultural relationship, and this might have affected the interpretation of the results of this pilot study

and the choice of topics examined. Moreover, this might also have prevented the further exploration of the side of the Icelander in this type of relationships. Nevertheless, her position as an insider can also be considered of advantage since her personal experiences provide a perspective that might have otherwise been ignored.

In conclusion, the topics that were perceived as important in regard to intercultural couples seem to have been applicable as family life educational material in the workshop. Although the participants' sample was not large enough to draw meaningful conclusions, participants seemed to have been generally satisfied with the topics of the presentations. That is, what was presented and discussed regarding the theory seems to have resonated with participants' own experiences. Participants were generally very sincere in their deliberations and actively participated in the discussions that took place during the workshop. Nevertheless, several setbacks can be identified once we examine the pilot study in retrospect. For instance, more than one session might have been necessary to deeply touch on the issues that the author of this thesis believes are important for intercultural couples to be aware of and to practice hands-on activities. Furthermore, issues of particular concern to the couples involved could have been discussed if more time had been available. In this regard, a more therapeutic approach would have been an intercultural couple's therapy program. Apart from the setbacks much can be learn from this pilot study and it is the hope of the author of this thesis that this work will lay a foundation for the development a more comprehensive program specifically tailored for intercultural couples and families in Iceland.

Working with intercultural couples

The product of this pilot study was of value in identifying issues that might prove important for family therapist in Iceland working with intercultural couples. The topics discussed in this thesis could be useful when working individually with these couples in a therapeutic setting. Furthermore, the results of this study might also serve as a reminder that the voices of both partners are important in helping these couples cope with their difficulties and that the therapist's personal opinions, values, and prejudices should not interfere in helping these couples deal with their struggles in their own way and by using their own traditions. Moreover, it is important to have in mind that even though some issues might be common to most intercultural couples, each couple is unique.

On a last note, it is important to acknowledge the incredible responsibility that family therapist have when working with immigrants and multicultural couples and families. Several issues have been highlighted concerning multicultural counseling and the competency of therapists working in this realm. For instance, in 1992 the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development approved a document proposed by the Professional Standards committee defining the need and underlying reasons for a multicultural perspective in counseling (Sue, Arredondo, McDavis; 1992). Furthermore, the association proposed a detailed list of multicultural counseling competencies and standards and strongly encouraged their adoption in the training of professional counselors. According to the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, the culturally competent counselor should have awareness of his/her own assumptions, values, and biases; have an understanding of the worldview of the culturally different client without formulating negative judgments; and be able to actively develop appropriate

intervention strategies and techniques in working with culturally different clients (see appendix I).

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Attachment I

Workshop for Intercultural Couples

November 12th, 2012

Questionnaire

Background Information:	***Background Information:***
Immigrant partner	***Icelandic partner***
Name:	Name:
Country of origin:	Country of origin:
Birth Year:	Birth Year:
Age:	Age:
Gender:	Gender:
Education:	Education:
Profession:	Profession:
First language:	First language:
Second language:	Second language:
Third language:	Third language:
Icelandic proficiency (please circle one of the following): None poor sufficient good very good fluent	
Length of stay in Iceland:	
Icelandic citizenship: Yes No	

Questions for the couple:

1. Where did you and your partner meet?

Abroad In Iceland

2. Are you married?

Yes No

- If yes, where did you get married?

3. Wedding date/Date the relationship started:

4. Do you have children together?

Yes No

- If yes, how many?

5. Do you have any stepchildren?

Yes No

- If yes, how many?

6. What language/s is/are spoken at home?

7. Are there any issues/problems that affect how you feel about your relationship?

Yes No

- If yes, what issues/problems?

8. In your opinion, what are the most common issues/problems that intercultural couples face?

9. What information do you think is important for intercultural couples know?

To be filled out by the immigrant partner:

10. Why did you come to Iceland?

11. Do you have a social support system in Iceland?

Yes No

- If yes, were does this support come from?

12. How do you feel in Iceland?

- Why?

Attachment II

Workshop for Multicultural Couples
November 12th, 2012

Workshop Satisfaction Form

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 very poor and 5 very good) please rate the following questions:

1. Overall, how would you rate this workshop?
(1 2 3 4 5)

2. How would you rate the usefulness of the content?
(1 2 3 4 5)

3. How would you rate the hands-on activities?
(1 2 3 4 5)

4. How would you rate the pace of the presentations?
(Too fast Too slow Just right)

5. Please rate the following presentations in terms of usefulness:

The immigrant experience and the intercultural couple
(1 2 3 4 5)

The family life cycle and the marital contract
(1 2 3 4 5)

Children, parents, and parenting styles
(1 2 3 4 5)

Something else you found useful?

6. Was there a topic that you wished would have been discussed (that was missing in the workshop)?

7. Any other comments about the workshop

Attachment III

December XX, 2011

Dear workshop participants,

I am here sending you a consent form that I will kindly ask you to sign and mail back to me in the enclosed posted envelope. The purpose of this consent form is for you to allow me to use the information collected from the questionnaire as well as the workshop satisfaction form that you filled out at the end of the workshop. This information will be used for the purpose of the pilot study that I will be writing about in my M.A. thesis. Additionally, in my thesis I will also refer to conversations that emerged during the workshop discussions.

Please note that none of the information collected during the workshop (either written or spoken) will be traceable to the workshop participants in any way. With this letter and consent form I am also attaching a brief description of you as a couple that I will be using in my M.A. thesis. If you do not approve of this description please let me know as soon as possible so that I can modify it to you convenience.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments by calling me at xxx xxxx or by e-mail at xxxxxxxx@gmail.com.

Best regards,

Paola Cardenas

Consent Form

We hereby give Paola Cardenas consent to use the information collected (for the purpose of her M.A. thesis) in the questionnaire and workshop satisfaction forms that we filled out at the conclusion of the intercultural couples' workshop held on November 12th, 2011. In addition to any spoken comments that emerged during the workshop's discussions.

Furthermore, we hereby give Paola Cardenas consent to publish on her M.A. thesis the description of us as a couple that she sent to us for our approval.

Paola Cardenas has affirmed to us that no personal information will be written about the couples or individuals and no written information will be traceable to any of the participants of the intercultural couples' workshop.

Bellow are our signatures testifying our consent,

_____

_____

Date:

Appendix

Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) proposed the following cross-cultural competencies and objectives:

I. Counselor Awareness of Own Cultural Values and Biases

A. Attitudes and Beliefs

1.Culturally skilled counselors have moved from being culturally unaware to being aware and sensitive to their own cultural heritage and to valuing and respecting differences.

2.Culturally skilled counselors are aware of how their own cultural backgrounds and experiences and attitudes, values, and biases influence psychological processes.

3.Culturally skilled counselors are able to recognize the limits of their competencies and expertise.

4.Culturally skilled counselors are comfortable with differences that exist between themselves and clients in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and beliefs.

B. Knowledge

1.Culturally skilled counselors have specific knowledge about their own racial and cultural heritage and how it personally and professionally affects their definitions of normality-abnormality and the process of counseling.

2.Culturally skilled counselors possess knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping affects them personally and in their work. This allows them to acknowledge their own racist attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. Although this standard applies to all groups, for White

counselors it may mean that they understand how they may have directly or indirectly benefited from individual, institutional, and cultural racism (White identity development models).

3.Culturally skilled counselors possess knowledge about their social impact on others. They are knowledgeable about communication style differences, how their style may clash or foster the counseling process with minority clients, and how to anticipate the impact it may have on others.

C. Skills

1.Culturally skilled counselors seek out educational, consultative, and training experience to improve their understanding and effectiveness in working with culturally different populations. Being able to recognize the limits of their competencies, they (a) seek consultation, (b) seek further training or education, (c) refer out to more qualified individuals or resources, or (d) engage in a combination of these.

2.Culturally skilled counselors are constantly seeking to understand themselves as racial and cultural beings and are actively seeking a nonracist identity.

II. Counselors Awareness of Client's Worldview

A. Attitudes and Beliefs

1.Culturally skilled counselors are aware of their negative emotional reactions toward other racial and ethnic groups that may prove detrimental to their clients in counseling. They are willing to contrast their own beliefs and attitudes with those of their culturally different clients in a nonjudgmental fashion.

2.Culturally skilled counselors are aware of their stereotypes and preconceived notions that they may hold toward other racial and

ethnic minority groups.

B. Knowledge

1.Culturally skilled counselors possess specific knowledge and information about the particular group they are working with. They are aware of the life experiences, cultural heritage, and historical background of their culturally different clients. This particular competency is strongly linked to the "minority identity development models" available in the literature.

2.Culturally skilled counselors understand how race, culture, ethnicity, and so forth may affect personality formation, vocational choices, manifestation of psychological disorders, help-seeking behavior, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of counseling approaches.

3.Culturally skilled counselors understand and have knowledge about sociopolitical influences that impinge upon the life of racial and ethnic minorities. Immigration issues, poverty, racism, stereotyping, and powerlessness all leave major scars that may influence the counseling process.

C. Skills

1.Culturally skilled counselors should familiarize themselves with relevant research and the latest findings regarding mental health and mental disorders of various ethnic and racial groups. They should actively seek out educational experiences that foster their knowledge, understanding, and cross-cultural skills.

2.Culturally skilled counselors become actively involved with minority individuals outside of the counseling setting (community events, social and political functions, celebrations, friendships, neighborhood groups, and so forth) so that their perspective of

minorities is more than an academic or helping exercise.

III. Culturally Appropriate Intervention Strategies

A. Attitudes and Beliefs

1.Culturally skilled counselors respect clients' religious and/or spiritual beliefs and values, including attributions and taboos, because they affect worldview, psychosocial functioning, and expressions of distress.

2.Culturally skilled counselors respect indigenous helping practices and respect minority community intrinsic help-giving networks.

3.Culturally skilled counselors value bilingualism and do not view another language as an impediment to counseling (monolingualism may be the culprit).

B. Knowledge

1.Culturally skilled counselors have a clear and explicit knowledge and understanding of the generic characteristics of counseling and therapy (culture bound, class bound, and monolingual) and how they may clash with the cultural values of various minority groups.

2.Culturally skilled counselors are aware of institutional barriers that prevent minorities from using mental health services.

3.Culturally skilled counselors have knowledge of the potential bias in assessment instruments and use procedures and interpret findings keeping in mind the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the clients.

4.Culturally skilled counselors have knowledge of minority family structures, hierarchies, values, and beliefs. They are knowledgeable about the community characteristics and the resources in the community as well as the family.

5.Culturally skilled counselors should be aware of relevant

discriminatory practices at the social and community level that may be affecting the psychological welfare of the population being served.

C. Skills

1.Culturally skilled counselors are able to engage in a variety of verbal and nonverbal helping responses. They are able to *send* and *receive* both *verbal* and *non-verbal* messages *accurately* and *appropriately.* They are not tied down to only one method or approach to helping but recognize that helping styles and approaches may be culture bound. When they sense that their helping style is limited and potentially inappropriate, they can anticipate and ameliorate its negative impact.

2.Culturally skilled counselors are able to exercise institutional intervention skills on behalf of their clients. They can help clients determine whether a "problem" stems from racism or bias in others (the concept of health paranoia) so that clients do not inappropriately personalize problems.

3.Culturally skilled counselors are not averse to seeking consultation with traditional healers and religious and spiritual leaders and practitioners in the treatment of culturally different clients when appropriate.

4.Culturally skilled counselors take responsibility for interacting in the language requested by the client and, if not feasible, make appropriate referral. A serious problem arises when the linguistic skills of a counselor do not match the language of the client. This being the case, counselors should (a) seek a translator with cultural knowledge and appropriate professional background and (b) refer to a knowledgeable and competent bilingual counselor.

5.Culturally skilled counselors have training and expertise in the use of traditional assessment and testing instruments. They not only understand the technical aspects of the instruments but are also aware of the cultural limitations. This allows them to use test instruments for the welfare of the diverse clients.

6.Culturally skilled counselors should attend to as well as work to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices. They should be cognizant of sociopolitical contexts in conducting evaluation and providing interventions and should develop sensitivity to issues of oppression, sexism, elitism, and racism.

7.Culturally skilled counselors take responsibility in educating their clients to the processes of psychological intervention, such as goals, expectations, legal rights, and the counselor's orientation. (p. 484-486).