The experience of intercultural parenting in Australia

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The Experience of Intercultural Parenting in Australia

by

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The growth of immigration and social diversity, changes in social and political ideologies and advances in global technology have contributed to increased cultural exchange in human relationships and an increase in intercultural marriages and relationships in Australia. Consequently, the intercultural parenting experience is emerging as an important phenomenon within society. Parenting experiences can be both challenging and rewarding for intercultural couples and their children. Much of the Australian research has focussed on parenting styles among different cultural groups. The focus of discussion in intercultural relationships tends to be on the children of couples from mixed cultures and races, rather than on the experience of the parents themselves. This research sought to address this gap. In this study, intercultural couple refers to participants comprising an Anglo-Australian-born with a partner who migrated to Australia from another country.

This research aimed to explore the experiences of intercultural parents raising their children together. It sought to explore the tools parents used to negotiate cultural differences in their child rearing practices, and explore the challenges, as well as the benefits and opportunities of intercultural couples in their parental practices. The study aimed to focus on the experiences of intercultural parents who do not seek professional help. It was anticipated that this study would generate findings that may assist current and future intercultural parents, add to the family systems theory respecting intercultural parenting, and suggest possible organisational policy and clinical implications for therapists and counsellors.

This study used a qualitative research method as the method of enquiry, as it sought to provide a rich description and meanings participants gave to their inner experiences of intercultural parenting. A social constructionist approach was used to delineate the experiences of intercultural parents. This theoretical framework offers insight into the perspectives of intercultural parents regarding their different parenting styles and practices. It respects participants’ voices and local knowledge.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data on the participants’ experiences of intercultural parenting. Twenty eight participants, comprising 14 couples living in the state of Queensland were recruited and interviewed conjointly. Thematic analysis was used to code and analyse data corresponding to the participants’ experiences. The analysis revealed four major themes of the couples’ experiences: (1) cultures coming together; (2) power relations; (3) reverse acculturation/enculturation; and (4) making intercultural parenting work.

The qualitative findings indicated that all the participants endeavoured to make their intercultural parenting experiences positive by negotiating, compromising, respecting and accommodating each other’s parenting style and practices. Intercultural couples experienced similar parenting challenges to homogenous couples, but their challenges were
exacerbated because of cultural differences. Intercultural parents negotiated their experiences by adopting four distinct parenting approaches: integrating universal and mixed parenting practices where parents encourage their children to embrace and be proud of their mixed culture; single or culturally specific models of parenting where children are encouraged to embrace the specific culture of one of the parents; individual approach, where children do not associate with a particular culture but are allowed to develop their own multicultural lifestyle and identity, commonly known as cosmopolitanism; and personality/individualistic belief about parenting where parents developed approaches based partially on their own experience of how they were parented. The individual approach was also evident in the other three parenting approaches parents adopted to negotiate their experiences.

The experiences of intercultural couples/parents were also influenced by other contextual factors such as the environment, gender, socio-economic status, extended family, friends, diasporic communities, religion, and individual/personality characteristics. Some of the findings in this study concurred with findings in previous studies. However, this current study revealed some important new findings within the Australian context, which can also be transferable to the global context: (a) reverse acculturation, (b) reciprocal acculturation, (c) shift towards authoritative parenting styles, (d) selfless parenting style (e) power relations in parenting practices, (f) disparity regarding the level of support and involvement between ethnic and white Australian extended families, (g) friends perceived as family members, (h) intercultural couples/parents also experienced significant benefits and opportunities, besides challenges and constraints.

Counsellors and therapists would benefit from exploring and focussing on the positive experiences as sources of strength for their clients and show cultural sensitivity and respect when dealing with intercultural couples and families. A number of organisational policy, clinical implications for therapists and recommendations for future research are suggested. Important organisational policy recommendations include: (1) universities and subsidiary educational institutions that provide marriage and relationship counselling courses need to introduce special modules regarding cultural literacy that focus on intercultural relationships and families, (2) professional helping organisations need to provide information and support services that are exclusive and appropriate to the needs of intercultural families, (3) implementation of cultural awareness and sensitivity, besides cultural competency in counselling agencies and practices, (4) the addition of the “Mixed” category in the Australian Census question regarding ethnic to help policy-makers and researchers seeking data based on Census categories.

Recommendations for therapist/counsellors would include: (1) exploring both the challenges and benefits that intercultural couples experience, (2) exploring the internal and external contexts of intercultural dynamics, (3) understanding that some of the concerns by intercultural couples and parents are common to those of non-intercultural couples and
parents. Therefore the provision of services and interventions needs to be balanced between cultural needs versus individual and contextual needs as opposed to the ‘intercultural’ aspect only, and (4) some of the popular therapeutic approaches that can be used in intercultural and mixed family domains are: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy; Narrative Therapy; Strength Based Therapy; and Solution-Focused Therapy.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

1. My late mother and father who believed in my human capital, taught me the value of education, responsibility and respect, and helped me in who I am today. I wish they were here to see the fruit of their belief and dedication. I owe all I am to you.

2. To my beautiful sister Chandranee, whose educational pathways were disrupted to look after me. I owe it to you dear sister.

3. My most beautiful wife Helen, for believing in me and supporting me unconditionally all the way through this challenging period. You have been my strength all along and one of the most loving and giving person I have ever come across. I owe it to you sweetheart.

4. My children Irene, Vick, Yasmin, Georgia, Madeline, and grandchildren Jasmine, Evelyn, Dylan, Darcy, Tyson and future grandchildren for recognising the determination and effort in pursuing my academic journey.

5. My relatives and special friends who encouraged me to pursue my goals in life.

6. Resiliency in adversity that helped me to become a better and stronger person.
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To the lovely intercultural parents who gave up their precious time to be part of this study. Their stories and experiences of intercultural parenting were inspiring and a great parenting educational tool for current and future intercultural parents. I hope that you have gained something from this experience as I have gained from your experience. Thank you.

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Finally, I cannot stop thanking my lovely wife Helen for the encouragement, tireless support and sacrifices she made to help me achieve my dream. You can now say that you have your husband back. To my children, you can also say that you have your dad back.

My life is blessed thanks to all of you.
PUBLICATIONS

The following works by the author were generated from the thesis:


DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis is my own original work. All other sources used have been properly acknowledged and referenced accordingly.

I also declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

_________________________
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November 2016
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When you go into a relationship, you expect differences or obviously you like differences. So that’s why you’re together and so when differences come up you know as a couple or parent, you negotiate and you compromise.

Kylie...........

1.1 Background and Rationale for the Research

The growth of immigration and social diversity, changes in social and political ideologies and advances in global technology have reduced boundaries and increased cultural exchange in human relationships (Bratwidjaja, 2007; Bustamante, 2011; Gonzalez & Harris, 2012; Singla, 2015). These factors have also prompted a trend towards an increase in intercultural relationships in Australia, including interracial, interfaith and interethnic partnerships (Luke & Carrington, 2000; Owen, 2002). A similar increase in intercultural marriages has been reported in other countries in the past decades, particularly in the United States (Bikel & Mandarano, 2012; Crippen & Brew, 2007; Frame, 2004; Globe Newswire, 2012, June 12; Qian & Lichter, 2007) and Canada (Wu, 2011). The term “intercultural” refers to the interactions between members of different cultural groups (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Intercultural couples are adults in a relationship who come from different cultural backgrounds (Perel, 2000). In this study, the term intercultural encompasses the different notions of ethnic, interethnic, racial, interracial, religious, interfaith and country of birth.

Given the changes in the cultural landscape of Australia, they are likely to impact on family structures as well as parenting behaviours and practices that may not occur in monocultural families. Consequently, intercultural parenting is emerging as an important family dynamic in Australian society. The rise in intercultural parenting presents new dimensions to parenting dynamics which can be challenging as well as rewarding for intercultural couples and children. The above quote from a participant in this study illustrates how intercultural parents manage intercultural parenting influences.

As of March 2013, the estimated resident population of Australia was 23,263,969 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a) and 26 percent of the total population were born overseas. As at June 2015, the proportion of people born overseas had increased to 28.2 percent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). About 17 percent of 4.28 million Australian couples were in a relationship between Australian-born and overseas-born partners. About 54 percent (387,998) were male partners born overseas and 46 percent (335,631) were female partners born overseas. In 2011, there were 121,752 marriages in Australia. About 17.4 per cent of Australian-born men and 15 percent of Australian-born women married somebody who was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a).
In south east Queensland, which was the chosen location of this study, the population was 2,897,951 in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). The number of people who were born overseas was 713,325. Sixty four percent of the migrant population in Queensland lived in south east Queensland with 36 percent in the rest of Queensland (ABS, 2014b). Eleven percent of the migrants were from non-English speaking backgrounds. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2011b), the number of people born overseas and from a non-English speaking background in south east Queensland was similar in comparison to that of Australia. In 2011, India accounted for 13 percent of all recent migrants to Australia, followed by China (excluding SARS and Taiwan) at 10 percent, Sub-Saharan Africa at 11 percent and North Africa and the Middle East at 7.4 percent. In Queensland, 31.6 percent of relationships were between males and females born in different countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). The statistics do not provide information on the ethnic background of marriage partners, except for their country of birth. The number of overseas-born spouses from India, Asia, Africa, Middle East and the Pacific Islands also increased significantly (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014c), migrants settle mostly near cities, universities and newly redeveloped suburbs.

1.2 The Research Problem

The focus of discussion on intercultural relationships tends to be on the children of couples from mixed cultures and races, rather than on the experience of the parents themselves. Parents from racial, ethnic and culturally diverse backgrounds face unique challenges that are under-researched in parenting scholarship. This research sought to address the gap. The literature on intercultural relationships suggests that parenthood or childbearing can be a significant source of relationship conflict as a result of divergent perspectives on childhood, parenting styles and practices, and the impact of cultural differences among couples (Bhugra & DeSilva, 2000; Crippen, 2008; Crohn, 1995; Gaines & Brennan, 2001; Romano, 2001; Singla, 2015). A review of the literature shows no published studies on intercultural parenting in Australia. Only a few Australian studies (Andreoni & Fujimori, 1998; Papps, Walker, Trimboli & Trimboli, 1995; Sims & Omaji, 1999) have compared parenting between parents from the same cultural background in different ethnic groups, including African, Lebanese and Vietnamese parents.

Most of the literature on intercultural parenting is based on overseas experiences such as in Europe, America and Canada (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Cabarello et al., 2008; Crippen, 2008; Keller et al., 2004b; Nakazawa, 2003) and focused mainly on intercultural parenting between Asian, African American, Hispanic and white Anglo European and American couples. One qualitative study in New Zealand (Hubber, 1998) focussed only on intercultural parenting between New Zealand European and Samoan parents. Another empirical study in Denmark (Singla, 2015) focussed on mixed-parenting between a Danish and South Indian partner. Although Australia has officially endorsed multiculturalism (Beech, 2013) and
recorded a quite high degree of intercultural relationships, unfortunately, there have been no published studies in Australia on the lived experiences of intercultural parenting within a single household. Such studies would have helped in understanding the experiences of intercultural parents in this country and how they negotiate their cultural differences in parenting. As mentioned earlier, Australia is becoming an increasingly multicultural nation and pluralistic society, and the increase in intercultural relationships and parenting across the broader cultural communities necessitated a study into the phenomenon of intercultural parenting which is distinct to the Australian context, rather than relying on overseas data which can be contextually different. This study sought to address this gap in the literature on the experience of intercultural parenting in Australia.

The literature on intercultural relationships focuses on the psychosocial challenges of intercultural relationships such as barriers to communication (Perel, 2000; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005), conflicts over parenting (Ho, 1990; Romano, 2001) and differences in cultural values (Garcia, 2006; Hsu, 2001; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). There is limited focus in the literature on the positive experiences of intercultural relationship cultural and their parenting. Falicov (1995) identified that although intercultural couples initially experience some form of conflict with the each other’s values and beliefs, they can also experience mutual cultural adaptation through increased understanding, tolerance and personal transformations. According to Heller & Wood, (2000) intercultural relationships enrich interaction, help negotiating differences, and increase intimacy and blending, thus enabling individuals to move beyond the cultural differences. This study therefore sought to extend the limited literature on the positive transformations of intercultural relationships and parenting and generate knowledge of relevance to non-clinical intercultural parents and helping professionals to enable them to understand the salience of cultural differences and experiences of intercultural parenting. It sought to enable the helping professionals to enhance their cultural competence, awareness and sensitivity, and adopt effective therapeutic strategies when dealing with intercultural families. This study included both the challenges and benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This research sought to explore the practices and strategies parents apply in negotiating cultural differences in their child rearing approach, the challenges they face, and the strengths and opportunities of intercultural parenting. The study aimed to focus on the experiences of intercultural parents who do not seek professional help.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The growth of immigration from Asia, Africa, Arab/Islamic countries and the Pacific Islands to Australia has resulted in an increasingly multicultural society and given rise to an increase in intercultural relationships and parenting in Australia. However, published research literature on the lived experiences of parenting in Australia could not be located in order to
inform current and future intercultural parents and the helping professionals about the impact of cultural differences in intercultural relationships and parenting. The focus on the Australian experiences of intercultural parenting is one of the major contributions of this current study.

Past research has focussed on the nature of relationships between intercultural couples, attitudes towards interracial marriages, issues faced by children in the relationship, and cross-cultural comparisons of parenting styles. In a review of the literature on intercultural relationships, Sullivan and Cottone (2006) pointed out that “little empirical research has been done with intercultural couples to assist with conceptualisation of problems and useful interventions” (p.221). This study was significant in that it sought to add to the existing literature on intercultural relationships and parenting by exploring the experiences of parenting in couples from mixed cultural backgrounds across the broad and diverse Australian society. For example, this study included people from Asian, African, Arabic/Muslim, Indian, Maori and Pacific Islander backgrounds.

The findings of this research will be helpful as they can be utilised in various government and private sector organisations such as schools, hospitals, Centrelink, Family Court, Child Protection Services, Department of Community Services and non-government organisations in their interactions and dealings with intercultural families. It has the potential to provide information to intercultural parents through a range of services such as educational materials in public libraries and community organisations. It will also add to the current theoretical knowledge base of family systems.

One of the significant contributions of this research is that it focussed on the experiences of intercultural parents who did not seek professional help and have not been the subject of other studies conducted in the clinical domain. The study explored the meaning-making process of everyday interactions of intercultural parents by focusing on the “what is” rather than “what should be” of parents’ own experiences of cultural differences. It examined the constraints and conflicts, and highlighted the positive experiences of parenting in intercultural families. The findings of this study would also benefit the couples who participated in the study. Another important contribution of this current research is that the emerging themes are potentially applicable to other similar contexts outside Australia as it presents real inner experiences and stories of intercultural couples/parents and the voices of migrant parents as outsiders.

1.5 Methodology

A qualitative research method was chosen as the mode of enquiry for this study. It was important to select a methodology that could provide a “thick” (Geertz, 1973) description of the phenomenon to accurately understand and represent the inner experience and meanings individuals gave to events within their social context (Cresswell, 1998). This approach is “consonant with a theoretical commitment to the importance of language as a
fundamental property of human communication, interpretation and understanding” (Smith & Dunworth, 2003, p. 603). Intercultural parenting is a complex phenomenon and as such the qualitative research approach suited this study because of its flexibility. For example, flexibility enables the researcher to adjust the research design as appropriate during the course of the field period. Brocklesby (2015) emphasises this point when she mentions the need, for example, to include family members in research with Maori, as well as the probability of having to reschedule and respect local customs. Also, because qualitative research focuses on interpreting how meaning is constructed, it suited a social constructionism epistemology, as the latter focuses on the construction of reality and meaning making within a contextual environment, such as intercultural parenting in this study.

Social constructionism describes knowledge as an internally constructed phenomenon that is socially and culturally decided (Gergen, 1985). This study was interested in exploring the subjective and lived experience of intercultural parents. It provided insight into the interpretative and inductive understandings through the participants’ account of their lived experiences of intercultural parenting. The research topic therefore was conducive to a methodology that emphasised subjectivity, lived experience, contextual knowledge (Crotty, 1998) and trustworthiness in the quality of data. The social constructionist paradigm encompassed these characteristics in providing an experiential understanding of why intercultural parents adopted particular parenting styles and practices. It respected participants’ voices and local knowledge, and therefore justified and provided a relevant framework and epistemological basis to this research. The interviews generated data that evidenced both participants’ subjectivity and meaning-making of their intercultural parenting experiences.

Social constructionism is a widely applied and accessible framework for investigating family studies. It has been used in studies of intercultural relationship (Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), and intercultural parenting (Crippen, 2013; Crippen, 2008, 2011; Hubber, 2007; Moffitt, 2012; Singla, 2015). This framework was therefore deemed appropriate to an exploration of the experiences of intercultural parents in this current study.

### 1.6 Research Questions

The aim of this study was to explore the personal experiences of intercultural couples in raising their children together. To achieve this, the research asked the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of intercultural couples in parenting their children?
2. What are the challenges and conflicts of intercultural parenting?
3. What are the positive experiences of intercultural parenting?
4. How do intercultural parents negotiate cultural differences and integrate cultural values in their parenting styles?

5. How can the findings inform intercultural parents and helping professionals?

1.7 Key Terms

The literature uses many terms interchangeably to describe different aspects of cross-cultural dynamics and the use of those different terms can sometimes cause confusion. It is therefore important to outline the definition of the terms in order to provide the reader with a clearer picture regarding how the terms were used in this study.

**Culture** was defined as a unique set of customs, languages, religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours shared by a group of people and passed on from generation to generation (Sodowsky, Lai, & Plake, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1990). These collective beliefs, values and behaviours provide members with a shared sense of identity (Triandis, 1994). Culture is seen as the factor influencing variations in intercultural parenting practices (Forehand & Kotchick, 1996), and as the driving force for parental behaviour (Ogbu, 1981). It is important to understand the broader definition of culture and that intercultural parents and couples may identify with more than one culture or subculture.

**Intercultural** is the interactions between members of different cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In this study, the term intercultural encompasses the different notions of ethnic, interethnic, racial, interracial, religious, interfaith and country of birth.

**Intercultural couples** are adults in a relationship who come from different cultural backgrounds (Perel, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

**Parenting** is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood (Belsky, 1984).

**Intercultural parents** in this study are intercultural couples who are in a married or de-facto relationship and raising biological children together in a single house (Crippen, 2008).

**Intercultural parenting** results from intercultural couples who are raising children conjointly.

**Transcultural** is the new family culture that is created when the cultures of two people from different backgrounds intersect (Crippen, 2008)

**Acculturation** is the cultural exchange that occurs when two or more cultures intersect, resulting in changes to the dynamics of both the migrating and host cultures (Berry, 1990).

**Reverse acculturation** is the process where an acculturated individual practices his/her heritage culture in the host culture (Kim & Park, 2009).
1.8 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters. This chapter has outlined the background and rationale of the study, the research problem, aims of the study, significance of the study, methodology, research questions, key terms, outline of the thesis, and conclusion.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the research previously conducted on intercultural parenting, intercultural relationships and marriage and culture. The research issues focussed mostly on the challenges and constraints intercultural parents encounter and the strategies they employ to negotiate their cultural differences and belongingness. There were limited findings about the benefits, opportunities and strengths of intercultural parenting experiences. A review of the challenges, benefits and negotiation patterns intercultural parents experienced is presented in this chapter. Also, the key theoretical assumptions with relevance to intercultural parenting are discussed.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological strategy to address the research questions. It outlines and discusses the qualitative research design and social constructionist epistemology used in this study. The research procedures used for data gathering included the unit of analysis, sampling, and interview structure. Thematic analysis was used to analyse participants’ inner experiences of the phenomenon. Finally, rigour and trustworthiness in this study is described through criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296).

Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings, including a detailed description of the data and the patterns and themes that emerged from the data. Chapter 4 describes the major theme of the study, that is, cultures coming together, and includes ten sub-themes about experiences relating to cultural identity, culture shock, racism and rejection, marriage disapproval, values and customs, gender roles and beliefs, language and communication, parenting practices, contextual influences, and benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting. Chapter 5 includes three themes regarding power relations, reverse acculturation/enculturation, and making intercultural parenting work and nine relevant sub-themes relating to parenting, language and communication, gender, insider/outsider status, valuing ethnic heritage and host culture, reciprocal acculturation, global culture, shift in parenting styles and problem solving tools and survival strategies.

Chapter 6 provides a thorough discussion of the findings and conclusions, reached from the study, describes implications for theory, policy, educators and professional practice, addresses strengths and limitations of the study, and examines areas for possible future research that emerged from this study’s findings. This chapter reflects on and discusses how the four major themes presented in the findings chapters are relevant to the academic literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It revisits the literature following the data analysis,
regarding intercultural relationship and parenting. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the study and the directions for future research are outlined.

1.9 Conclusion

The growth of immigration, globalisation, social diversity, and advances in global technology has prompted an increase in intercultural marriages and parenting in Australia. It is likely that family units will be impacted by this change and accompanied by parenting behaviours and practices that may not occur in mono-cultural families.

The focus of discussion in intercultural relationships tends to be on the children of couples from mixed cultures and races, rather than on the experience of the parents themselves. A review of the literature showed no published studies of intercultural parenting in Australia in order to inform intercultural parents and helping professionals on the impact of cultural differences in intercultural relationships and parenting. Only a few Australian studies have compared parenting across cultures between parents from the same cultural background.

The increase in intercultural relationships and parenting in Australia necessitated a study which is distinct to the Australian context, rather than relying on overseas data which can be contextually different. The focus on the experiences of intercultural parenting in Australia is one of the major contributions of this current study. The focus is also on the experiences of intercultural parents who do not seek professional help. This study was significant in that it sought to explore the experiences of parenting in couples from mixed cultural backgrounds in the broader and diversified Australian society.

This study aimed to make a significant contribution by generating insights into and findings on the experiences of intercultural parenting that may provide helpful information to the helping professionals, intercultural parents and couples anticipating to be intercultural parents, families, and various government and private sector organisations. It will also add to the current theoretical knowledge base of family systems to inform practice.

Several scholars proposed that social reality and meaning are co-constructed. In the context of intercultural parenting, intercultural couples co-construct meaning when dealing with differences and belongingness. As such, a social constructionism framework was suitable from which to explore the phenomenon of intercultural parenting. It is an epistemological position that explains how phenomena are socially constructed as a result of discourse and interactions with other people.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the research issues regarding the experiences of intercultural parenting, from both an international and national contexts. The review explores issues that are relevant to this study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the research issues relating to the experiences of intercultural parents, which includes identifying and critically analysing existing studies from both international and national contexts, and gaps in the literature on the research topic. Since the rise of globalisation and multiculturalism, scholars from psychology and social sciences have recognised the need to explore cultural issues relating to mixed marriage and intercultural families (Bornstein, 1991; Nakazawa, 2003; Qian & Lichter, 2007; Romano, 2001; Rubalcava & Waldman, 2004; Singla, 2015; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). A thorough literature search identified numerous studies on parenting, culture, cross-cultural communication, and intercultural marriages and relationships. The search used the key words parenting, culture, intercultural, inter-racial, cross-cultural parenting in the following databases: Pro-Quest, Google Scholar, Web of Knowledge, JSTOR, Informit, APA-FT, EBSCO, Scopus, Expanded Academic, ASAP, Factiva, Wiley on Line Library, PsycInfo, and PsycNet. There is limited literature overseas on intercultural parenting, and published studies on the experiences of intercultural parents in Australia could not be located. It was also difficult to locate literature relating to the experiences of intercultural parenting in either a clinical or non-clinical population in Australia. There is a need for further exploration of this phenomenon on intercultural parenting in Australia and within the globalized context, and therefore the focus of this study was to fill this gap.

The literature review focusses on parenting, culture, cross-cultural interactions, intercultural parenting and models of negotiation and decision-making in intercultural parenting as they influence intercultural parenting behaviour. The review also critically analyses previous research on the impact of culture and other associated factors on intercultural parenting and identify the gaps in the literature on intercultural parenting. Concepts of culture and cross-cultural interactions, and their influences on intercultural couples and parents are reviewed in the following section.

2.2 Culture and Cross-Cultural Interactions

Culture is a subjective and fluid concept and has therefore been defined widely and diversely by academics. The word culture frequently refers to practices and patterns that distinguish one society from another. Sodowsky et al. (1991) described culture as:

“conceptually in the anthropological sense, a set of people who have common and shared values, customs, habits, and rituals; systems of labelling, explanations, and evaluations; social rules of behaviour; perceptions regarding human nature, natural phenomena, interpersonal relationships, time, and activity; symbols, art, and artefacts; and historical developments” (p.194).
Ogbu (1999, p. 74) defined culture as “a people’s adaptive way of life” which comprises of the customary ways of people’s behaving, the assumptions, expectations, and emotions underlying those behaviours, the artefacts that are meaningful to the people, political, and social institutions, and cultural patterns of talking, feeling, and thinking. Hofstede (1980, pp. 21-23) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another”, which is passed from generation to generation. Ogbu’s and Hofstede’s definition of culture was relevant to this research in that it (a) includes the aspects of feeling, thinking, and talking which relate to research about parenting that focusses on cognition, affect and behaviour, and (b) parents are influential and vital in the transmission of culture to their off-springs.

An important concept of culture is the assumption that people from different cultural backgrounds have different beliefs and values, and, as such, behave in unique ways regarding parenting practices (Bornstein, 2012). The growing interest towards cultural diversity and its impact on parenting processes, have led to studies of parenting investigating differences in parenting practices according to ethnicity and cultural backgrounds (Bratawidjaja, 2007). Intercultural couples, with differences in cultural values, and previous exposure to different cultural practices with respect to such things as rules, norms of behaviour and cultural expectations, can experience internal conflicts during the relationship, especially when they have children (Bustamante, 2011; Romano, 2001).

There is a common assumption in prior research, namely, the assumption that diversity is due to ethnicity, and that ethnic groups are homogenous and exhibit similar behaviours, customs and values. For example, Hall (1976) divided cultures according to the way they communicate, and referred to them as “high-context” and “low-context” cultures. According to Hall, “high-context” cultures refer to societies that cater collectively in groups, have long-term strong relationships, have similar experiences and expectations from which people know what to do and think, and little is explicitly stated orally and in writing. In contrast, “low-context” cultures refer to societies where people have many connections but for a shorter period of time, information and meaning are clearly outlined in the message so that people know how to behave, and explanations are expected about things that are not properly understood or clear.

The levels of “high-context” and “low-context” cultures were classified by Copeland and Griggs (1986) for different cultures as follows:

High-context cultures: Asian, African, Arab, Latin American, French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Russian, Indian.

Low-context cultures: American, Australian, English Canadian, English, German, Irish, New Zealanders, Scandinavian.
Such assumption in the literature represents an overgeneralisation about ethnicity. Ethnic parenting values and practices are not necessarily the same in groups of the high-context cultures or low-context cultures, for example where a Chinese person marries an Indian or an American marries a white Anglo-Australian. Parents with a shared ethnic background may be different among themselves with regard to external variables such as country of origin, social class, acculturation and the nature of migration to the host country.

Hofstede’s (1980) seminal work posited that national cultures supersede ethnicity. He demonstrated that national culture mattered, arguing that organisations, institutions and theories of organisational behaviour are bound by culture. Hofstede (1980) defined culture as the totality of values considered as “mental programs” that are developed in individuals from childhood and onwards, and are distinctive for a societal collectivity. The “mental programs” influence people’s behaviours, perceptions, beliefs and goals in predictable ways. He defines the predictable ways as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity.

Power distance relates to the extent to which cultures accept that power is unequally distributed in institutions. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the lack of tolerance in a culture for uncertainty. Individualism refers to cultures that encourage autonomy and independence. Masculinity refers to the dissonance between masculine and feminine values, such as assertiveness versus nurturance.

According to Bornstein and Bradley, (2003), cultural values and practices are influenced by other within-group and intergroup variables such as access to education, social class, religion, stage of acculturation, cultural evolution and exposure or imposition by the dominant culture. Major socioeconomic shifts such as the movement from agrarian to industrialised societies and mass education (LeVine et al., 1994), democratisation replacing authoritarian regimes (Inglehart & Oysterman, 2004), and girls access to education in developing countries enriching their maternal knowledge (LeVine, LeVine & Schnell, 2001), have also impacted the cultural models of parenting over the past decades. Also, post-industrial societies witnessed other social developments about parenting impacting on parents’ cultural models, including globalisation, generational, advanced information technology, mass media images (Bornstein, 2012), and increased women’s participation in the workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014a; Charlesworth & Macdonald, 2014). The post-industrial changes in theoretical concepts about parenting are described in Section 1.3.1.

Regarding parenting and family socialisation goals, Kagitcibasi (1996a, 2005) explained that concepts of individualism and collectivism coexist. She later proposed an “emotional interdependence” model as an alternative to a model simply based on either independence or interdependence. The “emotional interdependence” model promotes both obedience and independence, whereupon children are socialised to become independent but be still in the company of others. This cultural model has been evidenced among Nso parents in
Cameroon (Keller et al., 2004b) and middle-class families in urban Turkey (Kagitcibasi, 1996b).

The literature supports the view that culture is not monolithic, but rather dynamic and individuals can develop competency in more than one culture (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). Most of the studies on acculturation have focussed on how immigrants adapted to the country and the new culture they live in. Qualitative studies into patterns of cultural adaptation (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Kim, 2001) identified three stages of acculturation process: culture shock, cultural adjustment, and identity change. Ting-Toomey (1999) described culture shock as a “transitional process in which an individual perceives threats to her or his well-being in a culturally new environment” (p. 245). A qualitative study of 120 intercultural couples living in the United States found that intercultural couples experienced cultural dissonance when planning their wedding ceremonies because they had to implement different cultural wedding rituals (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002). A limitation of this study was that it did not explore how the couples dealt with the differences in their relationship and parenting, hence the aim of this current study. Falicov (1995), based on clinical case studies from her practice in the United States, also demonstrated the similarity between couples’ experience of culture shock, and immigrants’ experiences of interactions with the values and norms of another culture.

After the initial period of culture shock, individuals are reported to go through a phase of cultural adjustment. Ting-Toomey (1999) developed new models of cultural adjustments which explained the different stages into the experience of migrants: honeymoon, the excitement of being in a new culture; hostility, from feelings of incompetence and confusion of identity; humorous, associated with cultural misunderstandings; in-sync, relating to experience of comfort in the new environment; ambivalence, related to mixed feelings when going back to country of origin; re-entry shock from stress and readjustment to the home environment; and resocialisation, adjustment to one’s new identity, cultural experience and adaptation. Bennett and Bennett (2004) added two other stages, which they called ethno-centric and ethno-relative stages. In the ethno-centric stage the main focus is on one’s own culture. The ethno-relative stage is related to acceptance, adaptation and integration of other cultures. Again, a limitation of these studies is that they have not addressed the concept of cultural adjustment among intercultural couples and parents. A few qualitative studies (Falicov, 1995; Hsu, 2001) have discussed the concept of cultural adjustment in intercultural relationships based on convenience samples in clinical case studies. This study sought to expand on the understanding of processes of cultural adjustment in intercultural relationship with non-clinical couples.

Most communication research, irrespective of the theoretical paradigm used, conceptualises that individuals adapt flexible identities over time, and have multiple identities that are constantly negotiated through social interactions (Hecht, Warren, Jung & Krieger, 2005; Kim, 2007; Ting-Toomey, 2005). As intercultural couples progress in their
relationships and develop strategies to negotiate and resolve their cultural conflicts, they can equally go through a process of identity change and construct a shared identity which Perel (2000) described as a third, transcultural reality, thus the development of an intercultural identity (Kim, 2001; Perel, 2000). Intercultural identity is described as transcending the original cultural identity or the identity of the host culture, resulting in increased functional fitness in the new culture, improved psychological health and the development of a broader intercultural identity (Kim, 2001). This study sought to explore intercultural couples’ and parents’ experiences of cultural adaptation through identity change.

According to (Kim, 2001), cultural adaptation can cause stress in intercultural relationships, thus triggering intercultural couples to develop coping mechanisms which promote transformations in intercultural identity, and culminate in a process of acculturation. The process of acculturation is discussed in more detail in the next section.

2.2.1 Acculturation

Acculturation is referred to as a process of adjustment by immigrant minority groups to the values, attitudes and behaviours of the dominant host group (Berry, 1980, 1990, 1997), changes into individuals’ cognition and behaviours from continuous exposure to other cultural groups (Cote & Bornstein, 2003), and a significant strategy for the transmission of cultural values in the process of parenting (Keller et al., 2004b). Acculturation is often confused with enculturation. “Enculturation” is the process whereby immigrants learn their group's culture. For example, when an immigrant parent teaches his/her child to use chopsticks, he/she is enculturating the child. Based on a longitudinal study of immigrants, refugees, indigenous groups and sojourners in Canada, Berry (1980, 1990) developed a model of acculturation that identified four strategies of acculturation immigrants pursued in their new cultural environment: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration or biculturalism refers to individuals who have bicultural competence because they can operate simultaneously in both the heritage and host culture. Assimilation refers to a preference for and ability to function well in the new dominant host culture. In this process, individuals may have difficulty with their heritage culture and relinquish their own cultural identity. Separation refers to a situation where people find it hard to navigate their norms outside their heritage culture and thus retain their original cultural values. Finally, marginalization is a strategy wherein individuals have little affiliation to both the host or heritage culture.

The acculturation strategies represent psychological acculturative processes along two dimensions of retention of one’s cultural background with the society of origin and integration with the culture of the society of settlement. Berry’s conceptual framework systematized the process of acculturation as situational/contextual variables, that is group or cultural level phenomena and person variables, that is individual or psychological level
phenomena that exist prior to and during the acculturation process (Berry, 1997). The situational variables include society of origin, that is, political context, economic situation, and demographic factors; group acculturation, that is physical, biological, economical, social and cultural factors; and society of settlement, that is attitudes and social support. The person/individual variables include moderating factors prior to and during acculturation. Moderating factors prior to acculturation include age, gender, education, pre-acculturation, status, migration motives, expectations, cultural distance regarding for example language and religion, and personality. Moderating factors during acculturation include phase, that is length of time, acculturation strategies such as attitudes and behaviours, coping strategies and resources, social support, and social attitudes such as prejudice and discrimination (Berry, 1997). Although these variables seem important considerations, Berry (1997) suggests that their relative contributions are likely to vary “according to the specific acculturative context being considered. That is they may be examples of a set of universal factors, ones that operate everywhere, but whose specific influence will vary in relation to features of the particular cultures in context” (p. 26).

A limitation in Berry’s conceptual acculturation framework is that it reported the acculturation experiences of migrant peoples only, and reflected the Western-based bias of immigration and acculturation research. It did not address the culturally distinct experiences of non-Western immigrants such as from South America, Asia and Africa, diaspora communities, and the contextual and environmental factors that impacted acculturation processes. The impact of the motherland was not considered on the acculturation process. Studies of diaspora communities (Johnson, 2012) contradicted Berry’s assumptions that immigrants eventually assimilate to the host culture. Johnson’s (2012) noted that when individuals are exposed to other cultures, it could lead those individuals to reinforce their identification with their heritage culture instead of encouraging identification with the host culture. Diaspora communities refer to immigrant communities who identify themselves as a community and maintain strong relationships with their homeland (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). These authors also argued that acculturation is fluid and dynamic rather than static. In their research of fully acculturated Indian migrants in the United States (Bhatia & Ram, 2009), the acculturation process was confirmed whereby the acculturated Indian migrants assessed the need to redefine their identities because of their feelings of insecurity and the host community attitude towards them following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA. This was also reflected in Australia regarding the influx of asylum seekers, which became a hotly debated political issue leading to the 2013 federal elections. New immigrants were criticised for their reluctance to assimilate (Beech, 2013).

A serious concern in acculturation theory is that of dimensionality, where some scholars proposed that (1) “acculturation occurs on a unipolar continuum, meaning that the stronger an individual adheres to his or her original culture, the weaker his or her attachment is to the new culture”; (2) “a bi-dimensional view founded in two axes and adherence to heritage culture and acquisition of new host culture”; and (3) the fusion
model, “that regards acculturation as a creation of a new culture different from either of the two original cultures” (Kim & Park, 2009, p. 360-2). These three arguments implicitly assume that intergenerational developments weaken individuals’ identity with their homeland culture and fail to point out other forms of acculturation processes currently emerging in the ever-growing multicultural and pluralistic societies such as the United States, Canada and Australia. Other forms of acculturation include reverse acculturation (Kim & Park, 2009) and mutual acculturation (Falicov, 1995). Kim and Park (2009) coined and described reverse acculturation as “the cultural practice wherein a fully acculturated U.S. born minority member introduces the heritage culture to the U.S. society” (p.359). Mutual acculturation is a process whereby intercultural couples are required to negotiate cultural conflicts, accommodate each other’s culture and develop new cultural codes as a result of which they gain increased understanding, tolerance and transformation (Falicov, 1995). Other scholars (Berg-Cross, 2001) applied Berry’s concepts to the intercultural dynamics of in-laws within the extended family systems, and Falicov (1995) extended Berry’s concept to that of mutual acculturation in intercultural marriage. Park, Kim, Chiang and Ju (2010) studied the relationship between perceived parenting styles and family conflict. Berg-Cross (2001), relying on research of case studies from her practice, identified four strategies of intercultural adjustment involving culturally diverse in-laws: (1) continental dividers, whereupon individuals retain their own cultural heritage and ignore that of their partners; (2) bridgers, where individuals sacrifice part of their own culture and incorporate aspects of their partners’ culture; (3) mergers, that is partners who abandon their own cultural values in favour of their partners’ cultural value; (4) cultural orphans, where couples abandon their own cultures but also reject their partners’ cultural values.

Falicov’s (1995) studies of cross-cultural families, and multidimensional, comparative training framework (1995), designed to integrate culture with all aspects of family therapy, also included intercultural couples in therapy and concluded that continuous interaction with a spouse from a different culture can be compared to the experience of a migrant in a new culture. Park et al. (2010) applied Berry’s model of acculturation in a quantitative study of 149 Asian American college students, examining the relations between perceived parenting styles and family conflict. In this study, tests of mediation revealed that “authoritarian parents, significantly explained why adherence to Asian cultural values was associated with increased family conflict. Test of moderation showed that as permissive parenting increased, more acculturated participants reported lower family conflict” (p. 67). The study also revealed that “assimilated participants reported less family conflicts at higher levels of authoritative parenting style in comparison to the integrated, separated and marginalises groups” (p. 67)

Hazuda, Stern and Haffner (1988) developed a comprehensive acculturation scale which “consistent with theoretical perspective operationalises acculturation and structural assimilation among Mexican-American as multidimensional processes” (p. 687). Prois (2013) described acculturation as a very personal and emotive process for migrants in deciding
what they hold on to and what they let go. In other words, migrants have to go through the daunting process of: choosing to stick to their heritage culture; integrating some of the host culture; or to fully adopt the host culture (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Cleveland & Laroche, 2007).

Crippen (2008) and Crippen and Brew (2013) developed a model of five strategies of cultural adaptation, based on process of acculturation, in intercultural parenting: assimilation, cultural tourism, cultural transition, cultural amalgamation, and dual biculturalism. In terms of parenting, assimilation strategy refers to the assimilation of the immigrant parent to the culture of the host parent and relinquishing their own heritage cultural values. Cultural tourism relates to “a pattern of asymmetrical mutual acculturation among intercultural couples, primarily with paternal accommodation” (Crippen & Brew, 2013, p. 267). Asymmetrical mutual acculturation refers to couples when there is “some degree of mutual accommodation to the culture of each partner, but the acculturative process was disproportionate to either primary maternal or primary paternal accommodation to the culture of the non-immigrant parent” (Crippen & Brew, 2013, p. 266). Cultural transition is described as “a strategy of asymmetrical acculturation among intercultural parents with primarily maternal accommodation” (Crippen & Brew, 2013, p. 268). Cultural amalgamation refers to the process of blending elements in intercultural relationships, whereby parents conceptualised cultural differences as acknowledge-transcend, that is “parents recognised the persistence of cultural differences, but viewed them as complementary and convergent in areas that were designated as significant such as religion or core values” (Crippen & Brew, 2013, p. 268). Dual biculturalism refers to a symmetrical process of acculturation, whereby both parents encourage biculturalism and emphasised their respective cultural codes to their children.

From the above outline and application of Berry’s acculturation model, it is possible to identify paucity in research on acculturation processes experienced by intercultural couples and parents, especially for non-clinical intercultural couples and parents. Like immigrants, intercultural couples are reported to experience multiple and often conflicting cultural realities, for example African or Asian versus European Australian culture. As such, intercultural couples can experience different levels of acculturation which can have significant impact and influence on family relations and parenting styles. This phenomenon is relevant to intercultural relationships and was explored in this study. This study sought to explore how intercultural couples and parents who do not seek professional help manage cultural differences through the process of acculturation. There is also a gap in the literature about the acculturation experiences of intercultural parents in Australia. This study aimed to address this gap.

A relatively new phenomenon has emerged in recent immigration and described as reverse acculturation. This phenomenon is described in more detail below.
2.2.2 Reverse Acculturation

Reverse acculturation is a term coined by Kim & Park (2009) which they describe as “the cultural practice wherein a fully acculturated U.S. born minority member introduces the heritage culture to the U.S. society” (p. 359). In this instance, reference was made to some fully acculturated American-born Koreans living in the United States, integrating part of traditional Korean wedding traditions and ceremonies with those of a conventional Western wedding. Reverse acculturation differs from the concept of assimilation and integration acculturation processes, in that cultural influences are transmitted from a minority culture to the host culture.

The conceptualisation of this phenomenon challenges current acculturation theory, arguing that the process of acculturation is not static and unidirectional but rather dynamic and fluid. According to Kim & Park (2009), the facilitators of this phenomenon are globalisation, advances in technology, multiculturalism, language proficiency and established social network, wherein the Korean heritage culture is introduced to the non-Korean members of the family by American-Koreans. A potential facilitator of reverse acculturation in Australia is cultural pluralism, which encourages and facilitates the celebration of immigrants’ homeland culture in the mainstream society, such as multicultural or international day and multicultural food celebration events.

Reverse acculturation, according to Kim & Park (2009) is increasingly visible in every aspect of the American society, “including food, clothing, family interaction, consumer behaviour or child rearing” (p. 372). Also, the benefits of reverse acculturation at the individual and societal levels are noted. At the individual level the benefits of learning and practising their heritage culture are classified as: “expanding their world view; practical and tangible benefits such as one’s advantage in the world of business when developing overseas market; strengthening their family relationships by making the immigrant parents proud and take more active roles in their children’s lives. Also, both the minority members and their associates benefit from the interaction because people who are not used to different cultures are exposed to new and unique cultures such as exotic foods and new ways of thinking” (Kim & Park, p. 372). At the societal level, benefits include knowledge of and acquaintance with “ethnic food, food industry, clothing, arts, beliefs, family dynamics, research, college curriculum, health care, and counselling” (Kim & Park, 2009, p. 373).

Another exploratory qualitative study (Chan, 2013), conducted in South Africa involving five South African Chinese and five Anglo-Saxon participants, identified the need for an updated acculturation process that recognises integration between homeland and the host culture as enduring and not temporary.

This evolving phenomenon in the U.S and South Africa is likely to mirror the dynamic multicultural society of Australia and the increasing rate of intercultural marriage and relationships. It is quite possible that similar wedding and other cultural practices will occur
in minority groups in the multicultural and pluralistic Australian society. Currently, reverse acculturation among minority groups in Australia has not been explored through research. Thus, this study sought to explore the phenomenon of reverse acculturation in the context of intercultural relationships and parenting in Australia.

Another dimension of cross-cultural dynamics involves the concept and theory of transnationalism in the context of intercultural relationships. This will be briefly discussed in the next section.

2.2.3 Transnational context

Transnationalism as concept and theory refers to functional integration of processes that cross borders relation of individuals, groups, firms and to mobilizations beyond state boundaries. Individuals, groups, institutions and states interact with each other in a new global space where cultural and political characteristic of national societies are combined with emerging multilevel and multinational activities (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Singla, 2015; Vertovec, 2009). Schiller et al. defined transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (p.1). These social fields are the product of a series of interconnected economic, political, religious and socio-cultural activities (Singla, 2015). Singla (2015) referred to the broad social and contextual factors that mixed couples experience as “liability of foreigners” (p. 143). This term refers to the challenges that migrant spouses encounter when entering the labour market of the host country, such as “lack of local language, knowledge of market rules and local labour experience, professional certification required in the new setting and discrimination” (p.143). According to this author, the negative experiences in the host society are anchored in ‘outside’ as well as ‘inside’ circumstances. Politics, for example, is viewed as an outside circumstance that is in close interplay with the inside circumstance. Visibly different intermarried couples are also subject to gaze in the public arena, which intercultural couples can interpret as negative experience. Poulsen (2012) refers to exclusionary processes in society regarding dark-skinned people, thus implying the phenomenon of colourism.

However, immigrant partners also experience positive outcomes in their new social environment, such as active engagement with their diaspora communities and adaptation and integrative acculturation to the host country (Singla, 2015).

Another important concept of culture is the assumption that different cultural groups and societies worldwide behave in specific and unique ways regarding parenting. Culture, according to Bornstein (2012), “helps to construct parents and parenting, and culture is maintained and transmitted by influencing parental cognitions that in turn are thought to shape parenting practices” (p. 213). The next section addresses the historical and theoretical conceptualisation of parenting.
2.3 Historical and Theoretical Conceptualisations of Parenting

2.3.1 Parenting

Although parenting is perceived differently across social and relational contexts, overall it is interpreted as a set of parenting practices applied to children (Lamb & Lewis, 2010). LeVine (1988) postulated that irrespective of culture, all parents share three goals: the health and survival of the child; teaching children economic survival skills; and encouraging those norms and customs that are important to the respective cultures. Parents’ roles are also constantly changing from the task of care and developmental growth to “intensive parenting”, that is, the intellectual, social and psychological wellbeing of children (Craig, Powell, & Brown, 2015; Craig, Powell, & Smyth, 2014). The concept of intensive parenting is further developed in sub-section 2.3.2.

Parenting is not an isolated phenomenon in the social structure. Parents’ behaviours and attitudes are influenced by culture. Different cultures across the globe value different parenting styles, as described in the next sub-section. Parents’ beliefs such as values, goals and attitudes, and parenting practices are widely emphasised in the study of parenting as shaping parenting behaviours. There are multiple perceptions about parenting and they are mostly influenced by factors such as cultural, social and political context, socio-economic status, gender and the family system (Harkness & Super, 1995; Jamrozik & Sweeney, 1996). Most studies that examined the experiences of mixed-heritage children within the family system came to the conclusion that the “parent factor” contributed significantly in influencing the lives of mixed-heritage children (Kenney, 2002; Martinez, 2001; Roberts-Clarke, Morris, & Morokoff, 2004).

Following behaviourist and Freudian psychodynamic socialisation theories in the early twentieth centuries, researchers and child behaviourists studied the impact of parents’ behaviour, such as patterns of reinforcement in the child’s environment, on child development (Sears, Maccoby & LeVine, 1957; Whiting & Child, 1953). Freudian theorists on the other hand proposed that biological factors were the basic determinants of development and not parental desires or social requirements (Baldwin, 1948; Orlansky, 1949; Symonds, 1939).

Psychodynamic and social learning theorists proposed that children develop a primary relationship and socialisation with the mother because the latter feeds the child (Freud, 1964; Sears et al., 1957). Freud (1964) and Spitz (1965) viewed the development of maternal attachment as a dual phenomenon which also involved the infant’s sense of pleasure during the “oral stage”. Later, new understandings of the nature of the relationship based on evolutionary foundation of attachment started to cause a shift from the Freudian perspectives of development. Bowlby (1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) disagreed with the earlier theories and introduced a blue print ‘attachment theory’ proposing that children’s strong
ties with the mother were based on a biological desire for proximity for the purpose of survival and reproduction rather than from an associational learning process.

Bowlby’s psychological attachment theory is one of the most influential perspectives on lifespan development from birth to death and across a wide variety of relationships. His theory suggests that (a) “human beings are wired to connect with one another emotionally, in intimate relationships; (b) there is a powerful influence on children’s development by the way they are treated by their parents, especially by their mothers; and (c) a theory of developmental pathways can explain later tendencies in relationships based on such early experiences” (Snyder, Shapiro, & Treleaven, 2012, p. 710).

Most empirical studies in the fields of social and emotional development rely on attachment theory as the guiding conceptual framework (Ainsworth, 1967; Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Feeney, Alexander, Noller, & Hohasu, 2003; Harris, 1995; Schore, 2001). The introduction of the concept of attachment to cultures globally has enabled different interpretations of how families respond to attachment relationships (Ainsworth, 1967; van Ijzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz 2008). Ainsworth, a collaborative research member of Bowlby’s team, studied attachment and its development empirically, focussing specifically on inter-individual difference. Her longitudinal ethnographic study (1967) of childrearing patterns between babies and their caregivers in the African city of Kampala, Uganda, was a landmark for understanding these connections cross-culturally and demonstrated the multicultural universality of attachment theory. Her study concluded that the important determinant of attachment quality is dependent on maternal sensitivity. Sensitivity was defined as ‘the caregiver’s capacity to determine

However, there have been some concerns about the cross-cultural applicability of attachment theory. For example, Keller (2012) asserted that attachment theory did not respond to evolutions in cultural parenting practices and was instead more adaptive of Western middle-class values and the conception of psychological autonomy. Van Ijzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz (2008) suggest that most cultural research regarding attachment apply Western constructs and methods to observe non-Westernised cultures, rather than applying culturally appropriate and contextual constructs and methods. Keller’s and Van Ijzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz’s assertions didn’t support universal style of attachment. In In a study of English and North American daughters-in-law, Joshi and Krishna (1998) pointed out the challenges of parenting models in intercultural marriages between Hindu and English and North American cultures. These authors referred to the North American parenting model of intense mother and child attachment in which “early dependence forms the basis of the development of the child’s inner sense of security and later independence” (p.179). This parenting model was different to the Hindu model of parenting which encouraged and promoted socialisation with the extended family, based on the fact that “dependence and interdependence are far more valued than autonomy and separation” (p.180).
According to Darling and Steinberg (1993), “early socialisation researchers recognised that individual parenting behaviours were part of a milieu of many other behaviours and, therefore, that the influence of an individual behaviour could not be easily disaggregated” (p. 488). Initial qualitative and quantitative assessment of parenting styles focused on: “the emotional relationship between the parent and child, the parents’ practices and behaviours, and the parents’ belief systems” (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 488). According to these two authors, socialisation theorists were concerned about “the emotional relationship between the parent and child and its influence on the child’s psychosexual, psychosocial and personality development... that individual differences in the emotional relationships between parents and children must necessarily result from differences in parental attributes and many researchers focused on attitudes as the attributes of importance” (p. 488). Also, the shift from parental behaviours to parental attitudes occurred because of the reasoning that “assessing parental attitudes would capture the emotional tenor of the family milieu that determined the parent-child relationship and influenced the child’s development” (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 488).

Researchers from the behaviourist and social learning schools focussed on parental practices instead of attitudes and developed measures of parenting styles to reflect on the patterns of behaviours that defined the learning environments of children (Sears et al., 1957; Whiting & Child, 1953). Their reasoning was that differences in children’s learning environment impacted on the children’s development. Researchers from different theoretical fields also started to focus on developmental outcomes of different socialisation processes by looking at the dimensions of parenting styles, including “acceptance/rejection and dominance/submission (Symonds, 1939); emotional warmth/hostility and detachment/involvement (Baldwin, 1955); love/hostility and autonomy/control (Schaeffer, 1959); warmth and permissiveness/strictness (Sears et al., 1957); and warmth/hostility and restrictiveness/permission (Becker, 1964)”, cited in Darling and Steinberg (1993, p. 489). These theorists agreed that parenting styles impacted on children’s development. Parents who exhibited warmth and responsiveness, rational guidelines, autonomy, communicated their expectations and the reasons for them resulted in what Symonds (1939) described as “model children” and whom Baumrind (1970) described as “instrumentally competent children”.

However, other social scientists examined the influence of other social context on parenting and suggested that the transmissions of parents’ beliefs, values and the role of families are important facets of functional and structural theories when applied to parenting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kohn, 1969). Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the social “ecological” theory of human development, proposing that human beings develop within interconnected systems that influence the individual termed micro, meso, exo, and macrosystems. The microsystem represents the individual and his/her social environment, for
example, the immediate family, school and work. The *mesosystem* is the interaction between the various structures of the *microsystem*. The *exosystem* is the local and regional communities that influence his/her behaviour such as parents’ workplace, neighbourhood, and social and legal entities. The *chronosystem* is made up of the environmental events and transitions that occur throughout a child’s life, including any sociohistorical events. The *macrosystem* represents the broader environmental level which includes the social, cultural and political frameworks in which the individual lives.

Bronfenbrenner later recognized that his original ecological model did not have enough focus on individuals’ own role in their development and thus further developed this model which he called “Bioecological Systems Theory” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). In comparison to the original theory, bioecological systems theory added more emphasis on the person in the context of development and explained that both the person and the environment affect one another bi-directionally. The bioecological model of human development can be applied to both children and maturing adults, and is thus considered a lifespan approach to development. The framework emphasises the importance of understanding bidirectional influences between individuals’ development and their surrounding environmental contexts. In contrast to his earlier models, Bronfenbrenner also included the *chronosystem*, meaning time, in the bioecological model as an important component in the way that people and environments change. The ecological and bioecological systems can be applied to the experiences of intercultural parents and couples as the latter are influenced by the interconnected and interdependent systems.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) ecological and bioecological approach is popular in the clinical domain (Jack, 2000; Luster & Okagaki, 2005; Silva, Campbell, & Wright, 2012) as it addresses the importance of the social environment and its influence on parenting attitudes and the child’s development. This conceptualization fits with the experiences of intercultural parents and children from mixed cultural background in that they are influenced by the interconnected micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono-systems and context such as the parental system, extended family, peers, friends, neighbourhood and the social, cultural, political and economic system. Unfortunately this approach does not reflect sufficiently on the cultural dimension of raising children. This study sought to expand the ecological concept to the experience of intercultural parenting by examining the influence of the interconnected system on intercultural parents. Parenting attitudes, beliefs and practices have evolved significantly over the years and generating changes and new theoretical concepts about parenting.

Other authors (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Rosenblatt, 2009) referred to a systems theory approach to analysing intercultural couple relationships and parenting. Systems theories can be seen to be informed by certain epistemological and ontological perspectives. With respect to epistemology, system theories imply a holistic perspective in acquiring knowledge which emphasizes understanding the interplay between the systems
and their interconnected elements in determining their respective functions. Informing this is the ontological perspective that the world consist of complex and multilayered systems (Rosenblatt, 2009). From this perspective, intercultural couples and parents can be understood to develop and participate in multilayered systems which are themselves influenced by other systems in their environment such as families and culture of origin, social, political, legal and economic systems. Rosenblatt (2009) identified three key areas of system dynamics that are central to the experiences of intercultural couples: “(a) key aspects of the ecosystem in which the couples live; (b) interpersonal power in the couple relationship; and (c) changes in couple system dynamics as the relationship evolves over time” (p.3). Systems theories enable an exploration of the relationship between perceptions and conceptions and the world intercultural parents live in and experience. Aspects of the ecosystem include, for example, the families and culture of origin; interpersonal power may relate to wealth differences, gender relations and patriarchy; and changes in the couple system dynamics such as the relationship may be better or worse, and change of religion (Rosenblatt, 2009).

2.3.2 Changes in Theoretical Conceptualisations of Parenting

Parenting concepts have evolved over the years and around the globe. “Generational, social and media images -culture- of caregiving and childhood play formative roles in generating and guiding parental cognitions” (Bornstein 2012, p. 213). Changes in social structures, migration, social and economic development, present parents with different challenges and socialisation processes that needed to be addressed further. According to Bornstein (2013), “modernity has witnessed a worldwide pattern of change toward urbanisation, media homogeneity, and Westernization that cumulatively contributes to dissolution of traditional cultural patterns” (p. 260).

Changes in socioeconomic structures are presumed to affect parenting, thus changing the focus from natural or cultural context to ecological contexts, and the context of the social construction of parenting. As LeVine and LeVine (1985) pointed out, children moving from an agrarian to an urban economy become an economic liability to their parents as they become consumers rather than producers. They also become less obedient because parents have lost the social and communal childrearing support of the homeland. Parents are increasingly faced with prolonged periods of children’s economic dependency, education, expansion of consumerism and mass marketing aimed at children, peer group pressures, and uncertainty about youth employment opportunities (Ambert, 1994; Arendell, 1997). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012-2013), thirty one percent of people age 18-34, compared to twenty seven percent of people age 20-34 (ABS, 2006-7), were still living at home for reasons such as financial hardship, education, unemployment, health, home and rent prices, partnering at a later stage, and divorce.
As mentioned previously, contemporary parents’ roles have changed from the task of care and developmental growth to “intensive parenting” focussed on the intellectual, social and psychological wellbeing of children. The latter is considered to be a crucial parental input and key determinant for children’s development (Craig et al., 2014). However, the role of mothers has also significantly changed in society. In August 2014, women’s employment to population ratio was 55.5 percent, compared to 67.2 to men. Unemployment rate for women was 6.1 percent compared to men at 6 percent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014c). Despite the increase of women in the workforce, parental child care time has increased in Australia (ABS, 2006). Working mothers spend 38 hours per week compared to 16 hours per week by fathers looking after their children in Australia. Also, in current Australian society traditional beliefs about family and parenting are being challenged. According to (ABS, 2013b) there were 780,000 single parents in Australia, who have to take on an even bigger role in the life of their child. Besides providing care and support, they must also generate an income for the family to survive. There has also been a gradual significant change in the pattern of the family. With the growth of urbanisation, modernisation, education, and individualism, the family size has changed from large to small (Connell et al., 2013).

Also, a study by Craig et al. (2014) of social and economic trends in Australia found that fathers’ parenting/child time had increased as compared to that of mothers, particularly in physical care, and that tertiary education no longer predicts significantly higher childcare time. Fathers’ parenting/child time has also increased in other Western industrialised nations, and fathers’ involvement has impacted significantly on their offspring’s development. An American study (Parker & Wang, 2013) on the convergence of the roles of working mums and dads, found that men’s participation in child care increased from 4 percent in 1989 to 7 percent in 2011. In 2013, men spent 20 percent of their day on childcare/housework and 60 percent at work, which is an increase from 7 percent in 2011. Contemporary variations in traditional family roles mean that fathers are now expected to nurture and care the child, and share domestic responsibilities in the home (Parker & Livingston, 2016; Parker & Wang, 2013). Fathers are seen as contributing significantly in the socialisation process of their children by enabling the development of autonomy, management of risk during physical and social interactions, development of physical and social skills, assertiveness, anger management, and academic and professional success (Fletcher, 2011; Newland & Coyl, 2010; Paquette, Eugène, Dubeau, & Gagnon, 2009).

Parenting is also being examined from a socio-ecological framework. According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) social ecological framework, other influential factors external to the mother and father relationship, such as grandparents, friends and the environment impact on childrearing and the emotional and behavioural development of children (Barnett et al., 2010). In Australia, grandparents provide regular care to approximately 25 percent of children 12 years or younger (ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This trend is even greater in Europe where approximately 40 percent of grandchildren receive regular
childcare from their grandparents (Kirby, 2015). Grandparents are classified as custodial grandparents, and informal grandparent caregivers. Custodial grandparents are the primary caregivers as opposed to the informal grandparents who are secondary caregivers (Kirby, 2015). A limitation in Kirby’s study is grandparents who do not fit in either of these groups, that is, grandparents who are not involved in care giving at all and the reasons thereof. This can be an area of further research. These social changes in parenting dynamics are important variables that the current study sought to address because they are worldwide developments that can presumably impact on parenting role and research paradigms. The next section addresses societal assumptions about parenting.

2.4 Assumptions about Parenting

Some parenting literature asserts that there is a societal assumption that most parents follow a “mainstream” or “majority” concept of parenting. The mainstream concept implies a particular accepted, expected and “right” way of doing things derived through a process accounting for the majority viewpoint (Patcher & Dumont-Mathieu, 2004). It is assumed that, universally, parents from all races and cultures are focussed on a common objective, that is “to caregive as well as to enculturate children by preparing them for the physical, psychosocial, and educational situations that are characteristic of their specific culture” (Bornstein, 2013, p. 262). Levine (1988) outlined a distinction between what parents want “for” their children and what they want “from” their children and emphasised that there are three universal goals shared by parents: (1) to provide for the child’s physical needs such as health and survival; (2) to teach them skills that are necessary for economic survival until they reach adulthood; and (3) to encourage the norms and customs that are important to the culture they belong.

However, while parenting goals and objectives may be considered universal, the methods of achieving these goals are not universal and are specific to the context of the family existence. LeVine (1988) described parenting as an adaptive process within the context of the family situation such as where a child’s survival is threatened in environments with high infectious disease or violence. In this situation, the parental practices would focus more on the goal of the child’s survival and health and to a lesser degree on the goals of normative cultural or societal values. LeVine (1988) emphasised that “each culture, drawing on its own symbolic traditions, supplies models for parental behaviour that, when implemented under local traditions, become culture-specific styles of parental commitment” (p. 8). This view is well supported by other researchers who have identified distinct cultural and contextual factors for parental behaviour (Bornstein, 2012; Coll & Patcher, 2002; Kotchik & Forehand, 2002; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Patcher & Dumont-Mathieu, 2004; Suizzio, 2007).

Belsky (1984) also argued that parental competence is greatly influenced by contextual factors. In his influential thesis titled “determinants of parenting”, Belsky (1984) developed a process model proposing that parenting is a systemic process involving three sources of influence: “personal psychological resources of parents, characteristics of the child, and
contextual sources of stress and support” (p. 83). For example, a parent who lost a child in a serious road accident whilst riding the bicycle on the road, in front of the house, may use strict parenting styles towards another child attempting to ride a bicycle on the road, thus affecting the developmental opportunities of the other child. Belsky’s (1984) process model on the factors that determine parenting is influential for studies on the process of parenting in general as it sets out a framework about the contextual processes of parenting. Coll and Patcher (2002) theorised that variations in parenting among ethnic and racial groups are not deficiencies, but rather real adaptations of parenting practices to differing contexts. These assumptions about parenting are further explored in the parenting and culture section below.

2.5 Cultural Influences on Parenting

Parenting is widely regarded as a culturally defined role wherein parents from diverse cultural backgrounds receive different forms of guidance about parenting practices, for example literature and education about parenting, direct training and advice from extended family members and friends (Bornstein, 2013). Super and Harkness (1986) developed a model they called “cultural niche”. This model discussed the influence of culture on child rearing practices and child development by influencing the following three sub-systems: “(1) the physical and social setting in which the child lives; (2) the customs of child-care and childrearing; and (3) the psychology of the caretakers” (p. 545). For example, with factor one, the sleeping pattern of children is influenced by the different cultural norms relating to the physical home environment. In the US, a child typically sleeps in a separate space or room and longer sleeping hours are reinforced to prevent disturbing the parents and frequent feeding. In East Africa, the child commonly shares the bed with the parents and breast-feeds anytime, thus reducing the need to reinforce longer sleeping hours for the child (Harkness, 1980). Regarding factor two, mothers in Africa and Asia often carry the child on their back during regular activities. This can be seen as a normal natural habit wherein it is unusual for babies to be on the ground, and how society deals with children in a given physical environment. For example, in a study of West African childrearing practices, Timyhan (1988) found that “in societies where food acquisition requires the mobility of the mother (or other caretakers) and the free use of the hands, babies are often carried on the back” (p. 7).

Thirdly, parents’ psychology refers to beliefs and values that are culturally framed regarding parenting practices and children’s development. These factors are considered as part of the parents’ psychology because they are mediated through parents and may contribute to differences in child development. For example, according to Bandura’s (1986) self-efficacy theory, mothers who consider themselves or feel competent in their parental role can be expected to interact more effectively and display optimal warmth, sensitivity and responsiveness towards their children. Dix (1991) suggested that mothers who evaluate their parenting failures to deficiency in their personal capabilities behave differently towards their children by minimising interaction and responsiveness towards the children.
In a study of Puerto Rican and US Anglo mothers’ beliefs regarding the socialisation goals for their children (Harwood, Scholmerich, Ventura-Cook, Schulze, and Wilson, 1996) found that the mothers’ goals were different. Puerto Rican mothers emphasised the need for respect, obedience and community acceptance compared to the US Anglo mothers who emphasised the need for self-actualisation such as self-confidence, independence and individuality.

Attitudes and beliefs about parenting vary significantly across different cultures regarding corporal punishment, parents’ expectations of children, and parents’ capacity to empathise with the needs of children (Jambunathan, Burts & Pierce, 2000). The meaning of parental beliefs and values differs regarding cultural context and is different to universal constructs, such as parental warmth. In their studies in Bangladesh on the ‘meaning’ of parental knowledge regarding children’s activities, Stewart & Bond (2002) revealed that “for girls, parental knowledge was strongly associated with parental warmth, but not with dominating control. In contrast, for boys, parental knowledge was associated with parental dominating control, but not with warmth” (p. 385). This parental belief points to gender differences regarding the protection and supervision of boys versus girls, thus reinforcing culture specific and societal values regarding parental practices. Another co-authored study in Pakistan, involving these two authors (Stewart, Bond, Ho, Zaman, Dar, Anwar, 2002) found that “autonomy-granting was highly associated with warmth for both boys and girls. However, in causal models of how parental attributes relate to their children’s outcomes, parental autonomy-granting played an important positive role for boys, but not for girls” (Stewart & Bond, 2002, p. 385). The findings demonstrate the existence of societal forces in middle-class Pakistan.

Bornstein (1991) emphasized that parenting practices shapes culture and pointed to the notion of universality versus culture specific parenting practices. A study comparing parenting practices in the US, France and Japan showed that generally culture impacts significantly on parenting practices in addition to culture-specific parenting practices, an example being infant vocalisation compared to infant eye contact. Infant vocalisation represents a universal child rearing practice. In most societies, parents encourage infant vocalisation by speaking to them and see them as mutual partners in the interaction long before the babies can speak, but in some other societies, parents think of it as a pointless behaviour and do not speak to babies because they think that it does not make sense to speak to babies before they are capable of speaking themselves (Bornstein, 2013). Likewise, eye contact can have different meanings in different cultures. For some cultures, mutual eye contact initiates interpersonal communications and social interaction, whereas in other cultures, mutual eye contact is interpreted as being disrespectful and aggressive (Bornstein, 2013).

Socioeconomic status, that is an individual’s position within a hierarchical social structure, combined of variables including occupation, education, income, wealth, place of residence, and ethnicity is found to be “a common methodological problem in cross-cultural
comparisons of parenting... that parental beliefs were cultural constructions and that cross-cultural differences in parental values reflected more general cross-cultural differences in societal values” (Kagitcibasi, 1996b, cited in Crippen & Brew, 2007, p. 109). Cultural values were also found to be resistant and slow to change despite over time because they represent an individual’s core identity. According to Crohn (1995) and Romano (2001) conflict arises in intercultural parenthood because the latter uncovers the underlying cultural differences and discrepancies in the real core values of the intercultural partners which were not of much concern previous to parenthood. The question then arises as to how intercultural couples resolve their cultural differences.

In a study of new mothers from Australia and Lebanon living in Australia (Goodnow, Cashmore, Cotton, & Knight, 1984), expectations of timetables for child development and milestones were different and shaped by culture. A similar study of culture-based expectations about child development among English, Jamaican and Indian mothers (Hopkins & Westra, 1989) revealed that “Jamaican mothers made more accurate predictions of when their infants would achieve sitting and walking alone relative to their English counterparts” (p. 117). The mothers’ expectations of their children’s developmental milestones were attributed to cultural dictates. Many of these studies and findings are quite old. Parenting culture has evolved universally over the years. Globalisation, advanced technologies, changes in social structures, and social and economic development present modern parents with different challenges and socialisation processes that need further examination. This study sought to address the gap.

Other researchers have discussed parenting patterns and principles found across all cultures and those that are specific to a cultural context. A study of self-evaluations and attributions in parenting (Bornstein et al. 1998), comparing ideas about parenting among mothers of 20 months old infants in seven nations, including Argentina, Belgium, France, Israel, Italy, Japan, and the United States, found that “few cross-cultural similarities emerged; rather, systematic culture effects for both self-evaluation and attributions were common, such as varying degrees of competence and satisfaction in parenting” (p. 662). Mothers from Argentina rated their parental competence and satisfaction unfavourably and attributed this to their lack of ability due to lack of help and advice about parenting. On the other hand, mothers from Belgium rated themselves as “comfortable and secure in their parenting philosophy” (p. 663), which is attributed to strong child care supports provided to them in Belgium.

New models of parenting which emphasised the importance of studying parenting as a multidimensional process were published in the late twentieth century. In the context of intercultural parenting, the earlier description of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model reflects on the proximal and distal environment that influences parenting attitudes. The ecological approach recognises the influence of the social environment on parents and children. Social class, wealth and income were also identified as having strong impacts on
the methods of child rearing (Leyendecker, Harwood, Comarini, & Yalcinkaya, 2005; Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002). However, according to the literature (Bornstein et al., 1998; Crohn, 1998; Harkness & Super, 1996; Julian, McKenry & McKelvy, 1994; Romano, 2001), cultural attributes appear to have a greater influence on parenting practices, which suits the purpose of this study, on intercultural couples.

Each culture has its own model of parental beliefs and practices and the way children are perceived (Bornstein, 2013; Okagaki & Divecha, 1993; Renzaho, 2011; Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainsbury, 2011; Sims & Omaji, 1999). Cultures such as African, Asian and Arabic/Islamic adopt differing parenting styles. This study sought to investigate whether parents from different cultural backgrounds vary in their parenting styles and practices. The scope of differences in parenting styles is expansive, and is comprehensively explored in the next section.

2.6 Parenting Styles and Practices

Darling & Steinberg (1993) developed a model of parenting which defined parenting style as a “constellation of attitudes towards the child that are communicated to the child and that taken together create an emotional climate in which the parents’ behaviours are expressed. These behaviours include both the specific, goal-directed behaviours through which parents perform their parental duties (to be referred to as parenting practices), and non-goal-directed parental behaviours, such as gestures, changes in tone of voice, or the spontaneous expression of emotions” (p. 488). Parenting is practised differently across different cultures and it is therefore vital to comprehend the concepts of Parenting styles and practices. Parents usually create their own parenting style based on several evolving factors such as one’s own parents and cultural influences. According to Santrock (2007), parenting practices are learnt by most parents from their own parents, which they either adopt or reject.

Over the past four decades, the concept of parenting style is widely used in developmental and social psychology in order to understand how parents’ behaviour and attitude impact on children’s developmental and social process. There are many influential theories on parenting styles. One of the most cited theories is that of developmental psychologist Baumrind (1971). Her research highlighted four basic elements that divide normative parenting styles in an effort to inform successful parenting: responsiveness versus unresponsiveness and demanding versus undemanding. Responsiveness is associated with authoritative parenting style where children are raised in a warm and affectionate environment and granted high autonomy. Conversely, demandingness is associated with authoritarian parenting style which includes low responsiveness, strict parenting and less autonomy. These were the platforms from which she identified three main parenting styles, one of which is adopted by parents: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. A fourth parenting style termed “neglectful” was later introduced by Maccoby and Martin (1983). However, Baumrind’s approach and model of parenting was based on the findings of Western white North American middle-class families.
Authoritarian parents are considered to be high on demandingness but low on responsiveness. This parenting style includes firm control over children, respect for parents and society, conformity, obedience, less autonomy and independence (Baumrind, 1971, 1989). The authoritarian parenting style seems to be prevalent and effective in collectivist cultures (Papps et al. 1995; Renzaho, 2011; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1989; Thomas, 1975; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

Authoritative parents are considered to be high on demandingness and responsiveness. In this parenting style, children are raised in a warm and affectionate environment, behavioural control is age appropriate and children’s opinions are encouraged about personal and family matters (Baumrind, 1971; 1989). Several studies on parenting responsiveness predict social competence and psychological well-being, while parenting demandingness predicts physical and intellectual competence, and children’s behavioural self-control (Baumrind, 1989; Darling, 1999; O’Connor & Scott, 2007). Authoritative parenting style is more conducive to individualist cultures (Baumrind, 1971; 1989).

Permissive parents usually respond to the needs of their children and are also very involved. However, they are low on demandingness. They exercise minimal control and do not set standards of acceptable behaviour on their children (Baumrind, 1971, 1989). According to Baumrind (1978), permissive parents see themselves as providers for the children for what they want from them, but they abstain from their responsibility to shape and change the child’s behaviour.

Neglectful or indifferent parents are considered to be low in warmth, firmness and restrictiveness. In this category, parents minimise interactions with the child, ignore their child’s whereabouts, educational programs, daily activities, social network, input in decision makings, and education about beliefs and values. The parents are more concerned with their own selfish needs to the detriment of the child’s developmental needs (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; McLoyd & Smith, 2002).

Baumrind’s typologies suggest that all parenting styles impact on children’s behaviour and development. Parents who are authoritative have more positive outcomes for their children such as better social skills when interacting with others and more instrumental competence such as being more emotionally equipped than those whose parents use other styles of parenting. Children and adolescents from authoritarian families gain self-regulation skills, but are lacking in self-expression such as poor social skills, vigorous interaction with others, lower self-esteem and are more depressed. Children from indulgent families most likely show negative behaviours from a lack of parental rules in their upbringing, do not perform well at school and are more prone to aggressive behaviours. However, they have better social skills, are less depressed and have higher self-esteem (Baumrind, 1971). Uninvolved or neglectful parenting is found to have the worst developmental outcomes for children such as poor social skills and educational performance from a lack of attention and interest from their parents (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; McLoyd & Smith, 2002).
Numerous other studies have confirmed Baumrind’s theory and found links between parenting style and pro-social behaviours and child outcomes. Those studies have supported the view that authoritative parenting is a better and most successful parenting style (Arendell, 1997; Carlo, 2006; Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002). A recent study (Rivers, Mullis, Fortner, & Mullis, 2012) involving 148 high school students and mainly white participants from counties in a rural, south central state of America, revealed that adolescents who reported their parents as having a more authoritative parenting style were found to demonstrate more intrinsic motivation in their academic pursuits. Another study (Cheah, Leung, Tahseen, & Schultz, 2009) examined the impact of authoritative parenting among immigrant Chinese mothers of pre-schoolers, and revealed that “Chinese immigrant mothers of pre-schoolers strongly endorsed the authoritative parenting style... authoritative parenting predicted increased children’s behavioural/attention, regulation, abilities, (lower hyperactivity/inattention), which then predicted decreased teacher rated child difficulties” (p. 311).

Baumrind’s (1971, 1989) and Maccoby and Martin’s (1983) typologies in regard to universal applications have been criticised as being biased because they are influenced by western cultural constructs and based on the findings of Western white North American middle-class families. The argument is that these models of parenting are more applicable to samples of parents from other cultural backgrounds. They do not relate to culture-specific ways of parenting. Intercultural and migrant parents engage into parenting styles that they have learned and been exposed to in their (Chao, 1994; Gupta, 2008; Joshi & Krishna, 1998). Lindahl and Malik (1999) differentiated between authoritarian and hierarchical parenting styles. The latter has strong significance and is highly valued in ethnic communities parenting styles and practices. Respect for parents, elders and authority are important collectivist values embraced by ethnic communities (Chao, 1994, 2000; Gonzales et al, 1996; Renzaho, 2011). According to Lindahl and Malik (1999) hierarchical parenting does not imply unresponsiveness like in authoritarian parenting. It makes the point that elders are respected for their wisdom and not questioned by subordinate members of the family or community. According to these two authors, hierarchical parenting is a useful concept in families with collectivist values and traditions, such as respect for parents and authorities and strong intra-familial boundaries. This distinction has not been explored enough in the wide volume of research on parenting, which the researcher intends to pursue in the current study. It can also be a topic for further studies.

Researchers have challenged the notion that authoritative parenting styles engender higher academic performance, and argued that other contextual references such as culture, race, ethnicity, and individual factors have been ignored in these studies (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, & Bamac 2006; Brown & Iyengar, 2008; McBride-Chang & Chang, 1998, cited in Rivers et al., 2012). For example, the academic successes of African American students have not been consistently attributed to authoritative parenting (Darling, 1999; Gonzalez, Greenwood, & Hsu, 2001; Mandara, 2006). In general, research indicated that African-American, Asian-
American and Hispanic families practiced less authoritative parenting than European-American families, thus adding to the argument that cultural values and beliefs have significant impact on parenting practices (Mandara, 2006; Renzaho, 2011; Sims & Omaji, 1999; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). Research also indicated that ethnic minority families practice authoritarian parenting is more consistently than among white families, even where ethnic minorities belong to different socioeconomic status (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Renzaho, 2011; Sims & Omaji, 1999). Studies by Chao (1994), Brody & Flor (1998), Renzaho (2011), and Sims & Omaji (1999) are outlined in the following paragraphs supporting the argument for bias against the cultural framework of parenting.

Chao (1994) argued that the Chinese concept of parenting as “training” (“Chiao Shun” and “Guan”) is more applicable to understanding Chinese parenting styles than are conventional constructs of authoritative and authoritarian European American parenting styles, and therefore differs from the dominant ideas in developmental psychology. Traditionally, researchers have used the term authoritarian to describe strict codes of behaviour that emerge from a desire to subjugate children and a need for parental control. In contrast, the Chinese concepts of “Chiao Shun” and “Guan” assume a parenting style that emerges from care, protection, and children’s well-being instead of their need for domination. It is therefore appears ethnocentric to qualify Asian parents as authoritarian because of their strong belief in providing concrete behavioural guidelines for their children. Chao argued that in order to prevent ethnocentricity, there is a vital need for developing a parenting style that reflects Confucian parenting. Confucianism is a high order Chinese cultural ideology that promotes the centrality of human relationships, emphasises respect for the hierarchy according to their position in the family and society, personal control and achievement, and the importance of social harmony (Chao, 2000).

In their study on parental challenges and successes in rural African families, Brody and Flor (1998) revealed a “no-nonsense” style of parenting which included supportive parenting produced positive social, educational, emotional and behavioural outcomes for children in the African families. Another study by Gonzales et al. (1996) proposed that the African Americans strict parenting styles could be a matter of the European American perception of parenting which is different from the African American perception. Darling & Steinberg (1993) explained the reason for the variability by suggesting that the African and European-American authoritative parents may hold similar goals to help their children attain their goals, but the methods they use to achieve those goals are different. The assumption underlying the comparisons in the academic performances of children raised between authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles is stylistic differences. According to Darling and Steinberg (1993), “although most parents hope that their children will excel academically, authoritative, permissive and authoritarian parents may differ in the relative importance they place on the goals of academic excellence and social success or the ways in which they help their children succeed” (p. 494).
Studies of African migrant families settling in Australia found that African migrant families come from collectivist cultures that embrace authoritarian parenting style, and value interdependence, respect for authority and elders, and corporal punishment (Renzaho et al., 2011). According to these authors, migrant families found it challenging to reconcile the parenting style of their home country with state legislated parenting policies in Australia. In the state of Queensland, where this study was conducted, the Queensland “Child Protection Act 1999” is the legal framework guiding the Department of Child, Communities, Child safety and Disability Services in child protection. The core principles of the Act in relation to child protection are: (a) the welfare and best interests of the child are paramount; (b) the preferred way of ensuring a child’s welfare is through support of the child’s family; (c) intervention is not to exceed the level necessary to protect the child; (d) family participation in planning and decision making for children; (e) consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies in decision-making regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; (f) children and families have a right to information; (g) services are to be culturally appropriate; (h) coordination, consultation and collaboration with families, other professionals, agencies and the community; (i) accountability of the department.

For subsection (1)(g), techniques for managing the child’s behaviour must not include corporal punishment or punishment that humiliates, frightens or threatens the child in a way that is likely to cause emotional harm. Harm includes physical abuse such as hitting. The Act’s core principles do not provide for consultation with immigrants’ and refugees’ agencies in decision-making regarding these constituents. Immigrant and refugee parents have different parenting value systems regarding discipline including smacking that might be incongruent with the state legislated parenting policies. Immigrant and refugee parents may not be used to state intervention in their parenting styles and practices in their countries of origin and as such parents may “feel undermined both in confidence, and in the parenting domain and competencies, especially the control of children’s behaviours and power” (Renzaho et al., 2011, p. 421).

Another study of African migrant families, Sims and Omaji (1999) found that a central goal of parents was practices relating to respect and punishment. The African migrant families believed that Australian children did not have enough respect for their parents and elders. The African immigrants’ parenting style and practices are quite similar to the Asian authoritarian parenting style in that both cultures emphasize parental care, protection, love and concern for their children’s well-being.

Arabic speaking migrant families in Australia are experiencing similar challenges to their African counterparts. Studies on parenting among Arabic speaking migrant families in Australia, including Iraqi, Lebanese and Sudanese migrant families (Ebbeck & Cerna, 2007; Renzaho, McCabe & Sainsbury, 2011), found that Arabic speaking immigrant families come from collectivist cultures. According to Renzaho, McCabe and Sainsbury (2011) African and Arabic families are used to “less state interference in parenting, and experience difficulties
with raising children in the individualistic culture of Australia where parenting and discipline are guided by state legislative guidelines” (p. 421). The Australian studies focused exclusively on parenting styles and practices among African and Arabic speaking migrant families. There is a need to expand on these studies relating to parenting styles and practices in the broader cultural composition of the Australian families and intercultural parents. This research sought to fill the gap.

These models of parenting raise the question of how intercultural couples negotiate differences, which will be explored in Research Question 4: “How do intercultural parents negotiate cultural differences and integrate cultural values in their parenting style?”

The next section addresses parenting dynamics within the Anglo-Australian context, which contributes to understanding the similarities and differences in parenting dynamics among families from other cultures in Australia.

2.7 Anglo-Australian History and Parenting Culture

The term “Anglo-Australian” is indicative of the cultural group originating from the United Kingdom (McDonald, 1995). Australia was colonised by Great Britain in the late 18th century. Due to the historical ties with Great Britain, the government, judicial and educational systems were developed from the British models. The colonial masters were of British or Irish background and reflected western values and cultures. Traditionally, husbands were regarded as breadwinners and women were predominantly responsible for child-rearing and domestic chores (McDonald, 1995). However a literature review shows that over the last three decades, attitudes towards fathers’ roles have changed in Western societies with the trend towards greater involvement of fathers recorded in several countries, including USA, Australia, Canada, France, Germany and Taiwan (Draper, 2003; Fletcher, 2011; Giallo, Treyvaud, Cooklin & Wade, 2013; HPaquette, Coyle-Shepherd, & Newland, 2013; Parker & Wang, 2013; Parker & Lingstone, 2016;).

The literature points to Anglo-Australian culture as embracing values such as independence, assertiveness and self-actualisation as opposed to, for example, Asian cultural values that espouse dependence and conformity (McDonald, 1995). Anglo-Australian culture has an individualistic orientation with a quite relaxed and easy going attitude (Hofstede, 1980).

Regarding parenting styles and practices in Australia, there is a perception that Anglo-Australian parenting styles and practices are significantly different to the parenting practices of other cultural groups. The literature points to a mostly authoritative style of parenting which would imply that Anglo-Australian parents use inductive approaches when disciplining their children (Kolar & Soriano 2000). The inductive approach involves giving reasons to the child as to why he/she is being disciplined and the use of persuasion to achieve or deter him/her from certain activities. However, the authoritative style can also impact on certain aspects of parenting “such as rewards and punishment which fall into the
category of power-assertive disciplinary techniques” (Kolar & Soriano, 2000, p. 9). This disciplinary technique is associated with an authoritarian parenting style.

The overall Anglo-Australian parenting goal is to encourage children to be independent and exercise autonomy. This reflects the Anglo-Australian cultural view of anti-authoritarian values (Osmond, 2000). In Australia, teenagers are more independent than teenagers from other cultures as Anglo-Australian parents hold different views of their children’s personal and developmental aspects of maturity, autonomy and independence (Renzaho, 2011; Sims & Omaji, 1999).

In an Australian study of comparative parental disciplinary practices used by mothers from the same socio-economic level and geographic area in Anglo, Greek, Lebanese and Vietnamese cultures in Australia (Papps et al., 1995), it was found that power assertion, commonly linked to authoritarian parenting, was the most frequently used disciplinary approach by all four groups of mothers. However, Vietnamese mothers preferred the inductive techniques which involved explaining reasons and persuasion in disciplining their children. These findings contrast with the findings of Harvey (1998) that Anglo-Australian parents are authoritative rather than authoritarian. This study sought to further explore these contrasting findings.

There is another perception or myth that the extended family does not exist in Anglo-Australian families. This has been challenged by research findings showing strong links with extended family members as a valuable support network (Millward, 1998). In an Australian study (Kolar & Soriano, 2000) it was demonstrated that extended family members were vital construct of the Anglo-Australian culture. Children’s contact with extended families was central in providing supports for the children, which points to a cultural similarity regarding extended and valued relationship that grandparents have with their grandchildren. The extended family is therefore considered as an integral part of the parents and their grandchildren’s lives (Kolar & Soriano, 1998). These studies are quite old and need to be reconsidered in the context of the current multicultural fabric of the Australian family and society. This current research creates a further opportunity to extend and build on Millward’s (1998) and Kolar & Soriano’s (2000) findings, to understand the role of the extended family in the current Australian family and society, with special focus on the influences of the extended family on intercultural parenting. The next section looks at how cultural factors influence parenting and family socialisation among intercultural couples.

2.8 The Intercultural Couple

An intercultural couple is regarded as two adults in a relationship who came from different nationalities, race, religion, ethnicity and language (McFadden & Moore, 2001; Perel, 2000; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Intercultural couples often have the task of navigating through and negotiating and resolving their cultural differences to enhance their relationship.
Common concerns in intercultural relationships are described as: values, gender, religion, childrearing, money, sexuality, social class, language (Frame, 2004) and barriers to communication because of the absence of a common language in which they could communicate fluently and understand each other (Romano, 2001). Intercultural couples have the added challenges of resolving cultural differences because two separate individuals have crossed over to form a relationship, negotiating divergent cultural values, determining place of residence and making decisions which are also influenced by external forces such as extended family and community members (Adams, 2004). They also lack similar socialisation processes in facilitating marital agreement compared to mono-cultural couples from the same economic, social and cultural background (Crippen, 2008). Most marriages are between individuals of the same race (Zebroski, 1999) in which couples develop strategies of marital decision-making. However, intercultural couples are more likely to encounter additional challenges because they hold more divergent values, beliefs, attitudes, and habits compared to mono-cultural couples (Ho, 2001) and the additional need to negotiate those cultural variations, especially when it comes to parenthood.

Generally, society has a greater acceptance of mono-cultural couples which lends to a greater focus on how intercultural couples deal with the outside forces (Henderson, 2000). Although conflicts occur in all relationships, the challenges are exacerbated for intercultural couples because of cultural differences. In a qualitative study which explored how intercultural couples negotiated racial and cultural differences (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013), the analysis revealed that “cultural issues appeared most salient to them within the internal working of their marriages, while racial issues became more relevant when they interacted with others and the larger community” (p. 53).

Other challenges for intercultural couples are described as social attitudes from encouragement and acceptance to hostility and intolerance (Bhugra & De Silva, 2000); non-acceptance from families and cultural groups, social ostracism, and problems of adjustment in communities (Kilian, 2001b; McFadden & Moore, 2001; Zebroski, 1999); families of origin influencing the role of grandparents and the hierarchical ranking of members in the extended family system (Hsu, 2001).

Other factors in the internal and external environment of the couples, including ethnic, social, political and economic conditions, can significantly impact on the relationship status of the intercultural relationship. Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell (2009) proposed a similar perspective by examining the role of systems theory in intercultural relationships. Concerns for intercultural couples were described in three domains: (1) power dynamics regarding the impact of social class, wealth and language issues; (2) an evolving couple system, which suggests that intercultural couples may not share their understanding of what marriage means; and (3) ecosystems, which addresses issues of race, gender, and the involvement of family. The common concerns mentioned above for intercultural couples are the focus of this current study.
Cultural differences often trigger conflict from which intercultural couples can experience high levels of stress and tension (Bhugra & DeSilva, 2000; Chan & Smith, 1995; Crohn, 1998; Falicov, 1995; McFadden & Moore, 2001; Moffitt, 2012). Falicov (1995) argued that intercultural couples experienced several layers of stress that differ to mono-cultural couples, due to cultural differences. Layers of stress included conflicts in cultural code, cultural differences, disapproval from family, friend and institutions, cultural stereotyping, maximising or minimising difference and similarity by couples, unbalanced view of the world causing polaristaion and disharmony, cultural transition from one stage and place to another, individual or family life-cycle issues, styles of communication, and child rearing values. These sources of stress for intercultural couples were confirmed in a later qualitative phenomenological study of intercultural couples exploring stressors due to cultural attributes (Bustamante et al., 2011). This study added other stressors experienced by intercultural couples, including religious and ethnic beliefs, and that intercultural marriages may have less marital satisfaction compared to mono-cultural marriages.

Bustamante et al. (2011) identified six primary coping strategies to reduce stressors: “(a) gender-role flexibility; (b) humour; (c) cultural deference by one partner; (d) recognition of similarities; (e) cultural reframing or the development of blended values and expectations that redefined the intercultural relationship; and (f) a general appreciation for other cultures” (p. 154). A valuable aspect of this study is that it viewed intercultural couples from the perspective of a strengths-based rather than a deficit model. The study was however limited to the experiences of only five intercultural couples. This study aimed to explore the experiences of a larger sample of intercultural parents with a view to extend on the above research and to understand more in-depth stressors and coping strategies experienced by intercultural couples and parents.

Intercultural couples may be more dysfunctional, and conflicts are more likely to result in marriage dissatisfaction or even divorce than those of mono-cultural couples (Cheng, 2010; Durodoye, 1994; Gaines & Brennan, 2001; Falicov, 1995; Monahan, 1970; Okitikpi, 2009; Rankin & Maneker, 1987; Skowronska et al., 2014; Troy et al., 2006). In a study of intercultural marital conflict and satisfaction in Taiwan (Cheng, 2010), marital satisfaction was positively associated with conflict management styles that used integrating, obliging and compromising styles. The results were consistent with previous findings that reported “integrating and compromising are the favoured conflict management styles for both husbands and wives in traditional and non-traditional relationships” (p.360). The integrating style involved a high concern for each other. The compromising style involved a moderate concern for each other. An obliging style involved one partner surrendering to the needs of the other in order to minimise conflict and achieve relational harmony (Cheng, 2010).

In a study of marital satisfaction factors in intercultural couples based on Westerner and non-Westerner relationships, Skowronska et al. (2014) found that factors such as “acculturation, language and communication, attitudes toward marriage, individual traits
and behaviours, support of the family, societal views, gender roles, managing of the household finances and child rearing” (p. 346) have an impact on intercultural couples’ marital satisfaction. In another qualitative study that examined communication in intercultural marriages (Tili & Barker, 2010) important areas of communication competence developed and used by intercultural couple were self-awareness, open-mindedness, mindfulness, showing respect, self-disclosure, and face-support. Important strategies to resolve conflict constructively included changing perspectives and using open communication.

Marital satisfaction has also been related to selection and relationship standards, that is, the likelihood of individuals in selecting a partner similar to themselves and converging overtime (Hiew, Halford, Van de Viver, & Liu, 2015). This study examined the endorsement of Chinese and Western relationship standards by Chinese, Western, and intercultural Chinese-Western couples in Australia. Western couples rated intimacy and the demonstration of love and caring as more important for a successful couple relationship. Chinese couples rated relations with the extended family, relational harmony, face maintenance, and traditional gender roles as more important for successful relationships. Intercultural couples endorsed the standards that were intermediate between the Chinese and Western couples. Almost all cultural combinations of partners shared greater similarity on standards. Across cultural combinations, high agreement between partners on both standards, predicted high relationship satisfaction (Hiew et al., 2015). The context of relationship selection and standards will be further explored in this current study.

It is reported that generally, intercultural couples are keen to negotiate and resolve their cultural differences. Romano (2001) described that couples negotiate their differences in one of four ways: (1) one partner solely embraces the cultural practices of their partner; (2) couples may seek compromise whereupon both relinquish aspects of their own culture and reach for equal cultural practices; (3) the couple ignores their differences, including traditions and norms and search for neutral grounds; or (4) the couple comes to a consensus whereupon each partner retains aspects of culture that are of important significance to them. In his later revised study (2008), Romano pointed out that successful intermarried couples share similar desires and expectations regarding commitment to their relationship and views about each other’s roles as husband and wife. According to this author, the key factors for positive marital adjustment in intercultural relationship include cultural appreciation, commitment, sensitivity, flexibility, common goals, sense of humour, love, sense of adventure and positive self-image. Other paradigms, such as the model of interracial relationship development (Foeman & Nance, 2002) suggested that couples navigate between the stages of racial awareness, identity change, coping and maintenance with a view to understand the nature of their relationship.

As mentioned above, the literature on intercultural relationships mostly has focused on the deficit perspective, that is, the challenges experienced by intercultural couples. There is an
assumption of a greater divorce risk in comparison to mono-cultural relationships. Recent studies have however challenged this assumption (Irastorza & Devoretz, 2009), and the myths that pervade western societies that intercultural couples are not stable, are trying to make a statement or have other motives for marriages (Kenney & Kenney, 2012). This current study sought to look beyond the myths and stereotypes and give voice to the intercultural couples themselves about their personal and lived experiences of being in mixed marriages.

There is a remarkable paucity of understanding about the successes, opportunities and benefits of intercultural relationships and parenting. In a comprehensive study of cross-cultural marriages (Romano, 2001), identified the rewards of their relationships, including: developing a deeper understanding of self; cultivating an international identity; providing their offspring a richer world; and a sense of belonging to the evolving multicultural world. Falicov (1995) and Molina et al. (2004) offered similar perspectives on the opportunities and success of intercultural relationships. Falicov (1995) recognised that “as time goes on, efforts at mutual adaptations and accommodations eventually lead to increased understanding and tolerance, and even to personal transformations that could be compared to a process of mutual acculturation” (p. 234). This current study aimed to explore the experiences of intercultural couples and parents from strength-based perspectives.

In view of the challenges and opportunities that impact on intercultural relationships, some intercultural couples engage in developing and cultivating a new culture, described as the transcultural family, that embraces both their individual and familial diverse cultural backgrounds. This is explored in more detail below.

2.9 The Transcultural Family

In a literature review of intercultural parenting, Crippen & Brew (2007) described transcultural as “represents the new family culture that is created when the cultures of two people from different backgrounds intersect to form a new culture” (p. 107). The creation of the transcultural family becomes much more meaningful when intercultural couples raise children in the relationship as their values and beliefs about childhood may be different. According to Ho (1990), when intermarried couples have children, it has the potential to reignite the couples’ own childhood experiences which discounted their own cultural beliefs about parenting.

After becoming parents, couples have to renegotiate their previous strategies of communication, compromise, consensus and flexibility regarding cultural differences which may have been minimised, accommodated, or ignored because each developmental stage of the child creates specific stressors for intercultural parents. In addition to negotiating and integrating their cultural differences, intercultural parents are encouraged to develop a new family identity that would embrace their different cultural backgrounds and “they must develop strategies to construct a third, transcultural family systems” (Crippen & Brew, 2007,
The creation of the transcultural family identity “would reflect the realities of both partners and offer a foundation for addressing those matters occurring during the family cycle” (Moffitt, 2012, p. 62)

Several earlier scholars expressed similar views to Moffitt, but went further in describing the benefits and opportunities associated with transcultural family frameworks such as “broader, stronger social and cognitive skills sets, as well as personal strength such as cultural adaptation, intercultural effectiveness, greater interpersonal flexibility, and less ethnocentric attitudes” (Crippen & Brew 2007, p. 112). There seems to be paucity in the literature on transcultural family identities. This current study sought to expand on previous studies and explore the phenomenon of transcultural family in the experiences of intercultural couples. The next section will address the theoretical underpinnings about intercultural parenting.

2.10 Theoretical Assumptions about Intercultural Parenting

Scholars and researchers have acknowledged that individuals’ behaviour and experiences are largely influenced by personal, social, cultural, environmental and contextual attributes. Nevertheless, there are several societal assumptions about intercultural relationships, marriages and parenting. Gergen (1999) and Berger and Luckmann (1996) proposed that social reality and meaning are co-constructed. This epistemology removes perceptions away from the individual and defines them from a different perspective that is, “placing them directly into the realm of discourse, social relations, and the contextual decisions of the majority” (Burr, 2003, p.9).

Other social theorists also believe that human beings operate within and are impacted by several interconnected systems. As noted previously, Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the ecological systems theory of human development, which assumed that human beings develop and function within interconnected systems. The ecological concept, applied to intercultural parenting, would assume that the experiences of intercultural parents are influenced by their interconnected systems and contexts such as parental system, neighbourhood, schools, friends, extended family and the broader socio-cultural system (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004). Most studies have explored the experience of mixed-race children, and identified the ‘parent factor’ as a significant variable that influenced the lives of mixed-race children (Kenney, 2002; McClurg, 2004; Martinez, 2001). Also, most of the studies were conducted within the traditional racial binary of black and white biracial children. Only a few have explored the experience of intercultural parents (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Crippen & Brew, 2013; Hubber, 1998; Singla, 2015).

In a publication on the raising of biracial children, Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) used the systemic lens to emphasise the influence of the multi-systems and the environmental contexts impacting on the experiences of mixed-race children and their families. The multi-systems were described as parents, extended families, peers, and the school environment.
However, the study lacked in-depth qualitative exploration of the multi-systems factors, as the latter would have allowed an understanding of the interacting patterns between the multi-system factors. The systemic concept, applied to intercultural parenting, would also assume that the experiences of intercultural parents are influenced by the multi-systems and environmental contexts. These important factors were explored in the current study.

Most researchers have addressed the issues of raising mixed-culture children from a developmental point of view. Rockquemore & Laszloffy (2005) and Kich (1992) suggest that the formation of children’s racial identity is age-appropriate, that is, linear and sequential in nature. It is therefore important for intercultural parents to foster children’s development regarding positive self-concept and multiracial identity between the ages of three to ten because this is the vital age during which children go through the phase of awareness and dissonance. Between the ages of eight to late adolescence, bi-cultural children go through the phase of struggle for acceptance, and ultimately into the phase of self-acceptance and assertion of mixed-racial identity during their young adulthood stage (Kich, 1992).

Other researchers have focussed on the experiences of intercultural couples and parents from a deficit perspective, based on their perspectives of intercultural parents in therapy. Intercultural relationships and parenting have been described as challenging, as being the cause of stress in intercultural families (Bratter & King, 2008; Bustamante et al., 2011; Crohn, 1998; Romano, 2001; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). Studies on sources of stress for intercultural couples focused on: “(a) profound differences in cultural values and worldviews; (b) “macro-cultural” or negative societal and family reactions and “micro-cultural” difficulties or differences in values, beliefs, and customs; (c) distinct communication styles; (d) religious and ethnic beliefs; and (e) “unbalanced view” of cultural differences” (Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen & Monakes, 2011, p. 155).

Another assumption is that parents bring up their children as they were reared themselves. The literature supports this argument. Parenting styles such as warmth and control can be transmitted inter-generationally. Authoritarian or authoritative parenting styles may also be transmitted because of the parents’ cultural views about children and child-rearing practices (McDermott & Fukunaga, 1977; Santrock, 2007). In a cross-sectional questionnaire study of intergenerational transmission of reported parenting styles (warmth and control), Tanaka, Kitamura, Chen, Murakami, and Goto (2009), found that “parents” rearing behaviours are similar to those experienced by their own parents when they were children. For example, transmission of corporal punishment is often reported to occur between two generations” (p. 82). The study also found that intergenerational transmission of parenting styles is mediated by another important variable, personality, which is partly influenced by hereditary and environmental factors.

Other studies in the family domain have emerged which challenges the concept of the nuclear family in contemporary families. Sabourin (2003) suggests that the nuclear family structure is no longer the model or measure from which to compare other forms of family,
and that with cultural diversity in the new family system, the focus has evolved to other variables such as religion, race, and sexual orientations. Furthermore, Floyd and Morman (2006) examined other variables of family structures that were missing in studies of family communication, such as the extended family: aunts, sibling-in-laws, grandparent-grandchild relationship, and relations through adoption. In line with Gonzalez and Harris (2009), these authors did not see families as explicitly embedded in cultural and cross-cultural meanings and systems. Turner and West (2003, 2011) also recognised the salience of diversity in the context of family studies and proposed additional variables impacting on family structures such as gender, disability and class. Given the interconnectedness of relational and parenting dynamics, these variables about diversity would most likely reflect on the parenting experiences of intercultural parents. This study also supports the above expressions of the need for more inclusive scholarship concerning the experiences of intercultural parents.

While acknowledging the fact that intercultural couples face some challenges and negative stereotypes, theoretical influences on intercultural relationships and parenting are slowly evolving from a deficit to a strength-based perspective, highlighting the benefits and opportunities of intercultural relationships and parenting, and the processes for their success (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Bustamante et al. 2011; Crippen, 2008, 2011; Irastorza & Devoretz, 2009; Ruebelt et. al. 2015; Seshadi & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Yancey & Lewis, 2009; Yodanis et al. 2012). According to Bustamante et al. (2011), despite culture-related stressors experienced by intercultural couples, other studies of intercultural relationships and parenting have “viewed intercultural relationships as an additive or enriching interaction in which individuals either learn from each other and blend or move beyond cultural differences through appreciation and humour” (p. 155).

Crippen (2008, 2011) identified several transformative opportunities for intercultural individuals, couples and parents. Cultural competency was “enhanced through the development of a broader frame of reference, increased cultural sensitivity, tolerance for diversity…. access to other models of parenting and the opportunity to confront and negotiate imprinted cultural values” (2011, p. 7).

Ruebelt et al. (2015) identified several strengths characteristics in intercultural couples such as cross-cultural adaptation and awareness, creation of unity and shared reality, establishment of strong interpersonal foundation, two way acculturation, tarof, and transculturation. The word “tarof” by Persian definition means “offer” and refers to a traditional role play that ensures equality. Transculturation is another term for the individual level of acculturation. These characteristics acted as the buffer to intercultural adjustment. Research with a particular focus on the experiences of intercultural parents is limited, and needs to be extended beyond black-white couples in the American context. The exploration of the experiences of intercultural parents from a wider intercultural context may generate different and richer perspectives on the experience of intercultural parenting,
and was, therefore, the focus of this current study. The next section addresses the challenges intercultural couples face over parenting.

2.11 Conflicts and Challenges over Child-Rearing for Intercultural Couples

Most couples face challenges in their relationship, but intercultural couples may face additional challenges as a result of cultural conflicts over parenting (Berg-Cross, 2001; Hsu, 1991: Keller et al., 2004a; Romano, 2001). The birth of a child becomes a stress point for all couples because of the necessary realignment from a marital dyad to a family dyad (Beck, 1988). This is reflected in intercultural relationships that are stable until a child is born (McDermott & Fukunaga, 1977) because previous cultural negotiations are not totally relevant to the new transcultural family environment. According to the literature, on top of all generally accepted challenges in childrearing faced by the broader community, intercultural couples face a bigger challenge from the changes because the birth of a child can be a trigger for conflict for couples who previously ignored or minimised the impact of their cultural differences (Bhugra & De Silva, 2002; Crohn, 1995; Romano, 2001). According to Ho (1990), the birth of a child may reignite the couple’s childhood experiences and beliefs about parenting. Examples of the variations in child rearing practices would be differences in fundamental values such as interdependence, autonomy, conformity and obligation (Mann & Waldron, 1977); contradictory goals and conflicts over discipline and parenting styles, racial and cultural identification, appropriate age of individuation and separation from the family of origin; expectation of child behaviour; levels of emotional involvement with the child such as distal versus proximal styles (Hsu, 2001; Keller et al., 2004b); and reduced marital satisfaction (Durodoye, 1994; Fu, Tora & Kendall, 2001).

With intercultural couples, sources of conflict include the other’s norms, values, religious beliefs, meanings and rituals (Perel, 2000; Romano, 2001); educational goals, forms of parent-child relationships, conflicting styles of parenting between the spouses (Berg-Cross, 2001); different gender role expectations and division of household labour (Tseng, 1977); discrepant child rearing expectations (Imamura, 1990); roles and expectations of the extended family (Gupta, 2008; Joshi & Krishna, 1998); and communication patterns between parents and children (McDermott & Fukunaga, 1977) In addition to these difficulties, McDermott & Fukunaga (1977) suggest that conflict in parental values can lead to emotional disturbance in children of those marriages.

Gender roles and ethnicity were also found to contribute to marital conflict during child-raising among different ethnic groups (Mackey and O’Brien, 1998). Tseng (1977) also found gender as one of the sources of conflict in the marital and child-rearing phase. Hoffman (2010) also referred to the term intensive or hyper parenting, which is a child-centred approach requiring lots of time and emotion. In this approach, the focus is still on mothers, termed “intensive mothering” which is a gendered model of parenting perceived as being responsible for most of the primary care to ensure the child’s proper development (Wall, 2010). Intensive parenting is therefore a gendered issue. Research consistently points to the
continuing salience of the provider identity for men and that their work identity is stronger than their identity as fathers (Townsend, 2002). It is not clear, though, that this perception is prevalent in all cultures. This aspect of fatherhood seems to continue among intergenerational fathers. Consequently, these findings indicate that intercultural couples were most likely to manifest differences in negotiation style due to gender and ethnic differences. The next section addresses how intercultural couples/parents negotiate and resolve their cultural differences about parenting.

2.12 Negotiation and Resolution of Intercultural Parenting Conflicts

When intercultural couples become parents, they have the additional task of negotiating intercultural parenting styles and practices, compared to mono-cultural couples. Romano (2001) suggested that couples embrace one of four styles of negotiating their cultural differences. According to the first style, one partner submits to the norms of the host culture and relinquishes his or her own practices. The second style relates to compromise whereupon each partner relinquishes some of their own culture in order to reduce conflict. The third style is one where the couple is in complete denial of the differences, and forfeits their tradition and values in search for neutral territory. With the fourth style, they seek consensus, with each partner exercising mutuality and flexibility by keeping some attributes of their culture that they consider to be essential for their well-being.

This last style of negotiating cultural differences is well reflected in Cross’s model (1971) of the development of “black” identity and applicable as a measure of successful intercultural relationships. Cross’s model includes the pre-encounter, encounter, emersion and internalization stages. In applying the Cross’s model to intercultural couples, McFadden & Moore (2001) suggested that “during the pre-encounter stage, individuals may perceive themselves as inferior to outside groups... it is necessary to recognise a need to tap human resources that will permit their cultural entry. Thus, the encounter stage emerges to permit the beginning of social communication... wherein individuals begin to access opportunities that provide for self-inquiry and interactive exposure” (p. 263). During the emersion stage, individuals engage in intensive and ongoing “social contacts across cultural lines that have economic and ethnic implications... there are numerous opportunities for self-talk and intercultural dialogue” (p.264). Finally, internalisation “is equivalent to cultural transcendency... as individuals experience this stage, they are transculturally and transspiritually functioning in the relationships that provide them with the basis for making decisions leading to future marriage within and across culture” (pp. 264).

A low rating for these stages can affect a couple’s overall adjustment and satisfaction in the relationship. Cross’s model has been successfully applied by social researchers, including McFadden and Moore (2001), to studies of relationships across cultural communities.

Other studies on intercultural marriage and parenting reported similar patterns of negotiation and resolution of differences. Markoff (1977) identified two solutions to
problems encountered in intercultural relationships which he termed “symmetric” and “asymmetric”. In the symmetric solution, one partner relinquishes his/her culture in favour of that of the host culture. In the asymmetric solution, both partners create new culture. Tseng (1977) identified five styles of cultural adjustment in intercultural marriage: “(1) one-way adjustment: one partner gives into the culture of the other; (2) alternative adjustment: the couple alternates between cultural styles; (3) simultaneous adjustment: elements of both cultures are adopted at the same time; (4) mixing adjustment: alternative adjustment at the micro level, that is using aspect of one culture or the other; and (5) creative adjustment: the couple adopts elements of neither culture, but finds their “own” way” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 12).

In their study on parenting “mixed” children, Caballero, Edwards and Puthussery (2008) found that the parents dealt with ongoing challenges about their own and children’s differences and sense of identity and belonging by refraining from regarding the problem as embedded in ascribed and cultural differences but rather “they could shift to seeing it as a difference that stemmed from personal preferences which was then more amenable to negotiation and accommodation” (p. 54). They identified three approaches in the parents’ description of raising their children:

- "An individual approach, where children’s identity is not necessarily related to their particular backgrounds. Parents could variously see their children as living cosmopolitan lives, developing their organic inner selves, making choices about their identities and transcending colour in the new modernity.

- A mix approach, where children’s background is seen as a rooted and factual part of who they are. Parents could variously feel that it was important for their children to know and be proud of their specific heritages, and regard mixed-ness as an identity in and of itself.

- A single approach, where one aspect of children’s background is given priority. Parents could variously stress the rules and values for life associated with the particular heritage, and see it as transcending other difference (notably faith over colour) and as being part of their children’s intrinsic selves” (p.53).

Singla (2015), drawing on sociocultural psychology came to similar conclusions about negotiation of differences and belongingness among intercultural parents. The qualitative, exploratory study was conducted in the Danish context and limited to six couples involving Danes and South Asians (Indian/Pakistani). Studies of other intercultural couples would most likely broaden knowledge and enrich the literature on the experiences of intercultural parenting in the Danish context.
The above-mentioned studies do not explain why intercultural couples adopt these problem solving strategies. Although, Crippen (2008) and Crippen and Brew (2013) developed a typology of parenting strategies used by intercultural parents, with an underlying model to explain why parents used those strategies. The underlying model included “constructions of difference and degree of mutual acculturation” (2013, p. 266). The strategies used by the intercultural couples were influenced “by and an intersection of the country of residence and level of acculturation; gender and/or primary caregiver influence; desire to transmit culture of origin; and opportunities for cultural immersion experiences” (2013, p. 269). This study sought to further understand why intercultural couples select these different strategies for conflict resolution over parenting. Although intercultural couples/parents experience additional challenges in their relationship and parenting dynamics to that of mono-cultural couples, they also experience many benefits and opportunities of intercultural relationship and parenting. The positive experiences are explored below.

2.13 Strengths and Opportunities of Intercultural Marriage and Parenting

Most studies on intercultural marriage has been carried out in the clinical domain, and has approached the issues from a deficit perspective, focussing on cultural difference as the source of conflict and stress for intercultural couples (Bratter & King, 2008; Hsu, 2001; Perel, 2000; Solsberry, 1994). There is no denial that intercultural couples face many challenges and negative assumptions. However, intercultural couples also benefit from being in intercultural relationships. The same can be said for children of those relationships. Some studies have focussed on the processes that shape successful intercultural relationships (Falicov, 1995; Gaines & Agnew, 2003; Yancey & Lewis, 2009). Falicov (1995) examined the opportunities and positive impacts of cultural differences on intercultural couples and identified a stage of cultural transition for intercultural couples that can lead to enrichment for each partner in the relationship. Also, mutual adaptation and accommodation can lead to increased cultural sensitivity, understanding and tolerance of diversity, personal transformation and mutual acculturation (Falicov, 1995). In also exposes intercultural couples to different forms of parenthood from which they can negotiate entrenched cultural norms and values.

When two people from different cultural backgrounds form an intercultural relationship, their cultures intersect to form a new family structure, termed “transcultural family”. Transcultural families promote strong social and cognitive capabilities and personal strength over diversity (Mann & Waldron, 1977). Intercultural couples tend to bring up bicultural children who have a broader worldview, are aware of the complexities of different cultures (Romano, 2001), and gain a sense of “cultural belonging, increased cultural literacy, [cultural] adaptability, and heightened empathy” (Crippen, 2011, p. 8). The term “bicultural” children in this study, refers to children whose background is composed of two different cultures.
In her study exploring cultural dissonance among intercultural couple and families, Crippen (2011) identified several transformative opportunities for intercultural couples and children. Transformative opportunities for couples included the enhancement of cultural competency through “the development of a broader frame of reference, increased cultural sensitivity and tolerance for diversity; access to other models of parenting and the opportunity to confront and negotiate imprinted cultural values; and parenting in another language provides an opportunity to learn or create a different style of parenthood than that which was modelled in childhood” (p. 7). Transformative opportunities for children included cultural belonging through a sense of connectedness; increased cultural literacy and adaptability from an expanded worldview and multilingualism; and cultural empathy through increased cultural awareness from the experience of belonging to an intercultural family. Intercultural couples can develop strength and resiliency in the marriage from their experience of shared cultural diversity, greater richness, and variation for potential solutions can also be achieved from cultural diversity in the family (Mann & Waldron, 1977). Other potential strengths among intercultural couples have been identified as curiosity about differences (Ting-Toomey, 2009), and similar interests and egalitarianism (Yancey & Lewis, 2009).

However, there is limited research focussing on the experiences of intercultural couples. Previous studies have focused mainly on the relationships between black and white partners in the United States (Karis, 2003; Killian, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2001). Intercultural couples include a broader spectrum of cultures such as Indian, Asian, African, Islamic/Arabic, Hispanic, Islander and Caucasian relationships. This study aimed to reach a diversity of the cultural communities in Australia in order to expand on current understanding and knowledge of the strength and transformative opportunities for couples and children in intercultural marriages and relationships.

Overall, the literature reflects significantly on the impact of culture on parenting and supports the fact that intercultural couples experience differences in their parenting styles and practices. This study builds on and expands this hypothesis within the Australian context.

2.14 Conclusion

The literature review on intercultural relationships and parenting has highlighted culture as the most important element in relationships between people of different cultures, and as a frequent source of conflict and requiring adjustments. Various theories of cultural adjustment, adaptation, integration, assimilation and acculturation have been formulated regarding migration and intercultural relationships (Berry, 1990; Falicov, 1995). Other social and psychological theorists (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; LeVine et al., 1994) have emphasised the importance of systemic, contextual and ecological factors that influence parenting behaviours. However, the literature is lacking that examines the microsystems in the
context of intercultural parenting. This gap on the parents’ domain of the microsystem has been examined in this study.

The literature shows that research on intercultural marriage has focussed mainly on conflicts, challenges and constraints. Few studies have been conducted on the opportunities and positive attributes of cultural differences in intercultural relationships and intercultural parenting. This study sought to address the gap. Parenthood has been identified as a significant trigger for conflict in intercultural relationships because parenting differences were not discovered or discussed until the child was born. The primary sources of conflict include culture and ethnicity, differences in parenting styles and practices, gender roles, cultural norms, beliefs and values, educational goals, disciplinary styles, roles of the extended family and the environment. Few studies have explored how intercultural parents resolve conflicts and negotiate an adaptive childrearing strategy. Recent studies of helping professionals revealed that the lack of training was a major concern when working with biracial/intercultural populations (Page, 2003). This study aimed to address the gap in the literature on intercultural parenting in Australia and within the globalised context. It sought to address how intercultural parents experience, negotiate and resolve their cultural values and differences about parenting.

The following chapter outlines the qualitative research design and methodology employed this study. Twenty eight participants’ narratives of their intercultural parenting experiences were collected and examined.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction
The methodology of this exploratory study, as examined in this chapter, considers our knowledge and social construction of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). It addresses the research question, literature review and the research paradigm it used to explore the phenomenon under study. This chapter outlines the research design and methods used in this study. It discusses the reason for using a social constructionism paradigm and qualitative research approach that emphasises subjectivity, lived experience and qualitative rigour. The data collection method, including the research setting, sampling, recruitment of participants and interviews are outlined. This chapter then describes the detailed data analysis process used in this study. The final section outlines the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, the ethical approach adopted in the research process, the role of the researcher, and the limitations of the study. The themes in the literature review guided the framing of the following primary research questions, as outlined in the introduction chapter, to elucidate and understand participants’ experiences of the phenomenon:

1. What are the experiences of intercultural couples in parenting their children?
2. What are the challenges and conflicts of intercultural parenting?
3. What are the positive experiences of intercultural parenting?
4. How do intercultural parents negotiate cultural differences and integrate cultural values in their parenting styles?
5. How can the findings inform intercultural parents and the helping professionals?

3.2 Research Design and Rationale

3.2.1 Social Constructionist Paradigm
Social constructionism is an epistemological approach that considers knowledge of the world as being socially and culturally constructed. Knowledge of phenomena is determined by issues such as socio-cultural factors, shared understanding of meaning, traditions, artefacts, language and practices (Gergen, 1985), and how people construct their perceived reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1996).

This paradigm is guided by two important elements: (1) it assumes that human beings create a model of the social world and its function to rationalise their experience and, (2) that people construct reality through the use of language as forms of communication
Meaning is dynamic and negotiated all the time (Gergen, 2003). In this subjectivist epistemology, “the knower and respondent co-create understandings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). Another basic tenet of the social constructionism paradigm is that the social construction of reality reflects on the subjective experience of everyday life (Berger & Luckman, 1996) and by those engaged in the research process.

Social constructionism rejects the objectivist notion that an objective reality or truth about the world that can be known. Rather, it is argued that experiences are mediated by language and that the researcher aims to understand the interpretations of meaning and knowledge constructed by social experiences, which are a product of interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1996; Gergen, 1992; Wittgenstein, 1953). Also, in the social constructionist paradigm, findings are substantiated by replacing the notions of validity, reliability and objectivity by alternative indicators of research rigour, such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of these concepts in this study is discussed later.

Social constructionism is often confused with social constructivism, and it is therefore important to clarify the differences. Social constructionism focuses on the artefacts that are created through the collective social interactions of a group (Gergen, 1985). Social constructivism on the other hand focuses on the process of knowledge construction from the individual’s perspective, creating their “knowledge claims” from external constructs (Schwandt, 1998, p. 241).

In his earlier writings, Gergen (1985) argued that social constructionism is an interpretation of social phenomena based on social interactions and experiences over time, instead of just individual experience. This approach appears very applicable to understanding the situations of Intercultural couples given that the realities of their lived experiences are co-constructed over time through their interactive relationship and ecological environment. According to Young & Colin (2004), “as an epistemology, social constructionism asserts that knowledge is historically and culturally specific; that language constitutes rather than reflects reality, and is both a pre-condition for thought and a form of social action; that the focus of enquiry should be on interaction, processes, and social practices” (p. 377). When parents from two different cultural backgrounds raise children together, they co-construct meaning about their parenting experiences and social reality, based on their historical, cultural and contextual experience of the phenomenon.

According to Schwandt (2003), “we do not construct our interpretations in isolation, but against a backdrop of shared understanding, practices, and languages” (p. 197). In line with Schwandt (2003) it is possible that there is a shared understanding that can be used to communicate and co-construct a mutual discourse of intercultural parenting. With intercultural parenting, it is assumed that those who come from different cultural communities can mediate their contextual differences through intersubjective
communication. Therefore, this study attempted to understand the realities constructed by intercultural parents in their social and contextual environment (Creswell, 2003).

According to Lincoln and Guba (2003)) there are “no permanent unvarying knowledge bases for truth claims” (p. 274). The social constructionism paradigm enabled me to explore subjective interpretations of intercultural parenting and challenge permanent knowledge bases for truth claims. This view is very important when discussing parenting issues, which has historically been dictated by prescribed ways of knowing. Discussions about parenting in the wider society often focus on the universal, mainstream, majority or Western views of parenting and pay less attention to other non-western and cultural approaches to parenting (Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Patcher & Dumont-Mathieu, 2004; Romano, 2001; Suizzio, 2007). The taken-for-granted styles and practices of parenting is different in the context of intercultural parenting, in that meaning is co-constructed in the current social and contextual environment of intercultural parents. According to Romano (2001), intercultural couples have a unique parenting experience, which is different from other homogenous couples (Romano, 2001).

Social constructionism is a widely applied and accessible theoretical framework for investigating family studies. It has been used in studies of parenting and intercultural relationship (Arendell, 1997; Biever et al., 1998; Crippen, 2008; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013) but only in a few studies of intercultural parenting (Crippen, 2008; Hubber, 1998; Moffitt, 2012). Given that the meaning of parenting experiences is co-constructed in the social and contextual environment of intercultural parents, the social constructionist framework was therefore deemed necessary and appropriate to an exploration of the experiences of intercultural parents in this current study.

3.2.2 Qualitative Approach

Since intercultural parenting is a complex phenomenon, this study required a qualitative research approach, because of its flexibility and ability to capture detailed textual descriptions of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2003). In order to address the research questions, a methodology that could provide a “thick” (Geertz, 1973) description of the phenomena under investigation was required, to provide an accurate as possible representation of the inner experience and meanings that individuals gave to events within their social context (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood & Axford, 2004; Paton, 2002). This approach is “consonant with a theoretical commitment to the importance of language as a fundamental property of human communication, interpretation and understanding” (Smith & Dunworth, 2003, p. 603).

Qualitative research emphasises the qualities and meanings of phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). It generates data that are studied for themes elucidated from the natural language of the participants (Minichiello et al. 2004). Qualitative research is suitable for
research in the social sciences because it embraces subjectivity and a holistic world view (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It focusses on the social construction of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Goldstein, Safarik, Reibolt, Albright and Kellett (1996, p. 299) also argued that qualitative methodology is “responsive to the unique characteristics of culturally diverse groups” as it adequately responds to the complexities in studying culture and other variables that are impacted by it such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. The flexibility of the qualitative methodology used in this study enabled the research to be culturally contextualised and thus appropriate to all the cultures involved in the study.

There are a number of traditional methodologies for qualitative research, classified as interpretive grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, critical action (action research and feminist research), and generalist qualitative methodology (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). This study used a generalist qualitative methodology in line with the social constructionist paradigm, which posits that reality and meaning of phenomena is socially constructed. This study was interested in exploring and generating a descriptive account of the experiences of intercultural parents. The generalist qualitative approach was used to describe the inner experiences of participants, including participants from various intercultural backgrounds instead of, for example, the narrative of one intercultural couple only. The generalist qualitative approach has been used in previous studies of clinical issues for pragmatic reasons that also produced interpretative and qualitative description of the phenomenon (Clark, Barbour, White, & McIntyre, 2004; Hornsten, Sandstrom, & Lundman, 2004).

This study also used a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach because it was interested in exploring the inner parenting experiences of intercultural parents. The qualitative approach has been used in previous studies of intercultural relationships and parenting (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Bustamante et al., 2011; Crippen, 2008; Hubber, 1998) because it was the intention of those studies to explore the inner experiences of intercultural couples and parents.

This type of exploration is personal in nature and involves an intensely interactive process with participants. It therefore required a method that is interactive, subjective, humanistic and holistic (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The qualitative approach added value to this study because its exploratory nature offers a new dimension and insight about studying the social reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of phenomena that is under researched. It also allows for flexibility of the research design as data unfolds (Creswell, 2003). Also, because qualitative research focuses on interpreting how meaning is constructed, it fits well with a social constructionism epistemology, as the latter focuses on the construction of reality and meaning in social and contextual environments, such as intercultural parenting.
3.3 The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is an essential and fundamental part of the process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b; Patton, 2002) whereby he/she collaborates with and has a personal relationship with the people and events under investigation. The quality of information or data obtained is dependent on the interviewer and the nature of the relationship and interaction between the participant and the researcher (Burgess, 1984; Minichiello et al., 2004; Patton, 2002). Based on the purpose of the study and the population and phenomenon under study, it may be useful for the researcher to describe important aspects of self, including linguistic and cultural knowledge, assumptions and biases, and experiences to qualify his/her ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003). The degree of “emic”, that is, insider status, and “etic”, that is, outsider status, reflects the amount of experience of the phenomenon of the researcher with the target population (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

This research stemmed from my lengthy work experience as a psychosocial counsellor in the government and private practice, and my own personal experience and relationships with other parents and friends who are in intercultural marriages. The parents I work and socialize with often seek guidance regarding frequent challenges in raising their children within different cultural and family values. Besides the concerns in other forms of parenting in mono-cultural families, intercultural parents have the added challenge of cultural differences in bringing up children. From a clinical perspective, the cultural differences seem to cause family conflict, social and psychological disturbance in couples and children, domestic violence and sometimes relationship breakdowns (Garcia, 2006; Hsu, 2001; Romano, 2001; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005).

In both these roles, I have witnessed the multiple realities of intercultural parenting. I have had the feeling that the participants, being aware of my intercultural family background, were receptive to my questions and forthcoming about their context. The absence of published literature and knowledge in Australia, on this very important and growing phenomenon, motivated me to undertake this study. I was interested in understanding the particular conflicts and constraints, the benefits and opportunities of intercultural couples in their everyday parental role, and the strategies parents apply in negotiating cultural differences in their child rearing approach.

In designing this study, I was aware of the challenge I raised by having an “insider” perception and pre-conception of the phenomenon from my role as an intercultural parent and professional counsellor. Given that the quality of qualitative data is influenced by the nature of the relationship between the participants and researcher (Minichiello et al., 2004), a limited personal disclosure was employed to gain what Rubin and Rubin (1995) described as “insider status” which facilitated rapport and access to participants. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) also noted, in order to learn about culture, one must be allowed to cross boundaries and be accepted. Given my insider experiences and assumptions about intercultural
relationships and parenting, it was important to focus on what I am trying to discover and to acknowledge my bias. Potential biases were minimised by seeking a wide range of participants’ perspectives, and elucidating narratives of their lived experiences. I also carried out “member checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by checking with the participants that their experiences were properly reflected in the transcript of their interviews to ensure credibility and reliability.

It is also recommended that researchers keep a diary or reflective journal as an integral tool for qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 2003) to “record the progress and directions of the research and researcher” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 218). According to Lincoln & Guba (2003), reflexivity is the ability to “critically reflect on the self as researcher” (p. 283). I kept a diary as a reflective tool to make notes of my personal learning experience about the research process, to record the progress of the research, and to make notes of my preconceptions after the interview. However, these were not used in the data analysis process in this study.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

3.4.1 Participants

Prior to collecting data, the research proposal was first submitted to and approved by the University of Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics No. SWAH2012/4), as part of my Master of Philosophy program, from which I recruited 9 couples (18 participants), and afterwards by the Southern Cross Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics No. ECN-14-066) as part of my PhD program from which I recruited 5 additional couples (10 participants). Participants were recruited from South East Queensland, Australia. This location was appropriate for the study for multiple reasons. It had experienced the greatest population growth rate of any state in the past 25 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). At the time of the 2011 Census, 20.5 percent (899,038 people) of Queensland’s population were born overseas, compared to 17.9 percent (711,451 people) at the 2006 Census. Sixty-four percent of the overseas born people lived in South East Queensland compared to 36 percent for the rest of Queensland. Eleven percent of the population were from non-English speaking background (Department of Immigration and citizenship (DIAC), 2014).

In 2013 through to 2014, there were 36,100 permanent additions to Queensland’s population (ABS, 2014). India was the country of citizenship most frequently nominated by primary 457 visa applicants granted (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014a). In the same period, Queensland received 2,350 permanent additions under the Humanitarian Programme (accounting for 6.5 percent of total permanent additions). Afghanistan (19.0%) was the top country of birth for permanent additions, followed by Iran (14.8%) and Somalia (9.5%). In Queensland people speak more than 220 languages, practice more than 100 religious beliefs and originate from more than 220 countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics,
The representation of the broad multicultural communities increased the chances of reaching the target population for this study.

3.4.2 Sampling Strategies

A purposive sampling strategy, including criterion and snowball methods (Patton, 2002) was employed to recruit the volunteer participants for this study. The criterion method uses a set of criteria to select participants. Participants were selected according to a set of inclusion criteria, and subsequently interviewed. Snowball sampling is a purposive sampling recruitment strategy to locate participants who fit the inclusion criteria. The snowball method is a word-of-mouth approach whereby selected participants were asked to identify as well as referred other potential participants for the study (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) suggested that purposive sampling strengthens qualitative research because it enables the researcher to have a deeper insight of the phenomenon under study. The sample consisted of 28 participants (14 couples). The size of the sample in a qualitative research depends on the nature and aim of the research. Given the qualitative nature of this study, I selected a small information-rich sample which allowed me to explore participants’ experiences “in great depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 227). In this study, intercultural couples were the unit of analysis and the following inclusion criteria were required:

- One person was Anglo-Australian and their opposite-sex partner was a non-Anglo-Australian person who had migrated to and lived in Australia for at least 2 years. The criteria for participants who immigrated to Australia from another country of origin were intended to enable insights into the primary socialisation process of the participant in the country they were born and raised. Likewise, the period of time the immigrant intercultural parent lived in Australia was an important criterion to include because the number of years immigrants settle in the host country impacts on factors such as integration, adaptation, assimilation and acculturation that in turn impacts on parental behaviours (Berry, 1990; Papps et al., 1995; Sims & Omaji, 1999). As mentioned earlier, one of the most cited theories associated with immigrants’ experiences in a host country is psychological acculturation, which is determined by how much the individual is prepared to retain an old culture or adopt the host country’s culture over time (Berry, 1990, 1997) and by an individual’s cognitions and behaviour change over time from continuous exposure to other cultures (Cote & Bornstein, 2003).

- Participants from the broad Australian community, including diverse cultures and backgrounds such as different countries of origin, religions, ethnic heritages and racial identities, were recruited in an effort to maximise cultural diversity. According to Sullivan and Cottone (2006), “intercultural couples are characterised by greater differences between the partners in a wider variety of areas, with race, religion and ethnicity as the primary factors” (p. 222). This is well reflected as shown in Appendix E regarding participants’ demographics. Participants in this study were from Asian, Indian,
African, Arabic, Islamic, and Pacific Islander backgrounds. There are other cultures in Australia whose experiences of intercultural parenting could have enriched this study, but did not participate in this study. This limitation could be addressed in another study of intercultural parenting targeting intercultural couples from other significant cultural communities in Australia.

- The participants were literate and spoke English, as there was an expectation that they would understand the questions and be able to express their experiences.

- Married or de-facto heterosexual intercultural couples, who were the biological parents of their children, and living together, were recruited in order to extract rich data to adequately reflect on their relationship patterns. This criteria was used in other overseas studies of intercultural relationship and parenting (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Crippen, 2008). According to Bratawidjaja (2007) “this specific criterion was important to select parents who are still in the process of parenting their mixed-heritage children” (p. 61).

- The intercultural couples were together raising children aged 0 - 23 and living at home. This age bracket for the children was purposefully selected to reflect on the parenting styles and practices of the parents during the developmental stages of the children because parenting style, discipline, and racial and cultural identification of the child could be sources of conflict during the developmental stages (Tseng & Hsu, 1991).

- Selection was restricted to participants who were prepared to be interviewed together. The conjoint interviews provided opportunities for the researcher to understand how the participants construct and co-construct meaning and knowledge about similarities and differences in their parenting experiences, thus validating the use of a social constructionist perspective. The literature review showed that most research relating to couples and intercultural couples used conjoint interviews (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Bustamante, et al., 2011; Crippen, 2008; Horowitz, 1999; Hubber, 1998; Luke & Luke, 1998; McNeil et al., 2014). According to these authors, a conjoint interview enables the researcher to compare the perspectives of each participant. The limitations of conjoint interviews are further discussed in the limitations section of this thesis.

3.4.3 Recruitment of Participants

This project involved a range of recruitment strategies to generate the purposive sample. I undertook two media interviews with a well-known local radio station and newspaper, as well as an online media release to publicize the study. I also recruited participants from a list of contacts I obtained during community workshops I facilitated on family matters and immigrant and refugee settlement programs in South East Queensland. Intercultural couples were invited to share their experience in the research. Four couples responded to the radio interview, two from the newspaper article, two from the community workshops, one during
a family outing at the beach, and five from the snowball approach, where participants referred other couples they knew in the same situation. Participants who were separated, New Zealander European, and could not do a joint interview were excluded. For ethical reasons, past clinical clients were not recruited because of a clinical relationship with the researcher, but they were encouraged to pass on the names of intercultural couples who would volunteer to take part in the study. Fourteen intercultural couples (28 participants) who responded within the recruitment time-frame were selected and interviewed for the study.

Before proceeding with the interviews, I ensured that all participants who contacted me, and those I was introduced to through the snowball exercise met the established criteria and volunteered as participants. I then emailed them copies of the Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A and B) outlining potential risks of their participation, rights of confidentiality and anonymity, and security of and access to documents, so that they fully understood the research process as participants and our mutual obligations. All potential participants confirmed their willingness to participate in the research. Face-to-face interviews were then scheduled. I was flexible about the places, dates and times of the interviews to accommodate participants’ needs. All the participants, except for one, preferred the interview to be conducted in their homes and provided me with details of their address. In order to establish rapport and comfort, participants were, at the start of the interview, requested to fill in a brief background questionnaire to provide an overall profile of the couples (Appendix D).

3.4.4 Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative exploratory study required a data-gathering method consistent with the framework of social constructionism. The semi-structured interview is one such method and was used in this study. Semi-structured interviews have been widely used in studies of couple relationships and parenting (Bratawidjaja, 2008; Hubber, 1998; McNeil et al., 2014). Nikander (2008) observed that a great deal of influential work using social constructionism paradigms comes from studies using interviews. Interviews are important when one cannot observe or know how participants experience their world. In this study, a face-to-face semi-structured interview provided the opportunity to explore the meanings intercultural parents attach to their experiences. The semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated the exploratory nature of this study, providing unstructured responses while maintaining some consistency of contents across the interview (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson & Harris, 1993). An assumption about the social construction of reality is that research can be conducted only through the dynamic interactive process between the interviewer and interviewee (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Fourteen semi-structured interviews with 14 intercultural couples (28 participants) were conducted to elicit the perceptions of intercultural couples who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Much has been written about data saturation and at what
point to stop scheduling further interviews (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Moustakas, 1994. According to some qualitative methodologists (Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 1998), “one round of long interviews with at least 10 participants could be enough to reach saturation” (Bustamante et al., 2011, p. 157). The length of the interviews in this study, which ranged between one and one and a half hours, allowed for rich data to be obtained, enabling the identification of substantial textual descriptions and themes. Also, each interview brought new and additional perspectives to the research. This was most likely due to the broad cultural diversity of the participants, and because it was a relatively new study of the phenomenon in Australia.

Participants were asked to sign the consent form and be interviewed conjointly in order to participate in the interviews. I developed an interview guide (Appendix C) and used it to ask questions that generated answers linked to the research questions on culture and parenting. The interview guide, whilst providing a framework for the interview, allowed for flexibility to probe into new domains that needed further exploration. Topics covered in the interview guide included the cultural background of participants, cultural values and goals, challenges and conflicts in intercultural parenting, negotiation of cultural differences, factors influencing parenting behaviour, positive experiences of intercultural parenting and helpful advice for current and future intercultural parents. Following provision of informed consent, the interviews were audio taped and conducted face-to-face, lasting between 60-90 minutes in length per couple. Geertz (1973) argued that face-to-face interviews provide “thick” description because they provide the opportunity to focus and expand on a particular aspect of significance. Throughout the interview, I took notes of some important narratives, such as perception of power in parenting approaches that could be useful in the analysis process. According to Patton (2002), note-taking during interviews influences the interview process by non-verbally conveying to the participants that what they are saying is noteworthy. Immediately after leaving the participants, I recorded my feelings and thoughts about the interview process. The notes gave me a general feeling about the interview and direction of the research, and what else I could look into to enhance future interviews.

The interviews were designed to create a participant-centred approach. According to Kvale (1996), the quality of data and subsequent interpretation arising from it depends upon the quality of interaction. In this study, participants were interviewed as a couple. The conjoint interviews elucidated rich data because the couples were very enthusiastic in describing their parenting experiences. From a social constructionist perspective the conjoint interviews pointed to the ways in which couples/parents co-construct their roles and identities as parents together (Gergen, 2009). According to McNeil et al. (2014), trying to understand the perceptions of one parent without simultaneously understanding the partner’s role and their relationship together is an incomplete exercise, because ultimately, parents develop their roles from being part of the family and the larger social environment and structure in which they are immersed.
The participants were also asked to give me their thoughts about the interview and the study to make sure that they were not adversely affected by the interview process. Most of the participants wanted to know whether they would be advised about the results of the research and I guaranteed them a copy of the findings. One participant in particular said that the interview helped her to have a deeper insight into her relationship and be appreciative of their context as a couple and a family.

A digital recording device was used to record the interviews, after which I downloaded the voice recordings and converted them to file formats. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim concurrently within a period of two months by a professional transcription service. The verbatim transcription involved typing out every word and sound on the recording because how something is said is equally important as what is being said. Most of these were utterances such as “mmmm”, “yeah” to encourage the participant and indicate that the researcher was following what they were saying (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Thematic analysis involves immersion in the transcripts. As such, I reviewed all the transcripts by listening to the recordings several times to fully comprehend the participants’ experiences and to make sure that I did not miss anything that was important from the interview due to language and tonal differentiations. Participants were then sent a copy of the interview transcripts for reviewing, as part of the member checking process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), to clarify that the transcripts correctly reflected what they said in the interview. Participants’ confidentiality regarding personal information (Patton, 2002) was strictly observed. All the participants’ names and other identifiable information were modified and special codes were allocated to their transcripts. All participants’ files were secured in a locked cabinet, were accessible only to the researcher and will be destroyed in seven years after the completion of the study in compliance with policies of the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee.

3.4.5 Data Analysis

This study required a social constructionist analytical method that could transform data regarding participants’ meaning and perceived realities of the phenomenon under study into emergent themes and findings. There are many ways to analyse participants’ experiences of a phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). One such method is thematic analysis which is a popular qualitative analytic method “for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It provides a “flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). As such, “thematic analysis conducted within a social constructionist framework cannot and does not focus on motivation or individual psychologies, but instead seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the individual accounts that are provided” (p. 85). It was therefore a suitable method to examine the realities and meaning making of intercultural parent in raising their mixed-culture children. According to Riessman
(2008) thematic analysis is the most widely used analytical approach. I used the general data analysis strategy outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) to code and understand meaning in complex data on the experiences of the intercultural parents.

The analysis started with the process of coding each participant’s transcripts. Before starting this process, and in line with member checking procedures, the participants were sent a copy of the interview transcripts for reviewing to clarify that the transcripts reflected correctly what they said in the interview. An inductive analysis process was used to discover important patterns and themes in data. The inductive approach has been widely described as “a systematic procedure for analysing qualitative data where the analysis is guided by specific objectives... the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data without the restraints imposed by structural methodologies” (Thomas, 2003, p. 2). Despite the fact that I collected the data myself and had some prior knowledge and initial analytic thoughts about it, I considered it very important to immerse myself deeply into the data to familiarise myself with the content and allow themes to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Codes were generated after I read and re-read the data, comparing participants’ responses against each other with a view to capture key words and patterns, generating a list of ideas about what was interesting in them, and developing a list of initial codes that could be assessed regarding the phenomenon. During the coding process, meaningful themes emerged in the data. A list of critical codes and themes were developed that could be assessed in the data.

Then, with each additional interview, a method of constant comparison was used to generate consistency in the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was helpful as it allowed me to move to the next process of categorising and developing the important themes that characterised the perceptions of intercultural parents. For example, all the participants spoke about culture shock, which were responses that described “challenges” in the context of their mixed-marriage. After comparing all the interviews to generate consistency in the code regarding challenges, a major theme entitled “cultures coming together” was developed, that characterised the perspectives of intercultural parents. Direct quotes from participants that matched the relevant themes and sub-themes were then used to support the analytical findings. During the analysis, I kept referring to the research questions to be congruent with the data. Initial analysis from the first interview was not used to guide future interviews.

3.5 Rigour and Trustworthiness

The standard of qualitative research can be judged by the methodological rigour and trustworthiness of the study, that is, good practice when conducting the research (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). It requires the researcher to design the study with regard to appropriate research conventions and critically reflect on the required standard of
the research. In this study, the researcher recognised the need to eliminate his assumptions and biases about the phenomenon to enhance the credibility of the data (Denzin, 1970).

In the social constructionist paradigm, findings are substantiated by replacing the notion of validity, reliability and objectivity in quantitative research by credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness is based on:

- **Credibility**, that is, whether the findings accurately describe the phenomenon;
- **Confirmability**, that is, data audit of the collection and analysis methods to confirm the findings of the results of the study;
- **Dependability**, that is, consistency in the inquiry processes used overtime to make the results dependable; and
- **Transferability**, that is, whether the findings can have meaning in other similar situations (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

These four criteria were used to confirm the methodological rigour and trustworthiness of this study. Regarding credibility, fourteen couples (28 volunteer participants) were interviewed over a period of nine months, generating extensive data to give voice to their experiences and support the analysis and findings. Comparison of the descriptions and interpretations of data was continuously carried out during the study. Member checking procedures outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were carried out. For example participants were sent a copy of the interview transcripts for reviewing to clarify that the transcripts correctly reflected what they said in the interview.

Confirmability was established through an audit trail consisting of interviews, notes, potential codes and themes and reflections were recorded in the research journal. In order to prevent subjective bias and add credibility to my findings in this study, I asked two of my supervisors and a colleague to conduct a peer review and code two transcripts of the interviews, so that I could compare them with my own coding. Two of my supervisors coded two of the interviews. During the coding and analysis process, my advisory team members actively supervised and gave me feedback about the codes and reviewed the final themes to ensure that they captured the participants’ narratives. Besides checking the integrity of the analysis process, all three reviewers also brought fresh and valuable perspectives to the process. For example, each reviewer had some different perspectives about the repetition of some segments of the methodological approach in another paragraph, which other reviewers thought was necessary in qualitative approach because it was introducing the next stage of the methodology towards the methods, thus enhancing the process.

Dependability was established in this study, from only one researcher adopting the same approach throughout the process for all the interviews. The valued judgements that were made were due to the level of consistency of findings over a period of time. This allowed for
the observation of similarities and differences and judgements that were made to remain the same over time, thus supporting the notions of dependability regarding findings.

The findings of this study cannot be generalised because of its qualitative nature. However, they may be transferrable to other settings and groups that share similar characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). In order to enable readers to transfer the findings of a study to other settings with shared characteristics, it is instrumental that the researcher collects rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study generated rich thick data of the experiences of intercultural parenting, presented in the findings Chapter 4 and 5, and can be used to determine transferability to other settings in Australia and globally.

Researcher reflexivity is another important tool in qualitative methods, whereby the researcher maintains subjectivity journals (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) to monitor his/her bias, by recording his/her thoughts and interpretations throughout the study. For example, in the first interview I thought that I was vocalising the “yes” word too often and balanced it instead with nodding gestures from the second interview and onwards.

Finally, according to Floden (2007), judgement about quality also necessitates considering whether the study addresses a question of social significance. In other words, does the study address a phenomenon that is important to knowledge, policy and practices? This current study’s contribution to knowledge, policy and practice has been outlined in the introduction chapter.

3.6 Ethical Practice

As mentioned earlier in the data collection and analysis section, the researcher applied for and obtained ethics approval to interview participants from the University of Queensland and Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix F1 and F2). Before conducting the interviews, participants were emailed or personally given a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) describing the background, purpose, goal and rationale for the research, and the procedures I would follow in the interview. Also, permission for the publication of any significant quotes from the interview was sought as part of the informed consent process (Appendix B).

One can argue that in-depth interviews are an intrusion of privacy, especially when investigating phenomena that is traditionally the private domain of individuals and families. My experience as a counsellor helped me to understand the intricacies of privacy and confidentiality in family dynamics, especially in individualistic societies and cultural contexts. Researchers, therefore, have a duty of care to respect and ensure participants’ privacy and rights. In this research, these obligations were extended to the participating intercultural parents. The researcher acknowledged and complied with the fundamental ethical principles of respect for persons; social justice; and professional integrity outlined in the AASW Code of Ethics (2010) for social work practised in any field. The researcher also
complied with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* of the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC, 2007)) regarding risks involved in research, information that needs to be disclosed to participants and the requirement of participants’ consent. Another international report (Belmont Report, 1979) adopted at the 1978 US National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biochemical and Behavioural Research, also emphasised the ethical principle of “*respect for persons*, which involves protecting the autonomy of all people and treating them with courtesy and respect and allowing for informed consent” (p. 4). During the research period of the study, the researcher was a registered member of the Australian Association of Social Workers, the Australian Counsellors Association and the Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors, and was bound by their respective codes of ethics.

Interviews can sometimes raise difficult issues such as emotional and physical harm (Fontana & Frey, 2003). The potential risks and benefits of participation were explained to the participants and informed consent (Appendix B) obtained to participate in the study. In order to minimise physical risk during the interviews, I considered the use of a safe venue and environment. In this study, all the participants, except for one, elected to be interviewed in their home. Psychological injury can also involve the participants’ perception of the researcher as holding a position of power (Barnett, et al., 2007). I minimised this perception by assuring the participants of their rights, by the way I dressed and presented myself, my attitudes towards them, my use of language and conducting the interviews at a place convenient to them, such as their home, so that they felt comfortable during the interview. I was also respectful of cultural saliency because in certain cultures, people preferred not to talk publicly about certain issues.

All the participants were informed that they can stop their voluntary participation in the study whenever they felt that they could not continue with their participation in the study. They were given the names of my supervisors whom they could contact if they had any concerns about the study. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to guarantee their anonymity and confidentiality. In compliance with policies of the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee, all identifying documents and information have been secured in computer files and a locked filing cabinet in the School of Arts and Social Sciences and at the researcher’s office for a period of seven years after the completion of the study and then destroyed thereafter. Participants were provided with a summary of the research findings in recognition of their contribution to the study.

I was conscious of my emic insider status as a professional counsellor and intercultural parent. It was therefore important to disclose my professional background and intercultural relationship to the participants. Although the insider status helped me to understand the phenomenon, assisted in gaining access, and developed trust with the participants, I was also aware of the bias it can create because of my professional position and experience as
an intercultural parent. Researchers attempt to minimise bias to increase the reliability and authenticity of their research (Silverman, 2006). In order to minimise the bias, I set aside my preconceptions and assumptions of the phenomenon in order to avoid influencing the interviews, and focused on the participant’s meaning making of their lived experience. I checked my own bias by monitoring my integrity through feedback from others on my process.

3.7 Conclusion

This study used a qualitative research design and social constructionist paradigm to explore the experiences of intercultural parents. These two perspectives provided the fit for a methodology that emphasises subjectivity and lived experience of the intercultural participants.

A purposive and snowballing sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants who reflect the broader and diverse cultural communities. The methodology for data collection and analysis included the research setting, sampling strategies, recruitment, semi-structured interviews and analysis procedures. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and describe the participants’ experiences. This involved becoming familiar with the data, formulating codes and identifying themes. Standards of rigour and trustworthiness were established by using the notion of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Also, ethical procedures required for this study were described.

Chapters 4 and 5 outline the results and interpretation of the data on the experiences of intercultural parenting. Chapter 4, Perceptions of Intercultural Experiences, focuses on the cultural identity, challenges for intercultural parents, language and communication problems, commonalities and differences in parenting, contextual influences on parenting and benefits of intercultural parenting. Chapter 5 focuses on power relations, reverse acculturation and managing and negotiating intercultural parenting.
CHAPTER 4: CULTURES COMING TOGETHER

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of intercultural parents in raising their children together. In order to do that, a qualitative methodology was employed to assist in answering the research questions. The study asked the following broad research question: What are the lived experiences of intercultural couples in parenting their children together? The narratives of the participants highlighted issues influencing the parenting styles and practices of intercultural parents. The narratives reflected both the challenges and benefits of intercultural parenting and the negotiation patterns intercultural parents used to resolve their cultural, personal and parenting differences. The participants’ narratives were analysed and interpreted to reflect their lived experiences.

Table 4.1 summarises the four themes identified from the narratives. This chapter provides results and discussion pertaining to Theme 1: Cultures Coming Together. Chapter 5 focuses on Themes 2, 3 and 4: Power Relations, Reverse Acculturation/Enculturation, and Making Intercultural Parenting Work. It is noteworthy that although the themes are distinct and presented separately, there is some overlap between them. For example, parental goals and values are represented across other themes. Also, because the experience of parenting is related to the experience of being a couple, especially in the intercultural situation, these themes are reflected in both contexts.

As outlined in the Methods chapter, participants have been identified by pseudonyms only. The analysis involved 14 couples (28 participants) from south east Queensland. The host participants were of Anglo-Celtic background and their immigrant partners were from diverse ethnic backgrounds as shown in Appendix E. All the immigrant partners spoke English as their second language. Two host partners spoke the first language of their partners as their second language. The participants reflected a diverse national and cultural background, socio-economic status (such as level of education and profession), religious affiliation, level of acculturation, length of the relationship, and number of children, which helped to generate a rich perception of intercultural parenting experiences. This background information about the participants is reflected in the summary of each case study family below to familiarise the reader with the cultural context of their stories.

4.2 Case Studies

Couple 1: Kylie and Malai

Kylie is Anglo-Australian and met her Thai husband Malai while she was holidaying on a small island in Thailand called Ko Samui. Malai was working in the tourist industry and called himself a ‘jungle boy’. He grew up in a small native village where his parents still live and work as street food vendors. Malai practices Buddhism and completed primary school.
education. Kylie is a university graduate and works as a teacher. She was brought up in a Catholic family on the Gold Coast, where her father worked as a local church minister. Malai migrated to Australia 17 years ago and they had been married for 15 years. They have two children, a girl aged 14 and a boy aged 10. Initially, they lived together at her parents’ home and encountered problems with Kylie’s father because of his Thai food culture. They later moved to their own place.

**Couple 2: Naomi and Pravin**

Naomi is Anglo-Australian and met her Indian husband Pravin in Australia. They were living in the same suburb and catching the bus together to the same University. They got married in India where they lived for 5 years. At the time of the interview, they had been together for 14 years. They have a son aged 5. Naomi is in middle management in the public sector, whilst Pravin owns two Indian restaurants on the Gold Coast. Pravin is very close to his family in India and travels there quite often. His parents also come to visit his family every year and stay with them for about three months, which according to them is a great source of support and richness for their son. Naomi is Catholic and Pravin, although being Indian does not necessarily practice the Hindu religion to the letter. However Naomi was shocked when her husband reverted to wearing his toga and grew his hair when they lived in India.

**Couple 3: Anya and Rajack**

Anja is Anglo-Australian and met her Indonesian Muslim husband Rajack through friends while on holiday in Bali. Rajack was a surfer and came to Australia for a surfing competition where he fell in love with Anja and they got married. Rajack is a house painter and Anja is a school teacher. Anja travelled to Bali to visit Rajack during the holidays until they decided to live Australia. They have four children, all boys, aged 13, 11, 5 and 9 months. Rajack, being a staunch Muslim was concerned about the children’s religion if they were to marry. Anja reported that she voluntarily and happily converted to Islam before they got married. They feel that they are not very welcomed in their neighbourhood in Australia.

**Couple 4: Sarah and Samuel**

Samuel is Anglo-Australian and met his wife Sarah at his workplace where she also worked. Sarah was originally from the Philippines and migrated with her parents to Hong Kong. Sarah had a previous immersion experience of the Australian culture prior to meeting Samuel as she has been studying and working in Australia. They had been married for 19 years and have two children aged 14 and 11. They have both been brought up in Catholic families and are university graduates. Samuel is an arts director and Sarah went back to higher studies. Samuel loves Asian food and way of life and their family is more inclined towards Asian culture.
Couple 5: Jim and Michelle

Jim is Anglo-Australian and met his Filipino wife Michelle at her cousin’s barbeque party in Sydney where she was living with her father. Michelle’s sister taught the Filipino language and was helping Jim as one of her students. Jim travelled to the Philippines regularly before he met Michelle and loved the strong family ties and simple way of living he saw there. This is why he decided to marry someone from the Philippines. Jim did not have a strong family life as his parents divorced when he was fourteen years of age. He reported regretting not having been able to continue his education. Jim is an electrician and his wife Michelle is educated and works in a bank. They have been married for 27 years and have twins aged 18. They are both staunch Catholics and raise their children with strong Catholic religious values.

Couple 6: Manuel and Tammy.

Tammy is Anglo-Australian and met her Ugandan husband Manuel through friends in Australia. Manuel came to Australia as an economic migrant and has got very strong extended family ties back in his country home of Uganda as opposed to Tammy who has minimal contact with her extended family. They had been together for 12 years and have two children aged 10 and six months. They are both Catholic and have university degrees. Manuel works in aged care and Tammy is a school teacher. Manuel is very strong-minded about his traditional customs and cultural values such as respect, discipline and work ethics and is in conflict with the Australian ways of parenting.

Couple 7: Daniel and Simla

Daniel is Anglo-Australian and met his wife Simla at a coffee shop in 2005. Simla is from Botswana and had been studying in Australia since 1995. She was just about to finish her Master’s degree and was not sure whether to stay in Australia. They have been together for eight years. They have a son aged 4. Simla had been in Australia for 10 years and had exposure and immersion in the Australian culture and, as she said, she knew what she was getting into. Both Daniel and Simla are university graduates. Simla has a very strong extended family network back in Botswana and travels there quite often. Simla misses her cultural background and tries to keep it alive by working in the multicultural sector where she is constantly involved with her African community and cultural activities, traditions and practices. Both Daniel and Simla encourage their son to embrace African culture and multiculturalism.

Couple 8: Bill and Azumi.

Bill is Anglo-Australian and his wife Azumi is Japanese. They met in Sydney where they were sharing a rental property together. Azumi had been in Australia only for a short while. Bill then moved to Brisbane and eventually to the Gold Coast for financial reasons. By coincidence, Bill found out that Azumi had moved to the Gold Coast and they became
flatmates again and eventually developed a relationship, despite the age difference between the two of them. Bill is 35 years older than Azumi. They had been married for 13 years and have two children aged 11 and 7. Azumi came from a very traditional and conservative Japanese family and her father opposed her marriage to Bill. Eventually when Azumi’s father became sick and needed her to look after him, he agreed for her to marry Bill. Bill and Azumi wanted their children to practice both cultures but were disappointed when the children did not want to learn and speak Japanese and were more inclined to the Australian culture.

**Couple 9: Gary and Yan**

Gary is Anglo-Australian and his wife Yan is Chinese. They met when Yan was attending English conversation classes run by a local church in Brisbane and where Gary was a volunteer helping with the English lesson classes. They had been married for 5 years and have two children aged 3 years and 3 weeks. Gary was previously married and has two adult sons from his previous marriage but they do not live with him. Both Yan and Gary hold university degrees and Gary was doing some further studies, while Yan was staying at home because of the pregnancy. Her parents were helping her with the pregnancy and looking after their daughter.

**Couple 10: Murielle and Jeehan**

Murielle is Anglo-Australian and her husband Jeehan is Turkish and a devoted Muslim. They met through friends at the beach on the Gold Coast at the end of the Muslim Ramadan festival and Jeehan and his friends were talking to her about the Muslim religion. Murielle had never heard about Muslims where she grew up. She liked what she heard, because according to her, religion was not much talked about in the Australian culture and in her family. She researched Islam and became Muslim. Then she went on to marry Jeehan. They had been married for 11 years and have three children, aged 10, 9 and 5. They both hold university degrees. Murielle is a part time University lecturer and Jeehan is continuing with some further studies at the same University. Murielle’s parents were initially opposed to the marriage but later accepted Jeehan when they realised that the marriage was working well.

**Couple 11: Josh and Ng**

Josh is Anglo-Australian and his wife Ng is Vietnamese. They met at the university where they were both studying. Josh is an IT programmer and Ng works in the welfare industry. They had been married for 4 years and have a son aged 20 months. Ng was pregnant at the time of the interview and was expecting her second child in two months. Ng’s parents were at her place helping with their son and her pregnancy. Josh is agnostic and his wife is Buddhist. Josh does not have an issue with the child being taught Buddhism and being brought up with Buddhist values because he believes in strong families. He has witnessed firsthand the benefits of strong family values from his wife’s side of the extended family,
especially since her parents have been around helping and supporting her with their son and her pregnancy.

**Couple 12: John and Rula**

John is Anglo-Australian and his wife Rula is Tongan who was brought up as an adopted child in New Zealand. Rula described herself as very traditional Tongan but also had some exposure to the “white people’s way” as she described it. John travelled to Tonga when his parents were working for the Tongan Government, and was exposed to the Tongan language. John is also quite involved with the Tongan communities and organisations in Australia. They had been married for 7 years and have two children, aged 5 and 2. They are both university graduates Rula was studying at the time of the interview. They are both strong Catholics and quite engaged in church activities.

**Couple 13: Cathy and Will**

Cathy is Anglo-Australian and her husband Will is Maori New Zealander. She lived in Brisbane and was brought up in an academic environment. She met Will at a party on the Gold Coast. He later moved to Brisbane and they had been married for 13 years and have two children, aged 13 and 11. Cathy is a school teacher. Will was a professional footballer, having retired after a serious injury, and is now a truck driver. Will did not have a healthy and positive upbringing because of serious domestic violence in his family and an authoritarian style of parenting from his father who was in the army. Will had a tendency to follow his father’s disciplinary style with the children, which was in conflict with his wife’s parenting style. Will admitted to learning a new way of parenting in his new relationship. Cathy was brought up in an upper class family and was expected to study and marry someone from the same class.

**Couple 14: Jay and Carol**

Carol is Anglo-Australian and her husband Jay is Fijian Indian. They were both studying at the same university and living in the same area and met at the local pub. They got married only 4 months after they met and had been married for 25 years. They have a daughter aged 17 and a son aged 14. Jay is a financial manager and Carol works in the welfare industry. Both Jay and Carol had a similar upbringing as they grew up in remote country towns on farms, helped their parents on the farm, and lived in similar kind of houses.

### 4.3 Summary of Themes Identified

The thematic analysis identified four major themes and twenty sub-themes from the narratives of the intercultural couples about their experience of parenting their mixed heritage children. The major themes are described as (1) cultures coming together as they related to parenting; (2) power relations when parenting; (3) reverse acculturation/enculturation as related to parenting; and (4) making intercultural parenting work. It is important to note that given the link between the experiences of being a parent
to that of being a couple, the themes reflect both of these contexts. The themes and sub-themes are outlined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Themes and Sub-Themes Identified from Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Cultures coming together                 | 1: Cultural identity  
2: Culture shock  
3: Racism and marriage disapproval  
4: Cultural values and customs  
5: Gender roles and beliefs  
6: Language and communication  
7: Similarities and differences in parenting  
8: Contextual influences  
9: Benefits & opportunities of intercultural parenting |
| 2. Power relations                          | 1: Righteousness and privilege of truth  
2: Language and communication  
3: Gender influence  
4: Insider/Outsider status |
| 3. Reverse acculturation/enculturation      | 1: Valuing ethnic heritage and host culture  
2: Reciprocal acculturation  
3: Global culture  
4: Shift in parenting styles |
| 4. Making intercultural parenting work     | 1: Individual sphere  
2: Couples’/parents’ sphere  
3: Child’s sphere |

4.4 Theme 1: Cultures Coming Together

This theme responds to the principal research question of the study that aims to explore the lived parenting experiences of intercultural couples. Despite the fact that intercultural couples and parents developed their own internal relational and parental systems, they were also impacted by other systems such as their families and culture of origin, political, social, economic and legal systems. Systemic factors that greatly influenced the experiences of intercultural couples and parents included the ecosystem in which they lived, interpersonal dynamics in the relationship, and changes in the couples’ system dynamics over time. The intercultural experience encompassed how participants perceived their cultural identities, relationships and the challenges and benefits they encountered as a couple and parent. The data revealed that intercultural couples, in particular immigrant partners, experienced culture shock and negative feelings, followed by gradual cultural adaptation and integrative acculturation within both realms of relational and parenting dynamics.
Nine sub-themes emerged based on the couples’ responses: (1) cultural identity; (2) culture shock; (3) racism and marriage disapproval; (4) cultural values and customs; (5) gender roles and beliefs which describes the influence of gender in decision-making and cultural preferences regarding parenting; (6) language; (7) similarities and differences in parenting practices; (8) contextual influences; and (9) benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting. Table 4.2 summarises the descriptions of the sub-themes for Theme 1, which are further developed in the sections that follow.

Table 4.2: Theme 1 Sub-Themes and Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultures coming together</td>
<td>1: Cultural identity</td>
<td>Describes participants’ experiences of their individual, couple, child, parent, family and religious identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2: Culture shock</td>
<td>Describes the participants’ experiences regarding language, food, shopping, children’s behaviour and parenting style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3: Racism and marriage disapproval</td>
<td>Describes participants’ experiences about the attitude of other members of the society towards them and their children and their relationship rejection by family and friends and the impact on their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4: Cultural values and customs</td>
<td>Describes participants’ different experiences of customs and values when exposed to each other’s cultural and social environment and the impact on their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5: Gender roles and beliefs</td>
<td>Describes the influence of gender dynamics in parenting and relational roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6: Language and communication</td>
<td>Describes participants’ challenges with language barriers that created misunderstanding and conflict regarding their relational and parenting roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7: Similarities and differences in parenting practices</td>
<td>Describes participants’ experiences of common and culture specific trends in parenting and the challenges and benefits associated with the parenting practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8: Contextual influences</td>
<td>Describes the impact of other socio-environmental contexts external to the family environment that influences parental roles and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9: Benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting</td>
<td>Reflects on the positive aspects of intercultural parenting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Cultural Identity

**Individual identity**

In this study, participants self-identified as intercultural couples. They described their cultural identity in many different ways that were found to be quite unique to each couple. The most familiar and common cultural identity was related to the country where the participant was born. For example, Manuel, who was born and grew up in Uganda, proudly identified himself as African:

“I’m African. I was born in Uganda and I’m of Uganda birth right”. (Manuel)

His wife Tammy concurred with his perception of cultural belonging:

“Obviously home is where the heart is”. (Tammy)

Some participants identified themselves as bi-cultural as a result of the association between their country of birth and their sense of belonging to the newly adopted country. This is clearly demonstrated in Sarah’s perception of her cultural identity:

“Having to migrate to Australia and having to assimilate to a different culture again... in a way now I am supposed to be Australian because I am also an Australian citizen now. But I still don’t feel like I am Australian because I don’t follow football, I don’t follow your [husband] typical Australian kind of culture... for me I am kind of a mix bag and I always call myself that....mixed culture...which is good”. (Sarah)

Sarah’s husband Samuel concurred with her perception and experience of belonging to a mixed culture:

“I would say culturally English but Asian slant towards food”. (Samuel)

An interesting pattern was apparent when participants were asked to describe their cultural identity. Immigrant partners were very firm about their cultural identity as being the country they came from, irrespective of how long they have been in Australia. In contrast, some Australian partners had difficulty in describing their own cultural identity. This may be partly because they seemed to take their culture for granted and therefore hard to explain. As Murielle said:

“What is Australian culture anyway? No one really has like, I don’t know anyone that has 100 percent Australian, like what is it? Like you can’t really pinpoint what exactly is an Australian culture because it is so mixed and so various where do you start to say that this is Australian and this is not”. (Murielle)
Some host participants started to take notice of their cultural identity and differences when they were exposed to other cultures, including travelling to non-western countries and having a partner from another culture:

“From my travels to the Philippines... I could see the strong family ties and I could see a lot of things in the Philippines... people in some cases they had nothing but those two hats. Whatever they had...they made the most of it and with the things they had. I thought well it will be a good life choice. So pretty much I made up my mind before I met my wife... I would probably marry someone from that part of the world”. (Jim)

Jim’s example demonstrated a cultural point of reference where he was able to make an assessment of his own cultural background against the backdrop of another culture in the Philippines.

**Identity as a couple**

Although this theme is distinct because it focuses on the experience of identity as a couple, and presented separately, it is linked to the experiences of intercultural couples in parenting their children because the experience of parenting is related to the experience of being a couple, especially in the intercultural situation. This theme is reflected in both contexts. Most participants described that when they are in the social arena, they can sense that people regard them as being different because of their looks and their mixed-heritage children. But they reported that this is not how they feel about or are even aware of themselves, unless this is drawn to their attention. Based on the responses, it was clear that a majority of the couples did not see being in an intercultural relationship as a major concern. They did not deny that there were cultural differences. They all agreed that they were culturally different as parents, which will be comprehensively described in sub-theme two. Two participants reported that when they formed a relationship with their partners, they never looked at the partner from a cultural perspective, but rather as another person and human. As Simla explained:

“Yeah, it happened. It wasn’t the fact that I was African or it wasn’t the fact that he [Daniel] was Australian. It was the fact that we are connected as two people”. (Simla)

In the above example, co-construction and negotiation of meaning was non-verbally acknowledged by Daniel regarding his wife Simla’s interpretation about themselves as a couple.

Intercultural couples described that they became aware of their cultural differences when people drew attention to it, experienced language barriers, when they had children, and differences in customs and traditions. From the perspective of physical “racial” features, two participants reported that they were treated differently as couples and as parents when they were in a social situation.
Cathy sensed the perception of difference from people when she was in the public arena with her husband and children:

“Because I am white, blonde hair, blue eyes and they are black, I do get looks sometimes from people because they meet Will [husband] and the boys and he is like, “this is my wife” and people are like, “oh yeah”. I would never have experienced that if I married a white guy”. (Cathy)

Participants also reported experiences of perception of difference from their own extended family members, mostly as a result of differences in physical characteristics and language. This is reflected in Cathy’s description of incongruent cultural identities as seen in her family by a member of her own extended family:

“When I had the boys, my aunty who is a barrister said to us, don’t worry there’s a lot of parents now that are having coloured children, that was only 13-14 years ago and I was like what?” (Cathy)

Another important issue regarding couples’ identity was the feeling and experience of being regarded as outsiders or insiders in each other’s country. In this study, ‘outsider’ status was related to immigrant participants living in the host country. According to the participants, this experience was associated from living in the partner’s country, speaking another language and having different customs and traditions. Malai described his perception of the experience of outsider status when his father-in-law criticised and complained about the cultural Thai food he cooked while staying with his host partner at her parent’s home.

“Can you imagine that, yeah. He doesn’t like my food, things smelled really weird. So it upset me because in my country food is number one thing for us and eating”. (Malai).

His wife concurred with his perception of being considered as an outsider:

“Initially we were staying with my mom and dad. Malai wanted to still be cooking his food and, you know, you’re used to that ... sort of cooking in breakfast, lunch, and dinner. That’s not how we do things here in Australia. So there were some challenges with my father. So my dad complained about it quite vocally. That was amazing”. (Kylie).

However, the outsider status was not exclusive to the experience of the immigrant partner. It was also experienced as a two-way phenomenon, especially when the host partner travelled to their immigrant partner’s country of origin to visit their relatives. One participant described how her perception of feeling like an outsider among her husband’s family in his country of origin made her feel lonely and hard to take:

“And I guess me being Australian and seeing like the Indians as foreigners, sometimes I guess it felt like I was the foreigner because I was the only Australian in the group and sometimes that was hard to take... sometimes people weren’t willing to talk and everyone
just spoke in Hindi. No one would try to speak in English so, sometimes I found that difficult you know and I felt a bit alone at times”. (Carol)

Two host participants described their perception of minority status within their own majority host culture and country. Gary related an experience of feeling the minority and outsider status within his own host culture because his wife Yan and her parents, who were staying at their home to help mind their daughter and with Yan’s new pregnancy excluded him from any discussion about their daughter’s health and spoke Chinese all the time:

“That's like I'm sitting in Asia by myself”. (Gary)

Gary’s wife Yan justified her act while also concurring with Gary’s feeling of outsider status:

“Yes and I didn’t realize if he didn’t complain. Also because my parents are here, I tend to speak more Chinese and sometimes just ignore him. If he didn’t complain I wouldn’t recognize it, I’d just keep speaking Chinese”. (Yan)

Insider status related to the experience of the host participants who were born in the host country and spoke the majority language. For the purpose of this study, insider status related to the host participants’ knowledge of the host culture and traditions regarding parenting. However, some participants also claimed the insider status from their experience of immersion in the Australian culture and society and through their relationship with their host partners. Two participants described their insider status based on the fact that they studied and worked in Australia before meeting their partners and marrying them:

“Well, when I met him I had been here for quite some time, since 1995. So I had already kind of friends who were Australians. So I knew exactly what people do, what my perception of the culture is... I had already been exposed a lot to the culture in some previous relationships, as well before this one”. (Simla)

The insider/outsider status can have a dual effect on the couple’s identity. Participants reported that the outsider status impacted negatively on their relationship and parenting. On the other hand, the insider status was reported as strength in the couple’s identity because it commanded respect for them from having knowledge of and immersion in the host culture and parenting practices. The insider and outsider status can also be perceived as a power issue in intercultural parenting contexts and will be further elaborated on in theme three.

Children’s cultural identity

None of the participants in this study identified their children as belonging to one particular culture more than another. They identified their children as bi-cultural because of their cultural heritage from both sides of the family, and because they are aware of their racial and ethnic cultural background. They identified their children as Australian from a nationality point of view because “they have grown up in Australia” (Sarah), and were
therefore automatically considered to be Australian from a nationality and citizenship perspective, which as much as it sounds contradictory, is how they perceived their children’s identity.

Manuel and Tammy explained their children’s identity as African-Australian because they are being raised in Australia but still have cultural association with Africa:

“I would be saying that he’s African-Australian, I suppose, yeah”. (Tammy)

“They’re Australian because they’re being raised in the Australian society, but they have got the African blood... when it comes to food, you know when we go there, the mangoes, she loves the music, the dance, but she’s used to the setting here. She’s used to communicating in the culture here. She’s used to the gadgets, the Australian gadgets. So yeah”. (Manuel)

Sarah described her children as Eurasian because they are born and being raised in Australia and because of the way they look:

“Because they have grown up in Australia... they would probably be very much Australian in the way they see things and do things with their friends because they are educated here... but I think if someone asked them because of the way they look, very Eurasian, I think they know that there is a Filipino side to them”. (Sarah)

Most parents also emphasised the choice of identity as belonging to the children themselves because of their looks, affinity and gravity towards a parent’s culture and also to prevent confusion about their cultural identity among their peers and the social environment. Azumi described that her children perceived their cultural identity based on their looks:

“I think they feel confused. I ask them “which one do you want to be, Australian or Japanese?”. Jessie she says Japanese and the little one says Australian”. (Azumi)

Dharam: And do they say why? Why would your first one say she’s Japanese?

“Yes because may be she looks more Japanese than Australian”. (Azumi)

The parents’ perception of their children’s identity was reported to have impacted on their parenting practices. For example, most of the participants said that they encouraged and guided their children to be involved with and acquire the cultural characteristics of their migrant partners such as teaching them their language, bringing them on holidays to their partners’ country of origin, and eating their cultural food. Michelle reported that she spoke her dialect and language to her children since they were young:

“When they were younger I used to talk to them in my dialect which is Ilocano. Ilocano is found on the northern part of Luzon. Even now when I get angry I express myself in my language...in Tagalog. They know I am angry and they know the meaning too”. (Michelle)
Simla and her husband Daniel reported that they raised their son to be bicultural and are keen to see him become bilingual:

“I want him to know that he’s from two cultures. He has an African culture and an Australian culture, and to respect both, and to feel comfortable with both… I keep saying that I will try with my Botswana because I would love him to know my language actually”. (Simla)

“He will gravitate toward an African stranger before he would ever gravitate to a white stranger. So if he doesn’t consider himself African, he certainly has an affinity toward that side of his culture, which is fantastic”. (Daniel)

All the participants reported that by the very nature of being intercultural couples and encouraging their children to be bicultural and bilingual has benefitted and enriched their children’s lives. The benefits and opportunities associated with children’s cultural identity will be explored in sub-theme 10 below regarding benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting.

**Parent identity**

According to the participants, parent identity was shaped by several internal and external contexts. Participants’ perception of internal contexts included pride in their heritage culture, embracing cultural diversity, religious values, gender activities, socio-economic status, and experience of own parents’ parenting. Perception of external factors included the family and social environment, and growing up in collective societies in which parenting activities occur. These intricate factors influenced participants’ attitude about parenting.

Regarding internal contexts, most parents, particularly migrant parents, were very proud of their heritage and cultural identity and encouraged their children to practice those cultural attributes, customs and values. One participant, for example, exposed her son to all the cultural activities of her diaspora community, so that he knows and learns about her mother’s cultural identity, and has continuous engagement with her community and cultural activities:

“I want him to know that he’s from two cultures. He has an African culture and an Australian culture, and to respect both, and to feel comfortable with both… I think the difference is the location… away from my close-knit family… perhaps it’s the reasons why I’m involved a lot with the African community here. So I can actually create that village and networks around me that my son can also experience the wide range of people around me, the difference and the strength of a community, which is how I grew up”. (Simla)

Simla’s husband Daniel was very supportive of Simla in encouraging their son to also identify with his mother’s heritage culture:
“But it’s good because we were worried that he would just be dark skinned Australian. His friends are primarily from the white society”. (Daniel)

Other parents considered themselves as bi-cultural and embraced cultural diversity as a rich experience for themselves and their children.

“So I’d say Australian slash Turkish, which is more of a historical sort of a bond which I’d like and intend to keep because of the religious values and stuff”. (Murielle)

“I totally agree Turkish Australian”. (Jeehan)

Parent identity was also demonstrated in terms of gender activities. One participant firmly believed that boys do not play with dolls and did not like his wife encouraging this behaviour in their son. This was described as a point of conflict in the family because his wife did not have a problem with their son playing with dolls:

“Men are supposed to be men and women are supposed to be women. He will see that part from me. I don’t want him playing with dolls... I would have a problem”. (Daniel)

“I think I would have a problem. He doesn’t play with them you know... he thinks they’re cute. He thinks they’re his girlfriends”. (Simla)

Parent identity was also apparent in participants’ description of their socio-economic status. Three participants described that they did not achieve the educational and job status they desired because of personal and family situations, and did not want to see their children in the same situation. They wanted their children “to be better” than themselves and have a better lifestyle by encouraging and helping their children to be educated so that they can have better jobs, and economic and social status:

“I’m pushing her to become a doctor. I’ve been talking to her because there are certain things I’ve failed myself. I told her [daughter], “Look, I wanted to do this. I wanted to do that”. So I’m trying to push her to see that she can do better than me and to do her best”. (Manuel)

Manuel’s perception of socio-economic status as an influential factor on parent identity was co-constructed as a reality by his wife Tammy:

“In African culture, study is so important... here you’re not really looking to the future... how many 15 that sort of age really know what they want to do with their futures. They don’t, not really and they don’t know consequences. They don’t where Manuel is from, it’s so important to study if they aren’t studying so they’re nothing”. (Tammy)

“Yes, that’s why I want to go back and study”. (Manuel)

Dharam: What about yourself, what do you think?
“I think it’s important. I’ve even gone back to Uni now. I’ve stopped obviously when I had him, but I wish I would have done it when I was younger”. (Tammy)

The participants’ socio-economic status also defined how they approached their parenting styles and practices regarding, for example, discipline. Kylie reported that her job as a teacher gave her a better understanding of children’s behaviour in their different stages of developmental growth and parented accordingly:

“The teaching that I did up until two years ago didn’t really involve discipline because it was young adults, so now that I am dealing with children and teenagers I guess I am more aware of what works and what doesn’t work with children”. (Kylie)

Two participants reported that their parents’ expectations of who they should marry was based on their own socio-economic status and assumptions. Their parents expected them to marry rich and educated men. This is exemplified in Cathy’s case:

“I went to a private girls’ school, I hung out with the church boys in Brisbane and the wealthy families and so mum and dad always expected me to marry someone that was going to be a doctor. Yes, so dad, so mum’s family they lived in West End in Brisbane but they were all private school educated back… they all went to Girls Grammar… I wanted to be a hairdresser when I left school and that was not an option, there was no option it was “you are going to UQ and you are going to get a degree and you are going”, you know”. (Cathy)

In the above situation, it was evident that Cathy resented her parents’ expectations which eventually impacted on her own parenting style. Cathy wanted her children to do what made them happy:

“I just want them to do whatever they want to do... and be happy with their life. I think because I was told that I had to go to University and all I wanted to do was be a hairdresser and now my mom says I probably had a salon... that’s what I was told to do so for me like S [son] our 11-year old is very good at football, he wants to be a professional footballer player and I’m happy as long as he is. I want them to do what they want to do”. (Cathy)

However, her view was not totally shared by her husband Will who believed that their children need to be educated for a better lifestyle:

“For me I think they really need an education, I really think they should want to strive for a better lifestyle...there is no future if your children don’t have an education. I don’t think football is enough, I was a professional football player and when that finished and you get an injury like I did, then your world stops, the money stops, you know what are you going to do”. (Will)

Although some participants were against the idea of socio-economic status influencing their choices in life, this was not reflected in terms of their own parenting for most of those participants. The participants were keen for their children’s education so that they could
enjoy a better lifestyle, especially in view of the tough competition in the job market. As Yan and her husband Gary explained:

“Even I think that the most important thing is to get them to have good personality and have the love for nature and happiness in their life, and academics should be the second thing... if I was in China, I raise the kids there, I'd have to put the academic maybe first or the equal because everybody does that. If I don't do that my kids can only go to the worst school and couldn’t go to university and couldn't get a job”. (Yan)

“At A's [daughter] age you're expected to be able to quote poetry and to have a CV for when you go to preschool. If you don't have a good CV about the awards you've won, you won't get into a good preschool”. (Gary)

External contexts such as the social and family environment in which parenting activities occurred also appeared to have influenced parent identity. The external contexts will be comprehensively described in sub-theme nine regarding contextual influences on intercultural parenting.

**Religious identity**

Most participants described religion as one of the influential factors determining the status of their relationship and how they raised their children. The findings in this study extended the interpretation of identity to that of one's religion. Participants from Muslim/Islamic backgrounds strongly associated their identity to religion. The religious identity dictated their socialisation values and hence their parenting styles and practices.

Rajack strongly emphasised his religious identity over cultural identity:

“I do not worry about the culture. The first thing I worry is religion... I am Muslim and she became Muslim... Before we got married we discussed me being Muslim and she said I will follow you. I said I do not want to force you to become Muslim and she was the one who converted into Muslim before we got married. I was worried about it because what about my children?” (Rajack)

Rajack’s wife Anya concurred with her husband’s emphasis on religious identity, especially regarding their children’s upbringing:

“Their upbringing!” (Anya)

“Yes and we have one child...I started to worry about it....what are we going to do about it? So we moved to Bali to raise my son”. (Rajack)

“We brought that religious culture and all those good quality back here...the way we run our family. Everything is the same as what we do over there”. (Anya)

Likewise, Murielle made strong reference to her religious identity:
“I consider myself to be Australian, raised in Australia, initially the ideals of Australia but as a Muslim those ideals changed... my thing more isn’t the fact that you live just culturally it’s more important for me to live what with good values being those Islamic values... I don’t consider my cultural values under that same umbrella as the religious values. I think cultures and religions are not the same thing. That’s my view on it”. (Murielle)

The participants’ responses demonstrated that couples made meaning of their identity in terms of their contextual situations and exposure to the culture of the host country. Identity can therefore be interpreted as more than just ancestral reference and needs to be looked at from the individual, couple, parent, children, and religious perspectives.

Besides cultural identity dynamics, the participants in this study experienced several challenges such as culture shock, racism and rejection, language and communication problems, values and customs, and parenting practices. The challenges are described below.

4.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Culture Shock

From the data gathered in this study, it was apparent that all couples faced challenges in their relationships and parenting practices. Some of the intercultural couples reported that their challenges were common to mono-cultural couples and parents. However, they encountered additional and unique challenges as a result of the intercultural dynamics. Most couples reported that they experienced culture shock due to a clash of cultural factors. Four participants described their experiences of culture shock regarding differences in children’s behaviour, parenting styles, and family values. Manuel, for example, was shocked at the level of rights children have in the host culture:

“With Australia... this culture does that. It gives children rights and then it gives them the right to stand up to their parents. They don’t have any respect. They end up burning factories or running out of the house when they are 14 or 13 and being in the streets which is not good”. (Manuel)

Manuel’s wife Tammy concurred with his opinion and thinks that parents are too soft with children:

“I think sometimes like we are too soft here. And I think they [husband] are all harder on the children. Here, if a child went without a meal, it would be the worst thing. There it happens quite frequently”. (Tammy)

Another couple was shocked at people’s lack of friendliness and attitude toward their family in the host culture, compared to the community attitude and friendliness in the migrant partner’s society and culture:

“When you see the people on the street or your neighbour, I will be honest with you, I have been here a long time, they hardly say hello. We tried to say hello to our neighbours but they look at us as if we are stupid or strangers”. (Rajack)
“In Indonesia, everybody is very friendly”. (Anya)

Culture shock was also reported regarding the lack of extended family interaction in the host culture. Rajack and his wife Anya reported that they were shocked at the non-existence of extended family influences in their children and own lives:

“If I am in Bali I do not look after my children because they go with their uncles and other relatives. Everyone is offering to come for lunch or go here….go there. Otherwise everyday they are with their cousins. It is not like here…here it is very different”. (Rajack)

“I have half brothers and sisters but I never see them, nor my cousins….it is quite different”. (Anya)

Dharam: Neither your aunties or uncles!

“Yes. It is shocking’. (Rajack)

‘I don’t see them either”. (Anya)

“Even the children hardly know them. It is shocking to me”. (Rajack)

“They would even hardly know them”. (Anya)

“But in Bali you know every single person. In Bali you will know your relatives”. (Rajack)

The narratives in this study revealed that participants were shocked at some of the cultural differences in family values as it impacted on some of the participant’s parenting, relational and socialisation experiences. For example, what constitutes a family was a significant point of cultural difference. Five couples described that in ethnic groups or communities, the meaning of family goes beyond immediate family members and includes secondary and distant relatives, friends and the community. One participant was disappointed when her extended family members were not invited to her host partner’s side of family functions. She viewed it as the reason why there are no strong family ties in the western culture. She was in conflict with the difference between the family values of her ancestral home to that of Australia:

“Our family does not only go with mother, father, daughter, sons, brothers, sisters and their boyfriend… with Asian family it has to be spread out… they will know that their family will not only be limited which is the Australian way or the western way. There is less interaction and less bonding. I find that one of the reasons why there is no family ties here because they limit and they become exclusive. I noticed that when we first married, when we get invited to his family [husband], straight away in my mind I said “am I the only one invited”… to me the invitation should be extended to me and to my family. Because I am now part of their family but I don’t see that in his family”. (Michelle)

Michelle’s husband Jim shared her disappointment:
“In other words they don’t just get it”. (Jim)

4.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Racism and Marriage Disapproval

Some participants expressed experiences of rejection which could possibly be interpreted as racism. Rajack and his wife Anya were upset about the attitude of their neighbours and other people who refused to acknowledge them:

“I have to put up with it... we have been here in this area for fourteen years and we hardly know each other”. (Rajack)

“They don’t want to accept us”. (Anya)

Cathy and her husband Will described how their children and they experienced negative racial comments, stereotypes, and rejection from friends. They perceived their friends and parents attitude about their relationship as discouraging and negative:

“It is hard isn’t it? I have always been attracted to people of colour and it has never been an issue for me, but I came with him and my friends would say oh he will hit you he is a Maori, they always hit their partners eventually... oh are you sure, you will get comfortable, you won’t be expecting it”. (Cathy)

“The boys get bullied and called niggers by their peers at school”. (Will)

Four participants experienced marriage disapproval from their in-laws. The marriage disapproval for three out of these four participants was from the parents of the majority host partner. Interestingly, in one case, it was from the reverse cultural perspective. Bill’s wife Azumi was Japanese and her father did not want her to get married to a person from another culture. This highlights the fact that racism can be a two-way phenomenon:

“So I’ll tell her I’ve got a ring here, see if that fits you and it did... so she is going to marry me, but her father won’t let me because he doesn’t like that kind of intercultural. He got sick and she had to go to Japan to help him. He couldn’t feed himself. His hands became fixed and because she helped him feed himself he then changed his mind”. (Bill)

Azumi concurred with her husband’s assessment of her father’s agenda regarding their wedding by nodding her head. In some instances, it appeared that people are quite oblivious of other cultures and the thought of intercultural relations. This was apparent when one of the migrant participants went to his wife’s house to seek permission from her parents to marry her. The father laughed it off:

“On my side, it became confrontational because I actually went there to my wife’s house and I asked her hand in marriage from the father which is very unique so he laughed it off, “Ho, ho, ho, ho.” He’s like Santa Claus. So they had this culturally, very different view of how people should be and when I came into the picture I was like totally opposite of their lifestyle. So they had a bit of an issue” (Jeehan).
Jeehan’s wife, on the other hand, perceived her father’s objection to their marriage from fear of failure because of cultural problems:

“My family was more worried that there would be problems... but after three to five years of realizing that there wasn’t massive problems, they’re like, "Well you can’t get much better.” (Murielle)

4.4.4 Sub-theme 4: Cultural Values and Customs

The narratives in this study revealed that cultural values and customs were significant points of difference that impacted on participants’ parenting and relational dynamics. Many parents expressed concerns about the disappearance of important values among children such as respect for the family and society at large, and the need to resurrect those values. Manuel and his wife Tammy emphasised respect for elders and boundaries, which according to them is missing in the western culture.

“Respecting and being helpful to one another and being able to do their best... respecting people because that is what is lacking in this society. You’ll find the kids on the train smoking, the fumes and the children are not respecting people, the elders and parents fighting with kids”. (Manuel)

“We were always taught to be polite, say please and thank you and things like that. Obviously, it’s different now. Society has changed a great deal”. (Tammy)

Most couples emphasised moral values in association with religious values and believed that the lack of moral values impact s negatively on families. As Michelle and her husband Jim explained:

“A moral value is number one because this will be their [children] most important tool when they have their own family. It is like this is their principle that they have to follow as they get older. They will be good citizens if they have all these values. One of the reasons people, families deteriorate because there is no values in their family... it has never been emphasised”. (Michelle)

“Looking after people, like in the new generation, that role seems to be handed over to other people, putting it off more and more”. (Jim)

Cultural values regarding sex before marriage for children was another point of difference among two couples. They described that their values were connected to their religious values and beliefs, complementary to the family and social values. Although Michelle and her husband were staunch Catholics and inculcated strong Catholic values to their children, their perception about sex before marriage was very different. Michelle was strictly against sex before marriage for her children as opposed to her husband Jim who was more relaxed about it:
“When they were in high school I know that in the western world, girls specially will have sexual relationship at an early age. I have emphasised to them about that, to treat your body as a temple, to respect your body. I think they have realized that now because most of their classmates have been sexually active at such an early age. They talked about it now with STD and all that. And I think that is where we disagree that they are old enough to know what is right and wrong. But it is different from my point of view... to the point that I have to bring one of children to a doctor... and let her be aware of the pre-marital sex and be careful with the STD. Apart from the mind belief is my religious belief of being pure before marriage and all that”. (Michelle)

“I thought of it more differently. If a child is in their teens... eighteen or twenty-one it will just happen. They are not anymore younger especially if they are with their friends after school. Some Australian kids are sexually active even as young as twelve. And the parents would be horrified with what is going on... but it is going on”. (Jim)

In the above case, Michelle’s perception regard sex before marriage was respected because according to her husband Jim, her cultural values regarding parenting is better and preferred her approach. This was reflected in Jim’s answer to my probe about how the approach impacted upon their parenting:

“I would still go with my wife’s model... I think the children have been brought up more to us as their mum’s is the model. That is the model...that is the model from my wife. That is the best model I have... I think the children know what is expected of them from their mother. And we would respect whatever happens in their house. But whatever happens in their mother’s house is a different thing. So the children know how to respect their mother and I will respect them”. (Jim)

Some participants were not very comfortable with certain cultural customs and values of their partners. Bill described how they had to take off their shoes when visiting his in-laws in Japan. He was very uncomfortable and unhappy about it:

“Well, we went to visit her family in Japan, we had to take the shoes off and then I had to put slippers on which were too small, and I’d be trying to walk inside the house and falling over these slippers... I hate taking off shoes all the time. It sends me bananas... I don’t like walking around in my socks. I can’t stand it. I’m not happy”. (Bill)

“And you kept hitting your head all the time... he is tall”. (Azumi)

“Yeah, so I had to bend down to walk inside their house”. (Bill)

4.4.5 Sub-theme 5: Gender Roles and Beliefs

Couples also faced challenges due to culturally constructed expectations and differences in gender roles and beliefs in different cultural communities. For example, in some cases the husband did not read books to the children at night and did not do household chores
because it was not a modelled behaviour from the country and family of origin. Kylie explained that she continues to read books to the children at night because her husband Malai was not raised to do that. As Kylie explained:

“When my husband’s at home at night, I go, particularly when the kids were little and read them books and things, he would never do that. And I’d think, “Oh, gosh, he’s only home a couple of nights a week, why doesn’t he go and read stories to the kids?” But, it only dawned on me the other day that he wasn’t raised to do that so why would he? It wasn’t modelled thing for him to do that but it was for me, so that’s what I do”. (Kylie)

“I got to, got to agree because that’s good thing for the kid... it’s good thing to do. But I don’t do it because it’s different where I come from”(Malai)

However, there seemed to be incongruence between Kylie and Malai’s culturally constructed perception in gender roles and beliefs, particularly about children’s sickness. In her household when the children are sick, her husband cares for the children. As Kylie explained:

“But, you know one thing that’s interesting when you talk about jobs and roles, when the kids are unwell, he is the one that is up there at night patting them down with a tepid cloth. They go to him, not me, because I’m like no fuss”. (Kylie)

Gender roles regarding children’s sickness was interpreted as a maternal responsibility among some migrant partners. Two participants reported that in China, when a child is sick, the mother always resorts to her own mother to help with the child’s sickness. Interestingly, one male participant was very upset about not being involved in the medical decision making process when his child was sick. His wife Yan reported that in the Chinese culture, the fathers are usually not involved in the care aspect of children. So she consulted with her mother when their child was sick. This was seen as a common gender practice among ethnic communities. As Yan explained:

“Just after she [daughter] was born my mother was here helping me. When she had something like got a fever and I and my mother worked together to try to gather information from Google, internet, anything and he was so angry because he said my kid, I should discuss with him, not with my mother. I think that may be the Chinese way because normally in China the father would not be involved... because that’s women’s thing. It’s not a man’s thing”. (Yan)

Interestingly, this perception of gender role regarding maternal care was challenged by Yan’s husband Gary. Gary was very upset about not being involved in the medical decision making process when their daughter was sick:
“I’m also an experienced parent. I’ve gone through three children before that. I’ve been through temperatures, teething, nappy rashes, all these sorts of things and I think that I have a reasonable amount of input to have into that” (Gary).

Likewise, Daniel’s expectations about his son’s choice of toys and his views of men and women were very definite and static. He expected his son to be rough and messy and expected men and women to be gender appropriate:

“He’s a boy. He likes doing boy things. He’s rough, he’s naughty, he’s messy. His masculinity comes out regardless if you want to go around actions or cultures. I expect men to be men, and women to be women. I don’t particularly like androgyny or masculine women, or feminine men... He will see that part from me. I don’t want him playing with dolls, for instance”. (Daniel)

Daniel’s wife Simla disagreed with his gender perception of their son regarding playing with dolls because she perceived their son’s interest with dolls differently:

“I will not say that he plays with dolls, but you know like you see the doll, there’s a doll there. It’s a beautiful African type of doll. Sometimes he picked it up and actually quite liked it and then he said that’s mommy”. (Simla)

Naomi vented her frustration at having to do everything from looking after their son to doing all the house chores. Her husband Pravin acknowledged that he is less involved in the parenting process and house chores, but reported that it was due to the demanding nature of his work as a restaurant owner. The inference here was that both of them work and needed to share their parental and domestic roles, but the husband was less involved:

“I do everything. Like everything, that’s very simple, that answers that, I do everything... I still take him to day care, I do all the housework, I do all the cleaning and the cooking, the folding, the washing, the ironing. I do everything like that”. (Naomi)

“Yeah she does most of the things... I still take him to day care... Mondays the whole day he’s with me because she’s at work. I’d say there isn’t a day that he’s with her all day from morning to evening. Most of the fun day, Monday I do that. And on top of that I’ve been a little busy for the past year and half because I just put up a restaurant and it’s demanding there, you can’t just leave the business as you know”. (Pravin)

4.4.6 Sub-theme 6: Language and Communication

Several participants perceived language and styles of communication as significant challenges and issues, especially for those in relationships with partners from Asian and non-English speaking backgrounds, when it came to communication and interpretation of daily parenting and relational activities and interactions. Three couples often misunderstood and misinterpreted what their partners said because of the cultural way of communicating a
message or intention such as the tone used, abbreviations, time taken to think about something and silence.

Gary and Yan described how communication between them became quite volatile because of language issues regarding parental and daily domestic activities:

“We’ve identified a lot of the issues with language, with speaking, like the way Chinese talk and the way we talk are very different. Chinese tonal language to westerners is foreign and is shown in your speech also usually in first emotion, particularly when English is a second language to my dear wife. Actually I think it was more in misunderstandings that we see the cultural differences. Mandarin is a very different language. It’s tonal. If you don’t get the tone right, they’ve got no idea what you’re talking about... when we got upset or frustrated about something Yan gets a little bit flustered and her English goes downhill very rapidly. When she gets angry, I wish she would speak Mandarin instead”. (Gary)

“I think it’s so unfair. I try but he just keeps talking, talking and I couldn’t. Sometimes even just several arguments is about could I, could you, or can you just this sentence. I just use can you do something?” (Yan)

Five participants described that although their migrant partners spoke English, their style of communication caused misunderstandings and conflicts for the couples. An example arising out of the style of communication is reflected in Gary’s family regarding dinner time:

“So when it’s dinner time it’s chīfàn which means eat food. That’s the sentence. There’s especially if you use the wrong tone when you’re saying stuff, people understand that quite differently and certainly that’s what happened between us. I would understand quite differently what she was saying. I felt that she was being really short with me and very abrupt, and I thought that was her fault... I felt like she was being rude to me”. (Gary)

Manuel and his wife Tammy described communication and interpretation challenges between themselves because of decision-making time frames about family and parenting issues. Manuel takes a long time to make decisions, which frustrates Tammy:

“I take a long time to make a decision and this is because I’m from another culture and then coming to a different culture. So I’m thinking back home I would be doing this like this, how do I do it here. I’m confused because I don’t know what the Australian culture is. So it takes me longer and Tammy is waiting, “what have you decided?” and I’m like “I’ll get back to you”. (Manuel)

“And sometimes his understanding of what I have said is different and then he’ll get annoyed. And then I’ll talk to him and he will say no and you said this. I’ll say no that’s not what I meant and I have explained what I meant or what I said and he does take that as an offence and sometimes he thinks she’s saying this horrible thing to me when it’s not what I meant”. (Tammy)
Silence was also reported as another form of challenge in communication style. Manuel and his wife Tammy experienced communication challenges regarding silence when an issue, such as cultural parenting customs and traditions, became too overwhelming for Manuel, but not for his wife who liked to resolve issues as they occurred:

“Yes if something is too much for me, I just keep quiet”. (Manuel)

“That makes me cranky with you because I like to resolve things”. (Tammy).

In the above situation, there is tension because Tammy’s partner’s communication style is culturally different to her own. However, despite the communication problems, misunderstanding and subjective interpretations, both Manuel and Tammy reported that they were interested in understanding each other’s culture and integrating it with their own. The motif here can be interpreted as the willingness for Manuel and Tammy to embrace difference and belonging through the conception of “mixedness”. Participants regarded their partner’s cultural dynamics as rooted in their identity.

Some of the differences related to the mode of communication with the children. For example, Cathy didn’t agree with the way her husband ordered the children around the house.

“But I will often say to Will, “don’t talk to them like that”, like he will go out and say “get dressed” and P will say “I’m watching this”, and he will say “I said now, do it now” and I say “why don’t you just say how long has that show got? Okay in five minutes we are going to switch that off” and Will would be like “because I’m the father and I’m trying to do it now”. And, because I’m a teacher probably as well, I know you have got to sometimes give kids a bit of time to say, he needs to stick to a routine, he needs to be told”. (Cathy)

Cathy’s husband Will agreed with his wife’s concern about the way he communicated with the children, but reported that it was a leaned behaviour from the way his parents communicated with him and his siblings:

“The way I was brought up your father said stop, you stopped, your mother said no more you stopped, you know go and do that, go and you know, go and get your brothers and sisters ready for dinner you know, I never had “I’m watching TV” and then I guess your way of handling it, I have learned that, the way that I used to fly off the handle and try to be assertive and say look I expect you do this when I tell you to do it and I don’t understand there is never, there is no excuse not to”. (Will)

Language and communication styles were also perceived and interpreted in terms of power dynamics. For example, mastery of the English language by the host partner during arguments and conflicts, often ended up in decisions being made in favour of the host partner because the immigrant partner experienced difficulty in communicating his/her opinions and thoughts about an issue clearly and effectively. Power has been identified and
interpreted as a discrete theme in this study and will be explored in Chapter five. The power dynamics regarding language and communication will be further explored in that chapter. The next section addresses the similarities and differences in parenting practices.

4.4.7 Sub-theme 7: Similarities and Differences in Parenting Practices

In this study, participants described their parenting experiences as both similar and different to those of mono-cultural parents because of the uniquely specific characteristics that were associated with their intercultural background. It is therefore important to elaborate on those similarities and differences. The interviews clearly pointed to the fact that common fundamental values and practices were at the core of the relationship and parenting experiences. However, the point of difference was how couples managed and achieved those fundamental values and practices to prevent conflict. The similarities and differences were described for both couples and parents. The primary aim of this study was to explore the parenting experiences of intercultural couples. As such, this section focuses on the similarities and differences in the parenting dynamics of intercultural parents. The similarities and differences in parenting practices are described from an internal and external perspective. The internal perspective addresses the dynamics between the couples/parents regarding parenting, whereas the external perspective addresses the outside dynamics that impact on and influence couples/parents parenting practices.

Similarities

The participants reported similar parenting dynamics such as family values, parental role and approach and parental support. These dynamics were identified and described as essential ingredients for healthy and successful intercultural parenting. Participants overwhelmingly acknowledged that although there are differences between their cultures of origin, there are also a lot of similarities between them regarding their parenting practices. As Daniel and his wife Simla pointed out:

“I think that there are a lot of commonalities within our parenting culture. We have a good, loving relationship and love our children, and pretty much I think agree on how we intend to raise our children... we want him to experience a lot and to have an open mind, and any chance for community engagement is very much encouraged so he has a fairly holistic wide range of upbringing”. (Daniel)

“I would not really want him growing in one way just thinking it’s very individualistic, so he thinks it’s just me, me, me. That’s why we want that bridge clearly defined so he is aware of others out there”. (Simla)

All the participants reported that their parenting practices were influenced by the experiences of their own parents’ parenting style and practices, such as what may be termed the “no and yes factor”. Some participants modelled their parents’ positive style of parenting and others rejected the parenting styles that impacted negatively on them. One
participant described how he never experienced a “yes” answer from his father whenever he asked for something that he liked or wanted. The answer was always “no”, which made him feel sad or not loved. As a result of the negative experience, the participant described how he never wanted his son to feel like that and provided him with things that he wanted. On odd occasions when he said no to his son, he felt guilty and bad about it:

“If he told me to do something and I don’t do it, he was very, very strict. I’m not that strict with my son. Maybe that’s why, because sometimes he was strict with me for no reason... if like [son] would want a toy just to give you a rough example, my dad would tell me, no you don’t need that. And no means no, end of story... so when he [son] says I want to get that thing Daddy, and I’m thinking if he doesn’t get it he will remind me for 10 days. So I just go do it... so I actually learned from that, basically, this is how I’m different to my dad”. (Pravin)

However, his wife Naomi had a different and positive experience of parental love and affection. She reported that her parents, especially her mother always showed lot of warmth and had plenty of time for her, which she liked and wanted to provide that parenting experience to their son:

“My mum was, I’m one of 5 children, so she was a very maternal person. She’s a very affectionate mother. She had a lot of time for us kids. It was always her intention to always be there for us all the time. All I can remember is mum being home after school every day, you know, she’s always there, milk and cookies. In a lot of ways I really embrace that and remember the specialness of that and wanted to provide that for [son]. I do smother him with a lot of affection”. (Naomi)

As described earlier, the participants reported religion as one of the influential factors determining the status of their relationship. The religious identity dictated their socialisation values. According to most participants, common religious values among the couples also influenced and helped them in implementing common parenting practices based on their common religious affiliations, values and beliefs. The common religious values regarding parenting were interpreted as being helpful in resolving parenting and relational cultural differences among the couples. This is explicit in Gary and his wife Yan’s case:

“I think maybe the church helps because the church we go is like a multicultural thing”. (Yan)

“Okay, the church that Yan is talking about, we’ve got a group of people that share values, we’re raising children with the same values. I guess they’re important for me because of my own religious beliefs”. (Gary)

All the couples interviewed expressed common goals for their children. The most common goals included providing the basic welfare needs of children, education, respect for others, and moral and religious values. From the data gathered, it appeared that the welfare and education of their children were the main goals of the participants. Jeehan and his wife
Murielle described how important and serious a job it was for them to provide for the welfare of their children first:

“*We put aside our own personal desires and wants and stuff like that and became selfless for the sake of the kids, which gives us, you know, I suppose a beautiful thing back there too because we try to do things to make them happy*. (Jeehan)

“Yes, we just argue on the spot and try to come to a resolution and the kids see that too”. (Murielle)

All the participants were adamant regarding education for their children. The focus on education for the children was not only for the personal success of the children in life, but also for the overall good of the community that they belong to and can serve. This was manifested in Daniel and his wife Simla’s enthusiasm about their son’s education:

“*He’ll be given a very high level of education. We intend giving him private schooling throughout high school. He will be expected to do university*. (Daniel)

Simla agreed with her husband Daniel’s views about education and commented on the importance of education for success within a globalised world:

“*Because it’s a global society now... We believe those things give you the best chance of success in life... that also contributes to the society that you come from, the better person you’ll become... We have that ground plastered and solid, then whatever he does out there in the world he will be a model citizen*. (Simla)

All the participants described the family and extended family as an integral and important source of stability and support for the children. However the level of engagement and support, especially from extended families, was a point of differentiation that will be discussed comprehensively in the cultural differences section:

“*My family is very strong, aren’t they, which is probably not unique for you [husband], because you’ve got grandparents and aunties and uncles, all living around the same area, we don’t have that. I’m really lucky because we have a lot of support from my family. My mum is always there to pick up the kids or look after the kids. She’d be the first person that I always call... I’ve always respected and admired Malai for his family value and instilling that value of respect for each other, the way he installs that in the children when they fight with each other. He always goes back to them saying, “This is your sister, she is your blood.”* (Kylie)

Kylie’s husband Malai echoed her sentiment about the important role of the family and extended family in children’s upbringing:

“So that’s good thing for the kid to see that”. (Malai)

Kylie and Malai’s perception was also echoed by other participants:
“I think family is still a big answer, I mean I have always had strong family in mind but I think it is even stronger on the Vietnamese side, like extended family especially because there is more involvement and I am sure if we lived closer to her extended family we would see them all, all the time”. (Josh)

A common issue among parents was parental role and approach to discipline. All parents agreed about disciplining their children but how it was done was a point of disagreement. Most of the female participants described themselves as soft and more moderate and considered the fathers to be too harsh, albeit more effective disciplinarians. Other parents believed in implementing discipline based on age-appropriate factors. Some parents also believed in smacking children when and where appropriate. Three host partners thought that their husbands were too harsh on the children. This is well reflected in Kylie and her husband Malai’s case, where Kylie is quite soft regarding discipline as opposed to Malai who believed that discipline needs to be conducive to the children’s conduct, which is also a belief from the way he was disciplined by his parents:

“There have been moments where I thought that Malai is being little bit harsh in the way that he’s been reacting to different situations. Because you always say to the kids, “Oh, you know, don’t push me there or you won’t like it.” Like I think they fear him whereas they don’t fear me”. (Kylie)

“But I know it’s pretty much like that in the area, the way I grow up… the kid go la la. I say do it now or I will wreck it. But we can play when it’s play time. We play like buddies. So they can know, oh this time it’s not playing”. (Malai)

“That’s true. I think that’s really clear, like the kids know when they are having fun with Malai, when he’s been playful with them and having a good time but then when he’s the father, things certainly are meant”. (Kylie)

The data collected in this study highlight an important point about discipline influenced by gender. All couples reported that when it came to disciplining the children, the fathers were more effective or more listened to than the mothers. Fathers were reported as being the “boss”. As some participants described it:

“I think the father is more the boss”. (Yan)

Dharam: Why do you say that? Is it a gender thing or what?

“He’s always the one who has a high authority. If I couldn’t get her to listen to me, her father could… I think mothers always tend to be soft and fathers are stronger… yeah, the boss of the family. Even the dog knows”. (Yan)

Most couples also reported that discipline needs to be implemented based on age appropriate factors. Gary, who is a father of two grown up children from his previous
marriage, described this perception of age appropriate discipline based on his long term experience as a parent:

“I believe that the children need to learn self-discipline. I believe that they do that through discipline initially. But as they get older, you do reason with them. I don’t think that you can reason with a 1-year-old too much because I think your words are falling into space… I strongly believe if you use discipline with children when they’re younger, you teach them self-discipline. They learn how to control, how to be self-controlled and self-disciplined and then as they get older they don’t need that”. (Gary)

The data also revealed that many couples supported and believed in smacking as a disciplinary measure. Some participants described the positive effect of smacking on themselves by their parents when they were children. Three participants reported that they smacked their children when they played up, but strongly maintained that it is different from beating children, which they don’t agree with:

“We believe in smacking, both of us have always agreed on that kind of thing. We’ve tried the old counting one, two, three when disciplining the children, we haven’t really done too much of the time out option because we found that it wasn’t very effective kind of thing”. (John)

John’s wife Rula concurred with John’s belief about smacking but explained that disciplinary patterns of children have evolved as the society’s belief about discipline has changed with time:

“I think you try your best and then I know society now is different, everyone, and your kids are going to grow up in the world that is different, everything is just so different from yours. I guess we just try to implant those things to them and hopefully they grow up and they choose to be good”. (Rula)

Another migrant participant believed that smacking from his parents had positive effects on him because he did things that he would otherwise not do:

“Yeah, my parents used a cane not once, not twice, which was really good with school. At certain times it just gets you to do certain things that we don’t do. Out here, the cane is not allowed, which is bad. You can’t smack the kids. You can’t do anything. But then at the end of the day if the kids burn the factory or burn the cul-de-sac at the end of the street, they’re going to ask, "Who are the parents of this kid?" But really you are trying to tell them, discipline them… but out here, you can’t touch the kids”. (Manuel)

Manuel’s wife Tammy concurred with her husband and believed that discipline in the form of smacking is different from beating a child and is appropriate when necessary:

“You can, but you can’t beat them. There’s a difference and I think every child, when it’s called for they do need a smack, I really think”. (Tammy)
All couples, except one, said that they had the full support of their spouses in terms of parenting and family roles. A lot of the support was divided between the working and study hours of their partners and sometimes according to the sphere of influence and what is convenient at the time. One participant described that he did not provide adequate support to his wife regarding parenting because of heavy business commitments. The data gathered also revealed that most mothers looked after the educational component of the children. Fathers, in contrast, were more involved in the socialisation process of the children, such as sporting and outdoor activities, which explains the sphere of influence factor, that is, parents take on responsibilities that they are more skilled at.

“We don’t have traditional solo jobs like I guess I do now and Malai often worked at night. During the day, if he can take the kids to school, he will take the kids to school. But we’ve chosen a lifestyle where we just help each other out where there’s a need... He does a lot of cooking when he’s home”. (Kylie)

“Because my Aussie wife doesn’t cook Thai food (laugher)... Okay. I’ll tell you about it. When they were a little bit young, we take turns, but pretty much like put them to bed, but because they’re big now, I don’t put them to bed. K put them to bed, read the book. Oh, it’s a good thing, I agree with that”. (Malai)

John was also explicit about his particular skill in his family. He did not want to be stereotyped as the typical Australian man marrying an exotic foreign wife so that he does not have to do anything, but at the same time he recognised his weaknesses such as cooking and his strength such as gardening and therefore they have a mutual agreement as to who does what according to their skills:

“I’m aware and I am conscious of being stereotyped by my fellow Australians. I don’t want to be perceived as the white man who’s married the exotic foreign wife and he just sits back and does nothing and the wife does everything and that’s why he married in that culture. At the same time I also recognise my strengths and my weaknesses. My weakness is cooking. In that case I believe not so much culturally, but we sort of accept as individuals where our strengths are. Rula mowed the lawn today because I was at work. It needed doing so she did it, but predominantly we stick to our roles and that suits me and it seems to suit her”. (John)

John’s wife Rula agreed with his description of their respective roles in the family:

“Yeah”. (Rula)

Interestingly, from the data collected, it was evident that most immigrant partners, in the event of them going back to their home country, reported that they would revert to the traditional and customary parental roles and values of their home country. This was especially noted in relation to gender, where there was a shift in the male immigrant partners’ roles out of necessity and because of what was conducive to the environmental, contextual and situational influences. As Malai explained:
“Because this is Australia, I have to fit in this culture. But in Thailand, I might not do what is considered a woman thing... no cooking, no washing clothes, because of my environment... here if we disagree even like my daughter or my kid, I wouldn’t go like with the strong word to them even I’m angry. But in Thailand I might do it. See the difference?” (Malai)

Malai’s view was confirmed by his wife Kylie:

“He hangs the clothes out and he hangs out the women’s underwear which is what he wouldn’t have done in Thailand”. (Kylie)

“We wouldn’t do that in Thailand”. (Malai)

Manuel and his wife Tammy expressed similar attitudes regarding discipline and children’s responsibilities, because according to them, the economic conditions, lifestyle and children’s roles are different to Australia:

“I would be most strict. I would use the cane obviously when it’s really necessary and we’ll go to the field and dig. You know, like teach them more hard work because there is no Centre link... and respecting, teach them to say Mister whereas here it doesn’t work they use the first name, so yes it would be different and teaching them to respect the extended families”. (Manuel)

“They have to do things around the home, they have their role around the home and the boys have a different role. So that would change in a way”. (Tammy)

Another common dynamic among parents was the socialisation process of children. Parents were very concerned about the lack of respect and negative social attitudes displayed by children and did not want their children to be exposed to that. As Rajack and his wife Anya explained:

“The culture is very funny here... the kids are running away, smoking on the street, kissing and stealing. May be my kid does not want to do that but it depends on who he is hanging with and that concerns me”. (Rajack)

Rajack’s wife Anya agreed with her husband’s perception and concerns regarding the socialisation of children:

“I think that there is a part of me that I would want to raise my kids differently anyway. Living here in Australia because you look at so many things differently, like children at age of twelve or thirteen they are already going out and I do not want my kids to be like that”. (Anya)

**Differences**

Intercultural parents/couples described that they also encountered additional and different cultural experiences because of the differences in their cultural values and beliefs, which in
most cases were not discussed or were dormant until they had a child that triggered the cultural differences. The couples/parents’ differences in cultural and personal dynamics impacted on their parenting practices. Intercultural couples described differences in intercultural parenting practices such as discipline; sleep patterns; cultural taboos and traditional medical practices; children’s socialisation process; education; language and communication style; role of children, and the role of extended families.

Most of the participants described that they did not think about parenting issues when they formed their relationship. This was partly because they were more focussed on the relationship. Their cultural differences about parenting emerged when the children were born, thereby prompting them to discuss and negotiate the differences, which will be described in chapter five. Two couples said that they researched the literature on parenting before becoming parents.

Most migrant parents reported that they were very serious about discipline, a characteristic they modelled from the way they were parented as described in the earlier part of this chapter. All the migrant participants said that they did not agree with the way children are disciplined in the host society and believed that parents need to be stricter on the children. For example, Malai thought that his wife needed to change her tone when the children are disobeying her, whereas his wife argued that the child’s behaviour can be related to the kind of day he/she had, such as tiredness and was therefore responding appropriately:

“Totally different the way the children in this country grow up. I totally not agree”. (Malai)

Dharam: What sort of things are you referring to?

“Like example, say the kid does a thing differently than what you tell them to do and you call that kid and say you are naughty. For me, I don’t grow up and sit in the chair watching the television for five minutes... the time out thing... and another thing is, when the kid damaged something they say, “Oh sweetie don’t do that. Can’t you hear me?” And for me I don’t agree with that because we warned them already”. (Malai)

“I think he doesn’t take into consideration which I probably do because I’m the mother, particularly with our son, he gets very, very tired and I know when he gets really tired, he gets really stuffy and actually gets a bit, sort of rude and verbally abusive, not nice. But, I guess I would make allowances for that but Malai won’t make allowances for that and so I think that’s a little bit harsh sometimes”. (Kylie)

This case demonstrated a clear example of subjective interpretation where one person relied on cultural references for the style of parenting as opposed to the partner’s individual and Western authoritative approach to parenting, thus triggering the difference.

Intercultural couples described the sleep patterns of children as another area of strong cultural differences. Two participants were more inclined to have the baby in bed with them
or at least in the same room as opposed to their Australian partners who wanted to train the child to sleep in a separate room. Both mothers expressed the need to nurture the child in close proximity and breastfeed them whenever required. This also meant that they did not have to leave the comfort of their room to feed the child. Their Australian partners were more concerned about sleep training by having the child in another room and letting the child cry. They also did not want to be disturbed in bed and have their sleep disrupted. This is exemplified in Josh and Ng’s case:

“Around his sleep and stuff and the cot sleeping like I brought our son into the bed and I think that might be a cultural thing, I might tend to justify the close sleeping. In most of the world they sleep in the same bed as the parents whereas here it’s different... I don’t know I didn’t feel comfortable with that and also I like feeding him to sleep, just like holding them and nurturing. I think controlled crying and stuff that is very western thing it’s not really like I think in Asian cultures or other cultures, if they cry you just feed them or your comfort them. So I think the controlled crying is really hard”. (Ng)

“The transition to the cot, yeah it’s hard because he has to sleep in a cot but you don’t want him to have bad habits. But because sleeping was a bit of a cultural thing, it was just a dilemma... he cries at like 4:00 in the morning and then comes and sleeps in our bed for a few hours and kicks us and we can’t sleep, so that’s just frustrating sometimes”. (Josh)

Breast feeding was another point of tension among couples and among the extended family. Manuel reported that in his African culture, mothers always breastfeed their children. He expected the same for his children and was very upset when his wife Tammy started to bottle feed their son when she went back to work:

“There was an issue there with breast feeding because I went back to work and he didn’t want to feed anymore, and my milk dried up. He wasn’t very happy about that and his mom wasn’t very happy either. It took me a while to explain to him and for him to understand. If I’m going to work five days a week and he’s having a bottle five days a week, he’s not going to want to be breastfed”. (Tammy)

Manuel and Tammy went on to describe other points of differences regarding cultural parenting practices, such as traditional medicine, umbilical cord and nappies. Manuel and his mother were not happy about Tammy’s lack of understanding of their cultural practices. Both Manuel and Tammy had to explain each other’s cultural practices extensively until a compromise was reached:

“I’m not going to just talk on my behalf but on the people who come from a different culture like this baby is supposed to be washed in a certain herbal medicine but Tammy doesn’t understand. I brought the medicine from home... But she’s asking me, “Why is he showering in this thing?” But that is what is important in my culture that is supposed to be done. Then
there is another thing of keeping the umbilical cord. If you don’t keep the umbilical cord from my culture, the kids will just loiter around they don’t become anything, so yeah”. (Manuel)

Dharam: It sounds like that is the point of parenting when you started to notice the differences?

“Yes, I like explaining because I’ve got different background and I have got to explain myself to Tammy, say, “This is why we are doing this because of this.” (Manuel)

“One of the things, the boys don’t wear nappies and I said well no and the way that we do that is different. We can’t have him around without a nappy and going to the shops... it’s just not something that is well so I got him in nappies”. (Tammy)

“Yes. It’s for these problems, the way you do that and my mom is telling me, "Oh has he got a nappy? If he’s at home don’t put on the nappies”. I’m thinking, oh, she’s my mom, she knows she raised me. So I come to Tammy and she says, “Why are we doing this”?. (Manuel)

In this situation, Manuel experienced conflict between his ancestral and his wife’s parental practices and how he would be perceived among his extended family and community for adopting his wife’s western practices against his cultural parenting practices. Under the circumstances, Manuel and his wife had to communicate and compromise on their parenting practices.

Another area of difference among intercultural couples was the socialisation process of children. Three participants did not agree with their children going out with friends or sleeping over, arguing that they care more about what is best for the children as opposed to their Australian partners who believed in trusting and giving responsibilities to the children.

Rajack was very protective of his children as opposed to his wife Anya’s idea of building trust in the children:

“With his friends, I want to go to the beach with my friends, I just want to catch the bus, I want to watch a movie. Of course it is not in my culture... I will not let him go. It is not something that children do outside that we do not know. I did not grow up like that”. (Rajack)

“I would be asking the questions “who are you going with? What time are you going to be picked-up, things like that”. You have to let them go and trust them. You have to give them responsibility to do the right thing. If you keep them locked up behind and pamper them, what will happen when they become adult. Are they going to be wild? And that hurts”. (Anya)

“That hurts... that is our culture. I do not worry on everything I just want what is best for my children”. (Rajack)
All the parents in this study described that they were keen about their children’s education, but migrant parents seemed to put more emphasis on education, both for themselves and the children. When prompted as to why they focus so much on education for the children, they responded that it was: (1) an important value to boost the children’s job opportunities, future wellbeing and better life style; and (2) they did not want their children to be doing what they are doing because of the lack of or missed educational opportunities. As Michelle, Manuel and Tammy explained:

“That is one thing I notice in the western world they leave the kids at year level 11 and let them do what they want and follow the dream. I really don’t approve of that and I tried to tell my workmates that”. (Michelle)

“I’m pushing her to become a doctor. I’ve been talking to her because there’re certain things I’ve failed myself... So I’m trying to push her to see that she can do better than me and to do her best”. (Manuel)

Manuel’s wife Tammy described the disparity in the perception and importance of education between her husband’s native country and the host culture:

“In the African culture, study is so important. Here you do not really know when you’re at that age. You’re not really looking to the future ... or how many children 15 that sort of age really know what they want to do with their futures. They don’t know consequences... for us here it’s not pushed so much that it’s so important”. (Tammy)

Earlier, differences in parents’ beliefs about children’s socialisation such as autonomy, trust and responsibility, were discussed. This section will look at parents’ description of children’s role, specifically children’s gender role relating to household chores and children’s rights and responsibilities in the family context. Most migrant parents still believed in and ascribed to gender related roles. For example, according to his Kylie, her husband Malai still believed in gender related roles in his family:

“But I think Malai probably expects more jobs from his daughter than he does from his son. Wouldn’t you say? So particularly at meal times, he’ll ask her to clear the table rather than, I think it’s just a default position that you just go to the daughter”. (Kylie)

“Yeah, because it’s a girl thing and boy things are different”. (Malai)

Another migrant participant went further in her cultural attitude towards gender role by emphasising and defining the domestic household chores for her children:

“Funny I’ve heard myself say to my son, you know you’re outside, you mow the lawn, it’s a man’s job. My daughter inside, now she’s washing the dishes and cooking. Come and watch cooking, I don’t want my son to cook. When I see my husband outside mowing the lawn, I say to my son, pull your boots on, outside”. (Rula)
All migrant parents believed that children should be taught hard work and responsibilities alongside rights:

“So I would be teaching them hard work and that is what is important raising the children here... another thing with Australia I think the culture here is to bring up rebels. Children are too much opinionated... this culture does that”. (Manuel)

Manuel’s wife Tammy disagreed with him that children in Australia are too opinionated:

“Sometimes that’s where we might clash because I always say what I think I don’t hold back, obviously with respect in mind. So sometimes it can cause issues but I’m not going to sit and say nothing and then be unhappy. Therefore I think we need to discuss things and then come to a medium where both parties are happy. Otherwise what sort of relationship or marriage would that be if one is always unhappy all the time and having to give in to everything?” (Tammy)

Interestingly, Azumi described how children are not praised for being good or successful in her Japanese culture, compared to Australian parents who praise children and regarded same as positive parenting attributes.

“The way he said my daughter is a first for (inaudible) or something. It’s not happening to Japanese parents. Japanese parents never say their children are the best. Oh my children are the best or beautiful or anything like that, but Australian people they admire their children. That’s good part, expressive, tell the people like this, but never in Japan will you say like this. People think “ojai baka”... Ojai means appearance, Baka is the fruit. You are two fruits, you can’t see”. (Azumi)

Besides the internal dynamics impacting on intercultural parents/couples, intercultural parenting also appeared to be influenced by contextual factors. A social constructionist approach attempts to understand participants’ experiences of a phenomenon based on individuals’ lived experiences and the impact of contextual influences on those experiences. The contextual influences on intercultural parenting are explored in the next section.

4.4.8 Sub-theme 8: Contextual Influences

Parenting role has a significant impact on the well-being of families and children. In this study, the responses from the participants demonstrated that parenting experiences were significantly influenced by broader systems and socio-environmental contexts external to the family environment and intimate relationships. Contextual influences that impacted their parenting practices included the environment, extended families, friends, personality/individuality, socio-economic status, and transnational processes.

Environment

All the couples described the environment, such as their neighbourhood and community as having an impact on their parenting experiences regarding safety and trust. Some
participants also described how living and interacting in a culturally diversified environment had a more positive impact on their family and parenting experiences, thus safeguarding their children against racial prejudice:

“We actively engage in the local Tongan community. We have a lot of interaction in the ethnic communities. We also have our church, which is multicultural, and Rula has got some family living here... so they’ve had exposure to both cultures in terms of the language...Sunday school, the whole thing, church. So our kids are therefore exposed to that as well. Most of the Tongan community events we go to are centred around churches anyway, different denominations. And I guess also what we see in other couples from different cultural backgrounds. We see what other couples do and how they’ve adapted and then we try and embrace a bit of that”. (John)

Other participants said that they altered their parenting attitudes in order to be conducive to the environmental circumstances in which the children are raised so that their children’s safety and achievements are optimal. Malai and his wife Kylie described that the physical and social characteristics of their neighbourhoods impacted on the decisions they made about their children’s activities:

“In Thailand, the environment is different than here. Maybe it’s more about safety and trust”. (Malai)

“Yes, because we would be eating out on the street more often. You probably spent more time outside there than what you would be doing at home. Yeah, because there’d probably be more freedom than what there is here. You spend a lot of time around adults”. (Kylie)

The environment impacted on the decisions made by some participants regarding sleepovers by children. Their decisions related to safety and trust in other parents they befriended in a new environment. As Carol and her husband Jay explained:

“We found ourselves in a new environment. We didn’t know the parents. We didn’t know the kids and we just had an abundance of people coming who we just didn’t know who they were”. (Carol)

“So if we were back in Wollongong, where we came from, and where we knew and were friends as parents, I don’t think a sleepover would be that stressful. Four and a half years ago, I mean when we first came here and I guess the Gold Coast has got that perception of being dodgy and then you let them go and then you think, “Oh, okay. Where are they going?” you know”. (Jay)

Manuel described how he had to build resistance and survival mechanism in his children by teaching them to be tough in a tough Australian environment:
“I’m still thinking because this is a very, Africa is rough but I think Australia is too rough. So I’m thinking I might teach him how to become rough as well because if I’m teaching him to be soft, respectful and whatever, will that be enough?” (Manuel)

Parental role seemed to be also influenced by the evolving demographics of the society. The very fact that Australia is becoming an increasingly multicultural society and many children are from mixed families seems to bring a degree of commonality among them and less need to get stressed. Also, their children were surrounded by other intercultural students and families at school and their social environment. As Sarah and her husband Samuel explained:

“It is just living in Australia but most of the other cultures are having families really and bringing them up the Australian way. Which is really Australia is a multi-cultural society...in a way we kind of fit that way. It does not seem odd or anything but for me there are no more values or anything from my culture that are a hindrance or advantage or anything... I think being in a school that has different cultures means they do see other cultures it is not just Australian. It is a good way that they see other cultures”. (Sarah)

“And the culture is not strange to most kids anymore. There are a lot of kids who have mixed culture. They generally do not look different...they have the Asian shape and eyes. But they are not surely being picked as Japanese or Filipino kids” (Samuel).

**Extended family**

The intercultural couples also emphasised the importance, contribution and significant role extended families play in the lives of their children and described this as the strength of the collective society. Intercultural couples described getting financial, moral and physical support from their extended families. Most of the migrant participants were raised in collective societies and valued the contributions of extended family members, especially grandparents, in their upbringing. In this study, participants were seen to be encouraging and facilitating the external parenting facilitators. For example, grandparents from overseas visited and supported them during pregnancy, childbirth and well after childbirth:

“The grandparents are here for a year at the moment... also, we plan to apply for my parents to immigrate here... we hope after or even before that, my parents live with us and she [daughter] the little one will see how we treat my parents with respect old people, respect other people and they will learn that because that’s Chinese culture”. (Yan)

However, the data showed a significant and consistent disparity about the level of involvement and support intercultural couples received from their migrant partners’ extended families compared to their white Australian counterparts. A clear differentiation of the extended family influence, as described by most couples, is exemplified in the following description by Pravin and his wife Naomi:
“In one way it is different compared to here. Because there you have a lot of relatives, everybody is around you, like you’ve got your grandmother, your grandfather, and all other relatives. Having a kid in India as you know is kind of a specialty… my mother never felt like she had a kid because of all the help all the time”. (Pravin)

“I guess it’s not so close knit. My parents actually moved away from Brisbane, where all the extended families are, my Nana, my aunts… I remember when I was about 4 years old we moved to the Central Coast. Mum says to get away. But I don’t remember ever being, I was never left in the care of my aunt or… we visit, we spend Christmas together, but that would be it”. (Naomi)

Michelle described how she got financial, moral and physical support from her extended family and was shocked at the attitude of her Australian in-laws when she asked for help:

“I was sick and getting worse. I just told his [husband] mum how I wish Jim can help me so that I can have some rest because I had twenty-four seven, I had twins. What I got from her, trust me, “look listen he is an electrician and he needs his sleep”. Wow, to get that from my mother-in-law was something that I never have expected from her. That sort of shocked me. I was also in my post-natal depression at that stage. So that kind of support I will never get from his side”. (Michelle)

Michelle’s disappointment was shared by her husband Jim who added some insights into the contrasting extended family support they experienced in their parenting exercise:

“We used to live on a boat…Mary got a lipodystrophy…she was sick and her sister came and stayed for a week. She cooked broth and so mostly she came to help”. (Jim)

Lack of support from the host extended family regarding child care was described as disappointing by several participants because it made it hard for them to juggle between work and their parental responsibilities. The disappointment is reflected in Tammy and her husband Manuel’s statements:

“My mum and I think in general, the Australian, the older generations they’re more selfish now. They don’t want to be looking after the children while we’re off at work. A lot of kids are in day care rather than being with their grandparents or their extended family”. (Tammy)

“That’s a shock to me. Now we don’t have anybody if he’s in day care, he’s sick. Since I took him to day care he’s been sick. If I leave the job the government is not going to support me. It’s just a conundrum”. (Manuel)

Distances between countries and states were also seen as impacting on parental support and cultural exchanges. Most of the immigrant participant’s extended family members live in other countries. Simla described how the distance makes it difficult for her son to experience the African extended family culture. However, although her husband Daniel has
extended family members in Australia, it saddens her to realise that the Australian extended family is not involved in their son’s life:

“It doesn’t exist in terms of the Australian extended family. Even though they’re here, it’s not that very far, but it’s never because his family just grew up like that. People do their own thing… yeah, it’s a very small family and very individualistic family. So our son doesn’t have as much connection with his extended family apart from Face Book” (Simla)

Daniel concurred with his wife’s disappointment:

“It’s not… my family is 2,000 kilometers away. S’s family is back home in Botswana, so we’re all orphans in some way” (Daniel)

Although most intercultural couples reported that they enjoyed positive extended family influences, one couple indicated that extended family members can also have negative influences regarding parenting. Rula and her husband John described how Rula’s sister was a negative influence when Rula tried to discipline the children:

“I’m glad that we’re actually away from my family. Because then I can keep control over my kids. If I was in New Zealand or Tonga, my kids would not listen to me. I had that experience of my sister coming to live with us for a year, my son was so different. He wouldn’t listen to me, he was really sulky… Because my sister was here and every time I tried to discipline him my sister would take him away. My sister would have a lot of say in the way I discipline my son” (Rula).

“He runs to the auntie for everything. My parents, they may be see things we do that they don’t agree with but they won’t say anything” (John)

“My family will”. (Rula)

“Which gives us that autonomy as a couple to make our decisions and find that balance, whereas T’s family would be boisterous in front of us to do things” (John)

Friends

The data gathered demonstrated that friends were important source of support and influence in relational and parenting dynamics. Most of the immigrant partners described that living away from their home country, including family members, friends, community, and customs and traditions, left them with a feeling of sadness, isolation, loss, and lack of support in the host country or the new environment they live in. Couples described how they developed new socialisation processes to minimise those feelings of loss and support. Friendship was described by some couples as a significant socialisation process for continued support and enhanced relational and parenting dynamics. The meaning of “family” extended to friends who were seen as family members due to the distance or lack
of involvement of family members. Simla described how in the absence of her extended family members, her friends and the community she engaged with became her family:

“That’s the way it is here. Family is not blood anymore. When you come from one country and citizen in another country your friends become your family. And so we’ve created our own networks of people that are friends and family, as well. One of my friends who I’ve been here with for a very long time, she knows everything. I see her as my sister and my other friends, they are the same. They’ve known him [son] since he was young. They are his aunties, not blood aunties, but his aunties. He has uncles everywhere”. (Simla)

Simla’s husband Daniel concurred with her interpretation of friends as family members given the situational context:

“A lot of the people that Simla spoke about, most of them have refugee backgrounds. And sometimes reaching out to others creates your own family network even if it’s not blood. It creates a communal family atmosphere”. (Daniel)

John described how he modelled his own experience of friends as families to his children.

“I myself have lived with a Samoan family for over 10 years and they’re kind of like my second brothers and things. So with our kids we’re kind of everyone’s uncle and auntie, even the church pastor and they called the wife auntie and so on”. (John)

Participants also described their friends as role model for parenting styles and important source of parental tips and advice. As Sarah described it:

“Your friendship will have an impact too. The way other parents discipline or don’t discipline and sometimes you think that you are not too strict or too relaxed. So when you see someone else with children go off the rails and how they react to it and makes you think of your own role”. (Sarah)

**Personality and individuality**

The narratives revealed that personality and individuality were other sources of influence on parenting. Some parents related their experiences to their personality type and individual events in their life as opposed to culture. According to Simla, it is just about who they are as individuals:

“For me, I haven’t looked at it as a different culture. It just has been about who we are. We were together for a little bit before we had him [son]. We got to know each other first before we became parents. It was a good thing because I knew what kind of things to expect from him”. (Simla)

Simla and her husband Daniel also explained the individuality perspective in relation to the daily activities and chores in her family.
“I would never really explain it as culture. It’s not that thing being a woman for example, or perhaps an African woman and they should be cooking and doing these things. For me, it’s never been a dominant thing in our relationship or parenting. It’s just been part of who we are without having to express it”. (Simla)

“We both get things done as collective and spend equal time. There’s no hierarchy and there’s no masculine/feminine structured relationship... we’re both quite liberal and well educated”. (Daniel)

The narratives identified flexibility as an important personality characteristic that facilitated the incorporation of partner’s cultural values and hence a vehicle to reduce conflict. Participants from both the host and migrant context reported that they tried to understand and accommodate certain cultural practices of their partners.

“Certain thing like this baby is supposed to be washed in a certain herbal medicine, but T doesn’t understand that... she’s working on it... If it wasn’t T [wife], if it was a different person who is strong-minded, they would refuse him to shower in that”. (Manuel)

“One of the things, they don’t wear nappies... and I said well no and the way that we do that is different. We can’t have him running around without a nappy and going to the shops... it’s just not something that is well. I got him in nappies. But if we were to live over there obviously, then he wouldn’t be wearing a nappy”. (Tammy)

Other participants believed in their own self-attribute and drive for successful outcomes in life. As Jay described it:

“I think with me, I tend not to focus on too much outwardly, like I don’t really feel pressure from my family or friends or anyone. It’s me, it’s the drive within me, I’ve got... If it’s to do with the household or the finances or education or kids, it’s my drive”. (Jay)

The belief system was also seen as an important construct in guiding how participants raised their children. Gary, for example, described that his parenting style was influenced by his belief system:

“I think more it’s my belief system than my culture. I’m not sure that there is a set cultural way of bringing up western children. It’s very ad hoc... I believe that I have a responsibility to mould them and I need to use tools that I have to do the best that I can to mould them. That’s not my culture. It’s just what I believe and what I strongly believe since I had my first child”. (Gary)

Childhood negative experiences seemed to have an impact on individuality patterns and behaviours of some parents. For example, Gary’s individual perception of how to bring up his children was also influenced by his own negative experiences as a child:
“What happened to me has influenced me in how I raise children. I’ve always been a parent with a purpose and a single-minded purpose. What I’m envisioning is the end product and I’m trying to achieve an end product almost with my child and that’s a child that I don’t care if they want to be garbage collectors, but it’s important that they’re happy and they are fulfilled in what they’re doing”. (Gary)

The narratives in this study showed how the socio-environmental contexts shaped the participants’ parenting process. In all sociocultural contexts, parenting appeared affected by both past and current situations that dictated which parenting styles and practices were most effective. Self-confidence, degree of safety and trust in the community, and support from friends contributed to the participants’ positive parenting experiences.

**Transnational processes**

As mentioned in the literature review, the concept of transnationalism refers to multiple links and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states. When immigrants engage in transnational activities, they create "social fields" that link their original country with their new country or countries of residence. These social fields are the product of a series of interconnected and overlapping economic, political, and socio-cultural activities. Intercultural couples and parents live within broader social context outside their relationship in both the country of residence and their immigrant partner’s country of origin. In this study broader social factors included migration, political and religious concerns. Migration concerns involved language and communication, and racism and discrimination problems. Within a transnational environment, immigrant partners described challenges they encountered in negotiating their belongingness. As Rajack and his wife Anya explained, despite the fact that they have been living in their suburb for fourteen years, their family has been the subject of racism, Islamophobia, exclusion and negative attitudes because of their Muslim and religious identity:

“I did see the difference... when you see the people on the street or your neighbour... I have been here a long time... they look at us as strangers”. (Rajack)

“I suppose people keep to themselves... don’t they?”. (Anya)

Other host partners described how their families were gazed at in public places and comments made about their children and husbands because of their visible differences:

“Because I’m white blonde hair, blue eyes and they are dark, I do get looks sometimes from people... I would never have experienced that if I married a white man”. (Cathy)

Both Cathy and Anya were very sensitive to the exclusionary processes experienced by their immigrant husbands. Cathy was particularly sensitive to the exclusionary process based on the ideologies of colour and racism towards her husband and children.
However, participants also described their positive transnational experiences, especially within the diasporic environment. For example, Simla described her positive experiences as a facilitator in helping her African communities to integrate the African network and social environment, and adapt to the host society. This integrative style of acculturation helped intercultural couples and parents to maintain their cultural affiliation, while at the same time being part of the larger host society:

“It’s reflected in the work I do with the African (inaudible) Council... It is very reflected in the work that I do working in the multicultural sector... it’s the reasons why I’m involved a lot with the African community here. So I can actually create that village and networks around me that my son can also experience the wide range of people around me and the difference, the strength of a community, which is how I grew up”. (Simla)

Simla’s integrative acculturation activities demonstrate her agency in the host society contrary to societal myths as victims of circumstances, such as socio-economic dependence.

The above analysis described the challenges and constraints that participants experienced in their intercultural relational and parenting dynamics. However, all the participants also recognised and reported experiences of significant benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting, both for themselves and their children. The positive experiences of intercultural parenting will be explored in the next section.

4.4.9 Sub-theme 9: Benefits and Opportunities of Intercultural Parenting

All the participants reported that they experienced several benefits and opportunities in their intercultural parenting journey. The positive elements of intercultural parenting were apparent in all the participants’ exciting descriptions of how their experiences enriched their lifestyle and family life. The positive experiences intercultural couples encountered in their relational dynamics were reported to impact on how they raised their children. Given the extent of the benefits and opportunities identified, it was important to recognise those as the strength of intercultural relational and parenting dynamics. The benefits to parents/couples and children will be described separately to allow an in depth understanding and appreciation of the extensive benefits and opportunities intercultural families experienced and enjoyed. This section will describe the perceived benefits to parents, followed by benefits to children.

Benefits to parent couples

Benefits and opportunities for intercultural couples were reported as richness of both worlds, learning another model of parenting, holistic family life, and cultural competency. Participants described how fascinated they were experiencing the richness of travelling to their migrant partner’s country, meeting their extended families and participating in the local culture. This fascination was exemplified in Kylie’s statement:
“When I went to his family, I was just fascinated because it was a place where not many foreigners or in fact, no foreigners, had ever been before. I got to learn about how to make exotic cakes. Your mum was making banana food with banana leaves. I love all that creating sort of stuff. It seemed a very simple sort of life and to me it was very appealing. And everyone was very friendly and lots of people were coming, and it was all about food and talking and socializing [laughter] I mean it brings more richness to my life and my children’s lives”. (Kylie)

Kylie’s husband Malai shared her jubilant emotions:

“Over there they say every day is happy day… it is like this in our culture”. (Malai)

The food culture of migrant partners was reported to be more appealing than that of the host partner, which was interpreted as enriching the host partners’ lifestyle. Samuel and Gary described their excitement about being able to share their migrant wives’ food culture:

“My food culture was very plain and boring, just an Aussie steak and veggies. Whereas that really impacted on the way we like to eat Asian food and live our lives now”. (Samuel)

“Food, to me it’s food. I love food from different cultures. It was really good. Enjoying food together, steamed buns, and all sorts of stuff. I love Asian culture. I love the food. I love the variety of food. I could go to China and go from restaurant to restaurant. We both miss the Chinese food from China”. (Gary)

The intercultural relationship was viewed as creating opportunities for intercultural parent couples to be exposed to other forms of parenting. Most parents reported that they learnt another way of parenting which added value to their own and children’s lives. Gary and his wife Yan described how they experienced and learnt about the dimensions of softness and discipline in parenting from each other:

“I think Yan brings an incredible softness in A [daughter]. She’s a very soft person and I think that that has an impact on our daughter. Yan is an incredibly soft and gentle natured person. I think that that puts another dimension into the parenting that I don’t have that softness because I am single-minded, I am focused and I’m trying to achieve something within her… It’s a learning experience for me in being soft and having that sort of nature. It’s something that I’m not used to. I didn’t grow up with any of that”. (Gary)

“One thing for me from his side [husband] is discipline. Discipline is a big thing I’ve learned. Yeah, it’s like love is not the only thing you have to do. When you discipline them you love them for the future”. (Yan)

Azumi explained the benefit she gained from marrying an Australian in terms of gender role limitations in her culture of origin when it comes to parenting. In Japan, she reported that women are solely responsible for raising children. She was able to experience a negotiated
parenting role with her Australian husband as opposed to strict cultural values and expectations about gender roles when it comes to parenting in Japan.

“I think because maybe Japanese men always working hard and then I can’t do everything, no time. So here Bill, he’s more involved with education or concerned about children. So that is my benefit for being married to an Australian guy”. (Azumi)

Cathy described how her husband Will learnt new ways of communicating with the children based on his own negative childhood experience. Will was brought up in a very violent and authoritarian family setting and had a tendency to parent the same way, especially with the boys. Cathy convinced Will to communicate instead with the boys, which resulted in better parenting outcomes:

“I think the boys are well rounded. They have learnt to communicate because you didn’t use to communicate a lot did you, like your family weren’t really communicating in that way, so they have learnt to talk things through and to communicate more”. (Cathy)

“They voice their opinion which was never in any of our household”. (Will)

Participants reported that they found other positive aspects of parenting and living that they never experienced in their own environment and upbringing. Tammy described some aspects of parenting different to her own:

“Yes, I think the way that they are just encouraging study and work ethics, not be lazy, they see things differently... I think people would work harder if Australians took a leaf out of that book. They would have more qualifications for better jobs”. (Tammy)

Perception of holistic family life was of concern among some host participants when exposed to and compared to their migrant partner’s upbringing. Three participants described that they did not grow up in healthy family environments, compared to their partner’s rich family life. They experienced poor or non-existent family life in their own upbringing. They really got a sense of healthy and holistic family life when they formed their own intercultural relationships and were exposed to healthy dynamics in their partners’ parent’s relationships. Daniel described how being with a partner from another culture made his family more complete and holistic.

“For me, I think, having Simla’s cultural influence about family has made me or made our family perhaps more complex”. (Daniel)

“No. Not in a bad way. Complex and holistic, and perhaps more inclusive and wide-scoping than if it had just been a typical Anglo-Saxon upbringing”. (Daniel)

Josh and his wife Ng echoed Daniel’s sentiment about acquiring strong family values, which was lacking in Josh’s environment.
“I mean I have always had strong family in mind but I think it is even stronger on the Vietnamese side, like extended family especially because there is more involvement and I am sure if we lived closer to her extended family we would see them all, all the time”. (Josh)

“Yes, strong family values drawing that from the Vietnamese side”. (Ng)

Intercultural couples described that the exposure to their partners’ world, people and other cultural entities gave them cultural ascendency and competency over those in monocultural relationships. They described the positive cultural attributes they gained such as sensitivity to, empathy and tolerance of cultural dynamics, adaptability and flexibility and open-mindedness. John described how he now understood why his wife does things the way she does:

“In terms of being more bicultural in the way I approach things, understanding sometimes things that frustrates me, that may be Rula might do. But I sort of sit back and think that she’s Rula and she’s not raised the way I was raised, don’t worry too much about it”. (John)

Samuel explained how he became more open-minded and thought outside the box:

“Also for me, it opens my mind like an outgoing Aussie and never thinks of going to Asia. But meeting an Asian girl I have been to Asia a lot. The Asian arts, I guess from that in mind, I am going that way, going towards Asian influence with arts, food, travel and we go to Asia more often than we have been to Europe. I did not have that influence before”. (Samuel)

Anya described how tolerance for each other’s culture enhanced her relationship with her husband:

“I think as you said you know, you have an open mind, you have the benefit of referring back to that type of culture. You can give and take in different things. We get along because I agree so much for his culture”. (Anya)

**Benefits to children**

Parents perceived that their children benefitted enormously from belonging to an intercultural family and being brought up by intercultural parents. The benefits were described as unique benefits unknown to children from mono-cultural families, including: best of both worlds; job opportunities, adaptability/tolerance/acceptance/open-mindedness, and food culture. Naomi and her husband Pravin reported that by encouraging their son to be bicultural has benefitted and enriched his life:

“I think it’s wonderful that he’s [son] being not just exposed to another culture, but learning about another culture and how daddy grew up... He talks about India and points to it on the map. He knows that’s where Nana lives. That’s an experience for a child who grew up in Australia doesn’t have. And he even said to me the other day when we were at a shopping centre “mommy they’re speaking Punjabi. It’s a foreign language”. So I think it’s been not
just a wealth of knowledge for him, but a beautiful experience to really share in another culture and that’s going to benefit him throughout his life, not just as a child”. (Naomi)

Naomi’s husband Pravin concurred with her view and elaborated further that their son’s exposure to two different cultures was benefitting him in his developmental growth as he was able to take the positives from both cultures. For example, growing up in the Australian context gave their son the tools to be strong and independent, and exposure him to the Indian culture taught him the notion of positive love:

“The positive in Australia is that he’s been given the tools to grow up to be a strong independent young boy, and the positive from the Indian culture is that he continues to be shown a hundred percent positive love, he will know that he’ll never be alone, we’re not going to kick him out when he’s 16”. (Pravin)

Two other participants reported that exposure to other cultures taught their children about non-materialism, and respect for people. As Tammy explained:

“But they also get to see the other sides where life is not about materialism, but life is about being kind to people, respecting people and helping... If you have only one culture, for example just Australian culture, they don’t know what else is out there in the world”. (Tammy)

There was a perception among most of the participants that mixed-race children are more beautiful and it increases their chances of getting jobs. This viewpoint is related to the biological phenomenon termed hybrid vigour, which “predicts that cross-breeding leads to offspring that are genetically fitter than their parents... somehow biologically different and prettier than non-mixed (non-white) people by nature” (Singla, 2015, p. 29). Gary was very adamant about the hybrid vigour phenomenon and its associated benefits to his daughter:

“So I think that being incredibly beautiful because of her mixed race, she’s just going to have a fantastic life. I think because while looks aren’t everything, and whether we like it or not, apparently studies of employment have shown that you’re more likely to get a job if you’re good looking”. (Gary)

Gary went further to describe that his daughter being bilingual enables her to establish business and employment opportunities in the emerging economies of countries like China where her mother’s side of parents and grandparents are from:

“There’s 1.4 billion Chinese. Being able to speak Mandarin is going to be an incredible asset for her as she grows up... with China being the emerging world economy, she’ll be able to facilitate business over there if she wants to because she can go over there and speak Chinese and English fluently, and sort of be interchangeable between the two”. (Gary).

Gary’s wife Yan concurred with her husband that their children being bilingual is beneficial for their future:
“She can go and work there and speak the language”. (Yan)

Children belonging to intercultural families and relationships were reported to be more adaptable, tolerant, accepting and open-minded to other cultures. All the participants reported those qualities in their children from belonging to two cultures. As Michelle and her husband Jim explained:

“They are more adaptable because they are exposed to two cultures... They have built tolerance from knowing themselves as culturally different and assimilated well. What matters to others would not matter to the children. We came from a different world. We light a candle for the night, whereas if the electricity went out with an Australian couple, they would say what kind of holiday is this”. (Michelle)

“Absolutely”. (Jim)

Jeehan and Murielle described how their children became accepting of everybody:

“They’re more worldly, like even the teachers have said that the kids are very worldly, they’re very accepting of everybody that they don’t, you know, they’re not judging”. (Jeehan)

“If you look at our kids and their friends, like my son’s best friend was a Chinese kid. My daughter is best friends with a Lebanese girl and it’s like her best friend is like an Australian girl. So it’s allowed them to see the class, a different class of people, a different diversity of cultures and be accepting to them so they can be friends with anybody”. (Murielle)

Children belonging to intercultural families were also reported to benefit from the food culture of their intercultural parents. Azumi described the benefits of the food culture for her children:

“I think they can have both cultures and different foods, better. Because the other children didn’t know nourishment, (inaudible), they couldn’t eat. My children it doesn’t matter anything they can eat. They can eat Australian food or Japanese sushi, or rice bowl, anything. Beans, pickles, or anything they can eat but other Australian children can’t eat because it’s from when they were born they get both things. So more variety for anything that is edible”. (Azumi)

From the above narratives, it was clear that all intercultural couples encountered positive experiences for themselves and their children as a result of their unique cultural affiliations. The differences were regarded as strengths and benefits that superseded mono-cultural parenting experiences. This study identified some other important issues that impacted on parent couple’s experiences regarding parental and relational dynamics such as power relations, reverse acculturation, and negotiation of differences. These are described in the next chapter.
4.4.10 Summary of Theme 1: Cultures Coming Together

This chapter included one major theme and nine sub-themes, which described participants’ experiences as intercultural couples and parents. The major theme included: cultures coming together. The experiences were described as both similar to parenting dynamics and different because of the intercultural characteristics. All couples encountered internal and external challenges regarding relational and parenting dynamics. Internal challenges related to identity issues, culture shock, racism and marriage disapproval, cultural values, gender roles, language and communication, and differences in cultural beliefs and parenting practices such values regarding children’s socialisation and developmental processes.

The external influences such as the environment, community, friends and extended family, and personal attributes played a significant role in intercultural couple’s lives and parenting processes. The degree of support they received from their environment, social network and the family determined the quality of their experiences as intercultural couples/parents.

The narratives showed that despite the challenges that intercultural couples experienced, they and their children also enjoyed many benefits and opportunities from their intercultural relationship. The benefits and opportunities for intercultural parent/couples were reported as richness of both worlds and cultures, exposure to other models of parenting, cultural competency, and a holistic family experience. The benefits and opportunities for their children were reported as belonging to two cultures, cultural awareness and competency, job opportunities, open-mindedness and the food culture.

Interestingly, many of the couple’s experiences were also impacted by other internal and external dynamics such as power, mainly regarding parenting and relational issues, acculturation processes and how they negotiated differences, and will be described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5: POWER RELATIONS, REVERSE ACCULTURATION/ENCULTURATION, MAKING INTERCULTURAL PARENTING WORK

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focussed on the first theme identified in participants’ experiences regarding relational and parenting dynamics: cultures coming together. In line with the research question of the study, this chapter focusses on Themes 2, 3 and 4, Power Relations, Reverse Acculturation/Enculturation, and Making Intercultural Parenting Work respectively, and their nine sub-themes, which emerged from analysis of participants’ experiences. Table 5.1 summarises descriptions of the eleven sub-themes of Themes 2, 3 and 4. More detailed descriptions of these sub-themes comprise the remainder of this chapter.

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### 5.2 Theme 2: Power Relations

In this study, couples reported that they tried to achieve a balance in how they manage their intercultural relationship and parenting experiences. However, some participants were still experienced prejudiced regarding power dynamics throughout different phases of their relational and parenting experiences. Participants described power in different ways, such as attempts by some participants to exercise authority over their partners by claiming the privilege of truth regarding parenting practices. Some of the migrant participants reported that they also experienced power dynamics such as inner status in the host partner’s country from immersion and acculturation, and a sense of belonging from being married to their host partner. The emergent sub-themes about power dynamics experienced by intercultural couples are described below.

#### 5.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Righteousness and Privilege of Truth

In this study, the issue of power was not always evident or obvious until it was brought up by one partner, usually by the migrant partner. Two participants seemed to consciously or unconsciously communicate with their partners in ways that reinforced their own cultural patterns of thinking and values. Gary, for example, described that he was “always right” and privileged in his cultural view about the sleeping patterns of children, because he had parenting experiences from his previous marriage. He believed that children should not be sleeping with parents and that they should be left to sleep-cry. His wife Yan was opposed to that method and wanted the child to sleep in the same bed as them so that she could nurse her. But Gary was very firm about his belief:

“Basically, we tried a sleep-cry type method. This is how we do it here. And mum goes “oh she’s crying. I can’t let my little angel cry”. Her strategy was to get up and my strategy was to try and stop her”. (Gary)

Dharam: So how did you resolve that?

“Most of the time I just tend to go his way”. (Yan)

“Because I am always right”. (Gary)
Likewise, Bill was very stubborn about what recreational activities children can or cannot go to. He did not agree with his wife’s cultural views about recreational entertainments for their children because he was not interested in those forms of entertainment and mindful about the associated costs. In this situation, Bill exercised power over resources because he had absolute control over the family finances. As a result, his wife gave in to his ways most of the time:

“I know what’s in the bank and she doesn’t. She doesn’t know how to do banking”. (Bill)

“I always obey his idea. That’s the way... he is a boss”. (Azumi)

“Because I’m right. I am a straight person and if I don’t like the idea I am not movable. I will not change my mind. I am fixed. I don’t need help. I am a very confident person. She needs help... but sometimes she will interpret the help I give her as not helpful and that’s her problem”. (Bill)

5.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Language and Communication

In this study, power regarding language and communication was evident when some participants reported that they tried to control their partner’s behaviour or thoughts. It was apparent that there was a complex interaction between power and language and communication. Communication patterns had an important impact on the dynamics of power between the couples. Some of the male participants from the dominant host culture appeared to dominate in the interaction with their partners because they spoke their own host language, promoted their own culture and thus became the judges of appropriateness and righteousness. For example, when Gary had fiery arguments with his wife Yan, he used his language ability to exert power in the communication. Gary capitalised on the strength of English being his native and host language to dominate and pursue his arguments whereas Yan lost grip of her arguments because she was trying to translate from her native Chinese to English. Frustration then made her turn fully to her native Chinese language and as Gary said he was “on fire”, thus a creating a power imbalance:

“When we would disagree about something, her English would decline very rapidly because she can’t think quick enough in English. So her mind would revert to Chinese, so she’s lost her words and I am on fire”. (Gary)

“The way I speak and annoy him or the way he speaks, I think it’s challenging and he tried to persuade me to go the western way”. (Yan)

In this situation, Yan being from the non-dominant culture reported that she felt less powerful.
5.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Gender Influences

Most of the male participants appeared to exercise more power than the female participants regarding discipline and socialisation processes of the children. All the female participants believed that their husbands had more power when it came to disciplining the children. As Kylie described, the kids know when her husband is playful and when he is the father:

“I think they fear him whereas they don’t fear me… they know when he is playing with them and when he is the father” (Kylie)

Kylie’s husband Malai reported that his approach to disciplining their children was effective because he used his disciplinary tone appropriately according to the children’s behaviour, contrary to the soft tone used by his wife:

“What happens sometimes is the tone, the talking. If you’re (wife) not happy with what they’re doing you should change your tone a little bit… Like for me, I can change, different all the time… when I say do this and they’re laughing I change my tone”. (Malai)

Interestingly, one participant linked gender power to males with religious values. Rula described how she submitted to her husband’s lack of understanding of her culture because of their religious values:

“He says he understands a culture, but sometimes there are things that he could really never understand. That’s when I think our faith comes in and there is a bit of a submission in our stuff. We have to kind of I have to submit to him. And so, “okay, I have to let go”. It’s painful, but…”. (Rula)

On the other hand, some male participants reflected on how they lost power when it came to gender roles in the intercultural family. Although men and women had defined roles in certain ethnic cultures, the inference was that men were still regarded as the authority in the family and ultimate decision-making processes. According to the narratives, this view of power status was compromised as a result of marrying into a western culture, which promotes equal gender power and rights. For example, Malai reported that he never cooked, washed and put women’s clothes on the clothes line. But in Australia, he started to cook, wash and hang clothes out to sustain a healthy relationship and family:

“He cooks all the time so that’s not what would happen in Thai culture. I think it’s just a survival thing because here like you said to adapt… he hangs clothes out and he hangs out the women’ underwear which is not what he wouldn’t have done in Thailand”. (Kylie)

“I have changed big time... like Kylie said in our culture the man never hangs women’s undies, bras, etc on the clothes line... because this is Australia, I have to fit in this culture”. (Malai)

Dharam: So if you go back home, you wouldn’t do that.
“No, no cooking as well”. (Malai)

Based on participants’ reports, it appeared that the shift in power dynamics was also related to the fact that most of the female participants worked in either fulltime or part-time jobs and therefore the husbands had to share the family and parenting responsibility. Also, the lack of parenting support from extended family members in Australia as opposed to the support in ethnic families back home, forced the men to share the family and parental role:

“I think it has to be shared a lot of the time because I’m working, he is working and we are trying to juggle school drop offs... if he is not working during the day, he will be at home and look after the kids. If I was at home and I wasn’t working, I would be doing the majority of the care”. (Tammy)

Tammy’s views were shared by her husband Manuel who agreed that he was doing more house chores because Tammy was also working:

“I changed being taught how to cook now and I’m not good at that”. (Manuel)

5.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Outsider/Insider status

In Chapter 4, participants’ perception of outsider/insider status was reported in terms of their experiences of identity as a couple. This section, however, describes outsider/insider status in terms of power dynamics and transnational processes in the participants’ parenting and relational experiences. From a parenting perspective, some participants described feeling powerless from being treated as outsiders regarding their parenting practices, such as sleep patterns. Two immigrant partners reported that in their culture and country, new born children sleep with the parents in the same bed, but were disappointed when their host partners insisted that the children should sleep in separate rooms. The immigrant partners felt powerless because the sleeping pattern of the host culture was imposed on them. This was apparent in Yan’s case, whereupon her husband Gary imposed the sleeping pattern of the host culture:

“He was like, "Just let her cry," and I just couldn't endure the crying”. (Yan)

“Mum couldn't endure. That's where they need to be guided”. (Gary)

However, the feeling of outsider status and being powerless was also felt among host partners. Two host participants reported feeling powerless from being treated as outsiders within their own host culture when their wife’s parents visited and stayed with them to look after their children. As one participant explained, when their child became sick, he was excluded from the care process, because according to his wife’s culture it’s a “woman’s business” to care for a sick child. His wife consulted with her mother about the medical needs of the child instead of him:
“To me relationally we should be resolving things as a family unit like we have, called family unit, you and I, and out from that whereas I guess part of the Chinese culture is you and your mother or me out of here. That’s the circle…” (Gary)

Gary’s wife Yan acknowledged his frustration:

“Hmmm”. (Yan)

Likewise, Anya reported that she and her children felt a sense of outsider status from being marginalised in her own Australian culture. Anya converted to her husband’s Islamic religion of her own free will before they got married and felt that her family was rejected by people on the street and neighbours:

“They just reject us”. (Anya)

The power dynamics regarding insider/outsider status have important implications for the participants’ experiences of parenting. For example, when the host partners visited their migrant partners’ heritage country and were exposed to the way of parenting in that country and culture, they reported that they got a better understanding of why their migrant partners parent and behave in a particular cultural way, and thus allowing for flexibility in their own parenting practices. As Naomi and her husband Pravin explained:

“There’s a focus here on children need to grow up quickly, they need to be independent, they need to be strong individuals, whereas in India I think the culture is more, this is a child, we’re going to treat them like a child until they become an adult”. (Naomi)

“I still think he is a kid. And even if he’s just close, I just want him to be a little of an Indian touch, that kind of experience that I had”. (Pravin)

“I think having R’s parents over 3 months every year so I get to see how she I guess interacts with JV as well and that impacted some of my parenting style”. (Naomi)

Many migrant participants also experienced power dynamics such as insider status from becoming an Australian citizen and having children who are born in the host country. As Sarah explained:

“I am now an Australian citizen... they [children] have grown up in Australia”. (Sarah)

However, some host participants also experienced power dynamics from what can be termed reverse insider status in their migrant partners’ countries, local communities and political and cultural associations. For example, knowledge of their migrant partner’s language and culture was inferred to as a privilege for insider status. This was exemplified in John’s family case:

“We had some Tongans come here on Aus-Aid scholarships, that I was able to be around and got exposed to the language and that’s when I became interested in learning about the
Tongan language and got a little bit of an insight, I guess, from an outsider looking in about the Tongan culture. I travelled with my family to Tonga when I was 13 years old... I got very much involved in the local Australian-Tongan community, Tongan community ethnic radio here in Brisbane. I made an effort with our daughter from a young age. I actively read her Tongan storybooks for children to try to expose her to the language. I spoke to her a lot more in Tongan, I sang her songs in Tongan”. (John)

Insider/outsider status was also influenced by participants’ experiences of transnational processes, that is, influences of broader political and social attributes external to their intimate relationship such as exclusion, learning a new language, negative stereotypes. Cathy and her husband Will described how they had to protect and build resistance in their children against racist attitudes at school because of their race and colour:

“I try and build resilience into the boys. I don’t know if that is, it is like if I had married a white man there wouldn’t be a, I wouldn’t have to deal with any racist element in the children’s lives. [Son] has been called a pooh at school before and a nigger”. (Cathy).

“We try and build resilience that you don’t just become a victim and go I have been called a nigger, you stand and be proud of yourself”. (Will)

Sarah described her experiences of negative stereotypes when she is in the public arena with her host partner:

“Years ago it was a hard thing when they looked at you...I know in the early times people looked at me....thinking is she a Filipina bride”. (Sarah).

5.2.5 Summary of Theme 2: Power Relations
This theme described the power dynamics experienced by participants as intercultural couples and parents. Based on the narratives, it appeared that fathers were regarded as the authoritarian figure, especially when it came to discipline and socialisation processes. Power was also interpreted within the sphere of influence such as command of the host language, participants’ insider and outsider status and the degree of immersion and acculturation in the host culture. Partners from the host culture also felt empowered from exposure, engagement and immersion into their ethnic minority partner’s culture and homeland.

The narratives also revealed that acculturation was not a one way process but was dynamic and fluid in many instances, based on the couple’s immersion, experiences and preferences of each other’s cultural processes. The process of reverse acculturation is described in Theme 2 below.

5.3 Theme 3: Reverse Acculturation/Enculturation
In this study, it was evident that reverse acculturation was facilitated by factors such as globalisation, mobility, multiculturalism, and multi-layered advances in technology. From
the narratives, reverse acculturation/enculturation was manifested in multiple domains such as use of language, identity, food, values, behaviours, cultural knowledge, and social affiliation and activities. Reverse acculturation was attributed to both the individual and societal level. From the individual perspective, reverse acculturation occurred when participants from the minority group reinforced their cultural heritage in the relationship and parenting processes in the host society. From the societal perspective, the cultural exchange was manifested at the centre of the host society itself, wherein the society accepted cultural coexistence or multiculturalism (Kim & Park, 2009). Given that this study explored the intercultural parenting experiences of participants, reverse acculturation was described mostly at the individual level of parenting and relationship dynamics.

The narratives in this study demonstrated another dimension of acculturation, where some participants from the dominant culture in the host society were also influenced by, preferred and adopted their partner’s minority group cultural processes. In other words, the influence shifted from an ethnic minority participant/partner to the participant/partner of the dominant host culture. Acculturation evolved as a reciprocal and bidirectional process wherein both immigrant and host partners exchanged certain cultural preferences. This can be thought of as “reciprocal acculturation”. Scenarios in which participants from the dominant culture adhered to the positive cultural practices of the minority group will be described below. Four sub-themes evolved from the participants’ narratives of reverse acculturation/enculturation: (1) Valuing ethnic heritage and host culture; (2) Reciprocal acculturation/enculturation; (3) Global culture; and (4) Shift in parenting styles. The four sub-themes are described below.

5.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Valuing Ethnic Heritage and Host Culture

All the migrant participants expressed strong sentiments and willingness for integration between their native home and host culture, including traditions, beliefs, and values and connections. The following statement by Manuel suggests that he considers himself to be both African and Australian and values the integration of the two cultures in his family:

“I am an African... and now I am an Australian. I became an Australian citizen. She is an Australian. She is learning about the African culture... You know the meals she cooks, African meals. She’s been to the country. Actually, she’s [daughter] Australian, but when it comes to food when we go there the mangoes and she sees the people, then she’s African. I’m teaching her the language. I’m teaching both of them and getting them to eat African food, as well”. (Manuel)

Manuel’s wife Tammy agreed with his statement and added how she and the children value Manuel’s heritage culture:

“She does – she loves the music and things like that”. (Tammy)

“She loves the dance, as well, you know”. (Manuel)
“I have learned a lot of his culture, as well”. (Tammy)

Simla on the other hand, while valuing the integration of the two cultures, emphasised the importance of the diaspora communities, in her case the African community in the host country which allowed her family, especially their son to have continued association with her home culture and community connections. Her husband Daniel supported her and their son to be involved with the African diaspora community and culture:

“I take him to events... it’s often kind of fun things that he comes along to when I do African events and that kind of stuff. His Africaness is so much formed and it’s forming his identity” (Simla)

“We were worried initially that he wouldn’t perhaps understand his cultural background. But as it turns out he more clearly identifies with that African side of his background”. (Daniel)

Reinforcement and incorporation of the migrant heritage culture was evidenced in participants from both the ethnic minority and dominant group. All participants from the ethnic minority group were strongly in favour of reinforcing their home cultural values and goals such as respect, discipline, strong family, work ethics, education and community engagement for their children. This was emphasised in Malai, Pravin, Manuel, and Michelle’s narratives. Malai described an example of incompatible host culture to his homeland traditional Asian parenting style, referred to as ‘filial piety’, such as respect for and unquestioning obedience to parents. Malai reported that unlike many children in Australian society he was brought up to respect all of his people and family, and reinforced those values in his children. His wife Kylie supported his views about family values and the way he reinforces it in their own family:

“I grew up with the respect for all our people like family, you know uncle, aunty. Number one is respect... the way children in this country grow up, I totally not agree... and these will become bigger in the future when they become teenagers because there is no respect, there is no fear of the parent, nothing... That is why I’m really reinforcing that with my children”. (Malai)

“To be honest, I’ve always respected in him that family value and instilling that value of respect for each other and your members of your family. I’ve always admired him for that and I’ve often just sort of sat back and observed him and the way that he installs that in the children”. (Kylie)

Pravin, likewise, believed that the values and emotions instilled in his child should come from the Indian side because it is missing in Australia:

“The values and emotions should come from the Indian side because I kind of don’t like what it is here. I only learned it slowly and slowly, because before in the last 2, 3 years, I am
looking into it more deeply... I kind of get scared, because when you see other kids, I don’t want my kid to be like that. No way in the world”. (Pravin)

Pravin also described his preference for the strong family values and support for children in his home country of India:

“I like the way things are done there than here. Like how close they are to their family. I don’t know whether [son] will be like that to us in the future. I would like him to be. I don’t want him to think that if he can’t afford anything I will say “get out of my house, I have nothing for you”. I am not that kind of person”. (Pravin)

Pravin’s wife Naomi concurred with her husband’s feelings and fears, but she also referred to the strengths of both cultures, which would benefit their son:

“Not as much respect for their parents... but I think the benefit for [son] is that he can take the positives from both the cultures”. (Naomi)

Rajack and his wife Anya explained that they have acculturated to the Australian society, but when it comes to cultural values and customs, they wanted to raise their children with their homeland cultural values and work ethics.

“We stayed in Bali for couple of years to understand the culture. My son will know which one is his grandmother and grandfather. I was worried about that” (Rajack)

“Yeah, it’s very important for them”. (Anya)

As described in the introduction to this theme, the narratives revealed that reverse acculturation was not just a unidirectional, but also a bidirectional, reciprocal process, explored further as follows.

5.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Reciprocal Acculturation/Enculturation

Most of the participants/partners from the dominant host culture experienced what can be termed as “reciprocal acculturation” given that they were also influenced by and supported the incorporation and reinforcement of the minority ethnic values and goals by their minority ethnic partners. According to the host partners, they were important values that were missing in their own upbringing and in the Australian society. This was reflected in John’s description and supported by his wife Rula:

“They are lucky in the values and morals. I would prefer more of the Tongan cultural values and morals because I like the fact that the brothers and sisters, the man, the brothers don’t walk through the house with no shirt on and expose themselves in front of their sisters. I like that there’s boundaries and there’s definitely respect for the elders and what they say, whereas Australian kids would tell their parents where to go at any age... when our daughter grows up, I think my wife would not approve of her wearing a mini skirt or short length dress
when she is a teenage girl. The expectation is that she dresses more modestly, with more self-respect and all that”. (John)

“They really dig into us the importance of staying as a woman and keeping yourself pure, of being a respectful person, and with your brothers and sisters in my culture, the girls were not allowed to be with the brothers, or go to the brother’s room or watch a movie with your brothers. I think that’s quite special growing up because I learn to respect my brothers and my brothers learn to respect me. I think my decision for the kids was based on my upbringing really”. (Rula)

Jim described how his travels and encounters with other cultures exposed and heightened his preferences and adherence to the minority group cultural processes, such as family values and education:

“From my travels to the Philippines, I could see the strong family ties. So pretty much I made up my mind before I met my wife...I would probably marry someone from that part of the world... It seems like we do not have many values in this country like the immigrants. They work hard, they get educated and become moral citizens. I think on my side, the children have been brought up more as their mum’s the model. That is the best model I have... yes the kids getting good marks from the early days. I see it from my wife and kids”. (Jim)

Michelle confirmed and supported and her husband’s view of family values in the Asian culture:

“I notice that the family life in the western world is different from the Asian family life. The mothers specially are the prime mover. She will be responsible for the moral value. The moral values in the western world, the religious values and the family values, I think I am grateful that they are now experiencing or realizing the values that I have taught them”. (Michelle)

Samuel described the influence Asian food had on the way they eat and live their lives in his family:

“I guess the one thing that follows is the food part from culture that we eat more Asian food. Cooked a lot of Asian food... My food culture was very plain, boring just an Aussie steak and veggies. Whereas that really impacted in the way we like to eat and live our lives now”. (Samuel)

Samuel’s wife Sarah agreed with his view by nodding her head. Gary described how globalisation and the emergence of China as a world economic and cultural power influenced him to encourage his daughter and himself to learn his wife’s Chinese language and culture, so that his daughter could benefit from the Chinese global job opportunities:

“I think that she is going to have an incredible benefit, with China being the world emerging economy... she will be incredibly placed to take advantage of it... she will be able to facilitate
business over there if she wants to because she can go over there and speak fluent Chinese and English”. (Gary)

Gary’s wife Yan concurred with his views:

“It’s good that they have the Chinese culture in their blood and they could use the Chinese language”. (Yan)

Gary’s description of globalisation, and seeing the world as an integrated whole, was manifested in the narratives of several participants. This phenomenon of a global culture is examined below.

5.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Global Culture

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that most participants believed that reverse acculturation was occurring because of shifts in the global culture towards a more cosmopolitan culture which values the coexistence of inherent differences and greater tolerance of diversity. According to the participants, the heterogeneous global culture and the willingness on their part to embrace aspects of other cultures enhanced their children’s lifestyle and opportunities in both the heritage country and host cultures. These sentiments are reflected in the following quotes.

“There are no borders anymore. It’s incredibly easy to travel worldwide. The world is increasingly a multicultural society. That’s what we are trying to do with our children. For me, I see that I have two Chinese-Australian children. To me, it’s very important that they learn aspects of both cultures and that they learn both languages ... to really try to get the best out of both worlds for them”. (Gary).

Yan concurred with her husband’s views:

“I think because our kids were born here, we will grow up here. I think it’s absolutely Aussie, but if they have more culture its good for the future... I think Western culture is good for kids because they are more happy, but there are some good things in our culture like respect for old people and good work ethics” (Yan)

Daniel described how Australia is a multicultural country and most Australians are outwardly thinking. For that reason his wife Simla was encouraging their son to be part of the global society and be connected:

“Like most, more liberal-minded Australians are culturally aware because we are a country where almost 50 percent of the population was either born elsewhere or their parents were... Australians are multicultural and outwardly thinking. We’re also widely travelled” (Daniel)

“So I would really want him to feel as part of the wider culture. And that’s how we are raising him... it’s about the connectedness”. (Simla)
Jeehan reported an example of global culture where what he called his “tribal communities” were starting to accept the western culture because they are increasingly exposed to and changing their views about other cultures. He related the experience to his own Turkish parents, who opposed his marriage to someone from a western culture, but gradually changed their views when they witnessed the positives and commonalities between the two cultures. The positive shift in the global cultural attitude and acceptance of intercultural relationship can be interpreted as enhancing positive family relations and children’s relationship with their extended families:

“My family were very tribal, very ignorant in their own ways. They had a big identity crisis when we got married. “You are not going to eat that horrible food. What are you? Is that food? What are you guys doing?” ... They didn’t really see too much of the world other than their own community. But once I got married into the Australian culture, my brother was the same also, they started to say, “wow there’s uniqueness in this. These people are different to us and they are not bad as what we thought, and we’ve always alienated these people, but really they accept others and we have so much in common”. So it allowed our intermarriage, allowed the rest of the family to see that it can actually work with cross cultures”. (Jeehan)

Jeehan’s wife Murielle concurred with her husband, and stated that globalisation also enabled them and their children to interact with friends from different cultures and nationalities, thus making them feeling globally connected:

“So I think because we’ve got friends from such a broad cultural base too that they [children] see someone from Tanzania that is, you know, one of our friends, or Gambia I think I’ve got friends from every nation. I could go on holiday around the world”. (Murielle)

“Syrians, Lebanese, Bangladesh and…” (Jeehan)

“I think we’re kind of the world’s global culture which is good for the children” (Murielle)

According to the participants, globalisation exposed them to different styles of parenting which helped them to reflect on their own parenting experiences and the parenting styles they preferred for their own children.

5.3.4 Sub-theme 4: Shift towards Authoritative Parenting Style

Most immigrant partners described their preferences for the Australian cultural concept of independence and authoritative parenting styles because according to them, it makes the children happier. Asian participants, in particular, reported that they did not like the authoritarian parenting style of their parents regarding discipline and educational expectations and hence adopted the authoritative parenting style towards their children. For example, Yan described how she felt sad and lacked self-confidence because of her father’s authoritarian style of parenting when it came to educational achievements. She did not want her children to go through the same experiences and feelings:
“My father was always like a “discourage”. It’s like when I got the top mark, may be top three score in the class, my father was like, “why didn’t you do harder? You could be the top one” and always made me sad... my father is an engineer and he wanted me to be an engineer. That job is not interesting for me. I don’t want to force my kids to do what I want. I try to encourage my kids. I don’t want them to feel that way because in my whole life I always think “Oh, I’m not the best. Always somebody is better than me”, lack of confidence”.

(Yan)

Yan’s husband Gary concurred with her feelings, and disagreed with the Chinese cultural and authoritarian parental expectations regarding education:

“I tend to disagree and I think it’s an old saying that goes all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. I’m not sure that as a result of all the education that the Chinese go through that they’re that much further advanced than western people are educationally, although all they’ve got is a depersonalized drilling system where people are forced to rote – do stuff by rote over and over, and over again for 18 hours a day. I’m not sure it’s benefiting that much”.

(Gary)

Likewise, Pravin reported that he did not like his experience of very strict discipline from his father, as a consequence of which he softened his approach towards his son:

“If he told me to do something and I did not do it, he was very, very strict... For my dad, no means no, end of story... sometimes I resented him for lot of things. I actually learnt from that and may be that is why I am not very strict with my son”.

(Pravin)

“You’re talking about when you were a teenager”.

(Naomi)

“Yes, my dad would tell me, no you don’t need that, end of story”.

(Pravin)

Communication and expression of feelings with children seemed to be elusive among some minority groups.

Azumi expressed disappointment about her parents not communicating and spending enough time with her because they were too busy working hard till late to make money. She had many questions for her mother but the latter never had time for her questions. Azumi did not want her children to suffer the same way:

“They were always busy. So they didn’t read me a book or anything... they never said to me to study... I couldn’t play outside or they didn’t take me to the parks or to amusement parks... had many questions to ask my mother but she had never time for my questions and she died too early. I tell my children and do not want them to suffer like me”.

(Azumi)

Bill witnessed and described his wife Azumi’s pain and disappointment, which according to him, led her to parent their children differently to her own upbringing:
“Well, she didn’t have a good feeling about her parents. From what I’ve heard, [wife] told me that there are many questions that she wanted to ask her mother about, and her mother never had time for her to ask questions... so she’s bitterly disappointed. She suffered and she doesn’t see how that was fair and she doesn’t want her children to suffer the same way”. (Bill)

Likewise, Sarah described how nobody talked about their feelings in her homeland family and wanted to reverse that cultural attitude:

“For me, going back to my family, nobody talked about their feelings. So my way of doing things are very emotional and I have to get them to tell me how they are feeling about something”. (Sarah)

Another participant described his upbringing as tribal, and did not want his children to grow up in a similar parental context. He wanted his children to grow up differently within the context of an evolving parenting style and civilised society. He was supported by his wife in the wish that their children need a different upbringing from his.

“I look at the wrongs and limitations that we had within that tribal culture [Turkish] and I think “well, I’m not going to do that to my kids”. I want them to expand, understand and be educated. I want them to be wise and diverse and be accepting of everybody’s culture”. (Jeehan)

“And to look at people’s culture and accept them and love them. Different foods, different occasions and also look at things that causes people, like societies from these cultures to go backwards”. (Murielle)

5.3.5 Summary of Theme 3: Reverse Acculturation

The narratives in this study revealed that migrant participants valued their homeland cultures and integrated them with the host culture to obtain a balanced and healthy intercultural parenting experience. The narratives revealed that some participants from the host society were also influenced by and adopted their partner’s minority group cultural processes, which can be termed “reciprocal acculturation”. The acculturation process also led to a shift in parenting styles wherein some immigrant partners/participants did not like the authoritarian parenting styles of their parents and opted for the authoritative parenting style in raising their children.

The analysis of the data revealed that intercultural parents had their own subjective understanding and interpretation of parenting based on the cultural parenting values, beliefs and traditions they were raised in their homeland and host culture, personal/individual style of parenting and contextual influences. The cultural differences in parenting sometimes led to conflict among the parents. However, parents reported that
they made considerable efforts to resolve the differences which are described in the following section.

5.4 Theme 4: Making Intercultural Parenting Work

One of the research questions in this study aimed to elucidate how intercultural parents negotiated and resolved their parenting differences. Intercultural couples faced unique challenges because of their cultural differences in parenting styles, beliefs, values and traditions. All the parents were very keen to make their parenting journey a positive experience. In order to achieve that goal, intercultural parents reported that they negotiated their cultural differences by developing several conflict resolution and management strategies.

The narratives were able to be conceptualised into three spheres to capture the significance and importance of the strategies. The three spheres are described as (1) individual sphere, (2) couple’s/parents’ sphere; and (3) child’s sphere. These three spheres overlap because of the close interactions between the spheres. It is also important to discuss the strategies from the individual, couple and child’s sphere, because it helps to generate deeper insights about the experience from their different perspectives. It also enables insights into the interactions between the three domains that are dependent on each other for successful experiences of the phenomenon. Strategies in the individual sphere included: respect, flexibility, patience and perseverance, acceptance and tolerance, and open-mindedness. Strategies in the couple’s/parents’ sphere included: communication, compromise, spheres of influence, asymmetric decision-making, cultural literacy and embracing partners’ culture, having a plan, and preparedness for minority feeling. Strategies for the child’s sphere included: not imposing culture on child, encouraging multiculturalism, listening and respecting children, consistency in parenting, and teaching children values. The three spheres are described below and outlined in Figure 5.1.
5.4.1 **Sub-theme 1: Individual Sphere**

The success of intercultural relationships and parenting was reported by participants to be partly dependent on their individual behaviour and characteristics within the cultural context. The most commonly reported individual characteristics were identified as respect, flexibility, patience and perseverance, acceptance and tolerance, and open-mindedness.

**Respect**

All the participants agreed that while there were cultural differences in their parenting style and practices, they respected each other as another person and the qualities they brought to the relationship and the family. As Kylie and Malai explained, they respect each other in the way they do things and who they are:

“He respects me in the way I do things”. (Kylie)

“I think I’m pretty lucky. I am a lucky man. We get along very well, like good partner and we know each other for a long time and we have children together and she does a good job, you know. She is easy”. (Malai)
Manuel described how he grew up in a traditional African way, but has changed his attitude towards women and respects his wife equally. He was even surprised that his wife could cook African food and show interest in his culture:

“I thought it was going to be hard. Of course, she wasn’t from Africa. Knowing food, (inaudible) eating the foods, I was shocked she could cook very good food... she learned how to cook African and expressed an interest in my culture, sort of respecting one another... I grew up in a very traditional way, but I’ve come very far, as well. I respect, I believe in equality between man and a woman. I’m not a misogynist (laughter)”. (Manuel)

Manuel’s wife Tammy echoed her husband’s cultural view of traditional African man and eventual adaptation to the host culture’s view about woman and emphasised that he had to make compromises for them to be happy:

“I don’t know if this is too much of a stereotype, but African males, they’re very different to Australian men. The way that they have been brought up is different. Their view of women and what women should be like and what their role is and what my role is, is a lot different to modern Australia... but I think you do have to make compromises at times to both be happy, like you do have to... don’t you”. (Tammy)

“Yes”. (Manuel)

Simla and Daniel explained that in fulfilling their daily obligations towards the family, they focus primarily on being respectful of each other and their cultural differences come second to respect:

“It’s not being conscious of their culture first and foremost. It’s being respectful of the other person and the culture becomes secondary to the respect in the relationship, and of the family network. We’re both quite liberal and well educated, and intelligent people. And whatever cultural expectations may have been relevant in the past, we don’t see as relevant now”. (Daniel)

“Daniel loves to cook and he takes care of us in terms of feeding us, the family. We both work so that is never an expectation that Daniel will do this, I will do this. It’s who comes home first and when we’re home together we both do things”. (Simla)

**Flexibility**

All the participants explained that there are certain issues that can never be resolved and the best strategy to survive them is flexibility and tolerance. Manuel explained how, after several explanations, his wife Tammy was flexible in incorporating his cultural traditions of washing new born babies in certain herbal medicine and keeping the umbilical cord:

“Like I said before, we had problems with washing the baby in herbal medicine and keeping the umbilical cord. If it wasn’t Tammy, if it was a different person who is strong-minded, they
would refuse him to shower in that yet the culture says he’s supposed to shower in that. We agreed me and her, so we kept that but in different culture with a different person they would refuse”. (Manuel)

Malai described how he became flexible in his cultural gender roles, such as hanging women’s clothes on the clothes line, because he lives in Australia and has to fit with his partner’s culture:

“For example because like my wife said before, in our culture, the man never hangs women’s undies, bras, etc, on the clothes line. We don’t do that in Thailand or in my culture. Because this is Australia, I have to be flexible to fit in this culture, in this country”. (Malai)

Malai’s wife Kylie confirmed before that he would not hang out clothes in Thailand because it is considered a women’s job.

“Yes. I know”. (Malai)

Carol echoed Malai’s experience, and according to her, it is also an overall learning and adaptive process.

“You have to be flexible, because you know it is two cultures meeting, and even though we didn’t have to sort lot of things out, there were certain things that we have to get used to both cultures, especially all the Indian things and the language and you are going to a party and I am the only Aussie there”. (Carol)

**Patience and perseverance**

Several participants explained that being in an intercultural relationship requires patience and perseverance, and allowing oneself the opportunity and time to understand the different ways their partners do things. It also allowed others to see things differently.

“It’s true. We know some Australian people they want to marry Indonesians but they are like these you know, they don’t give themselves enough time to know the partner. You have to have a lot of patience, you have to, otherwise, you end up fighting like two bulls because they have different ways of doing something”. (Anya)

“Especially in the cooking”. (Rajack)

‘I cook the pasta and things like that. He cooks the rice’. (Anya)

Kylie explained how her husband’s personal attributes of patience and peaceful way of doing things helped to resolve and bring peace to everyone in the family. This was acknowledged by her husband Malai who also attributed it to possibly his personality type and helpful attitude:
“I would have been out shopping or something and I’d be racing to get home on time but I
would get home with say 10 minutes to sort of hand over... we had one car at the time. I
would get there and he would just be patient, peaceful and calm. Here’s the key and off he
would go. Whereas if the situation was reversed, I would be like, “Where are you?” I’d be
frantic and stressed. So he has this inner peace, relaxed kind of attitude from his culture that
I think you know helps not only to resolve things, but it just flows to everyone in the family”.  
(Kylie)

“That may be my personality as well. I believe anything can help”. (Malai)

Two participants described how they persevered and persisted against their parents’
negative attitude towards intercultural relationships and their marriage. Their parents finally
accepted the relationship after they witnessed the success of the relationship, which
nullified their stereotyped beliefs about other cultures.

“Well, because we lived in Sydney among a big Turkish community, we were very Turkish
grounded. We were very isolated from Australian people ... we were like taught it was us
against them... my family was very tribal. They seem to marry only in their own faith and in
their own identity. But once I got married into the Australian culture, they started to say, "
they’re not as bad as what we thought”. So it allowed our inter-marriage”. (Jeehan)

“My family thought it was excellent. They were like “Yay!” initially”. (Murielle)

Acceptance, tolerance and open-mindedness

All the participants advised that their personal attributes of acceptance, tolerance, and
open-mindedness were key determinants for the success of their intercultural relationships
and parenting. Moderation between values and tolerance of each other’s culture benefitted
the children because they can relate better with their parents from sharing their cultural
values. As Naomi and her husband Pravin reported:

“Some moderation between adhering to your values and some education about the different
culture would provide the child with opportunities to relate better with the parents because
they’ve got an equal acceptance and understanding of both cultures so there’s an equal
appreciation there of each parent”. (Naomi)

“Yeah. In that way I think we’ve done well there”. (Pravin)

Michelle and her husband Jim described the need to accept and tolerate their partner’s
culture, but they would be more conservative in their parental approaches if there are risks
involved:

“Yes I became more tolerant to my husband’s western culture. You have to live in the
western world. You can’t be just pedantic. You have to live in harmony”. (Michelle)
“Unless it comes down to safety... If we can see that the children want to do something and it is peer pressure, the Australian way or whatever, then if there is a risk we pull back and say no... like schoolies. Unlike Gold Coast parents, we will go and pick up the kids every night...we don’t get them out of sight”. (Jim)

John and his wife Rula reported the need to accept and tolerate each other’s culture without too much expectation because they were raised differently:

“I guess in terms of being more bicultural in the way I approach things, understanding sometimes things that frustrates me, that may be Rula might do. But I sort of sit back and think that she’s Rula and she’s not raised the way I was raised, don’t worry too much about it”. (John)

“He claims he’s Tongan, he changes and I think my expectation is not there for him to kind of understand it, without me saying things”. (Rula)

All the participants described that being open-minded and knowledgeable of their partner’s culture before and during the relationship, and the diversity that the intercultural relationship brings, helped their relationships and allowed them to see things in a different way. Otherwise the relationship and parenting process won’t work. The notion of individual open-mindedness is exemplified in Anya and her husband Rajack’s narrative.

“If you have an open mind, you have the benefit of referring back to that type of culture. You can give and take in different things. We get along because I agree so much for his culture that is the benefit. If you have only one culture, for example just Australian, if you are only brought up in that environment, you don’t know what else is out there in the world”. (Anya)

“You don’t change people...we are not here to judge people. We hang around with anybody...we make friends with anybody”. (Rajack)

Sarah and Samuel echoed Anya and Rajack’s notion of open-mindedness and hoped that their children develop the same notion:

“I always keep an open mind and very accepting of people...it does not matter what background or race they come from. It is good if the kids are being the same and try not to be prejudiced and say hateful words”. (Sarah)

“Also for me it opens my mind like an outgoing Aussie. I never thought of going to Asia. But meeting an Asian girl I have been to Asia a lot”. (Samuel)

The next section describes making intercultural parenting work from the couple’s/parents’ sphere.

5.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Couple’s/Parents’ Sphere

Communication
Intercultural parents described that they tried to resolve their cultural and personal differences in parenting by actively communicating with each other. Communication was described mainly as talking about feelings and issues and listening to partners in order to understand each other and reach positive outcomes. The following cases exemplify a pattern reported by most intercultural parents:

Dharam: *How did you resolve the conflict about the issues you mentioned?*

“Obviously I’ll voice what I think and then he also voices what he thinks, as well. Neither of us sits back and sort of goes (inaudible)... I don’t think that we just go by his culture or just by mine either. Yeah, if there is an issue we discuss it and come up with what would be the best outcome for our family and for our children... there was an issue with breast feeding because I went back to work. He was not happy about it. It took me a while to explain to him and for him to understand. We had to talk about it”. (Tammy) “I tell her this is how we do it in Africa. She tells me this is how we do it in Australia. So we combine the two and come together with something. I can’t just come out and say oh, women are supposed to be in the kitchen, doing this. I tell her this is what’s supposed to be done and she tells me that, and then certify it. We work together”. (Manuel)

Most parents reported that they communicated their cultural differences about parenting during the course of the relationship when they had children. They reported that couples need to discuss their cultural differences before they have children:

“For example, we are just deciding now about private and public schools for our son. And we never spoke about that, you don’t think to talk about those kinds of thing, what are we going to choose. So I think that you need to talk about that, even before you have kids is a good idea. Communication is the biggest thing”. (Naomi)

Two couples reported that they communicated about their parental responsibility and cultural preferences before they got married. As Jeehan and Murielle explained, they discussed their relationship and parenting role well before they got married to prevent any disharmony later:

“I have a lot of friends in intercultural marriages and they have big problems, I think, because they’re not, they were never on the same page... that’s where we were like from the beginning very clear about these are my standards, this is the way... so that we wouldn’t find out five years later that it’s not what we are after. A lot of people get married and then work it out whereas, we’re quite logical. We’re kind of really like kind of negotiators”. (Murielle)

“We’d say, “Listen I don’t accept this, I don’t want that, and well I don’t like this, I don’t like that. If you do that to me then this marriage is not, you know, what I’m looking for”… so we both like negotiated over long periods of time before we got into the relationship. Okay, this is what we both are looking for”. (Jeehan)
John and Rula discussed the importance of discrete communication regarding parenting differences, such as disciplinary practices with respect to the child/children. They emphasised being united as parents and using another language so that the children are not exposed to the discussion:

“We try not to be seen as different in front of the kids... we just had a dialogue in Tongan, to try and not expose the kids to much to what we were talking about”. (John)

“Yeah, to stand united, so that the kids can you know “Ok, mum and dad are united” don’t try to play us”. (Rula)

Two couples described how their communication style about family and personal issues was more effective when they talked about it during evening walks together, and did not engage in heated debates in order to allow the free flow of communication. As Jay and Carol explained:

“We don’t yell and carry on. One of the things we do, we always in the evenings go for a walk you know it could be at 6 o’clock or 7 o’clock after dinner, so if there is any issues like that, what needs to be done, we tend to sort it out pretty quickly”. (Jay)

“We have always done that, we find that is a good time for just the two of us we can go and we can see that V did this or S did that or you did this and we did that or whatever and we just walk for an hour, talk about it and sort it out”. (Carol)

**Compromise**

Most participants stated that they were willing to compromise, that is finding a happy medium on certain cultural and personal values that are important for them and their children, in order to sustain a healthy relationship and enrich their own, and particularly their children’s lives. For example, Jeehan and his wife Murielle agreed to put aside their personal values and focused on their common religious values as the medium to reach a negotiated compromise. In the conflict resolution process, it appeared that most participants were making decisions in the best interest of their children. As Jeehan and Murielle explained:

“We have problems on some things where she might disagree on and then we’ll go into a conversation and say, “Well, why? But why?” And then we’ll try to come to a medium for the kid’s sake. I’ll say: “Well look, you put your defence aside and I’ll put my defence aside and we have a common ground here which would be our religious value. What would be the closest thing to what would be permissible for us in this circumstance”. And then we negotiate and compromise that way. But most of the times it’s mutual on everything”. (Jeehan)
“To be honest, if we did not have that, that line of thought as religion being the main rule, I guess the rule maker, then I think we would just clash completely. If I had just my own identity it wouldn’t have even worked because I would have just kept arguing”. (Murielle)

Tammy echoed similar sentiments about negotiating in the interest of the child:

“I think you have to make compromises at times to be both happy, obviously being from two different places, like you do have to work towards what’s best for the children... we have to sometimes compromise on what each other think on something” (Tammy)

In Josh and Ng’s case, they were having difficulties with sleep training their child. Ng was keen on her cultural practice of having the child to sleep with them in the same bed so that it was easier to feed and prevent the child from crying. But Josh was not comfortable with that practice and after long talks they came to a compromise:

“If it really gets on my nerves, I will just, we will talk about it and reach a compromise”. (Josh)

“I will try it my way and if my way works we will keep doing it and if it doesn’t work we go back”. (Ng)

Differences in parenting style were also resolved by way of compromise in Jay and Carol’s case. Carol thought that her husband Jay was too hard on their son regarding teenage activities, and that he needed to be more positive and allow some grounds for autonomy:

“Sometimes Jay was a bit over the top with what he thought with [son], like getting into those teenage years and it’s a hard thing to approach, like how long you let them out for, where you let them go, where are they going. And you know I sort of emphasised how we need to be positive and we need to encourage [son] to talk... and I think together we have had to sort of meet in the middle with that one because sometimes it has been a bit tough”. (Carol)

“We talked about it and say that maybe that wasn’t the best approach and we will say, “Okay. I need to change how I’m thinking”, and then say, "Okay, he can do this but he needs to get home at this time or whatever". (Jay)

Tammy described that, as a woman, she has her opinion and should be considered in decision-making processes to ensure a balanced outcome and a happy relationship. Her husband Manuel agreed with her opinion about compromise in decision-making processes:

“I think in his culture too that is changing with girls are being opinionated. Sometimes that’s where we might clash because I always say what I think I don’t hold back, obviously with respect in mind. So sometimes it can cause issues but I’m not going to sit and say nothing and then be unhappy. Therefore, I think we need to discuss things and then come to a medium where both parties are happy. Otherwise what sort of relationship or marriage
would that be if one is always unhappy all the time and having to give in to everything”. (Tammy)

“There’s no dominance over one another. Everyone puts it in and we’re working together to see how we can reach a medium”. (Manuel)

Sphere of influence

Some participants reported that they resolved conflicts by recognising and acknowledging their partner’s sphere of influence, in other words, their area of expertise, skills and knowledge in certain domains of parenting and embraced and encouraged them to operate within those parenting domains. For example, Jim believed that his wife’s style of parenting was the best and therefore let his wife do the parenting while he focussed his role on the external and manual jobs:

“In my culture mothers have the responsibility to raise their kids in the right way, religion, beliefs and values, education. I believe that is the mother’s responsibility. And Jim gave me the full control on that aspect”. (Michelle)

“My responsibility is the vehicles, the mechanics of the house, something like repairing the house, etc”. (Jim)

Malai and Kylie, whilst echoing Jim and Michelle’s sphere of influence, also emphasised on mutual respect for each partner’s ways of doing things:

“Well, I let Malai do things the way he does”. (Kylie)

“It’s better though... she does a fantastic job”. (Malai)

Anya explained that that some of her parenting decisions, especially with the children’s socialisation, were based on just keeping the children happy but she recognised her husband’s sphere of influence in recognising children’s risky activities:

“I’ll be honest. Sometimes I am thinking more just to make the kids happy. But when I sit down and think about it and I can see his point”. (Anya)

“Well, agree or disagree... because what happened, the law is very funny here. The kids are running, smoking on the street, kissing and stealing. May be my kid does not want to do that, but it depends on who he is hanging with”. (Rajack)

Asymmetric decision-making

The asymmetric decision-making process in relationships and parenting is described as a pattern where individuals sacrifice their cultural values in favour of their partners’ cultural values. The narratives revealed that in order to prevent conflict, some migrant participants sacrificed their cultural values in favour of their partners’ values. In this study, the asymmetric decision-making pattern was manifested mainly in relationships where one
partner exercised more power in the relationship due to language, income, personality, and gender differences. This was clearly demonstrated in Bill and Azumi's case:

Dharam: How do you resolve the conflicts you mentioned?

"I always obey his idea. That's the way. He is a boss". (Azumi)

"I'm not interested in entertainment and sensational places to go and visit, and have fun, and do slippery slopes... I'm not going to pay the money for things I don't want to, so she grudgingly will accept it. I won't do things that we've already done, like I won't repeat a trip in Canberra, which she wants with the kids... I'm a straight person and if I don't like the idea, I'm not movable. I will not change my mind. I'm fixed". (Bill)

Interestingly, one participant described differences as part of the natural fabric of intercultural relationships, and might not need a resolution:

"Even if there were differences, sometimes differences just are and might not need resolution. That is why we are two different people working together to raise a family". (Daniel)

**Cultural literacy and embracing partner's culture**

Several participants reported that in order to understand and appreciate each other's culture, it was very important for them to learn and embrace their partner's culture. Participants reported that they educated and immersed themselves into the partner's culture so that they can have firsthand experience of the internal cultural dynamics of the other culture and also to understand why their partners operate and behave in certain ways. As John and his wife Rula explained:

"We try and take the good of the Tongan culture and the good of the Anglo culture and invest that into our children". (John)

"Yeah I think the same thing too. I think to be a good parent you need to understand each other... Dig deep into each other's culture and list in there things that worked in their upbringing that worked for them". (Rula)

John and Rula's experiences were echoed by Kylie:

"We wouldn't have gotten together if we didn't have respect and acceptance for each other's culture. We started off from that position. You have a respect for the other person's culture". (Kylie)

John and Gary also spoke about the importance of learning some of the migrant partner's language because it helps to break the communication barriers and therefore couples could understand each other's needs and respond more effectively. Misunderstanding and
misinterpreting what is said because of language barriers was found to be one of the most serious challenges and cause of conflict among couples in this study.

“We identified lot of issues because of language and misunderstanding language... we need to try and make sure that we’re not misunderstanding what each other is doing. It’s very important to learn both languages”. (Gary)

**Having a plan**

According to the participants, all intercultural couples need to have a plan, also interpreted by some as ‘a constitution’, or ‘a set standard’ before they become parents. Couples reported that they need to discuss and agree on how they are going to negotiate and manage their cultural differences in terms of their relationship and parenting approaches and practices. An upfront plan would prevent conflict further down in the relationship because everybody will be clear about their children and their own needs. As Murielle and her husband Jeehan explained:

“I guess have a set standard, you know, that you’re starting from rather than guessing along the way and having to go through a whole argument to get to an endpoint say, “Look these are the guidelines” from the beginning... be upfront”. (Murielle)

“If you have a constitution in place let’s say that red light, if you get that red light and everybody expects those rules, those guidelines are so much more simple”. (Jeehan)

Daniel echoed Murielle and her husband Jeehan’s plan of having a plan as it helps to prevent conflict during the parenting phase:

“When we knew that he was coming, we had a plan where we would be in agreement on certain things so that we wouldn’t have to react to an instance without having some understanding of how we would behave in that instance”. (Daniel)

**Preparedness for minority feeling**

A couple of participants reported that intercultural relationships can sometimes be a lonely experience when interacting with the extended family in the partner’s homeland and that they had to be ready for it. Interactions were limited due to language barriers and gender socialisation processes:

“Sometimes I guess it felt like I was the foreigner because I was the only Australian in the group... sometimes people weren’t willing to talk. No one would try to speak in English, so sometimes I found that difficult you know. I felt a bit lonely at times... There are a lot of ceremonies and things like we did some of the things but we didn’t do lots of the Indian things probably a lot of them because I didn’t even know about them at the time as well and I guess there was an expectation that we probably should have done more of the things” (Carol)
Carol’s husband reported how he needed to protect his wife in his homeland against certain cultural expectations by extended family members as it can be a stressful and unnecessary experience to the partner and the relationship.

“I have to be strong like in the thing as well just to protect you, say if I did everything that was expected of me, how I should be with my kids and all that, it would create a far more stress on our relationship”. (Jay)

5.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Child’s Sphere

All the participants reported that they focused on the best interest of the child when implementing parenting approaches and practices. Most couples reported that they refrained from imposing a culture on their children, but rather encouraged multiculturalism, listened and respected their children, were consistent in parenting, and taught children values.

Children’s culture

All the participants recognised that due to the nature of the children’s mixed cultural background, culture should not be imposed on children, but rather discussed with them and given choices otherwise they would be confused and build resistance instead of integration.

As Pravin and his wife Naomi explained:

“Don’t put too much of your cultural influence on the child because he/she will be confused. I’m not going to tell my son to wear his toga and go to school. I can’t tell him that he has to be an Indian. You can talk to them a bit about moral values and respect... He’s living in Australia. He should be comfortable here, just like a normal guy”. (Pravin)

“Not imposing strict regulations that hinder the child’s development and growth and really put restrictions, cultural restrictions in a country where we’re very liberated, we’re very open. There needs to be some learnings, some education about the different culture, but don’t smother them or drown them with any culture”. (Naomi)

Samuel and his wife Sarah described an example of their friend who spoke Japanese all the time at home and in the process hindered her learning abilities and communication with the children. Samuel and Sarah were against the idea of pushing one’s culture on the child, but rather let the child decide for themselves:

“We were talking about our good friends in particular. The difference in languages has caused a huge problem, whether you speak Japanese or other languages, it caused a huge problem in her learning ability I think and the Japanese are super strict. I think that backfired on her in a lot of ways, whereas our kids are finding their own way. We do not push them in any direction that is going on nicely”. (Samuel)
“Sometimes you have to let them see for themselves. Don’t push your own beliefs, ideas”. (Sarah)

**Listening and respecting children**

Participants reported that it is very important to listen, respect and negotiate with their children because they might have different perceptions about things. Couples emphasised that respect is earned and that if parents respect their children, they will respect the parents in return. As Sarah explained and was supported by her husband Samuel:

“Sometimes you have to listen to your children and let them do the asking. Let them ask the question and you can tell them so much stuff and they might not feel or have the same perception of things”. (Sarah)

“Yeah, yeah”. (Samuel)

Some participants explained the importance of negotiating issues and outcomes with children instead of being too rigid. This is exemplified in Jeehan and his wife Murielle’s case:

“Negotiate with the kids instead of being very rigid, “You do this because I said so. I’m your father.” We say respect is earned. You respect the kids, the kids will respect you. Negotiate with them, give them the benefit of the doubt so that they’re grown up enough to make decisions and they will respond very positively... and they experiment for themselves”. (Jeehan)

“Like when I want my kids to do something, I make sure that they’re not doing it just because, like you know, these are the reasons behind why we’re saying, you know, this is the better bike to buy, I don’t know, or this is the way you cook the rice. It’s not just like this is the way we do it and that’s it”. (Murielle)

**Encouraging multiculturalism**

All the participants described the importance of encouraging children to be multicultural in their outlook because it would open their mind about other cultures, enable them to embrace diversity, and benefit them in their life. This is demonstrated in Simla’s and her husband Daniel’s case:

“It’s an opportunity to celebrate that diversity and then you see your child just flourishing within that culture that they live in... I want our son to know that he’s from two cultures. He has an African culture and an Australian culture, and to respect both, and to feel comfortable with both. And it’s the way we relate with each other and we interact with each other, that he will see and will have no problems with being with both cultures, and be confident in both cultures”. (Simla)

“But as it turns out he more clearly identifies with that African side of his background, which is fantastic...and any chance for community engagement is very much encouraged and not
only with S’s community work, but even just attending childcare and seeing the different cultures there. If you ever wonder if Australia is multicultural, you just see the mix of kids in his particular room in childcare, it covers all nationalities”. (Daniel)

Most participants also reported that they encouraged their children to speak some of their migrant parent’s language so that they get the best of both worlds, and are able to communicate with extended family members in their homeland.

“So I think it’s very important for them to be able to be both fluent in Mandarin reading and writing as well as fluent in English reading and writing, and to really try to get the best out of both worlds for them... and be able to speak with her grandparents”. (Gary)

“It’s good that they have Chinese culture in their blood and they know they can use Chinese language, Mandarin. They will have more culture here and also it’s good for their future”. (Yan)

**Consistency with parenting**

All the participants emphasised the need for consistency in parenting, especially regarding discipline and to be on the same side and present a united front, otherwise children will manipulate them. Consistency in parenting was viewed as important to prevent conflict in their relationships and importantly, not to confuse the child. The notion of consistency in parenting is well reported by Simla and her husband Daniel:

“One of the things we’ve said to each other, it’s about the parenting of our child in terms of being consistent. If we talk about strategies it is backing each other up on the things that we do... so that he [son] sees that there is, we are both on the same side. Because it’s not about playing games with our child and making sure that he knows his parents are his parents, and whatever they say is what we both agree on. It is very important to parent from the same side”. (Simla)

“That’s the only change that happened within the family when he first came along. Instead of having two mutually compatible individuals when he came along, it became a family and therefore you make more compromises. You do whatever it takes to keep the family unit protected and working”. (Daniel)

Three other participants echoed Simla’s and Daniel’s experience of consistency in parenting. Manuel and his wife Tammy reported a concrete and successful example of being consistent in parenting

“If we work together, if we want to discipline or do something to the children and say, "Okay we’re going to take this away for this time," and we stand by one another and then see that its working it normally does, doesn’t it?” (Manuel)
“Yes, we have children one playing one off against the other, if she comes to me and if he’s banned her from something and she comes to me and says can I use it I say, "No, you have to ask dad because dad banned you from using it so you have to ask him". So we stick together in that sense”. (Tammy)

The participants also reported on the importance of not disagreeing or arguing about parenting issues in front of the children, because children are very good at manipulating parents. This is exemplified in Gary’s and his wife Yan’s case.

“I think that that’s important to us as parents. Even if we have a different idea about how something should go down with her we don’t discuss it in front of her. As far as she sees, she always sees us as being united in where we’re going as parents. My experience is that the children will very quickly divide and conquer if they can see the differences between two parents and start playing you off against each other. I think that would be one of the best things, the consistency in what you’re doing and to keep disagreements about stuff behind closed doors”. (Gary)

“When we disagree about something we never let other, we never do that in front of her… we just discuss it later”. (Yan)

**Teaching children values**

All the parents emphasised the need to teach children good societal, moral and religious values because they believed that the lack of these values is deteriorating families and the society. They want their children to go against that trend and be good citizens:

“A moral value is number one because this will be their most important tool when they have their own family. It is like this is their principle that they have to follow as they get older. They will be good citizens if they have all these values. One of the reasons people, families deteriorate is because there are no values in their family. It has never been emphasised”. (Michelle)

Michelle’s husband Jim supported her views, and added that it was important for parents to teach children to be responsible, in matters such as having a job.

“I think one of the values is to have a job that they were legally allowed to have. That took a lot of their time in between their study. They had money to buy what they wanted. We do not have the pressure. Working and earning their own money for the children, you get them to realize that you don’t get thing for nothing in this world... Also, there are house rules and they have to follow those house rules. If they have work they have a responsibility to do that”. (Jim)

Michelle and Jim’s views were echoed by Gary, who also emphasised the importance of raising children with spiritual values:
“Our society in a lot of ways seems to be deteriorating, but I'd like my children to go against the trend and they have good values and they grow up with people with good values, but not just values for values sake, but also the spiritual side of it”. (Gary)

5.4.4 Summary of Theme 4: Making Intercultural Parenting Work

This section described how intercultural couples used conflict resolution and survival strategies to negotiate their cultural differences with a view to achieve positive parenting and relational outcomes. The participants reported that their concerted efforts of developing and adopting coping strategies within the intercultural context greatly enhanced their parenting skills and relationships.

Chapter Five presented three themes that provided further in-depth descriptions of participants’ experiences regarding intercultural parenting: Power Relations; Reverse Acculturation/Enculturation; and Making Intercultural Parenting Work. The eleven sub-themes identified were demonstrated in the in-depth exploration of the participants’ experiences.

Participants reported that parenting issues, language and communication, gender, and insider/outsider status influenced the power dynamics in their relationships. Also, most of the minority immigrant participants demonstrated their engagement with both the acculturation and reverse acculturation processes, wherein values and traditions of the heritage culture were introduced to the host culture and partner. Likewise, some of the host partners described “reciprocal acculturation”, wherein they showed preferences and engagement of their immigrant partners’ cultural values and practices. This study also revealed another important finding regarding parenting styles. Some immigrant ethnic minority partners described their preferences for the authoritative parenting style because of certain aspects of the authoritarian parenting style they were subjected to in their own upbringing.

Chapters 4 and 5 highlighted some new and significant findings resulting from exploration of the experiences of intercultural parenting in the Australian context: reverse acculturation; reciprocal acculturation; power dynamics in intercultural relationships and parenting; shift from authoritarian to authoritative parenting style; contrasting support and engagement from extended family members; and substitution of friends and diaspora communities as families. In Chapter 6, these new findings and the results from the themes and sub-themes in Chapters 4 and 5 are discussed in relation to the literature review in Chapter 2 and elsewhere.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore the experiences of intercultural parents in Australia, to provide insight into this increasingly visible phenomenon, for current and future intercultural couples, parents and helping professionals. Whereas a considerable amount of literature has researched parenting styles of interracial parents, and the children of intercultural parents, this research focused on the lived experiences of the couples themselves. This focus is particularly relevant, given the demonstrable increase in the multicultural profile of Australia, and the increasing prevalence of intercultural marriage and partnerships.

This study was embedded in a social constructionism paradigm, which allows for exploring how individuals create their perception of reality. Knowledge of the phenomenon in question and the lived experiences of the participants were determined by shared understanding of meaning, language and practices (Gergen, 1985), and co-creation of understandings by the knowers themselves and the researcher (Berger & Luckmann, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this subjectivist epistemology, the knower and respondent co-create understandings. Parents/couples from two different cultural backgrounds co-constructed meaning about their parenting experiences and social reality, based on their cultural and contextual experience of intercultural parenting. The social constructionist perspective enabled the taken-for-granted views of parenting styles and practices in the community and in the literature, to be challenged.

This study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to collect data. This involved the iterative process of constantly comparing data and writing and sorting notes, while at the same time maintaining context of the data and the voice of the participants’ within the narratives to illuminate understanding of the experiences of intercultural parenting. This process was important given that I was exploring a new phenomenon of interest in the Australia context. Credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the findings was ensured by achieving a balance between the saturation factors and remaining open to new perspectives.

Four major themes were identified from the rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences of intercultural parenting: (1) cultures coming together; (2) power relations; (3) reverse acculturation/enculturation; and (4) making intercultural parenting work. In the sections that follow, these four themes are presented and discussed in turn, and related to the research question and the literature regarding intercultural relationship and parenting reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter then provides an explanation of the limitations of the study, and the implications of the findings for theory, policy and family and marriage counselling. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.
6.2 Cultures Coming Together

Studies of intercultural relationships have gained increased attention since Ho’s (1990) popular publication on therapy with intermarried couples. According to Ho (1990), intercultural couples face a greater number of marital challenges than mono-cultural couples, especially regarding conflict over childrearing. The birth of a child reignites couples’ childhood experiences and beliefs about parenting. The transition from a couple to a family context challenges intercultural couples to create a new family identity (Crippen & Brew, 2007). They typically use different strategies to reconcile differences over childrearing: (1) the power rule where one partner assumes responsibility of all decisions; (2) sphere of influence rule wherein whoever is skilled and experienced in certain domain of childrearing assumes the responsibility for that domain; and (3) inertia rule where both parents abdicate their responsibilities for raising children. In this current study, inertia rule was not evident. Most couples/parents used the sphere of influence rule and two couples/parents used the power rule to reconcile differences over childrearing.

Subsequent studies emphasised the racial aspects of those marriages instead of the ethnic differences (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006). Globalisation and cultural diversity have positively impacted on the increase of intercultural relationships, and will therefore have varying consequences on intercultural couple’s preferences for cultural practices.

6.2.1 Cultural Identity

This study included participants from diverse backgrounds (see Appendix E). Intercultural couples showed numerous and different levels of perceptions of their experiences, compared to some overseas studies that involved mostly Asian and black Africans people married to white Anglo-Australian (Hsu, 2001; Killian, 2001; Thomas, Karis, & Wetchler, 2003). For example, when discussing the perception of identity for intercultural couples and parents, many studies focussed on the individual, couple, child and parents’ identity (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004; Cohen, 1982; Khatib-Chahidi, Hill, & Paton, 1998; Luke & Luke, 1998). Individual identity was related to one’s ethnic, racial and national background, ethnic exposure and immersion, and one’s personality and personal attributes. Couples’ identity was related to how they are perceived in the social, familial, political and legal arena, such as societal and family approval or disapproval, racism, looks, perception of their partners, contextual and situational references such as being made aware of it, language limitations, differences in customs and traditions, and insider or outsider status. Children’s identity was described in terms of the parental, societal and children’s own perception of their identity, such as being primarily Australian, bicultural or mono-cultural. Parents’ identity is shaped by internal and external factors such as parenting factors and attributes employed in their parenting role, and the socio-environmental and familial factors in which parenting activities occur.
This study confirmed the findings of those previous studies regarding individual, couple and children’s identity. However, it also revealed other aspects of couples’ identity, which are very important considerations for intercultural couples/parents. Regarding couples’ identity, this study showed that minority status can be also experienced and felt by the host partners. For example, two host partners related their perceptions of feeling the minority status when their migrant wives and in-laws, who were visiting at the time to mind their new born children, were speaking Chinese and Vietnamese all the time. One of the host partners described his experience as “being in Asia by myself”.

Mogra (2014), in a study of Anglo-Asian Muslimah in Britain, found that despite the demonstration of fluid identity regarding culture, ethnicity and race, the core identity remains that of being a Muslim. The findings in this study also extended the interpretation of identity to that of one’s religion. Four participants from the Islamic/Muslim background defined their identity as their religion, which is Islam, instead of culture. Their social values and parenting styles and practices were guided by their religious identity and values, rather than being based on cultural assumption. The experiences of intercultural couples regarding religious preferences are further discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Challenges for Intercultural Couples and Parents

This study demonstrated that intercultural couples/parents faced several challenges. Previous studies have described the challenges experienced by intercultural couples from a cultural perspective, such as culture shock (Crippen, 2008; Falicov, 1995; Romano, 2001), racism and rejection (Bhugra & DeSilva, 2000), marriage disapproval (Cerroni-Long, 1984), divergent customs and values, religion, socio-economic status, food, communication, raising children (Romano, 2001), changes in family dynamics (Hsu, 2001), concerns about children’s experiences (Hubber, 1998), gender roles and beliefs (Biever et al., 1998), and transnational processes (Singla, 2015). The findings of this current study confirmed the findings of the above studies. Most of the participants in this study experienced some form of culture shock, because of such things as language and communication barriers, food culture, values and customs, gender roles, family dynamics, children’s behaviour and parenting styles which negated their intercultural experiences, especially in the early stages of the relationship. Two couples stated that they did not experience culture shock to the same degree as the new immigrant partners because of their previous immersion in the host culture.

Some participants experienced racism and rejection at a personal level, and reported that it was experienced by their children as well. According to Laszloffy and Hardy (2000), racism is “an act that denies a person or group humane treatment or a fair opportunity because of racial bias... and that all expressions of racism are rooted in an ideology of racial superiority/inferiority that assumes some racial groups are superior to others” (p. 35). As such, discussions about racism are very appropriate and relevant in studies regarding intercultural parenting. Studies of mixed heritage children (de la Peña, 2008; Driscoll & Nagel, 2008; Maxwell, 1998) found that children of mixed marriages experienced problems
of acceptance in the cultural groups that were part of their heritage. The children’s physical traits were identified as the factors that defined their differences. In this study four participants reported this problem, providing some support for Maxwell’s statement. Two participants described that their children were racially vilified by their peers at school because of the physical differences to the point that they had to teach coping and defensive strategies to their children. Two other Islamic participants described that their neighbours were racist and would not talk to them and that other people on the street did not want to accept them.

In this study, the difference in the physical traits of participants and their children extended beyond the “black-white” concept, such as in American studies, because of the additional identifying physical characteristics of intercultural couples and mixed-race children from white Anglo-Australians to Asians, Indians, Middle Eastern, and Pacific Islanders, and black Africans. Hubber (1998) drew similar conclusions about the children of Samoan-New Zealand European relationships “who may experience different aspects of racism as the children may range in appearance from European to looking Samoan or Polynesian” (p. 63).

Olofsson (2004) found that intercultural couples struggled with how others in their environment, such as extended families, friends and the community perceived their differences. Cottrell (1990) also found that social stigma and society’s intolerance towards intercultural relationships are expressed in the attitudes of families and friends. The findings of this study supported Olofsson and Cottrell’s statements. Six participants experienced marriage disapproval from their parents and relatives based on racism and cultural differences. Two participants stated that their close friends strongly pursued them to end their relationship with their then boyfriend and current husband based on racial and cultural stereotypes and stigmas.

Another finding from this study is that racism and rejection doesn’t necessarily come only from members of the majority host culture. Whereas the literature usually refers to racism and rejection of intercultural relationship from members of the majority culture host society (Tizard & Phoenix, 1993), this study found that it can sometimes be a two-way phenomenon. Some members of the minority ethnic groups equally oppose marriages to someone from another race or culture. Two minority ethnic immigrant participants stated that their parents, friends and members of their community opposed their marriage to someone from another race, which indirectly impacted on their relationship during family and social events. This study found that the individual and personal characteristics of those participants, such as perseverance, resistance, stubbornness, patience and commitment enabled them to restrain the negative attitudes and sustain their relationships. This study has shown that language and communication styles have serious implications for intercultural couples. Barrett et al. (2005) contend that “any language directly impacts how people who speak it understand the world. It affects what we do and don’t think about whether or not there are words for some experience” (p. 57). Romano (1998) also stated
that language can contribute to misunderstandings between intercultural couples. Two other studies (Reiter & Gee, 2008; Tili & Barker, 2015) suggested that lack of or avoidance in communication in intercultural relationships results in distress. Reiter and Gee’s study (2008) indicated that “when compared to intra-cultural relationships, individuals in intercultural relationships were more likely to report conflict related to cultural differences” (p. 553). The findings in this study support the statements of the above studies. Five participants stated that language barriers and communication styles such as tone, abbreviations, time taken to think and silence created lot of misunderstanding of what was said or intended, thus leading to conflict, especially for those in relationships with Asian and non-English speaking background partners. However, the remaining participants did not report as much of a problem with language and communication, partly owing to their work or study immersion experience in the host country, or because they learned and spoke English in their homeland. This study also found that language and communication were reciprocal challenges for the majority host partners when they visited their minority ethnic partner’s country because they could not speak the local language or communicate with their partner’s relatives.

According to the literature, cultural values and customs are quite resistant to change, and are ingrained in parents’ values, beliefs and parenting practices (Gonzales, 1996; Keller et al., 2004b; Renzaho, 2011). In order to adapt to cultural differences and succeed in their parenting roles, intercultural couples/parents adhere to the concept of mutual acculturation, a term developed by Falicov (1995), defined as a bi-directional adaptation process in intercultural relationships, wherein partners from both the migrant or minority and host or majority culture adjust to each other’s cultural values. The process of mutual acculturation was evident in the findings of this current study. Besides learning about each other’s language and food culture, most participants reported that they visited their immigrant partner’s country so that both they and their children could have a better understanding, appreciation and direct experience of their partner’s culture and associated parenting and relational behaviours.

Gender roles and expectations are reported to be more rigid in collectivist cultures as opposed to the flexibility of roles in individualist cultures, especially regarding different rights and responsibilities between male and female (Kellner, 2009). Another recent study in Denmark (Singla, 2015) found that “the gender-related responsibility for primary parenting seems to be among women deeply engrained, irrespective of ethnic belonging” (p. 121). Negotiation of gender roles and expectations presents common challenges and reflects the power position in any relationship. However, it was exacerbated for intercultural couples because of the unique characteristics they bring into the relationship, such as dominant discourses of especially upper class South Asian males, who do not want to share household chores (Rastogi & Thomas, 2009). Interestingly, this current study suggested that gender roles were not too much of a challenge for most of the intercultural couples. Three participants reported challenges in gender roles regarding management of the family
finances and activities, sleeping patterns of children, and boys’ choice of toys. One participant stated that he could not fully execute his parental roles and obligations because of the nature of his work and external commitments. Most participants wanted their relationship and parenting experiences to be positive and therefore engaged in collaborative processes. The shift in parental roles and obligations by minority ethnic partners can be interpreted as an adaptive process to reduce conflict in the context of the majority host culture. Two of the minority ethnic, male partners stated that they would more likely revert to their homeland traditional male roles and expectations if they went back to live in their country. This can also be interpreted as a power dynamic and is further discussed in Section 6.3.

The literature on intercultural relationships and parenting emphasises that contextual, ecological and systemic factors greatly influence couples and parenting experiences (Belsky, 1984; Crippen, 2008; Crippen & Brew, 2013; Le Vine, 1988; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005). Kotchick & Forehand (2002) also reported that factors outside the family shape parenting generally. The findings in this study strongly support the literature review findings. Participants mentioned contextual and systemic factors such as the social environment, extended families, friends, socio-economic status, as well as personality and individual characteristics, as influencing factors impacting on their relationships and parenting practices. All the participants described how the environment, including positive and negative physical and social characteristics of their neighbourhood, impacted on their experiences of safety, trust and community living and the decisions they made about discipline and their children’s activities. Four couples reported that because Australia is becoming an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society, with many mixed families and children at school and in the social environment, they do not feel like being outsiders anymore, and they are not stressed about it.

Intercultural couples struggle with extended families’ stereotypes and intolerance towards intercultural relationships (Cottrell, 1990; Crippen, 2008; Crohn, 1995), a finding that was also supported in this study. The findings of this study also showed the importance of the extended family support, and revealed several other characteristics of the extended family dynamics, notably the contributions of the extended family towards participants’ experiences of parenting. There appeared to be a divide between the level of involvement and support provided by extended families from the minority ethnic partner’s side of the family, and that provided by the majority host partner’s extended family. The participants stated that the extended family members, including mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and aunties from their minority ethnic immigrant partners were very involved in their children’s lives and upbringing. Some family members even flew to Australia and helped with their pregnancy, childbirth and caring for the children for several months and this was seen as a very positive contribution to the parenting experience. Except for two couples, all participants stated that the involvement and support of extended family members from the majority host partner was very limited, and in some cases non-existent. Distance, family
conflict, intolerance for intercultural relationships and lack of interest were revealed as some of the reasons for lack of extended family involvement and support. The literature refers to extended family dynamics in terms of “individualistic, collectivist, high context and low context” social attributes (Hall, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; Molina et al., 2004). More research needs to be done on why extended family members from the dominant white host culture are not very involved in their children’s lives and upbringing.

This study showed that besides strong family influences, friends were another significant source of support and influence in the relational and parenting domain. Intercultural immigrant partners who lived away from their homeland often felt sad, isolated, lost, and lack of support in the host country. This feeling of loss and isolation is supported by Cottrell’s (1990) and Crippen’s (2008) findings about the challenges of living far away from families and relatives. In this study, participants reported that they turned to friends to minimise those feelings of loss and support. Migrant participants described that the friends and the community they engaged with in their new country of residence became their family, thus extending the theoretical meaning of family. The concept of “friends as family” can be related to the concept of “fictive kin” (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994; Lee, 2013; Voorpostel, 2013). Fictive kin are referred to as people to whom one considers to be related but who are not necessarily related by blood or marriage (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994). These authors referred to the family like relationships that African-Americans have been reported to form with non-related close friends. They argued that African-Americans defined the boundaries of their families flexibly so as to include more distant kin and collateral relatives so as to expand their network. Further research into this concept of friends as family would enormously benefit intercultural families and couples living in another country, far away from families and friends.

Social scientists (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Parsons & Bales, 1955; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2004) suggested that society is a system of relationships that creates the structure of the society in which we live and that determines one’s life and character. According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory, human beings develop within distinct interconnected systems such as the parental system. The findings in this study concur with the above statements. Two participants described that their parenting style was influenced by their interconnected rather than just cultural attributes. According to Leyendecker et al. (2005) and Hoff et al. (2002) socio-economic status has an impact on how parents raise their children. The findings of this study showed that socio-economic status was a notable cultural influence. Most of the parents strove for a better education for their children and themselves, and some couples wanted their children to be in better jobs than themselves, thus reinforcing social class attitudes. This study also showed that minority ethnic partners, especially Asian and African partners were more committed to their children’s and their own educational achievements and job opportunities. This attitude was based on the premises that: (1) they did not have the opportunities and financial means to achieve higher education in their homeland; (2) they did not want their children to be in the same situation
as them in a country like Australia which has plenty of educational and job opportunities; and (3) that education, better jobs and higher status in society reduces racism and social exclusion. Three participants from the majority host culture stated that they did not worry about what kind of jobs their children have, if the children are happy in what they are doing.

Respect for parents, families, elders and others in authority are important collectivist values embraced by many minority ethnic communities (Chao, 1994, 2000; Gonzales, 1996; Renzaho, 2011). These values are often confused with the “authoritarian” parenting style as opposed to “hierarchical” parenting style, which is highly valued in many minority ethnic communities. Lindahl and Malik (1999) differentiated between authoritarian and hierarchical parenting style in that latter does not necessarily imply unresponsiveness as in the authoritarian style, but rather that elders command respect for their wisdom and experience and not questioned by subordinate members of the family or community in that respect. It also emphasises respect for parents and authorities and strong intra-familial boundaries. The findings of this study concur with Lindahl and Malik’s statements. Most couples and particularly all the minority ethnic partners reinforced the hierarchical values in their parenting styles. Most did not agree with the way in which some children from the majority host culture disrespect their parents, elders, families and the authorities, are not interested in education and have poor work ethics.

Finally, transnational processes have a significant impact on the experiences of intercultural couples and parents. According to Singla (2015), the problems experienced by intercultural couples are anchored in what she called “outside circumstances as well as inside ones. Politics is perceived as an outside circumstance but in close proximity to the inside one” (p.145). The positioning of the immigrant partner as the “victim” of the political and social system demonstrates the interplay between outside and inside circumstances (Singla, 2015). This study confirmed Singla’s inside and outside circumstances assertions. Participants experienced migration concerns such as language and communication barriers, discrimination, exclusion, and public gaze. Within a transnational environment, immigrant partners described challenges they encountered in negotiating their belongingness. The host partners in this study expressed sensitivity towards the exclusionary processes of outside forces against their immigrant partners.

According to Singla (2015), changes in the political landscape of Denmark have been marked by polarised ethnic groups, Islamophobia, exclusion and negative attitudes towards multiculturalism. The findings in this study confirmed and extended Singla’s arguments. Although Australia officially embraces multiculturalism, the political landscape and public opinion have been recently increasingly marked by polarised ethnic groups, Islamophobia, exclusion and negative attitudes against immigration and refugee settlement, especially those from Islamic faith backgrounds.
Transnationalism, however, also had some positive effects on immigrant participants’ experiences. Singla (2015) described those positive experiences as diasporic community social engagement, adaptation and integrative acculturation. Her assertions were confirmed in this study. For example, two immigrant partners actively engaged in their diasporic community events and functions to sustain their cultural identity, beliefs, and customs and values, as well as promoting same to their offspring and host partners. The immigrant partners also utilised the transnational process as a vehicle to utilise their human capitals to assist members of their diasporic communities to adapt to the host society. In this study, most of the immigrant partners were highly skilled, had good jobs and enjoyed good socio-economic status, thus challenging the myths and stereotypes that immigrant partners are victims of circumstances, passive and economic dependants. The next section discusses benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting.

6.2.3 Benefits and Opportunities of Intercultural Parenting

Much of the literature on intercultural marriages and mixed heritage children has focused on the challenges and constraints couples and children encountered within such domains. Given the increasing globalised world and multicultural relationships and mixed-race children, more research is now emerging showing the benefits of being intercultural (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Crippen, 2008; Keller et al., 2004a; Molina et al., 2004). Bratawidjaja (2007) stated that intercultural couples “found themselves to be stronger individuals and couples because they focussed on their strengths instead of their weaknesses and the uniqueness they brought into both the marriage and parenting” (p. 184). Keller et al. (2004a) claimed that the process of parenting enables the transmission of cultural values. Molina et al. (2004) argued that intercultural relationships facilitate a richness that is less likely to occur in mono-ethnic couples. Crippen (2008) identified opportunities that extended to both parents and individuals such as access to other models of parenting, plasticity of roles, and enhanced cultural competency. Plasticity of roles refers to increased flexibility in gender roles in intercultural relationships.

Hubber (1998) argued that a child who has been socialised into a family which has successfully negotiated culture differences, “is uniquely prepared to deal with issues relating to those dimensions of difference between people, culture and other group comparisons, as well as the discrimination society accords to the minority groups differing from the “norm”... and that this ability would be less likely to be fostered in a family which is “mono-cultural” because cultural difference is not a salient issue” (p. 69). The findings of this study concur with statements by Bratawidjaja, Crippen, Hubber, Keller et al. and Molina et al. However, this study could not develop the ideas of the above researchers regarding benefits and opportunities experienced by the mixed-race children because they were not involved in the study. The participants’ perception of their children’s positive experiences was based on their own observational assessment of the children’s activities, developmental growth and socialisation processes within the family, and outside the family. Participants in
this study reported that their children inherited the richness and best of both worlds and have ownership of two different cultures. The fact that the children developed cultural competency, spoke another language and inherited “hybrid-vigour”, that is, they are beautiful from being mixed children (Lewis, 2010; Ziv, 2006), increased their job opportunities in Australia and globally. Participants reported that the food culture was a rich experience for the children as they were exposed to and could enjoy so many different dishes, compared to mono-cultural children. Participants also reported adaptation, acceptance, tolerance and open-mindedness as other positive characteristics that the children developed from being bicultural.

All the participants reported that they also enjoyed the above benefits experienced by their children, as well as other benefits and opportunities as intercultural couples. The benefits included other models of parenting from being exposed to parenting in other cultures, and holistic family life from being exposed to healthy family environments in their partners’ culture, compared to the poor or non-existent family life in their own upbringing.

This study also highlighted the benefits and positive effects of partner selection and relationship standard, whereupon couples selected their partners based on characteristics that they found attractive, such as exotic characteristics and other factors that they had in common such as having similar faith and family values. The context of partner selection based on relationship standards and commonalities were found to reduce intercultural conflicts and motivated couples to manage any relational and parenting issues. For couples who have been in long term relationship, partner selection and convergence on relationship standards helped to achieve (a) easier parenting dynamics, (b) better relationship satisfaction, (c) less stressors, and (d) facilitates positive integration/adaptation processes. This finding supported previous studies regarding relationship standards in partner selection (Hiew et al., 2015) revealing that almost all cultural combinations of partners shared greater similarity on standards. Also, across cultural combinations, high agreement between partners on both standards, predicted high relationship satisfaction.

According to the participants, the experience of being an intercultural couple and raising mixed-children was a rich intercultural phenomenon.

### 6.3 Power Relations

In this study, as outlined in Chapter 5, intercultural couples adopted several strategies to resolve conflict and achieve a balance in how they manage their intercultural relationship and parenting experiences. However, some form of imbalance and dominance regarding power dynamics still prevailed throughout their parenting experiences. In this study, power issues among participants were apparent in areas such as parenting practices, language and communication, gender, and insider/outsider status.
From a social constructionist perspective power is seemingly present in all phases of intercultural relationship and parenting. According to Pare (1996), “power is seen as playing a central role in privileging some voices or stories while silencing others” (p. 5). In other words, power grants the privilege to have one’s truth prevail and establish knowledge supremacy over others. This interpretation of power concurs with participants’ narratives in this current study. Two participants were absolute in the righteousness, supremacy and privilege about their own cultural “truth” over that of their partner’s cultural values, especially regarding parenting practices. For example, one participant in particular, from the majority host culture, believed that he was “always right” and had the privilege of his own truth regarding sleeping patterns of children, referred to as “sleep-cry”, because of parenting experiences from his previous marriage and the way it is done in the western culture (see Section 5.2.1). Although, the participant referred to the privilege of truth from his cultural perspective, it can be also interpreted as a power issue from a gender and personality perspective. Power therefore plays a role in any form of negotiation where individuals strive to have their voices and stories heard.

Cottrell (1990) found that intercultural couples tend to conform to the cultural practice of the dominant host culture. Seto and Cavallaro (2007) also found that the place of residence impacts on couples’ power distribution in a relationship. The findings of this study support the arguments of these authors. In this study, immigrant partners perceived themselves mostly as “outsiders” because they live in the host country and therefore the need to conform mostly to the host culture. In the context of the intercultural relationships, the concept of “outsider status” refers to the partner who migrates to the host country and lives in the partner’s home country. Most of the immigrant partners experienced power imbalance, from living in the host partner’s country, being isolated from their relatives, lack of extended family support, loss of their culture, and experiencing language and communication problems. One immigrant participant gave up on some aspects of her cultural values and traditional recreational activities for her children in order to minimise conflict with her host partner, who was adamant about his values. The host participants experienced insider status power dynamics from belonging to the majority population and race, speaking the majority language and having an overall knowledge of the Australian society and culture.

However, some participants also felt a sense of power from immersion in the host culture and “belongingness” from being married to the host partner. Interestingly, this study revealed that some majority host partners in intercultural relationships can also experience the feeling of minority status. For example, one participant felt completely ignored when his wife’s extended family members were visiting, and completely immersed themselves in their homeland language and traditional practices. Another participant from the majority host culture felt the same when she was visiting her husband’s native country and all his relatives spoke in their local language. She felt powerless and lonely. Two other host
partners described how they were the subjects of racism, rejection and ignored in the social arena because of their marriage to minority ethnic partners in Australia.

Romano (1998) stated that language barriers can create misunderstandings between intercultural couples. The findings in this study concur with Romano’s suggestions. Power regarding language was manifested when some participants tried to control their partner’s behaviour or thoughts. It was clear that there was a complex interaction between power and language. Two participants stated that language barriers made it difficult for them to win a plausible argument with their host partners as the latter overpowered them with the command of the language, which eventually led to frustration, emotional distress and unhappiness. Another participant found it difficult to communicate properly with her children in her first language because the children have assimilated into the host culture and did not want to speak their mother’s language. All the participants encouraged their children to learn or speak some of the immigrant partner’s language so that they could communicate with their extended families and members of the ethnic minority community.

This study revealed that communication style was another parallel challenge entwined with language problems. Power is most of the time present during communications with each other even if it is not necessarily evident. The intercultural partner perceived to have the most power often determined the communication pattern in the relationship. The relationship between communication and power in intercultural relationships is not often explored in the literature. In this current study, some participants had problems with their partner’s communication styles, which led to major misunderstanding, arguments, withdrawals and unhappiness. For example, one immigrant partner, in particular, resorted to his cultural ways of dealing with problems such as silence, withdrawal, time, and thought processes, whereas his host partner wanted immediate answers and dealing with problems straight away, thus imposing a western ‘individualist’ cultural value on the minority immigrant partner.

Hall (1976) refers to these styles of communication as being typical of “high context” and “low context” cultures, respectively. High-context and low-context communication refers to how much individuals rely on non-verbal cues to communicate a message. According to Hall (1976), high-context cultures prefer harmony and consensus, and are less governed by reason than intuition and feelings. The words are not as important as context, which might include the sender’s tone of voice, facial expression, gestures and posture. Many things are left unsaid, with the assumption that the internalised cultural context will indicate what is meant. Low-context cultures, on the other hand, are ones in which information is explicitly stated in the communication. Explanations are expected when statements or events are not clear, and meanings are derived from the situation or event, rather than from an internalised cultural understanding. Hall’s interpretation of “high-context” and “low-context” cultures clearly reflects the communication styles of participants in this study. This is exemplified in Manuel and his wife Tammy’s case. When they have an argument about an
issue, Tammy, who is classified as low-context culture, from being an Anglo-Australian, wanted immediate answers and resolution, as opposed to her husband Manuel, who is classified as high-context culture and takes time to think about his answers and responses.

Current empirical research regarding high-context and low-context styles of communication suggests changes regarding disclosure of information in high-context communication style. Hammami, Al-Jawarneh, Hammami, and Al Qadire (2014) examining “reasonable” patients’ perception of norms in a high-context communication culture, revealed that (1) even in an overall high-context communication culture, extensive and more information than is currently disclosed is perceived as the norm; (2) the focus of the desired information is closer to benefits and post-procedure’s issues than risks and available alternatives; (3) male, post-procedure, and older patients are in favour of more information disclosure; and 4) male, older, and more educated patients may be particularly dissatisfied with current information disclosure. This perception of norms in high-context cultures was not evident in this current study.

Power is not always a one-directional process. I suggest that the exercise of power in the context of Manuel and Tammy can be perceived from a reverse or reciprocal perspective. The minority ethnic partner, in relation to the situation explained above, could also be exercising power over his or her partner by resorting to silence and withdrawal in the communication process. This was also evident in Manuel and his wife Tammy’s case. For example, if Manuel was not happy about an issue, he chose to remain silent and withdrew from the argument, which frustrated his wife Tammy as she wanted a spontaneous resolution. This phenomenon is yet to be explored. A full examination of the context of power regarding communication styles in intercultural relationship is beyond the scope of this study and can be the subject for further research.

Keller (2009) suggests that there is a clear power differential in collectivist cultures. Women are regarded as having loyalty to men, rather than relying on their own potentials and success. Gender roles are more rigid wherein the rights and obligations of men are significantly different to that of. This study confirms Kellner’s findings and goes further by revealing that power dynamics also exist in intercultural relationships among men from individualistic cultures in the host society. For example, all the female participants stated that their husbands, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, exercised more power than them regarding discipline and socialisation processes of the children. One participant also associated gender power with males from the individualistic culture as an attribute of religious values, and described how she submitted to her husband’s lack of understanding of her culture because of their common religious values where the man is regarded as the “higher authority”.

This study also revealed another important finding, wherein male partners from the collective society experienced role reversals in the individualistic host culture. Some participants described how they lost power when, contrary to the gender values they
experienced in their homeland, they had to cook, wash and put women’s clothes on the clothes line. The gender power was compromised in order to sustain a healthy relationship. The findings also revealed that those male partners from the collectivist culture reverted to their traditional gender roles and expectations when they returned to their homeland.

6.4 Reverse Acculturation/Enculturation

In a US study, Kim & Park (2009) reported that Korean immigrants are reverting to what they termed “reverse acculturation” that is, introducing the heritage culture to the host nation. Miller (2010) refers to enculturation as adopting attributes of the new country they migrated to whilst retaining those of the heritage culture. Both these dynamics of reverse acculturation and enculturation were apparent in the findings of this current study. The findings on reverse acculturation reported by Kim & Park (2009) and this present study bring a different perspective to Berry’s (1997) formulation, and to current acculturation theory (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007), which state that acculturation is unidirectional and that immigrants eventually relinquish their heritage culture and adapt to the host country’s culture and values. Whilst this may be true for some immigrants, defined within contextual realities, such as fleeing war-torn countries and political and religious persecutions, it does not necessarily apply to migrants who immigrate to different regions of the world because of the effects of globalisation and a plural metropolitan society. The current study found that participants from the minority ethnic group engaged in both reverse acculturation as well as enculturation processes by reinforcing their cultural heritage in the relationships and parenting practices. The phenomenon was amply demonstrated in multiple domains, such as family values, language, identity, food, values and goals, behaviours, cultural knowledge and social affiliation and activities. Two particular participants also went back with their children to their heritage country for a couple of years in the early stages of parenting, to inculcate and immerse their children in their heritage culture because they did not like the western way of raising children. This is a phenomenon that is beyond the scope of this study and needs further exploration and study as a discrete phenomenon.

This study also revealed another dimension of acculturation, termed here for the first time as “reciprocal acculturation”, thus expanding the existing theoretical framework of acculturation. The concept of reciprocal acculturation in the context of this study refers to majority host partners who preferred and adopted the positive cultural practices and attributes of the minority group partners because it enhanced their lifestyle and opportunities, as opposed to the concept of mutual acculturation (Falicov, 1995), which is about adjustment of dysfunctional patterns wherein couples must negotiate cultural conflicts, make mutual accommodation and develop new cultural codes.

In the context of intercultural relationships and parenting, reciprocal acculturation can be defined as a process wherein partners from the majority ethnic culture surrender to the positive cultural practices of the minority ethnic partner. Five participants from the majority
host culture preferred and adopted their partner’s minority group cultural processes. Diaspora communities were also considered as an important mechanism to sustain cultural ties with the heritage culture and local members of the relevant minority ethnic communities (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). Diaspora communities are currently matters of debate and concerns in the public and political arena in Australia (Beech, August 19, 2013) and other countries embracing multiculturalism. The positive contributions of such communities to society in general, particularly in the context of intercultural dynamics, should not be ignored (Chan, 2013). Recent global shifts towards a more cosmopolitan culture also reinforce the concept of reverse and reciprocal acculturation/enculturation. As the participants in this study described, the willingness on their part to embrace aspects of other cultures enhanced their lifestyle and opportunities in both the heritage and host cultures.

The debates over parenting styles have been well documented over the years, with consensus, mostly in the western and individualist cultures, for the authoritative style of parenting (Baumrind, 1967; 1971), which emphasises responsiveness alongside demandingness. On the other hand, and as described in the literature review, most collective cultures, especially Asian, African and Middle-eastern cultures, embrace and justify authoritarian parenting. However, there seems to be a shift towards an authoritative parenting style in the Australian context, among intergenerational parents and some new migrants. In this current study, in the context of intercultural parenting, participants from the African culture were found to be practising a mix of authoritative and hierarchical styles of parenting. As mentioned in the literature review, Lindahl and Malik (1999) differentiated between authoritarian and hierarchical parenting styles, in that the latter does not imply unresponsiveness in the same way as authoritarian parenting style. They suggested that hierarchical parenting styles promote respect for elders, parents and authorities and strong intra-familial boundaries.

In two separate studies on African migrant families in Australia, Renzaho, McCabe and Sainsbury (2011) and Sims and Omaji (1999) found that many African and Arab speaking migrant families struggled to reconcile the parenting styles and practices of their country to the legalised parenting practices and policies in Australia. Renzaho et al. (2011) found that “migrants tend to come from collectivist cultures where an authoritarian parenting style (where obedience to authority is valued) is the norm, yet they find themselves in a new continent where individuality (valuing self-maximisation, self-reliance, individualism, and autonomy) is the norm” (p. 417). This current study, which includes the parenting experiences of some African migrants, reveals an evolving perspective on their parenting styles because of the intercultural parenting dynamic. The African participants in this study were keen to make their relationship work, and as such have adopted some strategies, including flexibility, compromise and negotiating their parenting styles. In the context of intercultural parenting within Australia, it appears that African participants have shifted from an authoritarian to a combined hierarchical and authoritative parenting style.
Four out of eight participants from Asian cultures have shifted from their parents’ authoritarian parenting style to that of the “authoritative” parenting style. However, the four Asian participants were female and therefore gender considerations in the way they were parented may have also influenced this shift. Unfortunately, there were no male Asian participants in this study to corroborate or challenge the changed pattern of parenting styles among the Asian participants. According to the participants, the reason for the shift in their parenting style was based on three factors. (1) Dislike of their parenting experiences from their parent’s authoritarian parenting style, particularly regarding discipline and educational expectations. The participants described that their parents were never happy with their study results and demanded better performances, thus making them feel sad, inadequate and lacking in confidence. (2) Lack of communication about children’s feelings. According to one participant, Japanese parents never say their children are the best. (3) Exposure to other styles of parenting where children seem to be happier. As one participant described, in the Chinese culture parents speak to children like a leader or treat the children as if they are workers, as opposed to Australians who were perceived as speaking to children on the same level. This is an interesting phenomenon revealing current and emerging changing attitudes about parenting styles among Asian communities in the Australian context.

The findings of this current study challenge current thinking about parenting in collectivist cultures. The assumption is that the collectivist culture embraces and promotes authoritarian parenting style. This assumption, as revealed in studies by Chao (1994, 2000) bears substance in Asian homogenous collectivist societies, but may not be entirely relevant to members of the collectivist society who have migrated to other western countries. The assumption is also challenged following another study (Cheah et al., 2009) in which immigrant Chinese mothers of pre-schoolers favoured the authoritative parenting style, because it predicted increased children’s behavioural abilities. This current study adds to the debate about assumptions regarding authoritarian parenting based on the findings of parenting within an intercultural context and a western society. Similar to the African context mentioned above, this study revealed an equally evolving perspective on the parenting styles among immigrant Asian participants, because of the intercultural parenting dynamics. The Asian participants in the intercultural relationships were equally keen to make their relationship work and as such have adopted some strategies, including flexibility, compromise and negotiating their parenting styles. In the context of intercultural parenting, within Australia, it appeared that the Asian participants have also shifted from an authoritarian to authoritative parenting style.

The results of this study also challenge the assumption that parents parent the way they were parented (Santrock, 2007; Tanaka et al., 2009). This was not fully demonstrated in all the parenting experiences described by the participants. Asian participants, in particular, did not like the way they were parented and as a result shifted from their parent’s authoritarian parenting style to an authoritative parenting styles. The shift in parenting style appeared to
have been influenced by the context of environment they lived in and exposure to new styles of parenting.

6.5 Making Intercultural Parenting Work

One of the aims of this study was to strengthen understandings of how intercultural parents resolve concerns and issues regarding parenting their children. Intercultural couples/parents faced unique challenges as a result of their deeply embedded cultural values that led to differences in parenting styles, beliefs and attitudes. However, all the participants in this study were very keen to make their parenting experience a positive one. In order to achieve that, the parents developed diverse ways of resolving issues, including conflict resolution and survival tools and strategies.

Several studies in the United States and the United Kingdom have documented strategies that intercultural couples used to resolve their conflict over personal and parenting differences (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Bratawidjaja, 2007; Caballero et al., 2008; Crippen, 2008; Crippen & Brew, 2013; Falicov, 1995; Ho, 1990; Kenney & Kenney, 2012; Killian, 2013; McDermott & Fukunaga, 1977; Romano, 2001; Root, 1992, 1996; Stoppard, 2007; Thompson, 1990). The strategies documented in the above studies ranged from surrendering to the host culture to sustaining cultural differences and developing constructive patterns of cultural adjustments. Studies investigating patterns of cultural adaptation (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Kim, 2001) revealed that intercultural couples go through three phases of cultural adaptation: culture shock, cultural adjustment, and identity change. This process would most likely apply to intercultural couples and parents, as couples in intercultural relationships often live in the partner’s host country for most of their lives, thus experiencing cultural and identity dissonance.

Ho (1990) found that heterogenous couples made decisions about parenting based on: (1) sphere of influence rule, where each partner takes responsibility for chores that they have an interest in and skill, (2) egalitarian rule, where decisions are made together, and (3) inertia rule, where both parents relinquish their responsibilities over childrearing out of respect to the other’s culture. This finding was not apparent in the current study, and the assumption would be that it is a very negative strategy for both the intercultural parents and children. Instead, the findings regarding sphere of influence and egalitarian rules regarding parental role and childrearing were evident in this present study. Most participants respected their partner’s areas of interest, experience and skill, such as education and sporting activities, as well as egalitarian rules when tough decisions were made, particularly regarding discipline. The participants reported that by appreciating and adopting certain positive qualities from each other’s culture, they enhanced their relationship and family life.
However, not all decision-making processes were resolved or negotiated in an egalitarian way. Thomson (1990) referred to “rules of power”, where sometimes some couples resolved conflicts over parenting by conforming to the cultural values of the host partner or controlling all decisions. These conflict resolution strategies, which were also referred to as asymmetric strategies in Chapter 5 were manifested in the findings of this present study. The asymmetric/power rule pattern of conflict resolution was evident in the instances of two couples where the majority host partners exercised more power in the relationship due to income, gender and personality differences. The minority immigrant partners resolved the conflict by conceding to the host partner’s values. But as they described, the asymmetric, power wielding behaviour left both of the migrant partners feeling “sad” and “unhappy”.

Falicov (1995) proposed what she called “mutual acculturation” as an important step to resolve conflicts in intercultural relationships. Mutual acculturation has been described as a bi-directional process of cultural accommodation in intercultural relationships. This process is evident in the findings of this current study. Participants reported that spending time in the minority partner’s homeland and trying to learn their language were two important factors that led to increased understanding of the partner’s culture and hence better relationships. One couple in particular wanted their child to be bilingual and their capacity to communicate with the child in both languages helped the whole family during their interactions with the extended family and community members overseas and locally.

Bratawidjaja (2007) found that in order to have a successful cross-national marriage, couples displayed essential personal traits such as adventurous spirit, flexibility, curiosity and spontaneity. The findings of the current study support the above, and went further, adding “respect for partner as another person” and “immersion” in their partner’s culture as essential attributes that increased the success of intercultural relationships and parenting. For example, couples respected each other as another person, who they are and the way they do things. One particular participant described how he changed from his country’s traditional attitude towards women and respects his wife equally. Immersion related to cultural literacy, where host culture partners particularly, studied their immigrant partner’s culture so that they have a greater understanding and appreciation of differences and how to deal with and negotiate the differences in given contexts.

A grounded theory study of intercultural parents in the U.S. (Crippen, 2008; Crippen & Brew, 2013), revealed that in order to negotiate diversity based on cultural differences and degree of mutual acculturation, intercultural parents used diverse strategies of adaptation including assimilation, cultural tourism, cultural transition, cultural amalgamation, and dual biculturalism. Assimilation strategy refers to the context where the immigrant partner assimilated to the dominant culture of the host parent as well as relinquishing their heritage cultural values regarding parenting decisions. Cultural tourism refers to a pattern of asymmetrical mutual acculturation, primarily with paternal accommodation. The strategy of
cultural tourism includes a degree of enculturation of children “through holiday celebrations, relationships with grandparents, introduction to foods, and short-term tourist visits” (p. 267) to paternal/maternal country of origin. Cultural transition refers to a strategy of asymmetrical acculturation with primarily maternal accommodation. In this context, parents “who immigrated from other cultures or raised in traditional immigrant households… identified a tension between their heritage cultures and their culture of residence” (p. 268). Cultural amalgamation refers to the process of blending elements in an intercultural relationship. In this context, intercultural parents recognise and acknowledge cultural differences but views them as complimentary and convergent in significant areas such as religion and core values. Dual biculturalism refers to a symmetrical process of acculturation whereby parents encouraged and transmitted both sets of their cultural values, codes, rules, norms, and behaviours to their children. The above findings confirm and add to previous studies of strategies of intercultural parenting (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Caballero et al., 2008; Gonzalez & Harris, 2012). The findings of this current study also reflected and supported all the above strategies of cultural adaptation. This current study also added some new findings regarding strategies of intercultural parenting, as outlined in the findings chapter, such as shifts in parenting styles and practices and selfless parenting.

An exploratory study of parenting “mixed” children in mixed ethnic, faith and race families (Caballero et al., 2008) and another recent study of intercultural marriage and mixed parenting in Denmark, using an integrative theoretical framework based on a socio-cultural psychological approach (Singla, 2015), have discussed three typical approaches that intercultural parents adopt to understand and negotiate differences, and create belonging in raising their children: single, mixed, and individual or cosmopolitan. The current study supported the above findings. Participants were found to use the three approaches when dealing with differences and belonging.

In the “single” approach, the cultural heritage, background and sets of rules, customs and values of only one parent is emphasised. In the current study, the “single” approach was adopted among three couples and they were faith related, including one Christian and two Islamic faith couples. In the Christian example, the migrant wife came from a very religious background and upbringing and brought up the children in the Christian faith. In the Islamic example, the wives became Muslims after marrying their Muslim migrant husbands and brought up their children in the Islamic faith. These three couples emphasised on the importance of bringing up their children in accordance to their faith identity and practice in order to instil a religious set of values in them.

In the “mixed” approach, children’s cultural background from both parents is recognised as part of their identity. In the current study, most participants encouraged and involved their children with the dual aspects of their cultural backgrounds. For example, one participant who is married to an Indian man makes it a point to involve and encourage their children to practice both Christian and Indian cultural values in all aspects of their lives.
In the “individual” approach, parents encourage their children to look beyond their cultural identities and to find and feel comfortable with other characteristics of identity. In the current study, participants reported that the “mixedness” in their children is helping them to be global citizens “who are able to fit in and identify with other communities and cultures” (Caballero et al., 2008, p. 23). The participants also reported that when the children become adults and leave home, they have the choice to decide on their own identities and not be necessarily rooted to the ways they were brought up.

This study drew an important finding about the three approaches used in negotiating differences and belongingness for the children. The single and mixed approaches were not seen regarding dual or mixed-faith practices. The participants in this study raised their children in only one faith. “Mixedness” was only evident regarding race and ethnicity among the participants. This study also challenges the notion that there is a universal way of raising children. Intercultural parents in this study appeared to raise their children within contextual and cultural domains that define their children’s identity and belongingness.

An interesting phenomenon in intercultural relationships and family dynamics, referred to as “third culture” (Perel, 2000; Falicov, 1995), and also referred to as “transcultural” (Crippen & Brew, 2013) was apparent in this study. The proposition was that the couples brought two cultures together when they formed a relationship, and eventually developed a third culture, which included sharing and amalgamating their two individual cultures in an effort to recognise, appreciate and sustain their cultural differences and enhance their relationship. In this study, the development of the third culture also became more apparent and critical when the intercultural couples had children, whereupon they had to develop a compromised third culture to raise the children in a consistent and meaningful way. The third culture proposition was exemplified in Daniel and his wife Simla’s case. Simla explained that as a couple, she and her husband Daniel brought two cultures together in their relationship. But when their son was born, they developed a compromised third culture which involved other strategies regarding issues about how to raise their son, besides their own cultural strategies. A full investigation of this phenomenon was beyond the scope of this study and further research in that domain would be very useful for intercultural families and relationships.

In order to successfully navigate intercultural relationships and parenting, participants in this study emphasised the need for intercultural couples/parents to actively engage in serious communication about any issues of concern. Unfortunately, most of the discussions were carried out during the term of the relationship when they had children. It is therefore important for intercultural couples to discuss childrearing practices before they plan to have children, so that they are clear about their cultural or personal preferences and have a negotiated parenting outcome to prevent cultural dissonance and conflict when the child is born. As some participants said: “sit down and talk about it’ and ‘have a plan”.
From an individual perspective, this study revealed that participants exercised patience, perseverance, tolerance, flexibility and open-mindedness in order to succeed in an intercultural relationship. For example, one couple described how their patience and perseverance to get married despite their parents’ and friends’ disapproval ended on a positive note and acceptance when the parents and friends realised that it was a successful relationship. From a couples’/parents’ perspective, this study found that couples/parents established effective and constructive communication patterns, followed by compromise, flexibility, tolerance, acceptance and open-mindedness, cultural literacy, embracing and respecting partner’s culture, preparedness for minority feelings, and having a plan. As most couples described, communication was the key determinant for their successful relationship and parenting process. Finally, regarding the child’s perspective, this study revealed selflessness and striving for the child’s best interest were the crucial determinants in couples’ resolve to compromise over certain aspects of their parenting practices. Participants refrained from imposing culture on children, listened and respected children, encouraged bi-culturalism, taught children family and social values and importantly tried to be consistent in parenting to prevent confusion in the child’s mind and avoid manipulation of parents. One couple in particular agreed to put aside their personal and cultural conflict about parenting practices and adopted their common religious value about parenting as a compromise strategy to resolve their cultural differences.

In conclusion, three interpretations are drawn from the findings of this present study. First, the findings on the experience of intercultural parenting in Australia concur with much of the literature as discussed in Chapter 2. Second, this study included a greater diversity of cultures than has been typically the case in prior studies, which added new insights into parenting experiences. Third, this study generated some new and relevant findings that would positively contribute to theoretical knowledge and literature on the experiences of intercultural parenting and intercultural studies, and are outlined here: (a) power dynamics in intercultural parenting; (b) reverse acculturation; (c) reciprocal acculturation; (d) shifts in parental styles and practices; (e) selfless parenting; (f) concept of friends as “family”; (g) differences in level of extended family support; and (h) benefits and opportunities of intercultural parenting. The next section outlines the strengths and limitations of this study. The diversity of intercultural relationship and parenting experiences revealed in this present study has positive contributory implications for theory, policy and practice standards.

6.6 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This section discusses the strengths and limitations of the current research, particularly reflecting on the study’s methodological approach. The study was conducted within the context of a growing multicultural Australian society, and therefore required an exploration of both the deficit and strength perspectives of intercultural relationship and parenting. As mentioned before, the broad diversity of cultures involved helped to generate valid and broader perspectives about the issues of intercultural couples and parents compared to
studies with singular or restricted cultural representations, such as in the case of a black or Asian person married to a white Anglo-Australian. As a result, this study generated insights into issues besides culture that impacted on intercultural couples/parents, such as gender, religion, socio-economic status, extended family, and the environment. The results of this broader intercultural study can also be compared with other research involving intercultural couples from only two different cultures, such as Samoan with New Zealand Europeans (Hubber, 1998), to examine whether the universal issues are consonant with issues in singular intercultural relationship and parenting.

Parents from different socio-economic status participated in this study, ranging from labourers, drivers, tradesmen, housewives, teachers, business managers, office workers and professionals. Also, the educational levels of the participants ranged from trade qualifications, primary, college, tertiary, university graduates and post graduate education (see Appendix E). The broad level of socioeconomic status among the participants in this current study generated different experiences and perspectives to this topic under study. Most previous studies on this phenomenon have included participants who were middle-class to higher economic status (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Crippen, 2008; Edwards et al., 2010; Nabeshima, 2005), and therefore the likelihood of generating different experiences of intercultural parenting is probably higher as compared to those from low socio-economic status.

Most overseas studies (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Crippen, 2008; Edwards et al., 2010; Hubber, 1998) have included parents with children aged between 0-18 years approximately. In this current study, the inclusion of parents with children aged 0-23 years helped to reflect on their extended parenting experiences with all the developmental stages of the children, especially teenagers and young adults who negotiate their own identities and divert from their parents’ expectations and goals and values for children. This proposition is substantiated by Kich (1992), latter suggesting that one’s identity formation is achieved through age-appropriate progression. In this study, participants from the minority ethnic culture were born and grew up in their heritage country. The fact that they were not fully acculturated in the host country made their cultural experiences more conspicuous.

In Chapter 3, my role as the researcher and my insider status in relation to the phenomenon from being an intercultural parent and a relationship counsellor was discussed, including my obligations to observe reflexivity in the research process. It was made clear to the participants that I was also an intercultural parent in a mixed marriage. This knowledge seemed to have a positive impact on the participants because they all expressed a sense of commonness, comfort, and the feeling of being understood when describing their experiences. This view was also supported by Bratawidjaja (2007) and Nabeshima (2005) in view of their research on the experience of being parents of mixed-heritage children.

This study also had its limitations. It was limited to one state in Australia. Although the demographical status, described in the background and rationale section, reflected the
broader societal composition of Australia, I acknowledge that there would be some variables pertinent to other states that were not revealed in this study.

This study also did not include intercultural couples/parents from the Australian Indigenous and host background because the focus was on those with a migration experience. A separate study on the experiences of intercultural parenting involving relationships between Indigenous and Anglo-Australians and inter-ethnic groups will presumably reveal a different perspective to the results of this current study.

Finally, this study did not include intercultural separated parents, single mothers and fathers, non-resident parents, adoptive parents, blended families and same sex couples. The inclusion of participants from these groups of intercultural parents and families could have added another dimension and perspective to the phenomenon under study. Further studies into these particular groups of parents are necessary to generate broader knowledge about their experiences of intercultural parenting.

Only intercultural couples were interviewed. Children and members of extended families were not included as it would have moved the focus away from the main units of analysis, that is, the intercultural couple and parenting. This study revealed the important role of the extended family, especially grandparents, in children’s lives and overall help for the family. The inclusion of the grandparents in this study could have shed more light on their own experiences of parenting and being part of the intercultural family. The focus on culture also limits insights into other issues such as gender, age, religion and socio-economic status. Fortunately, some of these factors, particularly the influence of religion on intercultural parenting and couples were precipitated by the participants themselves, which extended the findings of this study.

Only in-depth interviews with intercultural parents were conducted. Observation techniques of participants, their interpersonal relationship, and how they interact with their children and the environment would have added another analytical dimension to the relatedness and corroboration between the narratives of the participants and what was observed in their natural setting. Unfortunately, observational technique of participants and their environment was limited because of time constraints and the scope of this study.

Another limitation was the intention of the study to interview each couple together. If only one partner agreed to participate in the study, he/she was not included. This approach allowed the researcher the opportunity to study how couples negotiate issues, co-construct meaning of their experience together and interact in a family situation. However, this approach had potential limitations, such as the suppression of data from one partner due to the presence of the other, being overpowered by one partner talking more than the other, and fear of reprisals (Horowitz, 1999). Separate interviews could facilitate couples who chose to be interviewed separately for personal, cultural reasons and concerns about
Participants might have also talked about gender and power experiences differently if they were interviewed separately.

Also, although the results of this study cannot be generalised because of the sample size and qualitative approach, the information generated can be transferable and useful to other similar contexts and phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The diversity of intercultural relationships and parenting experience revealed in this present study has positive contributory implication for theory, practice standard and policy. In the next section, the implication for theory, practice and policy generated from this study is outlined.

6.7 Implications for Theory and Practice

This study provided much needed findings on the experiences of intercultural parenting in Australia. Although the findings in the Australian context cannot be generalised due to the sample size of the study, it still has the potential of transferability to the experiences of other intercultural parents, given the “thick” description of participants’ experiences. Several emergent findings were particular highlights of this current study and add to other perspectives on intercultural parenting and the family system: power dynamics in intercultural parenting; reverse and reciprocal acculturation; family concept of friends and diaspora communities in the host culture; and that intercultural couples/parents also experienced significant benefits and opportunities, besides challenges and constraints.

As mentioned previously, aspects of intercultural parenting can be approached from an individual, couple, parent or child perspective. The latter helped me to understand the couples’ experiences from the consistent interactions within and among the parenting domains. The degree of interactions between the factors in each and interacting domains defined the quality of the parenting experiences. For example, if a factor such as flexibility from the individual domain interacts positively with factors such as openness and acceptance in the couple’s domain, it may impact on the outcome of the parenting experience. Equally, if the factors between, for example, the extended family domain interact negatively with the couple’s domain, such as rejection and disapproval, then it may impact negatively on the experience of the couple’s relationship. It is therefore very important for practitioners in relationship and family counselling to understand the degree of interactions between the different interacting domains and endeavour to obtain rich information about the different domains of client’s lives in order to make proper assessments of their experiences.

The next argument is how do practitioners implement the findings of this and previous complementary research to provide effective counselling and therapeutic services to intercultural couples, parents and families? The literature review and findings have revealed both the challenges and benefits that intercultural couples experience and therefore it is
imperative that practitioners explore both these dynamics to strengthen their clients. This present study revealed that intercultural parenting was influenced by internal and external contexts. It is therefore important for the practitioner to explore these dynamics from an internal and external context. For example, an internal context related to the perceptions of one’s identity from an individual, couple, child, family and religious perspective. It is therefore recommended that practitioners make every effort to understand how couples locate their cultural differences. External context relate to outside factors that impact on the relationship and parenting. For example, some of the external challenges impacting on couples in this study related to the attitude of society, friends and extended family members towards their relationship, children and family, and racism and exclusion towards their children at school. It is therefore important for practitioners to explore intercultural parenting dynamics from an internal and external context.

This study revealed that the internal and external domains of family dynamics can often be the source of stressors that impact negatively on couples and parenting. Some of the significant stressors related to: (1) cultural differences among couples, such as language barriers, communication styles, parenting beliefs, values and practices, customs and traditions and socialisation processes; (2) societal attitudes such as racism and disapproval; (3) power relations regarding language, gender, insider/outsider status; and (4) contextual influences such as extended families and the environment. It is therefore crucial for counsellors/therapists to explore and identify those stressors and guide their clients as to how to resolve those differences.

The findings of this current study showed that intercultural couples/parents/children enjoyed many benefits and opportunities other than challenges in the intercultural parenting experience. Of special interest is the fact that intercultural couples and parents can manage and seek help with the challenges as opposed to the benefits and opportunities that are self-acquired, complementary and enriching. Counsellors and therapists can rely on these aspects of benefits and opportunities as sources of strengths in the relationships to encourage and empower their clients.

It is also noteworthy for practitioners to understand that some of the challenges reported by intercultural couples and parents are also experienced by non-intercultural couples and parents, such as concerns for safety, health, education, socialisation processes, and power dynamics. The common and unique concerns were comprehensively described in Chapter 4 (sub-theme 7). Therefore the provision of services and interventions needs to be balanced or measured between cultural needs versus individual contextual needs as opposed to the “intercultural” aspect only. As mentioned above, some intercultural family needs may be other than cultural needs, for example a safe place to live, getting a job and education for the children and parents. Likewise, in the case of couples, the practitioner may need to pay more attention to the contextual situation of the partner rather than focussing on assumed cultural differences because of their “interculturalness”.

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Based on the findings of this study, the implications for practice mentioned above also align with a set of competencies recently adopted by the American Counselling Association (ACA) (2015) for clinical work with intercultural couples and multiracial families. The purpose of the ACA set of competencies is to serve as a resource and framework for how clinicians can competently provide services to members of the multicultural population. Australian counsellors and the helping professionals working with multicultural population and requiring cultural competencies may find it valuable to draw on the set of competencies of the ACA model.

The findings of this current study can be utilised by counsellors and therapists to increase their understanding of intercultural relationship/parenting, and a helpful resource when deciding on therapeutic approaches.

Some of the popular therapeutic approaches that can be used in intercultural and mixed families’ domains are:

- Narrative Therapy (Molina et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2012);
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Beck et al., 1979);
- Solution-Focussed Therapy (de Shazer et al., 1986); and
- Strengths Based Therapy (Bustamante et al., 2011).

According to Molina et al. (2004), narrative therapy is conducive to the needs of intercultural clients. When using the narrative approach, counsellors/therapists help clients to tell a story of their experience, in order to have an understanding of the deeper meaning of their intercultural experiences, and also to make new meaning of the experiences (Molina et al., 2004). When using the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approach, counsellors/therapists can help clients to identify unrealistic beliefs and expectations, negative perceptions and subconscious negative thoughts about themselves and others in their environment (Beck et al., 1979). Therapists and counsellors can use this approach to guide intercultural couples/parents to build positive attributes about their intercultural perceptions and experiences.

The Solution-Focussed Therapy, also known as Solution-Focussed Brief Therapy, is an effective tool that counsellors/therapists can use to empower intercultural clients. De Shazer et al. (1986) described this approach as “utilizing what clients bring with them to help them meet their needs in such a way that they can make satisfactory lives for themselves” (p. 207). Solution-Focussed therapy falls under the social constructionism metatheory given that it’s philosophy and belief reinforces the fact that language is used to construct the reality of clients (Franklin, 1998). This approach has been used in previous studies of couples therapy, multiracial families, and immigrants (Cheung, 2005; Choi & Akdeniz, 2014; Fong & Urban, 2013). This current study revealed that intercultural couples/parents enjoyed many benefits and opportunities in their intercultural parenting experience such as richness and best of both world for couples, parents and children;
cultural competency, holistic family life; other models of parenting; job opportunities for children; extended family supports; adaptability, tolerance/acceptance and open-mindedness; and rich food culture, traditions and customs. As such, counsellors and therapists can rely on these aspects of benefits and opportunities as sources of strengths in the relationships to encourage and empower their clients and help them to change any negative thoughts about their experience (Bratawidjaja, 2007; Bustamante et al., 2011; Hsu, 2001). Bratawidjaja’s study (2007) showed evidence that cross-national couples could strive and survive in their relationship which can be used as useful information to encourage and empower clients.

Therapists using the Strengths Based approach can guide and encourage their clients to reflect on successful coping strategies they have used that helped their differences, thus offering them a sense of hope that their problems can be resolved. This current research showed that intercultural couples/parents used several approaches to cope with their relationship and parenting differences, such as, communication, flexibility and openness to their partner’s culture, respect and support for each other, and sometimes cultural deference where one partner defers to the other partner’s culture. The strengths based approach can be used to help intercultural couples/parents deal with challenges in a positive way.

Finally, counsellors and therapists would enrich and enhance their therapeutic approaches and provide more effective services to their clients by exercising reflexivity, that is setting aside their own bias and prior assumptions (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Patton, 2002) about intercultural relationship and mixed families; promoting notions of adaptability, flexibility, tolerance, appreciation, acceptance and open-mindedness; encouraging cultural literacy in the form of psycho-social-education; emphasising on the positives, benefits and strengths of “interculturalness”; and addressing intercultural clients issues within an integrated systemic, ecological and contextual framework.

6.8 Implications for Policy

In this study, intercultural couples/parents seemed to have difficulty in explaining the “mixedness” of their relationship and that of their children in social contexts and official documents. Whilst the adults in the relationship can at least relate their answers to their ethnic background, they described that their children were often confused about which parent’s ethnic group they belong to, even though they are Australian by birth. Much of the “mixedness” issue was successfully resolved in the UK. According to Caballero et al. (2008), “the inclusion of the “mixed” category in the 2001 UK census ethnic group question has been not only widely accepted but also influential in shaping other ethnic minority forms, as well as the visibility of a group of people who are labelled “mixed”. On a general level, administrative categories are regarded as socially significant and have important consequences for perceptions of the state of the society” (p. 55). Although the notion of
being “mixed” is not unproblematic, the argument here is that the “restrictive nature of the standardised census categories cannot fully reflect the subtlety and complexity of the experience and patterns common to mixed families and people from mixed backgrounds” (p. 55). It is therefore important to include the “mixed” category in the Australian census to help researchers and policy-makers obtain data to identify issues and develop strategies and programs that can effectively address mixed family issues.

Like the United States and Canada, Australia is increasingly becoming a multicultural, pluralistic society. The increase in intercultural marriages and relationships, prompting intercultural parenting requires culturally appropriate service delivery. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are noteworthy to enhance service delivery to this specific group of intercultural couples, parents and families. First, universities and other educational institutions that provide marriage and relationship counselling courses need to introduce special modules regarding cultural literacy that focus on intercultural relationships and families. Second, professional helping organisations need to be fully conversant with the cultural implications and needs of this specific intercultural phenomenon and population and provide education, information and support services that is exclusive and appropriate to the needs of intercultural families. Third, organisations that provide services to this specific group of intercultural couples and parents seem to be too focused on cross-cultural competency as an organisational policy and standards of service. Cross-cultural competency is not an easy approach for the best results because of the enormity of global cultural values and beliefs. This study has revealed that cultural awareness and sensitivity are important approaches for consideration and implementation.

The findings of this study in relation to intercultural parenting and relationships have significant mental health implications for immigrant families, especially regarding parenting. State regulations regarding the welfare of children and disciplinary practices of parents largely ignore immigrants’ and refugees’ cultural concepts of parenting, which add additional stressors on immigrants, refugees and intercultural families, particularly from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. These immigrant parents are confused, do not understand the state legislated Western influenced laws and policies regarding child protection and safety, and have children removed from the family (Papps et al., 1995; Renzaho, 2011; Renzaho et al., 2011; Sims & Omaji, 1999). In the State of Queensland, where this study was conducted, the Child Protection Act 1999, section 5C states additional principles for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children: (a) the child should be allowed to develop and maintain a connection with the child’s family, culture, traditions, language and community; (b) the long-term effect of a decision on the child’s identity and connection with their family and community should be taken into account.

However, despite the fact that 28.2% of the population of Queensland, which is also reflective of the national figure, are immigrants with different cultural beliefs and values about parenting, there are no additional principles for children and parenting for
immigrants and refugees in the Child Protection Act. It is imperative that child protection services, nationally and state-based, implement additional policies specific to immigrant and refugee parents and children regarding child safety. It is important for child safety workers to understand the cultural concepts of parenting, familiarise themselves with the needs and counselling issues of interracial and intercultural couples, parents and families, especially the implications and needs of immigrants and refugee parents in Australia. All government and non-government organisations need to implement policies with regard to educating professionals, students, supervisees and service users about intercultural, interethnic, and interracial issues. It is also important for immigrants, refugee parents and intercultural parents and families to be considered for Focused Psychological Strategies health care plans under the Medicare Benefits Scheme.

6.9 Future Research Opportunities

This study demonstrated the importance of further research into the experiences of intercultural parenting in Australia especially because of Australia’s growing multicultural and pluralistic society. Intercultural parenting is becoming an important issue in the Australian society and therefore an expansion of literature and knowledge in this domain would benefit helping professionals such as counsellors and therapists and general services. The findings of this broader intercultural research could also be compared with other studies involving singular intercultural couples, for example the study of intercultural parenting between a Samoan married to a New Zealander European, to examine whether universal intercultural parenting issues are consonant with issues in singular intercultural relationship and parenting.

This research has shown that minority immigrant partners, particularly Asian, African, Indian and Muslim/Islamic partners practised reverse acculturation, that is introduced their heritage culture into their relationship and parenting practices, beliefs and values. Also, several host culture partners showed preferences for their immigrant ethnic partner’s cultural and parenting values and engaged into reciprocal acculturation processes, especially in the parenting and extended family domains. At the time of this research, attempts to locate any research on reverse acculturation and reciprocal acculturation in Australia were unsuccessful. It is therefore important for further studies to be carried out to define and locate reverse and reciprocal acculturation concurrent to the cosmopolitan, multicultural and pluralistic global culture.

This current study showed that friends and diaspora communities became the “new family” for several minority ethnic immigrant partners in the host country, because they lived so far away from their own families, and felt isolated. There is a need for further studies of this “new family” development in the Australian and global context. The study also revealed the important role of the extended family, especially grandparents, sisters and aunties in children’s lives and overall support for the family, which according to the participants is
almost inexistent in the Australian context. The experiences of extended family members, particularly grandparents would be a substantial contribution to future studies of intercultural parenting.

This study revealed that many intercultural parents could not confidently identify the cultural identity of their children because the children perceived their identity differently to their parents’ perception. Those who tried to influence the children towards the minority culture and associated values, such as the use of a particular language, were often disappointed because the children were not always keen on the language aspect. Likewise when parents asked their children to qualify their cultural identity, the children were most of the time confused. Most of the children, according to the participants, related their identity to their physical features, such as looks. For example, if they looked African, they would describe themselves as African and associate more easily with people and communities that look like them. Further studies about the perception and experience of children in intercultural families, relevant to the cultures and context of Australia, are required as they will help to understand this conflicting intercultural family dynamic.

This study also did not include intercultural couples/parents from the Australian Indigenous background because the focus was on those with a migration experience. A separate study on the experiences of intercultural parenting involving relationships between Indigenous and white Anglo-Australians and inter-ethnic groups will presumably reveal a different perspective to the results of this current study. Finally, this study did not include separated parents, single mothers and fathers, non-resident parents, adoptive parents, and same sex couples. Further studies into these particular groups of parents are necessary, to generate broader knowledge about their experiences of intercultural parenting.

6.10 Conclusion

Intercultural relationships and parenting is a growing phenomenon in Australia in the face of the globalised, multicultural and cosmopolitan demography of our society. Unfortunately, there are some prevailing negative stereotypes and assumptions in society about intercultural relationships and mixed-children, based on cultural differences. As such, it was the aim of this study to explore the experiences of intercultural parents and broaden our knowledge about their relationship and particularly their parenting practices.

This study generated rich descriptions of how intercultural couples managed and survived their cultural differences. Although the findings cannot be generalised, they have the potential of transferability to similar contexts. There was no doubt that intercultural couples experienced similar parenting challenges as mono-cultural couples, but their challenges were exacerbated because of the cultural differences. As mentioned before, all the participants were keen to make their experiences positive by negotiating, compromising, respecting and accommodating each other’s parenting style and practices. Intercultural parents negotiated their experiences by adopting four distinct parenting approaches:
merging universal parenting practices and the mix approach where parents encourage their children to embrace and be proud of their “mixedness”; single approach where one parent encourages their children to embrace the values and beliefs of his/her specific culture; individual approach, where children do not associate with a particular culture but are allowed to develop their own multicultural lifestyle and identity, commonly known as cosmopolitanism; and personality/individualistic belief about parenting where parents develop approaches based on their own experience of being parented. Some parents put aside their cultural or personal differences and focussed instead on the best outcome for their children and the family. For the purpose of this study, this parenting style can be termed as “selfless parenting”.

The experiences of intercultural couples/parents are also influenced by other contextual, ecological and systemic factors such as the environment, gender, socio-economic status, extended family, friends, diasporic communities, religion, and individual/personality traits. Whilst parents endeavour to harmonise their parenting and relationship experiences from an internal perspective, the external influences, which are usually based on stereotypes and lack of cultural literacy, are beyond their control. It is therefore imperative that intercultural parents are flexible, compromise, communicate and develop strategies that produce the best outcome for the family as a whole. Cultural literacy for the children is also a necessity to boost their identity development.

Some of the findings in this study concurred with findings in previous studies. However, this current study revealed some important new findings within the Australian context, which can also be transferable to similar context in other countries, multicultural settings and societies. The new findings concern reverse acculturation, whereby immigrant partners introduced the heritage culture to the host society, instead of full immersion and acculturation in the host society; reciprocal acculturation, where participants from the host culture were influenced by and preferred and adopted their immigrant partner’s cultural processes; shift towards authoritative parenting styles whereby participants from Asian backgrounds were adopting the authoritative parenting styles because they did not like some aspects of how they were parented; selfless parenting style wherein parents sacrificed their cultural values for what is best for the child; power relations in parenting practices wherein the host partner claimed righteousness and the privilege of truth in their cultural views. Power issues among participants were manifested in areas such as parenting practices, language and communication, gender, and insider/outsider status; power to men as an attribute of religious values; minority status experienced by majority ethnic host partners; racism manifested from ethnic minority cultural groups; collectivist partners were more flexible regarding gender roles in intercultural relationships and parenting as an adaptive process to reduce conflict. Other new findings included a significant and consistent disparity about the level of support and involvement intercultural couples received from ethnic extended families, compared to their white Australian counterparts; friends became family members for immigrant partners because of the distance from their own family of
origin; and finally, most studies emphasised challenges of intercultural parenting. This study, in contrast, revealed that participants also derived significant positive experiences of intercultural parenting. The participants’ narratives quoted in this study support this finding.

Counsellors and therapists would benefit from exploring and focussing on the positive experiences as sources of strengths for their clients. The helping professions also need to show cultural sensitivity and respect when dealing with intercultural couples and families. A number of organisational policy and recommendations for future research have been suggested. This study serves as a useful platform for further studies into the experiences of intercultural parents in Australia, in order to help current and future intercultural couples, parents and practitioners in the family domain.
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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Topic: The experience of intercultural parenting in Australia.

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Phone: 0414 810 990

Supervisors

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Researcher

I am a Professional Psycho-Social Counsellor and PhD Candidate at the Southern Cross University, Australia. I am interested in knowing your experiences of raising children together as an intercultural couple. I have a strong interest in this area of intercultural parenting because of my longstanding background as a counsellor.

For the purpose of this study ‘intercultural couples’ are heterosexual adults in a marriage or de-facto relationship and living together. One partner needs to be a male/female Anglo-Australian in a relationship with a male/female first generation immigrant partner of Asian, African, Indian, Pacific Islands and Arabic/Islamic background. ‘Intercultural’ is the interaction between members of different cultural backgrounds and includes country of origin, ethnic heritage, racial identification and religion. The age range of the children would be between 0-23 years old and living at home.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to explore the experiences of parents raising children together in intercultural relationships. There has been some research on cross-cultural differences in parenting, but no published studies on the experiences of intercultural parenting in Australia.

Who will be studied and why?

The study seeks to interview intercultural couples together to explore their perceptions and experiences in raising children together, how they make decisions regarding parenting and understand how intercultural couples negotiate cultural differences. Are you an intercultural couple?
Who will the study benefit?

The study will contribute to literature and knowledge for current and future intercultural parents and the helping professionals to better understand the parenting experiences of intercultural couples. It will provide information to help other Human Services such as schools, hospitals, Centre Link, Family Court and other community organisations to respond better to the needs of intercultural couples.

The Interview

Your participation in the interview is voluntary. It will consist of an interview together as a couple at a time and location convenient to you. Interviews will be carried out over a period of three months from April-May 2014 and will last between 60-90 minutes each. The interviews will be audio taped with your permission and can be turned off at any time if you are not comfortable with it. To be eligible for the study, I will be considering participants who are 20 years and over. At the end of the interview participants will receive a gift voucher, in recognition of their participation in the study.

Participants can withdraw from the study at any time. All your data will be destroyed if you choose to withdraw from the study. At the end of the study, approximately December 2015, participants will be emailed a summary of the findings if requested.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be respected at all times. You will be identified by a code to the researcher only. All documents will be held in a locked filing cabinet and accessible only to the researcher. Data from the interviews will be retained for seven years and destroyed after that period in accordance with standard legal requirements.

Ethical concerns

This research has been cleared by the School of Arts and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at The Southern Cross University, Australia. You are encouraged to discuss any concerns regarding the study with the researcher at any time. If you have any concern about the ethical conduct of this research or the researcher, please feel free to contact my principal advisor Professor Mark Hughes on (07) 5589 3169 or by email: mark.hughes@scu.edu.au. Alternatively, you may also write to the following:

The Ethics Complaints Officer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW 2480
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

Thank you for your kind participation.
Dharam Bhugun (Researcher)
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: The Experience of Intercultural Parenting in Australia

Name of researcher: Coonjbeeharry Bhugun Email: c.bhugun.10@student.scu.edu.au Phone: 0414 810 990

Tick the box that applies, sign and date and give to the researcher

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand the information about my participation in the research project, which has been provided to me by the researcher.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I agree to allow the interview to be "audio-taped."  Yes ☐  No ☐

I agree to make myself available for further interview if required.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I agree to complete questionnaires asking me about my demographic profile  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I understand that I can cease my participation at any time.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand that my participation in this research will be treated with confidentiality.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand that any information that may identify me will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed or published.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand that all information gathered in this research will be kept confidentially for 7 years at the University.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I am aware that I can contact the researchers at any time with any queries. Their contact details are provided to me.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee  Yes ☐  No ☐

Your participation in this research is greatly valued and appreciated. Thank you.

Participants name: ___________________________________________ Researcher: ____________________________

Participants signature: ___________________________________________ Researcher’s signature: ____________________________

Date: ___________________________  Date: ____________

☐ Please tick this box and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive feedback about the research.

Email: ___________________________________________
APPENDIX C: The Interview Guide

Topic: The experience of intercultural parenting in Australia

Interview Protocol: Intercultural couples

Cultural background

Identity

• How would you identify yourself culturally and that of your partner?
• How would you identify your child/children culturally?
• How would your child/children identify themselves culturally?

Experience of partner’s culture

• May I ask how and where did you meet?
• I am fascinated to know about your first experience with your partner’s culture. Please describe it to me.
• How often do you interact with each other’s family members?
• Which culture do you practice at home?
• Which language do you use to communicate with each other?

Concept of cultural values and goals in parenting.

• Describe how you were brought up by your parents in your culture.
• Has the way your parents brought you up in your culture influenced your parenting values and the way you parent? If the answer is ‘yes’ in what ways and if ‘no’ in what ways?
• What would your mother be doing in her day to day activities in your culture?
• What would your father be doing in his day to day activities in your culture?
• What would mothers/fathers in your partner’s culture be doing normally in their daily activities?
• What is the role of extended family members in your culture?
• Who is responsible for the upbringing of your children? Who does what and why?
• How has that changed as the children grow older?
• How important were the cultural differences in sorting out who does what?
• What are the important values and goals you are teaching your child/children at home? (probe: language, education, discipline, religion, upbringing). Why are they important to you as a parent?
• Would your parenting style be different if you were raising your children in your country of origin? How and why will it be different or the same?
• How is this different from those of your partner?

Challenges and conflicts in intercultural parenting.
• Has parenting with a partner from a different cultural background been problematic for you?
• Is there a point of parenting when you started to notice the cultural differences which may have led to conflict?
• Would you like to describe a situation of parenting that has been challenging because of the difference in cultural values between you and your partner?
• Please give me some other examples of the conflicts and challenges?

Negotiation of cultural differences in parenting.
• How did you resolve the conflict or challenges? What strategies did you use?
• What strategies were helpful? Which ones did not help?
• Are there any advantages for you and your children in the way you work out any cultural difference?
• Have your cultural values changed in anyway on how you parent as a couple?

Topic: Other factors influencing parenting behaviour.
• Besides culture, have any other factors impacted on your parenting styles and practices? (Prompt) For example, has your socio-economic status such as level of education or job in any way influenced your parenting behaviour?
• How much of the conflicts and challenges are influenced by gender considerations?

Positive experiences of intercultural parenting.
• In what ways has parenting with a partner from a different cultural background been positive for you?
• How does your child/children benefit from being raised by intercultural parents?

Helpful advice and strategies for intercultural parents.
• Is there anything that you have learnt from being an intercultural parent?
• If you were asked to share some advice and helpful strategies about intercultural parenting with another or future intercultural couples, what would you like to tell them?
Appendix D: Profile of Couples Form

Interview Code No: ....................

Gender: Male/Female

Age:

Country of birth:

National identity:

Racial Identity:

Cultural and ethnic identity:

Religious affiliation:

Language spoken at home:

Marital Status:

Number of years in relationship:

Number of children:

No. Male:

No. Female:


Your level of education:

Occupation:
## Appendix E: Participants Demographic

Table 2: Participants Demographic developed for this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. Years in relationship</th>
<th>Cultural Identity</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>No. of children and age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Female Male</td>
<td>Kylie Malai</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Australian Thai</td>
<td>Postgraduate Primary School</td>
<td>2: 10 &amp; 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Female Male</td>
<td>Naomi Pravin</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Australian Indian</td>
<td>Graduate Graduate</td>
<td>1: 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Female Male</td>
<td>Anya Rajack</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Australian Indonesian</td>
<td>High School Tertiary</td>
<td>4: 9 moths &amp; 5, 11, 13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Female Male</td>
<td>Sarah Samuel</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hong Kong Australian</td>
<td>Graduate High School</td>
<td>2: 11, 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Female Male</td>
<td>Michell Jim</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Filipino Australian</td>
<td>Graduate High School</td>
<td>Twins: 18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Female Male</td>
<td>Tammy Manuel</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Australian African</td>
<td>Diploma Undergraduate</td>
<td>2: 6 moths, 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Female Male</td>
<td>Simla Daniel</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>African Australian</td>
<td>Postgraduate High School</td>
<td>1: 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Female Male</td>
<td>Azumi Bill</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Japanese Australian</td>
<td>Graduate High School</td>
<td>2: 7 &amp; 11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Female Male</td>
<td>Yan Gary</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chinese Australian</td>
<td>Graduate Postgraduate</td>
<td>2: 3yrs, 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Female Male</td>
<td>Muriell Jeehan</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Australian Turkish</td>
<td>Graduate Undergraduate</td>
<td>3: 5, 9, 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Female Male</td>
<td>Ng Josh</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vietnamese Australian</td>
<td>Undergraduate Graduate</td>
<td>1: 21 months &amp; pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Female Male</td>
<td>Rula John</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tongan Australian</td>
<td>Undergraduate Graduate</td>
<td>2: 2 &amp; 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Female Male</td>
<td>Cathy Will</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Australian Maori</td>
<td>Graduate High School</td>
<td>2: 11 &amp; 13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Female Male</td>
<td>Carol Jay</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Australian Fijian Indian</td>
<td>Undergraduate Postgraduate</td>
<td>2: 14 &amp; 17 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>