Cross-cultural differences: The experiences, challenges and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships

By
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Declaration

I, Tielke de Vries, student number 208093725, hereby declare that the treatise for Magister Artium in Social Work (Clinical) is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

Tielke de Vries
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Abstract

The topic of interpersonal relationships and the factors that enhance the longevity and strength of these have been well documented. Whilst there has been a steady increase in the occurrence of interracial relationships, it has not been matched by an increase in studies on the phenomenon and indeed very little empirical attention has been given to these relationships. Leslie and Letiecq (2004) highlight that the existing research on the phenomenon focuses primarily on the reasons individuals select partners outside of their own racial group. As interracial marriages are reportedly more vulnerable to divorce than marriages among same-race individuals, it seems important to examine the dynamics and quality of interracial relationships (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004).

The goal of the study was therefore to explore the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges, and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships. In this qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual study, the author has explored and described the specific cross-cultural differences that the couple has encountered in their relationship and the impact that these differences have had on the quality of their relationship. Furthermore the study aimed to explore and describe the strengths the couple has drawn from these cross-cultural differences to enhance the quality of their relationship. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques has been utilised to identify interracial couples who have been in a committed monogamous relationship of at least one year. The sample consisted of eleven individuals.

Semi-structured individual interviews were utilised as the data collection tool, and Tesch’s model of data analysis (in Creswell, 1998) has been employed. This model of data analysis consists of eight steps that have been used to analyse the data. Five themes emerged from the study: (1) cultural difference factors, (2) negative factors that influence the couple’s coping with cultural differences, (3) positive factors that influence the couple’s coping with cultural differences, (4) factors relating to cultural differences that strengthen the relationship and (5) recommendations to other interracial couples. The findings of the study make a meaningful contribution to couple counselling interventions for interracial couples, and also add to the body of knowledge on this sparsely researched topic.

Key words: challenges, cross-cultural differences, interracial relationships, relationship satisfaction, strengths
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CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

“One of the challenges of relationship is to forgive the other for being different”
Dr J. Walkup – Marriage and relationship counsellor

1.1. Introduction and background to the study

The focus of this study is on interracial relationships, and in particular how the differences interracial couples encounter serves to strengthen the quality of their relationship. In every committed relationship there are problems that come with the entity of relationships, however, the literature review seem to suggest that there are more problems in an interracial relationship, many of which may be more intense. There is hardly a uniform concept cited in literature in making reference to couples who are not from the same racial group. The researcher came across a variety of concepts that each adds a specific dimension to the union that is described. These concepts include: interracial couples, cross-cultural couples, interethnic couples, mixed couples, multicultural couples and even transnational couples. The concept interracial and cross-cultural relationships will be used for the purposes of this study, since the focus is specifically on couples from different racial groups, and in particular a union between a South African partner and a non-South African partner (mostly from an American or European origin). However each of the other concepts cited above will invariably be used, but then that will be in relation to the text from which it is drawn.

Landis and Landis (1977) claim that any marriage that has an enormous amount of differences between the two partners may be called a mixed marriage, even though the term is normally used to those marriages involving a difference in race, religion and nationality because these differences make the challenges of mixed marriages most evident.

Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) state that research on the quality of interethnic marriages is scarce and inconsistent, while a lot is known about the patterns of these marriages. Because the number of cohabiting interracial couples has been generally increasing over the past few decades and there is an increase in the number of children born within these
interacial unions, it is important to understand the experiences and quality of these relationships more clearly.

In Europe, back in the middle ages, it was unthinkable for a Jew to marry a Christian and for a ‘white’ to marry a ‘black’, so the likelihood of intermarriage across religious, racial or colour lines was never brought up (Fullerton, 1972). Later, institutional means, such as laws banning cross-racial mixing, were used to keep racial boundaries intact (Bratter & King, 2008).

During the apartheid era in South Africa, a black/white marriage did not exist legally because every white partner of a black person was reclassified as ‘coloured’ (Reddy, 1994). When in 1985 the Immorality Act No. 23 of 1957 and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act No. 55 of 1949 were repealed, interracial couples were allowed to marry and interact in public. In 1991, the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950 was also repealed. This was the last ‘pillar of apartheid’ to be repealed and its repeal allowed interracial couples to freely choose where they wanted to live (Calitz & Nkosi, 2010). Interracial contact and cooperation have slowly become more common and frequent since the repeal of the racial laws from the apartheid-era beginning in the late 1980s and the democratic political regulation that resulted from the period of negotiation of the early 1990s (Amoateng, Heaton & Jacobson, 2004).

Currently, interracial relationships are no longer illegal in any state and are more common around the world. Consensual interracial relationships are now seen everywhere in public and have increased slowly but steadily (Frankenberg, 2002). A factor that has affected the patterns of interracial marriage in the past decade could be the shift towards greater equality between white and black. Another factor could be the attitude of the youth culture. During this age most marriages occur and most youth have intense negative attitudes against racism and are positive towards acceptance of the struggle of the black people for equality – socially and politically. Also the music, jargon and other elements of the black subculture have become accepted into the international youth culture, which could make youth of any race more aware of the identity that they share (Fullerton, 1972). The process of equality and unity between races started as a slow process years ago. Currently within society, equality and unity between races are increasing quickly every year and with each year they become more common.

Mojapelo-Batka (2008) states that the aftermath of apartheid laws is still visible in South African society. One can still see how ingrained the social reactions of the society are towards interracial couples, and these reactions are part of the discriminatory laws of apartheid. But
South Africa is making progress and interracial dating among South Africans is becoming more common every year.

As children listen to adults giving advice, they learn about the clear in- and out-groups they have in their cultures and lives. Fullerton (1972) makes reference to the term ‘Endogamy’ in describing the notion of in-group marriages. This refers to the requirement to keep a marriage and the subsequent product from this marriage pure by marrying within one’s race, class, caste or religion. The opposing term is that of ‘Exogamy’, which refers to a requirement that people marry an individual from the “out-group” (Fullerton, 1972).

Antiquated motives for interracial marriages are given by Porterfield (1978) as the following: (1) making use of the ‘unique opportunity’ that socially opposed interracial sex offers for ‘acting out’ their personal problems (hostility, control, revenge); (2) idealistic or liberal reasons to go against the increasing cultural prejudice of society, (3) rejection by their social group and trying to fit in somewhere else; (4) rebelling against parental authority with the conscious or unconscious desire to hurt their parents; (5) self-degradation or self-hate and therefore marrying an ‘inferior’ partner; (6) the ‘lure of the exotic’, being sexually attracted to the ‘otherness’ of someone who looks physically different; (7) simply because two people love each other.

However looking realistically at how interracial relationships start, having liberal ideologies and living in integrated environments are greater predictors for interracial dating than maladjustment, as described above by Porterfield (1978).

Liela Groenewald, a sociologist from the Department of Sociology at the University of Johannesburg, presents statistics on interracial marriages from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The statistics show that from 1996 to 2001, of all the married couples in South Africa, the proportion of interracial married couples increased from 6.4% to 10.6%, indicating that the number of interracial marriages is growing slowly and becoming more accepted each year (cited in Calitz & Nkosi, 2010). This excludes interracial couples who are not married, who if included would make the numbers even higher. The increase in interracial relationships is understandable as there are now more opportunities for people from different race groups and cultures to meet each other at schools, workplaces and more integrated neighbourhoods.
1.2. Definition of key terms

**Culture:** to denote a set of more or less coherently tangible and intangible achievements, codes, rituals, memories and customs passed on and adapted from generation to generation in all human societies (Swartz, 2010).

**Cross-cultural relationship:** a committed relationship involving two partners of different cultures (Breger & Hill, 1998).

**Interethnic relationship:** a committed relationship involving two partners with a difference in culture, or religion, race, language, or a difference in all these aspects, compared with their own in-group or country of origin (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008).

**Interracial relationship:** a committed relationship involving two partners from different ethnicities/racial groups (Wong, 2009).

**Mixed relationship:** a committed relationship involving two partners with a difference in race, or religion, nationality, class, beliefs, or a difference in all these aspects together (Knox & Schacht, 2010).

**Cross-national relationship:** a committed relationship involving two partners that differ in nationality (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007).

**Multiculturalism:** the recognition and promotion of cultural diversity in public life, organized in ways that facilitate its co-existence and interpolation within social and political institutions with the view to foster greater social cohesion (Swartz, 2010).

**Relationship quality:** concerns how relationships function during their existence and how the partners feel about and are influenced by such functioning (Young, 2004).

**Relationship satisfaction:** concerns an intrapersonal evaluation of the positivity of feelings for one’s partner and attraction to the relationship (Sacher & Fine, 1996).
1.3. Problem formulation and motivation for the study

The topic of interpersonal relationships and the factors that enhance the longevity and strength of these have been well documented. Whilst there has been a steady increase in the occurrence of interracial relationships, it has not been matched by an increase in studies on the phenomenon. Furthermore, very little empirical attention has been given to these marriages. Existing research on interracial couples tend to focus more on the reasons individuals intermarry or the demographic characteristics of these couples. Leslie and Letiecq (2004) note that even though interracial marriages are more prone to divorce than same-race marriages, little research has focused on the dynamics and quality of interracial marriages. Bratter and King (2008) support the fact that interracial marriages are more vulnerable to divorce, in their study on the likelihood of divorce among interracial couples compared with same-race couples. They found that racial differences correspond to higher divorce rates but mostly in marriages where the white spouse is female.

The sentiments of these authors are supported by Reddy (1994) who emphasised that it is essential to hear the personal voices of couples from interracial marriages if we are to try and develop some insight into their dynamics. For the purpose of this study, the term interracial relationships will be used to refer to committed couple relationships between South African and non-South African partners.

The motivation for this study is threefold. At a personal level I find myself in a cross-cultural relationship. I am from the Netherlands and involved in a committed relationship with a South African Xhosa man. During the four years we have been together, I have become aware that several of the misunderstandings in our relationship are related to our different cultural orientations rather than a difference in our personalities or expectations regarding our relationship. I am therefore curious to ascertain whether other cross-cultural couples have experienced similar challenges and how they have addressed these culture differences.

At a professional level, it is important to expand the knowledge base and therapeutic approaches to working with cross-cultural couples. Being a helping professional, I am aware of the gap in the knowledge and therapeutic approaches available to counsellors to help cross-cultural couples understand and deal with their differences. Some conscious awareness of how to understand and deal with cultural differences can help a counsellor to be more equipped to deal with these matters in couple counselling. The research will also be useful for marriage
preparation, especially since there is a steady increase in the number of cross-cultural marriages.

At a theoretical level, there is a dearth of literature on cross-cultural marriages, especially in the South African context. Leslie and Letiecq (2004) highlight the importance of research on cross-cultural marriages by stating that even though interracial marriages are still relatively small in number, they are increasing and the numbers have doubled over the past 20 years. Therefore, this study will add value to both the therapeutic and research arena of the helping professions, in this particular instance, the social work profession.

1.4. Literature review

The literature review will reflect the research conducted to date in the area of general relationship satisfaction followed by studies on interracial marriages to date. The latter is an under-researched area and hence the reader will notice that certain authors are cited very frequently. Furthermore seminal authors dating back to the early seventies are also cited as they had made a significant contribution to the study of interracial relationships.

1.4.1. Constitution of a healthy relationship

What a ‘good marriage’ consists of, or what is considered important within a marriage, differs not only from society to society or from one ethnic group to another, it also varies within smaller groups, families and across generations (Breger & Hill, 1998). Relationship quality refers to how positive or negative individuals feel about their relationship. For example, within marriages, some people are quite satisfied with their relationship, whereas others are quite dissatisfied. Morry et al. (2010) explain that relationship quality predicts how individuals evaluate their relationship, which is a significant element of partner-perceptions.

Young and Long (2006) point out some general characteristics of healthy couples (same-race and interracial). The first characteristic is a belief in relative rather than absolute truth by being aware that each partner can have a different perception of the same situation. A second characteristic is that healthy couples see each other as close, intimate friends who respect each other. The third characteristic is that a healthy couple is able to deal with conflict in an effective manner. The fourth and last characteristic is having a belief in something larger
which could strengthen the couple and bring them closer together, like sharing a goal or a mission within religion, politics or family orientation.

Similar to the characteristics of healthy couples pointed out by Young and Long (2006), psychologist Robert Sternberg (1986) suggests that there are three different kinds of love. His triangular theory of love characterises love within the context of interpersonal relationships according to these three different components, i.e., intimacy, passion and commitment.

When two people get married, each partner carries his/her own bag of customs, traditions, habits, expectations, attitudes, views, opinions, future plans, behavioural patterns and his/her personal character into a marriage. Knox and Schacht (2010) point out that relationship satisfaction and durability of the relationship are reported higher, when couples have a lot in common. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) agree and explain from a social distance perspective that the greater the difference in backgrounds of each partner, the greater their difficulties could be.

According to Alpaslan (1997), the quality of a couple’s marital relationship can be predicted and influenced by addressing significant components of the couple relationship. He identified the following 14 components that need to be addressed by both partners in order to avoid misunderstandings and unmet expectations: Family of Origin, Growth potential, Self-image, Role division, Sexuality, Occupational practice, Choice of marriage partner, Parenthood, Motive for getting married, Financial matters, Communication, Parents-in-law, Conflict resolution and Religious growth.

When a couple comes from two different backgrounds it is especially important to talk about these components, since there are a lot of aspects that need to be discussed to make the relationship work and to eliminate certain challenges. This is no different for interracial couples. As an interracial couple you have all the usual challenges as well as those to do with race and culture. Pre-marital preparation could therefore have a positive influence on marital stability and marital quality, since difficult conversations and topics are often discussed in sessions, which decreases the chance of any surprises later in the marriage.

1.4.2. Challenges in interracial relationships

Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) found that interethnic couples experienced more challenges than couples in which the partners shared the same ethnicity. They explain that
interethnic relationships appear to experience more conflict when compared with same-ethnic relationships because of their current relationship characteristics and more complex relationship histories, and because their relationships were more heterogenous, and they had fewer shared values and less social support.

Mojapelo-Batka (2008) says that aside from the fact that interracial couples have to deal with the same challenges as same-race couples, they also have to face their own internalised racial stereotypes. These stereotypes need to be resolved if the relationship is to survive. Both partners need to question themselves about everything they have learned while growing up about white versus black people and vice versa (Calitz & Nkosi, 2010).

If the interracial couple has similar values and the quality of the relationship that they have achieved is high, it makes the problems that they are experiencing less distressing or traumatic (Landis & Landis, 1977).

There may be various levels of awareness of differences within an interracial marriage, some differences will be embraced and others can result in conflict. The immediate family has to become aware of the differences and evaluate them, as do the extended family and the community in which the couple lives. The family bonds may be strengthened if there is an awareness of commonalities as well as differences and this can unite the family. At first, the partners in an interracial marriage are probably not entirely aware of how big the differences between their beliefs and practices are. This could result in misplaced expectations and growing frustrations (Breger & Hill, 1998).

The main challenges of interracial couples that become apparent from the literature are as follows: challenges regarding the different cultures; reactions of family and friends; stereotypes, prejudices and racism from society; having biracial children; race and awareness; and being far away from home. These challenges are similar in both the American and South African literature and will be explained in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

1.4.2.1. Reactions of family and friends

The nature of a family could be a cause of some problems within an interracial marriage. When children grow up, parents teach their children the ideas that their families have, their traditions and life styles. The parents then hope that their children take these patterns with them and live their lives by these values. If the child leaves the family and their values, it
could be experienced as threatening by their parents. As children are growing up, they are being exposed to other attitudes and beliefs from outside influences that could be different from the family values that were taught by their parents. The parents could interpret their child’s new behaviour and attitudes as a rejection of family norms (Landis & Landis, 1977).

Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) explain that a lot of interethnic couples have to deal with the disapproval of family members and peers and that this lack of social support could have a negative influence on the relationship. This may result in lower relationship satisfaction and levels of commitment.

Kennedy (2003) has identified three reactions to a black-white interracial marriage: (1) Approval: this increases racial open-mindedness and decreases social segregation. (2) Indifference: the interracial marriage is seen as a private choice of the individuals. (3) Disapproval: this reflects racial disloyalty and impedes perpetuation of the black culture.

According to Landis and Landis (1977), the parental opposition is the greatest when the differences in background factors (social class, religion, race) and cultural characteristics differ the most. Usually parents of both partners who are in a mixed relationship are opposed to their relationship; opposition does not come from one side only. Even when the partners of the interracial relationship have a lot of background factors in common, it is often difficult for white and black families to accept that their children are dating across the colour line. Calitz and Nkosi (2010) note that interracial couples quickly learn to ignore the public’s reactions and therefore develop a thick skin. This is much more difficult when it comes to having to deal with the negative reactions of friends and family.

Interracial couples tend to receive more support from people of the same gender and race as themselves or their partner. So for example a black husband and a white wife will receive more support from black males and white females. People of the same race but the opposite genders of the couple are reported to be most against the relationship, especially in social situations (Dunleavy, 2004).

1.4.2.2. Stereotypes, prejudices and racism

Smith, Bond and Kagitzcibasi (2006) state that stereotypes are usually explained in a manner which proposes they involve prejudiced and negative views of others. When for generations within a society the same stereotypes exist about a specific group, they become part of the
culture. They meet the criteria of culturally influenced behaviour: they are widely shared and told by parents, grandparents and other elders to children and they become memories within a childhood (Brislin, 2000).

Breger and Hill (1998) point out that stereotypes could encourage people to choose a spouse from within their own circle. They further explain that stereotypes, positive or negative, of the ‘out-group’ into which someone has married, could affect how extended family, the community or even authorities react. So stereotypes could influence the social acceptability of an exogamous marriage.

How people feel towards other cultural groups is known as prejudice. Prejudices are used to express values (‘we are better than others’) or to defend self-images (‘the others have more money because they cheat’). Brislin (2000) notes that hostile rejection and very subtle tokenism are two of many different forms of prejudices. Some prejudices are held by people because they could get rewarded by their society or to avoid punishment. This was probably one of the reasons why, during the apartheid era in South Africa, so many white people went along with the regime.

There are people who believe that all individuals that belong to a certain out-group are inferior in several ways and cannot fully benefit from what society has to offer (e.g. education, good jobs, participation in community affairs, etc.) (Brislin, 2000). Racism involves a belief that when some individuals are born in a certain out-group, all the members are inferior when it comes to intelligence, morals and an ability to interact within a decent society. Intense racism still exists even though people are not talking that openly about it since interracial relationships have increased (Brislin, 2000).

1.4.2.3. Children in interracial families

When people, like parents or friends, are trying to talk a couple out of an interracial marriage, they usually bring up the question of children (Fullerton, 1972). This view is echoed by Calitz and Nkosi (2010) who said that family members often use the issue of the racial identity of a ‘mixed-race’ child to discourage involvement in an interracial relationship. The concept of racial identity was described by Hill and Thomas (2000) as a person’s identification with the racial group that they belong to, and the quality or manner of their identification.
Mojapelo-Batka (2008) explains that a big challenge for interracial couples in South Africa is when their children are automatically classified as ‘coloured’ by birth. Landis and Landis (1977) also agree that some of the most difficult problems in interracial marriages originate in relation to the children. They further add that children of interracial marriages are occasionally exposed to discrimination by both the races.

Children of a mixed marriage are ‘in between two cultures’ and they could experience some problems with their racial identity (Watson, 1977, as cited by Breger & Hill, 1998). Maxwell (as quoted by Breger & Hill, 1998) notes that the identities of mixed children are not quickly chosen and stable, they change with the stages of the life-cycle and the socio-political environments they live in. He continues to explain that mixed children may choose to take some features from both cultures that their parents belong to or choose to embrace one culture specifically. They could be bi- or multi-cultural, unless others force them to choose one or the other. It is important to remember, when creating your personal identity, that feelings of belonging could change according to the social, economic and political context.

1.4.2.4. Culture

Calitz and Nkosi (2010) note that the biggest argument used against interracial relationships is the disintegration of culture and heritage. Majopelo-Batka (2008, as cited by Calitz & Nkosi, 2010) explains that for many couples, dealing with different cultures is definitely seen as more of a challenge than dealing with different races. The black community is more likely to be unwilling to give up their rituals and culture as compared with the white community. Majopelo-Batka (2008) further explains that it is very important that mixed-race couples learn how to accommodate and accept each other’s cultures.

Some people are able to adjust more quickly to the differences of another culture than others. ‘Cultural flexibility’ involves changing your behaviour to meet the demands of situations found in other cultures (Brislin, 2000).

Disappointments that come from unmet expectations are likely to form a ‘dark cloud’ on a lot of marriages. The unmet expectations within an interracial marriage are usually bigger because of all the cultural differences. The disappointment that a person experiences is likely to extend to people who are close to them, which makes the hurting more complex. Arnold (2008) states that the disappointment gets bigger when the cultures are more dissimilar.
Brislin (2000) says that in the development of interracial relationships, frustrations are very common.

By definition, partners involved in an interracial relationship are presented with a broader range of cultural practices than people who married a person from the same race or culture. Cultural differences include gender roles, child-rearing, norms, language and general lifestyle. Sometimes, the differences could be minimal or the awareness of difference is little (Breger & Hill, 1998). Another difference partners in interracial relationships could become aware of is a difference between the individualistic and the collectivistic culture, if present. During the practices of daily life, the differences between the interracial couple could become clearer, hence eliciting the disagreements. The differences could become major points of conflict, or could enrich the diversity between the couple, or even both (Breger & Hill, 1998).

Breger and Hill (1998) have looked at the study of Hardach-Pincke (1988) in her work on German-Japanese marriages and it shows that within intercultural marriages, their awareness of cultural differences changes, but it still depends on the couple’s place within the lifecycle and their socio-economic situation. She demonstrates that the awareness of cultural differences of the couple, slowly becomes individualised which means that the differences are linked to the personalities of the partners instead of to cultural variation.

1.4.2.5. Race and awareness

Interracial partners sometimes experience negative reactions to their relationship. There seems to be consensus amongst authors on this topic that partners within a black-white interracial relationship may experience racism, however their experiences are very different from those of black and white people who are involved in same-race relationships. Hill and Thomas (2000) in particular describe this challenge by explaining that black partners in an interracial relationship usually have their racial identity challenged by other black people and that white partners in these relationships lose their white status, and at the same time experience an increased awareness of their whiteness. In the same vein, Luke (1994), Mathabane and Mathabane (1992) and Reddy (1994) explain that at that time the partners are not considered as members of the other race and are not given the full status as a member of their partner’s race (see also Hill & Thomas, 2000).
Reddy (1994) accentuate the discrepancy in experience between the white and black racial groups in South Africa, by explaining that the greatest privilege of being white is probably the lack of awareness about race. She notes that white people can go for weeks, months or years without thinking about race at all, while she doubts that a black person older than six years can forget about race for even one day.

Distiller and Steyn (2008) agree and explain that South Africans are specifically aware of ‘race’ because of the history of apartheid. But this burden is not equally shared, because ‘race’ for ‘whites’ is not a burden in the same way that ‘blackness’ is. This is because being ‘white’ is still more of a privilege than it is a burden. The author of this research feels that the lack of consciousness about race from white people could come from ethnocentric judgments. Frankenberg (2002) states that whiteness (as a set of normative cultural practices) is most obvious to people who are excluded from its privileges and to whom it harms and that the individuals that are included and safe within its borders, generally don’t explore it.

Mojapelo-Batka (2008) explains that interracial couples have truly reconciled: they can look at each other and see no difference. Reddy (1994) agrees with this statement by saying that she does not think that most people think of their lovers, children or parents in terms of being a certain race or ethnicity. She says that people know each other too well for this and that the conflicts that arise within a relationship do not involve race but often daily things like time, promises, disappointments, activities and all of life’s ups and downs. Porterfield (1978:123) confirms this by stating: “Quarrels or other family disagreements seldom carry racial overtones”.

1.4.2.6. Away from home

Many young people these days are more likely to go work or study abroad without any serious attachment to someone back home. Some of them will be ready to marry someone during that time. They have a big chance of finding someone who seems a desirable mate among the group they are hanging out with at that time (Landis & Landis, 1977).

Khatib-Chahidi et al. (as quoted by Breger & Hill, 1998) suggest that some people choose to marry outside their in-group to escape from a highly restrictive home life in which they did not want to remain forever. Others from more liberal families, could see out-marriage as a logical next step of an exited life which includes travelling, a lot of foreign friends, being
open to outsiders and new experiences. So according to the two reasons given, people marry outside their group to be rebellious or for enhancement of their own life.

There are definitely happy, healthy marriages between two partners who meet each other far from home and within a different environment from what they are used to. But before rushing into marriage together, young people should consider a lot of things first, before they make such a big decision as getting married far from home (Landis & Landis, 1977).

First, the partner who is far from home is more likely to feel lonely than ever before and therefore the need for companionship will be more urgent. Looking at his/her own need for companionship, it may be hard to be objective about the person they like and their traits.

Second, it is likely for a wife to enter her husband’s social class when she marries him. She should therefore expect to move into his world when marrying a man of a different social level, different race or nationality. It is less likely that the husband will move into her world (Landis & Landis, 1977). Therefore the partner far from home should consider if he/she can make the adjustments required, if he/she will be accepted into the new family/community and how they both act towards each other within their own culture.

According to Landis and Landis (1977), the partner who marries into the different culture has to be willing to do most of the adjusting. He or she cannot count on bringing swift changes to the ways of that world into which he or she will move. Breger and Hill (1998) agree and point out that especially when the extended family in-law is very close, it may be very difficult for the new incoming bride to be heard when she has a different or opposing opinion. The new bride can be seen as traditionally powerless. Arnold (2008) highlights that you don’t only marry your spouse, you also marry his or her culture. Within an interracial marriage it is both a challenge and an opportunity.

Cross-national marriages include a great diversity of experiences. These couples differ in nationalities, place of residence, time in history, to mention a few variables (Baker-Cottrell, 1990). Knox and Schacht (2010) point out that the degree of cultural difference is not necessarily related to the degree of stress within cross-national marriages. They claim that much of the stress is related to the intolerance of society towards cross-national marriages, that has manifested itself in the attitudes of friends and family.
1.5. Theoretical framework

The proposed theoretic framework for this study is social constructionism. Gergen (1985, as cited by Hill & Thomas, 2000:194) has summarised a social constructionist theoretical orientation to research as follows: “Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live”. According to Gergen (2009:26) “… social constructionists locate the origin of meaning in relationships”.

The most significant constructs in this study are ‘race’ and ‘culture’, since the focus is on interracial relationships and cross-cultural differences. According to Hill and Thomas (2000:193), race could best be understood “within a social constructionist framework as the negotiated interaction between a societal phenomenon of categorization based on physical markers (such as skin colour and facial features) and a personal phenomenon of identity development”.

Biever, Bobele and North (1998) note that cultural differences may increase the stresses that are present in relationships, which could present challenges for therapists who are working with intercultural couples. A framework is provided, by postmodern therapies based on social constructionism, for approaching the complexities of intercultural relationships. This framework is sensitive to different cultures, collaborative and based on strengths.

Social constructionist theories recognize the affect of external factors as well as the active engagement of the person in building realities (Hill & Thomas, 2000). In the context of interracial relationships, social constructionism is relevant in considering the impact that stereotyping and discrimination from outside sources and the public at large can have on the couple’s view of their relationship. This will require that both partners within the interracial relationship have to be prepared to survive the external resistance they receive, since the personal meaning that they attach to their relationship can supersede that negative outside influences (Hill & Thomas, 2000).

The impact of individual differences and realities is acknowledged. Each partner’s racial identity is unique. One partner’s experience of his/her racial identity will differ from that of another couple, within black and white interracial relationships. Within every culture, there are subcultures, where people have their own identity. A person’s identity is not only constructed from their family interactions, but also from their individual experiences, which
makes every person’s identity different from one another. Hill and Thomas (2000:194) note that: “Experience is characterized by the dynamic in which different views of the world lead to different experiences of reality, which are actually ‘real’ to the people who believe in them”.

Parallel with the recognition of the realities and differences of individuals, social constructionism acknowledges the overlap in people’s experiences because individual realities are all related to the prevailing discourses in society (Hill & Thomas, 2000). According to Burr (2003), our knowledge is denied to be a direct perception of reality, when looked at through social constructionism. Burr (2003) states that within social constructionism there is no such thing as an objective fact. She further explains that all knowledge is derived from observing the world from one perspective or another by social life, and that it is in the service of some interests rather than others. Statements can be driven by different concerns. Social constructions that are self-definitions or labels from other people that one finds appropriate for oneself are referred to as identity. Personal group memberships and relationships with groups are included within identity.

The process of social construction of identity goes as follows: the identity of a person is the product of their own interpretation and reconstruction of their history, as mediated through the cultural discursive context to which they have access (Hill & Thomas, 2000).

Social constructionism acknowledges the overwhelming variety in identity (Hill & Thomas, 2000). Multiple racial identities could be managed by a partner within an interracial relationship because of his/her cross-racial partnership. Hill and Thomas (2000:194) explain that: “The narrative tradition within social constructionism views this management of personal identity as a storying process”.

Qualitative research within the social constructionist paradigm considers research data as ‘constructed’ within a particular research context, rather than as an objective reflection of ‘reality’. Burck (2005:242) states that: “It draws on the idea that our ways of knowing are negotiated through social interactions over time and in relation to social structures, contexts and resources which support or indeed suppress these ways of knowing”. Based on the description outlined above on the premise of this theoretical framework, it should be apparent to the reader why this is the most appropriate theoretical approach for the purpose of the study.
1.6. Research question

The primary research question that the study wishes to address is the following:

“What are the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships?”

The sub-questions for the study are as follows:

1) What are the cross-cultural differences the couple has experienced in their relationship?
2) What are the specific challenges that have been brought about by these cross-cultural differences?
3) How have these cross-cultural differences served as a strength in the couple’s relationship?

1.7. Research goal and objectives

Research goal:

The goal of the research is to explore the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges, and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships.

Research objectives:

- To explore and describe the specific cross-cultural differences that the couple have experienced in their relationship.

- To explore and describe the specific challenges these cross-cultural differences have resulted in.

- To explore and describe the strengths the couples have utilized and developed as a result of the cross-cultural differences.
1.8. Research design and methodology

The research design and methodology will be briefly outlined in this section of the study. A more detailed discussion will be presented in Chapter Two of this study.

1.8.1. Research design

De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:106) define research design as “a blue print or detailed plan for how a research study is to be conducted”. Babbie and Mouton (1998) suggest that the design for any type of research depends on how much information is already known in the problem area to be studied. This study has employed a qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual research design and has generated insight into the cultural differences of interracial couples by looking at how cultural differences have influenced marital/relationship satisfaction.

Qualitative research

“Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998:15). By choosing this qualitative approach, I conducted interviews with the participants (inquiry process) which allowed me to explore the cultural differences of the interracial couples. This gave me a better understanding of the influence of their differences on their relationship quality (exploring a social or human problem).

Exploratory research

An exploratory research design is often used to explore relatively unknown areas in order to gain new insight and understanding (De Vos et al., 2005). When I searched for literature and conducted research on interracial couples, I found that there is a dearth of literature and research on interracial couples in the South African context. There is little literature available on this topic within the South African context, which makes this study particularly relevant for South African counsellors working with multi-cultural families and interracial couples.
Descriptive research

According to Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006), descriptive research refers to social research with as main aim to describe (rather than explain) a particular phenomenon. This was suited to this study and I have investigated and described the experiences interracial couples have had with cultural differences and the influence of these differences on their relationship quality. Cormack (2000:213) explains the aim of descriptive research as follows: “to discover new facts about a situation, people, activities or events, or the frequency with which certain events occur”. Through interviews with participants I have discovered new facts about interracial couples, their cultural differences and in what way the different cultures influence their relationship quality.

Contextual research

The study was located in a relatively small population in South Africa which is growing at a rapid rate. Many of the participants of this study were South African citizens who met their partners who were of European or American descent. By their own admission (as will be discussed in chapter four), the couples experienced different responses to their relationships in South Africa as opposed to outside of the country. These responses from either family members or the public at large also shaped the couple dynamics and hence relationship satisfaction significantly.

1.8.2. Research methodology

Data collection was done through individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. All interviews were recorded with permission, through signed consent forms. An independent interviewer was employed for the interviews. The independent interviewer is a relationship counsellor of profession and further has a postgraduate qualification in social work. The researcher was present at most interviews and acted as an observer and scribe. A pilot study served as a trial-run for the methodology and research questions. Changes were made according to the outcome of the pilot study. When all data had been collected, the interviews were transcribed. Once all the data had been transcribed, data analysis was effected using
Tesch’s (in Creswell, 1998) eight-point model of analysis. At this stage of the research, the researcher made use of the services of an independent coder.

1.9. Trustworthiness

Guba’s model in De Vos et al. (1998) was used to ensure trustworthiness of the study. Guba’s approach highlights ways to hold off biases in the results of the qualitative analysis. Four criteria are used to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this study. Trustworthiness can further be enhanced by showing evidence of the process of the study, raw data and the findings of the study (such as table 3.2, which presents the themes, subthemes, categories and subcategories), so that readers can clearly follow the research procedures and understand the decisions taken and choices used in the study.

1.10. Ethical considerations

“Ethics is a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students” (De Vos et al., 1998:24).

Avoidance of harm

The participants were not exposed to any physical harm connected to this study, but the researcher was aware that emotional harm could occur. The interviewer therefore explained to the participants beforehand that counselling services were available should any emotional harm occur. De Vos et al. (1998:25) explain that “respondents should be thoroughly informed beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation”. This was one way to ensure the avoidance of harm towards the participants. Because the participants were well informed about the interview, the topic and the impact that it could have on them, they were able to withdraw from the study if they wanted to. After each interview there was a debriefing
session with the participant. This allowed the participant to give voice to their experiences of the interview.

**Informed consent**

Obtaining informed consent means that all information on the goal of the study, the procedures which will be followed, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which participants may be exposed, and the credibility of the researcher are explained to the potential participants before participation is agreed upon (De Vos et al., 1998). The researcher obtained permission from the participants in the form of written consent for the interview. The consent form had details about the participant’s rights, including confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and protection from harm. Another part included in the consent form was asking the participants for permission to audiotape the interviews. This included how the recordings were going to be transcribed, where and how the transcriptions were stored, when the recordings would be destroyed and to make them aware of the fact that they could have a copy of the study if they request or require it.

**1.11. Dissemination of results**

A copy of the completed research will be made available to the library at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University where it could be useful for students and couple counsellors working with interracial couples to become aware of cultural differences, create understanding and ways to deal with cultural differences. Also the couples who participated in the study will receive a copy of the completed research. This could help the couples recognize similar challenges between them and other couples and might help them to find ways of dealing with the cultural challenges which could strengthen their relationship. A copy of the treatise will be provided to FAMSA and a journal article will be produced from the findings. The release of the findings does not include releasing the names of the participants and their identities will be protected according to the ethical code of confidentiality and privacy.
1.12. Chapter division

The division of chapters in this study is as follows:
Chapter 1: Overview of the Research Study
Chapter 2: Research Methodology
Chapter 3: Discussion of Findings
Chapter 4: Summary, conclusions, limitations and recommendations

1.13. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has given the reader an overview of the research presented. The introduction and background to the study have been presented here, as well as the problem formulation and motivation for the study. Literature on the research topic has been reviewed briefly and the theoretical framework has been explained. The research design and methodology have been introduced and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
2.1. Introduction

Chapter One gave an overview of the study. This overview included the background to the study, the problem formulation and motivation for the study, as well as the goals and objectives. The key concepts were furthermore defined, the theoretical framework outlined, and lastly a comprehensive literature review on the study provided. Chapter One also gave a brief description of the research design and methodology, which will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

2.2. Research question

The primary research question that the study wished to address was the following:

“What are the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships?”

The sub-questions for the study were as follows:

1) What are the cross-cultural differences the couple has experienced in their relationship?
2) What are the specific challenges that have been brought about by these cross-cultural differences?
3) How have these cross-cultural differences served as a strength in the couple’s relationship?
2.3. Research goal and objectives

The following goal was formulated in accordance with the research questions:

Research goal:

The goal of the research was to explore the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges, and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships.

The ensuing research objectives were as follows:

Research objectives:

- To explore and describe the specific cross-cultural differences that the couple have experienced in their relationship.
- To explore and describe the specific challenges these cross-cultural differences have resulted in.
- To explore and describe the strengths the couples have utilized and developed as a result of the cross-cultural differences.

2.4. Research design and methodology

The following section describes the research approach, with the accompanying methodological considerations taken into account during the study.

2.4.1. Research design

De Vos et al. (2005:106) define research design as “a blue print or detailed plan for how a research study is to be conducted.” Babbie and Mouton (1998) suggest that the design for any type of research depends on how much information is already known in the problem area to be studied. Kumar (2005) describes the differences between qualitative and quantitative research and points out that the two different methodologies differ in the following aspects: underpinning philosophy, approach to inquiry, main purpose of investigation, measurement of variables, sample size, focus of inquiry, dominant research value, dominant research topic, analysis of data and communication of findings. After carefully considering all these aspects,
a qualitative research method was chosen since it was more suitable for this study. Nicholls (2009 b:592) states that “qualitative research attempts to build theory, and it is this theory that is generalizable to others”.

The current study is a qualitative study which employed an exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design to generate insight into the cross-cultural differences of interracial couples to see how these differences influenced their marital/relationship satisfaction.

2.4.1.1. Qualitative research approach

“Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998:15).

In keeping with the qualitative approach, research interviews were conducted with the participants (i.e., the inquiry process) which allowed for the exploration of the cross-cultural differences of the interracial couples. This experience enhanced the researcher’s understanding of how these couples’ differences influenced their relationship satisfaction. This constituted the exploration of a social or human problem as suggested by Creswell (1998).

De Vos et al. (1998) explain that the aim of qualitative research is to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human action instead of explaining human behaviour in terms of universally valid laws or generalisation. Nicholls (2009 a) is of the opinion that when a person’s experiences, interconnections with others, or social and cultural systems in which they live, breathe, work, love and play demand attention, qualitative research is the most suitable. Especially with this topic and the different cultures involved, it was very important not to generalise since that is often done with people within cultures. Within this research, individuals were seen as unique with their own background, norms, values and belief systems. The research interviews allowed for the exploration of the couples’ cross-cultural differences, particularly in terms of meanings and interpretations that they attached to such differences, rather than the researcher’s projected interpretations.

De Vos et al. (1998:241) explained that qualitative research allows us to: “understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life”. Nicholls (2009 a) explains that
qualitative research favours inductive reasoning which involves theory building or developing rather than theory testing. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2005:380) confirm this: “in qualitative research the most common purposes are those of theory initiation and theory building”.

2.4.1.2. Exploratory research design

An exploratory research design is often used to explore relatively unknown areas in order to gain new insight and understanding (De Vos et al., 2005). A review of local and international literature revealed a dearth of literature and research on interracial couples in the South African context. Given the need for more information on this subject area, the racial diversity of the South African population, and the steady increase in interracial marriages in South Africa, it seemed particularly relevant to conduct this study. The need for this exploratory study was further fuelled by the opportunity to provide guidelines to South African couple and family counsellors working with multi-cultural families and interracial couples.

2.4.1.3. Descriptive research design

According to Bless et al. (2006), descriptive research refers to social research with as main aim to describe (rather than explain) a particular phenomenon. This was suited to the purpose of the present study.

Cormack (2000:213) explains the aim of descriptive research as follows: “to discover new facts about a situation, people, activities or events, or the frequency with which certain events occur”. The interviews with the research participants did indeed allow the researchers to discover new facts about interracial couples, their cross-cultural differences and in what way these different cultures influence their relationship satisfaction. It is these descriptions that formed the premise for the recommendations which will follow in Chapter Four of this study.

2.4.1.4 Contextual research design

The context of the study is important in qualitative research, since it is believed that human actions are strongly influenced by the setting in which they occur (Smith, 2006). Holloway and Wheeler (2002) state that the context includes the environment and the conditions in which the study takes place as well as the culture of the participants and location. The study
was located in a relatively small population in South Africa which is growing at a rapid rate. Many of the participants of this study were South African citizens who met their partners who were of European or American descent. By their own admission (as will be discussed in chapter four), the couples experienced different responses to their relationships in South Africa as opposed to outside of the country. These responses from either family members or the public at large also shaped the couple dynamics and hence relationship satisfaction significantly.

2.4.2. Research methodology

Babbie and Mouton (2002) state that the research method consists of the systematic, methodical and accurate execution of the research design. In the process of the execution of the research process, various methods and tools were used to perform different research tasks. The methodology applicable to this study included the following:

- Research population and method of sampling
- Entry to the research site
- Data collection method
- Pilot study, and the
- Data analysis

Each of these methodological concerns is now discussed in turn.

2.4.2.1. Research population and method of sampling

De Vos et al. (1998: 190) state that: “Population is a term that sets boundaries on the study units. It refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics”. Sampling in qualitative studies is based on qualities, where the researcher searches for participants who could provide rich or ‘thick’ descriptions of the studied phenomena (Nicholls, 2009 b).

The population of this study consisted of adult couples who are in a committed interracial relationship and have been living together for at least one year. A sample is “a smaller set of cases a researcher selects from a larger pool and generalises to the population” (Neuman,
Sampling required the identification of appropriate participants who could best inform the study and who could address the research question (Creswell, 2007). According to Neuman (2006) purposive sampling involve the researcher deliberately choosing participants to be included in the study on the basis that those selected can provide the necessary information.

The non probability purposive sampling technique was utilised to select a sample of eleven individuals who were in an interracial relationship or marriage. Ten of these participants’ constituted five couples who participated in the study, albeit in individual interviews. The inclusion criteria for the study were the following. Participants had to be:

- in a committed interracial relationship, and;
- Married or living together for at least one year, with or without children.

These inclusion criteria gave the researcher the chance to explore the differences in challenges and experiences within the phases of a relationship. It furthermore ensured that the couples could share rich narratives as they have had enough time to explore their cross-cultural differences and to experience potential challenges of an interracial relationship. The last two inclusion criteria stipulated that the couple had to be able to communicate in English, and had to be resident in the Eastern Cape so as to minimize the different influences of demographic factors.

The first participant for the pilot study was identified and approached by one of the research supervisors which was congruent with the purposive sampling method. After the first participant was recruited, the researcher requested him to identify potential couples who met the sampling criteria, as it proved to be difficult to recruit participants via the purposive sampling method. This proved to be effective and had set the researcher on a trail of other participants. The first research participant directed the researcher to at least three more research participants, which resulted in the researcher employing the ‘snowball sampling technique’. Babbie and Rubin (2009:149) explain that “snowball sampling is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate”. This technique involves approaching the participants who are involved in an interracial relationship, who could possibly identify other interracial couples that fitted the criteria for this study, as was the case in this study. The rest of the research participants were recruited by means of both the
purposive and snowball sampling approaches, primarily from people known to the researcher and the research promoter in person. This point and the fact that the researcher was in an interracial relationship herself, necessitated the appointment of an independent interviewer for the purposes of the data collection which will be discussed in more detail below. Data was collected up until data saturation. Flick (2009) points out that the criteria for deciding when to stop sampling is theoretical saturation, which means that no new findings emerge any more from the collected data.

2.4.2.2. Entry to the research site

Formal permission is important in any research and protects both researchers and participants from ethical and personal violations. Consent forms were used to obtain the formal permission of the participants to participate and permission to record the interviews. Upon receipt of informed consent, the independent interviewer initiated contact with the participants directly through electronic or telephonic communication to enquire about availability and interest of each participant. The topic and purpose of the study were explained here and dates were arranged for the research interviews. Before each interview, the consent forms were explained by the independent interviewer and then signed by the participant. The researcher was present throughout the whole process.

During the interviews the researcher made use of a small audio recorder and a drawing pad to make field notes. According to De Vos et al. (1998), field notes assist researchers to remember and explore the process of the interview in a reflective manner.

Five prospective participants were provisionally identified by the researcher and research supervisor from their social and professional network circle. Another six participants were identified later during the course of data collection, by broadening the research population from Xhosa partners to black and coloured African partners and from white European to white Western partners. These participants also came from the researcher and the research supervisor’s social and professional network circle. In total there were eleven participants in this study.

Nicholls (2009 b:590) states that in qualitative research “personal bias is acknowledged as an inevitable feature of our humanity, and one that is vital if we are to explore the feelings,
meanings and the personal context of our participant’s lived experiences and reflect on their meaning for us”. The researcher therefore employed an independent interviewer to interview the participants to ensure objectivity of the interviewer. The researcher was not present at three interviews in accordance with ethical principles; I excused myself as they were close friends of mine. The researcher ascertained the interest of the participants.

The pilot interview served to ensure the correct application of the interview questions. The venue used was chosen so there would be no disruptions during the interview. The location of the other interviews depended on the participant’s time, availability, convenience and transport. The estimated time of the interviews was about one hour maximum. After an interview, a debriefing period took place. This usually took less than five minutes, depending on the individual participant’s needs. The debriefing included finding out if the participants had experienced any discomfort during the interview and asking for a reflection from the participant on which questions they found easy or difficult.

2.4.2.3. Data collection method

The researcher collected data by using individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. By using semi-structured interviews, it was expected that “the interviewed subjects’ viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire” (Flick, 2009:150). The choice of this method of data collection came from the fact that the interview had a structure with several topics but there was still enough space for the participants to talk about their perspectives of differences, experiences and challenges and the meanings and explanations they gave to them. The researcher was able to obtain a detailed picture of the participants’ experiences through the interviews. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2005:379) state that “qualitative researchers incorporate the collection of rich, thick data into their design via prolonged engagement, persistent observation and other strategies”.

The data collection process was conducted by an independent interviewer as recommended by the Faculty Research Committee at the University. When looking at the pros and cons of an independent interviewer, Ritchie (2003) points out two benefits. He mentions that some authors argue that independent interviewers would be better interviewers since they have no
vested interest in any outcomes of the study. Ritchie (2003) further explains that sometimes the interviewer must be willing to abandon carefully prepared questions and be flexible by following the interviewee’s narration. The author of this research thinks the latter would be easier for an independent interviewer since he or she wasn’t the one preparing the questions and probably finds it easier to let go of any (rigid) structure. The researcher cannot think of any negative sides to employing an independent interviewer, since she herself sat in with most interviews and therefore also had the opportunity at the end of each interview to ask any questions.

The independent interviewer was prepared for the task at hand by reading the research proposal and by having a consultation with the researcher and the two research supervisors which gave her the opportunity to ask questions. The independent interviewer is a relationship counsellor of profession and the research topic falls within her area of expertise. The independent interviewer further has a postgraduate qualification in social work, which makes her competent in writing a masters treatise. Ethical principles were upheld during the process, by the independent interviewer being a registered social worker who adheres to the ethical code of privacy and confidentiality. Each participant was informed beforehand about the independent interviewer as a third party involved. This was explained when contacting the participants to schedule the interview appointments. During the interviews, the independent interviewer used several interview skills like summarizing, probing, clarifying, going back to previous questions and drawing parallels.

The researcher acted as an observer and scribe during the interviews. The following observations were made which is a collective combined view of both the independent interviewer and the researcher:

- The most apparent observation was that most of the research participants did not consciously think of their relationship as an interracial one. In fact it was evident from their surprise at how the data collection questions were formulated that most of them were at a stage in their relationship where they have a reduced awareness of being from different racial and or cultural groups. The participants, who had a more acute awareness of being in an interracial relationship, were in relationships of shorter duration at the time of the research interviews.

- Some participants did not answer the data collection questions directly. Instead they offered responses that were broader and non-specific in nature which created an
impression of evasiveness. This alerted the researcher to the possibility that they were trying to downplay potential cross-cultural challenges in their relationship as a way of challenging the theory around problems in interracial relationships.

- Quite a few of the participants also expressed or showed their discomfort with the term "interracial couples" and instead preferred the terms "mixed couples" or "cross-cultural relationships."
- Many of the participants expressed their gratitude for the research interview as it provided them with a reflective space where they were able to identify the progress they have made since the start of their relationship.
- Some participants had to think back and sometimes had difficulty sharing because it all occurred a very long time ago, which also suggest that the interracial difference have become so insignificant that it is hard to recall the challenging experiences of the past.
- The inverse was also true for some research participants who had such vivid recollections of especially their language differences that the research interview served as a reminder of their ongoing frustrations in this regard.
- The experiences of younger couples seemed very different from those of older couples. Younger couples seemed to be having to deal with more differences and challenges and everything was still fresh in their memory so they didn’t have to think long and hard about the questions.
- It seemed that the more mature and educated the couple, the fewer the differences/challenges presented in the relationship as they had sufficient time to work through them. These couples also had less difficulty in adjusting to each other’s culture.
- It was also interesting to note that many of the participants interpreted the question on differences to mean only negative experiences. This was clarified with the participants by the interviewer.
- All of the participants were eager to see the outcome of the study.
- It seems that couples who started their relationship in a Western country adjusted easier as a couple.
- A lot of participants would mention gender differences rather than cultural differences.
- It seemed that similarity in the socio-economic backgrounds of the partners, decreased challenges in the interracial relationship.
Most partners who have been far away from home seemed to have open minded and flexible personalities which made it easier to adjust to another culture.

The older the relationship, the more the partners were adjusted.

Within one interview it became known to the participant that the researcher was also in an interracial relationship, and after that the participant seemed more comfortable with the interview.

These observations enhanced the richness of the reported findings of the study and are therefore incorporated in the discussion of these findings in Chapter 3.

Kvale (1996:5) defined the semi-structured interview as: “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena”. An effort was made to gain this description by using the following questions as a guide for the researcher and the participants:

- Share your experiences of being in an interracial relationship.
- What challenges did the couple face at the beginning of their interracial relationship?
- How did they overcome/deal with the challenges?
- What efforts did the couple make to understand each other’s culture better?
- What adjustments did the couple have to make in their relationship?
- What changes had the couple noticed about themselves that could be due to being in an interracial relationship which involves two different cultures?
- What are the benefits and negative sides of being in an interracial relationship?
- What are the biggest cross-cultural differences between the partners? What effect do they have on the relationship (positive/negative)?
- Which differences have strengthened their relationship?
- How did they strengthen their relationship?

Burck (2005) explains that the types of research questions used in qualitative research are often open-ended and exploratory, focusing on generating hypotheses rather than testing them.
2.4.2.4. Pilot study

A pilot interview provides feedback to the researcher about the feasibility of the interview format and enables him/her to monitor the impact of the questions formulated to explore the issues (Burck, 2005). De Vos et al. (1998:182) state that the purpose of a pilot study is “to improve the success and effectiveness of the investigation”. They explain that the researcher must give space during the interview for criticism, comments and feedback by the participant. In this way the researcher can identify potential problems. These comments were considered by the researcher during the main investigation. The pilot study was done in the same manner as the planned main investigation. De Vos et al. (1998:188) conclude that the pilot study is “a last opportunity to avoid possible problems or make certain modifications”.

A pilot study was conducted in order to ensure the correct application of the interview questions. The researcher had two options available in order to set up a pilot study. The research supervisor and the researcher had identified an individual from the researcher’s own acquaintances and lecturers/students known to the research supervisor who met the inclusion criteria and who could be approached for participation in the pilot study. One of the participants was interviewed for the pilot study. There was electronic and telephonic communication to enquire about the availability and interest of this participant. The research proposal was sent to the participant beforehand and a meeting was arranged to explain the purpose of the study and to clarify and answer any questions. After the interview the transcript was sent to the participant of the pilot interview to verify with the participant if it was a true reflection of his perception of the interview, his story and experience.

During the pilot interview the following realisations emerged:
The interview questions were effective as they were understood by the participant and allowed for much narrative, but they were too many and too direct, specific and concrete. After the pilot interview, the questions were broadened to allow for a personal construction of the participants reality, instead of an induced construction marked by assumptions and possible bias. Nicholls (2009 b:590) emphasises the importance of this by saying that “many qualitative researchers look to hand over control of the study (to a greater or lesser extent) to their participants, allowing them to define what matters to them and what is superfluous”.

As mentioned above, the questions were broadened. Instead of asking several questions like: ‘Could you tell me how you met your partner?’, ‘How were the reactions of your family and friends?’, ‘Does your relationship has an impact on your racial identity?’, the researcher formulated these questions into one open-ended general question: ‘Can you share your experiences of being in an interracial relationship?’. This question opened up the conversation and allowed for uninterrupted narration, without the interviewer guiding the participant too much. Another example of how the old questions were broadened is as follows: Instead of asking specific questions like: ‘What challenges did you face in relation to communication ... to family roles ... to racism ... to traditions ... etc.?’, (whereby the interviewer assumed that the participant has had experienced challenges in these specific areas), the questions were broadened into one question: ‘What challenges you face at the beginning of your relationship?’.

The research participant who participated in the pilot study commented that he found the topics were covered in the questions, found the topic very interesting and was curious about the outcomes of the study. The venue allocated for the initial interview was favourable as there were no interruptions. The pilot study also alerted the independent interviewer to caution against introducing herself as a social worker employed at a family and marriage organisation as it could result in a confusion about her role and the nature of the research interview. Burck (2005) also mentions that this could be a dilemma for clinicians carrying out a qualitative research interview, to make a distinction between responding as a researcher and as a therapist.

Additional learnings for the researcher from embarking on this research journey are the following:

- That the participants should be asked to reflect on the interview in terms of how they experienced it. This way the interviewer and researcher can take this feedback into consideration during the next interview. Burck (2005:241) agrees and emphasises that “asking research participants to reflect on their experiences of the questions and the interview process, and any significant absences, can be extremely helpful”.

- Another significant learning was for the researcher to avoid asking participants during the interview to reflect on their partner’s experiences and feelings so as to avoid any assumptions in the outcomes.
The pilot study was evaluated by the researcher, the research supervisor, the co-supervisor and the independent interviewer and feedback was asked from the participant. The outcome of the pilot study predicted the suitability of the research design, data collection, research questions and methods. The transcript was emailed to the participant with the request that he reflect whether this represented an accurate reflection of the research interview. The participant confirmed that it did and that he did not have any corrections to make or additions to the transcript.

2.4.2.5. Data analysis

Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. It is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the massive raw data collected. The findings are generated and transform raw data into new knowledge (Tesch, as cited in Creswell, 1998).

The interviews were recorded by the researcher and the recordings were transcribed to convert the raw data into text form. The transcriptions provided a clear view of the data collection and gave the researcher an opportunity to become familiar with the content. The data analysis was conducted using Tesch’s model (as cited in Creswell 1998), which consists of eight steps, focusing the researcher on a logical approach. Based on Tesch’s model, the data analysis entailed:

1) Reading through all the transcripts to get a sense of the whole and to get familiarised with the data. Writing down initial ideas in the margin.

2) Choosing one transcript and reading it through carefully, writing down ideas page by page. Thoughts regarding themes that emerged were written down.

3) Step 2 was repeated with the remaining transcripts which were examined in a similar fashion. The topics that emerged were listed and similar topics were clustered together. Topics were divided into themes, subthemes and categories. The researcher used themes suggested by the objectives of the study, and divided the data into different groups. The researcher analysed the data further and created sub-themes and categories within the themes, suggested by the questions and the participant’s responses to them.

4) The researcher abbreviated topics as codes. Some new categories and codes emerged.
5) Researcher found the most descriptive wording for the topics and turned them into categories. Groups were made to reduce the total list of categories.

6) A final decision was made on the abbreviations for each category. The codes were put into alphabetical order.

7) The data were grouped under different categories and preliminary analysis was performed.

8) Final look through data, existing data were re-coded when necessary. Data were recorded and the final report was written.

According to Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2005), meaning is not a function of the type of data collected, rather meaning results from the interpretation of data represented by words. They further explain that “qualitative researchers use phenomenological procedures and their views of reality to discover meaning” (2005:379).

McBrien (2008:1287) explains that “when researchers are generating patterns or themes from qualitative data, they can enhance the validity of the categorization method and safeguard against researcher bias by enlisting the assistance of an experienced or expert colleague”. Therefore an independent coder assisted in the data analysis. The information was discussed and compared by the researcher, research supervisor and independent coder and we arrived at consensus on the themes. The findings that emerged through the analysis were compared with theory more than previous research, since interracial couples in the South African context is an under-researched topic. The researcher used the literature to support findings where possible.

2.5. Researcher’s background

My name is Tielke de Vries. I am a Dutch citizen by birth who moved to South Africa in 2006. At that time I was still doing my bachelor’s degree in Social Work in the Netherlands. My experiences taught me that my services as a social worker could be optimised in South Africa rather than in the Netherlands, which has a strong social welfare support network.

I met my partner in Port Elizabeth; he is a Xhosa man who was born and raised here. We have been living together in South Africa since 2008. Within our relationship I have noticed that a lot of our disagreements are not due to differences in our personal characters but more to cross-cultural differences. We both have learned a lot during these four years and our cross-
cultural differences definitely have had an impact on our relationship, sometimes positive and other times negative. Both of us have found a balance in our relationship between our two cultures which allows us to enjoy the best of both cultures. We are both quite flexible and still learn a lot from each other every day. My personal motivation for this study came from the observation that the divorce rate is a lot higher for interracial couples than for same-race couples. Linked to this was my own professional curiosity as to how other interracial couples (South African and non-South African) have used their interracial differences to enhance their relationship satisfaction.

2.6. Measures to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of the study

“Guba’s (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) model to ensure validity and reliability (trustworthiness) in qualitative research can be applied with positive results” (De Vos et al., 1998:331). McBrien (2008:1287) emphasises that in qualitative inquiry “the ability to follow the decision trail relating to theoretical, methodological and analytical choices is an important indicator of trustworthiness”. This can be enhanced by showing evidence of the process of the study, raw data (e.g. interview transcripts) and the findings of the study, so that readers can clearly follow the research procedures and understand the decisions taken and choices used in the study. Guba’s (1985, as cited by De Vos et al., 1998) approach highlights ways to hold off biases in the results of the qualitative analysis. Four criteria were used to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

2.6.1. Credibility

By applying the criteria of credibility, the goal was to show that the research was done in such a manner as to ensure that the facts, occurrences and observations were accurately identified and described. “An in-depth description showing the complexities of variables and interactions will be so embedded with data derived from the setting that it cannot help but be valid” (De Vos et al. 1998:351). The researcher used triangulation as a strategy to ensure credibility. De Vos et al. (1998:359) explained that the term triangulation “… referred mainly to the use of multiple methods of data collection with a view to increasing the reliability of observation ...”. The researcher also included a pilot study to increase the credibility of the research. This shows readers of this study that the researcher planned the research carefully.
and that the credibility of the interview was tested. The pilot study contained an interview with a participant who falls within the criteria of the participants, and was included within the results of the study since the data collected were useful. The pilot study was mainly a test to see how suitable the questions were and how that participant experienced the interview.

2.6.2. Transferability

The second method concerned transferability, which involved “the burden of demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context” (De Vos et al., 1998:351). Transferability checked whether the research results are alike, to see if they could also be applicable to the target group outside of the study, in the universe. Transferability was achieved by using a proposed sample with clear sampling criteria and an accurate description of the research methodology.

2.6.3. Dependability

Within dependability, “… the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions to the phenomenon chosen for research as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (De Vos et al., 1998:351). This refers to the question whether the research was dependable since the same participants were interviewed within somewhat the same context (their home, work environment or a conference room). The following methods were used to ensure dependability: an accurate description of the research methodology and peer examination. Peer examination involved the research supervisor reading all the transcripts and an independent coder to analyse the data. Also the participant involved in the pilot study read the transcript of his interview to verify if it was a true reflection of his experiences.

2.6.4. Confirmability

The final criteria, confirmability, “… is focused on whether the results of the research could be confirmed by another and places the evaluation on the data themselves” (De Vos et al., 1998:351). It was important here for the researcher to leave her own biases and prejudices aside so they could not influence the results of the research. Therefore there was an
independent interviewer conducting the interviews and the researcher acted here as an observer and scribe and recorded the interviews. I, as researcher, excused myself from three of the interviews with participants that were known to me personally, this in accordance with ethical principles as they were close friends of mine. An independent coder was used during the course of data analysis to ensure confirmability. The independent coder is a social worker with a doctoral qualification in the field that was employed to analyse the data independently and it was followed up with a consensual meeting where it transpired that there was a lot of overlap between the analyses. The researcher used triangulation as a method of data collection.

2.7. Ethical considerations

“Ethics is a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students” (De Vos et al., 1998:24). The researcher was cognisant of key ethical considerations to follow during the process of the study and these are now discussed below:

2.7.1. Avoidance of harm

Participants could be harmed either physically or emotionally. During this research one could have assumed that there would be no physical injuries but the researcher could not rule out any emotional damage towards the participants since this was difficult to predict. According to De Vos et al. (1998:25), “respondents should be thoroughly informed beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation”. This was one way to ensure the avoidance of harm to the participants. When the participants were well informed about the interview, the topic and the impact that it could have on them, they were able to withdraw from the study if they wanted to do so.

If emotional harm did arise during the interview, the participants also had a choice during the interview to discontinue if they wished to do so. This was explained to the participants before the interview started. If the emotional harm to the participants would be too much for them to handle, the interviewer and researcher would have tried to comfort them and referred them to
a counsellor if needed. After each interview there was a debriefing session with the participants. This allowed the participants to work through their experiences to minimise any possible emotional harm. As expected, there was no emotional harm with any of the participants.

2.7.2. Informed consent

“Obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures which will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which respondents may be exposed, and the credibility of the researcher be rendered to potential subjects or their legal representatives” (Strydom in De Vos et al., 1998:25). The independent interviewer obtained permission from the participants in the form of written consent for the interview. The consent form had details about the participant’s rights, including confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and protection from harm. Another part included in the consent form was asking the participants for permission to audiotape the interviews and informing them about the dissemination of results. This included how the recordings were transcribed, where and how the transcriptions were stored, when the recordings would be destroyed, informing the participants which organisations and institutions will receive a copy of the completed research and making the participants aware of the fact that they could have a copy of the study if they requested or required it.

2.8. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has looked at the research design and methodology in detail. The research question, goals and objectives were stated at the beginning of the chapter. A description of the chosen research design followed, explaining the qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual design. The research methodology included the research population and method of sampling, entry to the research site, data collection through semi-structured interviews, pilot study and data analysis using Tesch’s model of content analysis. Trustworthiness was proved through Guba’s model, and ethical considerations focused on the protection of the participants and their informed consent. Chapter three involves the discussion of the research findings.
CHAPTER 3
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter contained a review of the research methodology and in particular the data analysis process that was followed, which resulted in the emergence of the research themes and subthemes. Following on the data analysis, a consensus discussion ensued between the researcher, research supervisor and the independent coder to firstly verify and confirm the research findings. The goal of the research was to enhance an understanding of how cross-cultural differences could be utilised to strengthen marital/relationship quality within cross-cultural couple relationships. In order to address this goal, a total of 11 individual research interviews were conducted with participants who currently reside in the Eastern Cape of South Africa and are in an interracial relationship, as defined in Chapter One of this study. The participants volunteered their participation after being recruited via the sampling method described in Chapter Three.

The ensuing table provides a demographic depiction of the research participants with a particular reflection on information that was relevant to the purpose of the study.

Table 3.1: Demographic details of the research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ gender</th>
<th>Racial orientation</th>
<th>Duration of relationship (including courtship and legal marriage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South African Black</td>
<td>3 0-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 4-7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>South African Coloured</td>
<td>3 0-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 4-7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African</td>
<td>2 4-7 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 12 years +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European white</td>
<td>3 12 years +</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American white</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 11               | N = 11                   | N = 11
Marriage between black males and white females is called ‘hypogamy’ and marriage between white males and black females is called ‘hypergamy’ (Porterfield, 1978). According to Landis and Landis (1977:172) “in black-white marriages the male is more often black and ... the female is more often foreign-born or of foreign parentage ...”. Thus, according to Landis and Landis (1977), hypogamy is more common than hypergamy. This was also noticed when looking at the participants. Seven of the eleven participants were in a relationship involving a black male and white female.

Nine of the eleven participants were legally married according to South African law. It is unbelievable that this was illegal in South Africa almost thirty years ago, before the repeal of the racial laws applied during the apartheid era. As one male South African participant also mentioned: “And back in the day with apartheid it wasn’t possible.” Another female South African participant explained: “… you know it was against the law when we started.” From the table above it is evident that the majority of the participants have been in a relationship for many years. Some couples were even together during the years of apartheid, illegally. As one female South African participant stated: “... so we were actually in a relationship when the Immorality Act was still in place. And we couldn’t go to certain places because the Group Area Act was still there.”

Obviously, the younger participants have been together for a shorter period of time (including the unmarried couple). In this study it was found that the longer the relationship, the fewer challenges they experienced in their relationship. A reason for this could be that they have already overcome these challenges in their younger years and are now more adjusted to the cultural differences. One female South African participant explained as follows: “… it is just as I get older I just become more... it is just us in the relationship. It is the only change. So I am much more comfortable because that discomfort is no longer there. It has gone away but it is also because of various factors. ... I am older. I see the world differently. ... it’s just as life has gone by because you just realise what was all these issues all about.” For this participant relationship satisfaction came with maturity.

One central data collection question was posed to the research participants with the view of answering the research question and hence meeting the research goal, i.e.,:
- Share your experiences of being in an interracial relationship.

Further probes were used to stimulate elaboration on particular topics that were of relevance to the study; as well as ensuring that specific areas relating to the research question were
covered. These follow-up questions and prompts included the following:
- What challenges did you experience at the beginning of your relationship and how did you overcome these challenges?
- What efforts did you make to understand each other’s culture better and which adjustments did you have to make in your relationship?
- What changes have you noticed about yourselves that could be due to being in an interracial relationship which involves two different cultures?
- What are the benefits and negative sides of being in an interracial relationship?
- What are the biggest cultural differences between you and your partner and what effect do they have on your relationship (both positive/negative)?
- Which differences have strengthened your relationship and how have these differences strengthened your relationship?

Table 3.2 below portrays the major themes, subthemes, categories and subcategories that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 3.2: Table of themes, subthemes, categories and subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Cultural difference factors</td>
<td>Childhood background</td>
<td>How the individual was raised</td>
<td>Socio-economic background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language difficulties</td>
<td>Not knowing partner’s language</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difference in communicating and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>interpersonal relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of cultural knowledge</td>
<td>Family’s expectation that partner will</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and understanding of</td>
<td>follow cultural ways</td>
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<td></td>
<td>partner’s culture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different cultural and</td>
<td>Traditional vs. more</td>
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<td></td>
<td>religious traditions</td>
<td>liberal traditions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural events</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different wedding styles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slaughtering</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different customs for children</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blessings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>At birth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Negative factors that influence the couple’s coping with cultural differences</td>
<td>Different approach to lifestyle</td>
<td>Different approaches to social interactions</td>
<td>Importance of societal image varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grieving styles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different views on affection in public</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different food and eating rituals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different perception of time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different family roles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used to different luxury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative perceptions of society</td>
<td>Non-acceptance by others</td>
<td>By parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By siblings</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In certain towns and areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By friends</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By older people</td>
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<td>Children’s struggles</td>
<td>Asked if child is adopted</td>
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<td>Racial questions from other children</td>
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<td>Awareness of own differences from others</td>
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<td>Struggle to fit in</td>
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<td>Language difficulties</td>
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<td>Misunderstanding the meaning of language used</td>
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<td>Difficulties in communicating with the partner’s family and friends</td>
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<td>Difficult family interaction as children do not know a language</td>
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<td>Being far away from home</td>
<td>Strain on partner</td>
<td>Difficulty travelling whole family</td>
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<td>Being away from family core</td>
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<td>Met in-laws later in relationship</td>
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<td>Missing home, family and friends</td>
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<td>Difficult building new life</td>
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| 3) Positive factors that influence the couple’s coping with cultural differences |
| Positive perceptions of society | Acceptance by others | By parents |
| | | Other family members |
| | | Fellow students |
| | | Friends |

| Characteristics of the couple | Couple’s compatibility |
| Good communication | Knowledge of the partner’s language |
| | Knowing when to ask questions |
| | Open communication on issues |

| Good conflict management skills | Discuss challenges and differences |
| | Compromise |

| Elements in a relationship | Mutual support |
| | Respect and love |
| | Ability to deal with opposition together |
| | Sense of humour |
| | Work on relationship |
| | Spend time together |
| | Couple are compatible |
| | No focus on race |
| | Being far away from home |

| Personal characteristics of each partner | Independent of partner |
| | Adaptability of partner |
| | Easy going |
| | Open minded |

<p>| Type of social interactions | Having interracial friends and couples |
| | Benefit for the children |
| | Benefit for the couple |</p>
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<tr>
<th>4) Factors relating to cultural differences that strengthen the relationship</th>
<th>Previous experiences</th>
<th>Previous interracial relationships</th>
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<td>Lack of personal South African history or hurt</td>
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<td>Family history of interracial marriages</td>
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<td>Prior knowledge of the other’s culture and actively learning about the different cultures</td>
<td>Learning about partner’s culture</td>
<td>Experiences with partner’s family</td>
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<td>Knowledge from people from that culture</td>
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<td>An understanding of partner’s culture</td>
<td>Understanding through sport</td>
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<td>Togetherness and family life</td>
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<td>Acceptance of partner’s culture</td>
<td>Cultural food</td>
<td>Learning to cook cultural dishes</td>
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<td>Religious beliefs - ancestors</td>
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<td>Length of relationship vs. acceptance of differences</td>
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<td>Education and careers</td>
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<td>Understanding of each other’s careers</td>
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<td>Life Styles</td>
<td>Similar life styles</td>
<td>Similar visions and goals for life</td>
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<td>Similar religious views</td>
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<td>Similar cultural beliefs</td>
<td>Shared roles</td>
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<td>Common values</td>
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<td>5) Recommendations to other inter-racial couples</td>
<td>Marriage preparation</td>
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<td>Educating children</td>
<td>Education with regard to societal response</td>
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In the section that follows, the research findings will be discussed in terms of the identified themes and their supporting subthemes, categories and subcategories. This will be supported by verbatim extracts from the collected data, followed by theoretical interpretations and integrated discussions of the findings, as guided by the literature control.

3.2. Presentation and discussion of the themes, subthemes, categories and subcategories

The findings are divided into five themes: cultural difference factors, negative factors that influence couple’s coping with cultural differences, positive factors that influence couple’s coping with cultural differences, factors relating to cultural differences that strengthen the relationship and recommendations to other interracial couples. Each of these themes with their related subthemes will be discussed below.

3.2.1. THEME 1: CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FACTORS

The participants were asked to reflect on the cultural differences that have been evident in their relationship. Five subthemes emerged in the responses to this question. The first subtheme revolved around differences in their childhood background.
3.2.1.1. Subtheme 1: Childhood background

During the child’s formative years, the primary socialising agent (in most cases the biological parent) teaches their children the ideas that families have, their traditions and life style norms (Landis & Landis, 1977). However as children grow up, they are exposed to other attitudes and beliefs from outside influences that could be different from the family values that were taught by their parents, which is evidently also applicable in the case of the research participants. They were in agreement that several experiences dating back to their childhood were different from those of their partners and that this could potentially result in relationship tension, especially in so far as childrearing is concerned. The citations below are their verbatim reflections on being aware of the different ways in which they were raised:

One female non-South African participant explained it as follows:

“We have differences based on like how he was raised in his culture versus how I was raised in mine.”

She gives an example involving differences in time orientation, by stating:

“But he keeps the time well, that would be a problem if he didn’t.”

Another female non-South African participant made the following very similar observation:

“It’s also because of very different upbringing. Even him growing up in the location and me growing up in Germany.”

One male non-South African participant also mentioned a difference in upbringing between him and his partner. He noted the following:

“... look in Germany where I grew up, the community life is not so entrenched as it is here. In a way that people think more about family here than over there. But I think it also depends on families.”
He further explained as follows:

“But in my family obviously there was more an individualistic or I... in Germany I moved out at the age of eighteen, worked, had my own money and my own flat. And here it is very different. Here you are sheltered in a way because of the circumstances... the economic circumstances and as well for a woman it is not easier to actually be on your own here like in Europe. I think people are at an earlier age more independent and here people are more depend on family but I think it is because of the economic and societies circumstances.”

One male South African participant stated:

“Also coming from different backgrounds like maybe family wise, like we have been raised differently.”

He proceeded to give the following example:

“Her culture I think you have to really do everything like studies, you have to finish everything and then start working and then... then you must start having a family and like even getting married and things like that. Whereas in my culture, I think it’s not really a big issue if you start working immediately, like if you start a family immediately even after you have just finished school and even before you start working.”

This participant was referring to the difference in family planning, the value placed on education and having a career between the two cultures. Within the Western culture, family life is often planned only after qualifying for a career and establishing a stable income to ensure that the children can be provided for. The participant hence alluded to his experience in his own culture where pregnancies are often unexpected and family life is rarely planned.

Waldman and Rubalcave (2005) concur that the couple’s ability to create a harmonious relationship is usually compromised by conflicting unconscious cultural presumptions that collide. They furthermore note that individuals tend to assume that their cultural values are representative of truth. Therefore, these cultural differences can manifest in confrontations in
interracial relationships. Biever et al. (1998) support the view that many aspects of a couple’s life are being influenced by cultural presumptions and ethnicity, including gender roles, family upbringing and values of marriage, as is evident from the participants’ narratives above.

Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) echo that partners involved in an interracial relationship could hold conflicting values and expectations regarding their relationship and lives in general, since they grew up in families with different cultural backgrounds. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) suggest that couples can rather take the best from both worlds by co-creating a combined meaning of fundamental organizing principles, such as the concept of family, as a positive construction of interracial relationships. In fact they emphasise that interracial relationships expose the couple to new ways of thinking; broadening their worldview and at the same challenging and strengthening their own beliefs. A prerequisite however is for the partners to develop a shared perspective, embracing aspects of the other culture/race/religion into their daily lives. This will allow them to co-create and recreate their views, experiences and events, and subsequently reduce the stress and conflict within their relationship and consequently improve the relationship quality.

One female non-South African participant mentioned a difference between her and her partner’s socio-economic background. She expressed the following:

“... if you took us out of cultural context, he came from a better, wealthier family than I. I was more sort of white blue collar, where he was professional. I mean his parents went to college and my parents didn’t. So, I mean in that respect, he came from a better family than I did. He had more privilege eh in context.”

This statement from the participant confirms a unique theory, called the status exchange theory that was first considered by Merton (1941). Kalmijn (1998, as cited by Amoateng et al., 2004) puts this theory in a larger perspective of economic and social preferences by explaining that exchange theorists propose that well-educated minority men exchange their high socio-economic status for interracial acceptance and to proof that they can marry ‘white’ and that white women with a low socio-economic status exchange their high racial status for economic security.
Hohmann-Marriott and Amato’s (2008) analysis suggests that a difference in socio-economic resources plays no role in reducing relationship quality among interethnic couples.

3.2.1.2. Subtheme 2: Language difficulties

Many of the participants mentioned language as being the biggest difference between them as partners and explained that they have had difficulties with the different languages. As one female non-South African participant stated:

“So I think that might be the biggest thing, language. ... Because when he does go home and he can speak with his cousins and siblings and stuff, he is quite happy, tjirping away and initiative, just because he can and normally can’t because he sees me every day or he’s at [work], there’s not a lot of that interaction. So I think that for him that’s a big negative and I feel bad about that.”

She concluded: “Language might be our biggest sort of ‘could be’ issue, but not really an issue.” This participant explained that the language difference is there, but it is not as outspoken and not really an issue between the two partners.

This same participant further mentioned:

“He might get upset because I haven’t developed my language skills. ... I think in a way that is sort of my American cultural issue, language. I think here [in South Africa] things are a bit better and more flexible around learning. Cause they generally tend to learn quite a few languages as they’re growing up. We Americans are really bad, really, really bad.”

According to the participant, it is easier for South Africans to learn a new language because they grow up being exposed to different languages, than for Americans where the main language is English.
Another male non-South African participant mentioned that the language difficulties were mainly in the beginning:

“Initially, ja I suppose because when I came here my language wasn’t very good. Obviously sometimes language created confusion ... but I think if the level of understanding is there, the feeling for each other and if you don’t just listen to the words, but you listen to the body language, to the feeling – then you are actually getting the right message. I think that is important in a relationship like that as well.”

The participant explained that as a couple they overcame this difficulty in language by the feeling they have for each other and not only listening to the language, but also to each other’s body language. Another female non-South African participant explained that the language difficulty is still playing a big role in their relationship, especially when it comes to dealing with conflict:

“We communicate in English, which is not the mother tongue for both of us so it’s just, especially when you are arguing; it is difficult to understand each other. And sometimes you are just looking for the right words especially in an argument. It is so important to just express yourself exactly. And sometimes you can’t do that. Sometimes I can’t do that in English sometimes and then it frustrates you and that is one of the things.”

These experiences of the research participants concur with the observation by Brislin (2000) that frustrations are very common in the development of interracial relationships.

Another female non-South African participant reported on the same struggle with expressing herself in another language especially during a conflict scenario:

“In the beginning it was for me hard to express myself in English. When I would get cross, I couldn’t, I couldn’t do it in English. And also when you want to explain something, and you can’t find the words, it was very, very frustrating.”
This participant dealt with it by speaking in her own language, which was close to her partner’s language:

“Luckily he’s Afrikaans, so I would speak Dutch to him.”

It seems like the non-South African partners have the most difficulties when it comes to language. Probably because they moved to a different country with a different language which means that they have to do most of the adjustment. Amoateng et al. (2004) use the concept “out group marriages” to refer to marriage outside of one’s culture. They suggest that a big obstacle in out-group marriages in South Africa is the language barrier, especially since South Africa has 11 official languages, including nine major indigenous languages and English and Afrikaans. The possible language barrier, together with cultural factors, creates natural obstacles to marriages within the out-group. Amoateng et al. (2004:446) further found that the highest rates of out-marriage in South Africa were “among the Xhosa, Northern Soto and Tsonga groups, where 35 to 40 percent of the women and around 20 to 23 percent of the men marry out of their own language group”.

Brislin (2000) explained that the ability to solve conflicts and to be able to communicate effectively helps to create successful intercultural interactions, so that relationships on the longer term are not threatened. It also helps to be able to communicate in different ways. Two ways that can help are: use of the host culture’s language and nonverbal communication.

Some participants found that the difficulty with language is that one partner does not know the other partner’s language. One male South African participant expressed that:

“It would be somewhat easier if for instance she had been able to learn Zulu. ... She understands words, she just cannot speak it and then some words also are still foreign to her.”

Another female non-South Africa participant felt really excluded by not understanding her partner’s language.
She explained:

“Language is also a big issue because he would always just talk Xhosa to his friends and I would really feel excluded. ... You know that you do not understand the language and it just makes you feel so excluded.”

Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans are not international languages and they are quite difficult to learn for a foreigner. Also, the non-South African partners have only been exposed to these languages in South Africa. That is why most couples communicate in English since it is an international language and easier for both partners. However, most partners have made an effort to learn the other partner’s language, but some lost it because of not enough practising.

One female South African participant explained that:

“I don’t even know the language and that’s also a problem. I can understand but I can’t speak it back. Cause I have done courses but... so there’s a huge gap. ... I don’t understand a lot of what they say.”

“For us it is language because when I go to Germany and they all speak ... and they get tired of speaking English. So they would all speak and rattle on.”

It is evident from the participants’ expressions above that the inability to converse in their partner’s mother tongue can become a challenge in the relationship, especially when visiting friends or family that are not really fluent in English.

Chung and Gale (2009) propose that people can prepare themselves well and get help from others who know the culture, but warn that there will always be misunderstandings and conflicts when they interact in another culture. Chung and Gale (2009) continued giving the following example: in the individualistic Western society, open and honest expressions of feelings and thoughts plays an important role in effective family functioning, whereas in collectivist cultures, this communication style is seen as disrupting family harmony and tends to be discouraged.
One female South African participant mentioned not only language as a difference between them, but also the way of communicating and interpersonal relationships. She explained:

“It is the way of speaking and it’s just perceptions about how I felt that that was a barrier language and the way he spoke.”

She found her husband’s use of language abrupt or aggressive sometimes. Next to language and use of it, she also found another difference between the two cultures:

“It’s language and it is also a way of interacting because sometimes there is a distance within the culture. ... It is just language and interpersonal relationships that I find sometimes difficult.”

Interestingly, a male South African participant alluded to the absence of an expression of warmth in the traditional Black South African culture, by specifically making reference to how his wife’s expression of affection made him feel loved. He highlighted how this was different from his earlier experiences in relationships with black South African partners. This is discussed in more detail in subtheme five.

It is evident from the narrations by the participants and the support from literature that when people acquire knowledge about the many difficulties of intercultural interactions, it can help them to be more confident when interacting with people from another culture and to form relationships with them. This also accentuates the need to be sensitive to cultural issues during cross-cultural encounters and interactions.

3.2.1.3. Subtheme 3: Lack of cultural knowledge and understanding of partner’s culture

There was consensus amongst the participants that they had to take a significant time to understand their partner’s culture, with some still battling for years into their relationship to grasp these differences.
Two research participants articulated their difficulties in this respect as follows:

“In the beginning when you get here and you don’t know much about South Africa and you get into another culture. ... It’s all different compared to the Dutch, what norms I have.”

“For me it is harder because I haven’t, I don’t really see where he is coming from you know. ... As I said, it’s just mainly, I don’t have a good understanding about where he comes from. ... His friends and family visited often. ... I just find them very difficult, in my perception. ... I do find the culture very alien. I wouldn’t want to live ... I can’t see myself living there for extended periods of time because I find it hard.”

The narrative of the first participant suggests that when you are new to a culture, you have to review your own norms and values and take a good look at where you come from. Van Heerden (2008) concurs with this view by stating that for someone to be able to understand a certain culture, one has to go back to the identification of cultural practices that was learned or programmed from birth. The cultural practices will differentiate one group from another and are based on a set of values and assumptions. It is furthermore evident from the narrative of the second participant that an inability to understand these cultural differences can result in frustrations. Brislin (2000) asserts that these frustrations are particularly pronounced when their intentions on forming positive relationships are good but they struggle to translate them into behaviour.

The participants made specific reference to the history of apartheid in South Africa and how that contributed to the ignorance on cultural differences. One female non-South African participant had the following to say in this regard:

“Certainly whites weren’t allowed to know much about black culture.”
Another South African participant reflected on her husband’s struggle to appreciate her views on cultural differences in South Africa as follows:

“He would say that he can’t understand the issues about race all the time and like why must you feel that way. ... For me, the lack of understanding, which can be... it’s huge overcoming the gap that you have between each other and having to fill it in all the time because you don’t have the same common understanding about... of your society.”

It is apparent from studying South African history, that a lack of knowledge emerged between the different cultures in South Africa and stereotypes were formed to fill this gap. Brislin (2000) cautions that when a person has a stereotype about some race or culture, they are most likely to use that stereotype when they interact with someone who belongs to that group. The quotations by the research participants and the supporting literature certainly highlight how important it is for couples in such relationships to explore and learn about each other’s culture and history. In this way partners get a better understanding of each other, the stereotypes that exist and how their backgrounds and belief systems were influenced by these stereotypes.

In addition to the intrinsic and internal relationship challenges attached to not understanding one’s partner’s culture, the partners mentioned the challenge posed by the family-in-law in this regard. Specific reference was made to the expectation that the partner will follow the cultural ways of their spouse.

Within different families, there are different expectations. When marrying someone from a different culture, some families will expect that the new partner will follow their cultural ways. One female South African participant articulated her in-laws’ expectations as follows:

“Like an expectation for me to have learnt the language and expectation for me to be able to cook all the kinds of foods, the different dishes. And I am getting there.”

On the contrary, one female non-South African participant explained that because she was of a different culture, her family-in-law did not expect her to fulfil all the cultural things that are normally expected from a ‘makoti’ (a Xhosa wife).
She stated as follows:

“... I can get away with things. But ehm I think it was more they said ‘Well you know she is married, she’s not of our culture’, so it’s not as expected. Ehm, which really wasn’t fair but I went with it.” She further mentioned: “I mean they don’t even really make me wear skirts, cause they just know that I don’t wear skirts. I don’t have many, so I can wear shorts, even with my mother-in-law I did, even though she wished I don’t.”

Her South African partner also mentioned this flexibility with regard to his family’s cultural expectations. He explained:

“So certainly I think there must be some expectations that she would supposedly meet and in another vain as well is perhaps some leniency in the sense that eh oh maybe because she is from a white culture we might not necessarily, truly expect all of this package from her. So therefore in that case she may not come under the same form of scrutiny than it would be if I had married a black woman... ... So in that case then it’s almost a relief.”

It is clearly demonstrated by the narratives above that the participants experienced similar challenges to initially understand each other’s culture, and that some had to respond to expectations by their in-laws that they would follow the cultural practices. However, it is clear that acquiring the knowledge of their partner’s culture was not the only factor that enhanced their positive adjustment, but also their own adaptability, and to a large extent the warm acceptance by their in-laws. This will be discussed in more detail under theme three.

3.2.1.4. Subtheme 4: Different cultural and religious traditions

The eleven participants in the present study did not only have different racial orientations - according to South Africa’s historical racial classification system (Swartz, 2010) - but also originated from four different countries. As a result their reflections on different cultural and religious traditions were rich in description as cited below:
“His family is fairly traditional ... They do a lot of traditional rituals and things.”

“There are more traditions here [in South Africa] or more celebrations than I had in Holland ever before, everything is celebrated. ... they have more traditions here. ... A first birthday party of a child, we don’t have that in Holland.” In South Africa, there are many more non-religious celebrations and public holidays than religious celebrations (Culture of South Africa – history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family, 2006).

“He was brought up with probably no toys. I was brought up with having toys. ... But I often wonder, is his comments [that their children receive too many toys during celebrations] coming from the fact that he didn’t have those things and he turned out fine or does it really ... and I never really asked him why he ... He just thinks that they have too much stuff and why would they need another or more.”

“I guess the other difference would be the manner in which they have celebrations. You know weddings, the way funerals are managed, with the slaughter of the sheep and the parts that you eat. ... The biggest cultural differences would be the food around the celebrations and actually the celebrations themselves and how they take place.”

“Well I think that the biggest difference certainly is that they don’t slaughter. So we tend to slaughter and give thanks to our ancestors.”

“Celebratory type of way and yes the cows, sheep was slaughtered and all these other things and she ate that part and all the things she was supposed to eat and there are lots of powerful meanings in each one of these ceremonies so I had to explain and I also had to educate myself in that because I’d become so westernised.”

“We get married in this big church in New York and we’ve got to go to the township [in South Africa] that I am coming from and call the people who slaughter the sheep and there’s a certain part that you’re supposed to eat, sit on the floor and wear all these things you know that are African.”
“A maybe wonderfully elaborate wedding that starts three days earlier, with slaughtering and various gifts giving back and forth. I think it’s you know, it’s a rich experience. … You know if you go to a wedding that starts at one, you actually expect it to start at one, not at six you know.”

Marital ceremonies are among the most visible and important occasions to socialize and are usually planned with great care and in excessive detail and include a lengthy communal feast entailing a considerable expense (Culture of South Africa – history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family, 2006).

“Maybe I’d say ‘well why do we have to do, you know, the unveiling [of the tombstone] after a year sort of thing?’.”

“So obviously their Western traditions are more British oriented, where my American ones are more…, because I’m from a German background.” This participant refers back to the history and origin of traditional influences in South Africa, since South Africa was colonised by the British (and Dutch).

“Christmas is an issue. Because I’m Germanic Lutheran and I like Christmas Eve. He’s on this sort of British Colonial Christmas day. But there’s still a bit of contention. But I still have that my kids open at least one gift on Christmas Eve. … (imitating husband with low voice:) ‘I’m not going to open any presents until Christmas day’ and I’d say ‘You don’t have to’.”

“Christmas is different where I, with my family in Holland, we would have Christmas just with the family … and then their partners maybe. But here it’s your whole, everybody who wants to come, comes. Like when I have Christmas with his parents, people would knock on the door and come in and eat. In Holland or with my family, you would find that very rude.”

The narratives above depict a host of differences between especially South African culture and traditions which tend to be more collectivist in nature as opposed to the individualistic culture in more Western Society (in the case of the research participants, i.e., Dutch, German and American). The notion amongst the more collectivist cultures in South Africa (historically
coloured and black population groups) tend to be more traditional and focused on the family and community as a whole. Knox and Schacht (2010) highlight that 75 percent of the racial population in South Africa is African and 10 percent is white. They further explain that the African family is known for their patriarchy and their traditional relationship role scripts. It is evident from the narratives above that these differences can result in significant tensions in a couple’s relationship, especially if there is an unwillingness to accommodate and compromise, as proposed by Calitz and Nkosi (2010) that the black community is more likely to be unwilling to give up their rituals and culture compared with the white community. None of the research participants in the present study though reported experiencing this rigidity.

Another prominent difference highlighted by the participants is the concept of time where punctuality in the Western culture is viewed as a sign of discipline whilst South Africans are known for their flexibility regarding time which is called ‘African Time’. The difference regarding time will be further discussed in paragraph 3.2.1.5. Another prominent South African tradition amongst the black population group is the slaughtering of an animal and specifically giving thanks to the ancestors, a tradition that may be daunting and difficult to appreciate, but which one research participant mastered relatively well by adopting an adventurous approach to exploring the unknown. It appeared that this exploratory experience was also enhanced for the research participant, by having her South African husband educate her on the cultural ceremonies and slaughtering and in the process also educating himself again since he had lived in the States for several years. In the black communities, ancestors are considered the guardians of prosperity, well-being and good fortune. As a result, the presentation of gifts and provision of food concurring with the ritual slaughtering of livestock, are central to all rites of passage, traditional ceremonies and notable events. This, in addition to the brewing of traditional cereal beer and the slaughtering of livestock are essential in securing the participation and goodwill of the ancestors (Culture of South Africa – history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family, 2006).

A female South African participant says that she would get upset when her partner talked about certain cultural events in her area. She expressed that she felt that only she would understand the people from that culture because her partner was not from there. Because he was from overseas, she found that he was not allowed to make comments about or judge ‘her’ people here in South Africa.
She stated the following:

“He would say things about people in the Northern Areas and then I would get upset because I would think you don’t really understand why people are doing that.”

Within different cultures, there are different customs, also for children. Children from an interracial marriage could experience and celebrate the customs of both cultures.

One male South African participant explains that in his culture people use blessings to mark and celebrate growth and development among children. He stated the following:

“When there are rights of development and growth among children, so that when they reach a certain age they have to be if you will, blessed or certain rights have to be acknowledged and that kind of thing. So I don’t think that it happens in her culture.”

The same participant mentions that there are also cultural differences regarding the birth of a child. He expresses about his culture:

“If you are born there are certain customs that are done and slaughtering takes place and if you reach a certain age then certain rituals are carried out.”

In Western cultures, child birth is also celebrated, but usually by family and friends visiting and bringing gifts for the baby, instead of rituals and slaughtering.

One male South African participant gave an example of a cultural difference also regarding birth. He explains as follows:

“What the European does, ... friends get send a card with the newborn, a picture of the newborn baby and the thank you, the name and the weight and the date of birth and all of that. And at the bottom you’ll get a write-up saying ‘P.S. mom is sleeping from three till five in the afternoon’. Which means you can’t go around, from three till five, cause mom and baby
are sleeping. ... My sister, she’s got a baby now for about a year and a half ago, you just walk around, if he’s sleeping that’s fine, if he’s awake that’s better. But you just pop around.”

Another male South African participant explains the differences in celebrations in relation to children’s ages. He mentions that in his partner’s culture, there is a big celebration when you turn 16, and if you are from an affluent family, you will get a car. Also at 18 or at 21 years there are big celebrations in the States. He explains the difference compared to his culture:

“... and then when you turn 21, you are also some other activities and functions take place then so those would I think were the distinct differences.”

Two participants clearly expressed that they have religion differences between them as a couple. One male South African participant explained that he believes in God and his partner does not, because of the role it played in their upbringing. He expressed the following:

“You’re brought up with ... God. ... And you have to go to Sunday school ... from when you’re born to say eighteen, nineteen years old, you don’t have a choice but having to go. ... She grew up without religion, she recognizes God. ... But with me, I believe in it. I at the beginning, I was also for me going to church on a Sunday, supported. ... But for her it was like ‘I don’t want to go now’.”

This participant mentioned this as the biggest cultural difference between them as partners. He continued to explain as follows:

“I grew up with God, and she grew up having to make her own choice.”

He proceeded giving an example of the effect that the difference in religion has on their relationship:

“I believe, I pray before I eat. She doesn’t really pray before she eats, she just eats.”
In South Africa, almost all individuals believe in God. They are brought up with religion, through praying and attending Sunday school and end up believing. In Western cultures, religion often plays a less important role in people’s lives and not all individuals believe in a God.

His non-South African partner mentions another effect religion has on their relationship. She states that:

“Religion is still, still a difficult thing, because in, in his family we can’t speak open about it. I’m not religious and they’re very religious. But I will never be able to say that open to them.”

She further explains: “In Holland I never went to communion or what is that other thing called when you’re older.” The participant expressed that she had never attended a baptism or communion in Holland because she had not been brought up religious, whereas she attended several religious celebrations here in South Africa.

Qian (1997) reports that it is likely for individuals that cross one social boundary (ethnicity or race) to also be willing to cross other boundaries such as age or religion.

Within couples who do not share the same religion, religion could serve as a divisive force and religious disharmony could have a negative effect on a relationship. So with interracial couples that come from different countries and continents, conflicts are more likely to arise when religions are different (Knox & Schacht, 2010).

One male South African participant mentioned that one of the biggest cultural differences between him and his partner involves the ancestors. He explains that in his culture, they: “... give thanks to our ancestors”, whereas in his partner’s culture they do not give thanks to their ancestors, but instead they pray to God.

Traditional ceremonies present a unique opportunity through which black South African cultural groups give thanks to their ancestors. The most important traditional ceremonies include rites of passage (e.g. births, initiation, marriage, and funerals) (Culture of South Africa – history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family, 2006). The text also makes reference to a similar practice where native black African religion
focuses on honouring and respecting the ancestors and getting guidance from them. Byrnes (1996) points out the similarity of this practice in the Zulu and Xhosa culture where religion is used as a medium to seek the guidance and intercession of the male ancestral spirits, by e.g., pouring out of beer or offerings of meat.

3.2.1.5. Subtheme 5: Different approach to lifestyle

Every culture is unique in its own characteristics, including different approaches to lifestyle. These different lifestyles become more apparent when living with someone from a different culture. Participants mentioned several different approaches to lifestyle between them as a couple. Three participants mentioned that they had different approaches to social interaction between them and their partners.

One male South African participant mentioned a difference in social interaction, regarding notifying people before visiting them. He stated:

“For instance in our culture, being coloured, growing up in a coloured area, when you’re in your area, you’ll pop around by your parents’ place. Or you’ll pop around by a cousin or you don’t need to notify them or you can call them right around the corner. ... As where with my partner’s culture, the European culture, you need to set the time and date.”

He was referring to Holland, where it is considered rude not to phone people before coming over, since they could have other plans. In South Africa this is not an issue and people tend to be more informal when it comes to interactions.

One female South African participant mentioned a similar statement about her also European partner:

“... with the German way of doing things. It might be the way you relate or the way you... they have a particular code of conduct that you don’t do certain things. Like for example, you don’t arrive at somebody’s house without having phoned and having... where it is very informal in the Northern Areas where you just rock up at someone’s house.”
A male South African participant mentioned another difference, which is the concept of invitations in both cultures. Compared with South Africans, Europeans tend to be more formal when it comes to invitations. He gave the following example:

“For instance if it’s somebody, friend’s birthday, a close friend, it should go, it should go without saying that you’re invited. But the Europeans wouldn’t go unless they did receive a something black and white basically.”

A female non-South African participant also mentioned a difference of social interaction between the two cultures of her and her partner. She described the following example:

“He was always hanging out a lot with his friends. And me, I’m the person like; I think that if you are a couple you have to spend time together. And it’s just you two and he was more like, I think it’s also maybe how it was here in South African culture that girls and guys are very separated in what they do. They always do it separately, even if you are in a bar or whatever, it is always the guys sitting together and the girls sitting together so I didn’t like it because I would want us to be mixed and spend time together.”

This is again a difference between the individualistic and collectivistic cultures. People within an individualistic culture, like this participant, are most comfortable with a psychological or emotional distance between themselves and other group members. When greeting close friends, individualists will kiss them on the cheek and are less likely to give them a big hug. Brislin (2000) explained that when it comes to extended family, individualists could have a good relationship with some aunts, uncles or cousins, but it mostly comes down to occasional family meetings and Christmas cards. According to Brislin (2000) individuals reported they would feel stifled if they were steadily surrounded by others. He further points out that people who live within a collectivist culture usually keep a much closer relationship between them and other people within this culture, like extended family. Collectivists are comfortable with the constant psychological presence of members of their group.
The same non-South African participant further stated that she and her partner had different expectations of spending the festive season:

“... here December was like ... for him it was still the same festive season so he would go out every night and party and not be there and you know and I wanted to actually spend some quality time and stay at home.”

Where she comes from, Germany, the long school holiday or summer break is in June and July instead of December. She did not know that December in South Africa is like summer break for South Africans. December in Europe is winter and is more celebrated amongst family members, usually at home. A lot of people stay indoors because of the cold and have family and Christmas dinners together. She had different expectations of the December month from those of her partner.

One male South African participant mentioned that there is a difference in addressing elders when looking at his culture and his partner’s. He explained the following:

“in my culture you don’t call an elder by the first name. You always maybe have to say ‘Tata’ or ‘Mama’ or something like that. Whereas in her culture it is just different. You can just say... call somebody by their first name even though they are an elder. There is nothing wrong. ... I really felt uncomfortable calling her mother by her first name even though some of our friends there, they were doing that.”

Ember, Ember and Pasternak (1997) describe that within a lot of collectivistic societies people use the terms father and mother for their father’s and mother’s brothers and sisters. Also their children are not cousins but brothers and sisters. They state that these usages indicate the presence of kin groups larger than the nuclear family. A ‘father’ could simply be a male in the father’s descent group and generation and a ‘mother’ could be any woman of mother’s descent group and generation. Here in South Africa, it is common within the black South African culture to refer to elders as ‘Mama’ or ‘Tata’. It is seen as a form of respect when elders are called that. For example white Western people will use the term ‘sir’/‘madam’ or
‘mister’/‘miss’ to show respect to elders and it is considered weird to call people other than your own parents ‘mom’ or ‘dad’.

Within the black African culture there is a hierarchy regarding social categories like age, gender, kinship, status, male adulthood and political position and this is strongly manifested in their etiquette. In the rural areas this hierarchy is upheld in formal and elaborate forms of respect, e.g., specific social greetings are the norm. Even with the more westernised Africans, who have a more informal language and gesture of etiquette, the categories of social status are clearly marked verbally (e.g., the parents of a household should be addressed as ‘mama’ or ‘tata’ which is Xhosa for ‘mother’ and ‘father’); and non verbally (e.g., youngsters are expected to vacate their chair to make way for an adult) (Culture of South Africa – history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family, 2006).

One female South African participant mentioned that within her partner’s family the importance of societal image varies compared with her family. She states the following about her partner’s family:

“And just the way his family are very, which he doesn’t really do as much, they are very into appearances. ... I mean when I have met the aunties and everybody. It’s first you introduce yourself as who you are and then what do you do.” She proceeds explaining: “They all have these like very esteemed professions and that is very important. So there are a lot of comparisons that happen with what the children are doing and how much money they are earning and what your pedigree is. And that, appearances are very important so a lot of things that are done are with that in mind. So they make sure that they, even if they don’t really want to, that they do all the things that are expected all the time to keep up the appearance.”

She finds that in her partner’s non-South African family, appearances and how people perceive them are always being considered. She explains that it could be a cultural difference between the two families and their backgrounds.
She mentions the following about her family:

“Where my family’s not... there is an element of that but not as prominent as... ... So we don’t have these like esteemed professions in their eyes but for my family that is not really much of an issue.”

The same South African participant mentioned a cultural difference between the grieving styles of both her and her partner’s family. She mentioned that both families lost a relative around the same time, so it was easier to observe this cultural difference. She mentioned that his family has a more direct grieving style whereas her family has a less direct style of grieving. She explains as follows:

“His family when, the way that they’ve grieved and the way that he’s grieved. There is more of like a shutting down and numbing. There is like no talking, there’s no... It’s like people just completely shut down. Whereas, my family have very much tried to, there is lots of small talk and try to pretend and asking about things that are not... And not really actually dealing with the issue that is actually at hand whereas his family seems to cut straight through to the... and deal with the issue whereas with mine, we tend to dance around it a little bit more because it’s uncomfortable.”

Two participants expressed as a cultural difference that they both had different views on affection in public. One male South African participant mentioned that they both feel different about showing affection in public. His culture is more traditional when it comes to showing respect to elders, whereas in her culture, children at a certain age are also seen and treated as adults. He explains:

“Also I think things like maybe kissing in public, for me in my culture that is like kind of rude or not appropriate, you know. Whereas in her culture you can just do that and there is nothing wrong. And also for example, maybe even kissing in front of the parents it is like something normal for her cultural. Whereas for my culture, it is disrespectful.”
His non-South African partner also mentioned this difference:

“Also another thing you know is that he doesn’t like to show affection in public, like kissing or anything. In Germany that’s not a problem you know, but I can live with that. Those are really just small things you know.”

Vaquera and Kao (2005) found that interracial couples are less likely to exhibit public and private displays of affection than intra-racial couples, but are not different from intra-racial couples in intimate displays of affection. This suggests that interracial couples are less comfortable in displaying their feelings in public.

The culture people belong to provides guidance for choices about everyday behaviours. For example: what, where and when to eat, what activities are done, how to talk to elders or people with a higher status, etc. (Brislin, 2000). Another factor that individuals learn within their culture (as mentioned by the participants) is if it is appropriate or not to show affection in public. South Africans are by custom polite and cautious in their communication, but every different culture group has its own specific meaning of what is appropriate and respectful (Culture of South Africa – history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family, 2006).

Within some interracial couples, a big difference mentioned was the different food and eating rituals. As one female non-South African participant expressed:

“The biggest cultural differences would be the food around the celebrations and actually the celebrations themselves and how they take place.”

A male South African participant mentions as a difference that in Europe people eat more health consciously.
He explains:

“Europeans are very health, health, eh what’s the word, health conscious. They really watch what they eat: salads and vegetables. Ehm meat, they’re not really into meat, not like South Africans, or Africans basically, with the whole braai and the salad is just “some decoration for the table.”

A female non-South African participant agrees and mentions:

“And maybe then we also like different foods. Like he loves meat and just eats meat and bread and I really like salad and he always said ‘goat food’. He doesn’t eat goat food.”

She mentions another difference when it comes to eating dinner. She made the following observation:

“And ja, another thing like eating. For me, I am used to always eating at the table together with the family, you know. And I am starting when everybody is already at the table and having a conversation but with him, even his family, they are always just eating in front of the TV or on the couch and ja, it sometimes does bother me.”

Her South African partner also mentions this difference and states the following:

“Like also meeting her family and seeing that even when you have dinner you have to sit at the table and enjoy dinner. Whereas our culture you can just have dinner casually, like informally, like just sitting on the couch as family.”

It is evident from the narratives by the participants that the meaning of food; its preparation and method of serving can be a source of conflict in interracial relationships; particularly because of the different cultural connotation attached to it (Interracial marriages, [s.a.]).
One South African participant further adds another difference when it comes to drinking alcohol when having dinner. Here in South Africa it is considered rude and disrespectful when you drink alcohol in front of elders, whereas in Europe it is normal to have a beer or a glass of wine with your parents, since you are treated equally as an adult. The participant explains:

“And also things like while you are having a dinner you can... if you drink alcohol then you can have alcohol or wine with the parents and the whole family sitting at the table. Or if you are in a restaurant or whatever. Whereas in my culture, those are things you cannot...”

Three participants mentioned the different perception of time as a cultural difference between them and their partner. When you look at the Western and South African cultures, the South African culture is known for its laid back attitude when it comes to time, whereas most Western cultures are very time-orientated and punctual. They expressed their frustration around this difference in the following manner:

“Everything, time, time, cause they are all time orientated, it’s for me, it’s a bit too much.”

“It’s always time, time, time. ... She was stressing now, cause we were fifteen minutes late and she called saying ‘sorry, sorry, sorry’. And you saw me, like fifteen minutes is like ja, should I apologize for that?”

This participant gave another example of how time plays a role in their relationship:

“... the adjustment as well of ‘now now’, could mean in half an hour or could mean in five minutes. If I say ‘skat, I’m going to do it now now’, she wants to know, you know South African time. ‘Now now’ can be I’m going to do it now or in half an hour, then she’d want to know if it’s going to be five minutes or ten minutes or half an hour. ... I was, I was never time-orientated, I’d always just make it, just make it on time. But for myself, I’m very time-orientated now as well, also to an extend of course.”
A male non-South African participant also mentioned the differences in time between the two cultures of him and his partner by saying that:

“... I grew up in Germany with an education system where you are taught... it is very disciplined in terms of time and interaction between things like today... ... For example I would like to get it done now sometimes and people will think maybe I’ll do it tomorrow or whatever. So there is not that urgency behind it sometimes.”

Yet another male South African participant mentioned time as a difference between the two cultures. He explained the following:

“We have something called ‘African time’. We will have plans to go to an event and she will be like ‘we must not be late, we must be there at least ten minutes earlier’. ... And me, I will be like ‘no, we must be there thirty minutes later’. Because I know we are going to get there and you know the event has not started yet.”

He further expressed:

“She likes planning a lot and when something doesn’t go her way then she like freaks out which is... me I am not a planning person. I like to do things like go with the flow.”

His non-South African partner also mentioned time as a difference between them and expressed the following:

“I am German and maybe the most punctual persons in the world and it just makes me nervous if we have to be somewhere and he’s just not getting ready in time...”
She further explained that the concept of African time has influenced her in the following way:

“But I must say I think, with me, I think I have already been getting less punctual because it has coloured on me. It has affected me... I am becoming a lot more unpunctual myself.”

She proceeded to explain the following:

“Me, I really like to plan and then [my partner] is a very spontaneous person but sometimes I also see the positive sides of that you know because sometimes the spontaneous evenings end up those that are the best and everything you plan can still not work out the way you planned it, you get disappointed and those things.”

Three participants mentioned different family roles when looking at the two different cultures. One female non-South African participant mentioned the difference in household and gender roles. She gives the following example:

“When you for instance go to a braai or whatever, that all the women are doing all the work in the kitchen and the husbands are sitting, drinking outside. Ah ah, I don’t do that. It doesn’t work like that with me. We, I do things fair.”

She continues giving another example. She mentions here not only the differences, but also the benefits of different cultural gender roles:

“My husband for instance would want to, if we drive together somewhere, I, I mustn’t drive. Because you know, he feels that that’s not right and men should do that while I think ‘well ja, fine, if you want to drive, you drive. I don’t care. ... But there’s also good things, because I never have to carry something. While in Holland I don’t think, or I don’t have the experience that guys carry something for you, never.”
Another male non-South African participant mentions that he and his partner try to have equal roles in the household. He states:

“We try to share in terms of less responsibilities: children and household stuff.”

He further explains that they have to monitor their roles not to fall back into the traditional roles, by stating the following:

“For us, we try to balance it in a way that we help each other as much as we can, also in front of our children, that they know it as well. But often the roles in society often... you often, you fall back into that traditional role. I think we try to make an effort not to do that.”

A female South African participant explains that her partner’s parents’ roles are quite traditional gender roles when it comes to household tasks. She states:

“But more in the traditional sense where his mother did everything. She had to cook all the food, clean the house, had to wash all the dishes, had to look after the kids. And she served his food to him. He sits down and she brings it and she clears it away.”

She further expressed that for him seeing the negatives of the traditional roles of his parents, made him want to change these roles in his own marriage. She explained:

“He could see how exhausted it made her and how much it hurt her that his dad didn’t make an effort to help out. ... He saw that in his parents’ relationship and didn’t want to be like that. So he is incredibly helpful. He cooks and he washes the dishes. He helps me clean the house. And I suppose from what he saw, it is very much a shared... I am not expected to do everything. So I don’t think there is necessarily that strict... those very clearly defined roles in his mind.
Breger and Hill (1998) state that two individuals could have different opinions and expectations relating to gender roles; their responsibility towards and degree of involvement with extended family. This could be perceived as enriching but if not reciprocated, can result in confusion. Because when two individuals from different cultures unite in marriage, the spouses and their extended families could be disillusioned by such misplaced expectations. In the case of the participants mentioned above, most participants have shared roles in the household. One participant mentioned the benefits of having different cultural gender roles.

Differences in growing up with a different form of luxury are mentioned by two female non-South African participants. As already mentioned in paragraph 3.2.1.4., one participant described growing up with having toys whereas her partner was brought up with probably no toys. This topic comes up between them during holidays and celebrations where they discuss the amount of toys their children should receive.

A second female non-South African participant also mentions a difference in luxury that she is used to in her culture. She explains:

"Now I am staying with his family in his family's house. They don't have hot water and then he would have to heat up the water to take a bath and then it was too cold for me and then I was telling him to boil me some more water. And then I feel like a stupid, spoilt girl from Germany but it is like, to me, it is really like not have a hot shower, it's really something. ... And for him it is not a problem. He is used to that. So those things, they are also differences in the upbringing and what kind of luxury you are maybe used to."

This difference in luxury could require a fair amount of adjustment from the participant. Where she comes from, hot water is seen as normal. She only realised this is a luxury when she did not have access to it and it made her appreciate the luxury in her culture even more. Brislin (2000) also mentions that when people are not challenged by cultural differences, they find it normal and take it for granted. It kind of becomes like the air they breathe and they will only think about it, when it is no longer there.

The extent of this theme and the type of data generated provide an indication of the degree of differences that couples in interracial relationships may encounter. The next theme follows up
on this first theme, as it looks at the negative factors that influence the couples in coping with these cultural differences.

3.2.2. THEME 2: NEGATIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COUPLE’S COPING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The participants were asked to reflect on the cultural differences that have been evident in their relationship. These cultural difference factors were mentioned in theme 1 and its five subthemes. When discussing the cultural difference factors, negative factors that influenced the couple in coping with cultural differences were described by the participants. Four subthemes emerged from this theme. The first subtheme revolved around negative perceptions of society that had a negative influence on the couple’s coping with cultural differences.

3.2.2.1. Subtheme 1: Negative perceptions of society

Mojapelo-Batka (2008) states that the aftermath of apartheid laws is still visible in the South African society. You can still see how ingrained the social reactions of the society are towards interracial couples, caused by the discriminatory laws of apartheid. Luckily, this social discrimination is subtle, but it is still common and does a lot of damage. Subtle racism could include social slights and ambiguous remarks that are hard to pin down to racism. The participants were in agreement that society often still has negative perceptions of interracial relationships. This could have influenced the couple’s coping with cultural differences.

One male South African participant admitted that the negative reactions they were receiving from society invited much introspection on their part as a couple, especially at the onset of their relationship. Hence they often found themselves asking:

“‘do we have the stamina to deal with this hostility’ and all those things.”

Partners within an interracial marriage experience acts of discrimination or prejudice every day from strangers within their society. Jayson (2011) found that according to the 2011 Census data from the Current Population Survey an estimated 4.5 million married couples in
the USA are interracial. Dainton (1999, as cited by Leslie & Letiecq, 2004) who studied black-white couples reported that negative public reactions are experienced by 64% of black-white interracial couples. These statistics were from an American population, which is where the relationship of the couple cited above also started out.

This participant further mentioned:

“... as soon as I would walk in with my wife then you suddenly, you are this sort of ehm item that people would draws attention because it’s something that is different. ... I don’t know what it is they attach, whether positive, negative, you get a range ehm of responses. Some they’re not verbal but they are communicated by body languages and things of that sort. ... It’s in society that you, you run into those issues and some of those as expected being in South Africa and knowing our history eh being there. ... cause you think people have moved on quite a lot, but you find that they’re not.”

Calitz and Nkosi (2010) confirm this participant’s experience by saying that the moment interracial couples go out in public, people will stare and make denigrating comments which raises the couple’s awareness that they are different. This participant is referring to the subtle racism, mentioned on the previous page, which could include social slights and ambiguous remarks that are hard to pin down to racism. It is not strange for this participant to think people have moved on, since interracial contact and cooperation have slowly become more common and frequent since the repeal of the racial laws during the apartheid-era beginning in the late 1980s and the democratic political regulation that came forth from that in the early 1990s (Amoateng et al., 2004). Since the repeal, interracial relationships have become more ‘widespread’ and accepted in South Africa (Calitz & Nkosi, 2010).

Two male South African participants pointed out that people often presume that there must be an underlying pathology regarding interracial relationships:

“is she perhaps ehm mentally retarded in the sense that maybe that’s why she’s dating a black or maybe it’s not all there or things of that sort.”
“Thinking it’s either, his father’s got a , eh is a millionaire or he married her for her money. ... ‘What is this coloured boy, this black African guy, what does he got or what does he do for this white woman from Holland to be with him, there should be more than just love’.”

According to these two participants, because of the ingrained stereotypes within people, one (black or white) automatically presumes that there must be an underlying pathology when it comes to interracial relationships. Their personal experiences resonate with the view held by Reddy (1994) who remarks that according to most open-minded outsiders, interracial relationships make a political statement that is degenerating, and to traditional, inflexible outsiders, interracial relationships are seen as an alarming, sick outcome of integration.

A male South African participant was comparing his partner’s country (Holland) with South Africa regarding racism and acceptance of interracial relationships. He found his partner’s country more accepting of interracial relationships and had no experience of racism there. He claimed that one of the big disadvantages of being in an interracial relationship in South Africa is the way people look at you when you and your partner are together in public.

A female non-South African participant also relayed her experience of this public scrutiny in the following way:

“Obviously, you’d also get a lot of looks sometimes, but you get used to it. It’s also not very nice and I hope that in the future it’s going to change and that it’s going to get more normal.”

Her sentiments about the negative experiences and how to respond to them was echoed by another female South African participant who articulated her view as follows:

“I think it still exists in society that people have this specific... will still be negative towards you and you have to learn to deal with that.”

This participant’s reaction is concurred by Calitz and Nkosi (2010) who highlight that interracial couples quickly learn to ignore the public’s reactions by developing a thick skin. However, they acknowledge that it is more difficult when the negative reactions originate from friends and family.
One female non-South African participant has already developed a thick skin against negative public reactions. She states:

“*What other people say and how they look... ja, well, that doesn’t affect us.*”

In South Africa, interracial couples could still experience **non-acceptance by others**. One female non-South African participant explained her experience after apartheid. She relayed her experience as follows:

“... *at the beginning everyone was like ‘Oh yes, we all love each other, it’s wonderful’, it was new. And now it’s just kind of like ‘pff’, you know, some of those differences are staring them in the face and makes them uncomfortable. ... ... if someone is rude to you, because they’re not really happy with what you look like, you’d just sort of like ‘It’s your problem’. Eh, but it is irritating when you’re not waited on.’*”

Her South African partner mentioned that their relationship started in the US. He stated the following:

“... *so in a situation like in the US, it’s not too uncommon. Although it is not necessarily also a practice that is very ehm widely accepted.*”

Knox and Schacht (2010) presented a national survey that showed that 83 percent (more than 8 in 10 American adults) agree that ‘it is all right for blacks and whites to date’, up from 48 percent in 1987. Among younger people (those born after 1977), 94 percent say it is all right for black and white people to date. These findings show that acceptance towards interracial relationships has generally increased. There seems to be with each generation a little more acceptance.

The same participant further states:

“*It’s that you see changes with perhaps people who have been, ehm, or who have a higher social, ehm, socio-economic standing, that you started to get some eh sense of eh displeasure I suppose you could say.*”
Goodwin and Cramer (2002) point out that the pairing of a white female and a black male is regarded as ‘less appropriate’ than that of a black female and a white male. Within an interracial relationship between a white female and a black male, the black male is viewed as gaining a higher social status from the relationship. Within an interracial relationship between a white male and a black female, no change in social status is perceived to take place and it is therefore more accepted. This could be a reason for individuals who have a higher socio-economic or social status to not be accepting of an interracial relationship between a white female and a black male, as in the case of this participant.

This male South African participant continues to mention another example of feeling unaccepted as a couple by society. He states the following:

“... even when you are sitting, walking in the park or something like that, you continuously feel that you are being watched in that kind of sense.”

Another male South African participant agrees and expressed as follows:

“... it’s always tough you know and not just always in the beginning but it still is... Like people are always giving more attention when they see a black and white couple. ... And then there are those kinds of comments you know, whereas you feel like they are really negative but people ... because they’re not, you know, well informed.”

Monk, Winslade and Sinclair (2008) explain that the foundation of racism lies in dividing people into certain groups based on race or skin colour, but being aware of these divisions is learnt via enculturation rather than being an inherent quality. When for generations within a society the same stereotypes exist about a specific group, they become part of the culture. They meet the criteria of culturally influenced behaviour: they are widely shared and told from parents, grandparents and other elders to children and they become memories within a childhood (Brislin, 2000). When this participant mentioned that individuals who make comments are not well informed, he was referring to the fact that these people could have learned within their culture to respond negatively to and to have stereotypes about interracial
relationships. These people then do not know any better than that these relationships are for example inappropriate.

Knox and Schacht (2010) claim that much of the stress that interracial couples experience is related to the intolerance of society regarding their relationship, that has manifested itself in attitudes of friends and family. Besides experiencing negative reactions from the public, some participants also experienced non-acceptance by parents.

One female non-South African participant expressed that:

“I saw it as interference, and ehm the way people would think they must make a comment on your relationship or must interfere and tell you how to do things. ... I would feel that his family is interfering, I would get cross about it, but not towards them, but towards him. And I would say to him ‘say something about it’, ‘do something about it’, while he was obviously in between.”

According to Landis and Landis (1977), the partner who marries into the different culture, like this female participant, has to be willing to do most of the adjusting. They explain that this person cannot count on bringing swift changes in the ways of the world into which he or she will move.

Breger and Hill (1998) agree and point out that the incoming bride can be rendered powerless, especially when she enters a family in-law that is very close. Arnold (2008) highlights that you don’t only marry your spouse, you also marry his or her culture. Within an interracial marriage it is both a challenge and an opportunity.

According to this participant it was a challenge. She states:

“I thought of times that I want to go back and that I thought ‘I’m not going to your family anymore, I’m not going to visit them anymore, because it’s not working’. ... His family also found out that I’m..., I don’t really appreciate that what they were doing”.
One female South African participant expressed that she got the biggest opposition from her father. This was during the apartheid era. She explained:

“The first experience we had was opposition from my father because he, you know... the generation he’s coming from. ... For him it was almost like a treacherous to become involved with like a white man. ... especially if they find couples together. They would print their names and they would say that so and so were found and they breached the Immorality Act. That was my father’s worst nightmare that was that I would be one of those people. ... But my father was the one that was very concerned about races.”

Dunleavy (2004) explains that opposition within the black community comes from fear of negative reactions (physical or verbal) from the white population and perceived betrayal of the black identity and race. Opposition from the coloured community could hold the same reasons. The participant’s father feared negative reactions from white individuals that were against interracial relationships during apartheid. He feared that she would be arrested and publicly humiliated. Brislin (2000) confirms that some prejudices are held by people because they could get rewarded by their society or to avoid punishment. The latter was the case with this participant’s father.

Other participants also mentioned receiving opposition from either their own family or their in-laws:

“But from her father’s side obviously, you know, the traditions were conservative. Thinking... it took a while you know."

“My mother and father’s generation they are a little conservative, a different generation.”

“My family initially, was very against the relationship... My parents were very clear on you can be friends, but nothing more. ... But it always kind of felt that my parents were breathing down my neck and I had to like be careful and watch every move.”
The last participant’s family was not accepting of her relationship in the beginning, whereas her partner’s family had no problem. According to Calitz and Nkosi (2010) different race groups tend to have different reactions towards interracial relationships. Mojapelo-Batka (2008) points out that generally black family members are quicker to accept an interracial relationship than white family members. Porterfield (1978) confirms this by saying that the family of the black husband tended to be more receptive of the marriage between the interracial couple than the family and friends of the white wife.

Dunleavy (2004) explains that opposition towards interracial marriages from the white community often comes from individuals who believe in hierarchy of races (e.g. white supremacists). These individuals view interracial marriages as a disgrace to white families, seeing it as a betrayal of protestant work ethic values and racial purity.

When persons look at interracial relationships, they are forced to check and confront their own stereotypes. With family members it takes longer to deal with their own internalised stereotypes about the interracial couple. Mojapelo-Batka (2008) explains that interracial couples are forced to completely break down their own stereotypes and their parents have to go through a painful process of loss – dealing with their beliefs and hopefully finding reconciliation. This was also the case with this female South African participant, whose parents accepted their relationship only after a few years.

Usually when an interracial couple decides to take their relationship a step further, when they decide to get married or are having children, a lot of relatives come around, realise that it is serious and start accepting the relationship.

Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) explain that a lot of interethnic couples have to deal with the disapproval of family members and peers and that this lack of social support could have a negative influence on the relationship. This may result in reduced levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction.

Two female participants mentioned non-acceptance towards their relationship by siblings:

“My sister was young then so when she came visit me, she hated him, but she didn’t like anybody I dated, so.”
“My brother-in-law would never kiss me on the lips or whatever like we do in South Africa. He is very distant. I can’t understand that he is very distant to our children. ... his brother’s girlfriend. You know she finds me exotic sometimes. Like if I have my hair natural and I haven’t blow-dried it. Then she will always comment. And she is always making comments so I find her irritating.”

Some participants mentioned that non-acceptance occurs in certain towns and areas:

“There were few sort of negative reactions. Ehm my husband is from a small town in Gauteng ... So they [the negative reactions] are a little bit more there.”

“What I see if I’m in his area, he’s from Schauderville, there you get, there you get lots of comments and whatever that they shout at you and ‘whitey’ and all that.”

“... unless we go to this small town in the Mid-West [in the US] where there are fewer black people. You know ‘why are the people looking at us?’”

Golebiowska (2007) explains that residential context (regional or local level) can shape racial attitudes and the outline of people’s interpersonal environments can influence their racial attitudes as well. These three participants experienced more negative reactions from the society when they were in smaller towns or certain areas that are still categorised by racial segregation. However, one non-South African partner expressed that she noticed more comments in the big city. She mentioned the following:

“I would visit in New York. I saw a lot of people staring. I noticed more comments coming our way.”

One female non-South African participant explained that sometimes she also noticed non-acceptance by friends regarding different races and cultures.
She stated the following:

“I mean I know it with friends I have. And some of the things that come out of their mouths sometimes, I just go ‘You’ve got to be kidding me!’ You know that’s like ‘Okay, let’s back up here, cause I don’t think you really meant it like that’. But it’s just the way they were brought up in their perceptions.”

Golebiowska (2007:268) points out that: “Significant, positive changes have taken place in Whites’ racial attitudes since the 1960s, yet resistance to change in the racial status quo continues”. As this participant mentioned above, it is more difficult if people were brought up with negative attitudes towards other racial groups, like her friends who still make use of stereotyping.

It was mentioned by research participants that non-acceptance by older people is more common than non-acceptance among younger people:

“Oh, I think maybe younger people might have different experiences, older people will definitely probably have a harder time.”

“... say from sixty, sixty and up, especially the white people, they still look at us when we’re walking in Greenacres.”

Golebiowska (2007) found that young whites tend to have more favourable racial attitudes than older whites and hence proved to be more likely to accept a black person as an in-law. The older generation tends to hold on to certain stereotypes, especially in South Africa with the history of apartheid. However, with the younger generation there is a lot more tolerance and a lot more interracial interactions (e.g., at schools).

Two participants mentioned that they had experienced non-acceptance at social events. One female non-South African participant explained about when they were still living in the US:

“... we went to his sister’s graduation at a historically black university and the women didn’t want to seat us because I was white.”
Her South African partner mentioned an experience in South Africa and expressed that the same also occurred when they were staying in the US. He states the following:

“Or instances where people would just not want to eh have you around them under social circumstances or things like that. But like I said, all this happens and happened when we were in the US as well.”

Four participants pointed out that they had experienced non-acceptance at stores. The first two participants mention the difference in treatment when they are together compared with when they are by themselves:

“I know when we’re here, if I walk into a store by myself, I get treated differently than if we walk into a store together.”

“... depending who you are dealing with, sometimes you might even get more friendlier service than I would have if I was just by myself. ... if I’m just by myself, then I get the rough sort of service, whereas when we are together then suddenly other, it appears that other people seem they want to be on the good foot. ... when people realise that my wife is white.”

The following two participants mentioned the stares they receive when they walk with their partner:

“They always, always like, ‘Jup, saw them’, you know they’ll walk past and you see them in the corner of your eye having a look back at the two of us holding hands.”

“... every once in a while I will notice it, but I’m not looking for it.”

Killian (2001) found in his study that black partners tended to be more aware of and sensitive to negative public reactions than their white partners. He explained that white partners may not ‘look for’ or notice negative reactions in public because of their sense of security and
privilege that comes with being white, as with the last participant. White spouses also may not be aware of this because race has often been reduced to being a ‘black issue’ and has not been seen as a relation of power between black and white people.

One female non-South African participant mentioned that among future employees she also experienced non-acceptance. She pointed out that it is very difficult for them as a mixed couple, to get a black domestic working for them. She explained the following:

“... but getting ehm Xhosa women to work for you as domestics, because you’re a black family. It’s really difficult, they do not want to work for them. I now that sounds very strange, I know I was shocked. ... I’ve had two people leave who were uncomfortable with the situation.”

Four participants cited examples of different forms of stereotyping by people in society. A female non-South African participant explained:

“... certainly whites weren’t allowed to know much about black culture. And so they have a lot of stereotypes based on gardeners and maids and whatnot. Ant that is not true for cross the board...”.

This example is evident of the description offered by Smith et al. (2006), i.e., that stereotypes involve prejudiced and negative views of others. Brislin (2000) points out that in some cultures stereotypes could be considered part of the culture into which children are being socialized. This happens when these stereotypes are so negative and widespread that it becomes an ingrained part of the socialisation and is passed on from generation to generation.

A male South African participant explained that at first people will create a wall or barrier which makes him feel that he has to prove himself that he is not a ‘stereotypical black person’. He says that after he proves himself, they are more accepting. But initially he explains, people think:

“.. let me just not bring this person in just in case they are what I perceive to be. ... there are certain subtleties that exist even to this day whether looking at Europe or whether looking at
North America or even ehm Australia. In terms of how, if you are a person of colour, you’re still regarded to some degree as somebody who is not really intelligent and therefore you’re not necessarily fitting in a valley in the society. So although you may find that there are couples that are interracial globally, ehm it is still if you are black, you are still scary I feel, this stigma that you are not an equal citizen to them.”

There are people who believe that all individuals that belong to a certain out-group are inferior in several ways and cannot fully benefit from what society has to offer (e.g. education, good jobs, participation in community affairs, etc.) (Brislin, 2000). Racism involves a belief that when some individuals are born in a certain out-group, all the members are inferior when it comes to intelligence, morals and an ability to interact within a decent society (Brislin, 2000). As mentioned by the previous participant, intense racism still exists even though people are not talking that openly about it since interracial relationships have increased (Brislin, 2000).

A male South African participant mentioned the difference between South Africa and his partner’s country when it comes to the segregation of different races and the presence of racism and stereotyping in the two countries. He stated:

“The good experience was being in Holland and I never picked up anything ehm racial about eh, the whole set up there. There is no such thing in Holland of black community, white community, or coloured … they’re all together and the same.”

One female South African participant does not agree with this participant’s view of Europe and mentioned having experienced the stereotyping in her partner’s country. She explained as follows:

“... in Europe they would ask me like weird questions, like ‘are African men well endowed?’ You know they would have all these ideas about people in terms of sexuality and so on and so. That I was a bit angry about... and I will never forget things that they’ve asked me.”
Two participants mentioned that having a white partner is seen as something special and good and that people praise them for it:

“South Africa is an interesting sort of eh country and society in the sense that early on before the actual eh democracy came into being, you had instances where it was particularly if you were a male and you were dating a white female, among black males it was seen as ehm ... sort of like a prize, you know, it was a good thing to have done.”

“Like we always kind of use minibuses because of the time and if you just come to the minibus, people make comments and kind of like praising you, you know like you’re... you’ve got a white girlfriend... you are kind of a king, you know. Those kind of comments and mostly made in Xhosa so like I understand those comments so for me it’s kind of hard to even like respond to that because it feels like there is some kind of discrimination and some people are still kind of backwards you know mentally.”

Goodwin and Cramer (2002) point out that within an interracial relationship consisting of a white female and a black male, the black male is often seen as gaining higher social status whereby the white female here is perceived as the black man’s ‘prize,’ stolen from the ‘more deserving’ white man.

The participant mentioned another negative factor that arises from stereotypes. He stated:

“And negative, umm... also being black and sometimes you are... if you are stopped by a white police then you see how they discriminate as a black person and respect my girlfriend because maybe I would think because she is white.”

He proceeds giving the following example:

“We were kind of arguing on the street and then ... I wanted to go away to just tear my mind off ... and she didn’t want it so she was pulling me so that I don’t go. And then, it happened to come police and then apparently they thought maybe, I don’t know, if I was doing something
wrong to her. Maybe they thought that I was mugging her or what but they came with an attitude to me and I just kept quiet and then she came to my defence and said that I was her boyfriend and then they let me go. And then... later on I ended up going so later on they followed me and almost brutalised me because I don’t know what point they wanted to prove.”

One male South African participant expressed that there sometimes is a lack of empathy about the issues experienced by the non-acceptance of others. He explained the following:

“... certain individuals if they exist in situations where they’d really do not see or have not walked in another person’s foot or shoes so to speak, they have really no clear understanding of how, what are there. So when you come along and say, you know there are these problems, it looks as if you are maybe making things up out of nothing.”

Two participants mentioned that because they are in an interracial relationship they sometimes receive special treatment from family and friends:

“... she’s the one that stood out. And she’s the one that people says to ‘have a seat, have a seat’, trying to make her comfortable. And then she would say eh ‘I don’t need to sit, it’s fine’. She tried to, you know, make a plan on, on, on ehm not making people treat us special. ... The disadvantage, people want to treat us special. Ja, I think they want to treat us special.”

“In the beginning I would still sometimes in the family, not in the closest family but more to the cousins and aunts, I would still be special, because I’m now that white girl from Europe. So I would get a chair whereas, you know things like that. ... I would be really, people would stand up for me and I’d say ‘No, it’s fine, I can stand’.”

Special treatment could come from the fact that white individuals are still sometimes seen as the superior race by other individuals of colour. With these participants, the husband’s family wanted to make his wife extra comfortable because she is from a different culture. They could
also want to make a good impression, representing their culture and trying to defend the stereotypes.

3.2.2.2. Subtheme 2: Impact on children and parenting

The majority of participants mentioned having had or still having concerns about having ‘mixed children’ and the impact it has on them. As two participants explain:

“I think that it will be harder for... or different because when that happens with your own kids... because when you have kids you wear your heart on your sleeve and you don’t want to see anything or anybody say or do anything horrible to your own kids so at this point they question and wonder. ... It’s a negative in the sense that it is something that they are going to have to deal with it [being different].”

“I was very concerned if we have children. How they are going to... the challenges that they might face, you know in having interracial parents. That was a big concern for me personally. That I wasn’t going to have blonde haired, blue eyed children. And that was the difficult thing for me to have to come to terms with but it is actually really not an issue.”

Mojapelo-Batka (2008) says that a big challenge for interracial couples in South Africa is when their children are automatically classified as ‘coloured’ by birth. This last participant expressed that she had to come to terms with having ‘coloured children’.

Knox and Schacht (2010) agree that the biracial identity of the children of mixed-race parents could be a concern and they explain that most interracial parents identify their ‘mixed’ child as having a minority race status. They further note that there it is becoming more common for these parents to identifying their child as multiracial. Landis and Landis (1977) explain that their concerns are justified since children of interracial marriages are occasionally exposed to discrimination by both the races.

McClurg (2004) notes that all children go through a process of evaluating their position within their family dynamics. The person they can identify most with is the person they usually seek acceptance and companionship from. McClurg (2004) further explains that it
could be difficult for ‘mixed’ children to identify with their parents who come from a homogenous race. When they present with questions about their racial identities, their parents often struggle to offer appropriate guidance due to their own lack of experience with such challenges.

Schetky (2001), a clinical professor of psychiatry, mentions that the problems which can be faced by children in multi-racial families should be approached on a developmental level.

Three participants mentioned that they have considered the children’s struggles and gave the matter a lot of thought and yet still worry:

“What’s going to happen to my children? What are people going to think and all of that?”

“... how perhaps one’s children will deal with the issues and things of that sort.”

“I just always thought gosh. I was always so uptight about these boys. What are they going to... they are going to be worried; they are going to be anxious; they are going to not know where they belong; will they fit in? And I wanted them to be accepting of my community and his. I was so anxious about them and then now I see them and I think what was it for?”

Knox and Schacht (2010) bring up a counter-argument by saying that coping with racism or prejudice, as well as developing a healthy self-concept and appreciation for one’s racial heritage, can be learned in a variety of contexts.

Three research participants mentioned having to explain to others that their children are really theirs or getting asked if the children are adopted:

“Now we have children as well, so I get often times asked if they’re my children or if I’ve adopted them.”
“When we first moved here ... I would walk around with myself and my two children who are brown and one lady pulled over quickly and said ‘Who are you?’, you know. She called me an Aryan. This woman of Aryan race is walking around with these brown babies. And I was like ‘These are my kids. I had them’.”

“... so many people pay attention to that [skin colour] and it’s like, oh shucks, I forgot, you know. Even when they see our kids... I mean, I’m holding my kids and they are like ‘Hey, they’re so cute. They look like you but their complexion is different from yours’. ja these are my children.”

Six participants mentioned that they or their children sometimes get racial questions from other children:

“Although we did have one little girl, they [her children] were in playschool, she was about three/three and a half/four, and said ‘Why are you white and your man black?’.”

“... among their peers. There were instances where you get ehm, statements of saying oh, your mother is white and your father is black and that kind of thing.”

“We have to explain all of that to them because they interact. When other kids see them... This is my mommy, this is my daddy. They ask questions when we are not there.”

“But obviously we don’t want to influence how they choose their friends but often it is sort of the friends that yield all these comments, where they would speak about it in terms of different cultures.”

“Our friends ask us quite bluntly and out loud – why do you look this way and we just explain that in very simple terms. But I foresee there will probably be more of those kinds of things that might be said to the kids and I think that is going to be the most challenging.”
“It’s not something that really is a factor but I was scared on their behalf of how they would be treated; the questions they would have to answer.”

McClurg (2004) explains that peers usually play a big role in the identity development of biracial children. Questions regarding skin colour, hair texture, family composition and cultural practices, are asked by curious peers who see and name the visible differences amongst each other. McClurg (2004) further points out sensitivity to one’s ethnicity could be triggered by these reactions from peers, as well as feelings of being unique or different within the context of societal norms.

Five participants mentioned that their children had an **awareness of their own differences from others**. One female non-South African participant expressed the following:

“Cause they’re only, they’re only five and a half, but they know that they’re not coloured in the South African ehm cultural sense. They know they’re not white and because they don’t sp..., well we live here so it’s Xhosa, but they don’t speak isiXhosa, they don’t speak isiZulu, so they’re not really black. ... I mean they’ll say like ‘You’re white and daddy’s brown’ and then we’re like ‘Yep, we are’. And then you know, we deal with it and say ‘Yes that’s how it is, I’m from here and your dad is from there’, dada, blablabla, the whole history. Ehm but we never ever made a fuss over it. So, but they definitely could see it and feel it.”

“There have been instances where they’ve been able to notice that ‘Yes, we’re all of different racial roots’.”

“... they are curious... ‘Why is mommy paler than you?’ I don’t know, I was born here in South Africa and mom was born in America. We have to explain all of that to them.”

“When they were little, the oldest one said to me that ‘No, but I’m white, because my skin is white and you guys are all white’. But that was when he was tiny, tiny. But ever since then they know that they have all this mixed heritage.”
“I think that in a way once they became aware about it that they are from a mixed marriage, how can I say... it was not easy for them to come to terms with it because here in South Africa still people quickly put you in a box.”

Schetky (2001) explains that ethno-racial awareness usually starts somewhere between the age of three and five years.

One female non-South African participant expressed her concern that her children might struggle to fit in. She explained that being in an interracial relationship is a rich experience for her. When she mentioned her children, she stated as follows:

“I think for my kids, it's a little bit harder ehm, because they don’t know where they fit. ... So they’re having a little bit, they have worries every once in a while not knowing where they fit. ... Because they’re not strictly Zulu, not strictly, they’re not Xhosa either, and you know they’re not culturally coloured, they’re not white. And so they’re, they will have to learn to deal with that.”

Children of a mixed marriage are ‘in between two cultures’ and they could experience some problems with their racial identity (Watson, 1977, as cited by Breger & Hill, 1998), if a person’s identifying or not with the racial group that they belong to and the quality or manner of their identification refer to racial identity (Hill & Thomas, 2000).

Maxwell (as quoted by Breger & Hill, 1998) notes that the identities of mixed children are not quickly chosen and stable, they change with the stages of the life-cycle and the socio-political environments they live in. He continues by explaining that mixed children may choose to take some features from both cultures that their parents belong to or choose to embrace one culture in specific. They could be bi- or multi-cultural, unless others force them to choose one or the other. It is important to remember, when creating your personal identity, that feelings of belonging could change according to the social, economic and political context.
3.2.2.3. Subtheme 3: Language difficulties

As already discussed in theme 1, the majority of participants mentioned having language difficulties. In this subtheme, research participants mentioned that these language difficulties could have a negative influence on their coping with the cultural differences. Two participants expressed this as follows:

“The most frustrating thing for me is when we are... when we do go to visit his family I can’t participate in the conversations, so yeah, the language. ... Yeah, that is the biggest challenge.”

“I would say firstly language you know because we are not communicating in our own home language, you know. We have to meet each other half way which is English and ... our English is not that hundred percent.”

Three female participants mentioned a language barrier:

“... part of the reason I didn’t develop is because we wanted to talk and so for him to have to like, you know for me to try and communicate on a level, you know, appropriate level, I mean I didn’t have the vocabulary and I didn’t develop it. ... It’s just that, you know his English skills are so far superior than my Zulu skills would ever be, then it’s just simpler and more time efficient quite frankly, to just speak in English.”

“It is the way of speaking and it’s just perceptions about how I felt that that was a barrier language and the way he spoke.”

“I was mad with him because he wouldn’t tell his friends to speak English but when I was in Germany, I also experienced how difficult it is because sometimes you switch to German so quickly. ... Ja, definitely the language.”
Seto and Cavallaro (2007) explain that when a foreign partner has difficulty to adjust or has misunderstandings as a result of the language barrier, the couple is likely to experience a larger amount of stress.

Two participants mentioned that they or their partners were misunderstanding the meaning of the language used:

“With us it was language a lot. It was language because it was his second language so sometimes he doesn’t understand the nuances. He doesn’t understand subtleties. You have to explain to him because we are communicating in English. So a lot of things are lost and sometimes we can have conflict because misunderstandings with language. He will say something and then I will say that ‘You know what, that is very aggressive. That is very abrupt. I don’t like the way you said Hello, what do you want?’. I said that you don’t say that when you answer the phone. You say ‘Hello my love, how are you?’ or whatever. ... Having to totally explain what you mean by what you say a lot. And it still, still happens you know.”

She continued giving the following example: “... sometimes you want to express yourself maybe in an argument and you would maybe misunderstand each other because of... you are just meeting yourselves half way through language. So those were also some challenges. ... It is just that we are misunderstanding each other because of the ... we are not really speaking our own language.”

She also mentioned that she does not understand her family-in-law that well:

“But I don’t know what they [her family-in-law] are saying half the time. Where they are coming... because language is a big issue, it’s our biggest issue when I am there”.
The second participant also mentioned having misunderstandings because of language:

“... if you just take the language... We communicate in English which is not the mother tongue of both of us so it’s just, especially when you are arguing; it is difficult to understand each other. And sometimes you are just looking for the right words especially in an argument. It is so important to just express yourself exactly. And sometimes you can’t do that. Sometimes I can’t do that in English sometimes and then it frustrates you.”

She proceeded giving the following example:

“... if I see that he wrote on a girl’s site [on Facebook] and then I don’t know what it is then I suppose it is some jealousy because if it was English then I would see that it is just ‘what’s up’. But I don’t know because it is like a secret language so my thoughts are running wild because what could he be writing to this woman, you know. So things like that, maybe, it also just creates insecurity because you don’t know what he is talking to other people, especially women.”

Three female participants expressed experiencing difficulties in communicating with the partner’s family and friends. One female South African participant explained:

“But I understand a lot but when they get very philosophical, deep discussions then I can’t understand.”

Another female South African participant mentioned the following:

“... but there is a kind of an expectation from the aunties that I am able to speak ‘Twi’ and I can’t. I don’t understand it at all and they sometimes speak to me to test me out and I am like ‘I am sorry, I don’t understand you’.”
One female non-South African participant explained that having language as the biggest cultural difference, has the following effect on their relationships:

“Like ... feeling excluded among friends.”

Two participants mentioned difficult family interaction as children do not know a language. One male South African participant who already has children expressed that:

“... for instance the language issue whereby maybe is the case in my situation whereby you have children so where you are teaching them your language or things like that and if they they’re not then that begins. ... it is sort of a family situation where my wife has not necessarily learnt a great deal of my language. So it becomes harder to instil sort of one’s language in them, because they need to hear a different voice that will say the same sort of things or talk in my language.”

One female non-South African participant who does not have children yet, mentioned the following concern:

“What language are you going to talk with them because English... We both don’t speak English perfectly and I wouldn’t want my kid to grow up speaking a broken English but then if we talk Xhosa or German then we both won’t understand what the other is talking to the kids and then always ends up feeling excluded.”

3.2.2.4. Subtheme 4: Being far away from home

Since this research is about interracial relationships or marriages between South African and non-South African partners, it means that at least one partner is far from home. These interracial relationships or marriages could therefore also be called cross-national. Baker-Cottrell (1990) explains that cross-national marriages are most similar to interethnic marriages, but still there are two differences. The first difference is that the spouses often
maintain ties (e.g. citizenship) in both countries. Secondly, the couple could be living in a different country, a third country, where both partners are foreigners. Being far away from home could have a negative impact on the partner’s coping with the cultural differences.

One male South African participant mentioned that being far away from home could be a strain on his partner. He stated as follows:

“One of the things eh I suppose is that ehm it can be a strain on her in that eh of course family calling.”

This same participant also mentioned that because his partner is far away from home, it can provide some difficulty when travelling with the whole family. He explained:

“So, but now with children it has become a bit more difficult cause it’s not just travelling one person or two, you have to consider the whole number of people that travel. And so that does provide some challenges.”

He continues to explain that not only his partner, but also he is not living close to home. He expressed that a negative factor is being away from his family core. He states:

“And as well as being away from my relatives and family core.”

The same South African participant further mentions that because of being away from his family core, he is removed from family functions which means he does not participate in certain traditional functions or ceremonies that often. He explains the following:

“perhaps there’s certain things, eh ceremonies, ehm functions that the family would do fairly regularly that I would not participant in, and as a result then that further removes one from those sort of activities. ... But because we are so removed and not have participated in any of those kind of activities here when I’m in Port Elizabeth, they are now and again, we do visit and go and then so participate in whatever happens.”
Seto and Cavallaro (2007) note that physical distance and travel expenses could minimize the sharing of significant life events, such as weddings, births, illnesses and funerals, often shared by family unions. This could cause emotional distress from both sides and may strain family relationships over a long period of time, depending on the character of the life events.

Since one partner is from overseas, one partner’s family is also overseas. So it is not that easy to meet the family-in-law immediately. Two participants mentioned that they or their partner met the in-laws only later in the relationship:

“Unfortunately I never like met her family right in the beginning. So I met... the first time I met the family was like maybe six months ago when I went to visit her in Germany so that was the only time I met her family.”

“And my family, they only met him in the beginning of this year because that was the first time he came to Germany and that was very important because we had already been together for a while then and they had never met him so they could only hear the stories I was telling them.”

When asked about challenges in their relationship, one female non-South African participant mentioned that she was missing home, her family and friends. She stated:

“Obviously missing Holland and missing my friends.” She continues to explain: “... and that I’m not at home. You can’t, you don’t have a home really anymore, because I don’t see us living that side in Holland, but here, ja here I’m happy, but you can’t both be in your own world, with your own family and have everything. That’s also a negative. ... Cause you miss your family, you, you are in a whole different part of the world, you feel, or I felt alone lots of times. You feel sometimes, or I felt left out if my friends in Holland for instance would go all together on holiday or whatever, you’d feel ‘And what about me?’ ... I still miss my friends from Holland.”

Landis and Landis (1977) confirm that the partner who is far from home is more likely to feel lonelier than ever before and therefore the need for companionship will be more urgent.
Two female non-South African participants mentioned as a negative factor that it was difficult building a new life in South Africa:

“... and building up here a life while he, he can just continue with his life, with just something with it [her]. And I left everything and had to start all over again. ... ... I didn’t have my own friends, ... I had nothing there. But that also caused lots of stress..”

“And one thing that I’ve realised is that you always need to still need to have your own life, your own things. Especially in my case when you come into a different country, for your partner, you can’t just always make him responsible for your happiness. I’d just say.. ‘I came here for you, now you spoil me’. You also have to kind of create your own life here and things beside him, have your own friends, your own job, your own goals or else, he can’t make you happy solely, so.”

Seto and Cavallaro (2007) point out that learning a country’s language is important for foreigners when it comes to accessing resources and being able to live and adjust in a new cultural environment. They further explain that a lack of knowledge of the language could minimize a foreign partner’s career options and also limit opportunities to building friendships as to create a social support network next to the marriage. This could be one of the reasons why these two participants experience difficulty in building a new life in South Africa.

The extent of this theme and the type of data generated provide an indication of how the cultural differences could create challenges for the couple. The next theme follows up on this second theme, as it looks at the positive factors that influence the couple’s coping with the cultural differences.
3.2.3. THEME 3: POSITIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COUPLE’S COPING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The participants were asked to reflect on the cultural differences that have been evident in their relationship. These cultural difference factors were mentioned in theme 1. Negative factors that influenced the couple’s coping with cultural differences that emerged from the participants were described in theme 2. Besides negative factors, the participants also mentioned positive factors that influence couple’s coping with cultural differences, which will be described here in theme 3. Four subthemes emerged from this theme. The first subtheme revolved around positive perceptions of society.

3.2.3.1. Subtheme 1: Positive perceptions of society

Liela Groenewald, a sociologist in the Department of Sociology at the University of Johannesburg, presents statistics on interracial marriages from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The statistics show that between 1996 and 2001, of all the married couples, interracial married couples had increased from 6.4% to 10.6%, indicating that interracial marriages are growing slowly and becoming more accepted each year (Calitz & Nkosi, 2010). The participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of the perceptions of society. Quite a lot of participants mentioned that they have experienced positive perceptions on the part of society, family and friends.

One female non-South African participant mentioned that after the apartheid era, she experienced more acceptance by others and noticed more positive perceptions of society. She explains as follows:

“... I think because South Africa was a new rainbow nation and democracy, perceptions or reactions were fairly favourable.”

One male South African participant mentioned that besides negative perceptions, he also experienced positive reactions from society.
He noted the following:

“... there are like positive comments that... that you know you can see that someone is really appreciating the fact that, you know like, a black and white couple can make it.”

Leslie and Letiecq (2004) explain that the support that an interracial couple receives from family and friends is a variable that is likely to positively influence their marital quality. Eight participants mentioned a positive reaction or acceptance by parents. As one female non-South African participant explained:

“... his family was always very accepting, my family was accepting.”

Her South African partner mentioned that her partner’s family would rather have them live close by. He stated as follows:

“Perhaps the most strong component is the fact that I’m in South Africa and they’d rather have me there where they are mostly.”

Another male South African participant looked at both his partner’s parents and his parents. He mentioned the following:

“So with her parents it’s fine, they’ve accepted me the first day they met me. And my parents as well, eh obviously was a, not a thing for them, but ehm bringing a white girl to the house you know. Eh, it was different for them but my parents are a bit open minded and eh ja it was all good.”

A third male South African participant mentioned his mother’s positive reaction to his relationship.
He explained the following:

“*And my mother said to me after she met her that you’d be a crazy man if you don’t marry this woman. You know, there is a saying in Xhosa that ‘Ulibambo lwakho’ which means that she is part of you. I am part of her, you know. That’s what she said. Yeah, and that’s how I felt too. If your mom confirms something, it feels great.*”

Several other participants relayed the acceptance of their partner by significant others in their lives as follows:

“The important people in my life love him and love me. ... And with our parents and with our brothers and sisters being like I said earlier... the important people that matter are fine. So for them it is also not an issue or not a factor, which helps. Because I think if our families were still unhappy or not at peace then it would be very difficult.”

“I mean I met his mom here [South Africa] – there weren’t any problems there.” ... “They accepted, they were actually quite.. they very much liked him.”

“... I was concerned about her family but they were very receptive and I mean I never really experienced hostility.”

“... they also liked him very much.”

“Ja, my family definitely, you know like responded in a positive way like they never made her feel uncomfortable and or like made any comments that were kind of not good to swallow. So they have been also very supportive of the relationship. ... I went to visit her in Germany so that was the only time I met the family. But their response was also very good... showed me a lot of love and responded positively. I just felt like part of the family when I was there, you know.”
The same male South African participant proceeded by explaining as follows:

“... it will be maybe there would be a lot of adjustments to make if she was coming from a family that.. for example that is not familiar with blacks with black people. But the way it is, the way I see it from where she comes from, colour doesn’t matter that much. ... And even me and my family, we don’t have some discrimination like if you are white then this is what you must do in order for us to accept you in this family.”

“His family, we got along very well and ja, I always felt welcome in his family. Especially his mother, we were very close from the beginning and I also didn’t feel like that was a problem... that I am not South African, that I am not Xhosa, that I am not black, you know.”

The narrations by the participants above confirm what has been observed by Knox and Schacht (2010) that partners in interracial marriages are more likely to have been raised in racially tolerant homes. The unconditional acceptance of the partners by their families is evidence of the family members’ open-mindedness and tolerance of difference. Seto and Cavallaro (2007) point out that when both sides of the family have an understanding toward a cross-national marriage, it is likely to be easier for the couple and their extended family to willingly accept the national, racial and cultural identities that were brought together in the union of marriage. It is also clear from some of the narrations that the acceptance of the interracial relationship was motivated by the parents’ need to maintain a bond with their adult children.

Participants mentioned not only being accepted by parents, but also by other family members. Some of their experiences to this effect are cited below:

“In his family there are some quite traditional, traditional folks, ehm but they also really don’t, they don’t have a problem ehm they’ve accepted me definitely. And just also letting people come in and out of the cultural functions as they see fit.”
“... among my family as soon as they knew who I, ehm, it hasn’t changed. ... the only interpretation I can make is that it hasn’t been an issue.”

One male South African participant mentioned that their relationship was being accepted by fellow students. He stated the following:

“... the people I was with in college, there was no problem.”

Landis and Landis (1977) confirm this by saying that at college or university the attitudes of students are more inclined toward acceptance of interracial marriages. McClintock (2010), however, found that even among integrated, elite college students, it is possible that racial differences in status still exist (even though the students did not express or mention overt interracial hostility or discrimination in the study).

Four participants described the acceptance by friends as follows:

“... it’s my life, and I’m happy, she’s happy, her family is happy, my family is happy, we got too much, too many friends.”

“... even when we go out to eat with my friends in South Africa and go to parties... she would just blend in well. ... They were really..., they were always complementary. You know that ‘hey, you’ve got a good woman’.”

“We had a very good friend circle, a very different friend circle which I think was more open and tolerate than the normal society in the Northern Areas. ... They showed us, they taught us about... educated us about Port Elizabeth, about the dynamics particularly and geographically. So through that we had a natural interaction.”

A female South African participant explained that when she had worries about having mixed children and what challenges they would face in the future, other couples and friends of hers who accepted their relationship, helped her with that.
She stated:

“But in speaking to other couples who were married for longer, had children, all of that. That really just helped me to kind of realise it’s actually not that much of an issue.”

The experiences of some of these participants (in particular the last two narrations) suggest that being in friendships with other interracial couples, further enhanced the couple’s positive management of some of the potential challenges highlighted in theme 1 and two of this study.

Jayson (2011) explains that research found that the young adults in present society are more open to interracial or intercultural relationships and that their friends are more often of diverse racial backgrounds, compared with previous generations.

Most interracial marriages have little problem adjusting and the partners benefit from having friends who are also involved in an interracial relationship, since they have common grounds to discuss. These friends understand the challenges the other couple is facing and may share previous experiences or offer productive advice to help the couple cope with these challenges. It is beneficial for interracial couples to have friends since it is not healthy to become isolated (Interracial marriages, [s.a.]).

3.2.3.2. Subtheme 2: Characteristics of the couple

Some characteristics of partners in an interracial relationship can help the couple cope with cultural differences. Brislin (2000) explains that ‘Cultural flexibility’ involves changing your behaviour to meet the demands of situations found in other cultures. Brislin further explains that people who are flexible, who can resolve conflicts effectively, who can recognise differences in communication styles and who are curious and enthusiastic about learning more about another culture, are more likely to succeed in adjusting to the demands of intercultural interactions. Most participants mentioned some of these characteristics and expressed that these have influenced their relationship positively.

One female non-South African participant mentioned the couple’s compatibility as a positive factor in her relationship.
She stated:

“I handle finance, he handles whatever he, you know we.. It’s fairly joined.”

Although most participants seemed to have good communication in their relationship, three participants mentioned it directly. As one female non-South African participant stated:

“We have pretty good communication, so as far as like dealing with finances and kids and things, we’re usually on the same page.”

A male South African participant also mentioned having good communication in his relationship. He explained as follows:

“But where my wife is a typical social worker, who would say ‘let’s talk about it, what’s bothering?’ instead of just being quiet. Ehm, listen a lot.”

He further explained that he and his partner grow stronger together by:

“... talking a lot to each other, while you learn from each other.”

All of these participants emphasise the importance of good communication in their relationship. Good communication is a very important factor in every relationship, but especially in an interracial relationship where there are more differences and challenges that need to be discussed and negotiated. Meeks, Hendrick and Hendrick (1998) also emphasise the importance of communication in all relationships (interracial and same race). They explain that communication and self-disclosure are consistently related to relationship satisfaction.

Two participants mentioned that a positive factor is having knowledge of the partner’s language.
They shared their experiences in this regard as follows:

“Before I’ve had moved here, I did take Zulu, ehm because that’s what my husband’s family speaks. ... So I can understand more than I speak so when I then relate with the family, I can pick up things although sometimes I get things wrong. But then I ask and then I quickly refer to English and it’s fine.”

“I can speak Dutch, say about eighty percent I can speak Dutch. I can understand fully Dutch, but I can speak about eighty percent. So that’s, that’s what effort I did eh try to learn the language. She can speak Afrikaans fluently, eh so that’s what she did from her side as well.”

One female non-South African participant mentioned that knowing when to ask questions was an adjustment for her in her relationship which influenced their relationship positively. She stated as follows:

“Maybe knowing when to ask questions and when to leave it.”

She further explained:

“Well, I’m a person who asks a lot of questions sometimes. And to find out that sometimes there aren’t ready answers. And so I need to like sometimes just know when to just back off until the answers come as oppose to going ‘why do we have to do this’ or ‘what is this for’.”

Five participants mentioned that they have open communication on issues in their relationship. Below are the narrations to this effect:

“... if I see something that I think I like, ehm it could be a corner table or something, I’ll talk to her about it and want her to see it first, before purchasing it or something like that. ... Well I think partly we tend to like to talk about issues.”
“... we always talk a lot, and eh we just work it out, talk about it, make a plan, see how to go about things.”

“So we spent a lot of time initially talking through things. We spoke about children. Do we want children? How many children do we want? How do the different families deal with that kind of thing. And spent a lot of time speaking about our expectations.”

“We talk about everything. We express ourselves to each other ... frequently. ... Because we are very close to each other and she is like the only person that I can open up to and talk to and feel comfort from. So we had our moments talking and comforting each other.”

“... I am really trying to take his advice and for example he always hated it when I was always freaking out in public and me sometimes I can’t control myself and he gets so embarrassed and now he told me: ‘if you have a problem then just call me and we can go somewhere and just tell what the problem is’ and I am trying to do that. And I think that helped.”

Two participants (who are a couple) mentioned that having good conflict management skills has a positive influence on their relationship. They explained this as follows:

“... we discuss, we negotiate, come to an agreement. Ehm, we’re not screamers, we’re not throwers, we’re very sort of ehm..; ... certain things you might have to give a little bit more in certain areas. And then they’re going to have to give in another area or ehm accept that maybe you’re not comfortable with something. And either deal with it or than it becomes a conflict.” ... “We negotiate just about everything.”

“... if there are areas of strong disagreement then perhaps we’ll try and talk about them and see whether ehm, how best to resolve them or approach them or things of that sort. ... You know, sometimes you’ll both just pout in different directions and but by the evening you’ll talk about it and you’ll move on and those kind of things.”
Young and Long (2006) have pointed out four general characteristics of healthy couples (same-race and interracial) as mentioned previously in paragraph 1.4.1. One of these characteristics includes that the couple is able to deal with conflict effectively. They explain that a healthy couple handles conflict without running away, in an effective manner and has confidence that differences will be resolved.

Five participants mentioned that they discuss challenges and differences in their relationship, which has a positive effect on their relationship. Their verbatim accounts are cited below:

“And if whatever differences were there, I mean obviously there’s some instances where you get frustrated, and you rant and rave, ehm and you chat and talk with your spouse or my wife and discuss issues and we’d look at things and we try and we note that there’s some things we cannot change.”

“... I don’t like about her culture or she doesn’t like it about my culture, and keeping quiet until it just, eh how do you say it in English, it’s getting bigger and bigger and bigger to a point where everything would just explode. Eh, we will never allow that to happen.”

“You must speak about where you put your boundaries and what you going to accept of other people. What I would see as interfering and when you’re going to say no.”

“Also talking it through and maybe making her understand that this is how things go here.”

“We talk a lot. We really try to talk about things. I guess also, talking to friends or family from that culture that also makes you try to understand better that it is not him but the culture. But mostly, that is how we solve our problems. Just talk about it and try to explain ourselves as much as possible.”

Several of the participants indicated the need to compromise in order to ensure that their relationship would survive the interracial differences. However they also pointed out that the
compromises are also required in relation to general disagreements that had no relevance to cultural differences. Below are some of the extracts that describe their efforts in this regard:

“Like let’s go every second Saturday, every second Saturday let’s go to church, stuff like that. Eh, I have braai tonight and then in two weeks I’ll have a braai. And the week before that, and let’s have a fish braai, to even. ... So it’s always, it’s always a compromise and then making a plan. ... So it’s not to a point where it’s all the time culture versus culture.”

“... we must just talk about it and see how we can compromise.”

“And we negotiate them [the differences] and I mean in any relationship there’s always give and take.”

“I just think if just sometimes you need to find a compromise. And it is not like I mind eating on the couch. Sometimes I also like it. But sometimes then, I also want to do it the German way. ... I think in the future we just have to see that we can both get the things that we really need to be happy. I mean that’s not like he says ‘I need a cold shower’. I mean, he would also shower warm and that’s fine.”

Participants mentioned that there are certain elements in a relationship that are positive factors. These positive factors influence the couple’s coping with cultural differences.

Five participants mentioned that a positive element in their relationship is that they have mutual support in their relationship, which they described as follows:

“... we work on basis of mutual support.”

“... we must stand together, because we’re the ones living together as a couple. ... ..[my partner] formed more of a team with me than instead of his parents.”
The same non-South African participant mentioned that she is different from other wives in her partner’s family and that she and her partner sometimes seem strange to other people. She mentioned as follows:

“... but that was also his decision to go with somebody different, so we must make it work together. ... ...everything it makes, it makes you stronger as a couple because you are, you have to cope together. ... [my partner] helped a lot because he could explain to me why things are like that and how things are going.”

A male South African participant mentioned that they did not really notice differences between them. The reason he gave was as follows:

“... because we clicked so much on an emotional level and we just sort of understand how to do things. ... ...I felt that she has my back and I have her back, so to speak. ... And also I think being together really helped me grow as a man and I think it helped her grow as a woman. As we call it... we have each other’s supportive presence in this context.”

One female South African participant expressed the following about her partner:

“... but he is a very strong, supportive quiet person.”

A female non-South African participant mentioned that she and her partner supported each other’s studies and were on the same track. She explained as follows:

“We both were on the trajectory of... He had already finished his PhD. I was going into my master’s programme so we both supported each other in those kind of ways.”
She further mentioned that a positive of being in an interracial relationship is the same as any other relationship. She states:

“Just having someone there to support you and love you.”

The majority of research participants mentioned mutual respect and love as a positive element of their relationship. They described it as follows:

“So I would like to treat somebody else as I would like to be treated.”

“I just see her as a normal somebody that I love. ... And the benefits is, ja, I’m with somebody that I love.”

Porterfield (1978) confirms this by saying that just like same-race couples, most black-white couples marry because of love.

“I think what is important to me in this type of relationship is building a foundation of respect for each other, love for each other so we cross the boundaries. ... I think that we rely on the foundation of our relationship which is really respect for one another and love for one another. ... Like I said, we are guided by the fact that we love each other and we respect each other and we want to help each other to be better. ... Yeah, ... you know, to me, at least when we started, the foundation was if we love each other, respect each other, everything else is going to be secondary.”

“But we had one common, obviously strong common bond and that’s the feeling for each other.”

“... his parents have really instilled in him a sense of respect and a sense of dignity and that is.. really helped. I think in the way that he treats me as well.”
“We both believed in respecting one another.”

“Just having someone there to support you and love you.”

One male South African participant mentioned that he received a lot of love from his partner and her family. He reported that:

“As the time goes by you can see how much love you can get like... not discriminating my own race but I think with.. white race you always see so much love like when someone loves, they really love you. Maybe it is also because she’s from... not here South Africa because I have never experienced that kind of love with anyone that I have met here in South Africa. With her I really experienced a lot of love.”

His non-South African partner expressed that she likes certain aspects of her partner’s culture. She stated the following:

“... but I can’t say I just fell in love with [my partner’s] culture. I just fell in love with the person.”

Mental compatibility and love are success factors when it comes to interracial marriages, because when there is love between two people, nothing else matters but the happiness of one another (Love N Emotion [s.a.]). Rosenberg (2011) explains that partners have a good chance of developing a bond that can withstand the disapproving and negative reactions from society, when they remember the foundation upon which they established their relationship in the beginning. This foundation involves: what attracted them to each other, how their attraction became love and for what reason they got married or chose to commit to each other.

Two male South African participants mentioned the ability to deal with opposition together as a positive factor in their relationship.
One participant expressed the following:

“Well, certainly the fact that we are of different racial and ethnic groups and we are a union, has made it that it has to be, we have to overcome these pressures, these external pressures that occur, that happened. ... And so in that case if we are committed and like to see our union and our relationship and family move forward and stay strong, we have to then tackle them jointly in the sense that we have to be one on those issues. ... Cause like for instance if she may feel the certain cultural pressures even here yes okay maybe we need to figure out how best we can negotiate this issue that may be, might not be.”

Another male South African participant also mentioned that he and his partner had the ability to deal with difficulties and opposition together. He gave the following example:

“... and what is my family going to say? What are my friends going to think of me if they see me with someone who is not my colour, you know. So also those things like at least we are able to overcome that.”

Three South African participants mentioned a sense of humour as being a positive factor in the relationship, especially with regard to joking about the interracial differences. Their personal examples in this respect are cited below:

“We laugh about people, always find them funny and silly and ignorant and it strengthened our relationship even further.”

“... we do make jokes about it. Like if she walks in, I’ll call her ‘boer’, when she walks in Greenacres barefoot ‘skat, alleen boere maak so’, you know what I mean? That type of jokes.”
“It’s an issue that we make fun of. Like I said to him, if I am doing the dishes and he is sitting down: ‘Yes, I know my ancestors have been slaves, so that is why I am doing this and you are not doing this’. It becomes humorous.”

Strom (2003) notes that when spouses show each other emotional support; frequently express verbal affection and are enjoying humour together, this is a key communication feature in healthy marriages. He thereby confirms the statements of the participants that humour has a positive influence on their relationship.

Three participants mentioned an element of their relationship is having to **work on** their relationship. They all reported that every relationship requires hard work, but acknowledged that being in an interracial relationship requires slightly more effort, as cited below:

“... I think every relationship is hard work, but I think if you're eh from different cultures, it’s extra effort you have to do.”

“We have had to work harder, to be more sensitive, to make more of an effort to understand. And to research as well. ... I think through that our relationship is very strong. I think maybe we needed to work a little bit harder but only because it was from a distance. It was over distance and it was over different cultural backgrounds. To be more sensitive. So through that I think our relationship has grown.”

“To make it work so that people can see that it is actually a good thing.”

One male South African participant mentioned as a positive element of their relationship that they **spend time together** in their relationship. He explained the following about the beginning of their relationship:

“Plus, we spend a lot of time together. We had lots of fun and you know it was really a nice bonding before the kids came into play.”
He further mentioned that they still spend time together, now as a family with kids. He expressed the following:

“And also with the kids, we want to make sure that as a family we are intact. We spend a lot of time together and for me, it’s the fun part.”

The same male South African participant found that he and his partner as a couple are compatible. He mentioned as follows:

“And we are compatible in that context [gender differences].”

Six participants mentioned that within their relationship there was no focus on race. A female non-South African participant explained that part of why it worked well in the beginning between her and her partner was because she was not intimidated or afraid of black people. She did not focus on or even really notice race or skin colour. She explained the following:

“I mean it was a different group of people, to me it would be like going to a function with your boyfriend, your new boyfriend, to people you’ve never met. It just happened to be a group of South Africans.”

Five other research participants echoed this sentiment as follows:

“I tend to sort of see one as much as one is a human being I sort of seeing myself as no different very much than any organism or alter nature.”

“I just see her as a normal somebody that I love, ehm I don’t see her as white or black. She doesn’t see me as white or black, although it is there, we still, we do make jokes about it.”
“... it’s like she’s my partner and really the emphasis on the complexion becomes less and less and less and less. I guess just like a normal couple. ... It’s like any other relationship and I mean the emphasis of racial difference really was never an issue. ... So we focused on those issues [happiness] rather than what about issues of race. ... ... we have misunderstanding and fights like any other couple you know. But it just never really had a racial tone on it. ... I don’t even remember even having a serious conversation about the fact that she is white and I am black.”

Reddy (1994) agrees with this statement by saying that she does not think that most people think of their lovers, children or parents in terms of being a certain race or ethnicity. She says that people know each other too well for this and that the conflicts that arise within a relationship do not involve race but often daily things like time, promises, disappointments, activities and all of life’s ups and downs. Porterfield (1978:123) confirms this by stating: “Quarrels or other family disagreements seldom carry racial overtones”. Garcia (2006) found that conflicts that arise are more likely to be due to socio-economic, situational and personal factors than cultural differences, or at least to a combination of factors (including gender differences).

This research study is within a social constructionism framework. The framework comes back in this theme since it is mostly through the participants’ decision to view their partners as a person rather than by skin colour or cultural emphasis that they are able to derive the positive benefits out of their relationship. Hong, Chao and No (2009) mention that a social constructionist theory looks at more overlapping characteristics or attributes of different racial groups and thus would represent the groups as less discrete. This is in accordance with the research participants mentioned above and below, who do not focus on the difference in race, but rather focus on their similarities.

The same male South African participant proceeded, giving the following explanation:

“I think it’s also the mind-set. Probably, that mind-set minimises these race and issues. More than the focus on what we have to build as a couple and also as a family now with kids.”
One female South African participant also mentioned that race is not an issue. She explained:

“... it’s not an issue. I don’t think so. We have grown far beyond that. Our relationship has become us. I think it is with maturity. ... I think of that Julia Roberts movie: ‘I am just a woman standing in front of a man’; so it’s basically just a woman and a man in the end. Well it comes after years.”

She mentioned that because of the apartheid system, people have been focusing on race for far too long. She expressed the following:

“I want us to move beyond race and I am trying to see people just as beyond skin colour. I think for too long we were all caught up in that trap. I am really trying to move beyond that. ... I see him as a person; I don’t even see us anymore in terms of him being German and I am this. We are just two people making the best of it and having our own challenges. ... ...never think about it [her relationship] in terms of, so much in terms of culture and race. ... They [her children] made me see the world in a non-racial way.”

A female non-South African participant also mentioned that she does not focus on race in her relationship. She stated:

“I know it sounds silly but I often forget that we are of different colours.”

Mojapelo-Batka (2008) explains that interracial couples have truly reconciled: they can look at each other and see no difference. Reddy (1994) adds that if mixed-couples do not have a lot of problems apart from the problems non-mixed couples also share and those inflicted from the outside, their marriage can be as healthy and happy as any other marriage. The barrier to crossing the colour line, here will then be erased altogether.

One female non-South African participant mentioned that she and her partner being far away from home could have made it easier for them to start off their relationship.
She explained the following:

“... so maybe setting up and getting to know each other in a neutral territory, eh may have helped. And actually I didn’t think about that before, but yeah, because we were both away from home, both in a place.”

She further expressed:

“... but it could have helped that it was just us. Clearly we didn’t worry about anything else.”

Knox and Schacht (2010) confirm that partners in interracial marriages are more likely to live far away from their families of origin.

3.2.3.3. Subtheme 3: Personal characteristics of each partner

The majority of participants mentioned that personal characteristics of themselves and/or their partner had a positive influence on coping with cultural differences.

Two female non-South African participants expressed that being independent of their partner was an important positive factor in their relationship.

One female non-South African participant explained that she and her partner did not have issues that caused stress in the beginning in their relationship. She stated the following:

“We’re both independent, we are financially stable so there weren’t things that I think normally you would find in a relationship that would cause stress.”

Another female non-South African participant explained that she had to become more independent in order for their relationship to grow.
She expressed this as follows:

“You also have to kind of create your own life here and things beside him, have your own friends, your own job, your own goals or else, he can’t make you happy solely so...”

Landis and Landis (1977) state that special adaptability could be required when it comes to international marriages. When a mixed-marriage is successful, it has to do with the flexibility of the individuals involved. The flexibility of the successful mixed-couple involves the ability to face their problems and to try to do what they can about the problems. Also accepting circumstances or situations that others might find intolerable. Four participants mentioned that the adaptability of their partner or of themselves made it easier to cope with cultural differences. As one female non-South African participant explained:

“... I could engage people and eh so I think part of the reason we worked is cause I didn’t like freak out or had a problem with the functions or with what was going on.”

Her South African partner agrees and states the following:

“So those things you have to explain, but she didn’t shy away from, because if she had shied away from them, that would have been sort of a deal breaker kind of thing. ... Owing to her personality, I think she has adapted very well.”

This participant continues by comparing his wife to previous girlfriends and reported:

“And so whereas my wife presently she has been in similar those kind of situations and she’s really, from what I can tell, coped well.”
Another male South African participant mentioned about his partner’s adaptability:

“... she would just blend in well and I never really noticed any discomfort in her part in participating in those events. ... for example, if we go and visit my mother, you can’t go with your open hair; you are supposed to put something on your hair as a sign of respect. I don’t even have to remind her of that. She is like ‘Okay, we have to do this, we are going to her now’. And I mean it is just one of those things. They expect her to make coffee for her as a way of showing love for her. She just does them automatically. ... And she says ‘I’m cool with that – that’s part of who you are. I love you and I want to do that’. And she was able to do that. ... I’m happy about the fact that she embraced that. It’s a huge plus.”

One female South African participant mentioned about her partner in her community:

“He fitted in very well.”

Landis and Landis (1977:176) state that to achieve happiness in interracial relationships, “individuals must be mentally and emotionally mature and must possess more than average understanding and tolerance” to be able to adapt to another culture. From the statements the participants gave, it becomes clear that most participants possess personal characteristics that make it easier for them to adapt and adjust easier to a different culture.

A female non-South African participant expressed that she was easy going, which helped her in coping with cultural differences. She stated as follows:

“... I could very easily go with the flow, I wasn’t intimidated, I wasn’t afraid of black people;... I was just sort of you know, early mid-twenties and went with the flow. ... We’re both fairly easy going about things.”

Three participants mentioned that being open minded was a characteristic that helped them deal with cultural differences.
One female non-South African participant explained:

“And both of you being open-minded and able to embrace the other’s differences and the other’s culture.”

A male South African participant explained about dealing with the negative reactions from society as follows:

“I don’t care, I’m a very open, open minded guy.”

He further mentioned that he and his partner overcame challenges by both being open minded. He stated the following:

“It’s eh ehm me being open-minded. ... she’s been open minded as well.”

Another male South African participant mentioned that his partner is open minded. He stated:

“She has an open mind too.”

All these personal characteristics mentioned by the research participants (i.e., being independent, adaptability, easy going and open minded) made it easier for them to adapt to a different culture and to embrace the differences.

Flynn (2005) mentioned the Big Five personality traits from Costa and McCrae (1992), which are used to describe human personality, to explain differences in racial prejudice in personality. He draws attention to the relationship between racial prejudice and one specific Big Five personality trait – Openness to experience. Flynn (2005) explains that individuals who score high on this dimension are often more cultured, curious, intelligent, imaginative, original, broad-minded, and artistically sensitive than others. These individuals usually develop higher levels of self-esteem as they get older and are often less opposed to taking
risks. Furthermore they are more willing to consider opinions that differ from their own. He found an apparent correlation between ‘openness to experience’ in white people who reported less racist attitudes toward black people. This means that white individuals who possess the characteristics associated with ‘openness to experience’ are more likely to be in an interracial relationship than individuals who score low in this dimension and these characteristics could also make it easier for the partners to adapt to the cultural differences in their relationship.

3.2.3.4. Subtheme 4: Type of social interactions

Most of the participants explained that selected types of social interactions (such as socialising with other interracial friends and couples) had a positive influence on their coping with cultural differences. Their experiences are cited below:

“We do have friends ehm that are also interracial or bi-racial or whatever tag you want to put on it.”

“I think it made it easier for us, I would say because we all socialized together with these people that are also in mixed marriages. ... You know they’re friends and are in a similar relationship... a multi-cultural relationship and making us more conscious about it. I think that helped.”

“I mean, even in our circle of friends, one of [my partner’s] friends, an Indian guy who is married to a white lady, and other friends of ours are getting married in September. She’s Afrikaans and he is Xhosa. It’s very normal”

Baker-Cottrell (1990) found that the foreign partners of interracial couples, usually the wives, look for other foreign partners of interracial couples to interact with. The narrations of the participants confirm this.
One female non-South African participant explained the following:

“... I also have a lot of African friends and I seem to really connect with them or even I don’t connect to German people so well. ... So I don’t know, it seems like on some levels I really I do connect to those people better. Maybe, I don’t know whether it’s maybe that they are more, how do you say, have more temperament or also the dancing. I like to dance..”

Porterfield (1978) mentioned this as a motive for choosing an interracial partner. He gives it the term repudiation (rejection). This involves people that are not completely integrated into their social group or that have rejected it for some reason. People may find that their needs are not met within their social group and will start looking for contacts, friendship, and marriage elsewhere. They overstep the bounds of their group norms to try to fit in somewhere else, as with this participant. She expressed connecting better to people from another social group because her needs are better met within that group (the temperament and dancing). Fullerton (1972) mentions that music, fashion, jargon and other elements of the black subculture are united into the international youth culture, which could make youth of any race more aware of the identity that they share.

Marks (2006) explains that inhabitants are culturally bounded and have minimum genetic variation as a species. As a result we distinguish ourselves by cultural features like dress, body language, spoken language and others. Now and then they parallel physical differences but often they do not. These cultural features show people more clearly who we are and who we are not than biological features do.

Two participants mentioned that having other interracial couples as friends, was a benefit for the children. One female non-South African participant says the following about the interracial couples they have as friends:

“... who also have children who look just like them and they play together nicely and it’s fine.”
Her South African partner mentioned that living in a multicultural neighbourhood and having neighbours of different cultures, was also a benefit for their children. He explained as follows:

“But they do play with the kids in the neighbourhood. Eh and we have a range of ehm families in our neighbourhood. Eh we have ehm amaXhosa, we have ehm Afrikaners, we have eh Coloured children or families and ehm I believe English speaking eh families, so we have quite sort of a range.”

A male non-South African participant mentioned that having other interracial couples as friends, was a benefit for the couple. He explained the following:

“So we could share our experiences of in the community, how people were actually looking at us with a critical eye or whatever. We could share that. We could talk openly to our friends about that. I think that helped a lot.”

Two non-South African participants mentioned that they really enjoy the community life of their partner’s community. As one male non-South African participant stated:

“I actually enjoyed it. I was very much welcomed in Gelvandale and Malabar. I actually enjoyed life, community life more in Malabar and Gelvandale than where we are living now.”

He further explained:

“... look in Germany where I grew up, the community life is not so entrenched as it is here.”
A female non-South African participant also mentioned that she loved her partner’s community life. She expressed:

“Yeah, and I think the other big difference, which is why I love his culture so much, is also the sense of community and how you can really call on your neighbours.”

3.2.4. THEME 4: FACTORS RELATING TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THAT STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP

The specific cultural differences evident in the couple’s relationship have been discussed at length in theme one. The participants were asked to reflect on how these cultural differences have strengthened their relationship, and this is what will now be discussed under theme four. The first subtheme revolved around the partner’s previous experiences in interracial relationships and friendships.

3.2.4.1. Subtheme 1: Previous experiences

Four of the eleven research participants explained that their prior experience in interracial relationships had prepared them for what to expect and also sensitised them to the types of challenges they might encounter in terms of the interracial differences and public responses to their relationship. Their description of these ‘initiation’ experiences are cited below:

“I think because my husband isn’t the first interracial relationship I’ve had, so any things I may have had were already ripped out long before I was with him. ... like I said, he wasn’t the first person of a different race or different culture I’d ever dated, so ehm, I was sort of broken in as far as acceptances. ... as far as perceptions from the outside, I already knew what to expect as well. Ehm, cause I’ve been through it with various and under different ehm friends and partners I had before him.”
“Because the person I’m dating or that I’m married to now, was not the first ehm white person I dated, so that was not ehm met with any form of ehm scepticism or indifference or something.”

“... and plus being in so many relationships prior to meeting her, with black women as well and also had relationship experiences with that as well, so it’s a lot of stuff that you bring.”

“Well my husband isn’t the first person that I have been with in of colour so it was... not... I guess I kind of knew things to expect and things that might occur.”

The manner in which the participants described their earlier experiences suggested that they had the opportunity to deal with their own internal awareness of these differences as well as learning how to deal with public perceptions and responses to their relationship.

Luo (2006:26) explains the following from a social constructionist framework: when individuals are exposed to various interactions within different contexts, “the boundaries of social differences are redefined and a multilayered structure of identities is thus constructed”. Therefore, the internal perceptions and constructions of the research participants may have shifted and reconstructed as a result of earlier experiences.

Clark-Ibanez and Felmlee (2004) found that when a person has friends from different ethnicities and approves of inter-ethnic dating, the odds of having an interethnic relationship increase significantly. From this statement it becomes evident that people who date someone of another race or culture are prone to have a diverse friendship circle also.

One female non-South African participant mentioned that her lack of personal South African history or hurt is one of the reasons that they work well together as a couple. She explained this as follows:

“I do think that part of the reason that we work is that although he’s South African and black, I’m American and white. And I think, cause I do know or have known sort of interracial couples that are both South African that hasn’t worked. Because I don’t have the South African baggage. So I don’t have some, I didn’t grow up with some of the things that were happening ehm so I don’t have that. And so, ja, it’s just different I think.”
The same female non-South African participant further mentioned that her partner’s family has a history of interracial marriages, which by implication normalised their relationship to a large extent. She narrated as follows:

“In fact, his family on his mother’s side, many eh in the sort of more colonial times, ehm has a white great grandfather or great-great grandfather so ehm that wasn’t really a big deal then.”

Porterfield (1978) confirms that romantic interracial relationships already existed during the colonial times, but were seen as a cultural taboo.

All these previous experiences have strengthened the relationships of these participants, since there was already more acceptance towards the interracial relationship, the partners were already prepared and knew what to expect, and as one participant explained: she didn’t have the South African baggage, which also desensitised her to the perceived racial divide, so evident in the pre-democratic South Africa.

3.2.4.2. Subtheme 2: Prior knowledge of the other’s culture and actively learning about the different cultures

The majority of the research participants expressed that having knowledge of their partner’s culture has strengthened their relationship even further. It was evident from their responses that the participants have made a concerted effort and were naturally interested to equip themselves with knowledge about diversity in culture and races, both prior to meeting their partners as well as a direct result of being in an interracial relationship. Many of the research participants had lived in their partner’s country of origin whilst studying or working, whilst others went to visit their partner’s countries in a direct attempt to broaden their knowledge and understanding of their partner’s culture and associated customs. Following are some of their narrations as illustration of how they had broadened their knowledge of different cultures as a direct result of their personal, social and professional interest:
“... I think a lot of that is because of my background before I even met him. So I’d already ehm known about how these things work and so it wasn’t a surprise or you know it was just more exciting to see it and practise it.”

“I mean in terms of cultural knowledge, I have been exposed to all different cultures. ... I am a psychologist, from that background, so I studied different cultures. I have been influenced by Western cultures.”

“Ja, obviously through my profession as well, what I do.. being in social development it helped me. And in my thesis actually as a social worker we did a project in Turkey in a different cultural setting so that helped me. I think my background helped me. Definitely. The interest you can stimulate. I think if you are interested in different cultures you should stimulate it more.”

“Well, him being in the States for over twenty years, he already kind of knew where I was coming from.”

“... I grew up moving around. My father was in the navy and we’ve lived overseas and I’ve also travelled quite a bit so I enjoy learning about other cultures.”

“I had an interest in the background; I’d studied African lit, South African history and lit ... So ehm, like I said, I’ve known certain things, which is how actually we sort of met or gotten talking further when we first met.”

It seems from these quotations from the research participants that the individuals who grew up with more heterogeneous backgrounds, are more open to diversity. Clark-Ibanez and Felmlee (2004) confirm this with their findings by stating that when friends of one’s parents are ethnically diverse, the odds of one having an interethnic relationship increase significantly.
Also Baker-Cottrell (1990) found that some of the partners in cross-national marriages grew up in a multi-cultural environment. This could involve one partner being a child of a mixed marriage or growing up in an immigrant subculture or in a third culture.

The narrations below illustrate how the partner’s interest in each other’s culture served as an attraction to one another, as well as the considered effort made by the research participants to enhance their knowledge of their partners’ cultures, which in turn served to enhance the quality of their relationships:

“... certainly ehm, her interest in African folklore and ehm history and ehm aspects related to African culture. And eh she also had expressed having participated in some course work that ehm taught African culture and things of that sort. So eh, that just made a platform from which to sort of begin on if you will. Or start conversations and that eh would lead to further developments.”

“... I think really just by living here and living with the family and at work and I’m obviously a lot in the coloured area, so there, then you experience it and you learn about it. ... I found it interesting to, to learn about a new culture and to learn new things.”

“... and she is gradually picking up the African culture... ... And I mean, to me, that is a big plus in terms of her embrace of the African culture. I mean it’s amazing. Because when we met, I told her about the traditions, what is expected if you are going to be a ‘makoti’ and this is what they want and are you going to be comfortable with that? ... And she says I’m cool with that, that’s part of who you are. I love you and I want to do that. And she was able to do that.”

“There was a South African community that we would often go to for either memorial services or just getting together for South African holidays, going to the consulate. Going to events... Musicians or plays that were coming from South Africa. We usually attended those kinds of things.”
“Also spending a lot of time together and doing a lot of things together like if there would be... if there would be a traditional ceremony or something in the neighbourhood or one of my friends house, we would also just go there and she would also see how things are done and she would also ask a lot of things if there is something she doesn’t understand. I would explain it to her. And also just sometimes watching a lot of TV programmes and if like you know there is something that she wants to know about what’s happening, I would let her know and explain it to her. So also... basically just telling each other stories as well and just explaining everything how it is.”

“And also even me visiting Germany for three months. It also helped me a lot to get to know her culture.”

“... I was just so happy when [my partner] came to Germany so that he could also experience it. The other way around, you know. So I think that was very good for us. Finally for him to see that side. To see my side... to understand.”

“... she is more open to, even to... experience other things like in terms of my culture. She has an open mind too. She doesn’t have a problem like going to the location and doing things with me in the location and going out in the location.”

“... but he was really making an effort towards, to understand my culture and that was very important for me for him to see where I’m coming from and how I live.”

“His effort was definitely going to Holland, coming to Holland on a holiday. I said when I left, when I left and I came back on holiday, I said ‘If you are serious about this, I want you to come to Holland and that you... we don’t have to live there but I want you to see where I come from, and what is normal for me and who are my parents, who are my grandparents, where did I grow up, where did I went to school, what do we eat’, all these things. So he, he made that effort, which I still really appreciate.”
The extensive list of narrations by the different research participants also accentuate how much they appreciate the efforts their partners made to understand their backgrounds, which in turn enhanced their degree of emotional intimacy in the relationship. This furthermore supports the suggestion by Gladding (2002) that partners who actively work on the differences in their relationship have a greater likelihood of increasing their relationship success.

Four of the participants also relayed experiences of engaging directly with their partners’ families (either by their own initiation or that of their partners), and utilising teachable moments as part of their direct and indirect measures to enhance their knowledge of the cultural practices. Below are a few verbatim citations of such experiences:

“*Asking questions, listening, ehm, you get more information from the sister in-laws than you do from anyone else. So you just sit in the kitchen and listen as much as you can and pick up as much as you can.*”

“*Also his, one of his cousins who I’m close to, she, she also explained a lot to me. And she is a bit different than the family, she doesn’t like all that interference. ... So she, she also helped me if I would be fed up with things, she would explain to me why.*”

“*And plus, I have my cousins who coached her on this culture. For example, ‘these are some of the things you are expected to do’. ‘*”

“*And also like her meeting my family. And my family like maybe my parents would tell her stories like how things... how they used to do things when they... back in the days.*

Two female non-South African participants mentioned learning more about their partner’s culture through **knowledge from other people from that culture.**
One female non-South African participant expressed the following:

“I was at the university of Wisconsin for my undergraduate and there’s lots of anti-apartheid things, I knew South Africans. Eh, I had lecturers that came to South Africa so, and other partners actually.”

Another female non-South African participant expressed that she came for holidays and their wedding to South Africa. She explained as follows:

“So I think during those times that we came back were also opportunities for me to learn more about the culture. And then being here, having colleagues to also listen to their stories. The similarities with their stories of their upbringing in comparison to the stories that I have heard of him have helped me to also just further understand and confirm why he does the things he does sometimes.”

These experiences cited by the participants are in accordance with the view expressed by Brislin (2000) that people can enhance their insight into cultural differences by interacting frequently with people from another culture. Brislin (2000) furthermore adds that people appreciate others who take the time and energy to learn another culture so that distinctions of the many differences can be made, which in turn reduce the likelihood of stereotypes. This may also explain to some extent the participants’ selection of in-laws and close friends as mentors on cultural differences.

The participants also reflected on the value that they derived from their multicultural experiences. Whilst one participant claimed that it did not require huge adjustment, only an open minded attitude, two others were able to reflect on the specific value that they derived from making huge adjustments in attitude. This includes experiencing a sense of community and togetherness that is present in the African culture, as opposed to the individualistic cultures more prominent in a Western culture. Another positive included learning to be more relaxed and spontaneous as opposed to sticking to the rigidity of a programme and being time bound.
The verbatim extracts from the participants are cited below:

“... coming from different worlds we enrich each other. You know if we had come from the same community I don’t know if that richness would be there.”

“But I think it can be really enriching that you have these two different worlds. It can enrich your entire family’s life. It enriches all the interactions around you because there is this person that has this other experience.”

“I learnt a lot. I believe the more you get to know the other culture the more you actually learn and the more you grow yourself. You open yourself up.”

“... but just understanding the ways of the culture and the hierarchy of the culture and how that pays out in the circumstances but I.. there wasn’t really any big adjustment because I was open to the culture.”

“What I learned more in the relationship is about family life: about the togetherness. They support each other more in the community setting.”

“... that’s one of the most positive things because even me, if you’d like to say like the African way: how they are always more relaxed and they don’t freak out so quickly and they don’t plan everything and they’re more spontaneous and that’s another point you know. Me, I really like to plan and then [my partner] is a very spontaneous person but sometimes I also see the positive sides of that you know, because sometimes the spontaneous evenings end up those that are the best and everything you plan can still not work out the way you planned it.”

It is hence evident from these citations that the participants were able to contribute to an enhanced quality in their relationships by being more adaptable and putting on alternative cognitive lenses.
Luo (2006) notes that the two basic building blocks of ethnicity are identity and culture, according to the social constructionist model of ethnicity. These two blocks are being put together through social interactions from the inside and the outside of the ethnic community. Luo (2006) further explains that ethnicity involves the actions of the ethnic group – in which their self-definition and culture is shaped and reshaped – as well as the influences from the external larger society – in which ethnic definitions and categories are shaped and reshaped – and is the product of a dialectical process. Ethnicity is continuously being rebuilt and reinvented. Ethnicity viewed from a social constructionist perspective focuses on the changing, willing and situational nature of ethnicity, which is in accordance with the participants mentioned above who are very adaptable to the differences and embraced certain aspects of their partner’s culture.

Montgomery (1981) describes four categories of behaviours which contribute to quality communication: openness, confirmation, transaction management, and situational adaptability and explains that these elements are functionally linked to marital satisfaction. Montgomery (1981) confirms here that the adaptability of a partner influences marital quality in relationships. Also Baker-Cottrell (1990) mentions the effect of adaptability on marital quality. She explains that being exposed to a different culture is often stressful in the beginning, but in the long term it is not the cultural differences that account for interpersonal conflict, but rather the individual being rigid towards those differences.

Further to contributing to their own intrapersonal and interpersonal enrichment, one participant also reflected on how his partner’s father (who was initially very resistant to their relationship) changed his reaction towards their relationship when he noticed the participant’s respect and tolerance for the culture, family and community environment, especially given that the participant moved into the community with his partner for five years prior to getting married. The same participant also highlighted his ability to appreciate specific aspects of the community in which he also had a mutual interest. He valued the community’s interest in soccer and hence became actively involved in the sport, and through his experience became more integrated in the community in a short space of time.
He recalled his learnings as follows:

“So through that we had a natural interaction. So we came and we wanted to learn something. I think if there is a natural interaction where there is a kind of environment where you can naturally interact with each other through sports, arts and culture, history or whatever, it can just be only positive the way you exchange yourself. ... Just in the soccer team, you see it in the soccer coach. So there you see it. It is not easy but in a sporting environment or a multi-cultural environment you can do it. You become stronger afterwards.”

Greenstein, Carlson and Howell (1993) point out that when partners have an understanding of their own and their partner’s cultural background, their ability to make mutual decisions will be improved.

3.2.4.3. Subtheme 3: Acceptance of partner’s culture

It was also evident from the participants’ narrations that it required a lot of accommodation and assimilation to reconcile with some of the cultural practices and differences, and it would appear that it is such openness to change that has also enhanced the partners’ relationship quality. Some of the examples cited by the participants are quoted below:

“And both of you being open minded and able to embrace the other’s differences and the other’s culture.”

“... and welcomed her into the township in a regular, celebratory type of way and yes the cows, sheep was slaughtered and all these other things and she ate that part and all the things she was supposed to eat and there are lots of powerful meanings in each one of these ceremonies... ... ...I’m happy about the fact that she embraced that. It’s a huge plus.”
“And he loved it [the sense of community]. ... he said that it’s wonderful and doesn’t have that in Germany.”

“I guess I would have to say strengthened the relationship in the sense that I am accepting and I am willing to go to those... if there is a funeral, I will go. If there is a wedding, I want to go. ... I know.. what the expectation is of me when I go to these places. And I am okay with that. That my husband gets to go to the funeral when I am staying at home cooking and preparing all the dishes for when the people come back. I am ok with that. ... there weren’t any challenges because I really like the culture.”

“... there will be expectations of my son when he will go through initiation. At this point, we are both agreeing on that but I am not so sure once it actually comes how that will play out. And he is actually okay with my son going to the doctor rather than going out to the bush to have that part done.”

Dr Majopelo-Batka (2008) explains that it is very important that mixed-race couples learn how to accommodate and accept each other's cultures. The examples cited by the participants suggest that they have made active decisions to accommodate and assimilate some of these differences as far as possible. It is also evident from the last narration cited above that some of the accommodation may only be at an intellectual level with the acknowledgement that it may be more challenging to implement the action, but at least there is a willingness to consider going through the cultural experience rather than foreclosing on it.

Two participants mentioned that they had accepted the cultural food of their partners. Some of the other adjustments included actively learning how to prepare and serve certain dishes. Whilst some acknowledged that this came with its own challenges, it was evident that there was a willingness to be adventurous and embrace the different experience. Below are a few of their verbatim recollections of these experiences:

“Been to a slaughtering, didn’t bother me. I’ve eaten bits that I don’t like.”
“I’m willing to try the different foods. And I also want to be a part of making those foods.”

“... when we first met, I figured the best way to a man’s heart was through his stomach. So I went around and we had those large South African communities. We were in New York, in the New Jersey area, so I went around and sat with the ladies. They shared with me their recipes. I created myself a little recipe book so I was able to try to have those kinds of foods in the house every so often.”

“... I learnt cooking from his mom, I learned some South African dishes.”

“... ehm learning who to serve first.”

“To me, it is still weird when his dad tells me: ‘... can you make me a coffee.’ Or ‘bring me a cup of coffee.’ I am not used to that. You know, being this kind of house woman. But I am trying to please everyone and be as good as I can at that. But still it is not my culture and it sometimes feels weird to me.”

Yet another adjustment that the participants had to make was learning to accept their partner’s cultural clothing. Four participants described their experiences as follow:

“For formal functions, I’ll definitely cover my head and wear a skirt. But like just every day in and out the house I don’t. ... but if it was a formal function or so I would’ve definitely respected the, but ja. At first I made really big efforts to make sure I was always dressed appropriately, until I got the go-ahead. ... I hate skirts, it’s the idea of it, but I do it when I need to.”
“And when I’m at her place, and ehm her family requires that eh we go or have a jacket-and-tie-dinner or things of that sort, then I would ehm do those kind of things.”

“Well, I mean culturally in his community, when I go, when we go visit his mother. The expectation of me is to put the ‘doek’ on, the... And everything and I do that out of respect for his culture.”

Remaining cognisant of the cultural expectations also seems to be one of the ways in which the one participant ensured that she adjusted positively, as cited below:

“I think the only adjustment would be when we do go to his family that ehm just remembering all of the expectations; making sure I greet everybody, the expectation of, although it is somewhat of a self-inflicted expectation, where I will wear what is expected of me as the wife of the eldest son.”

It was interesting to note that the participants’ partners mentioned the same willingness to adjust to the cultural dress code and other practices as the aspects that they appreciated about their partners, as cited below:

“But it’s those kind of things as well as certain ehm ceremonial eh eh activities that would happen where if you are female, you have to wear something on your head and then those kind of things. So those things you have to explain, but she didn’t shy away from, because if she had shied away from them, that would have been sort of a deal breaker kind of thing. ... the aspects where ehm at the in-laws, she has to have a headscarf, and those kind of things. And so she knows that as she enters the household, she will have to have a headscarf.”
“I mean there are certain things that are so culturally connected for example, if we go and visit my mother, you can’t go with your open hair; you are supposed to put something on your hair as a sign of respect. I don’t even have to remind her of that. She is like ‘okay, we have to do this, we are going to her now’.”

Another area of adjustment for the participants included learning to appreciate the different religious beliefs. One female non-South African participant mentioned that she accepted the religious beliefs, regarding the ancestors, of her partner’s culture, and reported on this as follows:

“... we do report to the ancestors and do part of ehm that. Ehm, which isn’t at all at odds with how I believe or feel, so. Ehm, because I don’t feel it’s.. I mean, some people give it an animus wrap, which I think is complete crap because it has nothing to do with it. It’s no, to me, no different than using, the Catholics using the priest to intercede between them and God, and they just need the ancestors to do that. So ehm, you see I think a lot of that is because of my background before I even met him.”

Four participants found that the duration of their relationship had a positive influence on the acceptance of differences between them and their partners. They recalled their experiences in this regard as follows:

“... I mean quite frankly, it doesn’t really bother me, I’m so used to it, it’s been a long time. ... I mean we were together a long time, before we actually got married. ... And maybe it’s because we have been together for so long that if there were really like huge cultural things.”

“But that comes with maturity and I am not sure if it’s got to do with interracial..., what race plays but it is just as I get older I just become more... it is just us in the relationship. It is the only change. So I am much more comfortable because the discomfort is not longer there. It has gone away but it is also because of various factors. We have lived there. I am older. I see the world differently. ... We are definitely on the mature side of the interracial relationship.”
“... we lived together for a long time, got to know each other.”

“... me and [my partner] we have grown ever since we got together and there are like a lot of other challenges we have had. ... I think we have both grown a lot these past three years. I don’t know if it’s necessarily the culture: it’s just that after three years of relationship...yes the different cultures, and especially distance relationship, makes the relationship tougher and more of a challenge but we just, we just came out stronger and I think the longer we are together the more of distance relationship that we handle and then we see each other again and we feel closer and stronger... and ja I think maybe generally, it’s also our age; when we met I was 22 and he was 26. Now I am 25 and he is turning 30 this year and I think that’s just an age where you grow up generally and when I met him, he was not very responsible.”

All these participants expressed that the challenges and differences are more overt at the beginning of the relationship and that acceptance comes with the years: with maturity. Bader and Pearson (1988) explain that couples evolve through stages in their relationships, that resemble passages through early childhood development. The stages are: 1) Symbiosis; 2) Differentiation; 3) Practicing; 4) Rapprochement; and 5) Mutual Interdependence. The participants above mentioned being in the last stage: Mutual Interdependence. Bader and Pearson (1988) point out that the couple can enter a later phase of unchanging devotion and regularity which stems from encouragement of each other to grow through external contacts and resilience from knowing they are loved by one another. In this phase the perfect picture is in harmony with the reality and the stage of mutual interdependence (being mutually reliant on each other) is achieved. In this phase, two well-united individuals are satisfied with their own lives, have developed a deep connection with each other that is mutually satisfying and have constructed a relationship based on a foundation of encouragement of growth rather than one of need.

3.2.4.4. Subtheme 4: Education and careers

Three participants mentioned that having similar education had strengthened their relationship.
One female non-South African participant stated as follows:

“... our education is the same, we’ve gone through the same educational tracks, so we’re quite on par educationally and socially.”

She further mentioned that her partner probably would not have chosen a partner with a different educational background from his. She explained:

“Somebody who didn’t go to university but was in town and met him and you know whatever, but yeah didn’t have the same educational background and resources he had, I probably, I don’t think that would have worked. ... I think your educational socio-economic backgrounds being similar, is what makes it work.”

Her South African partner expressed the following:

“I met my partner at eh university, I was studying abroad.”

He further explained that his relationship developed around his wife’s interest in his culture and around both of them studying. He stated:

“But also I think to some degree it was around what we were there for in a sense of ehm our studying and careers.”

One female non-South African participant mentioned that she and her partner were on the same trajectory regarding their studies. She explained:

“We both were on the trajectory of... He had already finished his PhD, I was going into my master’s programme, so we both supported each other in those kind of ways.”
Knox and Schacht (2010) explain that partners in interracial marriages are more likely to have educations beyond high school. Fryer Jr. (2007) states that in the middle of the twentieth century, it was more common for low-educated individuals to intermarry, but that changed by the end of the century when individuals with a higher education were more likely to be in an interracial marriage. Also the social and economic status of racial groups has shifted over time, which could explain some of the patterns in data of the increasing interracial relationships. Fryer Jr. (2007) further points out that across all racial groups, the patterns of interracial marriage by level of education are very similar.

Homogamy refers to marriage between individuals of similar socio-economic status. Garcia (2006) explains that mixed unions are often homogamous. Qian (1997) found that interracial marriages are usually educationally homogamous. Qian (1997) further points out that it is easier for individuals with a high level of education to break the racial barriers to intermarriage than it is for individuals with a lower level of education. The reason for this is that racial minorities that are better educated tend not to live in racially segregated communities. Breger and Hill (1998) also state that if people have an education, it could help them to move away from the community that they grew up in.

Calitz and Nkosi (2010) also found in The Human Sciences Research Council report that people with a higher education are more likely to marry someone from a different cultural or racial group. An explanation for this statement is given by Amoateng et al. (2004) who point out that individuals with a high educational status are generally thought of as having a less negative attitude toward other cultural groups, as having good contact with a widespread range of people, as having greater resources that elevate mate selection and sometimes as complying less to the social standards of group norms. Amoateng et al. (2004) explain further that people with a higher education are likely to speak more than one language, which could also be a factor for out-marriage.

Landis and Landis (1977) also found evidence that shows that people who have similar socio-economic and educational backgrounds are more likely to marry each other. Porterfield (1978) and Rosenfeld (2005) agree that most interracial marriages, like same-race marriages, are educationally homogamous. Another study was done by Yancey and Emerson (as cited by Nord, 2009), who claim that the likelihood of interracial marriage is increased by equality in income and education. This claim is in contrast with the exchange theory.
These authors all agree with the participants that similarity in education increases marital quality in interracial relationships.

One female non-South African participant mentioned that she and her partner had an **understanding of each other’s careers**, which strengthened their relationship. She explained the following:

“... when we first met, said that he could probably never be with somebody who didn’t understand what he did and what his interest were. So he wouldn’t have picked a sociologist for an example, because he or somebody who sort of mainstream business and not in an university setting, because of the different lifestyle. Ehm and I do think, because I can see that with same-race same-cultural families who were somebody is on a sort of very academic university and the other person isn’t, can be sufficient.”

Knox and Schacht (2010) explain that college provides people with opportunities to meet, date, live with and marry another college student. Going to college could also heighten the expectation one has of their potential future partner, resulting in accepting only college-educated individuals as a potential spouse.

### 3.2.4.5. Subtheme 5: Lifestyles

Knox and Schacht (2010) state that generally, couples are more likely to report relationship satisfaction and the relationship is more durable when couples have a lot in common.

Three participants mentioned that having **similar lifestyles** had strengthened their relationship:

“... we’re quite on level with what we do and what we’re passionate about.”

“... I am just thinking about the way we eat at home. She has the same habits like I have. There is really no significant difference.”
“We’re both independent, we are financially stable so there weren’t things that I think normally you would find in a relationship that would cause stress. ... I think, just, the way we have been raised and... the things that brought us together and that we realised that we have more similarities in regards to: family life, how we treat others and things that we believe in.”

Landis and Landis (1977) explain that a marriage is more likely to succeed when two families have a lot in common, like beliefs, attitudes, values, educational level and other characteristics. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) explain that relationship heterogamy and differences between partners in attitudes and values are factors that reduce relationship quality in interracial couples. If the interracial couple has similar values and the quality of the relationship that they have achieved is high, it makes the problems that they are experiencing less distressing or traumatic (Landis & Landis).

The same female non-South African participant mentioned that she and her partner have **similar visions and goals for life**. She stated the following:

“[my partner] has the same goals and visions for life.”

Three participants mentioned that they and their partner have a **similar parenting approach**. One male South African participant expressed that when he looks at his and his partner’s family values and cultural backgrounds, he does not think it is that different. He explained as follows:

“I don’t think it’s different, it’s along the same lines. And so which actually helps in sense of the eh way we bring our children up.”

Another male South African participant expressed the following:

“... even when we were deciding about having children, it was not an issue. We knew that if we give them the values and beliefs of our upbringing.”
A female South African participant explained as follows:

“... we have very similar values... Whether it’s politically, whether it is about how we bring up our children.”

Four participants expressed that having similar religious views had strengthened them as a couple:

“... I’m not a practising Christian. Ehm at the moment I mean I’m just, I’m a scientist so. I ascribe to eh the scientific dogma so, then in that case for both of us it’s not an issue. Ja.”

“But both of us are quite a-religious, in that sense that it’s not like we don’t believe in God, it’s just that we don’t believe in an organised religion.”

“... we both have Catholic backgrounds.”

“And with the religious similarity.. We share the same faith.. That’s been more of a bringing together factor than culture has been a dividing factor. ... So a lot of our culture revolves around our faith so it is very similar and there are small differences. ... because of our faith... a lot of the culture kind of is connected with the faith because we share the same faith.”

Landis and Landis (1977) point out that when two individuals share the same religion, are of approximately the same economic level and share similar values in life, the fact that they are from different countries with nationality differences is of little importance to their happiness. Knox and Schacht (2010) explain that people of similar religion or spiritual philosophy tend to seek out each other. This is called religious homogamy.
Young and Long (2006) have defined some general characteristics of healthy couples (same-race and interracial), as mentioned in theme three. Another characteristic is that the couple share a belief in something larger. Healthy couples often share a belief, goal or mission that is larger than themselves, e.g. religion, politics, family orientation. This shared belief, goal or mission could strengthen the couple and bring them closer together. There is a phrase saying ‘The couple that prays together, stays together’.

One female non-South African participant mentioned having similar cultural beliefs as her partner. She explained as follows:

“I learnt more about him and his culture and the more I learned the more I realise that we are actually more similar than we are different when it comes to how we were raised and our cultural beliefs.”

Breger and Hill (1998) explain that sometimes a group may think that it is very different from other groups and could therefore ignore a broad range of similarities it might share with that group. On the other hand, two individuals from different cultures could have more in common than they have differences, particularly if they have a similar urban, highly educational and professional background.

Shih and Sanchez (2009) add that the majority of social scientists today share the belief that racial categories are not fixed and immutable, but socially constructed categories. These social scientists point out that differences within racial groups are much greater than the differences between racial groups and that race cannot give an explanation for biological differences. Racial recognition between different groups transformed with time accordingly to the present political and cultural climate.

Four participants mentioned having shared roles between them and their partners when it comes to the household, which strengthened their relationship. Their statements were as follows:

“... we view ourselves eh equally in our household.”
“... we don’t have strictly defined roles. I handle finance, he handles whatever he, you know we.. It’s fairly joined.”

“We try to share in terms of less responsibility: children and household stuff.”

“... seeing him with his parents... his approach to not wanting to be the same as them, it has really helped both of us. ... So I suppose him not being conventional has really helped.”

Three participants mentioned that a combination of their common values has strengthened their relationship. As one female non-South African participant stated:

“... we both had to review our norms and values and what we find important, how we can combine that.”

Another female non-South African participant expressed the following:

“Yeah, I think because he, even though there’s a big part of him that’s traditional, ehm he in himself is merely traditional with modern or Western already. And I think that helps.”

A female South African participant stated:

“... we have very similar values so... he is a person that I can be myself with very freely because our values are the same in every way. ... we share similar values.”

Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen and Monakes (2011) identified six primary coping strategies within interracial couples, for dealing with culture-related stressors. These six coping
strategies are as follows: 1) gender-role flexibility; 2) humour; 3) cultural deference by one partner; 4) recognition of similarities; 5) cultural reframing or the development of blended values and expectations that redefined the intercultural relationship; and 6) a general appreciation for other cultures. Most of these coping strategies have also been mentioned by the research participants in this theme and theme three. The following theme will revolve around recommendations to other interracial couples that came forth from the collected data.

3.2.5. THEME 5: RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHER INTERRACIAL COUPLES

The participants were asked to reflect on the benefits and negatives of being in an interracial relationship. The majority of the participants mentioned benefits or positives that could be recommended to other interracial couples. This theme describes these recommendations. Five subthemes emerged from this theme. The first subtheme revolved around marriage preparation.

3.2.5.1. Subtheme 1: Marriage preparation

The aim of premarital education or marriage preparation is to prepare couples for marriage and increase the likelihood of healthy, satisfactory marriages (Wong, 2009). Premarital education also focuses on preventing or decreasing marital distress (Parker, 1999; Stahmann, 2000). Premarital education is assessed with premarital/relationship inventories (PIs) and is typically offered through skills-based education (Parker 1999).

One female South African participant mentioned that she and her partner had marriage preparation before they got married, which helped them in terms of clarifying the expectations they had of each other. She explained it as follows:

“... we had very good marriage preparation. We had good input there and we have actually had conversations about that. What is your expectation of me as a wife? What is my expectation of you as a husband? What am I expecting you to do? What are you expecting me
to do? How do we share the responsibilities? Do we share the responsibilities? We had all those kind of conversations going in which helped.”

In addition to clarifying the expectations of their partners, the participant reflected how marriage preparation allowed them to unpack the differences in their family of origin and hence cultural backgrounds in advance. This she indicated, allowed her and her spouse to deal with a potentially difficult topic in an overt and transparent manner:

“... we were very well prepared and we had asked the tough questions, had the difficult conversations where there were lots of tears and arguments and all sorts but we worked through a lot of that stuff beforehand so we kind of went into our marriage with open eyes and there weren’t very many surprises. So I think that is something that I felt has been very helpful. I think it is important just across the board, but especially because of the differences in families and all of that. I think it’s very important. ... ... a lot of the work was done before hand, before the marriage. I think that was something that I really, really think helped us in that we were very well prepared going into the marriage.”

The citations by this research participant accentuate the point that when a couple comes from two different backgrounds it is important to talk about these differences in order to make the relationship work. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) emphasise that partners involved in interracial relationships usually face challenges emerging from several interpersonal and contextual factors, and hence need to examine these differences before the time. Romano (1988, as cited by Breger & Hill, 1998) echoes this view by flagging some of the challenges which may include misunderstandings about parenthood, effective communication patterns, language, space and privacy and concepts of personhood. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) point out that the quality of interethnic unions could be improved by addressing these challenges, pretty much as illustrated by the views of the research participants in the present study.

It is important to go into marriage well prepared. This becomes clear when one thinks of the high rate of divorce and other consequences of marital distress. Marriage preparation can also be of value when one considers the possibility of experiencing significant challenges early in marriage (Halford & Simons, 2005) as with an interracial relationship. Wong (2009) explains
the benefits of marriage preparation by noting that couples are being prepared through pre-marital inventories by identifying what their personal risk and resilience profiles are as well as other components that could affect their marriage.

3.2.5.2. Subtheme 2: Educating children

Within an interracial relationship, it is important to educate and prepare the children for certain issues they might be expecting in the future. Three participants mentioned this need for education, with regard to societal responses. One female non-South African participant expressed the following:

“I think just basically as we have as answer the questions as most age appropriate as we can, to you know to address and alleviate. And just actually just strengthen them and let them know that, you know some people aren’t going to be happy and you can’t make everybody happy.”

Her South African partner also mentioned educating their children with regard to societal responses. He explained as follows:

“... it’s one of those instances where if the parent or father/mother relationship is very strong around those issues, and open, one tends to get the feeling that at least you’ve laid a foundation that they are solid on that. And so whatever exterior or external forces may come, that they need to be just crowded on that aspect. But you cannot prevent what happens in life, and particularly like I said ehm, in a country like South Africa where we are still trying to find our identities and if you will it’s going to be a bit tougher for them.”

He further mentioned:

“... therefore also when they treat and behave with other people, it should not matter who, how and what it is they are, but they are human beings first.”
Another male South African participant expressed the following:

“... we do not want to be confined by these artificial blacks where one has to belong and this is something that we have already inculcated in our kids as well so that they don’t just put themselves in blocks.”

Three participants mentioned educating their children with regard to perceived differences from others. The strong message from all three of these participants suggested that parents should provide an open forum where children’s questions can be addressed directly, honestly and in an age appropriate manner. It was also evident that a mature, rational response rather than an emotive response is needed by the parents in order to facilitate the children’s adjustment to the perceived difference. A female non-South African participant explained as follows:

“Because they’re not strictly Zulu, not strictly, they’re not Xhosa either, and you know and they’re not culturally coloured, they’re not white. And so they’re, they will have to learn to deal with that. Ehm, and we just have to deal with it as it comes along.”

One male South African participant mentioned the following:

“... they are curious.. why is mommy paler than you are? I don’t know, I was born here in South Africa and mom was born in America. We have to explain all of that to them because they interact. ... we have an open policy at home. We sit down at the table and have dinners. How was your day? We narrate the stories and that is when stuff comes up and then we provide feedback. You know, view yourself as a human being.”

The same participant further expressed:

“I mean we are trying to create that environment so that if they are experiencing a challenge, they are able to bring it home. We have a conversation about it. We may not have all the
answers you know, but at least they have a forum to discuss these issues. And I believe at least when I look at my own childhood; this is something that I wish I had. And I told myself that I would make sure that it happens with my kids. And probably she feels the same as well. That we need to open up when we hear those voices. Very important you know.”

A male non-South African participant mentioned the following:

“... we emphasized this [their identity] a lot and talk openly about it in a very positive way. ... we can just consciously speak about it.. that they actually come from different mixed genes, or mixed parents. ... I think it is very important. It is very important in a relationship like that. You need to talk about things. You must be open. ... if you don’t talk about it, you are really creating identity problems. You need to be able to deal with it as it comes.”

Craig-Henderson (2010) mentions that whilst adolescence is challenging for most people, it is likely to be even more challenging for a racially mixed child. Craig-Henderson (2010) further explains that the biracial child goes through different phases during which they will lean more toward the identity of one parent and claim this identity. Creating their own unique identity could become a challenge since their identity is different from either parent. Hopefully they will manage to combine all these identities into one that allows them to unite different aspects of both parents’ backgrounds and identities. The result is an individual who appreciates and acknowledges both aspects of his/her identity by appreciating the additions of both parents’ racial groups. This could involve the child consciously identifying as ‘bi-racial’.

The mixed children often grow up respecting both cultures and benefit from a broad outlook on life. Children of interracial marriages are likely to develop a greater degree of acceptance of differences. These children are more likely to be better global citizens (feeling part of the world, rather than a country or race) than those born from an intra-racial relationship (California State University, Fullerton. Women’s Center and Human Services Dept. [s.a.])
3.2.5.3. Subtheme 3: Embracing the different traditions and cultural events

Three participants mentioned that combining the traditional holidays was a great experience for them. As one female non-South African participant mentioned:

“We celebrate thanksgiving, which is a US holiday. But he lived in the States for quite some times so he quite enjoyed doing that. So we’ve married a lot of those, those different cultural traditions together.”

A male non-South African participant expressed the following:

“We try to accommodate both in a way. We accommodate both in a way, we both have Catholic backgrounds but we try to, over Christmas, accommodate both cultures.”

A female non-South African participant explained:

“We do thanksgiving, which is American... we combine both. We celebrate Christmas and I mean a lot of things that we do when it comes to those kind of holidays, we do it how I was raised but he has accepted that and quite enjoys those kind of things.”

Four participants mentioned teaching their children about their cultural traditions. One male South African participant expressed the following:

“... I’d like to have them adhere to perhaps some of my cultural background.”

A female South African participant explained as follows:

“And cause we have also spoken from the beginning very free and openly about my heritage and his heritage. ... And because of that they seem to be very comfortable with both worlds. ... I think it was exposing them to both worlds. They have to be able to see it.”
Her non-South African partner mentioned the following:

“... also explain our children that in Germany we would do that and here we do that. We try to teach them both sides.”

One female non-South African participant confirmed that she and her husband also actively socialise their children about the two different cultures and the associated roles in their household:

“I can see that we are socialising our children also to take on these roles.”

The way in which the research participants manage the different cultural traditions seems to be in accordance with the views held by Feigelman and Silverman (1983, as cited by Lee, 2003, and Huh and Reid, 2000). These authors reported that when parents emphasise their children’s racial backgrounds, encourage ethnic participation, live in racially integrated communities and are very involved in these activities with their children, the children are more likely to show racial pride.

3.2.5.4. Subtheme 4: Acknowledging the benefits of learning about each other’s culture

Almost all the participants reported on the benefits of learning about their partner’s culture. Four participants expressed becoming more open minded and having broadened their perspective because of their experiences in an interracial relationship. One female South African participant explained this as follows:

“The relationship really helped me to kind of open my eyes to assumptions and beliefs that I had that I maybe never questioned and I just kind of swallowed from the way that I was brought up and the family that I was brought up in.”
She further expressed:

“... just having assumptions or beliefs challenged and having the opportunity to examine those and decide whether they are worth keeping or discarding. So that openness that came with that I think is definitely a positive.”

A female non-South African participant described how being in an interracial relationship has provided her with an opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth:

“I mean you learn about yourself when you are exposed to the way other people do things because it makes you question why you do things a certain way but it also exposed you to and teaches you a different way good or bad. So it is always, for me it is always learning something new.”

The same participant suggested that being in an interracial relationship and living in a different country has also elicited a more critical stance on her culture of origin:

“It has also made me really question the beliefs that we have as an American society. So not just individually but also just as Americans and how we think about school and working, I mean everything.”

A male South African participant furthermore explained how his involvement in an interracial relationship has resulted in him changing his beliefs on commitment because he saw the amount of love that his partner gave him which has been different to his earlier relationship experiences. He described it as follows:

“... before I met her I was just this person who didn’t believe in you know like commitment, having a relationship because I think of my past experiences.”
He articulated how this amount of love and commitment was different to what he had experienced in relationships with partners from his own culture:

“... it’s not a secret that some of my or most of my black sisters, they are more into materialistic things and not really expecting love or not expecting to show love. You know, as long as you have money; you have a car; a bank account that’s like you know... For me, I would say that is one of the reasons that why... what I noticed with her. Because maybe she’s a different girl from the girls that I normally used to go out with.”

Hunter (2010) explains that young men who are unemployed usually complain about them not being able to attract women. As a result, relationships are structured by material inequalities, which lead to complicated patterns of sexual relations. For example, a young woman may have a relationship with an older man (trading material for sexual relations) and have a younger boyfriend for ‘love’. Women can’t agree on what constitutes ‘true love’ and debate about this. Some women are of the opinion that ‘true love’ can exist with a poor but honest man, while others find that love involves a rich man who can provide and support a women financially. Others argue that ‘true love’ just does not exist in South Africa today.

The same male South African participant furthermore mentioned how being in an interracial relationship has also been intellectually stimulating:

“... I think I see the world from a different point of view because now I am not only an individual like where I was and this second person is obviously a different race from me. So most things that we talk about now, it’s on an international level. Things that are happening all over the world.”

Interestingly the participant’s non-South African partner echoed a similar view, which supports the observation that the intellectual stimulation has been a reciprocal benefit for them both.
She explained as follows:

“... I guess sometimes it’s also just refreshing you know to have someone who thinks differently and sometimes it’s like an eye opener to see things through a different view and then it would just make you look differently at things and ja. I would say maybe that’s one of the most positive things.”

Five participants mentioned that a huge benefit of being in an interracial relationship is **learning about other countries and cultures**. One female non-South African participant expressed the following about experiences in her partner’s culture:

“I mean I definitely think my life is rich because I have a lot of experiences, you know. ... it’s a rich experience.”

Another female South African participant reflected on the positive enrichment as follows:

“But I think it can be really enriching that you have these two different worlds. It can enrich your entire family’s life. It enriches all the interactions around you because there is this person that has this other experience.”

Three other research participants echoed how their experiences have not only expanded their language and cultural knowledge, but also their appreciation for diversity:

“... living now for so long in a different country, so diverse... I am happy about it that it took that way. You feel that you have grown through interacting with other cultures. You have grown. You have not only learnt language but you have also learnt the culture. ... It is worth more than anything else.”

“... you learn a lot of things like that you didn’t know about the other culture before so being close with someone that is not your race and you know, you get to know more things that you
didn’t know about like... ... You learn their culture. Like how they do things. ... Like with her culture and her family and learning also the German history because when I was in Germany then I got to learn how Germany became today’s Germany and how it was in the forties and also hearing it from ... her grandparents. Like her grandfather was a soldier at the time so also learning their history. So it was a positive thing for me.”

One of the participants mentioned how living in her partner’s country has enhanced her understanding of and appreciation for her partner:

“Ja I guess it’s just that you see those sides of your partner and you’re really impressed by it maybe or you appreciate it and you see the values of it and of course that makes you love your partner even more. ... So I guess the positive thing is embrace those things that are different but that are also, you know, you must not always see it as a negative thing maybe sometimes just let it be and just integrate and see that it’s not even that bad and sometimes it can be a good thing that with you know ja or know like that you also want to start ehm introducing it into your own life or whatever.”

In an interracial relationship, the couple is exposed to new ways of thinking. This could broaden their worldview and at the same time challenge and strengthen their own beliefs. Each partner could welcome aspects of the other culture/race/religion into their daily lives, as the participant mentioned above explained. Together the couple could take the best from both worlds, make it work for them and later pass it on to their children.

During the practices of daily life, the cultural differences between the interracial couple could become more clear. They could become major points of conflict, or could enrich the diversity between the couple, or even both (Breger & Hill, 1998). With these participants the differences have enriched and strengthened their relationship.

Being in an interracial relationship gives the opportunity to learn more and open up about another culture, race or religion. It can give you a new perspective. And not just from a textbook, but experiences first hand from the partner. This is an opportunity to set aside all the stereotypes about culture, race, religion and colour, and really take the chance to get to know someone different from yourself. It broadens the opportunities for learning and personal
growth. An individual could become more tolerant and respectful towards other cultures by embracing the differences. Both partners could be exposed to another country, experience new traditions and possibly learn a new language. Gerstein, Heppner, Aegisdottir, Leung and Norsworthy (2009) point out that individuals may also gain a richer perspective and understanding about one’s own culture when examining the cultural values and practices of persons in diverse countries.

Besides the intrapersonal changes that the research participants have reflected on, they also made reference to how their interracial relationships have broadened the worldviews of some of their friends and other family members who became more open minded. One female South African participant said the following about her friends:

“*Their minds have changed completely as well.*”

She describes the changes in her father and significant others as follows:

“*His patterns have and his I think perspective of the whole thing has changed a lot as well.*”

“... *I think it also opened the minds of our families but also kind of opened the way for some of our other friends, who might have been a bit afraid, to kind of see actually this is fine. This is good.*”

A further two research participants mentioned how their interracial relationship have also evoked a greater open mindedness within their immediate communities and society at large, simply because they dared to oppose the societal norms in relationships. One male South African participant described this as follows:

“... *if we walk down the street, have a look at us, we’re setting the example of time changing basically in South Africa, especially that side [in his neighbourhood] living with me, or with us as a big family. Ehm, but we’re making a change and ja, stop racism basically.*”
Another male South African participant described how his interracial relationship serves as a role model to challenge dominant historical societal discourses around relationship barriers based on race and culture:

“First of all for me I think it is good that we can be able to show the whole... the society that there are no like barriers... that you can’t date someone that is not your race. Even for the upcoming generation you know so that we can be a very good example. So now it is not like older days now that you can... that you were like... that there were boundaries that were there if you were seen with a white female as a guy then you go to prison or things like that. Or it is a disgrace to your own culture or things like that. So we are also like... kind of those example figures.”

In addition to the benefit listed above, the same research participant expressed how he embraced societal opposition to his relationship as a positive challenge to prove that interracial relationships can work:

“For me it just makes the relationship stronger. It just makes me want to like prove a point as well. To make it work so that people can see that it is actually a good thing. Not a bad thing at all to have an interracial relationship.”

This stance by the research participant is supported by Leslie and Letiecq (2004) who suggest that the possible feeling of being oppressed or not accepted because of one’s marital partner could lead to increased bonding between the couple and the couple could make more efforts to present themselves as a united front. It could develop greater commitment of both individuals to the relationship and is likely to form a strong union against outside influences.

In keeping with the research participants’ views expressed above that their relationships serve as a role model to society and that they force society to challenge historical stereotypes, Women’s Center and Human Services Dept. [s.a.] from the California State University Fullerton agree that an interracial couple is promoting equality and social acceptance to the society that they live in. The authors emphasise that interracial couples have the chance to erase just a little more prejudice from the world, by teaching others around them that their
relationship is like any other and making them realise how similar two ‘different’ people can be.

In addition to the couple themselves, their children could also serve as an example to others and can promote racial harmony, as Craig-Henderson (2010) noted that a lot of people view biracial children as a symbol that represents racial harmony, which is not weird since they are the result of two individuals from different races being together intimately. Many people see biracial children as presenting the best of both races. Biracial children represent to others that racial harmony is in fact possible.

By being confronted with interracial relationships and their offspring, South Africans get the opportunity to recover from apartheid and to look at themselves and other races differently. They are forced to deal with a (for them) difficult process that has to be addressed on a national level (Calitz & Nkosi, 2010). Mojapelo-Batka (2008) points out that interracial relationships are like conducting your own Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Social barriers change and interracial relationships prove that these relationships are important to the large society of South Africa because they challenge the norms of many races and the collectivism of the cultures.

Homann-Marriott and Amato (2008) explain that the resilience of social support accessible to interracial couples will increase when public awareness is being raised to increase tolerance and acceptance of crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. This could help these couples in developing relationships of higher quality.

Hopefully with the increase in interracial relationships and marriages, the negative attitudes of South Africans towards these interracial relationships will change and stay that way. But apartheid only ended less than 20 years ago, so South Africa still has a long way to go, says Mojapelo-Batka (2008). At least there are more opportunities for people from different cultures and races to meet now that apartheid has ended and it is now legal to date across the colour line.
3.2.5.5. Subtheme 5: Being comfortable with self and relationship

Two participants mentioned that they were comfortable with themselves and their relationship, which helped them adjust and cope with the challenges. One female South African participant expressed the following about dealing with negative perceptions from society:

“I just realized the kind of person that he is, is the person I wanted. It was more about, when it boiled down to the two of us, I could deal with issues like that. ... So I am much more comfortable because the discomfort is no longer there. It has gone away but it is also because of various factors. We have lived there. I am older. I see the world differently. And I am not sure if it is because of something that he did or I did, it’s just as life has gone by because you just realize what were all these issues all about.”

The same female participant proceeded, mentioning:

“That you eventually get to somewhere where you are just comfortable with each other and the broader society. Then it doesn’t really matter. Or they are comfortable with you because you are comfortable with yourself. ... And I think that is how they [other interracial couples] overcome it and they are comfortable in their relationship with others and that makes people comfortable too.”

A female non-South African participant expressed the following about the negative perceptions of society:

“But then I realised that this is the person I want to be with and I was ok with it and then I stopped seeing those things or hearing those things.”
She further mentioned a situation where she was questioned about herself and her children:

“I explained to her who we are but, you know it could have gone a different way if I didn’t feel comfortable with who I was I suppose.”

She further expressed the following about negative perceptions in society:

“But it doesn’t, it does not affect me. I forget because I am so comfortable.”

As already mentioned in theme 3 by Landis and Landis (1977), in order to achieve happiness in interracial marriages, partners must be mentally and emotionally mature and have more than the average understanding and tolerance. Being comfortable with oneself and one’s interracial relationship is important when looking at relationship quality. These participants confirm this.

Relationship quality refers to how positive or negative individuals feel about their relationship. For example, within marriages, some people are quite satisfied with their relationship, whereas others are quite dissatisfied. People who are comfortable within their interracial relationship, are expected to have higher relationship quality. Morry et al. (2010) explain that relationship quality predicts how individuals evaluate their relationship, which is a significant element of partner-perceptions.

This fifth and final theme presented the recommendations for other interracial couples that were derived from the data provided by the research participants. These will be mentioned again in the next chapter under recommendations.
3.3. Chapter conclusion

Chapter Three presented the findings of this research study, and these findings have been verified against the existing body of knowledge. The findings were presented in terms of the five themes, with their supporting subthemes and categories. The themes that emerged were: cultural difference factors; negative factors that influence couple’s coping with cultural differences; positive factors that influence couple’s coping with cultural differences; factors relating to cultural differences that strengthen the relationship; and recommendations to other interracial couples.

In this study, the research participants have described their experiences of being in an interracial relationship and factors that influence their coping with the cultural differences, either positively or negatively. It became clear that the couples are resilient and are very adaptable and flexible in certain unknown situations. These were strengthening factors in their relationship. In the discussion of the findings, quotations have been added to support the findings and a literature control was utilised to compare and contrast the findings.

The next chapter will focus on the summary, conclusions, limitations and recommendations. The recommendations will be addressed to social workers and other practitioners; and will be for policies and awareness; and for further research; while a summary of the themes of this chapter will be presented, involving recommendations for other interracial couples.
CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Introduction

Chapter One in this research report provided an introduction to the topic of relationship satisfaction and cross-cultural differences in interracial relationships and a brief description of the research methodology used in the actualisation of this study. This chapter further provided an overview of the literature available on the topic. Chapter Two described the research design and methodology used for this study in detail. Chapter Three discussed the findings that emerged from the collected research data. Five themes emerged from the findings: cultural difference factors; negative factors that influence the couple’s coping with cultural differences; positive factors that influence the couple’s coping with cultural differences; factors relating to cultural differences that strengthen the relationship; and recommendations to other interracial couples.

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide a summary of the research methodology and the main findings, to point out limitations to the study, to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the conclusions that can be utilised in social work practice and further study.

4.2. Summary of research design and methodology

The goal of the research was to explore the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges, and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships.

Three objectives were formulated in an attempt to reach this goal:

- To explore and describe the specific cross-cultural differences that the couple have experienced in their relationship.
• To explore and describe the specific challenges these cross-cultural differences have resulted in.

• To explore and describe the strengths the couples have utilized and developed as a result of the cross-cultural differences.

The study employed a qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual research design to attain the goal.

4.2.1. Sampling

The purposive sampling technique was utilised to select participants, which involved the researcher deliberately choosing participants to be included in the study on the basis that those selected could be best suited to help the researcher respond to the research question. Purposive sampling was used to invite adult couples within the age group of 18-50 years old, who have been in a committed interracial relationship and have been living together for at least one year, with or without children. Further criteria were: partners differ in racial orientation and each couple consisted of one partner of South African origin and one non-South African partner; all couples were staying in the Eastern Cape; and all participants were able to communicate in English.

Initially there appeared to be a need for more participants during the data-collection, which is why the researcher also made use of the ‘Snowball sampling technique’. This technique involved approaching the participants who are involved in an interracial relationship, who then identified other interracial couples that fitted the criteria for this study.

4.2.2. Data collection

Data were collected by employing individual semi-structured interviews. In order to gain more in-depth responses, open-ended questions were asked during the interviews. The researcher employed an independent interviewer to interview the participants to ensure objectivity of the research process. The researcher was not present at three interviews in accordance with ethical principles; I excused myself as they were close friends of mine.
During all the interviews the researcher made use of a small audio recorder and a drawing pad to make field notes. Consent forms were used to obtain the formal permission of the participants to participate and permission to record the interviews.

4.2.3. Data analysis

The collected data were analysed effectively using the model proposed by Tesch (in Creswell, 1998). An independent coder assisted in the data analysis. The data were analysed by both the researcher and the independent coder. The information was discussed and compared by the researcher, research supervisor and independent coder and we arrived at a consensus on the themes. Five themes emerged from the analysed data.

4.2.4. Ensuring trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of the research, the researcher utilised the model of Guba (1985) as cited in De Vos et al. (1998). Four criteria were used to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The specific strategies employed to address the criteria of trustworthiness ranged from triangulation of data sources; having reflective discussions; employing an independent coder; asking the participants to edit the transcribed data and several others reflected upon in Chapter 2.

4.3. Summary of the research findings

As previously mentioned, five themes were derived from the findings. A summary of these five themes and subthemes will follow.
4.3.1. THEME 1: CULTURAL DIFFERENCE FACTORS

The participants were asked to reflect on the cultural differences that have been evident in their relationship. Five subthemes emerged in the response to this question. The first subtheme revolved around differences in their childhood background.

Subtheme 1: Childhood background

The participants mentioned differences in upbringing or how they were raised between them and their partners. Differences in backgrounds regarding time orientation, neighbourhoods, community life, independence, family planning and the value placed on education and careers were mentioned here. Also a difference in socio-economic backgrounds was mentioned by one participant.

Subtheme 2: Language difficulties

Many of the participants mentioned language as being the biggest difference between them as partners and explained that they have had difficulties with the different languages. This difficulty was mentioned as becoming more evident when visiting family and during arguments and misunderstandings. Another difference that was mentioned was a different way of communicating and interpersonal relationships. Learning the language of the South African partner was attempted by most participants, but some gave up after a while because it was easier to speak in English. It seems that the non-South African partners have the most difficulties when it comes to language. Probably because they moved to a different country with a different language which means that they have to do most of the adjustment. The language difficulty and not knowing their partner’s language was described by some as frustrating. One participant also mentioned feeling excluded at times because of the difference in language.

Subtheme 3: Lack of cultural knowledge and understanding of partner’s culture

There was consensus amongst the participants that they had to take a significant time to understand their partner’s culture. Some to this date still do not have a good understanding of
their partner’s culture. Some participants brought up the issue of apartheid to explain the lack of knowledge; people of different culture groups were not allowed to know much about each other; and also people who did not grow up in South Africa have little knowledge of how it was during that time. One participant was expected by her partner’s family to follow their cultural ways, whereas another participant received more flexibility from her family in-law regarding those expectations since she was from a different culture.

Subtheme 4: Different cultural and religious traditions

Between different cultures and countries, different things are celebrated and in a different way. The majority of the participants mentioned this difference in cultural and/or religious traditions. Differences mentioned were: the large number of traditions and celebrations in South Africa; the amount of toys children receive during celebrations; the food of cultural celebrations and how the celebrations take place; the background of their traditions; ways of celebrating Christmas; wedding styles; different customs for children; and differences in religion. The South African cultural traditions were described as more traditional compared with the Western more liberal traditions. A big difference mentioned within the South African black culture was the use of slaughtering and giving thanks to the ancestors during celebrations.

Subtheme 5: Different approach to lifestyle

Every culture is unique and is characterised in particular ways, including different approaches to lifestyle. These different lifestyles become more apparent when living with someone from a different culture. Participants mentioned several different approaches to lifestyle between them as a couple. One such a difference relate to the approaches to social interaction, for e.g., whether to just arrive at someone’s house unannounced or to wait for an invitation. Other aspects mentioned were: a difference in addressing elders; the importance of societal image varies; different grieving styles; different views on showing affection in public; different food and eating rituals; different perceptions of time; different family roles; and being used to different kinds of luxury.
4.3.2. THEME 2: NEGATIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COUPLES’ S COPING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When discussing the cultural difference factors, negative factors that influenced the couple’s coping with cultural differences were described by the participants. Four subthemes emerged from this theme. The first subtheme revolved around negative perceptions of society that had a negative influence on the couple’s coping with cultural differences.

Subtheme 1: Negative perceptions of society

The participants were in agreement that society often still has negative perceptions towards interracial relationships. This could have influenced the couple’s coping with cultural differences. Non-acceptance by others was mentioned by the participants which included non-acceptance by parents, siblings, in certain towns and areas, by friends, by older people, at social events, at stores, and among future employees. Also mentioned by the participants was being stereotyped by society and experiencing a lack of empathy about the issues experienced. Some participants mentioned receiving special treatment as a result of coming from a different culture.

Subtheme 2: Impact on children and parenting

The majority of participants mentioned having concerns about conceiving ‘mixed children’ and the impact it has on the children. Participants were worried about the struggles and challenges their children might face, and about possible identity problems. Some participants were asked by people on the street if their children were adopted and had to explain that their children were theirs. Other participants mentioned that they or their children get racial questions from other children and have to explain the situation to them. Also mentioned by participants was that their children had an awareness of their own differences from others. This was then openly discussed at home. Only one participant mentioned that her children struggled to fit in.
**Subtheme 3: Language difficulties**

As already discussed in theme 1, the majority of participants mentioned having language difficulties. Participants mentioned that these language difficulties could have a negative influence on their coping with the cultural differences. Some participants mentioned a language barrier and other participants mentioned misunderstanding of the language used, which also evoke a sense of mistrust and being excluded. Also a difficulty in communicating with their partner’s family and friends was expressed by participants and difficult family interaction as a result the children not knowing the language.

**Subtheme 4: Being far away from home**

Since this research is about relationships or marriages between South African and non-South African partners, it means that at least one partner is far from home. Being far away from home could have a negative impact on the partner’s coping with the cultural differences. Difficulties that were mentioned as a result of at least one partner being far away from home were as follows: it being a strain on a partner, difficulty travelling with the whole family, being away from the family core, being removed from family functions, meeting the parents-in-law only later in the relationship, missing home family and friends, and finding it difficult building a new life.

**4.3.3. THEME 3: POSITIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COUPLE’S COPING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Besides negative factors, the participants also mentioned positive factors that influenced the couple’s coping with cultural differences, as described in theme 3. Four subthemes emerged from this theme. The first subtheme revolved around positive perceptions of society.

**Subtheme 1: Positive perceptions of society**

The participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of the perceptions of society. Quite a lot of participants mentioned that they have experienced positive perceptions of society,
family and friends. Acceptance by others was mentioned by the participants which included acceptance by parents, by other family members, by fellow students, and by friends. The acceptance by their family and close friends clearly seemed to be a very important factor for the research participants.

**Subtheme 2: Characteristics of the couple**

Certain characteristics of partners in an interracial relationship could help the couple cope with cultural differences. Most participants mentioned some of these characteristics and expressed that these have influenced their relationship positively. Characteristics mentioned by the participants that had a positive influence on the relationship are the following: couple’s compatibility, good communication, knowledge of partner’s language, knowing when to ask questions, open communication on issues, having good conflict management skills, being able to discuss challenges and differences in their relationship and compromising. Other positive elements in their relationship mentioned by participants were: mutual support, respect and love, the ability to deal with opposition together, sense of humour, having to work on the relationship, spending time together, couple are compatible, no focus on race and being far away from home.

**Subtheme 3: Personal characteristics of each partner**

The majority of participants mentioned that personal characteristics of themselves and/or their partner had a positive influence on coping with cultural differences. The personal characteristics mentioned were: being independent of their partner, the adaptability of their partner, being easy going and being open minded. All the participants seemed to have a very flexible character, which made it easier for them to adjust and adapt to cultural differences. Many of the participants were also in earlier interracial relationships, so it also transpired that they had a preference for the unconventional and were generally more adventurous in terms of embracing the unknown.
Subtheme 4: Type of social interactions

The majority of participants explained that some types of social interactions had a positive influence on their coping with cultural differences. One such social interaction included having interracial friends, which was found to be a benefit for the children as well as for the couple. Also enjoying the community life of their partner’s more collectivist community contributed to the positive impact on their relationship.

4.3.4. THEME 4: FACTORS RELATING TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THAT STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP

The majority of the participants mentioned factors that relate to cultural differences that strengthened their relationship. This theme described these strengthening factors. Five subthemes emerged from this theme. The first subtheme revolved around previous experiences.

Subtheme 1: Previous experiences

Some participants mentioned having been involved in previous interracial relationships before the current one, which caused them to be prepared and knowledgeable on what to expect when it comes to reactions of family, friends and society. One participant mentioned that her having a lack of personal South African history or hurt, is the reason they work well together as a couple. Also mentioned by a participant was her partner’s family history of interracial marriages.

Subtheme 2: Prior knowledge of the other’s culture and actively learning about the different cultures

Some participants expressed that having knowledge of their partner’s culture has strengthened their relationship even further. Participants mentioned that learning another culture was perceived as enriching and other participants mentioned that their partner’s having learned their culture had a positive effect on their relationship. Some participants mentioned that they
have learned more through experiences with their partner’s family and others mentioned learning more about their partner’s culture through interacting with other people from that culture. One participant mentioned he got a better understanding of his partner’s culture through sport and that gaining more understanding of the togetherness and family life in his partner’s culture has strengthened their relationship. It seems that having an understanding of their partner’s culture had a positive influence on all the participants’ relationships.

Subtheme 3: Acceptance of partner’s culture

Some participants mentioned that the acceptance of their partner’s culture and their partner accepting their culture was a strengthening factor in their relationship. Some participants mentioned accepting the cultural food of their partners, learning to cook the cultural dishes and learning about the serving procedures in that culture. Others mentioned accepting the clothing that comes with the culture. One participant mentioned that she accepted the religious beliefs, regarding the ancestors, of her partner’s culture. Some participants found that the length of their relationship had a positive influence on the acceptance of differences between them and their partners, since they were able to adapt to these changes over time. All these participants asserted that the challenges and differences are more overt at the beginning of the relationship and that acceptance comes with the years and with maturity.

Subtheme 4: Education and careers

Some participants mentioned that having similar education has strengthened their relationship. These participants mentioned being on the same educational trajectory as their partner, which was how some participants met and how others got attracted to each other. Also mentioned by participants as a strengthening factor, was having an understanding of each other’s careers.

Subtheme 5: Lifestyles

It was mentioned by some participants that having similar lifestyles has strengthened their relationship. Other aspects mentioned by participants that have strengthened their
relationships are having: similar visions and goals for life, a similar parenting approach, similar religious views, similar cultural beliefs, shared roles, and having common values.

4.3.5. THEME 5: RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHER INTERRACIAL COUPLES

The participants were asked to reflect on the benefits and negatives of being in an interracial relationship. The majority of the participants mentioned benefits or positives that could be recommended to other interracial couples. This theme described these recommendations. Five subthemes emerged from this theme. The first subtheme concerned marriage preparation.

Subtheme 1: Marriage preparation

Of all the participants, only one participant mentioned that she and her partner had had marriage preparation before they got married. This participant expressed that it helped them a lot, because, since they had all the difficult conversations at the beginning, they were well prepared and there were few surprises after they got married.

Subtheme 2: Educating children

Within an interracial relationship, it is important to educate and prepare your ‘mixed’ children on certain issues they might be encountering in the future. Some participants mentioned educating their children with regard to societal responses. Other participants mentioned educating their children with regard to perceived differences from others.

Subtheme 3: Embracing the different traditions and cultural events

Some participants mentioned that combining the traditional holidays was a great experience for them and their children. Other participants mentioned that they taught their children about their cultural traditions, heritage and background. Participants mentioned the importance of showing their children both worlds.
Subtheme 4: Acknowledging the benefits of learning about each other’s culture

Almost all the participants mentioned that within their interracial relationship there are benefits of learning about their partner’s culture. Some participants expressed becoming more open minded and having broadened their perspective because of the interracial relationship. One participant mentioned that aside from herself, she noticed her friends as well as her family of origin becoming more open minded and tolerant of diversity. Other participants mentioned that being in an interracial relationship could serve as an example towards others. They found that the society will become more open minded because they are forced to deal with these relationships. Some participants mentioned that another huge benefit of being in an interracial relationship is learning about other countries and cultures. They described how this is enriching and that you grow from those experiences.

Subtheme 5: Being comfortable with self and relationship

Some participants mentioned that they were comfortable with themselves and their relationship, which helped them adjust and cope better with the challenges. A participant mentioned that being comfortable came with maturity and asserted that if someone is comfortable with him/herself, others around this person will also become comfortable.

4.4. Conclusions

In concluding this research it is necessary to revisit the goal of the study. The goal of the research was to explore the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges, and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships. The participants were able to talk freely and openly about their experiences through the use of interviews guided by open-ended questions.

Most of the research participants did not consciously think of their relationship as an interracial one and were at a stage where they had a reduced awareness of being from different racial and cultural groups. Many of the participants expressed that they had never really talked in this much detail about their relationship and that by talking about the
differences in their relationship, they became aware of differences they had never thought of before. By asking the participants to think about how they overcame their challenges and differences, some participants mentioned that they had never thought of that before. This could come from the fact that the partners in interracial relationship do not talk that openly to just everyone about their relationships since these relationships are not generally accepted by the society. This interview was a challenge for some participants as they had experienced challenges mostly at the beginning of their relationship, which was a long time ago for some.

The participants reflected having experienced both positive and negative situations, and most of the challenges had been experienced at the beginning of the relationship. The longer the relationship, the more adjusted the partners were and the more comfortable they were with themselves, their partners and their relationship. Being comfortable could also come from having high self-esteem. Landis and Landis (1977:176) state that to achieve happiness in interracial relationships, "individuals must be mentally and emotionally mature and must possess more than average understanding and tolerance" to be able to adapt to another culture. From the statements the participants gave, it becomes clear that most participants possess personal characteristics that make it easier for them to adapt and adjust to a different culture.

The majority of participants had similar educational backgrounds. Qian (1997) also found that interracial marriages are usually educationally homogamous. Most of the non-South African partners that moved to South Africa, have an education in social studies or a social science background. The majority of the non-South African partners already had an interest in the African culture, through having followed courses on African culture or through growing up learning about new and different cultures, which could have stimulated their interest. All families and friends are accepting of the relationship, even though some needed extra time to accept and adjust to the relationship. This acceptance by family and friends made things easier for the participants. Marriage preparation was mentioned as very helpful by one participant. All participants seemed to have very flexible personalities and open-minded characters. The participants used open and effective communication to discuss differences and challenges within their relationship. Landis and Landis (1977) confirm that when a mixed-marriage is successful, it has to do with the flexibility of the individuals involved. The flexibility of the well adapted mixed-couples involves the ability to face their problems and to try to do what they can about the problems.
All these aspects have made it easier for the participants to adjust to the cultural differences and challenges that came with their relationship.

As already mentioned in theme four, Bustamante et al. (2011) identified six primary coping strategies within interracial couples, for dealing with culture-related stressors. These six coping strategies are as follows: 1) gender-role flexibility; 2) humour; 3) cultural deference by one partner; 4) recognition of similarities; 5) cultural reframing or the development of blended values and expectations that redefined the intercultural relationship; and 6) a general appreciation for other cultures. Most of these coping strategies have been confirmed by the research participants.

4.5. Limitations to the study

Eleven participants were used to collect data and there were some difficulties initially in identifying interracial couples that fitted the criteria of the study. I acknowledge that this limited sample could cause some limitations to the study. The snowball sampling technique utilised in recruiting participants for this research study, could have led to participants who were very satisfied and optimistic about their relationship and were happy to share their experiences. This could have resulted in giving a more positive view of their relationship, with the negative sides of being in an interracial relationship being reduced.

A wider geographical sample and using a larger number of participants could have increased the truth value of the data. With each participant one individual interview was conducted. I believe a second interview could have gathered more depth in the process and the collection of data could have been enriched through this. The researcher noticed that some participants were not totally comfortable during the interview which supports the suggestion that a second interview could have been helpful to have let the participants get used to the audio recorder. All the questions could possibly have elicited richer information if there had been a follow-up interview to give the participants more time to reflect on all the questions since a lot of participants had to think long and hard before answering some questions.
Most of the literature on interracial marriages has come from the United States and less from Europe and South Africa, so much of the studies and information is on black and white Americans. When I started this research, I expected to find copious information on interracial couples in South Africa, since they have become more common and there are many opportunities for people of different cultures to meet. When I looked for statistics of interracial couples in South Africa, I was unable to find recent results. I have not been able to access the most recent statistics from the HSRC to date. The dearth of literature in this area could have impacted on the background to the study and basic assumptions as well as the findings that could have been backed up with more literature.

4.6. Recommendations

Based on the findings described above, recommendations for further intervention and research on this topic are presented here. This section is divided into three parts: recommendations to other interracial couples; recommendations for social workers and other practitioners; and recommendations for further study.

4.6.1. Recommendations to other interracial couples

Arising from the data collected during the research, a theme emerged with recommendations to other interracial couples, theme five. Five subthemes or recommendations derived from this theme and are presented below.

► Firstly, marriage preparation is recommended to interracial couples. The aim of marriage preparation is to prepare couples for marriage and to increase the likelihood of healthy, satisfactory marriages. Another focus is to prevent or decrease marital distress. Pre-marital preparation could have a positive influence on marital stability and marital quality, since difficult conversations and topics are often discussed in sessions which decreases the chance of any surprises later in the marriage. For an interracial couple besides a lot of differences there are also other challenges that have to be dealt with, so marriage preparation could therefore be especially beneficial for these couples.
Secondly, it is recommended that interracial couples educate their ‘mixed’ children. Children from an interracial relationship could experience negativity from society. It is therefore recommended that the parents educate their children with regard to societal responses, so the child will be well prepared for this and develop a ‘thick skin’ against negative reactions. Also educating their children with regard to perceived differences from others is recommended as children are perceptive from a young age. It is important to have an open and honest communication about these issues, to prevent any racial identity problems later in life.

A third recommendation is to celebrate traditions and cultural events from both cultures and combine them. As an interracial couple, you co-create a new culture for your children. It is important for the children to learn about their heritage and cultural background, which can be done through teaching them the cultural traditions of both cultures. Also this has a positive influence on the development of their cultural identity.

Fourthly, it is recommended that the partners learn each other’s culture and try to embrace it. In an interracial relationship, the couple is exposed to new ways of thinking. This could broaden their worldview and at the same time challenge and strengthen their own beliefs. Also their perspective is broadened and their mind will open up to new ways of doing things. Each partner could welcome aspects of the other culture/race/religion into their daily lives of which they see the value. Together the couple could take the best from both worlds, make it work for them and later pass it on to their children. Learning about other countries and cultures can be perceived as enriching and a person will grow on a personal level from interacting with other cultures and learning a new language.

A fifth and final recommendation to interracial couples is to be comfortable with themselves and their relationship. This is a coping strategy for dealing with negative perceptions of society. When you are comfortable with who you are, with your partner and your relationship, other things do not matter that much and people around you will become comfortable too.
4.6.2. Recommendations for social workers and other practitioners

Arising from the review of literature and previous research, combined with the above findings, the recommendations have been categorised in two parts. First, recommendations that arose from this research study and secondly, recommendations that come forth from previous research and literature. Recommendations for social workers and other practitioners that work with interracial couples or multi-cultural families are as follows:

4.6.2.1. Recommendations from this research study

The following are recommendations derived from this study, for social workers and other practitioners:

► Separate counselling programmes for interracial couples should be developed since most programmes are based on same-race relationships. Counsellors should receive special training to work with these couples and families and enhance their knowledge on different cultures, interracial relationship dynamics, the possible challenges these couples could face, and interventions that could help these couples deal with the challenges. Also they should keep in mind that characteristics of healthy relationships or marriages could differ within each culture and one should be careful when applying this to interracial couples.

► Challenges should be discussed in the sessions and coping mechanisms to deal with these challenges developed. Also important is to raise awareness of the fact that each individual has different interpretations, experiences and observations from within their own personal culture. But the focus should be more on similarities than differences between the two partners to create an environment where various cultural approaches could be appreciated rather than opposed. Also partners could benefit from enhancing their self-esteem since being comfortable with self and the relationship seemed to be a positive factor in dealing with negative reactions from society.

► The challenges an interracial couple faces at the beginning of their relationship are unique because of the partners’ different backgrounds and could be stressful. It is therefore recommended that counsellors are sensitive to the cultural issues. Counsellors are frequently not aware of how their own culturally based ideas influence their work. It is important for them to become aware of and address this in order to work objectively with the clients.
4.6.2.2. Recommendations from previous research and literature

Based on the literature review, the following recommendations are made:

► Counsellors must embrace both an insider and outsider view about culture, human behaviour; and have knowledge of several counselling theories, interventions and strategies (Gerstein et al., 2009). Because the world is getting smaller, counsellors and psychologists are in greater need of research and theoretical frameworks that understand and are appropriate for counselling clients from all over the world.

► Recommended is the use of the culture-specific model (in Gladding, 2002) when working with interracial couples or multi-cultural families. The values, beliefs and orientation of different ethnic cultural groups are highlighted by this model. However, it should be cautioned that this model could lead to stereotyping since the focus is on group characteristics instead of on individual characteristics.

► Multicultural awareness therapy (as described by Nord, 2009) is another counselling method that can be effective with interracial couples or multicultural families. The goal of this therapy is, rather than to adapt to the stressful parts of society, to help the clients challenge them. It focuses on raising multicultural awareness in both partners of an interracial couple and engaging the individuals in conversations about race, identity and discrimination. Addressing cultural challenges could help improve the quality of interracial couples and families. This can be done through critical conversations by counsellors, by exploring the racial dynamics of the society and how it affects both partners. This practice will also strengthen the counsellor’s knowledge about multi-cultural families and their willingness to explore their own identity. It can be expected that an interracial couple’s need for cultural competence training is almost the same to that of a counsellor or therapist, since they both have interactions that are close and emotional with individuals and families from different races.

► Recommended is using therapeutic interventions that strengthen the racial identity of both partners. Research found that black people who have a strong racial identity, had a higher satisfaction within their mixed marriage (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Sellers et al. (2006, as quoted by Nord, 2009) also found that within creating a protective shield against discrimination, a strong racial identity could play a very important role. Both of these two
concepts show that therapeutic interventions which strengthen racial identity will most likely lead to increasing interracial marital quality (Nord, 2009).

► Another adequate theoretical framework for joining in critical conversations and to encourage the exploration of cultures is narrative counselling (Nord, 2009). This model forces the therapist to make empathic connections with each of the interracial partners about how their experience is organised by each of them. Waldman and Rubalcava (2005) believe that the client will experience growth while he/she is watching the therapist model empathic understanding and acceptance towards the cultural needs of their partner. It all comes down to that when a partner can become aware of how cultural differences influence their interracial relationship, the partner will be better prepared and be able to cope better with misunderstandings (Nord, 2009).

4.6.3. Recommendations for policy and awareness

On a policy and legislative level, the following recommendations are offered:

► The lack of South African literature on the research topic shows that there is not a lot of awareness about these relationships. Information from the current study shows that there needs to be a greater awareness and acceptance towards interracial relationships.

► It could be beneficial for social organisations to create special programmes for professional counsellors working with interracial couples. This would encourage these couples to go to counselling sooner and will result in a higher quality of interracial relationships and marriages. By the society being confronted with these relationships and seeing the stability of these relationships, could result in a larger increase in interracial relationships. This will then have a positive influence on racial reconciliation within South Africa.

► Policies should encourage non-racial living and integrate different racial neighbourhoods to enhance acceptance and racial reconciliation within South Africa. This could have a positive effect and promote the image of being a ‘Rainbow Nation’. Also it becomes easier for interracial couples to find an accepting and appropriate neighbourhood where they will fit in as a family, since South Africa is not integrated enough to accommodate interracial couples and their ‘mixed’ children. Multiculturalism should be promoted in South Africa to build greater intercultural understanding and social solidarity among the different race groups.
South Africa still makes use of ‘ethnic’ categories (white, black, coloured, Indian) as legal classification system. These categories come from the apartheid era and should not still exist in today’s democracy. Currently they are used as markers of social recognition and as indicators of social ‘advantage-disadvantage’ (Swartz, 2010). If South Africa can step away from these categories that address historical injustice, this will be the first step in the right direction to an accepting country with no focus on race, and hence reduce the likelihood of couples in interracial relationships being stereotyped as different.

4.6.4. Recommendations for further research

The dearth in South African literature on this topic confirms the need for further research, especially since interracial relationships are increasing each year. Further research regarding relationship experiences and quality of interracial couples is recommended in the following areas:

► This study could be replicated using a larger and more representative sample from a wider variety in different age groups and cities to generalise a broader population of interracial relationships.

► Exploratory research could be done in the area of self-esteem of the partners in an interracial relationship and the relation to their coping mechanisms for dealing with negative perceptions of society and to further assess the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms.

► Most of the previous research has focused on trying to understand why couples choose to marry interracially instead of on marital satisfaction within these relationships. This implies that interracial marriages are not normal and that the reason behind this choice is important to understand (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Further research on the quality and satisfaction of interracial relationships could assist in eliminating the stigma of not being ‘normal’, for those individuals within an interracial relationship.

► It would be interesting to explore the experiences, challenges, perceptions and racial identity challenges of children from an interracial relationship.
4.7. Chapter conclusion

This research has explored the cross-cultural differences, challenges and strengths, and how these aspects influence the relationship satisfaction of interracial couples. The findings and discussion of the findings were presented in Chapter Three. This chapter started by giving a summary of the research design and methodology, followed by summaries of the five themes that were derived from the collected data. Further, the conclusions, limitations and recommendations arising from the research were discussed.

Hopefully this research study will stimulate interest in further research around this topic.
REFERENCE LIST


California State University, Fullerton. Women’s Center and Human Services Dept. [s.a.]  *Benefits of an interracial relationship*. Available from: California State University, Fullerton <http://www.fullerton.edu/universityblues/interracial/benefits.htm> [Accessed on: 15 September 2010].


APPENDICES
Appendix 1:
Letter to proposed participants

Dear

My name is Tielke de Vries and I am currently studying towards a Master’s Degree in Clinical Social Work at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Part of the requirements of the degree programme is that I complete a research study. My study aims to explore the cross-cultural differences that inform the experiences, challenges, and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships.

In order for the study to be a success, I require interracial couples consisting of one South African and one non-South African partner who have been living together for at least one year, to participate in the research. I would be grateful if you would consent to participating in my study.

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be invited to respond to questions in an interview aimed at gaining a better understanding of the effect cross-cultural differences have on the quality of your relationship. The completion of the process will take approximately 1 hour and the day, time and location of the interview can be arranged to suit you. The content of the interview will be recorded, but at all times confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured. The study will conform to the ethical guidelines and requirements of the university, and I will enter into the individual confidentiality agreements with each person interviewed. Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw yourself at any time.

A summary report of the findings will be made available to the participants. If you would like any further information or are unclear about anything, please feel free to contact me via email: tielkedevries@hotmail.com or telephonically on: 072 606 9077.
My research supervisor is Veonna Goliath. She can be contacted on: 041 5042197 or veonna.goliath@nmmu.co.za.

Your cooperation and participation is valued and appreciated.

Kind regards,

Tielke de Vries
Researcher

Veonna Goliath
Supervisor
Appendix 2: Consent form

Consent form

I, ____________________________, agree to participate in this research. The following points have been explained to me:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw my consent at any time.

2. The focus of this research is on relationship quality of interracial couples (South African and non-South African partners) who have been living together for at least one year and have experienced cross-cultural differences in their relationship.

3. Participation is limited to one, semi-structured interview, with the possibility of a further personal interview if the researcher requires clarification on any point.

4. Although no discomfort or stress is foreseen, should I experience any discomfort or stress I reserve the right not to answer any question at any time during the interview.

5. Should I experience discomfort or distress the researcher will provide details of counselling services available at FAMSA or psychologists in private practice.

6. Participation in this research is entirely confidential and information will not be released in any individually identifiable form.

7. The researcher will answer any questions I wish to ask about this research now or during the course of the research process.
8. The results of the research will be made available to me if I so wish. Should I require a copy of the research I will communicate this to the researcher and provide the researcher with my postal details.

Signature of participant ____________________________ 
Date _________________

Signature of researcher ____________________________ 
Date _________________

Signature of interviewer ____________________________ 
Date _________________

Signature of research supervisor ____________________________ 
Date _________________

Tielke de Vries; tielkedevries@hotmail.com
Tel. 072 606 9077

Research supervisor: Veonna Goliath
email: veonna.goliath@nmmu.ac.za
Tel. 041-504 2197
Appendix 3: Permission and release form, recordings and transcriptions

Use of audio recordings and written material for research purposes – permission and release form.

Participant Name: ___________________________________________

Contact details:
Address: ____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________
_____________________________________

Telephone no: _______________________________________________

Name of the researcher: Tielke de Vries
Level of research: Master Social Work (Clinical)
Title of the study: Cross-cultural differences: The experiences, challenges and strengths for partners in committed interracial relationships.
Supervisor: Veonna Goliath
### Declaration

(please sign in the blocks next to the statements that apply)

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<td>1. The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me verbally and in writing.</td>
<td>Signature:</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I agree to participate in an interview and to allow audio-recordings of these to be made.</td>
<td>Signature:</td>
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<td>3. The audio-recordings will be transcribed only by the researcher.</td>
<td>Signature:</td>
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<td>4. Once the data have been transcribed the recordings will be destroyed.</td>
<td>Signature:</td>
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**Date:**

**Witnessed by researcher:**

**Witnessed by interviewer:**