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## How do individuals in intercultural romantic relationships use communication strategies to maintain their relationship? A qualitative analysis.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Psychology

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## Abstract

*Intercultural relationships*—romantic relationships where one partner is outside the other’s racial, ethnic, religious, and/or language group—are a growing sociodemographic group. Individuals in such relationships must navigate their cultural differences to mitigate the negative effects of the challenges they face and ameliorate the benefits of their relationship. Culture can impact preferences in communicating about these differences and consequently relationship maintenance. Yet little is known about how intercultural couples communicate about their cultural differences to effectively maintain their relationship. To address this gap, I conducted semi-structured, virtual, interviews with 23 intercultural couples and found that intercultural couples’ overall preference and efficacy of some communication strategies over others in four contexts: (1) recognize and reconcile their cultural differences, (2) navigate stigma and discrimination, (3) navigate regular relationship maintenance, and (4) maximize benefits of the relationship. This work highlights the functionality of communication strategies for the quality of intercultural romantic relationships.

## Keywords

Intercultural romantic relationships, cultural differences, communication strategies, relationship maintenance

## Summary for Lay Audience

With increasing globalization, more people are interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds more often. These frequent interactions have led to increasing romantic relationships amongst people from varying cultural backgrounds. Romantic relationships where one partner is outside the other's racial, ethnic, religious, and/or language group are called *intercultural relationships*. Individuals in intercultural relationships face unique challenges and garner unique benefits because of their relationship. To effectively cope with these challenges and maximize these benefits, intercultural relationships may need to rely on specific communication strategies, as communication is an important contributor to relationship quality (Epstein et al., 2016). Current literature has developed communication styles based on *intracultural* relationships: romantic relationships where both partners are from the same racial, ethnic, religious, and/or language group. However, culture can impact preferences in communicating about these differences and consequently relationship maintenance. Additionally, effective communication is dependent on situational context, yet there is little work exploring the efficacy of communication strategies in varying contexts, especially for intercultural relationships. To address these gaps in the literature, I conducted semi-structured, virtual interviews with 23 couples to examine how intercultural couples use communication strategies and determine their usefulness in different contexts. Findings show that intercultural couples do indeed use a variety of communication styles and strategies to varying levels of effectiveness, depending on the context. Specifically, participants used communication styles (developed from previous literature) as well as unique communication strategies: positivity, compromises, assurances, future focus, and unhealthy strategies (developed from current interviews using thematic analysis) in four contexts: (1) recognize and reconcile their cultural differences, (2) navigate stigma and discrimination, (3) navigate regular relationship maintenance, and (4) maximize benefits of the relationship. This suggests that different communication strategies are important tools for everyday maintenance of the relationship as well as navigating the unique aspects of intercultural relationships, advancing theory on the impact of cultural differences on romantic relationship processes.

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

Intercultural romantic relationships are relationships where one partner is outside the other's racial, ethnic, religious, and/ or language groups (Silva et al., 2012); these relationships are a prominent, and growing sociodemographic group. As globalization increases, more than 190 million people now live outside their country of birth or citizenship (Martin & Zürcher, 2008). These increasing interactions amongst people from different countries have resulted in romantic relationships between culturally diverse people becoming more common (Frame, 2003; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). Specifically, between 1990 to 2012, intercultural romantic relationships have increased from 3.1 to 4.6 percent in Canada (StatsCan, 2011) and from 7.4 to 10.2 percent in the United States (Rico et al., 2018), thus intercultural couples are becoming increasingly ubiquitous.

In popular culture, couples like Nick Jonas (a musician and actor based in Hollywood) and Priyanka Chopra (a musician and actor based in Bollywood) have become household names (Figure 1). Their wedding included both Christian (American) and Hindu (Indian) traditions that Jonas and Chopra, respectively, identify with. Their intercultural wedding generated both positive and negative responses in various forms of media, especially social media. Although this couple has been celebrated for the way they have integrated their cultures during their union, they have also been victims of stigma and discrimination because of their relationship, which they have publicly discussed in many interviews (Victor, 2021).



**Figure 1.** *Nick Jonas and Priyanka Chopra.*<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Challenges of intercultural romantic relationships

Individuals in intercultural relationships violate the cultural norm of endogamy: marriage within a particular group or category (Gaines Jr. et al., 2015; Moran, 2003). Because intercultural couples violate this norm, individuals in these relationships are often victims of stigma and discrimination despite their increasing popularity (Moran, 2003; Zaidi et al., 2014; Rosenthal et al., 2019; Valentine, 2018). The marginalization from society, family, and friends can manifest as social disapproval of the relationship (Brummett, 2017; Jin & Oh, 2010; Ngconggo, 2021), as well as prejudice and discrimination (Bratter & King, 2008; Zaidi et al., 2014). When individuals perceive greater marginalization due to their relationship, they tend to compartmentalize their identities, specifically they distinguish their identity within their cultural group and their individual identity within the relationship (Yampolsky et al., 2021). Specifically, this compartmentalization can lead individuals in intercultural relationships to feel less connected to their cultural groups values and norms (Amiot et al., 2007). This also impacts how much they feel like they belong in the relationship (Fergus & Reid, 2001; Reid et al., 2006). This separation of an individual's cultural and relationship identities

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<sup>1</sup> *Note.* This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC.

was associated with lower relationship quality (Yampolsky et al., 2021). Additionally, in general, intercultural couples have reported high levels of relationship dissatisfaction and instability (Rosenthal et al., 2019), which leads to a higher probability of separation and divorce (Bratter & King, 2008; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Consequently, Jonas and Chopra – and other intercultural couples – must somehow identify and effectively navigate their culturally ambivalent environment together, if they are to maintain a healthy, satisfying romantic relationship (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

## 1.2 Benefits of intercultural romantic relationships

Despite these experiences of stigma and discrimination, intercultural romantic relationships also provide their members with unique benefits for the relationship. Since intercultural romantic relationships are unique in their need to reconcile the cultural differences they face, the constant negotiation to address these differences can lead to development of more inclusive attitudes, especially towards outgroup members. In fact, intimacy within these relationships can counteract detrimental effects of negative intergroup contact (e.g., discrimination) and result in better outgroup attitudes (Graf et al., 2020). Indeed, Marinucci and colleagues (2021) conducted a review in which they concluded that intimate intergroup contact—like an intercultural romantic relationship—can have benefits for both individuals in the interaction. Specifically, in majority group members, intimate intergroup contact can reduce prejudicial attitudes (Paolini et al., 2021) even if an individual is more prone to adhere to prejudicial attitudes (Turner et al., 2020). This reduction of prejudicial attitudes can provide comfort for individuals within intercultural relationships (Paterson et al., 2015). In minority group members, intimate intergroup interactions, can lead to better health outcomes via self-disclosure (Begeny & Huo, 2017) and can have positive impacts on their adjustment, e.g., increases feelings of belonging in settings where they may be victims of stereotyping. This trend is consistent with previous research from the last 25 years (e.g., Pettigrew, 1997; Orta, 2013; Turner et al., 2007), further emphasizing the benefits of intergroup contact within intimate relationships to reduce prejudicial attitudes.

Another benefit of intercultural romantic relationships is the ability to develop a new identity that combines the two partners' cultural values and norms into a shared one

(Amiot et al., 2012; Cools, 2006). As individuals in an intercultural couple fall in love, they are rapidly entering a self-expansion phase, fueled by the desire for union with their partner (Aron et al., 2013, p. 94). The mechanism of this integration could be either using the inclusion of other in self (IOS) principle (Branand et al., 2019) or through identity fusion (Swann Jr. et al., 2009). The IOS concerns the degree to which the self and other overlap, it allows for one identity to take over another, while identity fusion considers how these identities merge together into a new identity (Kwang, 2012) which enables an individual to maintain a sense of self during this self-expansion phase (Branand et al., 2019). The feelings of love for one's partner can be fleeting but can also be incredibly motivating in long term relationships as well, meaning that individuals in long term relationships will feel the need for union with their partner throughout their relationship because their love for each other is growing and being maintained (Acevedo et al., 2012). The combination of identities has been shown to be beneficial in intercultural couples. For example, Remennick (2009), found that the development of a new bilingual and bicultural identity was necessary for minority members (Russian immigrants) of an intercultural marriage to assimilate to the majority culture (Israel). In these couples, the effort being made by one partner positively impacted the relationship because it led them to be more open to their partner's cultural values and beliefs, enough to start integrating it into a shared identity.

Therefore, intercultural romantic relationships face unique challenges, such as stigma and discrimination which can lead to negative consequences for the relationship (Rosenthal et al., 2019). In addition to these challenges, being in an intercultural relationship can garner unique benefits. As individuals build intimacy in their relationships, they can develop a new shared identity that integrates each partner's cultural values and norms. This new identity in turn can reduce prejudicial attitudes towards outgroup members and highlight bonding within romantic relationships. Consequently, individuals in intercultural relationships must find strategies to minimize the challenges and maximize the benefits of their relationship. Effective communication is one such strategy that may be helpful to navigate these cultural divides, cope with shared stigma together, and capitalize on the benefits of their relationship.

### 1.3 Relationship maintenance in interpersonal relationships

Individuals in intercultural relationships are uniquely required to be able to amplify the benefits and reduce the negative impact of the challenges they face, to be able to reap the benefits of being in a healthy, stable romantic relationship. In relationship science, a variety of prosocial and antisocial relationship maintenance techniques have been identified as interpersonal relationship maintenance strategies (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011). Some relationship maintenance strategies can detract from relationship success. Dainton and Gross (2008), for example, highlighted some antisocial relationship maintenance techniques, such as *avoidance* (avoiding the partner or certain topics or subjects) and *allowing control* (letting the partner make plans or decisions). Other relationship maintenance strategies contribute to relationship success. The most prominent of these prosocial relationship maintenance techniques were described by Stafford and Canary, who identified five behaviors that can positively impact relational quality (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Stafford & Canary, 1991). These five behaviors are: *positivity* (being optimistic and hopeful about the relationship), *openness* (desire to disclose information to one's partner), *assurance* (statements that imply commitment or that the relationship has a future), *social networks* (use of common friendships to keep the relationship functioning) and *sharing tasks* (completing one's responsibilities to the other). In further research, Stafford (2011) advanced an updated typology of the relationship maintenance strategies including four of the original strategies (positivity, assurances, social networks, and sharing tasks) and three new strategies: *understanding*, (feeling understood by the partner), *relationship talk*, (discussing one's desires for the relationship) and *self-disclosure* (sharing thoughts and feelings, not necessarily focused on the relationship).

### 1.4 Communication as a relationship maintenance strategy

Taking a closer look at both lists of the five and seven strategies of relationship maintenance (Stafford, 2011; Stafford & Canary, 1991), more than half of these strategies involve communication, including positivity, openness, and assurances (in the five-factor model) and positivity, assurances, understanding, relationship talk, self-disclosure (in the seven-factor model). These communicative strategies are strongly associated with

increased relationship quality in different types of intimate relationships (Dainton et al., 1994; Haas et al., 2022; Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013; Stafford, 2003). Thus, communication is an important skill to maintain interpersonal relationships, it is one of the most important contributors to relationship satisfaction (Epstein et al., 2013, 2016).

Currently, there is no widely accepted consensus on what effective communication entails in interpersonal relationships. The lack of integration in communication style studies has been lamented over for decades (de Vries et al., 2009; Leung & Bond, 2001; McCroskey et al., 1998). To address this criticism, Waldherr & Muck (2011) proposed an interpersonal communication circumplex as a reference model to distinguish communication style consisting of eight styles: *assertive* (stand up for themselves and their emotions), *expressive* (communicates their feelings verbally and nonverbally), *responsive* (considers the feelings of others during communicating with a partner), *agreeable* (appeases partner to maintain peace), *submissive* (does not communicate their opinions/ feelings rather they go with their group), *reticent* (creates emotional, social, and psychological space from their partner), *inconsiderate* (cold when communicating but not dominant), and *aggressive* (dominates conversations and imposes their views on other people).

#### 1.4.1 Communication in intercultural romantic relationships

Communication strategies as relationship maintenance techniques are assumed to be done with explicit intent of improving or preserving the current romantic relationship (Ogolsky et al., 2017). In romantic relationship research, most previous work investigated the communication and influence strategies intimate partners use in the specific context of problem-solving or conflict interactions (see Heyman, 2001). Thus, there is clear evidence that communication is beneficial under challenging interpersonal circumstances, like conflict interactions (Lee & O'Sullivan, 2018; Overall & McNulty, 2017; Stafford et al., 2000). However, even within the context of intimate relationship, such as romantic relationships, there is no consensus on what communication strategies are useful as overall relationships maintenance strategies.

Further, culture plays an important role in relationship maintenance: cultural norms and beliefs, can and do impact how couples communicate and negotiate their relationship (Cools, 2006; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Montgomery, 1992) and which communication strategy(ies) they find more effective (e.g., Halford et al., 2018). In the current literature, only the relational benefits of open communication (i.e., being clear and direct) has been mostly examined by relying on samples of intracultural romantic relationships (Halford et al., 2018), the findings from which have then been tacitly assumed as generalizable to all relationship types (e.g., Reiter & Gee, 2008a). An individual's adherence to individualistic or collectivistic values (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), can impact their use of *high-context* (i.e., the use of implicit, indirect messages) versus *low-context* (i.e., the use of explicit, direct messages; see Hall, 1976) communication styles (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Specifically, Asian Americans tend to use indirect communication and employ low-context communication styles more often compared to European Americans (Gudykunst et al., 1988; Park & Kim, 2008). Additionally, recent work suggests that there may be utility in adapting one's communication styles (e.g., indirect to direct) within an intercultural couple, for increasing likelihood of relationship success (Tili & Barker, 2015).

To summarize, previous literature has primarily examined how intercultural couples use direct versus indirect communication styles (e.g., Leung & Bond, 2001; Reiter & Gee, 2008a). This previous research shows that individuals in intercultural relationships may communicate differently, but the nuance in these communication differences has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

## 1.5 Present study

In this work, I aim to expand on the work conducted on intercultural romantic relationships and focuses on determining *how* individuals in such relationships communicate within their partnership to minimize negative effects of discrimination and maximize their unique benefits. Previous literature examining intercultural relationships primarily focuses on how direct and indirect communication are effective as relationship maintenance tools. However, the context in which one uses these communication strategies is also important, as recent work has shown (Ge et al., 2022). Therefore, in this



research I will examine how intercultural couples use a myriad of communication strategies (inclusive of the direct vs. indirect distinction, Gudykunst et al., 1988, and the circumflex model developed by Waldherr & Muck, 2011), and determine the extent to which these strategies are helpful (versus harmful) in different contexts.

This research is some of the first work applying multiple types of communication strategies (other than just direct and indirect communication styles) to intercultural romantic relationships. To investigate the nuance more thoroughly in how intercultural couples may employ communication strategies, I aimed to conduct semi-structured interviews (Morgan et al., 2016; Schrodtt et al., 2008). Semi-structured interviews in dyadic couples are ideal to be able to understand multiple perspectives on communication within the intercultural relationships. Intercultural couples are a growing demographic group. Learning how intercultural couples navigate the unique and shared ups and downs of their relationships is important to ensure that they have happy, healthy romantic relationships. By conducting this research, I hope to achieve a more nuanced and wholistic view of communication strategies in a variety of intercultural relationships by highlighting invisible sample groups through these interviews.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Method

#### 2.1 Participants

Eligibility criteria for participation in my study targeted participants who were currently in an intercultural relationship whereby both members of a couple identified with different races, ethnicities, religions, and/ or languages. 445 individuals completed a survey to assess their eligibility for the study, of which I then contacted 87 individuals, and 119 couples who were eligible to be interviewed. All these individuals identified themselves as members of an intercultural relationship but only 25% of the couples responded to the initial response email. In total, I interviewed 27 individuals in intercultural relationships, and 23 intercultural couples. For this study, I will only be examining the responses from the couples. 16 were interviewed together (*concurrent* interviews) whereas 7 were interviewed separately (*staggered* interviews). In total, there were 30 interviews (16 concurrent interviews and 7 staggered, i.e., 14 individual interviews).

On average, the participants were from couples who were together for 4.23 years ( $SD = 2.11$ , range: 1-10 years), and their ages ranged from 21 to 41 ( $M_{age} = 26.71$ ,  $SD_{age} = 4.82$ ). Only five of the couples consisted of an individual from a majority group and a minority group while the other 18 couples consisted of two minority group members. All the couples identified as monogamous, 20 indicated they were in a heterosexual relationship and three identified as an LGBTQ+ relationship. Eight couples were married, three were engaged, seven were seriously dating, and six were cohabitating with their partner. 16 couples were living together at the time of the interview, six had children, and one couple chose not to disclose this information. Seven couples initially met in educational settings (university, school), three couples met at work, four couples met through friends, three met online (dating applications or social media applications) and six met through serendipity (e.g., grocery store, movie theatre) before starting their romantic relationship. Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Summary of demographic profiles of interviewees.*

<i>PID*</i>	<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>Partner Age (years)</i>	<i>Religious affiliation</i>	<i>Partner's religious affiliation</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Partners ethnicity</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Partners language</i>	<i>Relationship status</i>	<i>Relationship length (years)</i>
316	26	29	Buddhism	Atheist	South Asian	East Asian	Hindi	English	Seriously dating someone(s)	5
320	26	26	Agnostic	Agnostic	East Asian	Something else	English	English	Cohabiting with someone(s)	8
321	21	22	Christianity	Sikhism	European	South Asian	English	English	Cohabiting with someone(s)	3
329	32	34	Christianity	Christianity	South Asian	European	English	English	Married to someone(s)	4
333	25	32	Christianity	Christianity	East Asian	Multi-ethnic	English	English	Seriously dating someone(s)	4
337	41	40	Christianity	Christianity	African	Multi-ethnic	English	English	Married to someone(s)	4
338	33	28	Christianity	Christianity	African	Indigenous	English	English	Married to someone(s)	10
350	24	25	Agnostic	Other	East Asian	Multi-ethnic	English	English	Cohabiting with someone(s)	5

<i>PID*</i>	<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>Partner Age (years)</i>	<i>Religious affiliation</i>	<i>Partner's religious affiliation</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Partners ethnicity</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Partners language</i>	<i>Relationship status</i>	<i>Relationship length (years)</i>
353	23	25	Christianity	Judaism	African	East Asian	English	English	Engaged to someone(s)	3
354	26	NA	Christianity	Atheist	African	Indigenous	English	English	Married to someone(s)	3
357	24	23	Christianity	Agnostic	European	Multi-ethnic	English	English	Seriously dating someone(s)	5.5
358	20	21	Sikhism	Hinduism	South Asian	South Asian	English	English	Seriously dating someone(s)	1
363	22	21	Christianity	Christianity	European	East Asian	English	English	Married to someone(s)	1.4
365	26	25	Islam	Christianity	Middle Eastern	Southeast Asian	English	English	Seriously dating someone(s)	2
366	24	23	Other	Atheist	Southeast Asian	East Asian	English	English	Cohabiting with someone(s)	2.5
368	27	27	Atheist	Christianity	European	East Asian	English	English	Engaged to someone(s)	7

<i>PID*</i>	<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>Partner Age (years)</i>	<i>Religious affiliation</i>	<i>Partner's religious affiliation</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Partners ethnicity</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Partners language</i>	<i>Relationship status</i>	<i>Relationship length (years)</i>
200	26	25	Islam	Christianity	African	Latino/a/x	English	English	Seriously dating someone(s)	6
207	24	23	Atheist	Christianity	African	African	English	English	Cohabiting with someone(s)	4
228	25	24	Christianity	Islam	East Asian	African	English	English	Engaged to someone(s)	3
231	30	32	Christianity	Islam	Middle Eastern	African	English	English	Married to someone(s)	3
234	32	35	Islam	Christianity	African	Middle Eastern	English	English	Married to someone(s)	5
249	30	29	Christianity	Islam	Middle Eastern	African	English	English	Married to someone(s)	5
252	21	25	Hinduism	Christianity	South Asian	Southeast Asian	English	English	Seriously dating someone(s)	3

*Note.* \*PID (participant ID) labelled with the 300 s (e.g., 316) were concurrent interviews, while participant ID s in the 200 s (e.g., 200) were staggered interviews. \*\*Age and relationship length is presented in years.

## 2.2 Procedure

This research study was approved by the Office of Human Research Ethics at Western University (certificate of approval can be found in Appendix A).

### 2.2.1 Recruitment and methods of data collection

Individuals responded to online advertisements and announcements (Appendix B) placed on various social media, online forums, and community websites (e.g., Twitter, Reddit, and Kijiji) to indicate their interest in being interviewed. The advertisements led participants to a Qualtrics survey (Appendix C) where they answered demographic questions to determine their eligibility to be interviewed. Participants were eligible if they were in a monogamous relationship with a partner who was outside their self-identified ethnicity, religion, and/ or primary language listed in the demographics survey. Additionally, in this survey the participants indicated if they preferred to be interviewed alone (individual interviews) or if they wished to be interviewed with their partner separately (staggered interviews) or together (concurrent interviews). All participants were required to provide an email for themselves and later provide an email for their partner (for the staggered and concurrent interviews). This survey took 15 minutes to complete, and participants were not compensated for completing this eligibility survey. All the eligible participants received an email, with the consent form (Appendix D), to schedule a virtual interview. Participants returned their signed consent forms via email.

### 2.2.2 Interviews and interview guide

Concurrent interviews lasted between 20-50 minutes and staggered interviews lasted between 15-30 minutes. Before the interview recording started, participants provided verbal consent. The interviews were conducted over Zoom, during which they were audio-recorded for accuracy, and then transcribed verbatim (Maxwell, 2012). After the interview, the participants were verbally debriefed (see interview script in Appendix E). All individuals that participated in the study were compensated \$11, as an Amazon e-gift card, they received this through their emails within 24 hours of their interview time. These gift cards were sent through email to the participants along with a debriefing letter

(Appendix D) which thanked the participants for their time and provided more details about the study.

## 2.3 Materials

### 2.3.1 Demographic questionnaire

Before conducting the interviews, participants completed a demographics questionnaire that identified each partner's age, ethnicity, language, religious affiliation, and their relationship status. The demographic questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

### 2.3.2 Virtual dyadic interviews

I conducted semi-structured dyadic interviews (see Appendix E for interview script). Semi-structured interviews are unique in their ability to allow for follow-up questions, outside of the previously planned interview script, to more thoroughly investigate new ideas/ topics that come up. Research about *how* members of intercultural romantic relationships communicate within their relationship is rare. This interview method is ideal to investigate this topic because the flexible interview protocol allows for a more in-depth discussion about personal and sensitive issues like relationship maintenance.

In this work, I employed two types of dyadic interviews: *concurrent* and *staggered*. concurrent dyadic interviews involve interviewing both members of the dyad simultaneously while staggered dyadic interviews involve interviewing each member of the dyad separately (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). In concurrent interviews, both members of the romantic relationship are present, and this may increase the level of comfort and openness the couple has with the interviewer. And while there may be less material for analysis because individuals talk over each other (Shotter, 1995), interviews may reveal more intimate aspects of the relationship and creates a joint picture of the relationship (Arksey, 1996). This joint narrative tends to highlight the more positive aspects of the relationship as both members of the dyad are sharing about how they are in a healthy, romantic relationship. Alternatively, participants may also self-censor some of their opinions or perceptions about their relationship because they do not want their partner

nor the interviewer to perceive them in a negative light. Therefore, they may try to protect their relationship by presenting their relationship through rose colored glasses instead of focusing on the stressful aspects of their relationship.

To address this concern about partner's perceptions coloring an individuals' disclosure, I also conducted staggered dyadic interviews. In the staggered interviews, each member of the dyad was interviewed separately. This method addresses one of the benefits of individual interviews, getting an in-depth look at an individual's experience within the relationship (Morris, 2001). By allowing each individual to speak to their unique perspectives, increases trustworthiness by data source triangulation because I am collecting data from a multitude of sources to gain multiple perspectives (Carter et al., 2014; Patton, 1999; Yardley, 2000). Even though the individual perspective shines through in these interviews, the dyadic view is interpretive (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). Conducting both concurrent and staggered dyadic interviews is ideal to address this research question because they combine the benefits of individual interviews and focus groups – the two most prominent interview types in relationship research. The dyadic interviews help provide a more comprehensive picture about how intercultural couples communicate and how effective these communication strategies may be. They highlight the interaction between two individuals because the participants respond to each other during the interviews.

The general structure of the interview (Appendix E) was as follows: after opening with some broad questions about the relationship, such as "How did you and your partner meet?", I asked participants about whether they noticed the cultural differences between the partners and how it may impact their romantic relationship. Then, I asked participants about the communication strategies they employed to maintain their relationship. This research was conducted during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic (interviews were conducted between September 2021 and January 2022) and therefore was conducted virtually. By employing these two types of dyadic interviews, I was able to examine multiple perspectives on intercultural romantic relationships.



## 2.4 Qualitative data analysis strategy

The initial transcriptions were done automatically in Zoom using Otter.ai. Six trained research assistants then edited the transcriptions so that they were accurate and representative of the interview content. All the transcribed interviews were then analyzed by me and four trained research assistants. Three of these research assistants had also transcribed the interviews, but I ensured that the research assistants transcribed and coded different interview transcripts.

After all the interviews were transcribed, I then used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to determine what communication strategies are useful for intercultural couples and whether there are unique contexts where they are applied. I captured interesting features of the qualitative data through codes, which are the building blocks for themes – a shared core idea. This analysis required six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006): (1) getting familiar with the data (reading transcriptions, theoretical and reflective thoughts); (2) generating initial codes (organizing information from data into categories); (3) searching for common themes (identifying similarities and discrepancies in the data); (4) reviewing themes (ensuring each theme is unique and accurately classifies ideas together), (5) naming and defining themes (interpreting overall meaning of each theme), and (6) producing a report.

Through step 1 and 2, I was able to recognize a variety of communication strategies that intercultural couples used that were anchored in previous literature. I developed a codebook (Table 2) identifying these strategies: *direct* and *indirect* (Gudykunst et al., 1996), *positivity* and *assurances* (Canary & Stafford, 1992), and Waldherr and Muck's (2011) eight proposed communication styles including *assertive*, *expressive*, *responsive*, *agreeable*, *submissive*, *reticent*, *inconsiderate*, and *aggressive*. In addition to these strategies, I also identified and coded some new strategies anchored in the data while reading through the interviews. These codes are labelled *compromise* (talking about negotiation with partner about cultural differences or conflict situation), *future focus* (talking about how cultural differences may impact their future as a couple), and *unhelpful strategies* (talking about “things not to do” within the relationship).

**Table 2.** Codebook for communication strategies.

<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Examples (italicized are direct quotes from the interviews)</i>
<i>Kappa value (SE of kappa) *</i>		
Open_ direct 0.867 (0.090)	Direct statements about preferences and open examination of differences; expressive communication behavior	e.g., an individual feels comfortable sharing their thought and feelings to their partner, i.e., self-disclosure <i>“Yeah, I feel like, for me, having direct conversation's not that scary because like you know just like let emotions out and just like be practical.”</i>
Indirect 0.867 (0.090)	Depending on nonverbal cues and context to share information rather than explicit statements	e.g., an individual states that they rely on context cues or nonverbal cues to communicate with their partner <i>“especially I'm from China and, I don't know how, how well my English is, but when I communicate with him, sometimes there will be still a lot of misunderstanding... so I won't tell him when I'm upset”</i>
Assertive 0.795 (0.112)	Individuals talk about their feelings and can make a request about what they need within the relationship. They stand up for themselves and do not let others take advantage of them without taking advantage of other people.	e.g., an individual talks about initiating conversations about the relationship (e.g., during conflict scenarios) with their partner <i>“For me, if I don't like something, I like to just address it right away, instead of like letting it linger because then it leads to resentment”</i>
Expressive 0.762 (0.158)	Reflects a mix of talkativeness (vs. uncommunicativeness), certainty (vs. uncertainty), energy, and eloquence. Individuals are effectively communicating their emotions verbally and nonverbally	e.g., an individual talks about sharing their feelings or behaviours, especially during conflict scenarios <i>“But in, like, in this household it's become very, like, positive, right, so, like, I'm always saying thank you for things, making sure he hears my appreciation.”</i>

<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Examples (italicized are direct quotes from the interviews)</i>
<i>Kappa value (SE of kappa) *</i>		
Responsive 0.729 (0.126)	Individual considers other feelings, listens to what they say and recognized their needs, can control or display their negative feelings and emotions when interacting with their partner.	e.g., an individual talks about taking over more chores while their partner is going through a difficult time <i>"I feel--I feel like when she has a hard time, like, and I see it, I try to, like-- before she even asks because sometimes, she's just like, "well, I said I was gonna cook", so, like, I would just do it."</i>
Agreeable 0.763 (0.113)	Individuals talk about not wanting to initiate arguments and just "go with the flow"; individuals won't necessarily go out of their way to express their emotions or thoughts, want to appease their partner.	e.g., being passive in the relationship, especially during arguments <i>"sometimes it's like I'm very empathetic and, a lot more often than not, I - in terms of communicating - I will try to go with what he wants."</i>
Submissive 0.628 (0.242)	Submissive communication behaviors or like being unassured in communication or within the relationship. Will not communicate their feelings or talk about their feelings.	e.g., agreeing with your partner no matter what <i>"whenever she's calm after some hours, I'll just meet her and tell her I know I angried you, so I apologize and even if she's wrong."</i>
Reticent 0.850 (0.102)	Individuals that exclusively rely on indirect communication or are distant; silent, restrained. Individuals who create space from their partner; could be emotionally, socially, psychologically	e.g., will use the silent treatment during arguments or conflicts <i>"P: Well, when we got together, he told me, like, I want this to be, like, we should talk things out, we should, we should, like if something's, like, bothering us we should say something... and that never really worked for me, so, I just kept my mouth shut and would just, like, stay there silently."</i>

<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Examples (italicized are direct quotes from the interviews)</i>
<i>Kappa value (SE of kappa) *</i>		
Inconsiderate 0.651 (0.321)	Individuals are cold and misanthropic without being dominant, individuals that are formal and awkward. They communicate without warmth, responsiveness, or concern for others	e.g., an individual bluntly tells their partner that they are not interested in their problems. <i>“you know, like, I'm honest, I'm brutally honest. And yeah, that can come off that rubs the wrong way sometimes”</i>
Aggressive 1.00 (0.000)	Individuals that take over the conversation, are very dominant. They impose their opinions/ views on other people: “my way or the highway”	e.g., they overtly attack people who disagree with their position <i>“Okay, I'll say, you know I'll be honest, I am a very stubborn person, you know. So, whenever I am angry... (I'll wait till he apologizes) because I'm still worth the effort, he'll still be the one to pay”</i>
Compromise_negotiation 0.733 (0.120)	An individual talks about compromise, accommodation, boundaries as a communication strategy/ method	e.g., an individual talks about compromise or negotiating with their partner about cultural differences or during conflict situations <i>“Yeah and then we try to like listen to his point of view, if he has anything to say and then, kind of reach a mutual compromise.”</i>
Positivity 0.586 (0.183)	Positivity assesses perceptions of the partner's cheerfulness and optimism Goal is to maintain equilibrium	e.g., an individual talks about their partner in a positive light and recognizes their efforts to develop a healthy romantic relationship <i>“Well--well like, she--she likes to write notes, so she writes notes for me sometimes, it's kind of cute. I like that. (Pause) But I feel like we're just really vocal as--as well, like, when we do something for each other we--we, like, we go out to our way to, like, say thank you and, like, "oh, I appreciate that".”</i>

<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Examples (italicized are direct quotes from the interviews)</i>
<i>Kappa value (SE of kappa) *</i>		
Assurances 0.789 (0.115)	Assurances concerns the degree to which the partner stresses the idea of there being a future in the relationship	e.g., an individual talking about the success of their relationship and discussing strategies that they use to ensure that they have a successful relationship <i>“down the line if we decide to--I think the biggest thing that's, like, looming in my head is when we do have, like, a family together, like, where we place ourselves, if our culture will play into that a little bit”</i>
Future_focus 0.714 (0.131)	Discussions about their concrete future as a couple, focusing on their differences (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, language, culture)	e.g., a couple specifically talking about how cultural differences are going to impact their future as a couple, whether they have had these discussions or not <i>“as our relationship gets more serious, like, talking about getting married or having children and then trying to navigate different language barriers or religious differences will be important”</i>
Unhelpful_strategies 0.722 (0.129)	Individual(s) specifically talk about “things not to do” within the relationship or refer to unhelpful communication strategies	e.g., a couple citing avoidance or defensiveness as unhelpful communication strategies <i>“Pb: So, like, for example, we've been trying recently, like, for example, if I do something or she does something that bothers the other, instead of just keeping quiet and, like, letting it go, we kind of just mention it ... because we've noticed that we just let--sometimes we would let things go and then, like, we let it go and let it go and then--and then, like, in a few weeks you'll be like, "oh my God, like, I'm tired, like, you--for the past week you haven't done this and then this ... breaking point.”</i>

*Note.* \*kappa values were calculated using an online tool (*Quantify Interrater Agreement with Kappa*, 2022)

Combining a deductive (coding communication strategies present in previous literature) and inductive (coding communication strategies derived from the interviews) approach to coding the interviews captured how intercultural couples may use multiple communication strategies to maintain their relationship, especially communicate about their cultural differences. Thus, combining deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) analyses enabled me to capture both the explicit and underlying meaning of the patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

I shared the codebook with coders (who were blind to code development thus far) and went through examples to consolidate confusions and develop a final codebook. I used Taguette (Rampin & Rampin, 2021) – a free, open-source qualitative research tool – to identify and collect these excerpts and examples to use during training of coders. Each coder was assigned a subset of interviews to code and advised that excerpts could be coded for more than one code identified in the codebook (Table 2). For example, participant 228a takes on a submissive communication style to avoid sharing their thoughts and uses the positivity communication strategy to highlight their relationship's positives to not engage with conflict in the relationship “*we focus mainly on positive things that we learn to avoid arguing, yeah*”.

Coders received an excel file to independently code through their subset of interviews. All interviews were coded by two coders. All the codes had moderate or substantial agreement in the coded responses ( $\kappa \geq 0.5$ ) according to Landis and Koch's (1977) guidelines (*Quantify Interrater Agreement with Kappa*, 2022). After independent coding was completed, coders met to discuss any divergent coding that emerged and used the data to support one decision over another. If there were still any discrepancies, a coder, blind to the interview but part of the coding team, was consulted to help come to a consensus about the final codes. Relying on multiple coders and conversing with them about their perspective about the data added breadth to the phenomenon of interest by discussing different interpretations of the data allowing for investigator triangulation (Carter et al., 2014; Patton, 1999).

## 2.5 Researcher positionality statement

While conducting qualitative work, it is important to recognize a researcher's impact on the research process as interpretation of data is more clearly subjective. Being reflexive and reflecting on my positionality within this research provides me a safeguard against researchers bias, as it enables me to remain honest, regardless of what the results show (Darwin Holmes, 2020; Jackson, 2015). There is some work that corroborates how researchers from different cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds from participants may impact different aspects of the conducting sensitive research (Manohar et al., 2017).

I am a young, South Asian woman, this is my first project studying intercultural relationships. My ethnic background and gender impacted the extent to which participants felt comfortable sharing sensitive information with me about their relationships. When participants and I had things in common, such as, attending the same university or being from a similar ethnic background, participants were more forthcoming during the interviews. I was also more comfortable in repeating questions to gain more clarification from participants during these interviews. Additionally, considering I am new to this research field, I was going through my own reflective process about what "good" research is and how to conduct it. This project helped me realize that so much of research is either subjective and requires recognizing the positives and negatives of decisions made during the research process. Skills that I was struggling with at the start of this project. As the project continued, I felt more equipped and able to conduct this research, these developments were evident in both my researcher and personal journals. In short, my personal experiences coupled with learning experiences during the research process provide me unique insights into participants' experiences that I was able to then draw upon during data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Results

Individuals in intercultural romantic relationships use a myriad of communication strategies to maintain their romantic relationship. The following results are trends from both types of dyadic interviews (concurrent and staggered;  $N = 23$  couples) presented together. These various communication strategies encompass how intercultural couples discuss unique and regular stressors and benefits to minimize their negative effects and ameliorate their positive effects in multiple contexts.

#### 3.1 What communication strategies do intercultural couples use?

##### 3.1.1 From previous research

In previous research, the distinction of direct versus indirect communication has been explored in intercultural romantic relationships. In addition to these communication styles, I also looked at how other types of communication styles – that have primarily been applied to intracultural couples – were used in intercultural relationships. To do this, I calculated the proportion of each communication strategy used across all interviews and within each interview, these percent values of the proportions are presented in Figure 2.

The distinction of direct versus indirect communication (whether participants explicitly or implicitly share their thoughts and feelings to their partner) in intercultural couples was well represented in my data. All the participants used direct communication while talking about their relationship. Almost 15% (all codes input in Figure 2) of all the excerpts from the interviews indicated direct communication style use. Interestingly, only about half of the couples used indirect communication, only 1.16% (all codes input in Figure 2) of the interview excerpts used this communication style. This trend is atypical from previous research on intercultural relationships, where a participants high-context cultural background should bleed into their indirect communication style more concretely (Gudykunst et al., 1988).

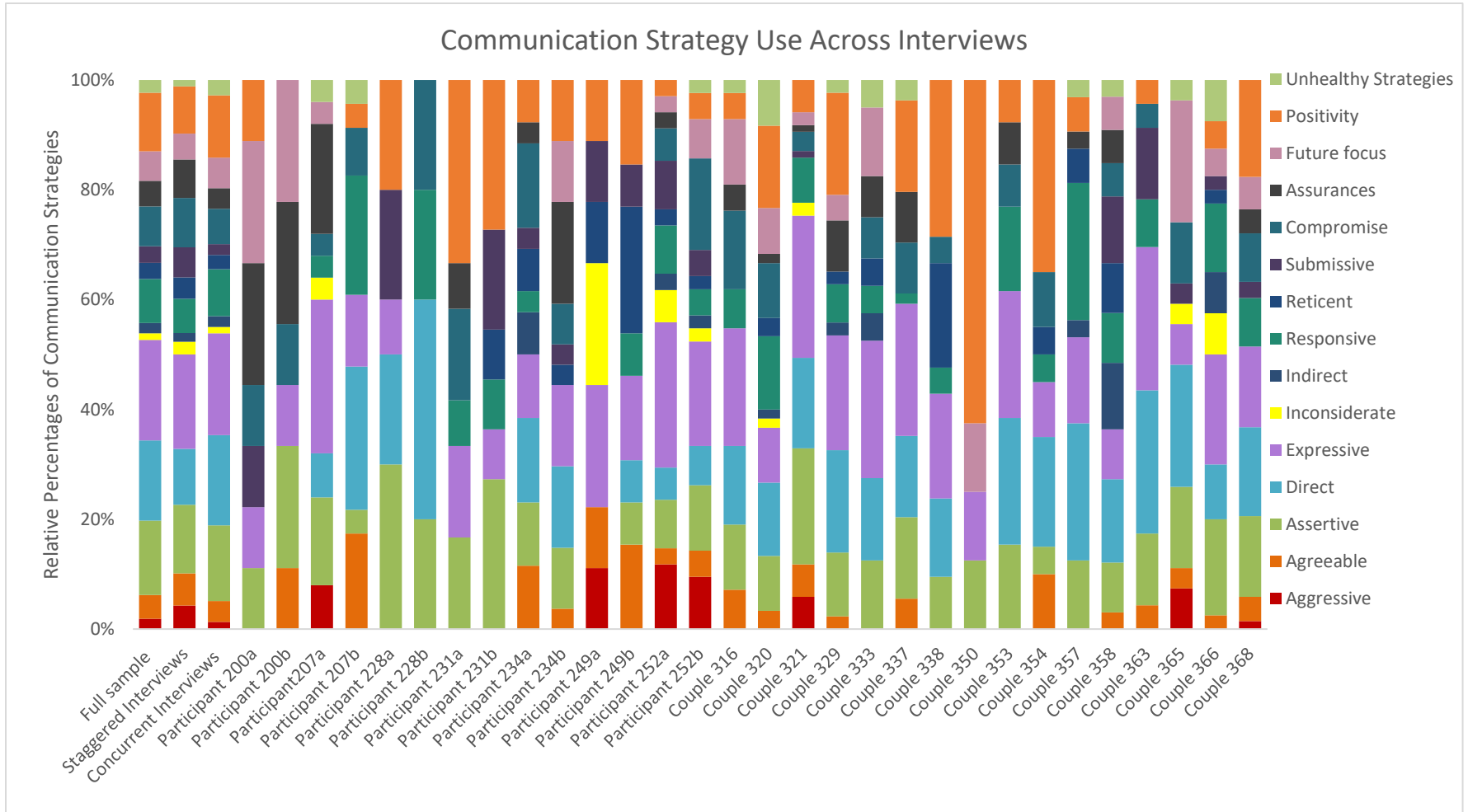


The communication circumflex model (Waldherr & Muck, 2011), highlights eight different communication styles. In this sample, one of the most popular (18.34%, all codes input in Figure 2) communication styles from this model was the expressive communication style. In most interviews, participants confidently and effectively communicating their emotions verbally and nonverbally. Assertive (13.55%, all codes input Figure 2) and responsive (8.06%, all codes input Figure 2) communication styles were also present in more than half of the interviews. Additionally, agreeable communication was present in about half of the interviews but was only present in 4.32% (Figure 2) of all the interview excerpts. Individuals who prefer agreeable communication tend to only express their emotions and feelings to appease their partner and achieve peace. The other four communication styles outlined in the communication circumflex model (Waldherr & Muck, 2011) – reticent (2.92%; all codes input Figure 2), submissive (3.04%; all codes input Figure 2), inconsiderate (1.16%; all codes input Figure 2), and aggressive (1.87%; all codes input Figure 2)– were present in less than a third of the interviews.

Thus, the communications styles outlined in previous intercultural (direct and indirect) and intracultural romantic relationships (communication circumflex model), are all strategies intercultural couples in this sample use. Therefore, there are some descriptive trends about frequency of communication styles that I want to highlight. Overall, direct, assertive, and expressive communication styles were the most common communication strategies used across all the interviews (all codes in Figure 2). Reticent and indirect communication strategies tend to be present in multiple interviews but are not discussed in depth during the interviews (all codes in Figure 2), even though they are brought up by many participants.

In addition to these overall trends, there are also some interesting differences in communication style use in concurrent versus staggered interviews. The greatest difference between concurrent and staggered interviews was in the aggressive communication style. In staggered interviews, aggressive communication style was more common (4.29%; staggered interviews in Figure 2) compared to concurrent (1.31%; concurrent interviews in Figure 2). Similarly, participants were more likely to discuss

their use of a submissive communication style – to counteract their partner’s aggressive, inconsiderate communication styles – in staggered interviews (5.47%; staggered interviews in Figure 2) compared to concurrent interviews (1.97%; concurrent interviews in Figure 2). Additionally, direct communication was more common in concurrent interviews (16.42%; concurrent interviews in Figure 2). Thus, when couples were interviewed independently, they were more willing and able to talk about how they may manipulate or impose their own beliefs on their partner instead of focusing on all the positive aspects of their relationship.



**Figure 2.** Communication strategies across interviews, displayed in percentages.

This data table associated with this graph can be found in Appendix F.

### 3.1.2 Newly identified themes

In addition to the communication styles anchored in previous literature, I also identified several new themes of communication styles that intercultural use during relationship maintenance. I aggregated occurrences of the communication strategies and then found proportions of each strategy used across all interviews and within each interview, the percent values of these proportions are presented in Figure 2.

The new themes I developed are positivity, assurances, future focus, compromise, and unhealthy strategies. The theme of positivity highlights how participants are cheerful and optimistic about their partner. This is referring to the ability of partners to “hype each other up” within the relationship. This communication strategy is like or anchored in the relationship maintenance strategy “positivity” and was present in about 10.63% (all codes in Figure 2) in the data. Compromise (7.24%; all codes in Figure 2) was another theme and communication strategy that was popular in this data. This communication strategy refers to how individuals compromise or negotiate with their partner about cultural differences or during conflict situations. The next two themes: assurances and future focus, are focused on communication about the future of the intercultural relationship. Future focus as a theme, refers to specific, concrete discussions about how cultural differences may impact the future of their relationship, while assurances as a theme refers to the degree that a couple implies that there is a future for the relationship. Their occurrence in the data was similar, the themes future focus and assurances were present more than a third of the interviews: and present in about 5% of the excerpts (future focus: 5.37%, assurances: 4.67%; all codes in Figure 2). Unhealthy strategies, as a theme, refers to the ability that intercultural couples recognizing and discussing the unhelpful communication strategies that they should avoid. This communication strategy was present in about 2.33% of the excerpts (all codes in Figure 2).

The frequency of four of these new communication categories across staggered and concurrent interviews were slightly different. In concurrent interviews, positivity (11.33%; concurrent interviews in Figure 2) and unhealthy strategies (2.79%; concurrent

interviews in Figure 2) communication strategies were more commonly used compared to staggered interviews. Alternatively, in staggered interviews, assurances (7.03%; concurrent interviews in Figure 2) and compromise communication (8.98%; concurrent interviews in Figure 2) strategies were used more often, compared to concurrent interviews. The trend in these data seems to be that when both partners are present participants were inclined to talk about how they are wonderful partners to each other (positivity communication strategy) and able to articulate what they have learned about effective communication and how to use it (theme of unhealthy communication strategies), compared to staggered interviews. However, when partners are interviewed separately, they highlight how they accommodate and compromise in the relationship (compromise communication strategy) and their concerns about the future of the relationship (assurances communication strategy).

Most couples' communication styles tend to map onto the general trends of common communication styles (Figure 2). But there are some slight differences in the trends of these communication strategies across staggered and concurrent interviews. Overall, the high frequency of direct, expressive, assertive and positivity is interesting. It suggests that almost all the couples can and will share their thoughts and feelings with their partner. Building on the safety that couples feel with each other to share their individual perspectives, participants also see their partner's more positively as shown through the commonality of the positivity communication strategy across interviews.

Previous research tends to focus on how individuals communicate in intercultural relationships by specifying different communication styles an individual may use. But good communication is not just about how you talk, generally, but rather what communication strategies you use *depending on the context*. Some of the newly identified themes are anchored in relationship maintenance literature, but some are unique to intercultural romantic relationships. Therefore, to determine the efficacy of these communication styles and strategies, it is important to see how these communication strategies are used by intercultural romantic relationships in different domains of communication.

## 3.2 When and why do intercultural couples use particular strategies?

### 3.2.1 Cope with unique challenges intercultural couples face

Intercultural relationships are unique in their need to navigate two challenges throughout their relationship: (1) reconciling their cultural differences and (2) managing the frequent experiences of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination they face (Zaidi et al., 2014). To reconcile their cultural differences, individuals must first learn about each other's cultures and then begin reconciliation of any differences that come up.

#### 3.2.1.1 Reconciling cultural differences

To learn about these potential cultural differences, multiple couples in my sample had open, explicit conversations about this topic. My interviews with participants suggest that being able to have discussions about cultural differences can prevent one partner from feeling frustrated and overwhelmed by the differences. These open conversations employ direct, assertive, and expressive communication styles as ways to indicate investment and commitment to the relationship, because individuals within the couple addressing these issues. However, if feelings of frustrations due to the cultural differences do arise, it is important to have direct, expressive, and responsive conversations to ensure that both partners feel seen during this challenging process of integrating differing cultural identities. Additionally, this integration process required many participants to be able to compromise and make sacrifices to bolster positive relational outcomes.

For example, before couple 234 started dating, they had an explicit conversation about what an intercultural romantic relationship would look like. Participant 234b had been in intercultural relationships before but those relationships ended because they were never able to reconcile their cultural differences and “*get on the same page*”. To ensure the longevity of their current intercultural relationship will last, participant 234b initiated an open conversation with participant 234a before they started seriously dating to ensure that both parties had the same goals in mind. During this conversation about cultural differences, participant 234b used the direct, expressive, and assurances communication strategy, such as “*I really like you and I would like to spend the rest of my life with you*”

*and talk to you. I can't bear to lose you".* By using the assurances strategy, they were discussing their future as a couple and indicating investment in the relationship by ensuring that both participant 234a and 234b were certain about their feelings and the relationship. Having this initial conversation also helped create an environment within the relationship where couple 234 was able to have even more concrete conversations about the future (future focus communication strategy). Participant 234b was excited to have these conversations with their partner because now as a couple, they can discuss upcoming life milestones such as starting a family, *"Like we get to talk about future. I would like to have a baby with her"*.

Couple 316 also had an open, direct conversation about cultural differences before they started dating. To add context to their motivation for initiating this conversation, participant 316a stated that,

*I think I kind of like told him [participant 316b] in the beginning, that like my culture comes with certain restrictions. Is this what you're okay with? And then yeah and then we kind of just like -because I don't want him to like to be stuck in it without any context ... Yeah, so I think that was just like me in the beginning, when I was asking more targeted questions about like what our long-term relationship would look like.*

This direct, assertive conversation using a future focus communication strategy at the beginning of the relationship was essential for couple 316. Participant 316a is very self-aware of their original cultural background and the impact it has on their life in their host culture,

*I've grown up in India and here, so I can see both sides, but then I can understand like, why my parents are the way they are kind of thing. But I also understand like you know it takes a toll on different things when the other person's not used to it right, like for them being from here, so they don't understand it, which is fair.*

Initiating this conversation with the future focus communication strategy as its crux allowed couple 316 to make sure they were also on the same page about how participant

316a's cultural background may impact this new romantic relationship. Participant 316a's parents strongly adhere to cultural norms and values from their heritage culture, "*my parents are really strict in dating and in general*". During this conversation about differences, participant 316a also used a lot of responsive communication style, for example, "*Is this what you're okay with?*" By checking in with her partner's needs, participant 316a was able to address her own concerns about cultural differences as well as prioritize their partner. Having this open, expressive, and responsive conversation allowed couple 316 to ensure that they did not "*waste our time if our long terms goals don't align kind of thing*".

In other couples, conversations about cultural differences came up more organically as their relationship progressed. As the relationship progressed and couples were getting to know each other better, they felt more comfortable bringing up cultural differences. Some couples in this sample were friends before they started a romantic relationship and ended up discussing cultural differences during the friendship phase of their relationship. For example, couple 249, had conversations about their cultural differences naturally at the start off their friendship. This couple used direct and expressive communication styles to and the assurances communication strategy and as a way of getting to know each other:

*I'll say then we were still friends, then. I was like, hey I would like to know about you or something. We're friends, we don't take nothing, nothing in serious or something. I was like ok I like to know more about you, I'll tell you about me, tell me about you.*

Thus, having conversations using direct, expressive, and responsive communication strategies to directly discuss cultural differences allowed partners to prioritize each other's perspective and feelings by ensuring that they were taking time to make sure they had the same goals for the relationship. These communication styles exemplified the assurances and future focus communication strategies – proving confidence that one's partner was invested in the relationship, because they are counting on/ planning a future together.



Active conversations about cultural differences and their impact on the romantic relationship's outcome are beneficial for intercultural couples because they increase relationship certainty. However, when one partner is making more of an effort to reconcile these cultural differences, conflicts and clashes within the relationship can arise. For example, family is important to both partners in couple 321, but participant 321b's is more traditional. To indicate their high levels of investment and commitment to their relationship, participant 321a has spent a lot more time getting to know the other's cultural beliefs and values. Participant 321a's active interest in their partner's culture by using direct, expressive, and assertive communication styles was helpful in integrating them into participant 321b's family. During the interview, participant 321a used the expressive communication strategy to indicate that they noticed that their efforts were not reciprocated: "*I feel like I take a lot of interest in his culture, not so much in mine -he doesn't take much interest in mine but that's the tea but like I know he liked it*". When participant 321a was direct and assertive while talking about how they were making efforts to learn their partner's mother tongue, "*I've told you that it bothers me that we don't speak the same language and you just kind of ignore it,*" their partner 321b responded that, "*you know how busy I get with work and sh\*t, I don't really think about these small things*". In this interaction, participant 321b used the inconsiderate communication style and dismissed their partner rather than being responsive when participant 321a was being expressive and sharing their feelings about the situation. By the end of the interview, it was clear that participant 321a was frustrated with their partner for not reciprocating the effort that they were making, rather they were being dismissive of their partner's feelings. Couple 321 did not develop a solution on how to reconcile participant 321a's feelings of frustrations because they were putting in more of an effort to negotiate cultural differences. Perhaps because they never had a conversation about how their cultural differences may impact their relationship, something that participant 321b hinted at towards the end of the interview: "*we should've had a bigger talk [before getting serious]*".

Alternatively, couple 316 had many conversations about how to reconcile one partner's feelings of frustrations due to cultural differences. Participant 316a had instigated an open, direct conversation about cultural differences before initiating a

romantic relationship. Participant 316a has a much more traditional family and thus felt like she needed to keep her relationship a secret from her parents, despite feeling invested and committed to their partner after their initial conversations. Delaying telling her family about the relationship was to avoid any potential blowback and negative reactions from the parents. Participant 316b compromised and went along with delaying the relationship disclosure but as the relationship got more serious, delaying the relationship disclosure, especially because participant 316b's parents are more openminded and welcoming of the intercultural relationship:

*took a toll on me [participant 316b] like towards later on... but I am a pretty compromising person so for me, it was not a big deal. It definitely took a toll on me like towards later on in the years, so.*

To compensate for the negative impact of delaying relationship disclosure, now that everyone knows about the relationship, participant 316a is ensuring that their partner is building a relationship with their family members, especially her parents. Specifically, she uses assertive communication style with her parents because she recognized the feelings of frustration in her partner, for example:

*like if he's [participant 316b] picking me, up I want him to like come to the door and like say hi to them and if my dad's like not -like if he's [dad] trying to hide, I call him out on it. I'm like 'Dad, he's here you need to say hi to him' kind of thing. To lay the expectation that you know you kinda have to put in the effort to like [because] I saw that it took a toll on him too, and it was it's not fair to him, especially when his family is so accepting towards me. So, I'm like I want him to feel that too and I think they're getting better at it. Like my brother's fine like he's known from the beginning, but my parents are getting better at it.*

Participant 316a encourages her parents to make an effort with her partner now that the relationship is out in the open, specifically by asking her dad to interact with her partner. This slow exposure of participant 316b to participant 316a's family is addressing participant 316b's feelings of frustration about having to keep their relationship a secret

and helping participant 316a's family come to terms with the relationship, indicating the high levels of investment participant 316a has in this relationship.

Thus, in the context of learning about each other's cultures, it was beneficial for couples to have direct, expressive conversations about their cultural differences. When both partners are actively engaging these conversations and making efforts to reconcile the differences, it tends to increase feelings of investment and commitment and avoid feelings of frustration. Not discussing these differences can lead to conflict in the relationship because participants were not able to be responsive as they were unsure about what their partner wanted or needed, which resulted in them using the inconsiderate communication style. By having explicit conversations about cultural differences, participants were able to increase certainty in their romantic relationship, because both parties knew where the relationship was heading by using the assurances and future focus communication strategies.

### 3.2.1.2 Navigating stigma and discrimination

The second unique challenge intercultural couples face is managing experiences of stigma and discrimination from parties outside the relationship. These external parties can either be loved ones, such as family or friends, or strangers. In these interviews, participants discussed experiencing discrimination from family members and from strangers but not friends, so those are the only two themes I will be addressing in the following sections.

#### 3.2.1.2.1 From family members

Intercultural couples in my interviews described using different strategies when navigating marginalization and social disapproval from family members. To defend their partner and their relationship, participants used direct and assertive communication styles. In these interviews, participants indicated that advocating for their romantic relationship in this way led them to feel more connected to their partner as well as value them more, because they were intentionally choosing their partner. Additionally, witnessing one's partner advocate for them, resulted in the outgroup partner using

expressive, assertive, and responsive communication styles to indicate that they felt more invested in the relationship.

For example, couple 321 had a fight because participant 321a was not invited to an engagement party that participant 321b's family was hosting. Participant 321a used assertive and expressive communication styles to inform their partner about how they felt excluded because they did not receive an invitation even after they had been together for a few years, and she had previously attended family events. Participant 321a clarified why they thought this was a racial issue:

*[participant 321b] has a sister and her boyfriend -she's only a year older, they've been dating less than we have and that boyfriend went (to the engagement party) but I didn't. So, I was like okay this is clearly about color because he's Sikh, Punjabi, and I'm not but he was invited, and I was not.*

Participant 321a used the expressive communication style to say that she wanted her partner to advocate for her and get her an invitation to the engagement party because this was a racial issue. Participant 321b then used the agreeable communication style to add that, *"I always say something, she's not always there"*. In this situation, couple 321 coped with this discrimination by using assertive and expressive communication strategies to get participant 321a an invitation to the engagement as a way to resolve the conflict within their relationship.

In other cases, the prejudice from family members can result in negative relationship outcomes. For example, couple 354's families made many explicit statements about how they did not approve of the intercultural romantic relationship. Specifically, participant 354b said that *"My dad never accepted him as best, he was always [asking] like why'd I go for someone that actually outside our culture, you know. He didn't accept him"*, participant 354a agreed that they faced similar struggles with their immediate family:

*[family members asked me] 'why do I have to go off of our culture' and uh to get someone they have lots of rules in that culture than what I think, um but um, you*

*know, this all happened at, at the, the first stage of the, first year of the relationship so.*

This disapproval of the relationship weighed so heavily on each of the individuals that they ended up breaking up for a while because, “*it was getting really intense ... [because] both parties [families] did not want us to see each other*”. They used expressive and responsive communication styles over multiple discussions to decide that they needed to break up until things calmed down. However, during this break they were both trying to convince their respective families to accept the relationship because they were in love with each other. They used assertive and expressive communication styles and the positivity communication strategy, to explain to their family that, “*It’s about your genuine feelings and the person’s impact, or view. That’s all that matters, not the culture*”. In this case, the couple prioritized expressive and responsive communication styles to cope within this discrimination. For couple 354, taking a break and not communicating with each other, but rather actively fighting for their relationship by convincing their families to accept the relationship was a testament to how much they were committed and invested in the relationship.

Sometimes discrimination is more subtle than explicit statements for couples, even if they are from similar cultural backgrounds. For couple 350, there is a lot of colonial history between their cultures and countries of origin: Japan and Hong Kong. Participant 350a was worried about her grandparents making her partner uncomfortable by saying something to them or implying that they were one of the colonizers. Couple 350 had a few direct, expressive, and responsive conversations; participant 350b met participant 350a’s family to ensure that they were in good space and on the same page. Indeed, participant 350b expressed how,

*with regards to her [participant 350a] grandparents, there were sometimes, where it was a bit awkward for me, especially because I don’t speak the language. So, I wouldn’t know and then Pa would have to translate and then I’m like oh okay, they’re talking about the history, like there’s not much I can do about it.*

Similarly, participant 350a expressed how she was worried about interacting with participant 350's family because,

*there's also a little bit of a negative perception of Chinese people by Japanese people. So, I hope they don't necessarily associate those kinds with myself. I know it's like a little bit different because I am like I guess Westernized in the sense. That I grew up in Canada, but there are these like thoughts sometimes that I think like oh yeah maybe that's happening, but maybe that's what they're thinking and stuff.*

To address both partner's concerns and fears, couple 350 had intentional, open discussions where they could both be expressive and responsive to ensure that they were prioritizing their relationship and each other, participant 350a using the positivity communication strategy said how, *"like I don't hate my family, it's just like... he has been a rock for me ... like I choose him for now, not for now like forever"*.

When navigating discrimination from family members, it was important for participants to use direct and assertive communication styles to defend their relationship and their partner. Within the relationship, if partners were feeling isolated and excluded, it was beneficial to use assertive and expressive communication styles, so the issue can be brought to their partner's attention. Bringing this issue to the forefront then allows the partner to employ the agreeable and responsive communication style to start resolving this issue within the relationship and use direct and assertive communication strategies while conversing with the individuals who are being discriminatory. Regardless of whether discrimination was explicit or implicit, using these communication styles allowed participants to show each other how much they value each other and prioritize their relationship during these hardships, ultimately encouraging feelings of investment and love between the partners by using the positivity communication strategy.

### 3.2.1.2.2 From strangers

In these interviews, participants varied more strongly when navigating discrimination from strangers. Some participants preferred ignoring these discriminatory

events completely while others felt it was important to talk about them. Ignoring the event entailed that the participants did not communicate about these events at all throughout their relationship. This lack of communication ensured that participants were not giving any power to these negative situations and instead turning the focus back on themselves and their relationship – to figure out how to thrive under these negative circumstances. For example, participant 228a said that “*some people have made negative comments [about the relationship]*” but their response to these behaviors is no communication, “*we don’t pay much attention to it... [instead] we promised not to listen to what other people are saying*”. Not talking about this experience was a way for couple 228 to not give the discriminatory experience any weight to their relationship. Instead, they turned the focus back onto the relationship and decided that they were going to ignore what people are saying to protect their relationship.

Some couples do find it helpful to talk about these discriminatory experiences but try to keep these conversations short. The function of these quick, short discussions is to encourage each other to ignore these experiences. For example, participant 207b gets discriminated against because of their accent, often she is overlooked and when their partner notices,

*there are times that he does notice, but then again, he says, you know, just you know the moment you stop ignoring you kind of make those people, you know, feel bad about themselves about what they're talking about, and life moves on, life just moves on.*

Participant 207b used direct and expressive communication styles to share how she is uncomfortable in situations where she is overlooked. Instead of being responsive and talking about this issue, participant 207a offers the advice of just moving on, demonstrating the use of the inconsiderate communication style. Couple 207 acknowledged the discrimination but did not really have a meaningful discussion about the discrimination, even though participant 207b expressed their discomfort, rather they chose to ignore it completely and allow “life to move on” which seemingly made them both feel better.

Similarly, couple 353, mentioned that they had an explicit conversation after they experienced discrimination from strangers. Participant 353b used expressive communication to say that,

*after the first instance, [we] sat down and we had to try to navigate through. Like okay it's happened, and it may happen again or how do we deal with it next time. So yeah, I think we sat down talked about it and I tried to prepare in case it happens again. How, I suppose, because I think I got a bit mad. Although I didn't fight or get into a hustle. I think she had me come down and I think better for each other.*

The desire to have a conversation stemmed from the fact that participant 353b had gotten upset and angry when they were discriminated against – an unhealthy communication strategy. To avoid feeling upset about a stranger again and employ healthier coping mechanisms, participant 353a initiated the conversation and made sure that they knew how to handle these stressful situations as a couple. This conversation used direct, assertive, and expressive communication strategies to help participant 353a “*calm down ... she reminds me to breath cause when I get angry I, I have to eventually like breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out.*” Participant 353b was using responsive and the unhealthy strategies communication strategies to decrease their partner’s negative emotional response. Indeed, participant 353a offered that,

*I think, after any such encounter, when we get back home like review the whole incident to see if I improved and how I handle it. So, I think we usually talk every time it happens, we must go back home and review the whole situation and see if we handled it correctly.*

Having additional check-in conversations after negative discriminatory incidents allows couple 353 to turn these experiences into a self-reflection exercise, which in turn allows them to improve their relationship. The main goal of couple 353 is to focus on themselves and not let stigma negatively impact them to the best of their abilities. Participant 353a said, “*we've decided to focus on our relationship*” and participant 353b corroborated and



said, *“So, a lot of things don't really affect us. Just focus on being together and having our relationship work. So, most of the time it is effective”*.

Participant 252a talked about multiple experiences of strangers staring or making comments to couple 252 about being a cute couple because they are both in intercultural and homosexual relationship. Participant 252s shared that once, *“we get a random stranger come up to us being, like ‘you guys are gold, you guys are amazing, and I’m like okay, but who asked, you know?’”* or that *“we get weird looks [when we’re out in public]”*. These reactions from strangers made participant 252a uncomfortable, to a point where, *“I don’t hold hands in public because ... of the homophobia... it’s something that I constantly think about”*. This took a toll on their relationship, and participant 252b used assertive communication to ask, *‘why don’t you like holding hands?’* but participant 252a did not communicate that they felt uncomfortable holding hands in public because of the stares to their partner. Towards the end of the interview, participant 252a said that they did not disclose the reason behind their discomfort because the one time they did, participant 252b responded, *“oh okay”* and the lack of responsive communication from their partner made them not want to share. During participant 252b’s interview, it was clear that they did not perceive any discrimination when they are in public: *“Interviewer: have you ever witnessed or experienced any discrimination or prejudice because of your relationship? Participant 252b: No, not at all really”*. So, for couple 252, both partners are not on the same page about whether they are experiencing discrimination and thus were unable to effectively discuss the effects of the experience on their relationship. Instead, both partners ended up feeling confused and unsure about their partners behavior.

When navigating discrimination from strangers, there is no one strategy that is beneficial for all couples. Some couples prefer not to communicate about the discriminatory experiences at all while others prefer to have explicit conversations about them using expressive and response communication strategies. These conversations help a couple get on the same page about how to cope with these negative experiences, usually that results in participants not participating in unhealthy communication strategies: focusing on their relationship and ignoring the people who are discriminatory. When

couples are not perceiving the same kinds of discrimination, trying to have an expressive and assertive conversation was not fruitful because either partner is misinterpreting their partner's behavior. This discomfort and confusion could lead to relationship uncertainty because either partner was unable to see the other's perspective.

### 3.2.2 Cope with regular romantic relationship challenges

In addition to navigating unique challenges, individuals in intercultural relationships must also navigate regular relationship issues, especially conflict management and during major life milestones/ transitions.

#### 3.2.2.1 Conflict management

Communicating during conflicts is one of the most common themes present in the current relationship literature. In these interviews, most participants valued addressing issues head on, using direct and assertive communication strategies. Specifically, they first ensured that they were emotionally ready to approach the conflict situation or if their partner preferred indirect, submissive communication styles, create an environment where they would be comfortable sharing their feelings, such as starting the conversation about something random instead of the conflict situation. Most participants preferred to use direct, assertive, expressive, and assertive communication styles to find solutions to their conflict using the compromise communication strategy. Finally, they talked about using positivity to remind their partner about each other's positive facets while solving the problem. Unique communication strategies that were called out as unhelpful were the silent treatment (behaviours that fall under the reticent communication strategy).

During an argument, couple 354, primarily used the reticent communication strategy to negotiate the conflict: "*we take a break from each other, and you know, reflect, you know (look) past things.*" Using reticent communication strategies was also a beneficial conflict management strategy for couple 333, specifically participant 333a expressed how they needed to "*calm down and then we'll talk or else it just kind of blows up... leads to reacting badly or overreacting.*" Taking a step back from the situation was important for these couples, specifically, participant 333b used assertive communication to say that they had to learn how to "*take away our emotions ... and talk logically ...*

*rather than getting mixed up and ... getting mad for something that is small*” which was a good strategy as it helped participants feel ready to constructively address the issue at hand.

When participants were ready to address conflicts, they highlighted the importance of different communication styles and strategies. Couple 354 talked about being direct, assertive, expressive, and responsive during conflicts, participant 354a *“both of us that do talk to each other, you know sharing each other's feelings and telling each other how we feel at a particular time”*. By coming together when they were both able to address the issue logically, couple 354 was better able to articulate their own perspectives by using direct, assertive, and expressive communication styles, as well as be attentive and respectful to their partner by using responsive communication styles. Employing all these strategies in tandem led to couple 354 solving their issue through compromise, thus highlighting the importance of the compromise theme: *“we just have to find a way to make things work (because we love each other)”*. This mix of communication strategies was beneficial for the relationship because it made it feel like *“communication wasn't a problem”* throughout the relationship for couple 354. This mix of communication styles and strategies while addressing conflicts was also beneficial for couple 234. Specifically, participant 234a used expressive, assertive communication styles to highlight compromise as a communication strategy: *“I'll be like okay we just need to sit down and talk about things you know, get to know them, you explain to me what is going on and I'll explain to you, we'll find a solution to it.”* Participant 234a is creating a space in both a physical and emotional way to facilitate direct, expressive, and responsive communication styles which result in compromise to come to a solution.

Another beneficial strategy to address conflicts was by finding or creating neutral spaces to discuss these issues. Couple 333 highlighted the benefit of this neutral location because it allowed them both the physical and emotional space to have more emotional conversations where they can be direct and assertive without fear:

*we'll sit down and we'll talk about it and it's one of those heart-to-heart talks, but you know we get down to the nitty gritty the hard to talk about stuff. We kind of break it down work through it and then go back to it again.*

This space also allows them to be both expressive and responsive, each partner can let all their feelings out and then come back together and figure out how to accommodate these feelings and compromise to solve whatever issue they are having. Even talking through an example of these emotional conversations, participant 333a was being responsive by realizing that if, “*you're really that unhappy (in a stressful job) I'm not gonna I'm not going to pressure you (to stay in that job) ... and we can find you a new place (where you feel comfortable and supported)*”. If these open, direct conversations are not helpful in resolving the situation, then participant 234a talked about using positivity to remind each other that they care about each other, for example, they may say something like “*hey baby I love you or something like that and I'll do anything for you*”. Participant 333b also highlighted positivity as a communication strategy during conflict scenarios because reminding each other about the good parts will enable us as a couple, “*(to) communicate, (and so) we'll make sure we'll make each other happy, like all the time*”.

Even when one partner in an intercultural couple preferred indirect, submissive communication during an argument, the other partner often encouraged them to employ direct communication strategies instead. For example, Participant 329b said that they would be assertive, direct while being responsive because they wanted to figure out why participant 329a was being distant (reticent) during the day. This difference in communication strategies preference has led to many opportunities where the couple had to

*sit down and chat for a while, just to understand where we're coming from and why we're coming from that direction, and sometimes it's because of cultural things, but sometimes like, we said something in a way that the other person didn't quite understand. We need to be clear.*

These sit-down conversations had become a habit for this couple because these were the only times during their relationship where they felt that “*we were able to really*

*communicate anything that we were feeling or anything that was going wrong or things that were going well and just really connect with each other*". So, participant 329a has been learning to slowly transition out of reticent communication strategies to have these open, direct conversations which increases intimacy between the partners because they often realize that *"we are on the same page about a lot of things [especially deeper issues like child rearing]"* which results in both partners feeling closer to each other.

Similarly, participant 358b uses a lot more indirect communication, and reticent communication styles when they are upset, so participant 358a feels like they have to take control and ask what happened to the partner, *"Yeah, he does get annoyed"* to which participant 358a used assertive and expressive communication style to affirm, *"yeah I've told her that before"*. Participant 358a feels like he must constantly be reading their partner's mind. The way they then cope with these indirect behaviors is by distracting his partner into talking about what is bothering them: *"We play Pokémon Go a lot ... [I'll use this the game to] bring that [something neutral] up. I'll just kind of ease into it... and then finally she'll tell me what will going on"*.

Couple 249 used more aggressive and submissive communication styles during arguments. Participant 249a said that *"I am a very stubborn person, you know. So, whenever I am angry... I'll just try to be the stubborn (until participant 249b apologizes) ... because I'm still the one with the effort, he'll still be the one to pay."* To counter this more inconsiderate and aggressive communication style, participant 249b uses more submissive communication. For example, they say that

*we do argue, and I'll just be like okay and even though I know I'm right I'll just tell her she's right... whenever she's calm after some hours, I'll just meet her and tell her I know I angried you, so I apologize and even if she's wrong.*

The differences in communication styles during conflict situations seemed to work for couple 249 but were strategies that other couples avoided. This indicates that there may be certain conflict management strategies that are unique to certain couples.

Overall, participants seem to prefer direct communication strategies when addressing conflicts within their relationship. First, participants use the reticent communication style to remove the negative emotions out of a conflict situation and approach it more logically. When they are ready to address the conflict, participants preferred to use direct, expressive, and responsive communication styles to be able to use the compromise and positivity communication strategies as problem solving techniques. Even though some participants preferred indirect communication styles, their partners often convinced them to use direct communication. Although this seems to be the problem-solving mechanism most participants preferred, there were still some exceptions, where participants preferred aggressive and submissive communication styles to achieve their goals.

### 3.2.2.2 Communication during life milestones

In addition to conflict management, direct, expressive communication is particularly helpful during major life transitions. Intercultural couples uniquely need to negotiate their cultural differences while going through transitions. Participants preferred to acknowledge these cultural differences through direct and expressive communication styles. For these couples, negotiating these cultural differences was only possible when participants used the compromise and assurances communication strategies. Talking about their future as a couple seemed to ensure that both partners were on the same page about what their goal for their future together looks like.

Couple 333 was thinking about getting married, consequently, cultural differences were becoming increasingly salient for them. During the interview, they talked about how they were currently learning about the different culturally specific wedding traditions they may need to integrate at their own wedding. To negotiate these cultural differences, couple 333 used assurances and future focus as communication strategies. Participant 333a used direct, and expressive communication to mention how there are thoughts in the back of their mind about traditions that they may need to incorporate into the wedding, *“at the end of the day, I think, like if we got married and stuff, I do want I do want to do some Chinese traditions, like a tea ceremony”* because they want to be respectful of both families, which they mentioned numerous times throughout the interview. Additionally,

participant 333a asked their partner, participant 333b to have direct, explicit conversations with their family to learn about the familial traditions that they may want:

*my younger sister she's more into [traditions] than me and my siblings are all she knows more into the Afghani culture but she knows more of the stuff, so she tells like her husband that, then she tells me then I tell her [participant 333a].*

Participant 333b is not actively concerned about integrating these cultural traditions to the relationship but is responsive and participates in this information seeking to appease participant 333a's anxieties about the future.

Wedding planning was also a source of stress shared by couple 365. Participant 365b expressed their anxiety about pleasing their parents even though they were dating outside of their culture. Throughout the interview, participant 365b talked about how she specifically did not care about cultural differences, but her parents do because they “*are from a very strict Christian family... but I don't really care about cultural differences*”. Thus she wants to marry someone from the same religious background. Specifically, participant 365b used future focus communication strategies and assertive and expressive communication styles to

*Make hints about religion in the beginning, just because I knew for myself, even if I'm not religious, just for like respect of my parents, I can't bring home someone, and then and just be like oh I'm going to have like a Hindu wedding or a Muslim wedding, Buddhist, like something like that.*

To reconcile these differences, couple 365 had a few direct discussions about the implication of their cultural differences and whether they should continue the relationship or not. Participant 365a used assertive and expressive communication to harken back to their conversation and highlight how,

*I [participant 365a] made that clear in the beginning that I needed this [a Christian wedding], so when I felt like he was agreeing with me in the beginning, I, when things were kind of going the opposite, I was like, hold on.*

Because participant 365a felt like they were not the same page, she reinitiated the conversation using direct and assertive communication styles because she felt like participant 365b was no longer on the same page as her. The first time they tried to work through these cultural differences, participant 365a used the expressive communication style to say that *“it was very difficult I would say, and it didn't go well”* and participant 365b agreed, *“it was bad, because there's a lot of miscommunication and the lack of communication. On both ends, you know, and you know myself in particular”*. To avoid further miscommunication, participant 365a talked about how they compromised and decided to *“set boundaries over, over our arguments and discussions ... because you know, obviously you can't perfect something overnight, but you could work on it gradually and I feel like it's, you know, it's been slowly getting better”*. By using the compromise communication strategy through assertive and expressive communication styles, couple 365 was able to ensure that the next conversation they had about cultural differences was productive.

Intercultural couples must uniquely negotiate their cultural differences while going through major life transitions. In these interviews, the pattern seemed to be that in one couple, one partner was more concerned about the cultural differences, usually because their family had more traditional values. To be able to have conversations about their cultural differences effectively, participants preferred using direct, expressive, and assertive communication styles to state their cultural differences and the anticipated impact of these differences on the romantic relationship. This allowed their partners to use responsive and agreeable communication styles to speak to their partners' concerns. The most prominent communication strategies participants kept relying on were future focus and assurances while having these conversations.

### 3.2.3 Maximize benefits of being in an intercultural romantic relationship

In these interviews, intercultural couples discussed how effectively communicating about their relationship allowed them to garner unique benefits. Participants highlighted a couple of strategies that maximized these benefits for their relationship. Some participants talked about how learning to communicate as a couple



helped them have effective and intentional conversations about their cultural differences. These conversations provided opportunities for partners to train each other on how to respect each other's different identities and creates a space where partners can collaborate and develop concrete strategies and solutions that will be beneficial, they integrate these cultural differences into their relationship.

To maximize the benefits of being in an intercultural relationship, participants used communication strategies that allow them to integrate their identities into one shared identity. Participants often saw their differing cultural identities as an opportunity to strengthen their relationship by reframing the differences as learning opportunities. This process increased the feelings of inclusion and belonging within the relationship as participants share cultural norms and food. For example, participant 350a, discussed how “*every kind of experience we have is different*” and instead of finding these differences exhausting, couple 350 uses these knowledge gaps as opportunities for learning about their partner – the positivity communication strategy – as well as broadening their perspective. Specifically, participant 350b used direct, expressive, and assertive communication strategies to say that,

*you definitely learn a lot more. Like your, the way you think definitely broadens when you date someone outside of your own culture. You get different perspectives of how you think, what you think is correct, political views are different, interests are different and the way you approach a certain problem is different and then by dating someone who's not, who's got that, like those different thoughts and different styles definitely makes things somethings work a lot better and it just keeps things interesting.*

Instead of seeing the differences in a negative light, couple 350 tries to see cultural differences as opportunities to be expressive and agreeable by teaching each other about their personal histories, thus using the positivity communication strategy. This sentiment was echoed by participant 207a, who used expressive communication to use the positivity communication strategy and talked about how,

*you get to perceive things differently from their point of view, you get to talk a lot, and actually it makes you think more about what might and what might not happen, what, you know... It's just, it just sounds nice to be diverse, contrary to just having similar opinions on everything.*

A similar thought was also shared by participant 207b who used the expressive communication style and positivity communication strategy to say,

*I mean it's been a great challenge like it's something that I really appreciate doing, because with the challenges coming, I get to learn new things, and I also get to let other people know about my cultural background, so they also learned something from me.*

Cultural differences added novelty to couple 207's relationship, participant 207a used expressive communication style and said, "*it's kind of like a, like a spice ... when you're two different people from different backgrounds and different beliefs, you know, we have a lot to talk about, we have a lot to share*". Learning about the deeper cultural differences made the relationship interesting and "*fun*" according to participant 207a. To start learning about each other's cultural differences, participants used the positivity communication strategy. This strategy coupled with expressive communication helped participants feel connected to each other and enjoy the differences because they brought novelty to their relationships.

In intercultural relationships, learning about each other's culture and integrating these cultural differences into their relationship is necessary so individuals can maximize the benefits of being in an intercultural relationship. By actively learning about each other's culture, individuals can increase feelings of inclusion into their partners family and increases feelings of closeness within the relationship. These conversations, regardless of when they happen, are opportunities to learn how to use the compromise communication strategy and be accommodating within the relationship. In couples where both partners are actively learning about the other's culture, their communication strategy use leads to benefits for both partners within the relationship. For example, couple 333 used a lot of assertive and expressive communication strategy to talk about these benefits.

Specifically, participant 333a expressed that, “*spending all this time with Pb and meeting his family and talking to his family and all that stuff I learned so many new things and it's so fascinating*” and participant 333b agreed and using expressive and direct communication strategies, added that

*we always ask questions like before like if I'm going to an event for her family and I never been to an event like this she'll tell me or ask questions, or I'll just stay beside her and not talk just in case I say something stupid [Pa laughs] and vice versa.*

Actively engaging in learning about each other's culture increases couple 333's feelings of intimacy within the relationship. Throughout the interview, they used expressive language freely while discussing how they were excitedly teaching each other about their differences. This process made each partner feel invested in the relationship as well as feel included when they were at the other's family events. This then makes integration of these cultural differences much easier within the relationship. Couple 333 enthusiastically expressed that a concrete way in which they celebrate each other's cultural differences is, “*we share our experiences right so fascination in a way of each other's culture, such as food, especially with food right.*” Trying new foods is also a proxy way that couples showed their open-mindedness and willingness to integrate their partner cultures into their own. For example, participant 329a was assertive and expressive by sharing how trying new food, “*that kind of scared me a bit like as far as that part of the culture, like that food, I love the food that we make here, like you know what she makes for me, I do, like I love Chinese food.*” The opinion amongst most participants was that food was one of the greatest benefits of being in an intercultural couple.

In these interviews, to maximize the benefits of being in an intercultural relationship, participants had direct conversations where they learned about each other's cultures and integrated them into their relationship. To do this, most participants used the positivity communication strategy and direct, expressive, assertive, and agreeable communication styles. They reframed the cultural differences as learning opportunities that they could use to grow individually and as a couple.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Discussion

In this study, I explored how intercultural couples used a variety of communication styles and determined the extent to which they are helpful in different contexts. From previous literature, I examined how intercultural couples used direct and indirect communication (Gudykunst et al., 1988) and the eight communication styles derived from the communication circumplex (Waldherr & Muck, 2011): assertive, expressive, responsive, agreeable, reticent, submissive, inconsiderate, and aggressive. Participants used all these communication styles during the interviews, but overall preferred using direct, and expressive communication styles and used aggressive and inconsiderate communication styles least often. In addition to these communication styles, I also found new themes (anchored in the interview content) and examined how participants used unique themes: positivity, compromise, unhealthy strategies, assurances, and future focus communication strategies. There were some differences in how these communication styles and strategies manifested across staggered and concurrent interviews. Overall, participants used all these communication styles and categories with varying usefulness as tools in four contexts: (1) recognize and reconcile their cultural differences, (2) navigate stigma and discrimination, (3) navigate regular relationship conflicts, and (4) maximize benefits of the intercultural relationship.

#### 4.1 What communication strategies do intercultural couples use?

Culture can significantly impact an individual's communication preferences and in turn the relationship maintenance behaviors they tend to use (Cools, 2006). In these interviews, there were some general trends in communication strategy use amongst intercultural couples. The two most common communication strategies among these were direct and expressive while the least common were aggressive and inconsiderate. This implies that there are some communication strategies that all couples prefer to use over others. This is consistent with Halford and colleagues' (2018) work, who found no cultural differences in communication patterns specifically during problem solving

discussions amongst Chinese and White couples living in Australia, but inconsistent with other research that shows clear differences in how individuals from different background's prefer to communicate (e.g., Hiew et al., 2016; Tili & Barker, 2015).

Based on the interviews, I identified five new themes of communication for intercultural couples, including: positivity, compromise, assurances, future focus, and unhealthy strategies. Some of these communication strategies are similar to the relationship maintenance strategies already identified in the literature, specifically, the relationship maintenance strategies identified by Stafford and Canary's relationship maintenance strategy measure (RMSM; Stafford & Canary, 1991). The themes of positivity, assurances, and future focus derived from these interviews map onto the positivity, assurances, and relationship talk factors in the RMSM. My theme of positivity is like the positivity factor in the RMSM, as both encapsulate positive feelings about one's partner. Seeing one's partner in a positive light can benefit relationship quality (Niehuis et al., 2011), for example, these feelings of positivity can increase feelings of love and lead to less conflict within a relationship (Murray & Holmes, 1997). My theme of assurances is similar to the RMSM's assurances factor, because they both capture a participants' perspective about the future of the relationship. However, in my definition of the theme of assurances, I focus on the potential future of the relationship causing stress to the participant. Individuals in marginalized relationships like intercultural relationship may face heightened anxiety about their relationship and its future (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). To cope with the increased relationship uncertainty, intercultural couples might explicitly talk about how their cultural differences may impact their future and their relationship quality – these conversations all fall under my theme of future focus. This theme leans on some of the ideas of openness and relationship talk from the updated RMSM (Stafford, 2011). It is similar because both encourage direct communication about the nature of the relationship itself, however, future focus specifically focuses on how the couple's differences (i.e., race, ethnicity, religion, or language) manifest in their relationship. Openly discussing these issues can be beneficial for the couples as it ensures that both parties can be certain about their future which can improve relationship outcomes for the couple (Knobloch & Theiss, 2011).

The next theme I identified was compromise. In these interviews, participants discussed how compromise and accommodation was necessary for their ability to reconcile cultural differences and consequently, increase relationship quality. Previous literature talks about how compromise is necessary and a side effect of relationship maintenance. However, if individuals in intercultural couples want to maintain a healthy relationship, they must actively communicate to participate in accommodation and compromise (Rusbult et al., 1991). Compromise seems to be one of the communication strategies that permits identity integration (e.g., Remennick, 2009). Indeed, individuals that have highly fused identities, meaning have included their partner into their own sense of self, are more likely to make sacrifices as a way to maintain their relationship (Joo & Park, 2017). Finally, I outlined the unhealthy strategy theme which identified the self-awareness of unhelpful strategies for their individual relationships within the intercultural couples I interviewed. Previous research has identified antisocial relationship maintenance, such as avoidance, (Dainton & Gross, 2008), and how damaging they can be for the stability of a romantic relationship (Schrodt et al., 2008). As couples get to know each other, they learn how to communicate effectively through trial and error. Many intercultural couples in these interviews were able to recognize the utility and necessity of this communication process. The fact that couples are aware of the communication strategies that could be harmful to the relationship and have learned to avoid them as much as possible is an interesting finding of this work.

There are general trends in preferences of communication styles and strategies based on these interviews. However, it is important to note that different maintenance activities are going to uniquely serve couples, depending on the situational context (Dainton et al., 1994). Recent work by Ge and colleagues (2022) indicates that the benefits of using different communication styles are dependent on the context in which they are being used.

## 4.2 When and why do intercultural couples use particular strategies?

Indeed, in these interviews, intercultural couples employed these communication styles and strategies in various contexts, to varying degrees of success. There were four

contexts in which intercultural couples employed these cultural strategies: (1) recognize and reconcile their cultural differences, (2) navigate stigma and discrimination, (3) navigate regular relationship conflicts, and (4) maximize benefits of the relationship.

#### 4.2.1 Recognize and reconcile cultural differences

Specifically, participants preferred using direct, expressive communication styles and the assurances and future focus communication strategies to recognize and reconcile their cultural differences. Recognizing and reconciling cultural differences was one of the mechanisms by which participants started to expand their sense of self and integrate their partner into their own identity. These direct, expressive conversations allow participants to re-evaluate threatened dimensions by perceiving their cultural differences as a positive (Lemaine, 1974). Indeed, communication about culture was associated with more satisfactions and less relationship distress in intercultural couples (Reiter & Gee, 2008). Additionally, individuals in intercultural relationships may experience heightened uncertainty because they must navigate their cultural differences (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). In these interviews, using these communication strategies helped participants help fuse their identities together and thus reduce relationship uncertainty, which is consistent with previous research (Denes et al., 2018). Decreasing relationship uncertainty can improve overall relationship quality (Dainton et al., 2017; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011).

#### 4.2.2 Navigate stigma and discrimination

To navigate stigma and discrimination, participants relied on a variety of communication strategies, depending on who the perpetrator of discrimination was. If intercultural couples experienced explicit or implicit discrimination from their family members, participants preferred to use direct and expressive communication styles to discuss the effects of the discriminatory experience as a couple. It was important for a couple to defend their relationship and advocate for their partner, especially when the outgroup partner is being isolated and excluded from the social network, the ingroup partner felt that they should stand up for their partner. They also employed the positivity communication strategy to minimize the negative effects of these experiences and maximize the positive feelings of being in a healthy romantic relationship. However,

when the discrimination was coming from strangers, there was a greater variety in effective communication strategy use. Some couples preferred to not communicate about discriminatory experiences from strangers at all, while other couples did discuss these experiences using expressive and responsive communication strategies, ultimately trying to avoid using unhealthy communication strategies. This allowed participants to have secondary control over the situation, an adaptation strategy (Compas et al., 2001). A superficial conversation about discriminatory experiences, compared to a direct in-depth conversation, did not seem to satisfy participants, and led to unease in the relationship. This may be because they are perceiving their partner as less supportive than they are capable of being, which can adversely impact their relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2022). Direct conversations allow participants to gain primary control, by making directed efforts towards the problem, in this case the experiences of discrimination (Compas et al., 2001).

#### 4.2.3 Navigate regular relationship conflicts

In the interviews, participants highlighted two contexts within regular relationship maintenance: conflict management and major life transitions in which they used various communication styles and strategies. To address conflicts, participants tended to use reticent, expressive, assertive communication styles and compromise, positivity communication strategies. Conflict management is one of the most common themes that romantic relationship research explores. Indeed, being able to effectively problem solve has been shown to be better for relationship outcomes (Dominguez, 2017; Overall & McNulty, 2017). There is some evidence that culture impacts conflict management strategies in romantic relationships (e.g., Liu, 2012), but other research indicates there are no conflict management differences across different types of intercultural relationships (e.g., Troy et al., 2006). Further, participants who preferred using indirect and reticent communication styles often needed to adapt to an assertive communication style to resolve conflicts effectively. This pattern of adapting one's communication style preferences has been shown in previous literature (e.g., Remennick, 2009; Tili & Barker, 2015).



To successfully maneuver through major life transitions, participants needed to effectively address their cultural differences, their preference was to use direct, assertive, expressive, responsive, and agreeable communication styles and the future focus and assurances communication strategies. In these interviews, participants were primarily concerned about how cultural differences will factor into wedding planning. Previous research shows that intercultural couples must manage an array of intricacies while preparing for marriage (Newcomb, 2020). To address these intricacies, clinical research examines how premarital counselling may impact relationship quality (Riles, 2016; Wong, 2009), there is still little work exploring how ethnicity may impact relationship help-seeking behaviors like couple therapy (Stewart et al., 2016).

#### 4.2.4 Maximize benefits of being in an intercultural romantic relationship

Finally, to maximize the benefits of their relationship, participants primarily used direct, expressive, and assertive communication styles and the positivity communication strategy. Effectively communicating about their cultural differences seems to be the mechanism by which partners develop a new joint identity, which has positive impacts on a romantic relationship (Amiot et al., 2012; Martinez et al., 2016). One of the interesting trends in these interviews was that participants seemed unsure about how to talk about the benefits of their relationship or how they enhanced these benefits to bolster their relationship quality, compared to their willingness/ ability to talk about conflict management. Some couples discussed “hyping their partner up” or sharing positive events, both of which are aspects of capitalization. Indeed, capitalization can bolster relationship outcomes in both interracial and intraracial romantic relationships (Dowlat, 2018). This could be because the mechanisms by which participants are bolstering their relationships have become routine relationship maintenance (Dainton & Stafford, 1993), which can strongly benefit the relationship (Aylor & Dainton, 2004). Further, no one set of maintenance activities is going to serve all couples equally well within this context (Canary & Stafford, 1994).

### 4.3 Implications

Despite the ubiquity of intercultural romantic relationships (Rico et al., 2018; StatsCan, 2011), research examining how these relationships are maintained is limited. Indeed, a recent review of romantic relationship maintenance literature reports an average of about 70% white participants and 50% married couples (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2022). This homogenous literature results in implicit assumptions about the nature of all relationships by research based upon majority groups. There are some exceptions to this homogenous literature (e.g., Dainton, 2015; Yum & Canary, 2009) but regardless, these few studies are not representative of the global population. By conducting this research, I am addressing the homogeneity of samples in romantic relationship maintenance literature by conducting interviews with a diverse sample of intercultural romantic relationships.

Additionally, in previous literature the function of open and direct communication – communication strategies that have been developed in the considerably larger intracultural romantic relationships – has been examined in intercultural relationships (Reiter & Gee, 2008). Applying the communication circumplex model (Waldherr & Muck, 2011) to intercultural couples shows how intercultural couples are like other types of romantic relationships when using communication strategies for relationship maintenance. Further, in the present work, I examined *how* individuals in intercultural couples maintain their relationship through communication, specifically exploring how culture and situational context may impact the effectiveness of communication strategies. Dedication to effective communication and maintenance behaviors can promote positive relational outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction and establish expectations of the future of the relationship (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013).

Identifying the strategies that assist individuals in intercultural relationships while they are navigating culturally ambivalent environments is important so they can maximize the benefits of effective communication strategies. Further, these communication strategies may also be beneficial for other marginalized couples who share similar experiences of stigma and discrimination, such as same-sex relationships (Rosenthal et al., 2019), thus advancing research on romantic relationship processes. This

discovery will help individuals in such relationships navigate the unique sociopolitical contexts they are in. Further, this findings from this work can be applied in clinical psychology and therapy contexts to guide researchers and clinicians to develop actionable techniques to promote healthy and happy romantic relationships among increasingly diverse romantic relationships. Specifically developing preventative interventions and evaluate the extent to which communication is effective for premarital and marital romantic relationships.

#### 4.4 Limitations

There are several limitations that extend from this study which provide opportunities for future research. First, although the sample is diverse – especially compared to previous research on romantic relationship maintenance (Ogolsky & Stafford, 2022) – there are some variables whose uniformity may impact the way in which these couples maintained their relationship. In this sample, the average length of the relationship was 4.24 years with couples who were in committed, long-term relationships. Additionally, all the participants resided in a Canadian province and most stated that they felt strongly tied to their Canadian identity through their interviews (e.g., explicit statements: “*I am Chinese-Canadian*”). Thus, they may have assimilated to Canadian values and norms and identified with them more strongly without conscious effort. The homogeneity of this sample in these two realms may have given an inflated sense of importance to certain communication strategies, as individuals in these relationships may have already developed effective communication practices at the time of the interviews.

Further, I conducted the interviews virtually which could have impacted how willing participants would be to disclose sensitive information about themselves and their relationship. As a researcher, I had no control over where participants were attending the interview from, and their interview location could have impacted their ability to self-disclose. For example, if participants were driving around on the street alone, they may be less likely to self-censor because they are in a safe location where they can speak freely. Alternatively, if a participant is at their parent’s house they might not have felt as comfortable sharing information about their relationship, especially if parents have

indicated discomfort or disapproval of the relationship. In other fields, there is some evidence that face to face or in person interviews provide different information compared to virtual interviews (Grova et al., 2021; Krouwel et al., 2019). Further, previous work has outlined the differences in how interviewing a couple separately or together – labelled staggered and concurrent interviews in this research – may impact how comfortable they are disclosing sensitive information about their relationship (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001).

Finally, I conducted these interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic. This unique global context may have impacted the themes that were salient for intercultural couples. Throughout the pandemic there was an intense anti-Asian sentiment (“Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide,” 2020; Perng & Dhaliwal, 2022, p. 19) that may have brought Asian participants’ racial and/or ethnic identity to the forefront of their mind. Identities are closely tied to our relationships (Hecht & Lu, 2014) and can impact how an individual perceives their relationship (Fincham & Beach, 1999; Kunkel et al., 2003).

## 4.5 Future Directions

The limitations of this study provide many opportunities for future research. Previous research states that people that are earlier in their romantic relationships do not communicate about their cultural differences (Reiter & Gee, 2008). This may be because individuals just find it easier to ignore their cultural differences until they reach a point where they are required to compare their similarities and differences. Thus, it is important to continue investigating communication behavioral patterns in couples at different stages of life to determine whether communication style preferences and behavior change over time or are adapted as the relationship is developed as communication preferences differ among the various stages of relationships (Flaherty, 1999).

Future researchers should also investigate other factors that may impact communication use. For example, having a strong racial identity can serve as a psychological buffer against discrimination (Phinney, 1996), perhaps how strongly one identifies with their culture of origin (versus host culture) may impact communication

strategy use within intercultural couples. Further, the differences in the frequency of communication styles and strategies across staggered and concurrent interviews indicates that there are individual level and/ or dyadic level factors that impact how individuals in intercultural relationships use communication styles and strategies. Indeed, Ge and colleagues (2022) found that positively valenced versus negatively valenced contexts impacts communication style preference and Ross and colleagues (2019) found that socioeconomic status can impact communication efficacy. These differences need to be closely examined to determine the extent to which these differences and identify what unique factors impact prioritization of certain communication strategies versus others or the frequency of strategy use.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic changed how individuals value communication and the mechanisms by which they communicate. Many couples were forced to either transition to a long-distance relationship where they were dependent on technology mediated communication to maintain the relationships or accelerate some relationship milestones and live together. Recent work has shown that this type of cyberintimacy can have a profound impact on different stages of a romantic relationship (Kwok & Wescott, 2020). This communication strategy may be particularly helpful for the non-cohabitating couples, as previous research suggests that technology can mediate and create a feeling of relatedness when partners are separated (Hassenzahl et al., 2012). The impact of cyberintimacy for different romantic relationship types—like intercultural couples—has yet to be thoroughly investigated despite some evidence that seemingly micro-interactions, like texting, can have a positive impact on relationship satisfaction (Luo & Tuney, 2015). During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a global trend to increasingly rely on technology to maintain interpersonal relationships, as many countries were imposing strict quarantine regulations (The Netherlands, Bastoni et al., 2021; Italy, Gabbiadini et al., 2020; Saudi Arabia, Hassounah et al., 2020; The United States, Nguyen et al., 2020). With this increasing reliance on technology mediated communication, their impact on interpersonal relationship, especially romantic relationships, must be investigated in future research. These developments in communication technologies will then provide further collaborations between different scientific fields that could contribute to the development of cyberintimacy-enhancing interventions.

## 4.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how intercultural couples use multiple communication strategies within their relationship and whether these strategies are helpful. Findings indicate that intercultural couples use a variety of communication strategies to navigate romantic relationship maintenance, ameliorating the negative effects of these challenges and enhance the benefits of these relationships, in unique contexts. These interviews suggest that the benefits of particular communication strategies are dependent on the context in which they are being used. By conducting this research, I am addressing several gaps in the romantic relationship maintenance and intercultural communication literature. This could help future researchers and clinicians to better determine what “effective” communication is and how to promote it in romantic relationships. Future research would benefit from further unraveling the contextual factors that may impact communication as a relationship maintenance behavior in intercultural relationships and other marginalized relationships.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Ethics Approval.



**Date:** 10 August 2021

**To:** Dr John Sakahik

**Project ID:** 118598

**Study Title:** Intercultural Romantic Relationships and their use of Communication Strategies

**Short Title:** ComStrategies & InterculturalRR

**Application Type:** NMREB Initial Application

**Review Type:** Delegated

**Full Board Reporting Date:** September 3 2021

**Date Approval Issued:** 10/Aug/2021 19:48

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 10/Aug/2022

Dear Dr John Sakahik

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

**Documents Approved:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Individual_InterviewGuide	Interview Guide	21/Apr/2021	
Concurrent_InterviewGuide	Interview Guide	21/Apr/2021	
Staggered_InterviewGuide	Interview Guide	21/Apr/2021	
Debrief_EligibilitySurvey	Debriefing document	21/Apr/2021	
Verbal_Debrief	Debriefing document	21/Apr/2021	
WebsiteAnnouncement	Recruitment Materials	21/Apr/2021	
Debrief_Interview	Debriefing document	29/Jun/2021	2
Verbal_Consent	Verbal Consent/Assent	29/Jun/2021	3
LOI_Concurrent	Implied Consent/Assent	29/Jun/2021	3
LOI_EligibilitySurvey	Implied Consent/Assent	29/Jun/2021	3
LOI_Individual	Implied Consent/Assent	29/Jun/2021	3
LOI_Staggered	Implied Consent/Assent	29/Jun/2021	3

**Documents Acknowledged:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Qual_Eligibility_Survey 14.06.2021	Screening Form Questionnaire	14/Jun/2021	2

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as

Page 1 of 2

Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

*Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).*

## **Appendix B: Online Advertisement.**

### WEBSITE ANNOUNCEMENT

**Title:** Seeking participants to interview!

SEEKING INTERCULTURAL COUPLES FOR INTERVIEWS! (Eligible participants get an \$11 Amazon gift card)

**Are you...**

**Canadian?**

**At least 19 years old?**

**In a relationship with someone from a different culture than you?**

Researchers at the University of Western Ontario (UWO) are looking for couples where each individual identifies with different race, ethnicity, or religious groups. We are interested in your experiences together and what strategies you use to maintain your relationship.

This study is completely voluntary and involves...

Completing a 5- minute relationship survey online to determine eligibility

A 30-minute virtual interview

Each participant will receive a \$11 Amazon gift card

If you and/ or your partner are interested in participating, please complete this survey:  
[https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_a3PXm3wnn3BltoW](https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a3PXm3wnn3BltoW)

Thank you so much for participating!

## Appendix C: Qualtrics Eligibility Survey.

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Start of Block: Consent

consent LETTER OF INFORMATION

### **Project Title:**

Intercultural Romantic Relationships

### **Investigators:**

John K. Sakaluk, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario  
(Principal Investigator)

Adira Daniel, M.Sc. Student, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario  
(Research Support Staff)

### **Perceptions of Relationships – Invitation to Participate**

You are invited to participate in a study titled *Perceptions of Relationships Project* that is being conducted by Adira Daniel, Dr. John Sakaluk, and his Methodology and Relationship/Sexual Science (MaRSS) Lab. Dr. Sakaluk is an Assistant Professor in the department of psychology at the University of Western Ontario. Adira Daniel is a M.Sc. candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of Western Ontario, supervised by Dr. Sakaluk. You may contact Dr. Sakaluk by emailing [REDACTED] or Adira Daniel by emailing [REDACTED] if you have any further questions about this research.

### **Purpose, Objectives, and Importance of Research**

The purpose of this research project is to understand how people perceive their intercultural romantic relationships. Specifically, we are interested in how these individuals navigate their relationship and cope with the negative effects of the challenges they may face. Research of this type is important because it will allow us to better understand the similarities and differences in how people think and feel about their relationships.

### **Participants Selection and Involvement**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently involved in a romantic relationship. If you consent to participate in this research, your participation will include answering a brief number of demographic items. All participation will take place online through this survey and will require 10 minutes or less of your time.

If you are eligible, you may be contacted by the researchers to be interviewed about your relationship. If you choose to participate, this interview will be around 30 minutes.

### **Possible Risks and Harms**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and they include potentially feeling embarrassed answering some of the demographic questions. To prevent or navigate these risks, **you are free to skip any questions that might make you feel uncomfortable.**

### **Potential Benefits and Compensation.**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include learning about the process of research firsthand and helping to advance the state of knowledge of relationships. If you consent to participate in this survey, you may be eligible to participate in an interview. If you participate in the interview, you will receive a \$11 gift card. If you are eligible, researchers will contact you through the email you provided.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data can be deleted if you contact Adira Daniel or Dr. Sakaluk with the email your provided. **If you do not contact us with the provided email, we will be unable to identify and delete your responses.**

Your survey responses will be collected through this online survey platform, Qualtrics. Your contact information will be saved on a master list only available to the investigators listed in this study. **Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be via the security protocols in place for data collected through Qualtrics.** Qualtrics uses encryption technology and restricted access authorizations to protect all data collected. In addition, Western's Qualtrics server is in Ireland, where privacy standards are maintained under the European Union safe harbor framework. The data will then be exported from Qualtrics and securely stored on Western University's server.

### **Dissemination of Results and Disposal of Data**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: 1) conference oral and poster presentations at scholarly meetings; 2) press-releases, social media and on the internet; 3) peer-reviewed journal articles; 4) student theses/dissertations/class presentations, 5) publications in books. In the course of dissemination, it may be necessary to share anonymized aggregated data, in order for external reviewers and readers to verify the accuracy of our analyses and research reports. This will be facilitated via Adira Daniel or Dr. Sakaluk's Open Science Framework page—a service for sharing research materials, with data servers located in Canada (Montreal). Data from this study will be stored indefinitely, in order to maintain the verifiability of the findings to interested researchers and readers.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED]. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

### **Contacts for Further Information**

At the end of this study, you will receive a debriefing sheet explaining the nature of the research. If you choose to withdraw from the study but would still like a debriefing sheet, it can be accessed here: [[Debrief](#)].

If you would like any further information about the research or receive a copy of



potential study results, please contact Adira Daniel at [adanie48@uwo.ca](mailto:adanie48@uwo.ca).

### **Consent**

By completing and submitting the questionnaire, **YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED** and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

*Please retain a copy of this letter for your reference [Loi].*

I confirm that I am age 19 or older and consent to take part in this survey. (1)

I do not consent to take part in this study. (2)

End of Block: Consent

Start of Block: Debriefing

debrief

### DEBRIEFING LETTER

**Project Title:** Intercultural Romantic Relationships

**Investigators:**

John K. Sakaluk, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario

Adira Daniel, M.Sc. Student, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario

### **Thank you for participating in this survey!**

This research is being conducted by Adira Daniel, Dr. John Sakaluk, and his Methodology and Relationship/Sexual Science (MaRSS) Lab. Dr. Sakaluk is an Assistant Professor in the department of psychology at the University of Western Ontario. Adira Daniel is a M.Sc. candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of Western Ontario, supervised by Dr. Sakaluk. We appreciate your time in participating in this study!

The survey you completed will help us to better understand how people think about their intercultural romantic relationships. In this survey, we asked you a number of demographic questions to determine your eligibility for the next part of our study – an interview. If you are eligible to participate in the interview, researchers will contact you through the email you provided. This interview will be about how you navigate your intercultural relationship, it will last about 30 minutes.

If you have any questions about the research, you may feel free and contact **Adira Daniel** [REDACTED] and/or **John Sakaluk** [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

*Please retain a copy of this letter for your reference [Debrief].*

End of Block: Debriefing

Start of Block: Contact

### **Contact Information**

Please answer the following questions carefully and accurately so we can contact you if you are eligible to participate in the study.

initials Please enter your **initials** below (e.g., the initials for John Doe would be JD).

---

email Please enter your email. Be sure to enter this correctly so we can contact you if you are eligible to participate.

If you do not enter your email, the survey will end immediately.

---

Skip To: End of Survey If Condition: Please enter your email. Be... Is Empty. Skip To: End of Survey.

End of Block: Contact

Start of Block: Partner Contact

dyad If you are eligible to participate in the study, would you and your partner be interested in being interviewed together?

I would like to be interviews alone (1)

My partner and I would like to be interviewed separately (2)

My partner and I would like to be interviewed together (3)

End of Block: Partner Contact

Start of Block: Demographics

### Background Information

Please tell us a bit about yourself. This information will remain anonymous and confidential. Results will only be reported in aggregate form. You may decline to answer these questions if you wish.

age What is your current age, in years?

▼ Under 19 (1) ... 90 (73)



religion Which of the following most accurately represents your current religious or spiritual affiliation?

Christianity (1)

Judaism (2)

Islam (3)

Hinduism (4)

Sikhism (5)

Buddhism (6)

Agnostic (7)

Atheist (8)

Other (9) \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer not to say (10)

job What is your current occupation?

Full time employed (1)

Part-time employed (2)

Unemployed (3)

Full time student (4)

Part time student (5)

Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer not to say (7)

ses What socioeconomic status do you most identify with?

Lower class (1)

Lower middle class (2)

Middle middle class (3)

Upper middle class (4)

Upper class (5)

Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

education What is your highest level of formal education?

Some primary and/ or secondary education (1)

High school graduation (2)

College/ Trade school diploma (3)

Undergraduate degree (4)

Postgraduate degree (5)

Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Page Break

sexorientation Which best describes your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual (straight) (1)

Lesbian/Gay (2)

Bisexual (3)

Asexual (4)

Something else (please specify) (5)

---

Prefer not to say (6)

relorientation When it comes to relationships, I think of myself as:

Monogamous (1)

Non-monogamous (e.g., polyamorous, open relationships, swinging etc.,) (2)

Questioning (3)

Something else (please specify) (4)

---

Prefer not to say (5)

relstatus What is your current relationship status?

Single (1)

Casually seeing someone(s) (2)

Seriously dating someone(s) (3)

Cohabiting with someone(s) (4)

Engaged to someone(s) (5)

Married to someone(s) (6)

Prefer not to say (7)

language What language do you feel most comfortable communicating in? If you are comfortable communicating in multiple languages, please list the language you use most often.

---

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Relationship Demographics

lengthrel If you are currently in a relationship, for how many years have you been with your primary partner? (e.g., 1.5,5,10)

---

sameeth Is your current primary partner from the same race/ ethnicity as you?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Prefer not to say (3)

Skip To: partnerethnicity If sameeth = 2

partnerethnicity Which of the following best describes **your primary partner's ethnic background**?

African (1)

European (2)

South Asian (3)

East Asian (4)

Southeast Asian (5)  
 Latino/a/x (6)  
 Indigenous (7)  
 Middle Eastern (8)  
 Multi-ethnic (9)  
 Something else (10)

partnerage What is **your primary partner's age**, in years?

▼ Under 19 (1) ... 90 (73)

partnerlanguage What language does **your primary partner** feel most comfortable communicating in? If they are comfortable communicating in multiple languages, please list the language they use most often.

---

partnerreligion Which of the following most accurately represents **your primary partner's current religious or spiritual affiliation**?

Christianity (1)

Judaism (2)

Islam (3)

Hindism (4)

Sikhism (5)

Buddhism (6)

Agnostic (7)

Atheist (8)

Other (9) \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer not to say (10)

livetogether Do you and your primary partner live together?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Prefer not to say (3)

children Do you and your primary partner have any children?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Prefer not to say (3)

End of Block: Relationship Demographics

## Appendix D: Consent and Debrief Forms.

### LETTER OF INFORMATION - STAGGERED DYADS

**Project Title:** Intercultural Romantic Relationships

**Investigators:**

John K. Sakaluk, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario  
 Adira Daniel, M.Sc. Student, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario

### **Perceptions of Relationships – Invitation to Participate**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Perceptions of Relationships Project* that is being conducted by Adira Daniel, Dr. John Sakaluk, and his Methodology and Relationship/Sexual Science (MaRSS) Lab. Dr. Sakaluk is an Assistant Professor in the department of psychology at the University of Western Ontario. Adira Daniel is a M.Sc. candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of Western Ontario, supervised by Dr. Sakaluk. You may contact Dr. Sakaluk by emailing [REDACTED] or Adira Daniel by emailing [REDACTED] if you have any further questions about this research.

### **Purpose, Objectives, and Importance of Research**

The purpose of this research project is to understand how people perceive their intercultural romantic relationships. Specifically, we are interested in how these individuals navigate their relationship and cope with the negative effects of the challenges they may face. Research of this type is important because it will allow us to better understand the similarities and differences in how people think and feel about their relationships.

### **Participants Selection and Involvement**

You are being asked to participate in this study because of you and your partner are currently involved in an intercultural romantic relationship and have indicated interest in being interviewed about your relationship. If you consent to participate in this research, your participation will include (1) answering a number of demographic items and (2) an interview. Along with this letter, you will receive a link to the demographic items ([https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_a3PXm3wnn3BltoW](https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a3PXm3wnn3BltoW)). The interview will be about how you navigate your relationship and **will be recorded**. It will be about 30 minutes long,

### **Possible Risks and Harms**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and they include potentially feeling embarrassed due to the study topic (i.e., detailed aspects of participants romantic relationships and experiences with racism, stigma, and discrimination in daily life).. To prevent or to deal with these risks, **you are free to skip any questions that might make you feel uncomfortable.**

### **Potential Benefits and Compensation.**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include learning about the

process of research firsthand and helping to advance the state of knowledge of relationships. To compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given a \$11 gift card.

### **Voluntary Participation and Confidentiality**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. You do not waive any legal right by participating in this research. If you do withdraw from the study your data can be deleted if you contact Adira Daniel or Dr. Sakaluk with the email your provided.

The interview will be conducted and recorded over Zoom. Only the audio recordings will be saved. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be via the security protocols in place for data collected through Zoom. **All data collected through Zoom for this study will be stored on the University of Western Ontario shared folder system.** This folder will only be accessible to the research team.

### **Dissemination of Results and Disposal of Data**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: 1) conference oral and poster presentations at scholarly meetings ; 2) press-releases, social media and on the internet; 3) peer-reviewed journal articles; 4) Student theses/dissertations/class presentations, 5) publications in books. In the course of dissemination, it may be necessary to share anonymized aggregated data or quotes from your responses, in order for external reviewers and readers to verify the accuracy of our analyses and research reports. This will be facilitated via Adira Daniel or Dr. Sakaluk's Open Science Framework page—a service for sharing research materials, with data servers located in Canada (Montreal). Data from this study will be stored indefinitely, in order to maintain the verifiability of the findings to interested researchers and readers.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED] [REDACTED] This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

### **Contacts for Further Information**

At the end of this study, you will receive a debriefing sheet explaining the nature of the research. If you choose to withdraw from the study but would still like a debriefing sheet, it can be accessed at: .

If you would like any further information about the research or receive a copy of potential study results, please contact Adira Daniel at [REDACTED]

### **Consent**

Please read this form before your interview. Before you are interviewed, you must VERBALLY INDICATE that you indicate that you understand the above conditions of



participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Please sign below if you fully understand the nature of this project and wish to participate in this project.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Please retain a copy of this letter for your reference.*



### **Voluntary Participation and Confidentiality**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. You do not waive any legal right by participating in this research. If you do withdraw from the study your data can be deleted if you contact Adira Daniel or Dr. Sakaluk with the email your provided.

The interview will be conducted and recorded over Zoom. Only the audio recordings will be saved.. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be via the security protocols in place for data collected through Zoom. **All data collected through Zoom for this study will be stored on the University of Western Ontario shared folder system.** This folder will only be accessible to the research team.

### **Dissemination of Results and Disposal of Data**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: 1) conference oral and poster presentations at scholarly meetings ; 2) press-releases, social media and on the internet; 3) peer-reviewed journal articles; 4) Student theses/dissertations/class presentations, 5) publications in books. In the course of dissemination, it may be necessary to share anonymized aggregated data or quotes from your responses, in order for external reviewers and readers to verify the accuracy of our analyses and research reports. This will be facilitated via Adira Daniel or Dr. Sakaluk's Open Science Framework page—a service for sharing research materials, with data servers located in Canada (Montreal). Data from this study will be stored indefinitely, in order to maintain the verifiability of the findings to interested researchers and readers.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

### **Contacts for Further Information**

At the end of this study, you will receive a debriefing sheet explaining the nature of the research. If you choose to withdraw from the study but would still like a debriefing sheet, it can be accessed at: .

If you would like any further information about the research or receive a copy of potential study results, please contact Adira Daniel at [REDACTED]

### **Consent**

Please read this form before your interview. Before you are interviewed, you must **VERBALLY INDICATE** that you indicate that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Please sign below if you fully understand the nature of this project and wish to participate in this project.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Please retain a copy of this letter for your reference.*

## DEBRIEFING FORM

**Project Title:**

Intercultural Romantic Relationships

**Investigators:**John K. Sakaluk, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario  
(Principal Investigator)Adira Daniel, M.Sc. Student, Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario  
(Research Support Staff)**Thank you for participating in this study!**

This research is being conducted by Dr. John Sakaluk, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology and Adira Daniel, a Masters student, at the University of Western Ontario. We appreciate your time in participating in this study!

The interview you completed will help us to better understand how people think about their intercultural romantic relationships. In this interview, we asked about the challenges that individuals in intercultural relationships face and how they cope with those challenges. We will analyze your responses to determine 1) identify specific challenges intercultural couples face and (2) which communication strategies they use to navigate these challenges.

Your responses will remain confidential, however there is a master list indicating your name with your participant ID. This master list is **ONLY** accessible to the two investigators listed above. Your responses will be associated with your participant ID and stored for seven years. If you choose to withdraw from the study your data can be deleted if you contact Adira Daniel or Dr. Sakaluk with the email your provided. **If you do not contact us with the provided email, we will be unable to identify and delete your responses.**

It is possible that thinking about your relationship may have induced some uncomfortable memories, thoughts, or emotions. These feelings are completely normal. If you'd like to talk to someone about any issues that came to your attention today, you may wish to consider contacting a mental health counselor. **Helpful services are widely available, usually for a reasonable cost.**

You may find a counselor near you by going to the Canadian Psychological Association website (<http://www.cpa.ca/public/findingapsychologist/>), Family Service Ontario (<http://familyserviceontario.org/>) or The Centre for Addition and Mental Health (CAMH; <https://camh.ca/-/media/files/community-resource-sheets/couples-counselling-pdf.pdf>).

If you have any questions about the research, you may feel free and contact **Adira Daniel** [REDACTED] and/or **John Sakaluk** [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact The Office of Human Research Ethics [REDACTED].

██████████ This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

### **Appendix E: Interview Script.**

#### VERBAL CONSENT

\*before starting the recording\*

Hello, thank you so much for participating in this study! My name is [], I will be conducting our interview today.

Before we start, I want to talk about the letter of information I sent you earlier this week. Just to summarize the letter, I will be interviewing you about your current romantic relationship. We are conducting this study to see how individuals in intercultural romantic relationships maintain their relationship. So, I would like to talk to you about your positive and negative experiences in your current relationship.

The interview will take about 30 minutes. I will be audio-recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments! Your video may also be recorded during our session, we will delete the video recordings. If you prefer, you can turn your camera off now. Because we're on zoom, please be sure to speak up so that we don't miss any of your comments. The interview data will be completely **confidential**. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with our research team members. There is no compulsion for you to participate in this project and you may withdraw at any time if you choose to participate.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

I will start recording the interview now. You should get a notification to consent to record the interview.

\*before starting the recording\*

Hello, thank you so much for participating in this study! My name is [], I will be conducting our interview today.

Before we start, I want to talk about the letter of information I sent you earlier this week. Just to summarize the letter, I will be interviewing you about your current romantic relationship. We are conducting this study to see how individuals in intercultural romantic relationships maintain their relationship. So, I would like to talk to you about your positive and negative experiences in your current relationship.

The interview will take about 30 minutes. I will be audio-recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments! Your video may also be recorded during our session, we will delete the video recordings. If you prefer, you can turn your camera off now. Because we're on zoom, please be sure to speak up so that we don't miss any of your comments. The interview data will be completely **confidential**. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with our research team members. There is no compulsion for you to participate in this project and you may withdraw at any time if you choose to participate.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Just a heads up, while you are talking, you may notice me writing down notes in my notebook – this is just so I can keep track of what has been said. I will start recording the interview now. You should get a notification to consent to record the interview. When I start recording could you \_\_\_ say “I am participant 1” and \_\_\_ say “I am participant 2”.

\*start recording\*

\*\*\* state participant ID number on camera before beginning\*\*\*\*

First, I'll start with asking you some general questions about your relationship.

1. When/ where/ how did you meet?
2. How long have you been together?
3. What drew you to each other?
  - a. *Probe them on any reasons that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
  - b. How did you decide that you wanted to pursue a relationship with each other? Is there anything in particular that helped you decide moving from a short-term to a long-term relationship?
    - i. *Compared to other partners, what are their qualities?*
    - ii. *Probe them on any reasons that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
4. What is the best part of dating your partner?
  - a. *Probe them on any reasons that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
5. What has been the most challenging part of dating your partner?
  - a. *Probe them on any reasons that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
  - b. Do you think the pandemic took a toll on your relationship?
    - i. In what way?

So, y'all are actually being interviewed because you are in an intercultural relationship. We define this as someone whose significant other is outside their cultural – specifically, racial, ethnic, religious, or language group.

6. Have you ever noticed these cultural differences?
7. How do you think your cultural differences significantly impacted your relationship? Are there any particular downsides or “drawbacks” to dating someone outside of your culture?
  - a. Was there/is there a particular challenge that keeps reoccurring in your relationship?
  - b. *Probe them on any challenges that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
  - c. How do you feel about those things now?
  - d. *Probe them on any reasons that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
8. Are there any specific benefits of dating someone outside of your culture?
9. Have you witnessed or directly experienced any discrimination or prejudicial occurrences during your relationship?
  - a. Can you describe these experiences?
10. How much do you communicate with each other about your experiences—the good and the challenging—as a couple with partners from different cultures?
  - a. What do you talk about?
  - b. How do you talk about it?
11. Are there any strategies you individually use to cope with the negatives about your relationship?
  - a. *Probe them on any strategies that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
  - b. Are there any strategies you and your partner use together?
12. What strategies do you use individually and/ or together, to enhance the positives of your relationship?
  - a. *Probe them on any strategies that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*
  - b. Are/ were these strategies helpful?
    - i. How? How not?
    - ii. *Probe them on any reasons that are unclear – ask them to elaborate*

**Possible probes:**

- Would you give me an example?
- Can you elaborate on that idea?
- Would you explain that further?
- I'm not sure I understand. Could you clarify that a bit for me?
- Is there anything else?
- It's common that...



**Thank you for participating in this study!**

I need to ask you some final questions to wrap up this interview:

1. Do you have any final thoughts/comments/observations/ questions, either about your experiences or about this study, that you think are important to share for us to know? Did anything strike you as particularly interesting or unusual?

This interview you completed will help us to better understand how people think about their intercultural romantic relationships. In this study, we asked about the challenges that individuals in intercultural relationships face and how they cope with those challenges. We will analyze these responses to determine 1) identify specific challenges intercultural couples face and (2) which communication strategies they use to navigate these challenges.

It is possible that thinking about your relationship may have induced some uncomfortable memories, thoughts, or emotions. These feelings are completely normal. If you'd like to talk to someone about any issues that came to your attention today, you may wish to consider contacting a mental health counselor. **Helpful services are widely available, usually for a reasonable cost.** You may find a counselor near you by going to the Canadian Psychological Association website.

All results will be published anonymously as group data. If you have any questions about the research, you may feel free and contact me (**Adira Daniel**) or our lab director, **John Sakaluk**. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact The Office of Human Research Ethics at the University of Western Ontario. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

I will be sending you a formal debriefing letter which will have a list of potential resources that may be useful for you. This document will have all the contact information for all the people I mentioned. Thank you so much again for participating in this study!

## VERBAL DEBRIEFING

### **Thank you for participating in this study!**

I need to ask you some final questions to wrap up this interview:

- 1) Do you have any final thoughts/comments/observations/ questions, either about your experiences or about this study, that you think are important to share for us to know?
- 2) Did anything strike you as particularly interesting or unusual?

This interview you completed will help us to better understand how people think about their intercultural romantic relationships. In this study, we asked about the challenges that individuals in intercultural relationships face and how they cope with those challenges. We will analyze these responses to determine 1) identify specific challenges intercultural couples face and (2) which communication strategies they use to navigate these challenges.

It is possible that thinking about your relationship may have induced some uncomfortable memories, thoughts, or emotions. These feelings are completely normal. If you'd like to talk to someone about any issues that came to your attention today, you may wish to consider contacting a mental health counselor. **Helpful services are widely available, usually for a reasonable cost.** You may find a counselor near you by going to the Canadian Psychological Association website.

All results will be published anonymously as group data. If you have any questions about the research, you may feel free and contact me (**Adira Daniel**) or our lab director, **John Sakaluk**. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact The Office of Human Research Ethics at the University of Western Ontario. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

I will be sending you a formal debriefing letter which will have a list of potential resources that may be useful for you. This document will have all the contact information for all the people I mentioned. Thank you so much again for participating in this study!

**Appendix F: Data Table for Figure 2.**

**Table.** *Communication Strategy use across interviews.*

<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Agreeable</i>	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Assurances</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Expressive</i>	<i>Inconsiderate</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Responsive</i>	<i>Reticent</i>	<i>Submissive</i>	<i>Compromise</i>	<i>Future focus</i>	<i>Positivity</i>	<i>Unhealthy Strategies</i>
All Codes	1.87	4.32	13.55	4.67	14.60	18.34	1.16	1.87	8.06	2.92	3.04	7.24	5.37	10.63	2.34
Staggered Interviews	4.29	5.86	12.50	18	10.16	17.18	2.34	1.56	6.25	3.91	5.47	7.03	8.98	4.69	8.59
Concurrent Interviews	1.31	3.77	13.79	23	16.42	18.55	1.15	1.97	8.54	2.63	1.97	3.77	6.40	5.58	11.33
Participant 200a	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0
Participant 200b	0	1	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Participant 207a	2	0	4	5	2	7	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
Participant	0	4	1	0	6	3	0	0	5	0	0	2	0	1	1

<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Agreeable</i>	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Assurances</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Expressive</i>	<i>Inconsiderate</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Responsive</i>	<i>Reticent</i>	<i>Submissive</i>	<i>Compromise</i>	<i>Future focus</i>	<i>Positivity</i>	<i>Unhealthy Strategies</i>
207b															
Participant 228a	0	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0
Participant 228b	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Participant 231a	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	4	0
Participant 231b	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	3	0
Participant 234a	0	3	3	1	4	3	0	2	1	2	1	4	0	2	0
Participant 234b	0	1	3	5	4	4	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	3	0
Participant 249a	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Participant	0	2	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	2	0

<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Agreeable</i>	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Assurances</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Expressive</i>	<i>Inconsiderate</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Responsive</i>	<i>Reticent</i>	<i>Submissive</i>	<i>Compromise</i>	<i>Future focus</i>	<i>Positivity</i>	<i>Unhealthy Strategies</i>
249b															
Participant 252a	4	1	3	1	2	9	2	1	3	1	3	2	1	1	0
Participant 252b	4	2	5	0	3	8	1	1	2	1	2	7	3	2	1
Couple 316	0	3	5	2	6	9	0	0	3	0	0	6	5	2	1
Couple 320	0	2	6	1	8	6	1	1	8	2	0	6	5	9	5
Couple 321	5	5	18	4	14	22	2	0	7	0	1	3	2	5	0
Couple 329	0	1	5	3	8	9	0	1	3	1	0	0	2	8	1
Couple 333	0	0	5	3	6	10	0	2	2	2	0	3	5	0	2
Couple 337	0	3	8	5	8	13	0	0	1	0	0	5	0	9	2
Couple 338	0	0	2	0	3	4	0	0	1	4	0	1	0	6	0
Couple 350	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0

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<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Agreeable</i>	<i>Assertive</i>	<i>Assurances</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Expressive</i>	<i>Inconsiderate</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Responsive</i>	<i>Reticent</i>	<i>Submissive</i>	<i>Compromise</i>	<i>Future focus</i>	<i>Positivity</i>	<i>Unhealthy Strategies</i>
Couple 353	0	0	2	1	3	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0
Couple 354	0	2	1	0	4	2	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	7	0
Couple 357	0	0	4	1	8	5	0	1	8	2	0	0	0	2	1
Couple 358	0	1	3	2	5	3	0	4	3	3	4	2	2	0	1
Couple 363	0	1	3	0	6	6	0	0	2	0	3	1	0	1	0
Couple 365	2	1	4	0	6	2	1	0	0	0	1	3	6	0	1
Couple 366	0	1	7	0	4	8	3	3	5	1	1	0	2	2	3
Couple 368	1	3	10	3	11	10	0	0	6	0	2	6	4	12	0

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## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Adira Daniel

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
2016-2020, B.Sc.

The University of Western Ontario  
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**Honours and Awards:** CGS Joseph-Armand Bombardier Master's Scholarship Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)  
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**Related Work Experience** Teaching Assistant  
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### Publications:

Sakaluk, J., & Daniel, A. (2022). How EIRD is Sex Research?: A Commentary and Reanalysis of Klein et al., (2021). *Journal of Sex Research*, 59:7, 818-825, DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2022.2087854

Midgely, C., Lockwood, P., Balasubramanian, L., Daniel, A., & Hu, L. (2022). "Mom always liked you best!": Concern for parental regard in sibling social comparisons. *Self and Identity*. DOI: [10.1080/15298868.2022.2091016](https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2022.2091016)