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Jori Adrianna Nkwenti  
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Accustomly Intermarried: Racial/National Intermarriages and their Negotiation of Family  
Celebrations

By

Jori Adrianna Nkwenti

A Thesis\* Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
In  
Sociology  
College Teaching Emphasis

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

March 2022

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Accustomly Intermarried: Racial/National Intermarriages and their Negotiation of Family Celebrations

Jori Adrianna Nkwenti

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Dr. Aaron Hoy

Advisor and Committee Chair

---

Dr. Vicki Hunter

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Dean Chris Brown

Acknowledgments

To my,

Dearest Committee Members

*offering me their energy and expertise*

Remarkable Advisor and Chair

*equipping me with their wisdom and guidance*

Enthusiastic Participants

*vulnerably sharing their stories*

Fellow Racial/National Families

*accustomly intermarried & living their lives in love*

Loving Husband

*Virgo anchor in this academic storm*

Family

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*“I try to show her  
the ropes of what  
goes on my way,  
she shows me the  
ropes that go on  
her way type  
deal.”*

-T

## **ACCUSTOMLY INTERMARRIED**

Racial/National Intermarriages and their  
Negotiation of Family Celebrations

JORI ADRIANNA NKWENTI

Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Master of Arts in Sociology-  
College Teaching Emphasis

### *ABSTRACT*

Previous quantitative works gives a decent account for the predictors of racial/national intermarriages, and qualitative research finds that intercultural couples negotiate their racial, national, religious, class, and cultural differences within the context of their intimate relationships and the broader stigma of the social world. However, no scholars, to my knowledge, have looked intently at this intersection of interracial and international intermarriages. Related, scholars have not dissected how these couples negotiate their family celebrations- despite research showing the importance of celebrations to family well-being. Through autoethnographic reflexivity, and in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of 4 individuals married to a spouse of a different race and nationality (one U.S. born), I try to answer how racial/national spouses negotiate their family celebrations. Results reiterate that racial/national intermarriages are complex and multifaceted. Yet, my findings suggest that increased geographic proximity and accessible communication to non-U.S.-born family increases the racial/national intermarriage to adopt more of the non-U.S.-born spouses’ cultural traditions: making culturally shared celebrations more likely.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

While brainstorming the beginning stages of this study, I thought to how my newly made family tries to understand and incorporate both of our cultures. I, Jori (25), identify racially as White, and was born and raised in St. Paul, MN, U.S. My husband (28) identifies racially as Black and African, and responds ‘Africa’ when answering “Where are you from?” when in a U.S. context. One afternoon, I asked my spouse if we were going to have our kids celebrate Halloween, something that I knew was not celebrated where they grew up. They jokingly told me that if Halloween occurred in their hometown, real witches would come out. But, without a doubt, they declared that, of course, our kids would grow up celebrating Halloween in the US. “I do not want our kids to be weird. Whichever culture they are in, that is what they will celebrate.” My partner’s joke resonated with me and made me wonder how many other families like ours sometimes default to U.S. celebrations, why that is, and what it looks like for them.

This research study analyzes couples who are interracial and internationally intermarried, and how they negotiate their family celebrations. In other words, I look at how married couples of different races and nationalities discuss (or not) which celebrations they will take part in, and why. I take an intersectional approach by asking, how do the intersecting social identities of the participants play a part in whose cultural celebrations are celebrated?

First, it is important to explain the terminology that I use throughout this research study since there seems to be a lack of consensus in the literature as to what to call my population of interest. Some scholars choose to list out the identifiers of their sample population such as, “interracial and intercultural” (e.g., Seshadri and Knudson-Martin 2013) or add a slash like “interethnic/interracial” (e.g., Gaines, Granrose, Rios, Garcia, Youn, Farris and Bledsoe 1999; Henderson 2000). Similarly, some scholars who are focusing on specific racial groups may use

terms like “White-Asian Indian marriages” (e.g., Inman, Altman, Kaduvettoor-Davison, Carr, and Walker 2011), or “intermarriage with non-Latino Whites” (e.g., Qian 2002). “Intercultural” (Karis and Killian 2009), “Intermixing” (Reiter and Gee 2008), and “Mixed-Citizenship” (López 2022) are a few more ways I have found the sample described. A broader but related concept commonly used within the sociology of families is exogamy, which refers to marital relationships involving two people of different social groups (the opposite of which is endogamy).

Somewhat of an emerging theme in the literature is the term “intermarried” or “intermarriages,” which broadly means to marry an individual of another social group. In other words, any marriage that crosses the boundaries of race, religion, ethnic group, nationality, etc. might be considered an intermarriage. To date, scholars have used the term in several ways. First, some have used it to describe what most would simply call interracial couples (e.g., Fu and Wolfinger 2011). In most instances, though, “intermarried” is used to define a relationship of two or more differences. This can look like: “intermarriage across ethnicity and immigrants” (e.g., Chiswick and Houseworth 2011), “interracial and interethnic intermarriages” (e.g., Yang and Bohm-Jordan 2018), or lastly, “racial/ethnic intermarriages” (e.g., Henderson 2000).

Borrowing this latter approach, for my research study, I will refer to “racial/national intermarriages” in order to show that I am focusing on racial and national differences with no specific emphasis on certain racial groups or countries of origin. Now, how do I define and categorize the components of race and nationality? With race being defined as a social identification that is connected to particular physical traits and/or ancestry (DeFrancisco and Palczewsk 2007; and Desmond and Emirbayer 2009), I determined participants’ race by how they themselves identified. Nationality was identified as country of birth for the participant. I did



not specify for how long they needed to have grown up in their country of birth, as long as the participant identified as non-U.S.-born. In Chapter Three, Table 1 presents my participants' multiple identities in their own words.

There are actually very few people who find themselves in racial/national intermarriages in the U.S, which is surprising and, at the same time, understandable. It is surprising because the U.S. is made up of more immigrants than any country in the world (Passel, Wang, and Taylor 2021), with almost a quarter of youth coming from immigrant families (Lichter 2013). From 2020 data, immigrants make up 13.7% of the U.S. population (Lichter, Qian, and Tumin 2015), and one-in-seven new U.S. marriages in 2010 was interracial or interethnic. At the same time, based on 2008-2015 Census data, around one in six marriages in the U.S. involves at least one partner who is an immigrant. Of those international marriages, more than half involve the other partner being U.S.-born (Lichter et al. 2015). However, among these mixed-citizenship intermarriages, most are between partners of the same race (Lichter et al. 2015; Qian 2002). Viewed through a wholistic lens, it is understandable that there are few racial/national intermarriages because the U.S. remains highly segregated, racially and nationally separated, and has increased integrated segregation<sup>1</sup>. In fact, all racial groups, majority or minority, frequently try to avoid interracial interactions because of the anxiety it harvests (Paige-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, Alegre, and Siy 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Various racial groups that are physically close to one another but do not engage in socially meaningful interactions.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Racial/National Inter marriages

#### *Rates and Predictors of Inter marriages*

There are various degrees as to which immigrant populations intermarry with U.S.-born persons, and to what extent these intermarriages are potentially interracial (Spörlein, Schlueter and Tubergen 2014; Lichter, Qian, and Tumin 2015; and Qian 2002). Various data sources<sup>2</sup> can paint a larger social and cultural picture of intermarriages in the U.S. over generations. A common consensus among these is that the more heterogeneous a country is prior to their citizens immigrating, and the increased size and greater gender imbalances of the immigrant population, the more likely they were to marry outside of their immigrant group.

When examining the interracial component of these international intermarriages, it becomes more multifaceted. Although Spörlein et al. (2014) specifically looked at mix-citizenship intermarriages, they discovered there is a potential link between where immigrants settled and intermarriage rates. For example, states that once had laws prohibiting interracial marriages were found to have low exogamy among immigrants. Moreover, Lichter et al. (2015) and Qian (2002) argue that the length of time a particular immigrant group has been living in the country influences their rates of intermarriage. A fitting example is the U.S. Japanese population. They have lived in the U.S. for many generations, and as such, much of their population is U.S.-born, and these individuals are more likely to intermarry with Whites than any other Asian group, either immigrant or U.S.-born (Qian 2002). The more fluent in English an immigrant population is, the more likely they are to intermarry with someone born in the U.S., especially to

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<sup>2</sup> i.e., Decennial Census and Current Population Survey data from 1900 and 2000 of 140 national-origin groups from Spörlein et. al (2014); 1980 U.S. Census Chiswick and Houseworth (2011), and Concatenated Microdata from the 2008–2012 ACS (Qian, and Tumin 2015)

Whites (Chiswick and Houseworth 2011; Qian 2002). Also, the higher an immigrant's level of education (Chiswick and Houseworth 2011; Lichter et al. 2015) and if they are naturalized (Lichter et al. 2015) increases intermarriage rates.

Skin tone can also act as a factor, specifically for intermarriage with Whites (Qian 2002). However, Qian (2002) does question the strength of this association, arguing that even though intermarriage among Black and non-Latino Whites is the lowest, followed by lighter-skinned Asians, and White skinned Latinos, there are other variables in the relationship that can explain this more effectively. For instance, an immigrants' country of origin and group history in the U.S. statistically override the association between skin tone and racial/national intermarriage.

#### *Variations in Intermarriage Across Racial and National Groups*

Among immigrants, Qian (2002) and Qian and Lichter (2001) both conclude that immigrant marriages are more likely to occur between same-race immigrants compared to same-race U.S.-born individuals. That said, when non-White immigrants marry a U.S.-born-person, they typically choose a non-White U.S.-born partner over someone who is White. For example, Asian and Hispanic immigrants have higher rates of national intermarriage with those of the same race/ethnicity as them (Waters 2000).

Looking more specifically, Lichter et al. (2015) analyzed 2008-2012 Census data and found Black immigrants, compared to every other group, were less likely to out-marry, even to U.S.-born Blacks. If they do racial/national intermarry, it tends to be with native-born Latinos (Lichter 2015). Asian and Latino immigrants who end up in a racial/national intermarriage tend to marry White U.S.-born-persons over any other U.S. racial group. Asians tend to have more racial/national intermarriages than ethnic/national intermarriages (i.e., only 3% ethnic/national intermarriages according to 2008-2012 Census data) (Yang and Bohm-Jordan 2018). Finally,

White immigrants are much more likely than all other immigrant groups to marry U.S.-born-persons (who are usually White). These comparisons are statistically significant generalizations, but we also need to keep in mind the nuances of racial categories and how that affects the data. For example, Asian Indian, compared to the generalized Asian category, are least likely to marry interracially or interethnically (Qian et al. 2001).

Taking a closer look at racial/national intermarriage similarities and differences when it comes to gender, Qian and Lichter (2001) found that for non-White immigrants, women are more likely than men to marry U.S.-born Whites. That said, there are noticeable differences among immigrants' racial categories. For instance, U.S.-born Asian men marry Asian immigrants more than their U.S.-born female counterparts. And U.S.-born Black women are more likely than U.S.-born Black men to marry a Black immigrant (Lichter et al. 2015). Lichter et al. (2015) argues that most of these gender differences stem from various histories, marriage markets, and preferences. Chiswick and Houseworth (2011) argue women have more social pressures to raise a strong and culturally sound family, while Qian and Lichter (2001) argue that many immigrant women are trying to break their cultural traditions, whereas immigrant men are more strongly tied to their culture because of the higher status they receive from back home by being in the U.S.

### **Negotiations in Interrelationships**

The sample for this study has been analyzed in other research, but not intentionally or holistically. Rather, earlier research has had a sample that was part racial/national (see Leeds-Hurwitz 2009; Lopéz 2022; Seshadri and Knudson-Martin 2013; and Ting-Toomey 2009) but did not highlight or cover this racial/national intersection in-depth. Many scholars that have part of their sample made up of racial/national relationships come from the scholarship of

intercultural relationships. This includes sample populations of interethnic, international, interracial, interfaith, and interclass relationships. Depending on the research question, one relationship is not highlighted over the other since the purpose is to find out how distinct cultural components in the relationship, affect the overall relationship satisfaction, longevity, conflict-resolution, parenting/children, etc. For this section I reference these scholar's works and try to pin-point directly where racial/national relationships are being observed, and note differences in the sample otherwise.

A vast amount of literature makes clear that interracial relationships in the U.S. are stigmatized (see Inman et al. 2011; Killian 2003; Steinburgler 2012), and individuals in interracial relationships experience racial bias that affects how they interact with one another. Because of this, qualitative research suggests that interracial couples engage in several distinct negotiation processes. First, there is negotiation between the couple around how to manage those outside of the relationship, usually termed "third-party viewers" (Henderson 2000; Hibbler and Shinew 2002; Karis 2003; Killian 2003). Second, there are processes of negotiation revolving around internal aspects of the relationship, sometimes referred to as "relationship management" and/or, more specifically, "racial/cultural management" (Hibbler and Shinew 2002; Karis 2003; Killian 2001; Seshadri and Knudson-Martin 2013).

#### *Negotiations with Third-Party Viewer*

A central theme that appears within the literature is the notion of the third-party viewer, or the outsider – individuals who are not taking part in the intermarriage but nevertheless hold space within it (Henderson 2000; Hibbler and Shinew 2002; Karis 2003; Killian 2001; Killian 2003; and Seshadri and Knudson-Martin 2013). Third-party viewers are people in the neighborhood, at the grocery store, extended family members, as well as a perceived belief that

someone is watching and most likely placing judgment. Third-party viewers have enough social influence on individuals to interfere with their relationship formation even before one person meets another: all by shaping partnering preferences of those members in different racial groups (Vasquez 2015; Vasquez-tokos 2017; Qian and Cobas 2004).

Hibbler and Shinew (2002) conducted a study on interracial families and their experiences with leisure activities. They found that before interracial families go out in public, they often talk either amongst themselves and/or with trusted family or close friends about whether it is safe to go. They also found that one partner may sometimes decide to “check it out for themselves” before bringing the other member(s) of the family along. Furthermore, Henderson (2000) found that interracial couples may have a stronger emotional bond compared to intraracial couples because of their need to navigate around third-party viewers. Through this navigation process, interracial couples seem to develop coping strategies (Hibbler and Shinew 2002; Killian 2003), and Henderson (2000) argues that these coping strategies lead to stronger bonds as interracial couples become used to partnering together against their surrounding environment.

Similarly, scholars have found that Black-White interracial couples use various strategies to cope with discrimination from third-party viewers. For example, Black and White couples can choose not to talk about racist incidents and pretend it did not happen to protect themselves and preserve their relationship (Killian 2003). Such colorblind approaches usually come at a cost to the partner who does not identify as White because it perpetuates racism within the partnership (Killian 2001; Steinburgler 2012). Indeed, couples often deprioritize their racial difference and frame their love for their partner as crossing racial barriers (Karis 2003). That said, Killian (2003) remarks that the more White partners interact with individuals outside the relationship

while with their partner, there becomes more racial awareness and more awareness of third party viewers. Adding more complexity, a study conducted on Black Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. found that they are less likely to feel pressure to assimilate to the White dominant culture while maintaining their ethnicity, only until they begin to directly experience racial discrimination in their new home (Gaines and Ramkissoo 2009). They are more likely to feel comfortable in White spaces, compared to their children's generation, who hold similar cautious feelings as Black U.S.-born individuals.

When it comes to differences in language, Llerena-Quinn and Bacigalupe (2009) said that "language is the ticket that allows travel into each other's world." They conducted a qualitative study including interviews with 20 participants, 14 first-generation Latina immigrant women, and 6 non-Hispanic White U.S.-born males. A spouse may feel excluded if they do not speak the same language as their spouse's family of origin. Furthermore, communication is cultural, and intercultural couples may experience confusion or overwhelming feelings when interacting with their spouse's family of origin because interaction styles are learned from culture. Not only can it affect communication within the relationship, it can become a disadvantage for the spouse who speaks both languages, because they can lose their sense of self, and their voice, when needing to translate between their spouse and family of origin. Additionally, a language difference can become a huge issue for the immigrant spouse if they do not speak that of the country they now reside in. Relying on their spouse as the only means to access the context of their new space.

Lastly, laws can also affect a family's sense of belonging in the U.S., as well as incorporation of both spouse's culture. Lopéz (2022) found that in mixed-citizenship families where one spouse was unauthorized, and the other U.S.-born, once they were granted citizenship, the whole family felt "more American." In addition, both international (mixed-citizenship) and

racial/national intermarried respondents disclosed that once their family became authorized, they were able to and wanted to integrate both cultures into their family. In contrast, families who were rejected naturalization, distanced themselves from American culture. And those still waiting for approval from the U.S. and cannot access their home country, felt less attached to either.

### *Negotiations Within*

When analyzing the negotiation process within intermarriages, it is important to take note that race is a fluid concept constructed by macro systems and interpreted at the micro level. Thus, racial meanings are at least partly situational (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015). Every person in the U.S. will have a racial label put upon them, as well as a racial label they put on themselves. However, a partners' degree of understanding of their own racial identity, as well as how actively or passively they may view their partners' racial identity, can be different (Karis 2003).

Some Black-White couples reject the idea that they are cross-cultural or interracial completely (Karris 2009). Some of those reasons have been found to be because they feel it highlights their differences and not their similarities (i.e., class, education, religion, or referencing their family and life they created together) (Killian 2001). Some reject the emphasis on power relations, and the White partner may denounce race altogether. Related to this, the last reason why Black and White couples reject cross-cultural or interracial labels is because they reject the uncomfortable racial realities and continue a colorblind view of the world (Karis 2003). This strategy may help them go about their day-to-day lives as a couple, but it simultaneously constrains their ability to validate the other's social identities (Ting-Toomey 2009). Lopéz (2022) finds that a common theme from her sample of mixed-citizen couples, who



were also interracial, was that race was mentioned as an initial attraction for a couple, and/or a cause of dissonance with a generalized other, but never as something noteworthy in their relationship.

An intersectional insight worth mentioning here is that immigrant status affects the day-to-day relationship and acculturation processes<sup>3</sup>. There have been scholars who look at the strategic ways unauthorized immigrants assimilate into their U.S. environment in order to go undetected by immigration authorities (Menjívar 2011; García 2014; and Hagan, Lowe, Quintal 2011). For example, Lopéz (2022) states that immigrants may adopt the clothing and behaviors of the surrounding community to try and fit in visually. They may also learn about certain security checkpoints and avoid police by engaging with their social networks.

Inman et al. (2011) found in their study of affluent and educated first and second-generation Asian Indians and White Americans that there are four broad categories that couples put themselves in when asked what label they use for their relationship. The first category is not having a discussed/applied label at all. Inman et al. (2011) explains that for these couples, their varying identities place no meaning in their relationship. Second, some couples see themselves as “intercultural” because they notice their cultural and racial differences. Out of the participants who identify their relationship as intercultural, women tend to see cultural differences as more salient. Third, some couples see themselves as “interracial,” drawing attention to their racial differences. That said, Inman et al. (2011) pointed out that most of respondents spoke about their racial difference as comments from what others/third-party viewers have said about their difference races. Last, other couples see themselves as “interreligious,” emphasizing how their religious differences impact their relationship. However, this group is the smallest of the four.

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<sup>3</sup> Assimilation to a different culture, typically the dominant one.

This research shows how various couples negotiate what their relationship means to them. As the authors conclude, just because someone is Asian Indian and another is White American, there are multiple ways that they can/will think about their relationship.

When researchers focus on the internal negotiation of interracial couples, they find more evidence of them negotiating cultural differences rather than racial difference *per se* (Inman et al. 2011; Seshadri and Knudson-Martin 2013). For instance, race is discussed far less often among interracial couples than which foods to prepare, which clothes to wear, which religious events and spaces to attend, etc. This may be because of the White partner not “seeing” or wanting to see the racial oppression of their partner, and/or the Black partner’s decision to stay silent or not speak up about experiences of racism (Killian 2001). In addition, race is not the only identity being negotiated within an interrelationship, as there may be differences of gender, class, religion, and age within the relationship, as well. However, research does suggest that successfully negotiating racial and/or cultural differences and consciously affirming a partner’s differences is beneficial for couples. For instance, Inman et al. (2011) notes that Asian Indians and White married partners show a stronger engagement in their marriage when there is a shared commitment to each other’s cultural practices, such as sharing food, religious ceremonies, and clothing.

Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) conducted a study on the ways that interrelationships manage the differences in their partnership. Their sample included many different interracial and cultural make-ups, and out of their sample of 17 couples, 9 were foreign born. They found that within interracial couples, there are five categories the couples may use to develop their relationship. First, when an interracial couple practices what Seshadri and Knudson-Martin term “singular assimilation,” one partner tends to take a back seat in the

relationship, and their cultural practices come second. For example, the couple may eat more food from one partner's culture and/or speak their language. Second, couples holding an "agree to disagree" mentality see their differences as attractive and positive features of their partner and relationship. Third, when both partners do not necessarily know what to make of the differences in their relationship, they are practicing what Seshadri and Knudson-Martin term "unresolved management." Fourth, there are couples who keep their cultural practices but rarely integrate them within the family unit. This interracial couple practice is termed "coexisting" when each partner practices their own culture separately. Lastly, "integrated" is when interracial couples fuse their cultures together by performing both.

When intercultural conflict appears in intermarriages, Ting-Toomey (2009) suggests a mindful approach. Where in culturally similar relationships, couples can create more of a neat conflict-resolution package, comprising of culturally similar concepts of "your needs" and "my needs." For intercultural couples, there is not one package that can be created, but a need for multiple roads to a culturally mutual conflict-resolution. For them to be constructive conflict partners, they need to be open to their partners culture-based conflict-resolution, actively listen and reframe, and create collaborative dialogue skills that they can use on a daily basis. Ting-Toomey (2009) highlights that individual's cultural value orientations become a barrier for intercultural couples because they "serve as implicit guidelines for our motivations, expectations, perceptions, interpretations, meaning formation, and communicative actions." For example, what it means, or looks like, to *love*, for one partner, may be completely different for the other.

Although there is an increased likelihood for misunderstanding in intercultural relationships, scholars have found that those in these relationships mention their benefits: personal enrichment in beliefs and values; developing a multicultural framework; experiencing

diversity; deeper connections with their partner due to experiences with prejudice; raising welcoming and fair-minded children; and, a sense of being “at home,” no matter their environment (see; Romano 2001; and Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995).

### **Celebrations and Families**

Family celebrations can include birthdays, weddings, graduations, holidays, births, and anniversaries (Whiteside 1989; Wolin and Bennett 1984). Celebrations can be yearly occurrences or special occasions, and they necessarily reflect the cultural contexts of participants. More broadly, family celebrations fall under the category of family rituals, which are rooted in their cultural context, incorporate more than one family member, and serve a key function in the solidification of the family’s beliefs and customs (Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas, Josephs, Poltrock, and Baker 2002). Indeed, celebrations fall under rituals because they repeat structured performances, involve multiple members of the family, and hold symbolic meanings (Pleck 2000).

Family celebrations are beneficial to the family unit (see; Fiese 2006; Wolin and Bennett 1984) as well as individuals within the family (see; Fiese 1992; Gobeil-Dwyer 1999; Newell 1999; O’Connor and Hoorwitz 2003; and Wolin and Bennett 1984). For example, family celebrations are beneficial to families because they create a sense of belonging within the group (Wolin and Bennett 1984), create narratives when it comes to the family’s identity (Fiese et al. 2002), and set boundaries defining who is, and is not, in the family (Wolin and Bennett 1984). Studies also suggest that family celebrations link families to their community and to the broader society (Wolin and Bennett 1984). When it comes to individuals in the family, children are usually the ones under study, and scholars have found that these rituals supply the needed structure for healthy development, as well as interpersonal experiences (see; Wolin and Bennett

1984). Studies also show that family celebrations are comforting for children, as they help deter anxiety (O'Connor and Hoorwitz 2003). Bocknek (2017) found that for specifically Black and African American children within lower-income households, active participation in family rituals supported the child's emotional development and intelligence.

Still, most of the research in this area focuses on White, U.S.-born, heterosexual families. The limited research that looks more inclusively at family celebrations suggests that celebrations that occur in lower-income and homeless, remarried, LGBTQ+, and Black families serve the same purposes as those noted above. For example, when it comes to celebrating birthdays for lower-income families, Lee, Katra, and Bauer (2009) found that families living in low-income and rural areas try to create birthday celebrations as "normal" as doable. For example, mothers try to make their child's birthday as happy as possible by having cake and presents. Schoonmaker (2006) looked at families living in a homeless shelter and the ways that celebrating a child's birthday affected their family and the overall shelter morale. Results show that residents at the homeless shelters who received monthly birthday parties for the children had higher levels of happiness, resident cohesion, and a greater sense of normalcy than those residents who did not have birthday celebrations.

For LGBTQ+ families, celebrations are a way for most to "re-enter" their family of origin. Not surprisingly, then, there is more active participation in celebrations for LGBTQ+ individuals when families are more accepting of their family members sexuality (Oswald 2002). Similarly, Whiteside (1989) found evidence of this when studying family rituals of remarried families, where celebrations are a tool for families to create space for inclusion, as well as naturally problem solve issues.

## **Intermarriages and Negotiations of Celebrations**

Research makes clear that stigma forces intermarried couples to negotiate their racial and national identities, including cultural practices, both in public and in private. Negotiation processes take place within racial/national intermarriages, where the differing cultural, racial, ethnic, and regional/national identities of the members are constantly being negotiated (see Inman et al. 2011).

Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) analyzed marriage ceremonies through an intercultural lens by using data from “interracial, interethnic, international, interfaith, and interclass” weddings. Although there was no distinction between which intercultural wedding they were referring to, they wanted to understand how two different cultural celebrations happen at once. Findings suggest two common outcomes for the wedding format. Intercultural couples either emphasize one culture in the wedding ceremony, or highlight neither cultural ceremony by, one, defaulting to the mainstream ceremony that fits White U.S.-born, higher socioeconomic status, and Christian expectations or, two, having a court wedding/eloping. Importantly, though, international intermarriages are more likely than other intercultural marriages to create two separate weddings. In actuality, only a small number of international couples try to incorporate both cultures into their wedding ceremonies. For those that do, majority find it to be unsuccessful, whether both parties were displeased with the outcomes, or only one side. A solution Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) suggests for those weddings that honor both cultures is not in the common recommendation of “more communication,” but to also maintain ambiguity in those interactions, and symbols used. Referencing how social interactions are fragile in culturally heterogenous settings, allowing for vagueness and keeping an open mind leads to less conflict and dissatisfaction overall.

Beyond Leeds-Hurwitz' (2009) study, researchers still do not know much about how racial/national intermarried couples experience their family celebrations or how these celebrations are negotiated. Therefore, in this project I hope to close the gap by focusing on how racial/national intermarriages negotiate their family celebrations.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Method

From September 2021 to December 2021, I conducted 4 in-depth semi-structured interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) with a convenience sample of individuals who are part of a racial/national intermarriage. Although some research on married couples uses joint interviews conducted with both spouses simultaneously, I conducted one-on-one interviews with either or both spouses. I chose this method, first, because this allows space for each participant to feel open and comfortable speaking, especially about disagreements with their spouse. Related, this also eliminated the possibility for one partner dominating the interview. Second, for scheduling purposes, it was more efficient to find a time that works best for two people instead of three. Third, although I would have preferred to conduct joint interviews and then follow-up with individual interviews with each partner because the benefits of bias checking and viewing active partner exchanges, with the time, energy, and resources available to me, individual interviews were most feasible.

I conducted these interviews using an active interviewing style (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Active interviews are those that the interviewer actively takes part in, and such interviews tend to be conversational, leading participants to feel more comfortable. This approach is based on the constructionist perspective, meaning that the interviewer recognizes that an interview is a collaborative process in which the interviewer and respondent co-create a shared reality. Although active interviewing is done mostly in ethnographic research, I thought I could apply this style to my interviews since I share this lived experience with participants. Our shared experiences, when discussed in a conversational way, allowed me to build rapport with participants and led to richer interview data.



## **Sample and Recruitment**

The sample for this research study includes people in racial/national intermarriages, where one identifies as non-U.S.-born and the other as a U.S.-born citizen of a different racial category. Participants had to be married and over the age of 18 years old in order to participate in an interview.

I posted a flyer on all social media platforms I run (Instagram and Twitter) and requested others to share the flyer. To gather more potential participants, at the end of each interview, I asked participants if their spouse would like to participate, and if they knew any other people who would be interested and qualified. Although snowball sampling strategies can sometimes lead to homogenous and thus biased samples, the approach was warranted here since the population I wish to study is quite unique demographically. I also reached out to the International Student Association at Minnesota State University, Mankato as well as International Student Services to see if they would email my flyer to international students. I also emailed the chairs of other International Student Organizations of major U.S. universities including, but not limited to, large universities in Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York, and California. Similarly, I created Craigslist posts requesting volunteers in similar states as noted above. I reached out to businesses, community centers, and non-profit organizations that serve international folks around the Twin Cities, Minnesota. For instance, I emailed the organizers of Midtown Global Market on Lake Street if they were willing to hang copies of my flyer or distribute the flyer through their newsletters or email. Lastly, I created a Reddit account, and joined groups that could have users who met my sample requirements.

Despite using multiple, overlapping recruitment strategies, I had a difficult time getting a substantial number of participants. From September to mid-October, I had conducted three

interviews. I still remained hopeful that more people would see my flyers, and invitations through outreach. By late-December I had conducted my last interview, and exhausted my recruitment measures. In total I had one participant express interest, but back out when trying to schedule. Then another couple expressed interest, but did not meet the sample requirements. In total, I interviewed four individuals, two who were married to each other (Maggie and Tony), and two whose spouses were not interviewed (Aric and Bryn).

Only being able to interview four participants for this study allowed me to tell rich analytical narratives, but comes with limitations. I do not have a lot of diversity in my sample. Although each couple consists of different pairings of race and nationality, 4 is not enough to stand for how many racial categories we have in the U.S., let alone adding countries of origin. Similarly, having only four participants did not result in saturated data. Although I was able to construct a few themes, there are likely more left to be analyzed, as well as having them further supported by data drawn from across cases. In alphabetical order in Table 1 below, I include my sample. The identifiers are all self-definitions, documented here in the participants own words.

Table 1. *Sample Description* (n=4)

Name	Occupation	Age	Nationality	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Religion	Education
<b>Aric</b>	Educator	31	Kenyan, Kenyan American	African, or African American	Male	Straight	Christian	More than Masters
<b>Bryn</b>	Graduate Student	22	U.S. Born	White	Cis- Woman	Straight	Agnostic with a Christian twist	Bachelor of Science, Masters
<b>Maggie</b>	Stay at Home Mom	25	Mexican	Latina	Female	Bisexual	Catholic raised	Less than HS
<b>Tony</b>	Own Business	28	U.S. Born	Black	Male	Straight	—	Some college

Once future-participants contacted me via email or social media, I set up a quick phone call to introduce myself and ask screening questions to make sure they fit my target sample population. The screening questions included: How old are you? Are you and your partner currently married? Do either you or your spouse identify as an immigrant to the United States? Is the spouse a US-born person of a different racial category? If they passed my screening questions, I informed them that there will be one interview lasting between 60-90 minutes and that I will ask questions (updated as seen in Appendix One) about their relationship and specifically about their family celebrations. I let them know that I am mostly interested in better understanding how people who are in intermarriages celebrate family or cultural celebrations, and that there may also be questions about how they negotiate differences. After my explanation, I asked if they still had interest in taking part in an interview.

I sent a Qualtrics survey, including the consent form, to those interested and asked them when they would like to schedule the interview. Once they completed the form and selected a date, I sent them a Zoom link with the date and time of the meeting. The day prior to the date set, I sent out a reminder email, and asked if they had any questions, and reminded them that their participation is completely voluntary.

### **Interview Data Collection and Analysis**

Due to COVID measures, as well as the potential for participants to reside in distant locations from the Twin Cities, I used Zoom to conduct the interviews. Once everyone was logged into the Zoom meeting, and before the interview started, I reminded participants that in all public presentations of my research, including any publications, I will use pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Also, I reminded them that if at any time they feel uncomfortable, they can refuse to answer any questions and/or may exit the interview at any point without

penalty. Although all participants chose to leave their cameras on, it was not mandatory. Once the interview began, I asked a range of questions about the following topics: the participant's demographic information, their relationship background, past experiences and current experiences with family celebrations, including with extended family, and their expectations for future celebration experiences. I asked how they chose the celebrations they celebrate as a family and specific rites that are important in them. Questions that sought to identify potential conflict with the participant's spouse included the following: "Tell me about a time where you and your spouse disagreed on which celebration to have? How did you come to a solution?" and "Since you both are currently in the US, what would you do different if you were to do the celebration in your or your spouse's home country?" Finally, I tried to tune into potential future celebrations by asking, "Have you and your partner discussed potential celebrations you would like to celebrate together. Why, or why not." And, "What celebrations do you want to pass along to your children? And Why?"

In keeping with the active interviewing style, I was an active participant. I shared experiences and stories of my own where I saw a benefit to the flow of conversation. It allowed me to keep the conversation going, maintain rapport, and help the participants feel comfortable. Together, participants and I shared laughs, sighs, and recognition, of our related, and often shared, experiences. At the end, I asked if there was anything else participants wanted to say as final thoughts. Two of the four participants took my offer, and added a topic we did not fully discuss. Afterwards, we ended the interview and I asked if there was anything they wanted to say off record.

Since I recorded the Zoom interviews, afterwards, I downloaded the rough transcript and then edited each transcript by checking it against the audio file to ensure total accuracy. Once I

had transcribed the first interview, I began using grounded theory techniques (Charmaz 2006) to discover the ways in which intermarried families negotiate their celebrations. I used specific grounded theory techniques, and not grounded theory as a whole, because my research is not entirely inductive. Although I allowed new theories and concepts to emerge from the data, my focus was on the negotiation processes involved in family celebrations because the literature shows there is some sort of process of negotiation that happens between interracial couples, and between intercultural couples, and I wanted to see how this occurs between racial/national intermarriages. After I coded the first interview line-by-line, I created a memo to figure out which focus codes were relevant, and simultaneously I started focus coding.

Roughly during this time, I conducted an additional two interviews. This time, I went in with focused coding. I started to memo-write and gather larger themes that emerged throughout the interviews. After coding the first three interviews I added a few questions to my interview guide that included more of the origin story, daily life of the participant, and recognition of where the data was guiding me. I used this interview guide with my fourth and final interview. After the transcription of the fourth interview, I did additional focused coding. Once I was finished focus coding, I did a few more memos to flesh out the findings presented below.

Keep in mind how a sample of four inevitably affects my results when reading my analysis. Since I am unable to easily name themes across cases, or support variation with multiple cases, I chose to present my results in a more narrative way. A benefit however of having a small sample is that I can go into greater depth and detail with each participant and narrate their experiences more fully. I incorporate more of their own words to give the reader a fuller, more visceral sense of what their marriages and family celebrations are like. To my knowledge this is the first study intentionally examining racial/national intermarriages, and

therefore having a small sample of which I can present highly detailed accounts of each participant is impactful to the larger field of research.

Finally, I felt it important to note to the reader where personal bias has come into play during the construction of the project, as well as analysis. I initially chose celebrations as a way to study negotiation because they are a major demonstration of culture, but also because I wanted to study something *lighthearted*. While deep into the coding process, I realized that there is a component of celebrations for racial/national intermarriages that is truly melancholy. This layer of the story is at most watered down in the results section because of this initial bias. For many racial/national intermarriages, they are negatively affected by U.S. immigration laws that either consist of overbearing deportation threats (real or perceived) that they live with on a daily basis. Including the inability to access the non-U.S.-born home country or extended family (because of documentation, economic resources, or otherwise), and restricted access to traditional materials that are often rooted in ceremonies.

Another way my ignorance came into the study was in the conception of what celebrations are. I started thinking about celebrations through my cultural framework, highlighting major U.S. holidays as examples (i.e., Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Year's). Because of this I was shocked when Tony brought up funerals when giving examples of celebrations he experienced growing up. I remember explaining broadly my feelings, and realization, to my spouse sometime after the interview was conducted, and the first thing he did was giggle. Not in a taunting way, but in a "Really? You know better than that!" sort of way. He replied something along the lines of, "of course people do not view celebrations the same, we all have different cultures." Fortunately, I started with a loose definition of what a celebration is when interviewing, and that allowed this finding to emerge. All this brings up a major question

that should insist caution when reading my findings: what other large areas in the data are potentially missing, mistaken, and misleading?

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Forming Intermarriages, Forging New Celebrations

#### *Maggie and Tony*

Maggie (25) was born in Mexico, and racially identifies as Latina. Her husband, Tony (28), was born in the U.S. and identifies racially as Black. They met on chance during late summer, leading into fall of 2011, and were instantly attracted to one another. Tony was standing outside on a mutual friend's driveway when Maggie drove up. She playfully pushed her friends to tell her who was standing there and to give brief introductions. Once Maggie left, she then told her friend to message Tony that she thought he was cute, and after Tony stopped hiding his feelings and "playing it cool," the relationship slowly bloomed. They both would describe their relationship as best friends. "That's like my best friend for sure!" Maggie declared during the beginning of our conversation. Although it took them a while to become an actual couple, the whole time they were able to get to know each other: what they like, do not like, and what makes them stress-free and happy together. After working everything out, they eventually married June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018. They have five amazing kids together, the youngest being 6 months old and the oldest 7 years.

When it comes to major celebrations, for Maggie as a kid, December 12<sup>th</sup> was a huge spectacle. It is the celebration of the Virgin Mary, "where everyone would dress up in their native clothing and go to the church to wish a Happy Birthday." She remembered Christmas being extremely family-oriented and religious growing up. She recalled:

*[On Christmas Day, my mom would make] this big pot of what we call Pozole. It was like this stew and, you know...it was obviously very family-oriented where...at midnight we would kiss our baby Jesus and finally lay him in the manger, and then go to bed. And*



*then my parents were very impatient. It was like four in the morning, 'Wake up, Santa is here!' \*excited tone, and let out a giggle\* But it was never like, 'Santa is here.' \*pause\* 'Oh, baby Jesus came to drop off your present!' So, it was like more of like religious, I should say.*

Maggie immigrated from Mexico at a very young age, and she remembers how Christmas started to change in her immediate family. They would still go to church, but instead of planning a huge family event, her parents might have a quick conversation about which house they were going to this year. She reminisced how confusing it was learning that in the U.S., Santa comes, and not baby Jesus or the Three Kings. "I came here when I was four, so it was very confusing for me to adapt to you know, the customs and everything here, where it was like, oh, oh! That is not a thing here, okay \*giggle and shrugs\*"

In present times, Maggie, Tony, and their five children go to church on the 12<sup>th</sup>, and everyone is involved in creating a rosary because "that was a very important thing for me growing up." Maggie described how Christmas has maintained its family-based roots, and they have their celebration at home opening presents and setting the cookies out for Santa. The only disagreement she identified between her and Tony when it comes to Christmas is when they were actually going to celebrate it. Otherwise, the main traditions and rituals, such as which foods are being prepared or church attended, is evenly split between the families.

For Tony, Christmas was big, but sort of like all the other traditional U.S. holidays. "Obviously, you know, Thanksgiving, Christmas, all that. We celebrate[d] that. Halloween, not really a big deal, but yeah, let's go trick or treating, let's get free candy! You know what I am saying. New Year's. \*pause and sigh\* That is a different problem man." New Year's was more on his mind when we were discussing salient celebrations as a kid. "I hated that one," Tony said

with a sigh. “Not going to lie, I hated that one.” New Year’s for Tony was filled with his family’s traditions such as cleaning the whole house top-to-bottom. He explained:

*You have to have your whole house clean, spotless, not a speck nowhere. You have to have all the clothes washed and set up and put away, everything! And then you have to have black eyed peas boiling into the new year... Everyone supposed to have cash in their pocket, and the man of the house had to walk in with money in their pocket. Only reason why I hated it was like when you cleaning, you think that it’s clean, but to your parents, it is not clean!*

Maggie brought up New Year’s as well and how she has adopted some of Tony’s culture during this holiday.

*And New Year’s, \*giggle\* New Year’s they have a tradition where the house needs to be super clean to start out the year like new... and you have to have money in your pockets, and have to have black eyed peas boiling, and I am not sure what it all is, but like that is a tradition I took on that we have now taught the kids. Because that was new to me... New Year’s [to me] is like party time! \*excited giggles\* And when we got together his mom was like ‘no!’ New Year’s is like, you have to, I am not sure what the meaning is \*pause\* but \*shrugs\* it is fine, we took it on, you know, that is something that we also do.*

Although Maggie does not really know the meanings behind Tony’s New Year’s traditions, and Tony does not actually like some of those traditions anyway, the whole family still celebrates. When I asked Tony “What celebrations do you want to pass onto your children?” he gave a hearty laugh.

*Oh shit! Hahahah oh shit! They going to have to go do every! Everything right! Everything, all this shit I fucking did, the stuff she does. The shit I celebrated growing up, and the shit she celebrated growing up. Like we already instilled that in them. Just like my mama I am going to be, 'it is New Year's, you know what it is!' Type shit. They are going to have to do it all! Oh man.*

A big contributing factor as to why Tony still celebrates and has shared this New Year's tradition he loathed growing up, is because of his and Maggie's close relationship with his mother. "We don't have a choice to do New Year's! Who the fuck is going to say fuck to their mama?! I am 28, and my mama still be like, mmhmmhh. Like we know we got to do that." He described Maggie's relationship with his family, and particularly to his mother as extremely close. At one point he exclaimed with endearment in his voice, "She talk to my family more than I do type shit!" And Maggie echoed this. She has a close connection to his family, and that even when she did not understand an aspect of Tony's culture, she would feel comfortable asking his mom.

In separate conversations with Maggie and Tony, they both explained how culturally-mixed their family has become. Tony described to me a time when he and Maggie hung out with friends and his family at a cookout. He started off, "Now, everything is all mixed you feel me." And went into how "she loves like soul food and shit you know what I am saying. Baked macaroni, corn bread, sweet potatoes, chicken, turkey, ham, all that shit." And Maggie confirmed his observations, that on a day-to-day basis she mostly does the cooking for the family so she will "go with Mexican, or ... American food or whatever we are really feeling," that is usually convenient for her to make. "But for sure holidays we \*short pause\* the soul food is sooo delicious! \*Giggle\*" So, when it comes to the cookouts, Tony describes how, "We will throw all that shit down [eat traditional cookout food] then she will slide through with some tacos..."

He shortly after mentioned that “It be weird as fuck. She will eat her food, and she will put salsa on there, like nword what?! You can’t do that?!” It is not an entirely conventional practice to mix two different types of cultural foods, and Tony mentions the social consequences next: “You will not be invited to the cookout no more if you do that type shit you feel me \*laughing\*” In his case, Tony was describing how family and friends at the cookout might look at Maggie oddly for mixing barbeque food with salsa – something that may not necessarily matter when at home, but in the eyes of the generalized other, is likely to be commented on. From the way Tony described their mutual friends and his family, though, these comments should not be perceived as insults but as jokes. At their social events, “Everybody roasting you. Don’t matter. Look fair game for everybody you know what I am saying. We just be in there acting a fool.” This cultural difference could have deeply offended Maggie, but Tony defended that “she adapted really, really quick.” For Maggie and Tony as a whole, they are both open to learning about as well as adopting aspects of one another’s culture.

### *Aric*

Aric (31) was lovestruck within moments of meeting his spouse. At the time he was finishing up his master’s program at a university in northern Minnesota, and they met through mutual friends. Aric, identifying racially as African and/or African American, was born in Kenya. His spouse is White and was born in the southern U.S. They had a budding love of attraction that grew quickly, becoming engaged within months and married after a year in late 2017. Besides being physically attractive and always open for a fun adventure, Aric illustrated that his spouse had a fascination and appreciation of Africa, and they connected on that. Still at the time living in separate apartments, she would work while he would attend classes. He described to me that she was a literal “guardian angel” sent when he really needed her. So, it just

made sense to 'tie the knot' and solidify their relationship. Looking back, five years into marriage, his celebrations have changed immensely.

"I know worldwide that Christmas is big, and I feel like in Kenya, people tend to celebrate Christmas more," Aric told me. He clarified this thought that Kenyans celebrated Christmas more because,

*...without the luxury of wanting \*pause\* having you know the finances to be celebrating all the time... there's always that one celebration that is more meaningful which people feel okay to spend money. And you know by the idea of celebration, is like okay, who's gonna like... go to like kill a goat, or kill an entire cow! \*smiles excitedly\* You know, and having family around. During Christmas people tend to have everybody around for the most part. So, what I remember most is Christmas has always been the biggest celebration in my, in all of my life.*

Christmas, to Aric, was about family, community, and the delicious and special foods only eaten on Christmas.

*Pretty much Christmas used to be, my dad gets up in the morning, he goes to this market if we're just at home by ourselves, because...we live in an urban area, we do not have cattle, we do not have you know any livestock of any sort, so what happened was we had to go and buy. So, my dad would get up in the morning very early, go and buy some you know the cow, or the goat stomach, I don't know what \*pauses to think\* the intestines and the inside. I don't know, some people don't eat them [in the U.S.] but in Kenya, we call them matumbo. The cow stomach. That cow stomach which is really nice when you make it. So, we always had that for Christmas...and some goat meat as well, which it's not something we have all the time because ... [it] is kind of special you know.*

From the excitement in Aric's voice, and details given about his experience growing up celebrating Christmas, you could feel how big of a deal it was for him.

I asked Aric if there were any celebrations he disliked growing up, and he sort of joked, "I cannot think of any. There's not too many \*chuckles\* too many celebrations, so that you could choose [which to dislike]." The variations in celebrations were something that definitely stood out to Aric when he first immigrated to the U.S. to obtain his master's degree. He was exposed to a few similar holidays, and a lot of new ones. For the new ones he experienced, he started listing them off one by one on his fingers. Yet, even the celebrations he was used to, such as Christmas, began to look vastly different from back home. With his spouse of five years, their Christmas sometimes includes the similarity of spending quality family time, but there are far more differences in their celebrations together, including travel for romantic vacations, shopping the deals after Christmas is over, and the absence of his traditional dishes like matumbo. He illuminates on what his Christmases in the U.S. with his spouse usually looks like:

*Christmas was more, more like friends, family, just you know, visit with some of the people who've been very close to us. Visit with our own families, like my spouse's family. And go out shopping. Actually, right after Christmas, you know, yeah \*giggle\* Or just go to the beach by the lake but with the ocean, so it was more traveling, was more of, you know flight, it was more of, you know just those days away from home.*

The more and more Aric and I discussed his family celebrations and overall dynamic, the more it was highlighted how much of his wife's culture and traditions he took on. This was not something that Aric was upset by, or really thought about a lot. He grew up in a non-traditional household in the capital city of Kenya, Nairobi. Here he was exposed to a wide variety of different ethnic groups and tribes, and even foreigners of all different colors in passing. So, he

made the point he already is more open to differences and trying new things. For Aric now, the holidays are lively and filled with the Christmas spirit when his wife wants to do something.

Aric's wife's involvement is important because, when Aric and I met, they were going through a rough patch in their marriage. The lack of communication and compromise originating from his spouse was starting to become a major strain in the overall partnership. "These are things that are like present which could change, you know, I'm not saying like this is going to be the outlook on life, you know, it's just what's going on right now with...personal choices, selfishness in relationships." When Aric thinks about celebrating Christmas now, you could hear the slight disappointment in his voice. "I'm sure things could change and the thought of leaving [Christmas] presents, you know, like right now, I'm not even thinking of giving her presents [in general] you know." He let out a slight chuckle to cut the growing tension. He remains hopeful that they will be able to work out their differences when it comes to their day-to-day marriage.

In Aric's relationship, he experiences a lot of dissonance with his partner when it comes to communication. He comments, with "our cultural backgrounds definitely, we've had some, you know, pretty rough times understanding each other when it comes to priorities and when it comes to preferences." Sometimes we think of priorities and preferences being about large, life-changing events and differences, but Aric was explaining how it is the small things that turn ant hills into mountains for them. Drained, he admits, "It's just like something as simple as, how do you prefer...your living room to look like" or whether or not to own pets. "It's a constant struggle every day still in our... marriage... From our basic understanding of you know, life preferences." He sighs,

*Most of the time if you're the one who has to compromise, or your spouse doesn't have to, then you know, yeah that's why things tend to feel like oh it's a breaking point you*

*know... marriage is a difficult, life is difficult, you know, and just like I said, without compromise, you know things never work out... and I think as men sometimes, we have to do that.*

*Bryn*

Bryn (23) [White, U.S.-born] was at a multicultural event at her university in central Minnesota with her phone hooked up to the speakers and playing music, when her now-spouse [Egyptian, Egypt-born] came up to request Egyptian music. She of course agreed, and he swiftly grabbed her phone to play some of the hits. They shared a few words, but that was about it. They did work for the same tutoring department at the community college they were attending, but they did not start talking-talking until he invited himself to come with Bryn to pick up Christmas gifts one random afternoon. They had only talked a little before that, but all of their mutual friends would come to Bryn and ask about him. “I don’t know, I don’t keep track of him!” she giggled with the memory. They were good friends for years before they started dating. Around 2019 they verbally entered into a relationship when her spouse was in Egypt a month before he was to come back to the U.S, with the idea that they could always remain friends if it did not work out. Well, things did work out for this young couple, and they recently married in late 2021.

For Bryn and her spouse, they celebrate all the more traditional U.S. holidays. Christmas is huge, Thanksgiving, Easter, but “we never have gone to like a church for any of these things. So, they [are not] necessarily religious for us. They're more just like fun, and you know, something like a tradition that we do.” Christmas, for Bryn, is still filled with the Hallmark traditions she had growing up, and for her spouse, it looks a lot different from what he grew up celebrating prior to coming to the U.S. This is mostly because he grew up Muslim, so Christmas



was not a celebration he would have until he did with one of his host families in the U.S. starting in high school. Overall, Bryn and her spouse have kept her family's traditions of Christmas.

*Christmas Eve, we will go to my mom's place and, it's because my family always celebrates more on Christmas Eve. Christmas, not much happens. Christmas Eve is when everybody comes, and then we will do like a gift exchange, which he's a part of, and kind of open the gifts that we decided to wait to open in front of other people...We will usually go to [one of his] host family's homes for a little bit...because they celebrate more so on Christmas day rather than Christmas Eve.*

The only difference for Bryn is that during this holiday, she has to spend a little time at her spouse's host families. Sometimes the same day her whole family does their gift exchange. This is probably the biggest discussion besides the lists they give to each other with gifts they are looking forward to.

*Trying to navigate whether going to host families, and then my family. Just because, I think we both prefer going to mine, because, it's more relaxed and he knows everybody. But he doesn't see his host family as often. So, I think he's closer with my family now, but we still want to go see them, and they give him gifts and like, he's still kinda part of the family, so we go there. But sometimes I'll be like, let's leave at this time...and he says we have to stay longer than that. Gift exchange is starting at like three, we got to go!  
\*having a little back and forth pretend conversation being herself and spouse\* And so we just like try to figure out how to do that... But otherwise not really any disagreements, I think we're on the same page most of the time.*

Bryn expresses their openness to try new things, that they as a couple are very nontraditional and open to creating new memories. Both not having access to some of her spouses culture, and

being newly together without the immediate and consistent fears and stressors of deportation that overwhelmed the start of their relationship, they have come together and created their own traditions. Together they celebrate what Bryn termed Christmas Eve-Eve, where maybe a day before Christmas Eve itself, they give their gifts to each other. “So just the two of us. And then we’ll have some wine, he’ll cook, and we will sit in pajamas and like play with our new, like we don’t get toys or anything, but open and play with what each other gave.” When it gets close to the holiday season, they also love to grab coffee or hot-cocoa and walk through the local light show in their town.

### **Family Relationships, Intersecting Identities, and Negotiation Power**

#### *Geographic Proximity and Immigrant Families*

Approximately 80% of Americans live less than a couple of hours away from their mother (TheUpshot 2015). For immigrant families, families with immigrant members, those in transnational relationships, and/or racial/national intermarriage like those in this study, geographic proximity to family of origin can be far greater, as they are often borders apart. For participants in this study, it was found that the closer the racial/national family was to the non-U.S. family of origin (i.e., the family of the non-U.S.-born spouse), the more cultural practices of the non-U.S.-born spouse were transferred into their celebrations as a family. The same appears to be true for if the racial/national family is geographically close to the U.S.-born families, they are more likely to maintain more traditional U.S. celebrations. If the family is close to both, there is more likely to be a mixture of both spouse’s culture.

For example, Maggie came with her family of origin to the U.S. from Mexico when she was 4 years old. They were able to be present for her and Tony’s wedding, they are now there for the kids’ birthdays, and when her family decides to hold Christmas, Maggie, Tony and the kids

will go over on Christmas Eve to celebrate with everyone. Tony grew up in Chicago, and most of his extended family and family of origin still lives there. That said, Maggie and Tony have made frequent trips to visit his family for leisure and celebrations, and his mom will come to the Twin Cities to visit. As noted above, Maggie and Tony tend to incorporate both of their cultural celebrations, and negotiate a lot more, discussing which rituals will be present for what ceremonies.

In context with geographical proximity, there seems to be a strong gendered imbalance when it comes to its effects on the transmission of culture and celebrational practices. This can be seen in Maggie's relationship with Tony's mom, as above, as well as with Bryn's relationship with her own mother-and distance to her mother-in-law. For Bryn and her spouse, they are close proximity-wise to her mom, and not geographically close to her spouse's family of origin, who resides in Egypt. This is one thing that actually makes her sad at times when it comes to her husband's circumstances. The reality is that for them, Egyptian and U.S. laws force her spouse to be away from his family if he wants to stay in the U.S. with her and start his career to support the family they are starting together in the U.S. She told me,

*I have no experience with being away from my family for two years. I can't even imagine... like I miss them when I'm gone for a month. So like I'm super close my mom. So like, I just saw her last week and she just texted me, asked me to come home because she misses me. \*giggle\* I'm like, I cannot imagine... being away, like being in his position, being away from his family for that long.*

They are both family-oriented, but only have geographical proximity to her family that currently lives a little more than an hour away.

For that reason, most, if not all, celebrations are present at Bryn's mom's house, including Christmas as outlined above. For Easter, her mom will hide easter eggs filled with jello-shots sporadically around her yard, or they participate in costume contests on Halloween in her mom's living room. Their wedding reception consisted of a food truck parked in the driveway, and a karaoke machine set up on her mom's yard. Bryn's face lit up when describing her recently small 45-person wedding reception, and her embarrassing singing, and hysterical moments she said she will always remember. Then, she went a little bluer, explaining, "The only thing that's kinda tricky is, for the wedding, like his parents could not come, family couldn't come." Even most of their friends that were there were friends they both shared, or were hers initially. "All his friends are in Egypt or out of state," she elaborated when outlining his decision to not do a bachelor's party. She quickly bounced back to her lighthearted nature, "and so we'd have to go there at some point hopefully soon, and do another version [of our wedding], which I'm excited for. \*giggle\*"

When I asked Aric how the food in his house would be different if he had more access to the ingredients he grew up with, he said, "Yeah definitely if there was more availability of things from my culture that I know that I really, really like [here in the U.S.], that definitely could impact what you know, food in the house looks like." But to Aric, it is not about accessibility, rather proximity to the women who would use those ingredients. He points out, "because I'm a man, I want to really say that that would not necessarily be true. I'd say what would make it more true would be who I have in the house. If I have my mom in the house, definitely, she would probably want to cook some African food." Although this is about everyday consumption, it can be applied to what foods are prepared for celebrations.

Aric made the point that if there was a way to get Kenyan ingredients, it really depends on the woman's means and desire to buy and prepare those dishes. Since Aric only lives with his wife, and almost none of his family lives in the U.S, there isn't that exposure to his culture proximity-wise. He explained how most of the food he eats is American.

*I feel like in my relationship we tend to have a lot of American food, and I feel like I conceded easily, frankly it was easy for me to concede on this because, we live in America. So it's easy to what's available, it's easily accessible to us is what's available here right, it's American food. And by American food I just mean like the culture where it's fast foods, it's what you can easily get from the store, or if it's anything that we have to make at home.*

Aric also said he is not picky when it comes to food. He was telling me how not only did he grow up in a modern household in Nairobi, the mindset he was raised on was to thank God whenever food was given to you since food did not come in plenty. His spouse is a little pickier when it comes to what they eat though.

*My spouse is very indifferent about, she's just not very open minded, I'd say, when it comes to different cultural foods. You know, so she is more comfortable with where she grew up... [African food] is not something she would ask for. You know, still she's more comfortable with what she understands... that has really shaped the way we cook at home, all our decisions to cook or not to cook.*

To Aric, it really depends upon which woman he is living with, to determine which foods will be prepared in the house, and for celebrations. Even though Aric is not meticulous when it comes to what is on the table, you will hardly, if ever, smell ugali or pilau being prepared when you walk into his house because his wife does not desire anything outside American foods. There

is also not the opportunity there for her to be exposed to his mother's cooking; to explore which Kenyan foods she may like, could potentially mirror in cooking at home, and overall enjoy with him and his family; because his mom is more than 8,000 miles away. Similarly, Bryn and her spouse have more exposure to her U.S.-born family, and the more traditional U.S. holidays, and fun intimate family rituals they have created together with her family of origin. Here, it begs the similar questions mentioned in Aric's situation: would their racial/national celebrations include more Egyptian cultural celebrations if they lived closer to his mom and family as a whole?

### *Communication and Gender and Immigration*

Cultural transmission has been found to fall primarily on women. The sharing of culture from generation to generation is not exclusively women-led, but primarily. Studies with samples of heterosexual families in the U.S. find that women experience more anxiety around the holiday season due to the social pressures placed on them. They are more compelled to do increased domestic work and gift-shopping, and celebrations for 91% of women involve maintaining social ties, and general "kin-keeping." (Reese 2019). My data on these three families demonstrates just this: that the cultural practices of the racial/national family depends upon how much the wives of the family do, including in some cases in collaboration with a mother or grandmother. A wife's access and ability to communicate with her mother, and mother of her spouse, seems to be connected to the wife's knowledge, experience, and performance of their cultural celebrations.

As outlined with Maggie and Tony, Maggie is close with Tony's mom, to the point where Tony claims she speaks to his mom more than he does. Maggie also has a close relationship to her own mom, and therefore has the ability to transmit her own culture, and learn to adapt Tony's culture at the same time. For Tony, he has a great relationship with his mom, and is

friendly with Maggie's mother; but his relationship with his mother-in-law overall does not impact which Mexican traditions show up in his celebrations.

Maggie frequently teaches her immediate family her Mexican heritage. For example, she has the kids help her make roseries, or when Tony's dad passed away, making him a card and leaving out sweets by his picture for Día de Muertos. She explains to her children, "okay, your grandpa is going to come, granddaddy is coming to eat you know some sweets, so just leave him something, make him something nice."

This gendered experience of sharing culture is highlighted in this example of Maggie describing how badly she wants to travel to where she calls home.

*I want to take them back home so bad! And I want to go home so bad! I feel like I was very young when we did move up here, but that is still home. Like our house is still there, our family is still there ... and, everybody is like 'when are you going to bring the kids?' I promise, one day, I will bring them. Because I do want them to see, especially something so big like Day of the Dead, or even like our Independence Day, like for them to see, how amazing, like the traditions are.*

Besides Day of the Dead and Independence Day, Guadalupe (Virgin Marry/Dec 12<sup>th</sup>) is highlighted. "Or like December 12, like Guadalupe, its, just a big deal for everybody! People literally crawl to church! People, you know, they are very devoted to you know, the Virgin Marry. Which I would like for them to experience that at least once. To be like, oh, that's how my mom grew up! Like, they really do that!" The whole time Maggie spoke about her home country of Mexico, her eyes sparkled. Tony mirrored Maggie's excitement for traveling to Mexico with the kids, noting that Mexicans really know how to celebrate: "I heard their shit be going crazy! ... it is pretty much the same [as the U.S. celebrations], with the biggest shit you

know what I am saying, just a bigger deal type shit.” Although Tony may or may not be wrong in his assumptions about Mexico, the planning, networking, and transferring of culture is mainly on Maggie to do.

Maggie also recognizes that Tony grew up with a different culture than her and that it is just as significant to him, and she wants to make sure his traditions are celebrated too. Oftentimes, she may not understand why something was done, but has the ability and access to ask his mom. She said, “I think that from very early on we respected each other’s cultures where like, he’ll explain to me, or I will ask his mom, what does this mean?” The couple’s openness lead them to want to share their culture with one another, but Maggie’s ability to connect and communicate Tony’s culture with his mom, opened the door for them to be able to share their celebrations.

Similarly for Bryn, she expressed her openness and desire to share her spouse’s Egyptian culture plenty of times, loving when he cooks, and wishing he had more access to his culture in the U.S. She just has an extremely challenging time learning how to incorporate it into their daily or celebratory lives. She told me she sometimes watches Egyptian films, or YouTube’s Egyptian wedding ceremonies, affirming “it looks pretty fun. And it’s very dance-oriented, which I like. \*giggle\*” But Bryn usually runs into a language barrier, whenever she tries to Google about Egypt, such as Egyptian news and politics to stay up to date. “I mean, I’ve looked up information, but a lot of times it, it’s like in Arabic. \*giggle\* I don’t know.” She laughs mid-thought, “I know like four words,” she admits. “I should probably learn Arabic, but that seems reeaally complicated... ugh. I don’t think I could do that, but yeah.”

Bryn’s spouse speaks fluent English, and in their immediate relationship she said language is not something that ever causes a problem for them communication wise. She also



says that she speaks to his brothers frequently, who are also fluent in English, and she will sometimes ask about their culture to better understand more. But his brothers tell her to wait until she is able to meet their mom.

*Like I've talked his brother like two days ago and they're like, yeah, there's not many from what I hear, like proper ingredients to make a lot of the traditional dishes or like they're hard to find [in the U.S.]. And he was also like [Bryn's spouse] barely knows how to make Egyptian food and he's going to ruin it for you, [and] to wait till you have our moms when you come to Egypt, I was like, Okay, I'll wait till then!*

This is not to say that Bryn does not already communicate with her mother-in-law; she does via phone and video calls, but her ability to do so entirely relies on her spouse to translate. “I talked to his mom on the phone well he translates for me... And she's like, \*giggle-pause with subtle arm movements\* Yeah. So I'll, I'll talk to them, especially his mom, and I love her! But he'll have to translate like back and forth, and he gets really confused.”

Bryn mentions she sort of likes her spouse's mandatory presence when communicating with the in-laws, as there are a few short-term benefits.

*With his mom, I actually kinda like it, only because normally I get nervous meeting the parents or like whatever. And then like it's almost like he's buffering whatever I'm saying. \*giggle\* Like he's not going to say anything offensive or weird, he's not going to translate it and make it sound [good], like it's almost like a filter to make sure whatever I'm saying is coming out in a good manner. \*giggle\* I kind of like that.*

We had a little laugh at the end when she joked “he could be talking so much shit. You don't know!” The language barrier between Bryn and her mother-in-law causes stress for her spouse in needing to interpret for both parties. Even if Bryn and her mother-in-law were to discuss

Egyptian culture, it would need to be filtered through her spouse which hinders Bryn's ability to access information and learn about Egyptian culture and barring her from adapting Egyptian culture into their celebrations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

There are certain rates and predictors of racial/national intermarriages. Some researchers have analyzed immigration without taking into consideration race and found that generally the more heterogeneous a country is prior to their citizens immigration, the larger and longer amount of time an immigrant population resides in the U.S., which state they immigrated to, and an increased gender imbalance of the immigrant population, the more they are likely to marry an immigrant group outside their own (Spörlein et al. 2014). When including the racial categories of immigrant groups to discover which predictors can be used to determine racial/national intermarriages, it gets more complicated. Besides the fact that race is a social construct and differs amongst individual's self-identifications as well as a country's racial construction, Asians, Latinos, Whites and Blacks have been lumped together despite their differing ethnicities and countries of origin. Related, there are also gender differences that influence the rates of intermarriages (Chiswick and Houseworth 2011; and Lichter et al. 2015). Additionally, there is consensus that the more education an immigrant group has, more fluent in English, as well as having a naturalized status, the more likely they are to marry a White U.S.-born persons (Chiswick and Houseworth 2011; Lichter et al. 2015; Qian 2002; and Qian and Lichter 2002).

Additionally, earlier scholarship, to my knowledge, does not focus directly on the intersecting identities that make up racial/national intermarriages. Majority of research that

includes racial/national intermarriages as part of their sample focuses more holistically on intercultural relationships. (i.e., Leeds-Hurwitz 2009; Lopéz 2022; Seshadri and Knutson-Martin 2013; and Ting-Toomey 2009). Knowing this, negotiation practices for racial/national intermarriages can be placed into two categories: third-party viewers, and relationship management styles. Racial/national intermarriages are shaped by third-party viewers and the generalized stigma of intercultural relationships, forcing them to navigate public spaces more strategically. When it comes to relationship management, racial/national intermarriages are found to develop various techniques to help them mitigate cultural differences (i.e., Inman et al. 2011, Karris 2003/2009, Killian 2001, Lopéz 2022; Seshadri and Knudson-Martin 2013; and Ting-Toomey 2009).

Finally, celebrations as a whole bring positive outcomes for families (i.e., Fiese 1992; Gobeil-Dwyer 1999; Newell 1999; O'Connor and Hoorwitz 2003; and Wolin and Bennett 1984). Yet again, previous scholarship, to my knowledge, has not studied racial/national intermarriages and how they create, practice, or are affected by, their family celebrations. When intercultural weddings were studied by Leeds-Hurwitz (2009), it was found that rarely do intercultural spouses create a ceremony that incorporates both of their cultures, and if they do, usually one side of the family is not satisfied with the results; International couples tend to create two separate weddings standing for their two distinct cultures; And usually, intercultural couples will default to the mainstream cultural wedding ceremonies, or omit rituals all together by having a court marriage. Through this research project, I highlight the livelihood of racial/national intermarriages by purposely questioning how racial/national intermarriages negotiate their family celebrations.

Through the opening narratives I try to illustrate how each participant has various levels of negotiation when it comes to their family celebrations, and different social factors that contribute to each family's ability to negotiate. I make the argument that Maggie and Tony do the most negotiation out of the three participants. The reason is because the family has close geographical proximity to both sides of the family, and Maggie has access and the ability to communicate with Tony's mother to transfer Tony's culture into their family, as well as her own. In complete contrast, I place Aric's story. The celebrations they grew up with are completely different to what they consist of in present times with their spouse. This is because Aric's spouse is not willing or able to incorporate his cultural celebrations. I then use Bryn's story to bridge this juxtapose narrative. Bryn is more open to trying unfamiliar cultures unlike Aric's spouse, and more like Tony and Maggie, but her family does not incorporate her spouse's Egyptian celebrations. I argue this is because she lacks the close geographical proximity to her spouse's mother, as well as the ability to communicate with his mother, and it results in her family celebrating more U.S. traditions.

My findings suggest that increased geographic proximity and accessible communication to non-U.S.-born family increases the racial/national intermarriage to adopt more of the non-U.S.-born spouses' cultural traditions. Gender and immigration status are highlighted as intersecting identities because of their impact on the racial/national intermarriage ability to have intergenerational solidarity (geographic proximity and communication). Gender is a social identity worth further investigation because of its prevalence within the data. When it comes to different-sex relationships, how do spouses with different ideas of gendered norms negotiate those differences, and is it actually the strongest predictor within a relationship for which celebrations will occur, and how they are performed? Gender and immigration status are the intersecting identities that I chose to highlight in the results, although religion and class seem to be prevalent as well in the daily and celebratory negotiations. Further research with a larger

sample should take a more intersectional analysis of gender, immigration, religion, and class to better understand racial/national intermarriages. Additionally, skin color and tone, sexuality, (dis)ability, and geographical location are social identities worth further exploration in both qualitative and quantitative research.

Additionally, race should be explored more thoroughly, since my data showed minimal cognizant connection of race to participants' relationships and celebrations. Although I probed with questions about race roughly two to three times in each interview, only one followed up that race had a significant impact on their relationship. There could be a multitude of reasons for this. For instance, immigrants' perception of race is different than its construction in the U.S., and this may impede a couples' ability to talk about the issue, as well as a researchers' ability to capture it. In addition, colorblind love is a mainstream U.S. cultural frame that may lead some to deny this significance of race in this relationships. This could also be seen in the same light as civil inattention, where a partner may pretend not to 'see race' as to save face, and minimize potential discomfort.

Although research has not yet focused on racial/national intermarriages specifically, research does suggest that interracial couples borrow the cultural frame of colorblind love to make sense of and navigate their relationships (see Karis 2003; Killian 2001; Steinburgler 2012). Indeed, the general absence of race in the couples' understanding of their relationship should beg some questions. Steinburgler (2012), who interviewed Black and White heterosexual, gay, and lesbian couples, found that some White partners began to view their race differently, and more critically, by being in a relationship with a Black partner. However, for most couples, a White person simply being intimate with someone Black does not cause the White partner to develop a new racial perspective or a critical racial lens. White partners do not see race any differently,

continue to not see their Whiteness, and even further maintain the cultural norm that White is not a race at all. Given that my participants made little mention of race, further research should be done to see how the cultural differences in a racial/national intermarriages matter for the way spouses think about and approach racial difference, potentially feeding into this idea of “love overcomes all injustices.”

A small sample has a disadvantage of not being able to easily show themes across cases, or further support my data by drawing across themes. Additionally, using convenience sampling techniques does not allow for generalizability to the greater population (Small 2009). That said, there is an undeniable advantage of having Maggie, Tony, Aric, and Bryn’s stories narrated in-depth. It allows me to explore and illustrate the nuances each racial/national intermarriage has. Each family has its own traditions, even when it comes to the same celebrations.

Despite these limitations, my results offer, to my knowledge, the first intentional glimpse into the lives of racial/national intermarriages, how their relationships with their home country, intergenerational solidarity, and U.S. institutions, play a hand in shaping their negotiations. I raise these findings, as well as plenty of other important questions that future research will hopefully eagerly seek to address.

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## APPENDIX

### *Appendix One*

### QUESTIONS:

#### Non-U.S.-born Interview Guide

##### *Relationship History*

- Tell me the story of how you two met (How did you two meet?)
  - What were some things you liked most about your partner? /What really attracted you to your partner?
  - Was the area where you grew up diverse? How do the people you grew up with portray relationships like yours?

- When did you get married? How did you know the “time was right”?
  - How would you describe your marriage?
  - What is the relationship with extended family?
    - Is there communication present? Close connections? Language barriers?
- How would you describe your marriage today? How do you feel about it?
  - Strengths and weaknesses
  - What are the qualities in your partner that stick out to you?
  - Benefits and difficulties
  - Have cultural differences come up in your marriage? What did you do to reconcile those differences?
- What is your daily experience like being married to someone of a different race and nationality?
  - Do you think these have to do with anything?
  - Feelings of stigma? Do you have examples?
  - Is there one over the other that comes up more, noticeably?
    - Religion? Cultural? Location wise? Racially? Language?
- Tell me what types of foods you make at home. Are they foods you grew up with or know, your partner, a mix?
  - So how do you make those decisions about what to eat?
- Tell me a time when you and your partner fully agree, or fully disagreed on how to raise your children? (If they have them) could ask same question for food.
- Do you both share the same religion? How do you navigate that? Tell me how religion plays into your celebrations.
- Do you both share the same religion? How do you navigate that? Tell me how religion plays into your celebrations.

#### *Past Experiences with Family Celebrations*

- Tell me stories about the celebrations you had as a child (family of origin?).
  - Dimensions-what did it look like, what is the celebration about?
  - Yearly/special/cultural
  - Food-whose food? Mixed? One cultures? Not either partner’s cultural dishes?
  - Music
  - Location
  - Participants-big or small events? Family and/or friends? Strangers?
  - Rituals-Things that *must* happen at these events. Things that make this event extra special.
- Were there any celebrations you hated doing as a kid? Did it ever occur to celebrate those with your spouse due to tradition?
  - Are there any celebrations that you do as a family now that you wish you did not?
    - Why, or, why not?

#### *Current Experiences with Family Celebrations*

- Tell me stories about the celebrations you started as a family (with partner currently).
  - Dimensions-what did it look like, what is the celebration about?
  - Yearly/special/cultural
  - Food-whose food? Mixed? One cultures? Not either partner's cultural dishes?
  - Music
  - Location
  - Participants-big or small events? Family and/or friends? Strangers?
  - Rituals-Things that *must* happen at these events. Things that make this event extra special.
- Tell me about a time where you and your spouse disagreed on which celebration to have? How did you come to a solution?
  - No disagreement? Oh okay, why do you think that is?
- Are there any celebrations you did as a child that you wish was something you did now?
  - Why are you and your partner not celebrating that?
- Are there any celebrations you simply can't practice as a family here?
  - Location?
  - Materials?
  - Specific people not here?

#### *Current Experiences with Family Celebrations with Spouse*

- Have any of those celebrations changed from the beginning of the relationship till now? How so?
- How did you and your spouse choose these celebrations over others?
  - Why do you like to celebrate these celebrations?
  - Did you seem to "default" to the celebrations you are currently celebrating? Mirroring the U.S. traditions?
    - Can you give me a specific example of a conversation where you made a specific decision?
- Are there any rites that are necessary in the celebration?
  - Rites: stuff you have to do during the celebration. i.e., elders eat first. Certain person says prayer.
- Do you usually have them at home? If they are at home, why is that? What does the production look like? When they are not, how do you decide where to have them?

#### *Including Extended Family*

- How do your parents take part in your family celebrations? What is the involvement of your extended family?
  - How involved are your parents in these celebrations? How involved are your relatives in these celebrations?
- We have talked a lot about celebrations your personal family puts on, tell me about the celebrations your family usually attends?

- How does the distance between your family and your new family affect the celebrations you have?
- What does your extended family feel about the family you made? About your celebrations?

*Future Celebration Experiences*

- Have you and your partner discussed potential celebrations you would like to celebrate together. Why, or why not.
- What celebrations do you want to pass along to your children? And why?
- Since you both are obviously in the US, what would you do different if you were to do the celebration in \_\_\_\_ country?

*Cultural Q's*

- What is your religious identity?
  - Would you say religion has impacted your marriage/relationship with spouse?
  - Have you ever experienced a conflict when it came to religion?
- How has your language impacted your relationship?
  - Have you ever had any difficulty communicating with your partner?
    - If yes, "Can you tell me about a time when that happened?"
- How do you think your partner has impacted your life?
  - For better and worse
- Is there anything else you have for me before we end this discussion?

*Demographics (emailed or end)*

- How do you identify?
  - Age:
  - Race:
  - Nationality:
  - Education:
  - Occupation:
  - Religion:
  - Gender:
  - Sexuality:
  - Something else you would like to include.

U.S.-born interview Guide

*Relationship History*

- Tell me the story of how you two met (How did you two meet?)
  - What were some things you liked most about your partner?
  - What really attracted you to your partner?
  - What is your relationship like with your partner's family?
- When did you get married? How did you know the "time was right"?
- So, before you got married, did you have any conversations about your partner's immigration status?



- What is the relationship with extended family?
  - Is there communication present? Close connections? Language barriers?
- How would you describe your marriage today? How do you feel about it?
  - Strengths and weaknesses
  - What are the qualities in your partner that stick out to you?
  - Benefits and difficulties
  - How have cultural differences come up in your marriage?
  - Would you say your partner has adjusted to the way things go in the US?
- What is your daily experience like being married to someone of a different race and nationality?
- Feelings of stigma? Do you have examples?
  - Is there one over the other that comes up more, noticeably?
    - Religion? Cultural? Location wise? Racially? Language?
- Tell me what types of foods you make at home. Are they foods you grew up with or know, your partner, a mix?
  - So how do you make those decisions about what to eat?
- Tell me a time when you and your partner fully agree, or fully disagreed on how to raise your children? (If they have them) could ask same question for food.
- Do you both share the same religion? How do you navigate that? Tell me how religion plays into your celebrations.

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- Tell me stories about the celebrations you had as a child (family of origin?).
  - Dimensions-what did it look like, what is the celebration about?
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  - Rituals-Things that *must* happen at these events. Things that make this event extra special.
- Were there any celebrations you hated doing as a kid? Did it ever occur to celebrate those with your spouse due to tradition?
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*Current Experiences with Family Celebrations*

- Tell me stories about the celebrations you started as a family (with partner currently).
  - Dimensions-what did it look like, what is the celebration about?
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  - No disagreement? Oh okay, why do you think that is?
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  - Why are you and your partner not celebrating that?
- Are there any celebrations you simply can't practice as a family here?
  - Location?
  - Materials?
  - Specific people not here?

#### *Current Experiences with Family Celebrations with Spouse*

- Have any of those celebrations changed from the beginning of the relationship till now? How so?
- How did you and your spouse choose these celebrations over others?
  - Why do you like to celebrate these celebrations?
    - Probe - Did you seem to “default” to the celebrations you are currently celebrating? Mirroring the U.S. traditions?
    - Can you give me a specific example of a conversation where you made a specific decision?
- Are there any rites that are necessary in the celebration?
  - Rites: stuff you have to do during the celebration. i.e., elders eat first. Certain person says prayer.
- Tell me about a time where you and your spouse disagreed on which celebration to have? How did you come to a solution?
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  - How involved are your parents in these celebrations? How involved are your relatives in these celebrations?
- We have talked a lot about celebrations your personal family puts on, tell me about the celebrations your family usually attends?

#### *Future Celebration Experiences*

- Have you and your partner discussed potential celebrations you would like to celebrate together. Why, or why not.?”
- What celebrations do you want to pass along to your children? And why?

- Since you both are obviously in the US, what would you do different if you were to do the celebration in \_\_\_\_ country?
  - How have you learned about your partner's country of origin?

*Cultural Q's*

- What is your religious identity?
  - Would you say religion has impacted your marriage/relationship with spouse?
  - Have you ever experienced a conflict when it came to religion?
- How has your language impacted your relationship?
  - Are you trying to learn their language? Do you find it difficult at times to communicate? Is there an instance when communication went wrong? How did you get on the same page? Do you find it difficult to speak with their family members? What does that look like?
- How do you think your partner has impacted your life?
  - For better and worse
- Is there anything else you have for me before we end this discussion?

*Demographics (emailed or end)*

- How do you identify?
  - Age:
  - Race:
  - Nationality:
  - Education:
  - Occupation:
  - Religion:
  - Gender:
  - Sexuality:
  - Something else you would like to include.