

Cross-Cultural Parenting:
Experiences of Intercultural Parents and
Constructions of Culturally Diverse Families

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*This is dedicated to Olivia in China and Xander in Ethiopia,
who provided the inspiration for this research
and the motivation to finish.*

AND

*To my intercultural tribe of family and friends
who have made cross-cultural pollination
such a fun and interesting journey.*

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ABSTRACT

According to U.S. Census Bureau data (2003), intercultural relationships are on the rise, and much has been written on cultural differences in marriage. A significant amount of literature has discussed challenges confronted by couples in these partnerships; however, much less has been written on how couples navigate their cultural diversity which is often amplified after they become parents. The goal of this study is to reveal the personal stories and narratives of intercultural parents who have not been the focus of previous research. To examine their experiences, the following research questions guided the structure of this thesis: *What are the experiences of intercultural couples raising children together? How do they construct family systems within culturally diverse households?*

Consistent with humanistic and existential approaches in professional counseling which focus on the relativity of the human experience, this study employed a qualitative research design. A social constructionist theoretical framework and a grounded theory methodology were used to examine the experiences of intercultural parents and how they construct family systems within culturally diverse households.

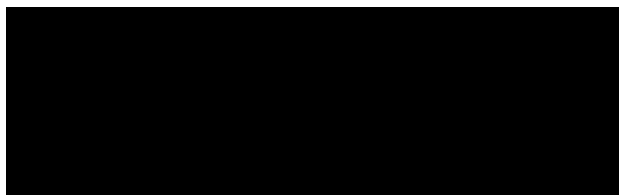
This study incorporated in-depth interviews as a primary technique in data collection to elicit perceptions of intercultural couples, using parenting and childrearing as a lens to explore their lived experiences. Twenty-one participants from fifteen intercultural couples were interviewed in an individual, conjoint, and/or sequential format; ten participated in individual or conjoint follow-up interviews. Using a grounded theory approach for data analysis, four themes emerged that relate to both intercultural parenting and culturally diverse families: (1) the cultural context and constructions of identity for parents and families; (2) cross-cultural challenges and cleavages;

- (3) negotiating intercultural parenthood and culturally diverse families; and
- (4) opportunities for parents and children in culturally diverse households.

A model of cultural adaptation among intercultural parents is presented as an analytical tool to better understand how parents co-construct culturally diverse family systems based on their conceptualization of their cultural differences and their degree of mutual acculturation. This multi-dimensional model of cultural adaptation illustrates that cultural adaptation among intercultural parents is neither a static nor a symmetrical process. Parents adopt different strategies to reconcile their cultural differences, including assimilation, cultural tourism, cultural transition, cultural amalgamation, and biculturation, at various stages of their relationship and for different purposes. Counselors will gain from understanding these divergent strategies and family systems to better equip couples to benefit from their diversity and differences within their families.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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