



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES: EXPLORING THE
CHALLENGES IN INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES AMONG
SARAWAKIAN WOMEN**

Effinie Anak Handi Wander

Bachelor in Psychology (Honours)

2024

**LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES: EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES IN
INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES AMONG SARAWAKIAN WOMEN**

EFFINIE ANAK HANDI WANDER

This project is submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor in Psychology with Honours

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
(2024)

The project entitled **‘Love Knows No Boundaries: Exploring the Challenges in Interracial Marriages Among Sarawakian Women’** was prepared by Effinie Anak Handi Wander (77944) and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor in Psychology with Honours

Received for examination by:



Dr. Jamayah Binti Saili

Date:

09/07/2024

Gred

A

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, it is only appropriate that my deepest gratitude and thanks go to my Final Year Project supervisor, Dr. Jamayah Saili. Without her constant guidance, reminders and advice, I would not be able to complete this research project as well as I could have. I would also like to express my thanks to my supervisor who has been patient in handling all 11 of us while juggling her busy schedule as an esteemed Psychology lecturer. She has consistently been supportive and kind in providing me with wonderful insights and criticisms in completing this research project.

In addition, I would also like to thank all 9 of my research participants who has been nothing but cooperative in assisting me in the data collection process for my Final Year Project. Without their willingness to help, I would not be able to write this acknowledgement section now and pass this subject this semester. Thank you for taking the time out of your day to help out a university student with her project!

Moreover, I would also like to express my appreciation to Mohamad Azhari bin Abu Bakar, the Final Year Project Coordinator. The resources and references he has so kindly shared with us have assisted me a lot in writing almost everything in this research.

Lastly, I must shout out to my family and friends during the few months I completed this research project. Their unconditional love and support have inspired me to keep going although I sometimes felt like giving up. Thank you to my family members who always cheered me on no matter what. Thank you to my friends who have also given me valuable advice and materials to brush up on my research competency. Thank you to the friends who have also provided laughter, a shoulder to cry on and constant words of affirmation that have certainly lifted my spirits to be more motivated in completing my Final Year Project. You know who you are!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	1
LIST OF TABLES	I
LIST OF FIGURES	II
ABSTRACT	1
ABSTRAK	2
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	3
1.0 Introduction	3
1.1 Background of the Study	3
1.2 Problem Statements	6
1.3 Research Objectives	9
1.3.1 General Objectives	9
1.3.2 Specific Objectives	9
1.4 Research Questions	9
1.5 Research Framework	10
1.6 Significance of the Study	10
1.7 Definition of Terms	11
1.7.1 Interracial Marriage	11
1.7.2 Sarawakian Women	12
1.8 Limitations of the Study	13
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.0 Introduction	14
2.1 Marriage	14
2.1.1 Concept of Marriage	14
2.1.2 Married Life	16
2.2 Marriage in Malaysia	18
2.3 Interracial Marriages in Malaysia	20
2.4 Gender Roles in Marriages	22
2.5 Interracial Marriages	24
2.6 Challenges in Interracial Marriages	26
2.6.1 Discrimination & Stigma	26
2.6.2 Lack of Support	28
2.6.3 Adaptation to Each Other's Culture	30

2.6.4 Deterioration of Psychological Wellbeing	31
2.7 Coping Strategies in Overcoming Challenges in Interracial Marriages	32
2.7.1 Support From Loved Ones	32
2.7.2 Professional Help	34
2.7.3 Religion	35
2.8 Psychological Wellbeing	35
2.9 PERMA Model	36
2.9.1 Positive Emotions	37
2.9.2 Engagement	38
2.9.3 Relationships	39
2.9.4 Meaning	39
2.9.5 Accomplishment	40
2.10 Summary	41
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	42
3.0 Introduction	42
3.1 Research Design	42
3.2 Pilot Study	43
3.3 Participants	43
3.4 Data Collection	45
3.4.1 Recruitment Process	45
3.4.2 Interview Procedure	45
3.5 Validity and Reliability	46
3.6 Data Analysis	47
3.7 Ethics of Study	49
3.7.1 Participant Information Sheet	50
3.7.2 Informed Consent Form	50
3.8 Summary	51
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	52
4.0 Introduction	52
4.1 Demographic Data of Participants and their Spouses	52
4.2 Findings	53
4.3 THEME 1: I Love You, Despite Our Differences	55
4.3.1 Cultural Differences	56
4.3.2 The ‘Significant’ Others	59
4.3.3 Religious Differences	63

4.3.4 Being the Wife	64
4.4 THEME 2: Navigating the Storm	66
4.4.1 Talking it Out	67
4.4.2 Taking a Breather	72
4.4.3 A Shared Culture	73
4.5 THEME 3: The Collective Vision.....	79
4.5.1 Destigmatisation	80
4.5.2 Messages of Support	83
4.5.3 Words of Wisdom	85
4.6 Summary	88
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	89
5.0 Introduction	89
5.1 Challenges of Interracial Marriages Experienced by Sarawakian Women	89
5.2 Coping Strategies Employed by Sarawakian Women in Interracial Marriages	97
5.3 Future Expectations and Hopes of Sarawakian Women in Interracial Marriages	102
5.4 Related Theory/Model Discussion	108
5.5 Summary of the Study.....	110
5.6 Implication of Research	111
5.7 Recommendations	114
5.8 Summary	115
REFERENCES	116
APPENDIX	129

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria of Participants	44
Table 2 Demographic Data of Participants	52
Table 3 Overview of Main Themes and Subthemes	54
Table 4 Theme 1: I Love You, Despite Our Differences	55
Table 5 Theme 2: Navigating the Storm	66
Table 6 Theme 3: The Collective Vision	79

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.....	10
Figure 2. PERMA Model	37
Figure 3. Phases in Conducting Thematic Analysis.....	48

ABSTRACT

While it is a common occurrence, interracial marriages in Malaysia are still seen as taboo in Malaysian society. People in mixed-race marriages have distinct issues that may differ from those in a same-race partnership. This research study aimed to address the specific challenges women in interracial marriages go through, their coping strategies in handling those issues, and their expectations and hopes for the future regarding interracial marriages, focusing on the lived experiences of Sarawakian women. A qualitative research method was utilised, with semi-structured interviews conducted for 8 Sarawakian women in an interracial marriage. The data collected were then analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Among the challenges faced by these women were: cultural differences, lack of support in their marriage, religious differences, and experiences of being the wife. Meanwhile, the coping strategies typically employed by these women were communication, distractions and incorporating both spouses' cultures. These findings were able to raise awareness of the unique challenges women in interracial marriages go through as well as highlighting the type of support needed. It is recommended that future researchers conduct more studies on the experiences of other demographics throughout Malaysia for generalizability, and to employ mixed methods of research to gauge participants' level of psychological wellbeing as well as their personal experiences being in mixed-race marriages.

Keywords: interracial marriages, cultural differences, married women, psychological wellbeing, cultural adaptation

ABSTRAK

Walaupun merupakan perkara yang biasa di Malaysia, perkahwinan campur masih tabu dalam masyarakat Malaysia. Individu dalam perkahwinan campur mempunyai isu yang lain daripada individu dalam perkahwinan sama bangsa. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menerokai cabaran yang dilalui oleh wanita dalam perkahwinan campur, strategi dalam menghadapi isu tersebut serta harapan mereka pada masa depan tentang perkahwinan campur, menumpukan kepada pengalaman wanita Sarawak. Kaedah kajian kualitatif telah digunakan, dengan temu bual separa berstruktur dijalankan untuk 8 wanita Sarawak dalam perkahwinan campur. Data yang dikumpul dianalisis menggunakan Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Antara cabaran yang dihadapi oleh wanita-wanita tersebut ialah: perbezaan budaya, kekurangan sokongan dalam perkahwinan mereka, perbezaan agama, dan pengalaman menjadi isteri. Selain itu, strategi mengatasi masalah para wanita tersebut ialah komunikasi, hiburan dan menggabungkan budaya kedua-dua pasangan. Penemuan ini dapat meningkatkan kesedaran tentang cabaran unik yang dilalui wanita dalam perkahwinan campur serta menonjolkan jenis sokongan yang diperlukan. Adalah disyorkan agar penyelidik menjalankan lebih banyak kajian tentang pengalaman demografi lain di seluruh Malaysia untuk kebolehgeneralisasian, dan menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan campuran untuk mengukur tahap kesejahteraan psikologi peserta serta pengalaman peribadi mereka dalam perkahwinan campur.

Kata kunci: perkahwinan campur, perbezaan budaya, wanita berkahwin, kesejahteraan psikologi, penyesuaian kepada budaya baru

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter encompasses the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research framework, the significance of the study, the definition of terms, and the study's limitations.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia is a unique country wherein it boasts a multicultural society of citizens of different races, religions, and cultures, with a demography of 70.1% Bumiputera, 22.6% ethnic Chinese and 6.6% ethnic Indians as of July 2023 (Statista Research Department, 2023). Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures that mix and interact with each other, more prominently when people of two distinct ethnicities come together in holy matrimony, also known as interracial marriages. Besides, some cultures only exclusively found in the Malaysian climate originate from various intercultural marriages. As an example, the Baba Nyonya or Peranakans are a fusion of marriages between Chinese traders and Malay women in past decades (Leow, 2023). Another example would be the Mamaks, a designation for Tamil Muslims residing in Malaysia, as Hassan Mydin and Saidumasudu (2018) stated. These wonderful and distinct cultures resulted from decades-long mixed marriages, promoting the rich diversity Malaysia would have to offer.

Located in the eastern part of Malaysia and considered part of the Borneo islands, lies Sarawak. According to The Official Portal of Sarawak Government (n.d.), Sarawak

comprises 12 administrative divisions: Kuching, Samarahan, Serian, Sri Aman, Betong, Sarikei, Sibuan, Mukah, Bintulu, Kapit, Miri and Limbang. Sarawak is home to the indigenous Dayaks, the Malays as well as the Chinese, who each bring their customs and practices to the table. Sarawak itself has its own culture and diversity that differs from West Malaysia or Sabah as a whole, for instance, the usage of Bahasa Melayu Sarawak, a dialect of the Malay language predominantly spoken by Sarawakians. As globalisation rapidly increases in modern times, it is no surprise to know that most Sarawakians venture outside of their homes to the Peninsular or overseas, especially with the influx of Sarawakians moving to the West for their tertiary studies or better job opportunities. This practice may therefore bring about interracial marriages among Sarawakian Malays, Dayaks or Chinese with West Malaysians of differing ethnicities or a foreigner of another nationality.

Interracial marriages are not an uncommon sight in countries all over the world, with Malaysia having over 11% of mixed marriages in the year 2019 from the extensive amounts of registered marriages across the country (Loh, 2021). However, being in an interracial marriage comes with its own set of challenges. As a case in point, Malaysian society still generally views intercultural marriage to be taboo (Reddy & Selvanathan, 2020). Kerney (2021) argued that the existence of discrimination and hate based on racial structures is one of the main reasons why couples may perceive their interracial relationships as inappropriate. Likewise, Kerney also mentioned that approval or the lack thereof of these relationships from one's loved ones may also contribute to these feelings of low confidence. For instance, microaggressions committed by in-laws of women in interracial marriages lead to an unclear standing of their place in the family (Greif & Saviet, 2020), showcasing that any form of racism that manifests as

disapproval of the relationship is the main reason for feelings of instability in these interracial unions.

In addition, assimilation or adaptation to a partner's cultural practices that are significantly different from one's own culture may prove to be another issue on its own. Interracial marriages require both people in the relationship to properly understand and tolerate each other's customs and beliefs, which also means the eventual addition and mixture of the two cultures that are present in the new family. Moreover, there is the topic of ethnicity and religious faith that commonly intersects, more prominently, interwoven in the Malaysian community itself. It is still considered uncommon in West Malaysia for intercultural marriages to occur, especially for those converting to Islam from a non-Muslim background (Maznah et al., 2009; Nagaraj, 2009; Zainal, 2018). Hence, marriages between two people with different cultures as well as different religious beliefs pose its own set of issues.

Thus, it can be said that there are specific challenges that come with the commitment of being in a marriage with a partner of a different ethnicity. Various factors and causes that lead to the challenges and issues faced by those in mixed marriages should be properly investigated. Besides, the coping strategies used in overcoming these stressors in married life may prove useful in gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences. Therefore, this study will be able to contribute to society by exploring the challenges faced in interracial marriages among Sarawakian women. With sufficient information told through the real-life stories of these women, the right type of support can also be given out.

In short, the main aim of this study is to dive into the types of issues faced by Sarawakian women who are in marriages with a partner of a different race. Perspectives and the voices of women who identify as Sarawakian are taken into focus for this study, especially concerning the identification of the coping strategies they used as well as their hopes and expectations for the future regarding interracial marriages.

1.2 Problem Statements

Marriages between two people of differing ethnicities are not sacred in several parts of the world, especially in this modernised era of technological wonders. However, it is not to say that these interracial marriages do not come with challenges, most particularly, with the amount of pressure exerted on the spouses themselves. While it is shown that people in loving relationships tend to fare better in aspects of health, it is not usually the case for people in interracial relationships, as shown by a study conducted by Calderon et al. (2022), whereby couples in interracial relationships were reported to have poorer physical health and psychological wellbeing compared to their same race counterparts. Perhaps this can be attributed to the amount of discrimination faced by the couple, paired with the social stigma that comes with marrying a partner of a different race. For instance, Vazquez et al. (2019), found that Black-White couples facing stigma due to the nature of their relationship reported less positive marital satisfaction. Stigma perpetuated by family members also brought about a poorer quality of the relationship between interracial couples (Brooks & Morrison, 2022). However, a more satisfying experience of marriage with feelings of unity and acceptance between those of differing races can be cultivated if the couple are committed to making it work as well as appreciating each other's cultures more (Rich, 2023). In a Malaysian study, foreigners who married Malaysians also stated that they receive assistance in navigating

these challenges through their Malaysian life partner, and circle of friends and families (Husain et al., 2021). Vazquez et al. also mentioned that religious or spiritual faith assists in strengthening ties and increases satisfaction in their married life. Therefore, it is necessary to properly understand why statistics as such came about and the effects it may have on interracial married couples, to come up with solutions that can support them better.

Apart from that, there is found to be a lack of research and gaps from past studies when it comes to the topic of interracial marriages in Malaysia as a whole. Most research studies are primarily focused on Western communities. It is important to put a lens on the Malaysian community when it comes to discussing interracial relationships, as Malaysia is known as a multicultural country. Integration between the different races in Malaysia has led to a common sight of interracial marriages (Nagaraj, 2009; Reddy and Selvanathan, 2020). Further research should be done in terms of understanding the experiences of those in interracial marriages between the major races in Malaysia.

Next, the interception of race and religion plays a big role in the lives of interracial couples in Malaysia, hence, it would be beneficial for society to understand how these two aspects are related and conjoined. Among married Malaysian couples, religion was found to be a vital component that is used in establishing and regulating their married life (Zainul Abidin et al., 2018). Most research related to this topic rarely considers how changes in one's religious beliefs due to mixed marriages can affect the marriage in itself or their well-being as well. Reddy and Selvanathan (2020) also agreed that interracial Malaysian marriages are even more discouraged when religious faith is involved, in which one partner would have to undergo conversion in the process of

matrimony. Thus, it is also vital to dive into these issues when conducting this research study, more specifically in properly understanding the experiences of converts.

From another view, Sarawak, with a large population of indigenous communities of the Dayak people (with distinctions such as that of the Ibans, Bidayhuhs, Kenyans and more) remains underrepresented in Malaysian-focused research. Thus, it is important to note that the experiences of Sarawakians married to a partner of another race should be taken into consideration in conducting any related research. It may prove to be beneficial and open up new information regarding the challenges of one's mixed marriage in the context of a Sarawak-based social climate.

Marriage in general, seems to be a grand occasion for humanity that spans across centuries, most notably, for the women involved. Throughout most of history and even in the present day, men are commonly depicted as the caregivers and breadwinners of their families (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2018). Hence, as stated by Greene and Stiefvater (2019), women are pressured to marry well, whether as a rite of passage to adulthood, following expectations from their elders or for religious reasons, as well as the fact that there is a big focus on the concept of marriage being a woman's entire goal in life. In case studies done by Greif and Saviet (2020), the women reported having unsatisfying relationships with their in-laws the most, leading up to the feeling of the lack of support that they seek from their newfound family. Collecting and listening to the stories told firsthand by women in an interracial marriage can help shed light on the typical problems they may face that may differ from the opposite gender (due to gender roles and expectations, stereotypes and such). It may also bring about significant results that show how gender roles imposed between men and women affect their views and

experiences on marriage generally, interracial relationships and its impact on aspects of their mental health.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objectives

This research aims to understand the challenges faced in interracial marriages among Sarawakian women.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To explore the challenges of interracial marriages experienced by Sarawakian women.
2. To understand the coping strategies employed by Sarawakian women in interracial marriages.
3. To understand the future expectations and hopes of Sarawakian women in interracial marriages.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the possible challenges and issues in interracial marriages experienced by Sarawakian women?
2. How do Sarawakian women in interracial marriages cope with the challenges?
3. What are the future expectations and hopes of Sarawakian women in interracial marriages?

1.5 Research Framework

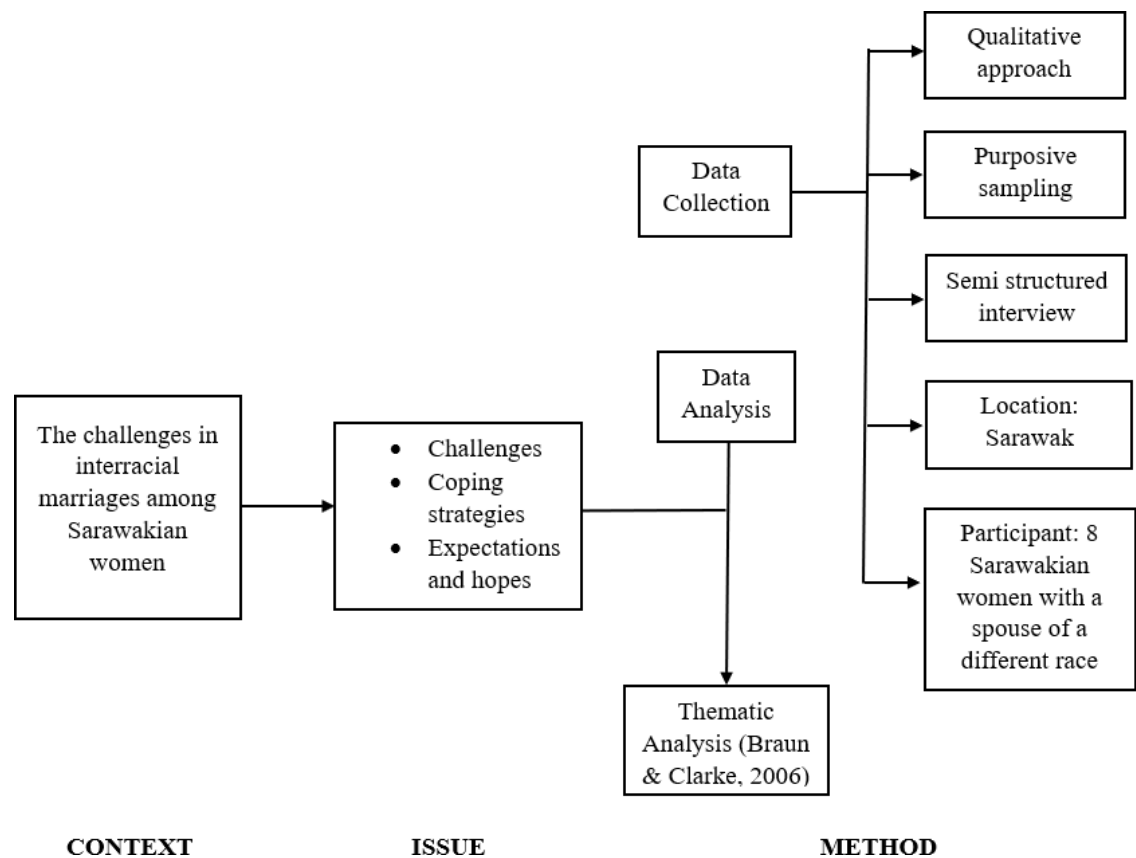


Figure 1. Research Framework

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research study explores in more depth the challenges faced by Sarawakian women in interracial marriages that may bring about a significant change and impact on the women themselves, their respective spouses, loved ones, as well as the Sarawakian and Malaysian communities. First and foremost, this study enables the public to thoroughly understand the experiences and certain hardships when it comes to marriage with a partner of a different race. With these, feelings of empathy and inclusivity can be promoted as a way to support those currently undergoing this situation.

Moreover, this study assists in lessening the amount of social stigma that comes with interracial marriages. It may also ensure an increase in social harmony as the Malaysian community tries to incorporate respect and understanding of the vast cultural perspectives found in the country.

Besides, shedding light on the challenges of marriage concerning women will open up a noticeable space whereby gender norms, stereotypes and expectations are discussed more openly. When gender equality becomes more prominent, it can help to empower women all over the country to take charge of the direction of their lives more courageously.

Lastly, this study provides benefits to the women involved in interracial marriages by delving into the types of support needed to overcome these challenges. Obtaining firsthand information on what we as a society can do to lessen their burden is important in ensuring that their voices are heard. Hence, family institutes especially those involving interracial families will be able to live a more vibrant, happier life knowing that the issues they face are understood and given support by the majority.

1.7 Definition of Terms

This research study will include certain terms, which will be defined below in two categories: conceptual definition and operational definition.

1.7.1 Interracial Marriage

Conceptual Definition:

Interracial marriage refers to a union between two individuals who are of distinct ethnicities and cultures. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), the word ‘interracial’ is defined as “involving different human races”. Meanwhile, ‘marriage’ has the meaning of “a legally accepted relationship between two people in which they live together” as stated by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.). Thus, it can be said that an interracial marriage involves the intertwining of two people’s lives, in which both of them openly share and accommodate each other’s unique cultures as a sign of love and commitment to one another.

Operational Definition:

In the context of this research study, interracial marriage is defined as a legally recognised matrimony of two people from different racial backgrounds. Participants of this study will be first screened by identifying their ethnicity and their respective spouses’ ethnicity. Once it is found that both partners in the marriage come from distinct cultures and ethnicities, hence, they can be considered as research participants who are in interracial marriages.

1.7.2 Sarawakian Women

Conceptual Definition:

Sarawakian carries the meaning “of or relating to Sarawak or its people” (Vocabulary.com Dictionary, n.d.). Besides, women, the plural of woman, is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) as “an adult female human being”. As such, Sarawakian women can be defined as people who identify as female and are born and raised in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Operational Definition:

For the operational definition of Sarawakian women, the study participants consisted of adults who are Sarawakian and are of the female gender. Concerning this research study, the participants would be women who have Sarawak as their birthplace on their identification cards and are accustomed to the norms and practices in Sarawak. To ensure that the research subjects fit the criteria of what is needed for this study, 8 female participants would be asked to disclose their identity such as their birthplace and place of residence firsthand.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This research study has the major objective to understand and explore the challenges faced in interracial marriages among Sarawakian women. However, it is pertinent to note and acknowledge that there are still certain limitations when conducting this research. Firstly, as the research is designed in a qualitative format through interviews, exploration and analysis of data obtained may be subjected to biases, such as that of the researcher's own bias or social desirability bias shown by the interviewees.

Furthermore, the generalisation of findings in this research study may be limited. Since this study focuses exclusively on the experiences of Sarawakian women, it may not be able to represent the entire population of Sarawak such as the men, as well as be unable to take into account the vast cultural point of views of other races in Sarawak. The conclusions taken from this research may also not be generalised in other parts of Malaysia such as Peninsular Malaysia which has its unique customs and practices. Hence, it is vital to keep in mind that the answers and data may not be an accurate representation of what the research intends to dive into.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces a review of existing works of literature about the topic of interracial marriages. Several sections, such as the concepts of marriage and interracial marriages, challenges and the coping strategies applied in interracial marriages were discussed in more detail.

2.1 Marriage

2.1.1 Concept of Marriage

Marriage has long been a tradition and custom that was, and still is, prevalent throughout the history of humankind. Marriage is defined as “a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (if any)” (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). Marriage can be traced back as a common practice as far back as ancient civilisations. Nevertheless, matrimonial union in the olden days was typically devoid of actual feelings of mutual love and attraction, but more to ensuring stability in the economic and societal aspects of life, as well as a solution in preserving their identities as a tribe (Garayová, 2021). As the centuries went on, the concept of marriage gradually changed as well, into what we know and understand today.

Marriage between two individuals (known as monogamy) occurs for several different reasons, most particularly, from a religious viewpoint. The Christians’ perspective on marriage is interwoven with God. For instance, in the Middle Ages, marriage was seen

as a lasting Christian sacrament or promise to God (Baker, 2019). Tomko (2018) also argued that marriages in Christian communities are seen as a calling or vocation for two people who are ready to love and sacrifice for each other. In fact, present-day legislation of the Church indicates that marriage serves two major purposes: for the spouses' own good and for giving birth to their children (Smoliński, 2019). Hence, marriage happens when two individuals come together to celebrate their companionship and welcome in a new phase of life as one entity, as newlyweds and new parents with the blessing of God.

Meanwhile, marriage is also perceived as an important legal occasion that is tied to the social laws of humanity. Antony et al. (2019) mentioned that marriage is seen as a type of socially acceptable and encouraged commitment between two different people, which enables both of them to cater to their emotional, social, occupational and sexual needs. This is consistent with a study conducted by Fallahchai and Fallahi (2019), whereby Iranian university students stated that their top reasons for getting married are due to emotional, religious and sexual purposes. Besides, marriage is an act that is regarded very highly in society and seen as a sort of achievement. Those who choose to remain unmarried are often stigmatised, due to the community's perception of singlehood as a marker of failure to adhere to social norms, which in turn causes adverse psychological and social impacts on the individuals facing these judgements (Himawan et al., 2018).

Thus, marriage is a normal occurrence in human society, with a long and interesting history of its origins. The concept of marriage has changed over time, from marriage being merely a social status for individuals, to a private relationship between two people

that symbolises a sense of fulfilment for the parties involved (Garayová, 2021). However, new trends of non-marriages or non-nuclear families are also evolving in this modern era.

2.1.2 Married Life

Getting married is a large stepping stone in the journey that is life. Perhaps one of the biggest distinctions in navigating life from a single person to a married person is the adjustment to another lifestyle. It is an entirely different world to experience life from before marriage to being in a marriage. For example, it was found that newlyweds have the common issue of adapting to married life as well as the practice of living together under the same roof with each other's spouses (İlhan & Işık, 2019). Despite that, Pretorius et al. (2021) examined the anticipation and adaptation effect before and after marriage within a sample space of South Africans. They discovered that men have a significantly longer anticipation effect, but generally, both genders adapt quickly to marriage. This is in accordance with a study by Williamson and Lavner (2019) whereby "the majority of spouses have high, stable trajectories during this period, and significant declines occur only among initially dissatisfied spouses". This shows that while adjustment to marital life for newlyweds may be difficult for some, adaptation eventually occurs as long as both parties are willing to try. As a matter of fact, spouses who view one another as their best friends receive the most benefits in terms of their wellbeing (Grover & Helliwell, 2019).

One's psychological wellbeing is a main identifier of the changes between life in non-marriage situations and life in a marriage. In a research study done by Grover and Helliwell (2019), married couples in the United Kingdom were reported to feel more

satisfied when compared with their non-married counterparts, whereby marriage is likely to become a component in ensuring their contentment in their middle ages. Moreover, individuals entering their midlife period who are satisfied with their marriage are more likely to feel happier with their perceived inner world, and interpersonal relationships with others (Moroz et al., 2019). Another paper written by Matkarimova and Kabakova (2020) stated that marriage provides advantages for the general wellbeing of an individual in the Republic of Kazakhstan, by positively influencing areas of psychological health and support, as well as increasing satisfaction in life. Furthermore, in a research study conducted in Singapore, marriage provides comfort to the individual in the sense of having companionship and support, which in turn influences their satisfaction in life and strengthens their coping strategies in facing difficulties in life, thus lessening the risk of developing mental health issues (Siva Kumar et al., 2019). Nevertheless, those who are unmarried or have remarried, in contrast with a couple that is continuously married, tend to fare just as well as or even better than the latter in certain aspects of wellbeing (Hsu & Barrett, 2020). Hsu and Barrett also emphasise that gender seems to play a part in measuring one's psychological wellbeing between married and unmarried people. For instance, they found that women, who have been married more than once, or never married at all, reaped more benefits in terms of their wellbeing compared to men. Yet, it was also noted that men obtain greater mental health benefits in a marriage whereas married women had more psychological stress (Huntington et al., 2022; Kurdek, 2005).

When discussing the differences between singlehood and married life, the topic of child-rearing is inevitable. Having a child on top of being in a marriage is a large change in one's life, it also requires strength and willpower to adjust to these new developments

properly. Shimizu (2020) found that both spouses view their way of child-rearing differently than one another due to their own upbringing and respective personality traits. In contrast, wives generally feel very appreciative of their husband's efforts in taking care of their children, whereas the husbands tend to perceive their child-rearing practices as solely individual rather than a collaboration with their spouses (Shimizu, 2021). Overall, co-parenting on top of navigating marriage is a challenge that most people struggle with as they enter married life.

In short, married life has a significant impact on couples, especially in terms of their wellbeing. Adjustment to life as one another's spouse, and living together as well as raising children together were among the obvious differences of life before and after marriage. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to note that gender roles, gender expectations, and cultural norms may contribute to the level of adjustment and wellbeing of married couples experiencing life post-marriage. Hence, the amount of works of literature available that are mostly focused on a Western context may not be generalisable for those living in the Asian regions.

2.2 Marriage in Malaysia

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023), the overall number of marriages registered in the year 2022 was 214824 marriages, obtaining a 0.5% decrease in the rate of marriages in comparison with that of the year 2021. Apart from that, the Muslim marriage rate in 2022 was 4.1% less than it was in 2021, whereas there is an increase of 15.3% from the year 2021 to 2022 for non-Muslim marriages. Thus, there is a steady stream of couples entering married life year by year in Malaysia.

Malaysia is known as a multiracial and multi-religion country in Southeast Asia. While Islam is the country's official religion, anyone is free to practise their own faith and beliefs as stated by Article 3 of the constitution (MyGovernment Portal, n.d.). Malay Muslims make up a majority of the Malaysian demographics as well.

Based on a study done by Sumiati and Jamaluddin (2023), the teachings of Islam specify that marriage includes a strong formation of bonds between the husband and wife and that having a marriage took place is considered as obeying Allah's laws and also seen as a way of worship. In addition, Islam discourages a romantic relationship between a man and woman that has no intentions to further the relationship to marriage, but rather, for both parties to lay the foundations of their relationship that leads to a pure and holy matrimony (Abdul Aziz et al., 2020). Abdul Aziz et al. also argued that a legal and official marriage between two people who love each other will assist one in acquiring a wider understanding of the Islamic faith and getting closer to Allah. Hence, religious factors play a giant role in facilitating Muslim marriages here in Malaysia (Fallahchai & Fallahi, 2019; Manap et al., 2013).

Malaysia adheres to social customs and norms that are typical of Asian or Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, it is no surprise that Malaysians' perceptions of marriage share similarities with those in differing Asian countries as well. Mohd. Razif (2020) wrote that in Malaysian culture, or *adat*, one's marital status is of the utmost importance, as it provides an avenue to intimacy with your lover and grants rights to reproduction. Malaysian society may also view a person as a functional adult only when he fathers children or when she becomes the mother of someone's child or someone's wife (Mohd. Razif, 2020; Peletz, 1996). This perception of marriage is also interwoven

in the social rules written in the Malaysian community, whereby marriage is quite accessible and encouraged, in order to prevent young couples from conducting any unlawful sexual intimacy acts pre-maritally (Mohd. Razif, 2020). To conclude, Malaysian communities see marriage as an act of achieving success in one's life, as well as a solution to ensure courtships between couples remain clean and untouched by pre-marital intimacy, which also intersects with religious rules and teachings imposed in Malaysia.

2.3 Interracial Marriages in Malaysia

Interracial marriages are nothing new or shocking for the multicultural society of Malaysia. As of 2019, about 11% of registered marriages in Malaysia were mixed marriages between individuals of distinct racial backgrounds (Loh, 2021). Integration, assimilation and adaptation between the many races present in Malaysia is what makes Malaysia a unique country, but it also makes mixed marriage commonplace (Nagaraj, 2009; Reddy & Selvanathan, 2020). These interracial marriages that are increasing more in more in Malaysia have also led to a rise in the demographic of multiracial people (Ang & Shik, 2013; Chong, 2009; Reddy & Selvanathan, 2020). For instance, Reddy and Selvanathan provide examples such as the usage of the label 'Chindian' to describe those who are simultaneously Chinese and Indian, 'Chiban' (Chinese and Iban descent) and 'Sino-Kadazan' (Chinese and Kadazan descent), which are the multiracial identities of individuals born out of interracial marriages in Malaysia. Apart from mixed-heritage children born out of the major races in Malaysia, there are also multiracial identities formed from cultures outside of the country, due in part to colonisations from previous powers. As an exemplification, Loh and Karubi (2018)

identified specific terms such as the 'Kristang', children of Portuguese descent and Malaysians.

Focusing on the context of Sarawak, mixed race marriages are also typically common, most particularly, between the Dayaks and the Malays or non-Bumis. In a study conducted by Nagaraj (2009) based on the year 2000 Population Consensus, interracial marriages has a higher rate in East Malaysia than Peninsular Malaysia, possibly due to a more diverse population of differing ethnicities found in the East when compared with the Western part of Malaysia. As recent as June 2024, Dr. Jerip Susil, the Deputy Minister of Transport of Sarawak, presented native status certificates to children of mixed native Sarawakian and non-native parents, citing that "There are many mixed marriages in Sarawak, which is our uniqueness. It is our law that children whose parents (either father or mother) are native can apply for Sarawak bumiputera status" (Dayak Daily, 2024, para. 5). This has also enabled them access in purchasing and inheriting native Sarawakian land (Ting et al., 2023). The privileges given to those born out of indigenous interracial marriages are certainly rewarding, hence, it is no surprise that intercultural matrimony in Sarawak will eventually be on the rise in the near decades.

On the other end of the spectrum, intercultural marriages between Malaysians and non-Malaysians are also prevalent in the country. This has contributed to the existence of unique terms used to describe descendants of these transnational marriages such as Eurasians (European Asians) and Pan-Asians (Pacific-Asian/Asian Americans) (Loh & Karubi, 2018). The Registration Department of Malaysia recorded about 29,698 marriages between non-Muslim Malaysians and foreigners from the year 2018 up to November 2022 (Abd Halim, 2023; Jana Saim, 2023). In addition, it was found that

there is an increase of around 12.3% in these types of marriage from the year 2017 to 2018 (Abdullah, 2019; Jana Saim, 2023). Hence, it goes to show that love indeed, has no boundaries, even for two individuals who are of differing ethnicities and culture, and perhaps even different nationalities.

2.4 Gender Roles in Marriages

Sex and gender are two distinct concepts that share certain similarities. Lips (2020) stated that sex refers to the biological perspective of the definition of male and female, on the basis of differences in anatomy; whereas gender is more concerned with the nonbiological aspects of male and female - cultural expectations in society on the masculine and feminine roles played respectively by men and women. However, Helgeson (2020) argued that the term 'gender' should be reconstructed into 'gender roles' instead, showcasing the expectations society imposes on men and women to act accordingly: masculinity meaning to be more aggressive, independent and competitive, and femininity to behave more emotionally expressive and nurturing.

Gender roles are prevalent in every component of society, and the institute of marriage is no different. Men were seen as the sole breadwinner and providers of the family, while women were expected to cater to house chores and take care of their children, in conjunction with the view of a more patriarchal society in which men dominate over women (Choi et al., 2021). Because of prevailing gender norms of men being the leader of the family, single women are pressured by parents and society to marry well in order to be supported by their husbands (Gui, 2022). But as industrialisation gradually brings about shifts in society in the near decade, these gender roles are also undergoing processes of change. The emergence of new family norms and dynamics, such as having

women now take part in income acquirement for the family through lasting careers, and men being more involved in childcare signifies a switch in traditional gender roles (Oláh et al., 2018).

New and more modern gender roles, also referred to as ‘egalitarian gender roles’ where the husband and wife are not tied to traditional stereotypes pertaining to their gender are on the rise. The egalitarian gender norms practised by recently married couples were also found to have a significant impact on marriage and divorce statistics. In the United States, as egalitarian gender roles become more dominant and prevalent in its society, marital instability decreases, thus leading to lower rates of divorce among married couples (Pessin, 2018). In addition, a more egalitarian route predicted more satisfaction for women in practising their gender roles, based on a study by Soltanpanah et al. (2017). However, higher satisfaction in gender roles due to a more egalitarian approach is only applicable in a Westernised environment, where views of gender inequality are more radical and less accepted compared to other continents. Nonetheless, Soltanpanah et al. did conclude that satisfaction in one’s gender roles affects their life satisfaction too, regardless of culture.

With the mentions of cultural differences and cultural norms, the gender roles played by men and women concerning their marriage may be influenced by these cultural factors too. Non-Western cultures, focusing on the region of Asia, adhere to traditional gender norms more strongly, perhaps due to the upholding of a more patriarchal viewpoint in their community. As an example, women residing in East Asian societies are expected to conform to the gender role of “becoming a dedicated mother”, which also affects their levels of happiness in life (Hori & Kamo, 2017; Ochiai et al., 2008;

Qian & Qian, 2015). In addition, women in Central Asia with a more traditionalist view on gender roles reported the lowest statistics in levelling up to a higher social class, subscribing to the belief that men should be providers of the family as they are presented with more opportunities and the privilege to easily pursue education and obtain jobs (Urbaeva, 2019). Besides, the collectivist culture that is widespread among Asian communities also plays a major role in the dissemination of traditional gender norms in Asia. As stated by Ercan and Uçar (2021), the collectivist urge to include extended family members and friends in discussions of potential marriages and spouse choices leads most women in Turkey to take traditional gender roles into account when approaching the topic of marriage.

In short, gender roles are very prominent in a heterosexual marriage, where men are expected to take charge of the family's finances and overall livelihood, whereas the women are to ensure the stability of the family such as actively being involved in child-rearing and conducting house chores. This is particularly reflected in a male-dominant society, yet, as modernity embraces us all, more equal or egalitarian gender role practices are increasing in several households, providing higher satisfaction for those involved.

2.5 Interracial Marriages

Interracial marriage is the holy matrimony between two individuals who are of distinct ethnicities and cultures. In the United States, intercultural marriage was not seen as a legitimate union up til the early 20th century, due to the anti-miscegenation laws that were introduced in the country when slavery was abolished (Hamzoui, 2018). Miscegenation is defined by Provost (2023) as the mixing or reproduction between two

individuals of differing race and ethnicity, especially between Whites and non-Whites. Hamzoui also mentioned that it was considered forbidden for Whites to pursue a romantic relationship with any Black person in the United States, although finally “in 1967, the Supreme Court of the United States *Loving v. Virginia* declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional”. Thus, interracial marriages are no longer taboo in the eyes of the law, which in turn causes a sharp increase in inter-race relationships and marriages for citizens of the United States. Since the anti-miscegenation laws were discarded in 1967, 3% of newlyweds the following year were comprised of interracial marriages, and kept increasing with data in 2015 recording more than 670,000 interracial marriages (Livingston & Brown, 2017).

Interracial marriages in Europe are also trending upward, especially in recent decades. While Europe is considered a rich tapestry of several cultures originating from different countries in the continent itself, such as that of Nordic, Slavic, Celtic cultures and so forth, exogamous marriage (marrying outside of your identified group) rates are high, especially among migrants in several European countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Estonia, Romania, and Spain (Hannemann et al., 2018). In contrast, it was found that in Sweden, white Swedish citizens generally favour marrying someone outside of their own race if they legally and culturally identify as Swedish, as compared to marrying someone who is racially different from them and is also of a different nationality (Osanami Törngren, 2018).

It can be said that interracial marriages are a worldwide experience, nonetheless, the history, current perceptions and perspectives of people in regard to interracial marriages are also dependent on geographical and cultural factors.

2.6 Challenges in Interracial Marriages

2.6.1 Discrimination & Stigma

Interracial marriages in general may pose several challenges for the couples involved. Perhaps one of the biggest difficulties that come with being in a mixed marriage is the discrimination and stigma faced, especially when considering the rich history of interracial marriages, such as that of the United States which decades ago only just ruled out anti-miscegenation laws. While interracial marriages are common and widespread now, society in most parts, still views mixed-race relationships as taboo.

Discrimination based on one's racial identity, "is understood to be a combination of the ideology of racial superiority (racism) and the social structures and interpersonal behaviors associated with dominance and oppression" (Pieterse & Powell, 2006; Kirkinis et al., 2018). Racism is prevalent among mixed-race couples in relationships and marriage. Yeung (2021) noted that microaggressions and implicit bias on the basis of race that is passed down in the family are among the forms of racism faced by couples of differing races. This racial aggression may be due in part to certain aspects of social psychology, such as ingroup and outgroup influences. According to Robinson (2019), people often have the belief that the group they belong to is the best among other groups, hence contributing to feelings of closeness to anyone who shares similar characteristics, such as hair colour. Thus, people who are perceived to be different from them physically may invoke feelings of unease, as they may think that they lack a common ground in experience and are wary of their own people entering romantic relationships with a member of the 'outgroup'. Robinson also takes into account the role of prejudice and stigma in perceptions of interracial marriages, whereby mostly negative stereotypes are imposed on the 'other person' (typically a Person of Colour)

at the first touchpoint. For instance, in Malki's (2021) article, one participant commented that he refused to have a Black brother-in-law as he assumes that all Black people are untrustworthy, based on his personal negative experiences with a handful of them. In addition, overt beliefs that the ingroup is superior to others mirror that of racial supremacy, which may also negatively affect interracial couples. As an exemplification, research conducted by Oh (2018) found that White supremacy, or the belief that Whiteness prevails throughout the United States, sees interracial couples as a threat to the racial structure of White people in the country.

In Malaysia, discrimination based on race is prevalent in the community, most particularly in the form of racial microaggressions. Lino and Hashim (2019) found that the abundance of ethnic groups in Malaysia still faces microaggressions due to their racial identity, influenced by in-group similarities and outgroup differences. Since Malaysia is a multiracial society, perhaps the need to preserve and maintain respective cultural traditions and customs for generations to come contributes to a wider inclination for marriages within one's ethnic group, leading to a less-than-positive view and stigmatised attitude towards interracial marriage in Malaysia. (Foo, 2016; Nor Hafizam et al., 2023). This is the same case with transnational marriages, especially when the foreigner in the marriage is non-White. For instance, in a study done by Anaelechi et al. (2022), African spouses married to Sarawakian women noted that they faced several forms of discrimination due to their race, such as not having access to a work visa which impacted their family's income, or receiving racist and xenophobic remarks from others in their community, due to the negative perceptions that people and the media alike have towards Africans. However, the research study completed by Nor Hafizam et al. collected findings whereby Malaysians' level of understanding and

acceptance of interracial marriages within the country was high. Another study by Damin et al. (2022) also obtained findings whereby most Malays agree that interracial marriages can affect the levels of tolerance positively between the Malays and the minorities in Malaysia. To summarize, while the discrimination of racial identities alongside social stigma plays a part as a big challenge in the marital institution of interracial couples in the context of a Western country like the United States, Malaysia's community is generally more accepting of mixed marriages.

2.6.2 Lack of Support

Marriage is a joyous ceremony, a symbol of the union of two families coming together to celebrate the love between two people in their family institution. Nonetheless, interracial couples tend to receive less support, or to some extent, rejection of their matrimonial celebration from their close ones (Midy, 2018; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Family and friends alike may not accept the interracial relationship between the couple due to many reasons, such as racial biases or implicit discrimination. For certain individuals, continuing the relationship or even taking it to new heights such as proposing marriage, depends on whether his/her family are ready to accept someone outside of their racial group (Alkayid & Awad, 2019). Research by Henderson and Brantley (2019) recorded findings that low parental support contributes to stress between both same-race and different-race couples, which in turn may increase the risk of depressive symptoms of the individuals affected. Midy also argued that the disagreement or lessening degree of support for their romantic choices may manifest in less satisfaction in the marriage, and even feelings of annoyance and hatred toward one's own partner.

In social or public situations, interracial couples are also victims of hostility and rejection from others, which is also deemed as a lack of social support outside of their immediate circle (Midy, 2018). This interrelates with acts of racial prejudice or bias that contribute to discrimination based on one's racial identity. For instance, it was found that interracial couples tend to show less public display of affection due to the increased visibility of the public's perception of both of them (Steinbugler, 2005; Walter, 2022). Interracial couples in public spaces reported getting stared at in a way that incites uncomfortableness, showcasing less support and approval for the existence of their relationship (Bauer, 2010; Zambelli, 2023). Another example of hostility would be in the form of unnecessary discourse. In a study exploring experiences of discrimination in Black-White couples, Black partners more often than not receive comments or questions about their marriage from their own racial community, such as how their identity as a Black person could be impacted just because they married a White person (Rosenblatt et. al, 1995; Walker, 2020). The disapproval shown and displayed by others in public spaces through subtle gestures such as the aforementioned, indicates a lack of support towards relationships of the romantic kind for individuals of different races.

The governmental institutions also plays a significant role in contributing to the challenges of those in interracial marriages, more so in the case of marriage between Malaysians and their foreign spouses. There is a lack of support and resources given to people in mixed international marriages, in terms of citizenship rights and access to nationwide services. Jana Saim et al. mentioned that Malaysian women, who have husbands of a different nationality suffers from governmental laws that inhibits their offspring to obtain Malaysian citizenship, in comparison to when it is a Malaysian man

with his foreign wife. This type of systemic discrimination can be seen as a lack of support towards their marriage and creates new problems for the couple financially, psychologically and socially. Hence, having little or no support at all on the basis of their relationship is a challenge every interracial couple inevitably goes through.

2.6.3 Adaptation to Each Other's Culture

Marriage between two individuals is about loving one another enough to be willing to compromise, in order to create shared experiences and moments in life together. Therefore, spouses must learn to tolerate each other's quirks, habits and customs, especially as they move in together as a unit. This also includes both parties involved to be receptive of each other's unique cultural traditions, practices and norms, when concerning individuals in an interracial marriage. Hence, a couple who realises and understand that they are both two people who are from distinct backgrounds and cultures will spend less time in learning and adapting to each other's cultural norms (Anaelechi et al., 2022; Romano, 1997).

Language barriers and long-standing familial and cultural practices are among the challenges interracial couples have to go through together (Alkayid & Awad, 2019; Renalds, 2011). For a marriage of two distinct cultures to work, every individual would need to practice open-mindedness, being less subservient to ethnocentrism and more tolerant towards ambiguity in the context of a foreign culture that is not one's own. It is vital to shed the high levels of these aforementioned components, as "the acceptance of interracial relationships may require an individual to think outside of societal norms, a low tolerance for ambiguity could be related to a low acceptance of interracial relationships" (Robinson, 2019). Being tolerant of each other's cultural practices,

despite the differences and unfamiliarity may also ensure peace to prosper in the household (Anaelechi et al., 2022). Spouses would have to work together as a family to learn and appreciate the diversity presented in their respective identities.

The same goes for religions too, particularly when one person in the relationship makes the decision to convert to their spouse's religion. For example, in Malaysia, when a non-Muslim marries a Muslim, they would have to convert and practise the Islamic faith as per the laws mandated in the country. Puah et al. (2021) stated that most Muslim converts chose to fully accept the teachings of Islam to further assimilate into the Muslim community and to feel a sense of welcome. Besides, some converts with children worked alongside their spouses in sharing each other's heritage, thus causing their child to be able to adapt to both cultures easily and communicate well with both sides of their family (Roslan et al., 2022).

In a nutshell, adapting to an entirely new culture may become difficult if an individual chooses not to embrace tolerance and openness. Nonetheless, it is also important for the spouses to support each other in learning the traditions and practices in their newly formed union as both husband and wife to overcome this challenge.

2.6.4 Deterioration of Psychological Wellbeing

These difficulties faced in navigating interracial marriages together may also lead to poorer psychological wellbeing. Although there seems to be an upward tick in one's wellbeing and life satisfaction when they are married, the same cannot be accounted for for those in interracial marriages. As an example, Wong and Penner (2018) brought to light that same-race partners who are married or are living together show fewer

depressive symptoms, though those in intercultural relationships may not necessarily obtain the same benefits for their psychological health. This is possibly due in part to the discrimination endured by the couples, alongside a lack of social support from their community. Moreover, a study in 2023 by Pittman et al. (2023), found that “interracial couples were, on average, more likely to experience discrimination, and higher perceived stress, more depressive symptoms, and worse overall self-rated health” compared to individuals in a same-race marriage. This is in accord with research by Calderon et al. (2022), in which mixed-race couples possess poor physical health as well as poorer psychological wellbeing. It is clear that the accumulation of stress from stigmatisation and discrimination, having little to no support from their network, paired with the need to fit in and compromise with respective spouses’ differing cultures, significantly affects the wellbeing of interracial couples and leads to mental health issues as well. Therefore, the satisfaction of the quality of their relationship may be affected too. These factors alongside other stressors may contribute to a shorter lifespan of their romantic relationships (Brown et al., 2018; Kreider, 2000). It was reported that interracial couples filed for divorce more than same-race couples, projecting about 41% chance of interracial divorces than the 31% accounted for marriages of similar racial makeup (Yeung, 2021).

2.7 Coping Strategies in Overcoming Challenges in Interracial Marriages

2.7.1 Support From Loved Ones

While it is evident that there is a myriad of challenges that come with being in an interracial marriage, there are also certain coping strategies that can be employed, especially for the women in these mixed marriages. Perhaps one of the biggest and most common coping strategies for these unique challenges is to find support in the arms of

loved ones. As an exemplification, parental support is among one of the top choices children go to for reassurance and advice. Concerning romantic relationships, parents play a major role in developing their children's perception of the quality and healthiness of their romantic life through family practices and the environment at home (Henderson & Brantley, 2019; Raby et al., 2015; Xia et al., 2018). Therefore, it is a given that children would seek help from their parents the most regarding their mixed-race relationships.

Furthermore, social support from their friends or their community is also vital in overcoming the difficulties of experiencing mixed marriages. The presence of societal support for couples in interracial marriages provides them accessibility to social capital, forming positive relationships with others that also bring about benefits in terms of assistance within their community (Grether & Jones, 2020; Jang & Danes, 2016). Besides, a supportive circle is also found to be a vital component in preserving the spouses' commitment to each other, not just for those in interracial relationships but also for married people generally (Dainton, 2015; Grether & Jones, 2020).

Aside from relying on one's inner circle for support in navigating issues arising from their interracial marriage, it is obvious that support from one's spouse is the most important part of coping. According to Sappor & Affum (2023), being able to communicate with one another effectively, such as giving one space if needed, or making sure to have talks together when the need arises is seen as a resource in coping, as well as the action of sharing house chores or initiating romantic gestures like gift-giving or physical intimacy. The act of practicing effective communication between spouses is also supported by Anaelechi et al. (2022), based on a qualitative study done

to gauge the types of support Malaysian women and their African spouses offer to one another. Protecting one's spouse from negativity such as racial discrimination is also a form of love that can strengthen the relationship between husband and wife, alongside providing support in their marriage.

2.7.2 Professional Help

Cultural dissimilarities and unfamiliarity are among the top reasons why interracial marriages may fail compared to same-race marriages. Although support from one's spouse is very important in diving into a foreign cultural practice or norms, it is not the sole solution. Challenges arising from the experiences of people in interracial relationships and marriage may lead to a less-than-desirable result in one's psychological wellbeing. This, of course, may potentially bring about a myriad of mental health issues, therefore, interventions in the form of receiving professional help could be necessary. Counselling or therapy can provide a wider network of support for the couple to go through these issues together, however, it is better to have the counsellor take into account multicultural perspectives when conducting their sessions (Daniel, 2023). Notice (2019) also noted that while most couples, including interracial couples, attend therapy for common issues in any type of marriage, it should be ingrained in the therapist's practice that these issues may be attributed to several factors that are unique to those in mixed marriages, including differences in ethnic backgrounds. As such, a more beneficial counselling session can be completed by the couples, lessening their distress.

2.7.3 Religion

Religion remains an integral part of humankind. Almost everyone in the world professes a certain religion and finds comfort in it. People turn to God and ask for assistance through prayers, religious ceremonies and so much more, hence, this may lead to a peaceful state of mind for some as well as relieving symptoms of stress or other negative feelings. This can be applied in the context of interracial married couples who are looking to cope with the constant pressures associated with their marriage. Henderson and Brantley (2019) mentioned that those who engage in religion with their different race partner provides an avenue for both of them to focus on their personal, internal identities such as spirituality and kindness, rather than on physical aspects of themselves like their racial makeup. In addition, in a study conducted by Vazquez et al. (2019), religion provides advantages for interracial couples by giving them a platform to increase their resilience and adapt to the negative stigmas they may receive on the topic of their relationship. Thus, it goes to show that partners in mixed marriages can turn to religion to counter the challenges they have to endure in their marriage.

2.8 Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing is defined as the positive state of mind belonging to an individual. It also includes one's life satisfaction and overall happiness in life. Psychological wellbeing is multidimensional, whereby several aspects of mental and physical health are considered, such as stress, disabilities and other physical health issues (Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). It is further divided into two major types: hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing. According to Bojanowska et al. (2022), hedonic wellbeing is concerned with the acquirement of positive emotions and the absence of negative ones, leading to one's satisfaction with life, whereas eudaimonic

wellbeing focuses on the development of one's skills in order to achieve self-actualisation.

Perhaps the most famous instrument used in measuring psychological wellbeing is psychologist Carol Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scales. The tool itself is further divided into six separate domains: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationships, personal growth, purpose in life, and autonomy (Ryff, 1989). However, Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scales only focuses on measuring eudaimonic wellbeing. Hence, the PERMA model, another theory put forth in the realm of measuring psychological wellbeing, will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

In the context of exploring the challenges of interracial marriages among Sarawakian women, determining and understanding the level of psychological wellbeing of these women through in-depth interviews can be a viable way to enrich pieces of literature pertaining to this topic. More particularly, it provides a deeper understanding of how Malaysian cultures play a role in influencing the wellbeing of people in interracial relationships, as well as suggestions to improve the psychological wellbeing of those who are affected by difficulties found in mixed marriages.

2.9 PERMA Model

The PERMA model was developed by positive psychologist Martin Seligman (2011) in his book entitled 'Flourish'. Seligman stated that the PERMA model symbolises the five pillars needed in order to build a life full of feelings of fulfilment. In addition, the PERMA model is the first to include both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of wellbeing

into one theoretical framework (Goodman et al., 2018; Seligman, 2011). It includes five components that make up the acronym PERMA, which are: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.

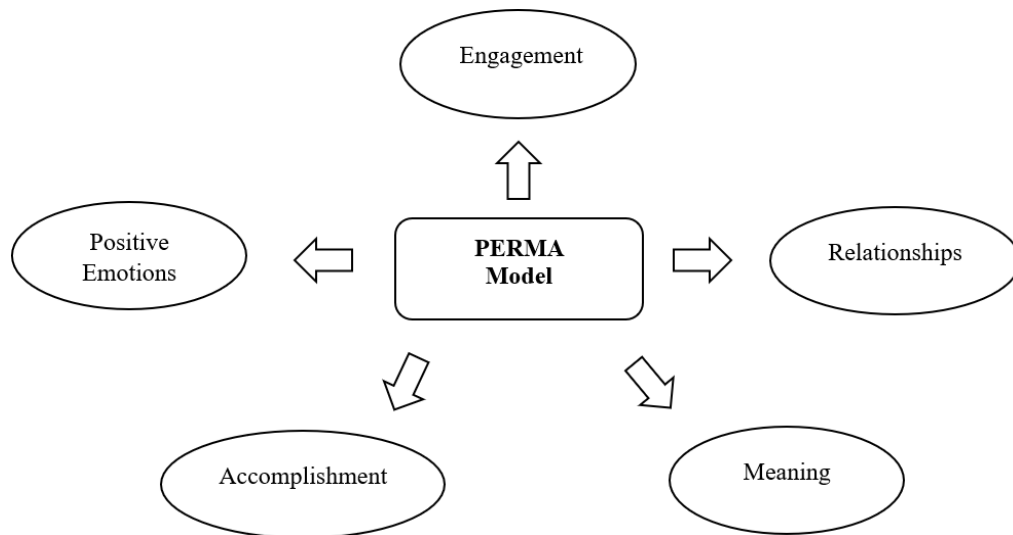


Figure 2. PERMA Model (Seligman, 2011)

2.9.1 Positive Emotions

Positive emotions are categorised as certain feelings that bring joy to the individual, thus defined as emotions that are positive. This includes emotions like happiness, pleasure and contentment (Feng et al., 2020). This array of emotions contributes to one's psychological wellbeing by ensuring hedonia is experienced, in which negative emotions (such as sadness, sorrow and worry) are absent. When one experiences these positive emotions rather than negative ones, they tend to feel more satisfaction in life. Thus, higher levels of life satisfaction also translates to higher levels of psychological wellbeing.

Being in a loving marriage with one's spouse should invoke feelings of happiness and pleasure. However, pertaining to the topic of interracial marriages, many issues may arise and may cause negative emotions to prevail over the joys of marriage instead. This, of course, will affect the psychological wellbeing of the couples involved. Therefore, it is vital that spouses work together to overcome this challenge and maintain a sense of love and pleasure for one another in their married life.

2.9.2 Engagement

Engagement in the context of the PERMA model includes conducting any sort of activities that are interesting to the self and one where they can truly immerse in it, until they may even feel as if time has stopped for them when indulging in those activities (Feng et al. 2020). This may include taking the time to do one's hobbies or pastimes in relation to their interests. For instance, a person whose hobby is knitting is said to have an engagement when they sit down and knit for hours on end, not aware that time has slipped by since they are truly focused on the activity.

Couples in interracial marriage, or perhaps even marriage in a general sense, should practice the act of engagement as much as possible. They can engage in several types of activities either individually or as a couple, with the latter being able to tighten the bond between husband and wife. Engagement, as defined by the PERMA model also enables both spouses in an interracial marriage to relieve themselves of the pressure and challenges ever present in their married life, at least for a short while. This will bring about an energy of positive emotions, and as previously mentioned, can improve their psychological wellbeing.

2.9.3 Relationships

Relationships is the bond formed between individuals and other people around them. As stated by Feng et al. (2020), it may also include the societal components of life such as the integration and assimilation within a community that the individual decides to be a part of. Being social creatures by nature, human beings need to communicate and form relationships with each other, for the satisfaction of life and the creation of memories that facilitate positive emotions, thus leading to good psychological wellbeing.

Married couples should have good relationship ties with each other, as well as their spouse's families and respective circle of friends. Expanding knowledge and communication beyond one's own culture may prove to be beneficial, especially if the intention includes properly getting immersed and understanding your own spouse's cultural and ethnic identity and norms. The existence of these relationships can ensure that there is a healthy development of a person's identity beyond just their marriage. Relationships can also provide engagement, one of the components in the PERMA model by joining in on activities with their social circle. Besides, the relationships formed between individuals and others can enable them to seek assistance and support from people when the difficulties and pressures of being in an interracial marriage get too much.

2.9.4 Meaning

"Meaning is defined as belonging to something larger than the self and feeling connected to something beyond oneself", concluded Feng et al. (2020) in explaining the 'M' in Seligman's PERMA model of wellbeing. It can be tied into philosophical

understandings of what the meaning of the self, or life is, rather than just seeing the self superficially. Meaning in the context of PERMA model also has relations with eudaimonic wellbeing, which is the pursuit of self-actualisation.

Although current technological trends have contributed to a decline in marriage rates in the practical sense, the symbolism that marriage brings is still high and continues the desire for humankind to engage in marriage (Cherlin, 2004; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Pessin, 2018). This shows that people still value the meaning of what it means to be in a marriage. Apart from that, those in interracial marriages may also find meaning in understanding the cultures of others who are different from them, as well as garnering appreciation and promoting tolerance for the diversity of racial and cultural identities of humankind. Nevertheless, a person needs to balance between their own culture and their spouse's, for a healthier formation of cultural identity and a satisfactory life as well (Sappor & Affum, 2023).

2.9.5 Accomplishment

The last element in the PERMA model is accomplishment, explained as success or ability in conducting tasks or jobs (Feng et al., 2020). An individual who can master tasks will feel a sense of accomplishment, and it is typically accompanied by feelings of joy and pride, which are associated with positive emotions. This leads to better psychological wellbeing overall.

There are many challenges an interracial couple in a marriage would have to go through. Nevertheless, if they are able to overcome these difficulties and enjoy the life of being married to someone they love, it can be said that they have managed to accomplish the

act of solving these issues. Hence, they would feel more satisfied with the course of their life, alongside increasing the level of their psychological wellbeing.

2.10 Summary

This chapter discussed the abundance of pieces of literature related to the topic of interracial marriage and the challenges faced by couples in such marriages. The history of interracial marriages, statistics of mixed marriages, and obstacles alongside coping strategies were reviewed extensively. Besides, other important aspects of marriage such as gender roles and life after marriage were included in this chapter. The concept of psychological wellbeing and the PERMA model were introduced as well.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter mainly covers the research methodology adopted for this study. In this chapter, the research design, pilot study, information on research participants and sampling procedure planned for this study were explored. Moreover, the procedures that were conducted for the collection of data and analysis of the data, validity and reliability, the ethics of the study, and a summary of the methods that were applied in the research are included in this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

This research study is categorised as a qualitative study. Qualitative research, according to Tenny et al. (2017), is a type of research where a participant's views, experiences and behaviours are collected, answering questions about the hows and whys. It differs from quantitative research methods which are more concerned with quantifiable data and the correlation between two variables. A qualitative approach enables explanations of social norms and provides meanings to human activities and behaviours (Leavy, 2014). Thus, this research design complements the topic and objectives of this study, whereby the researcher explored in more depth the challenges and experiences of interracial marriages among Sarawakian women, the coping strategies employed by these women and their future hopes and expectations. It was done through semi-structured interviews with a selected amount of participants who had shared their own rich experiences and meanings about being in an interracial marriage, which was beneficial for the researcher.

3.2 Pilot Study

Pilot studies are typically small-scale studies conducted before actual data collection, for researchers to test out the procedures and methods they have in planning for a larger research investigation (Arian et al., 2010; Lowe, 2019). For this research, a pilot study was planned before conducting the actual interview sessions with 8 participants, involving 1 participant who is a Sarawakian woman in an interracial marriage. The guided questions prepared beforehand was used as interview questions in the pilot study, while the researcher gauged the understanding and apprehension of the participant towards the questions. Afterwards, the questionnaire was revised to ensure that it was adequately structured to answer the research questions and objectives (see *Appendix* for the revised guided questions). Hence, it showed the importance of conducting a pilot study beforehand, which was to heighten and maintain the quality of research results obtained in the actual data collection process, as pilot studies enabled researchers to find areas of improvement in constructing their questionnaires for the participants (Malmqvist et al., 2019).

3.3 Participants

When selecting the appropriate participants for this research study, four inclusion criteria were formulated as listed in Table 1. Eight women who fulfilled all four inclusion criteria were chosen to participate in this study. The participants in this research were involved voluntarily, and were given virtual Grab or Zus Coffee gift vouchers.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in Selecting Participants

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Sarawakian	Non-Sarawakian
Female	Male
Married	Single or unmarried
Married to a spouse of a different race	Married to a spouse of the same race

This study aims to shine a light on the experiences of women who identify as Sarawakian and are in interracial marriages, meaning that their spouse is of a different race and ethnicity than they are. Hence, only those that fit the inclusion criteria as stated were considered.

In choosing the sample for this research, purposive and snowball sampling were applied. Purposive sampling is defined as the “intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon” (Robinson, 2017). In the context of this research, purposive sampling was the best option in choosing a sample space. This is because this study dives into a qualitative approach that requires certain criteria of participants, which are Sarawakian women in interracial marriages. As such, purposive sampling employs a strategy that enables no randomisation of samples but focuses on specific cases that can be included in the research study (Campbell et al., 2020). Snowball sampling, meanwhile, is when participants of the research would recommend other potential participants to join in the

research, until the target size of research participants is reached (Parker et al., 2019). In the context of this research, initial willing participants who knows of other Sarawakian women in interracial marriages have shared the research details to these contacts, thus enabling the researcher to gain a wider access of participants.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Recruitment Process

The data collection process started with the recruitment of the participants. Participants were recruited through promotions on social media applications and through mutual contacts, which indicates that snowball sampling was used. Potential participants who fit the inclusion criteria were contacted and were briefly given vital information on the research study. Participants who agreed to be interviewed on their experiences being in interracial marriages were then involved in a discussion about the time and place for the interview session to be conducted.

3.4.2 Interview Procedure

A semi-structured interview was carried out with all research participants in the pursuit of collecting the data needed for the study. This type of interview consisted of a mixture of both closed and open-ended questions, which are then followed up by questions of why and how (Adams, 2015). Putting a focus on the context of this research study, a semi-structured interview was proven to be the most viable type of data collection process. This is because by understanding the participants' perceptions and points of view on what it means to be in a marriage with a spouse of a different race and culture, a more lively discussion can be cultivated rather than having a rigid interview process. Besides, follow-up questions were also incorporated to understand in more depth the

lived experiences of these women. It ensures that more data is obtained to be able to generate several themes later on for the data analysis.

The interview was divided into four parts (Part A, B, C, D and E). Part A includes explaining the purpose of the interview to the participants, as well as the distribution and signing of the participant information sheets and informed consent forms. Meanwhile, Part B was related to the demographic data of the interviewees. Part C then dove into the challenges faced in interracial marriages among the participants. Moreover, Part D explored the coping strategies used by the participants in overcoming the issues. Lastly, Part E discussed their hopes and expectations for the future. All the questions used in the interview questionnaire were modified to ensure they achieved the research objectives and answered the research questions (see *Appendix* for the guided questions).

The interview sessions were conducted face to-face in Kuching, Sarawak, or done via video chat applications online for those living outside of Kuching and those who are unable to meet up physically. The interview lasted about two hours or less. All 8 sessions were also recorded with a recording device to ease the researcher's effort in transcribing the interviews, and subsequently, acquiring the data needed for this research study.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity in research refers to the degree of accuracy of a measure whereas reliability is defined as the extent to which a certain research can be replicated and produce the same results (Middleton, 2019). Any type of research needs to have these two aspects, to

ensure that the study is done well and produces effective results, as well as having it be generalised across different populations.

In the context of this study, the validity of this research was measured by conducting a screening and cross-checking the guided questionnaires used for interview sessions. The questions asked were able to prompt answers from participants that also answered the research questions and objectives. The questions were run through with the researcher and supervisor, and any criticisms were taken into consideration in improving the questions. A pilot study involving one participant was conducted to further increase the validity of the questionnaire. Next, to increase the reliability of this research study, a thorough review of works of literature published in recent years related to this research topic was conducted. Comparisons between findings in past research papers and the findings of this research study were made to ensure an increase in reliability.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied in analysing the set of data collected from all participants. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. It is also a type of methodology that every researcher diving into qualitative studies should first learn the foundations of since it provides opportunities to hone skills that can be beneficial for different forms of qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is a relevant form of data analysis for this research study. Interpretations of themes found throughout the data collection process led to a wider and bigger perspective in understanding social contexts

(Majumdar, 2018). Therefore, thematic analysis enabled the researcher to form a larger understanding of what it means to be in an interracial marriage, beyond the basics.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six phases in conducting a thematic analysis, as shown in Figure 3.

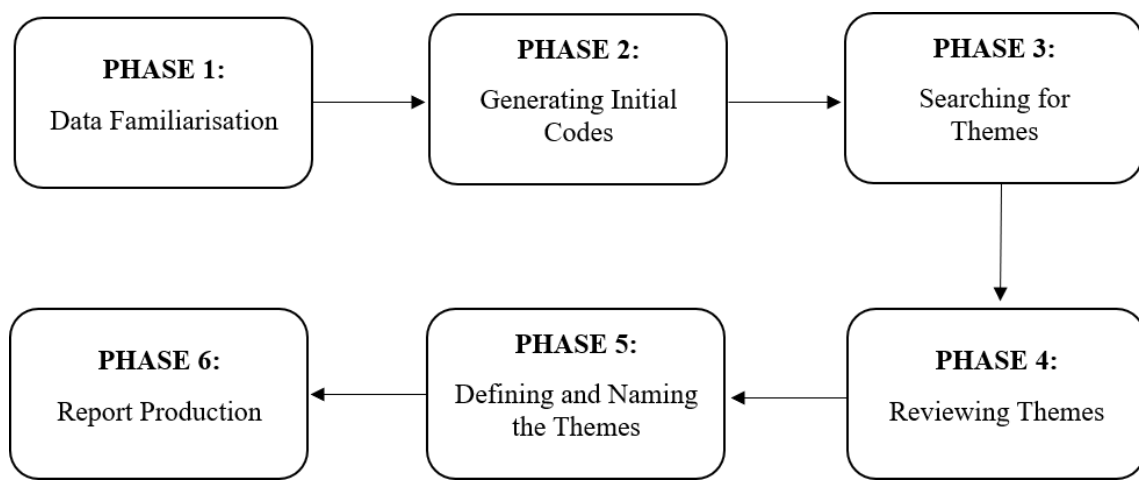


Figure 3. Phases in Conducting Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Phase 1: Data Familiarisation

Data obtained from the interview sessions were transcribed thoroughly. Afterwards, the researcher has read and reread the data to be fully immersed in the abundance of information and knowledge gathered through the collection of data. Next, any initial ideas were noted down for future reference.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Any relevant or interesting parts from the overall data collection were assigned an initial code. Extracts of data that can be categorised into certain groups were collected together and then collated together within each code.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

The third phase involved collating the generated codes into potential themes. In essence, the codes were analysed and studied to find unique combinations of how certain codes were sorted into several themes.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Any possible themes that were created were then properly revised. It is pertinent to note that the themes were still relevant with the addition of the codes of data. Besides, a thematic ‘map’ was also created as part of the data analysis.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming the Themes

The process of refining the themes generated was ongoing, ensuring there were proper themes that can be defined and put into their categories. The themes were also given names for classification. The themes generated were not too broad or too complicated.

Phase 6: Report Production

The last phase involves the final stages of analysing data. Any vital data obtained were used to produce an academic report for the research, providing rich and informative explanations for readers regarding the topic chosen.

3.7 Ethics of Study

In any type of research, it is vital to ensure ethical considerations are taken into account, particularly when it involves human participants. As stated by Mckenna and Gray (2018), ethics in research has the sole objective to protect the rights of research

participants and to guarantee that there is no unwanted harm inflicted on them. Therefore, this research study employs several ethical measurements such as the participant information sheet and informed consent form which was read and understood properly by all the participants (see *Appendix* for a digital copy of the participant information sheet and informed consent form).

3.7.1 Participant Information Sheet

Participation sheets were handed out to research subjects whereby details about the research were stated, such as the research title, research purpose and the role they would play in this study. Their participation was voluntary and they have the right to withdraw if needed. In addition, participants were also informed that confidentiality is guaranteed and that any information regarding their identity was not made public. Lastly, the researcher's contact information is also stated in the participation sheet, providing them a way to engage with the researcher for any further questions regarding the study. This sheet is important to make sure that the participants understand what the research is all about and how their involvement plays a part in this study.

3.7.2 Informed Consent Form

Apart from that, informed consent forms were also distributed to all participants. The form consists of acknowledgements that the participants understood what they will be doing in the research study, as well as consenting to have their answers in the interview sessions recorded and used for the study. The informed consent form was read through and signed before the interview begins.

3.8 Summary

This chapter focuses on the methodology used by the researcher in conducting the study. The research design, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis were thoroughly discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the rich results and findings that culminated from the data collection process from March 2024 to April 2024. 8 Sarawakian women married to a partner of a different race were interviewed, and data obtained from these interview sessions were then analysed using the process of thematic analysis. Once completed, 3 main themes were found to be significant alongside respective subthemes.

4.1 Demographic Data of Participants and their Spouses

Table 2 incorporates all 8 participants' demography, such as age, origins, their ethnicity and occupations as well as their spouses'.

Table 2

Demographic Data of Participants

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Years of Marriage	Occupation	Children
Shania	31	Bidayuh-Chinese	Christian	3 years	Engineer	None
	31	Chinese-Peranakan			Engineer	
JoJoe	47	Bidayuh	Muslim	23 years	Housewife	5
	50	Malay-Iban	(convert)		Banker	
Aina	37	Malay	Muslim	2 years	HR Executive	None

	40	<i>Caucasian (UK)</i>			<i>Chef</i>	
Rafidah	43	Malay	Muslim	26 years	Housewife	2
	62	<i>Bidayuh</i>			<i>MBKS worker</i>	
Ika	32	Malay	Muslim	6 years	Housewife	1
	33	<i>Turkish (Turkey)</i>			<i>Pilot</i>	
Edith	28	Iban-Chinese	Christian	7 months	Legal consultant	None
	34	<i>Black (Swaziland)</i>			<i>Graphic designer</i>	
Diana	51	Bidayuh	Christian	22 years	Security guard	3
	54	<i>Indian</i>	<i>Hindu</i>		<i>Factory worker</i>	
Lina	35	Chinese	Muslim	8 years	Housewife	3
	38	<i>Malay</i>	(convert)		<i>Technician</i>	

* Names are pseudonyms

** Spouses' data are in italics

4.2 Findings

The qualitative research method is applied throughout this research project, with 8 interview sessions done with all 8 participants. The interview includes semi-structured questions focused on the challenges of interracial marriages, their coping strategies and hopes and expectations for the future, thus answering the research objectives itself. Findings from these sessions are then categorised into 3 main themes, alongside subthemes for each main theme.

Table 3

Overview of Main Themes and Subthemes

No.	Main Theme	Subthemes
1	I Love You, Despite Our Differences	Cultural Differences The ‘Significant’ Others Religious Differences Being the Wife
2	Navigating the Storm	Talking it Out Taking a Breather A Shared Culture
3	The Collective Vision	Destigmatisation Messages of Support Words of Wisdom

The first theme is “**I Love You, Despite Our Differences**”. It details the several unique challenges Sarawakian women have personally braved through in their interracial marriages. A more detailed explanation is depicted in Table 4.

In addition, the second theme is “**Navigating the Storm**”. This theme focuses on the coping strategies usually used by these Sarawakian women in facing and overcoming adversity in their mixed marriages. Table 5 showcases the subthemes and categories for this main theme.

Lastly, the third theme is “**The Collective Vision**”. It describes the shared and collective hopes and expectations of Sarawakian women in interracial marriage for the future, pertaining to individuals who will marry someone of a different race than they are. A deeper dive of this theme alongside its subthemes is put into Table 6.

4.3 THEME 1: I Love You, Despite Our Differences

Table 4

Theme 1: I Love You, Despite Our Differences

Main Theme	Subthemes	Category
Theme 1:	Cultural Differences	
I Love You, Despite	The ‘Significant’ Others	<i>a. Loved Ones</i>
Our Differences		<i>b. Outsiders</i>
	Religious Differences	
	Being the Wife	

From the first main theme, “I Love You, Despite Our Differences”, four subthemes were generated: ‘Cultural Differences’, ‘The ‘Significant’ Others’, ‘Religious Differences’, and ‘Being the Wife’. Each subtheme is further divided into relevant categories. The first subtheme, ‘Cultural Differences’, explore the differences between the husband and wife’s prominent culture, and how it leads to the feeling of culture shock and uncomfortableness during marriage. The second subtheme, dubbed ‘The ‘Significant’ Others’ explains the reception of their marriage from loved ones (family, friends) as well as strangers in the society and the government. Next, ‘Religious Differences’ is another subtheme, particularly focusing on the experiences of converts.

Lastly, another subtheme entitled ‘Being the Wife’ dives into what it means to be a woman in a marriage and the responsibilities that come with it. This theme focuses on the aspects of challenges that those in interracial marriages have collectively experienced, and how certain things that are unique to these mixed-race couples may also affect their psychological wellbeing.

4.3.1 Cultural Differences

Based on the analysis of the interviews, more than half of the participants experienced challenges and shortcomings in getting used to the different cultures practised by their spouses. As the women interviewed were from varying races and hometowns and married men of a different race (and even countries), the culture and practices that may seem typical and mundane to their husbands may not be the same for the wife. This can be reflected in the ways of living or beliefs that differ from husband and wife. Hence, the experience and adjustment to a whole new culture may cause the women to feel uneasy and hesitate to be more open to trying new things as they are not used to it yet.

For instance, what most research participants said in unison to the issue of cultural differences is the food, where the difficulty of adjusting to the meals comes from both sides, either the wife or the husband in the relationship. This is more prominent with participants who married foreign spouses, such as that of Ika’s (who married a Turkish man), Aina’s (who married an English man) and Edith’s (who married a Swazi man).

“...Umm, maybe I can say food. I always have this kind of problem with my husband. We always talk about uh, I can't eat what they're eating. He can't eat what we're eating. I'm so used to eating rice and I have to eat rice every day but he has to eat bread and I have to make like 2 meals all the time...” (Ika)

“...And other things, street food, in hawker centres, that is very new to him. Uh, my husband, uh, for street food, it's a little hard to convince him to dine in, yeah. If let's say in KL, totally, he refuse to dine in or to eat any street food in hawker centres...” (Aina)

“...So I introduced him to one of my favourite dishes, which is Hainanese chicken rice and in true Hainanese fashion, the chicken wouldn't be fully, like cooked until it's dry and sad. You know, there's it's gonna be, you see, sometimes it might be slightly, it's slightly bloody and the bones, you know, stuff like that. So when he first, uh, tried it, he was really grossed out. He was like, you know, this is not safe, you know, which is true, you know, logically speaking, yeah, I get that...” (Edith)

Apart from food, cultural practices and traditions are also among the few things that contribute to the feelings of culture shock among interracial married couples. Namely, practices during special holidays or celebrations of one's culture or religion. Shania shared an occurrence that shocked her when celebrating Chinese New Year with her husband's side of the family, regarding the practice of 'soja', where children kneel in front of their grandparents and say wishes of longevity to them:

“...So that was new to me because with my own grandparents, my own, my own grandmother, I don't do that. I think for us, for my mom, it's more like you wish her and then you know, you, normally, you just hug or you kiss her and that's about it. Like, we don't have a specific thing that you must say with your grandmother, but for my husband and his family, that's what they do. So that was quite new to me. And it was a bit awkward lah because like, you know, you just kneel there...” (Shania)

Meanwhile, Jojoe mentioned her feelings of surprise when stepping into a typical Malay gathering, as she was not used to it before.

“...I think about if they, they made this um, meeting. Ohh, what do you say? Majlis kenduri, like that. Yeah. And they really, um, have this good teamwork actually, the whole village, you know, like I was like, wow, everybody is coming and then talk really loud also. Yeah. And then they talk like, yeah, uh, directly in front of you, whether you like it or not...” (Jojoe)

In addition, differing mindsets from both sides may also cause issues in both husband and wife to properly understand their differences, culturally. According to Holden et al. (2021), one's behaviour is influenced by their surrounding culture and their own beliefs. Therefore, it is not surprising to know that people of distinct races and cultures may have contrasting perspectives on things and behave according to what they are already comfortable with. This shift between two whole mindsets can be observed by the anecdotes shared by Shania, Aina, Edith and Ika.

Shania shared that in the early days of marriage, going back to Sarawak to celebrate Gawai was something she ought to do as much as possible, but at times it felt hard to penetrate her husband's mindset for him to understand why it was important to her.

"...Because he, he comes from a place where it's not celebrated. So it's not...before he met me, it wasn't important to him also. And it's not even a holiday here [West Malaysia], right? So yeah, I think that's how, that's how it is lah. Like, you know, being married to someone who is very different from you. Learning, learning each other. I think it. and it trickles down to other things like your personal values, how you are raised and then each other's way of doing things..." (Shania)

Whereas for Aina, Edith and Ika who collectively married those of differing races and nationalities, the challenges they experienced were more to the Asian mentality versus the more Westernised mindset. For example:

"...I can say that culture mostly because um...in UK, basically Western, Westerner they don't call their mother-in-law or father-in-law by, like us, we call them mak, or mummy, daddy. They just call by name. They don't call daddy or uh, dad. They just call by name. So that is, until now I feel awkward to call my parents-in-law by their name. Ya. I'm not get used to it, and for me...because we've been taught since kids, since children that we are not allowed to call someone elder than us by their name right? So if anything, I will not call them, I will ask my husband 'can you call your mum and dad blah blah blah'..." (Aina)

“...So when I heard stuff about, um, for example, way back in the olden days, Swaziland is like polygamous in terms of like, yeah, men...I'm not saying marrying, like they would say marrying, but it's not really official. It's like they have one legal wife and then 3, 4 other non-legal wives that they have you know so um, and then I think, I think their king is also polygamous. He has like quite a few wives as well. But anyway, I'm, I'm, digressing. So for me, culturally speaking and as a feminist I found it really difficult in the start...” (Edith)

“...Uh, the way we think is really different from people, Malaysia and Turkish people. We are not the same person. Uh, they are warm. I think warm. But uh, Malaysian people, we are warm, but not as much as that we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for our guests, for example, but uh, that kind of thing. I'm, I'm not really...I'm not a good host, for example, because of my family. I think they're not really...it's really hard to explain...how to explain in better words. I mean, my family, I can see that they're a bit cold, cold people. They're not like, uh, very warm people. So that it's really affected me and the way I am towards other people in Turkey, when I first came, it's uh it's like that. The way my parents are with other people. So and it uh, affected my relationship with them, these people, these new people that I met...” (Ika)

4.3.2 The ‘Significant’ Others

Many of the research participants also recalled having less than favourable support for their marriage. Having people close to you who disagree with whom you chose to spend your entire life together with may cause several issues that impact the wellbeing of the couple. In fact, the couple may feel more stressed out in their married life, thus translating to feelings of irritation and perhaps to extreme levels, hatred against their own spouse (Midy, 2018).

a. Loved Ones

Family members and friends are among the category of loved ones who may not be in favour of women marrying outside of their race. This act of resistance towards their matrimony has manifested in many forms, for example, in outward rejection where blessings were not given, ostracization and even in overt or subtle acts of discrimination.

A pattern is observed whereby only a particular demographic of participants involved in this research have had difficulties ensuring they receive blessings from their parents to proceed with marriage. This would involve non-Malay women who chose to marry a Malay husband, thus having to convert to Islam as per Malaysia's laws, or vice versa. This is shown in cases shared by Jojoe and Lina (who converted to Islam) as well as Rafidah (whose husband has converted).

"...My own parents is disagree with this uh, marriage actually. But not so bad. Yeah. It's, it's my own parents, because different religion of course. Yes. And then um, my father has this. Uh, actually have this bad relations with uh, Malay people actually. It's not like that bad. But always meet the wrong person. So he has this, uh, what do you call bias? I don't know. Uh, not really biased, but he was travelling a lot. So always in this uh...Malay culture, met this Malay, um, so last time people said Malay and uh, Islam is really related..." (Jojoe)

"...Like my challenges, of course it's family. Cause I'm Chinese, he's Muslim. At the time, my father, my father he didn't stop but he was worried. The thing he is worried about is that, Malay can marry four women. He was worried about this. Then my mum, she is the one who objected to it the strongest, she disagreed the most..." (Lina)

"...Like my husband's family, actually they didn't really agree. Especially his mum's side, she really didn't want my husband to marry someone of a difference race. Of a different religion..." (Rafidah)

For Ika, who moved to Turkey to live there permanently with her husband, her family's disapproval of her initial marriage with her husband was more concerned with the fact that she would be far away from her family and they were worried about her wellbeing.

"...Umm, at first they object it. My father especially because I, uh, he likes that I work as a teacher here. Stable. Uh, and he said, why do you need to go live so far, and that kind of thing. At first my father...my mom accepted because she, she's more to, open-minded and she accepted. And, and my father. He didn't

accept, it takes time and after he met my husband that time, then he was able to accept...” (Ika)

Moreover, aside from immediate family, participants also shared instances where friends disagreed with their marriage, ranging from snide comments and questions, as well as eventual loss of contact after getting married.

“...But also got this, um difficulties like my friends say, ‘Why you marry him?’ You know, this kind of thing? ‘Why? You know he’s Malay, he’s Muslim. You gonna leave your religion is it? You will leave your family’. Uh. Actually my parents kind of like not really give me this kind of uh...it’s more from my friends actually. Yes, uh kind of, weird also at that time. So a lot of questionnaire, everything there...” (Jojo)

“...I have some friends that after I converted, I got married, they sort of, don’t look for me anymore...” (Lina)

Whereas in the case of Aina and Ika, who both married foreigners, their friends had certain distasteful comments on their marriage, perhaps due in part to the stereotypes and beliefs they have about the more Westernised mindset.

“...But uh, when you are talking about discrimination, yes, I do face this kind of thing whereby my friend, my friend really concerned about my relationship. Like, ‘oh you know that mostly Caucasian, they are not sincere to convert, convert Muslim, if you convert just to get married, you better don’t get married with this guy’ and so on, or ‘if let say you get married with Caucasian, you know that for them divorce is very easy. For them getting married is something, commitment not lasting’. So that is the thing I am facing during that time...” (Aina)

“...So my friend, some of my best friends, like, they said, don’t [getting married to a Turkish guy]...think, think twice, not twice, more than twice. Because later, um, and he also works, you know, a job like that [pilot] you know, working far away, meet with the beautiful workers, colleagues...” (Ika)

b. Outsiders

Apart from that, outsiders (e.g. strangers, people with no personal relations with the participants) also seem to have negative opinions of their own on their interracial marriage. Take for example, an interaction between Edith and her therapist at the time, who had since terminated the service.

“...So I um, confided in her about how difficult it was, long distance and everything. And you know, how sad I would get if, you know, we don't speak as much or we're having some difficulties communicating just because of the distance, you know? And then she would be like, ohh, you know, but yeah, Africans are like that, you know? Do you really wanna, you know, uh, marry and then go to Swaziland?” (Edith)

Whereas for Aina, she finds it disheartening that there are people who would judge local women for marrying a foreigner but not holding Malaysian men who married foreign women to the same standards. She feels that it is unfair and it makes her sad that outsiders have so much to say about her decision more than her own family.

“...Mostly our community, our social community, if you marry an outsider, it's always about sex. Those are words that, uh, what...we can see how far these people's mentality are. Right? When women marries an outsider, marries a White person, oh, these people will bash. But when a man marries a White person, they would worship him, like, 'oh, give tips, how to get a White girl' and so on...” (Aina)

Diana also shared how people outside of her social circle tend to look down on her marriage with her Indian husband, and how it has affected her emotionally.

“...For example...cause last time my husband works at KL. So when Auntie already had kids and live at the village, so there was a lot, a lot of people said 'you stay here, your husband stay somewhere far away', they will say, 'what do you know about him? Maybe he has a new woman'. This is normal stuff already. When you think about it....sometimes it's stressful also thinking like that. Like Auntie's mind is bothered, is it correct what those people say?” (Diana)

However, support in terms of receiving assistance, easier access, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) from government bodies for those registering marriage and permits with a foreign spouse proved to be a difficult process for participants like Aina and Edith.

“...And during that time, we just know uh, about the difference...a big difference between immigration in Kuching, Sarawak and in, um, Malaysia. It’s something like, I thought that our immigration uh...there’s a difference only for Semenanjung, but when we are in the midst of doing lafaz nikah, only we found out that my husband cannot work in Kuching, in Sarawak, if let’s say, he is holding work visa...” (Aina)

“...Malaysia doesn't seem like it's ready for interracial or international marriages. They, they um, like I said, we just got the spouse visa after six long months, which includes my husband flying into Kuching every month and after every second or third month he has to fly to Singapore and come back. It's all nerve wracking every time he flies off, I worry. Is immigration going to stop him? Are they going to detain him? Um, there's many stories of African men being detained for one thing or the other. And then they die. Right? In jail. In uh, in the cell, in prison cell. Um or abused or what have you. Or just not being let go. Um, so I worry, um every day...” (Edith)

From these few interview sessions, having support, agreement and assistance as the women venture into a new stage of life with a partner of their choice is vital to ensure that their marriage can smoothly sail.

4.3.3 Religious Differences

Religion, race and culture have been very tightly interwoven in humanity since the olden days, especially in Malaysia’s multicultural society. Most participants who converted to a different religion after marriage and followed their husband’s reported that they faced issues in getting used to practising their new religion. Here are a few

excerpts from participants who have faced challenges when they converted to a new religion or another denomination (Christian).

“...Really difficult [converting to Islam]. Yeah, so I'm I'm, I'm...even now, I'm still learning. Yeah, it's really difficult. Totally different. Totally different the way it is. I don't know. Because I'm not. I'm not really good at it. Uh, until now? Yeah...” (Jojo)

“...Actually, to be honest, religious difference was one of the biggest impact, actually, for me. Not, not that I was not like...I was, I am a practicing Christian and you know for the longest time since young. You know I was in church. I go Sunday school. You know typical things that you do in church right. Like that kind of thing. I think it's just how his parents...so the difference between like how Methodist Church operates and how Anglican church operates is not the same. You know we have the liturgy, we read from the book, we go and kneel, we go, we go to the altar to go and get the communion, all this kind of thing. In Methodist Church, in this church that he is in, they don't do it that way. It's very different because his church is not as traditional but the essence of the religion is the same...” (Shania)

In contrast, the conversion of religion from the husband's side has also affected the wife's wellbeing, such as in the case of Aina's English husband who converted to Islam. People in their community expected him to be well-versed with Islamic practices as soon as possible, which Aina has shared made her feel disheartened as she knows that her husband has put a lot of effort into becoming a good Muslim.

“...And of course, some people like, they really want to know about my husband's progress, especially our society, I don't know, Muslim community lah, it's not Muslim community lah, Malay community especially. They will...they will only accept your spouse as a mualaf who have progress as fast as they can. They don't see about the challenge that they need to cope. What they accept, 'OK, you have to be a Muslim, a very good Muslim'...” (Aina)

4.3.4 Being the Wife

Despite the rapid ascension of technological wonders alongside more awareness and voices that speak out against social injustice, gender roles are still prevalent today,

especially for husband and wife. Stereotypical duties and tasks are still being imposed on both spouses in their shared household, as agreed by a majority number of research participants that were interviewed.

A woman's responsibilities as the wife and mother of the household typically includes doing house chores such as cleaning, cooking, taking care of the kids and more. Nevertheless, more than half of the interviewees are also working women with their careers to focus on. Therefore, there may be certain specific challenges faced by these married women to balance both their home and their careers. Most of the interviewees mentioned that they felt that it is their responsibility to still uphold their duties as the doting, loving wife despite the modern age.

"...I think I do feel the pressure of having to, you know, keep up with my A game and like maintain this house, you know. And I think especially I don't know if this is an inbuilt thing or this perception I have, but especially when your in laws come, you will want to keep it clean. So that there is the impression that you're not lazy. Yeah, but I mean I would say that yeah, I think for me personally this thing still applies even though you know things I have changed and it may not necessarily, it doesn't have to be that way. But due to our circumstances it is that way. And I think also for me personally, I feel that then, I feel the responsibility to, OK, I need to make sure the house is clean. I need to make sure that the house is in order..." (Shania)

"...Like, I do feel pressured to be the perfect wife, whatever that means, right? Um, whether it's like making sure food is on the table and make sure the house is at least decently clean, like there, it's always in the back of your mind. Sometimes you're like, OK, you know, because you were raised with these rules, like whether in movies or in the family, um, it makes you...there's a small voice in the back of your head saying, hey, you know, you're a wife now. You have to make sure everyone's fed, make sure everyone's clean and it's stupid. When you sit down and think about it, right for longer than 5 minutes, you sit down and you think, hey, why is it my, my thing?" (Edith)

In addition, taking care of their children also ultimately goes to the wife's, the mother's responsibility. There is more pressure on the women to make sure their child's needs are attended to, sometimes causing them to feel more stressed out.

"...Uh, maybe...I have a baby, right? So like, most of the time of course I'm the one to take care of her. And I don't have a helper. So that kind of stressed me out. I really don't have time for myself. I can't even go to the gym, like, I cannot live my life like previous, previous, uh, before baby, because I don't have help and I wish that I have family close, closer to me who can help me out. Because even my mother-in-law also live so far away and they're old so they cannot take care of me..." (Ika)

"...Since Auntie had kids, Auntie's husband, sometimes he...last time lah, he didn't really care much about the kids. Like when they were little he spent less time with them. Like going to school, in school, I do everything. Like taking the kids from school, all the way til Auntie's kids are in secondary school, like going to meetings all that, Auntie does it all. Until now. He does things less. My husband does less things for the kids. Of course there's a lot of challenges, but Auntie just does it, for my kids..." (Diana)

4.4 THEME 2: Navigating the Storm

Table 5

Theme 2: Navigating the Storm

Main Theme	Subthemes	Category
Theme 2: Navigating the Storm	Talking it Out	a. <i>Communication with Spouse</i>
		b. <i>Talking to Loved Ones</i>
		c. <i>Professional Help</i>
	Taking a Breather	
	A Shared Culture	a. <i>Assimilation & Adaptation</i>
		b. <i>Incorporation of Both Cultures</i>

The second main theme, entitled “Navigating the Storm”, has three subthemes extracted from it: Talking it Out, Taking a Breather and A Shared Culture. For the first subtheme, ‘Talking it Out’, it involves communication and sharing problems the woman has faced with their spouses, trusted loved ones, and in certain cases, finding a professional such as that of counsellors or therapist to relieve their pain. In addition, ‘Taking a Breather’ zooms in on rest and relaxation techniques that is used by participants to feel less stressed out with challenges in their marriage. Lastly, ‘A Shared Culture’ focuses on how they assimilate into the new culture, and how the husband and wife incorporate their respective cultures into the household as a normal practice for them. This main theme explores the coping strategies used by the women in mixed marriages to overcome the challenges and difficulties they have personally gone through in their married life.

4.4.1 Talking it Out

When asked about what they would do when problems in their interracial marriage take a toll on them, the majority of the participants agreed that they would communicate it with the people around them. This includes their husbands, and loved ones such as family and friends. Some have also sought out advice from professionals in the mental health field in order to feel supported or to also receive bits of advice to go forward.

a. Communication with Spouse

Difficulties, shortcomings and issues that arise from the unique experience of being in a mixed marriage may be different from those who married a partner of the same race. Hence, for many of the participants, tackling the issue head-on by communicating what’s wrong with their spouse is the most effective way rather than seeking assistance

from others. As an example, when there are problems that arise from confusions about each other's prominent culture, participants such as Ika and Shania would sit down with their spouses and discuss these differences.

"...Yeah, I think communication is the best, every time we have problems I talk it with him, I explain. I cannot be like your mom. I cannot be like Turkish people, so if you have to accept me, you have to accept me as Malaysian. You cannot change the way I grew up, the way I was exposed to people. Like that. So, ya, he understands lah, through communication..." (Ika)

"...Sometimes to communicate with each other about things like this [going back to Sarawak for Gawai celebration] can be a bit of a...it can be difficult lah. So I think over time I, I, I, I sort of learned that for my partner, he is the kind that I need to really, I need to put it in front of him like it's on the table that, 'hey, this is the situation that I'm in. This is important to me. So it will be very much, I would really appreciate it if it would also be just as important to you because you know now you're also a part of the family..." (Shania)

Talking about certain cultural or familial issues that they faced with their spouses has also led both husband and wife to compromise with one another more often, ensuring both parties can get what they seek for and solve the problems as one.

For instance, Aina's husband does not like having the toilet floor wet as he is used to dry toilet floors back in the United Kingdom. With this information, it has encouraged Aina to advise any visitors coming over to use another toilet to ensure her husband feels more comfortable living in Kuching.

"...Cause he doesn't like wet toilets. He feels disgusted by it.. So after that incident, everytime that my friends or family come over, I will brief them that 'OK, you don't use this toilet' and because, at our home we have 3 toilets. So basically even myself, even myself, me and my husband use different toilet..." (Aina)

Whereas for Edith, it is tradition for a married woman in Swaziland to cover her hair up during formal situations and while meeting the in-laws. While she does not agree with this practice, she chose to follow through with it as a sign of respect.

“...Um, so that was something that I had to compromise on because he did explain to me that it's more so of a respectful gesture towards my in laws. So that would be his mother, for example. So um, it's just. And also for formal events. So for me, finding compromise in marriage is really important...” (Edith)

Meanwhile for Lina, when her and her husband has differing point of views on how to best educate their children, they eventually choose to compromise and come to an agreement together.

“...We only fight in choosing the best way to teach our kids. But, even when our opinions are not the same, we don't keep it too long, won't bring that problem to sleep, we will solve that issue on that day too. Cause we don't want, we don't have a reason to fight that long...” (Lina)

Besides, communication with spouses also ensures that they can cooperate with one another and come up with workable solutions to their issues.

“...We talk. I talk with my husband and my husband will discuss then uh, maybe come up, come up with the solution then try to see the positive ways and uh like that in positive way and then good solution like that, just like that...” (Jojo)

“...Yes um me and my husband are very vocal and verbal so we would actually have a lot of sit downs and just have really um, difficult discussions sometimes out of the blue. But I actually prefer that instead of having to...I know people would prefer having to set aside a special time and everything, but for me, it really shows some semblance of familiarity and security when you can just sit down and say, hey, you know about what happened the other day. I'm not really happy with what you did. Just out of the blue, right? Um. And then the person would then give an honest feedback, not a rehearsed feedback. Um. And I, I really prefer that, actually. So. So in short, yes, I do speak to my husband. Uh,

a lot. And he knows me very well. And um, yeah, uh, he, he gives me advice..”
(Edith)

“Uh, I guess like we will, like, talk among ourselves first lah. So, whatever that is...isn’t approved by our elders first, I won’t, what, I won’t fire back, right? Cause they’re our elders. So I...patience needs to exist. Just be patient, but my husband he did not gave up, so, if there’s time, my husband will go to the village, bring me along, so, even if they didn’t agree last time, but as time goes on, they accepted fate lah, I’m his wife now...” (Rafidah)

“...Communication like uh, if we have problem, like this kind of, me and my father right, my dad, uh...so like what I said to my husband, ‘you should think something to impress him’, so uh, after that, he straight away came to Malaysia, that kind of thing. So communication helps me a lot...” (Ika)

b. Talking to Loved Ones

Aside from talking it out with their respective spouses, many participants also turn to people they trust such as family members and friends. Most participants agreed that they needed to vent out to someone who would be a listening ear and seek outside perspectives and advice on overcoming the adversaries.

“...I talk with my best friend. My...the one who I know since primary school. So I remember my friend said that ‘OK, just forget about them, and someone who always talking bad things about others, someone who always talk negatively, is someone, actually, they are someone who is not happy’. And then, second thing, I, um...from my male best friend also, he said that ‘different people, different challenges, it doesn’t mean that the uh, Malaysians they married Caucasian people will divorced, you will encounter the same problem. No, totally different. You just have faith, and then um, celebrate your differences...” (Aina)

“...Um...ah, I will ask them lah [friends], advice, how to...uh, overcome these things, if there’s conflict between family or husband’s family or my family members lah in this mixed marriage. Later they will give ideas lah how, but their ideas, can be trusted lah. I also have tried to do what they told me to...”
(Rafidah)

“...I only look for my sister when I need her opinion. For example, if my opinion is different than my husband’s, I think my kids need to go to art school, my

husband thinks they don't need it, not that important, I will go look for my sister, ask her which one is more important..." (Lina)

Sometimes, the women also communicate with people of a similar racial and cultural background with their spouses to get wider knowledge and have their questions answered about an unfamiliar culture to properly understand their husbands better.

"...I only have a friend who is, she's a Peranakan and like we are close friends. So sometimes if my husband say something I'll be like 'true or not ah'? So she will verify and be like, yeah, that's how it is. But it's not that I don't trust my husband. Like I say, sometimes I just want to confirm..." (Shania)

"...I also talked with a few people that have married with Turkish, how is it at first, how. Mostly they will say they always have problem with mother-in-law. Most of them have this kind of problem..." (Ika)

"...Aunty will find my sister-in-law that's Indian. I tell stories with her, how to do this, how to do that. Because she's also Indian, so we know lah, how she will tell us..." (Diana)

c. Professional Help

A few of the participants have also mentioned that they indeed seek out assistance or an outlet through mental health professionals by joining therapy sessions.

"...I also meet, I met with psychiatrist, from Malaysia. Online. But it was after having a baby. I start to meet her..." (Ika)

However, there are instances where the therapists choose to be very unprofessional and incompetent by outwardly being unsupportive and discriminatory against their partners. This may have also contributed to more stress on top of trying to get through the everyday challenges of being in a mixed marriage, even when joining therapy should be a non-judgmental safe space for one to express their worries.

“...I used to go to a therapist. Um, but. And I don't think you can blame me. Uh. I have been quite fearful of therapists since then. Because as you should know. Yeah, as you should know, because I've been in many sessions with her prior to her making that comment [making an unsatisfactory statement regarding Edith's choice to marry her Swazi husband]. And during those previous sessions I had shared everything. My life story, all the deep dark secrets, the horrible things, the good things and also the horrible things in life and my childhood and what have you. So for her to turn around and betray me like that, I felt very betrayed. Yeah. So since then I've been a little bit reluctant...” (Edith)

In short, communication between the wife and her husband, alongside opportunities to let out all the issues that have been plaguing them to trusted companions and mental health professionals are among the most common strategies used by these Sarawakian women in settling up or lessening the burden they feel due to challenges in their mixed marriages.

4.4.2 Taking a Breather

When things at home get a little too much to bear, about half of the interviewees cited taking a little time for themselves to relax and distract themselves first. It is only once they feel better that they dive back into tackling the issues that have troubled them. For these women, taking a breather may literally mean sitting down and letting their minds be at peace for a short while, such as Edith's and Lina's own experience when challenges in their marriage get overwhelming.

“...There's a lot that can be said from taking a step back and you know, maybe sitting in separate rooms for like a few minutes, um, at that time, your brain, your mind is racing like 1000 miles a minute. So eventually when you start to slow down and you start to think, there's a lot of changes that happen within that 5 minutes when you're sitting down alone and thinking about things. So, yeah, that's my main one, my main strategy...” (Edith)

“And afterwards, if he [husband] gives his opinion, I can accept, but I need more time lah. I need more time to tell myself. For example, I’m so down, something happened and I feel so down, I will tell my husband. He will also advise me, he will also say, ‘how can this happen? What will happen to you if you continue being like this?’ I will accept, I also understand, but I need a little more time to go back to my old self...” (Lina)

Furthermore, other participants referred to having hobbies or interests as a point of distraction for them to relax and take their minds off things that stress them out.

“...Aunty have to find lah, like my hobby, I like fishing last time, so I don’t remember lah things that give us pressure. Go fishing lah, Fishing, release all the pain in the heart, throw away the feeling of tiredness from thinking too much. Go fishing. After that at times Aunty don’t go to work, stay at home. So I plant vegetables, plant whatever I think I should. So...we can forget those things...” (Diana)

“...I will go to the beach lah, I will eat, then I go to the beach. After that I also won’t really care what people say, I will advise myself lah. I feel down, I will also talk to myself...” (Lina)

“...So because of COVID, well, a little bit years before COVID, but also especially after COVID, I became a fan of video games. So I would try to, yeah. I would try to divert my energies there...” (Edith)

4.4.3 A Shared Culture

All 8 participants agreed that in the early days of marriage, they encountered some difficulties in understanding a foreign culture and certain traditions that are practised by their spouses. However, with assistance, time and support, they are able to get used to the new culture, perhaps due in kind to the process of assimilation and adaptation. Apart from that, both spouses have also found a common ground to share one another’s culture together and eventually produces a household whereby both distinct cultures are already mixed into one.

a. Assimilation & Adaptation

While at first, it was hard to familiarise themselves with an entirely new culture that is so different from their own, this research participants acknowledge that trying their best to experience and practise their husbands's traditions and beliefs is the best way to reduce the difficulty. Eventually, they have gotten used to it and managed to assimilate or adapt into the community.

In Shania's case, going back to Malacca and visiting her husband's relatives and exploring a traditional Peranakan house was eye-opening for her, helping her to embrace her husband's Peranakan side more.

"...So and then hearing them interact among each other in Malay because you know Peranakan, they speak Malay among each other. They don't speak Chinese necessarily. So it was quite an experience for me. I personally enjoyed it. But it was one of the things that I think helped me to understand my husband's side even more. I think it's only by that by doing that, that you can actually pick things up..." (Shania)

For Ika, communicating with her husband on trying to assimilate into Turkish community is important for her to get used to living in Turkey.

"...I like told him lah I will try to learn your, your things, your culture, Turkish culture, like that. Because I live here and like, I have to do this because all around me doing that, for example learning the language, I have to learn their language and I have to be more...for example Turkish woman they're more fierce bah. Us Malaysian women very like, still, polite and soft. So I learn to be fierce more. Whenever my husband said something, I have to say no, I shouldn't say yes all the time. That's what Turkish. So I learned to be that. Now..." (Ika)

Besides, Edith would resort to visiting a South African restaurant to try out their delicacies whenever she missed her husband while he was away.

“...And then every time I missed him, I would take a Grab to go to this restaurant and order like extremely expensive food. But I was just very, I missed him, right? So I would have all this food. And, um, so that was my small way of kind of showing, you know, showing um, how do I say this, uh, of embracing it, of embracing the culture...” (Edith)

Whereas for Diana, she has also personally gone and experienced the Thaipusam celebrations and learnt to conduct Hindu prayers with her husband’s side of the family.

“...Aunty also went to their wedding ceremony. Like trying to get used to them lah, if they do prayers, because Hindus do their own prayers, so I also try to follow lah. How their prayer styles are, so I also try to follow their style. Like that. For Deepavali celebration too, my husband would celebrate it at my village. He did it last year. He will celebrate. I also follow lah, if he makes like...cooking together. I also help to cook...” (Diana)

Conversely, their spouses have also shown instances where they returned the favour and tried to adapt to the women’s culture.

Shania’s husband is curious about Shania’s Bidayuh side of the family, never failing to ask her questions related to the Bidayuh traditions such as the food, music and celebrations when they have the opportunity to come back to Shania’s home in Sarawak.

“...He actually has a lot of self initiative to try and understand because you know, he doesn't know everything about my side of the family because you know we...we live here [West Malaysia] so we don't see everybody at the same time. Maybe the, this person you saw, like the last time you saw this person is like three years ago. So yeah and my family's quite large, my dad's side is quite large. So we, I think like he does ask a lot of things as well when we are together. He actually does ask a lot of stuff. And I think that kind of makes the job half easier as well because I don't have to keep telling him things. But he will also ask, yeah yeah, so to immerse in it, maybe in future we will do more things that can immerse him in better...” (Shania)

Edith also mentioned a wholesome interaction between her and her husband when he flew back from Edith's hometown in Kuching, bringing back a bag of Chinese New Year decorations packed by her mother for them to hang around their residence.

"...So he actually was the one to hang up these small Chinese New Year lanterns and tiny, like lockets and all these, you know, you know, the stuff I'm talking about, right? The, hanging decorations, the coins, you know, um, so he, he was the one who hung up everything. And he was the one who insisted that we decorate the house. So we did. Which I really appreciate because he really is interested in embracing my, my culture..." (Edith)

Meanwhile, Lina's husband is ready to practice any Chinese celebrations or festivals alongside his family, as long as it is something that does not go beyond the limits and rules of his faith.

"...And, we as Chinese people have our own tradition during New Year, I will ask him to follow, he will listen also as long as it isn't past the limits of his religion, he feels it's OK. If it's past the limits of religion, he will tell me lah why we cannot do this that, so I also accepted lah..." (Lina)

b. Incorporation of Both Cultures

While the wives have managed to assimilate or adapt to their spouse's culture, they have also introduced and incorporated their respective cultures into their shared household. Hence, their family unit now consists of the eventual merging between two distinct cultures, where both husband and wife participate in each other's traditions and beliefs together. Over time, the early challenges of trying to adapt to a whole new culture no longer pose a threat to their wellbeing. Any relevant celebrations and festivals are typically celebrated by both partners and to an extent, their kids too.

“...Raya we must go to my, parents in law. So Gawai and Christmas we must go back to uh, Serian, to my own kampung. So my, my kids is like that. So my kids are, let them them, uh, to learn themselves, their own culture. So school holiday last time, yeah, school holiday also like that. Sometimes I send them to Serian, live with my, own parents. Uh, sometimes in Sri Aman, sometimes in Tebelu to learn the Malay also, yeah, during the school holiday like that. So I let them to learn themselves like that because I cannot say it out. I cannot teach them so let them, experiencing it themselves like that...” (Jojo)

“...Feels normal, cause, even like celebrating Raya, I also celebrate together, my husband’s family come over. Gawai, I also will visit my husband’s family at the village too, like normal lah...” (Rafidah)

“...Chinese’s celebration, all got. Malay one, also got. If I’m at Kuching, my sister celebrates Christmas, we would also tag along. But we don’t celebrate lah, we just come over to her house, exchange gifts like that...” (Lina)

There are also moments where both husband and wife share their cultural traditions and practices in the same house, such as cooking each other’s ethnic dishes for the other to experience.

“...I think in the first year we got married, I actually tried to cook ayam pansuh. So I think, yeah. And then he was saying like, but I told him that, OK, this is the very simplified version because I didn’t cook it in bamboo. I mean I couldn’t find bamboo at the point in time. And then, you know, and I said, and in actual fact the the real method of cooking ayam pansuh is very tedious and it’s long. Like you need to put it on fire for like hours. Because my uncle had cooked before, like, so I was there lah. And then he was saying that, oh, is it nicer? And I said, yes, it is actually nicer if you cook it in the bamboo itself, because I, you know, there’s certain things that you have eaten before but you can’t really find it here. So you just recreate things like this. Yeah, it can be even things like laksa or like kolok mee, you know you recreate all these things at home...” (Shania)

“...When I get married with my husband, he is the one who prepare breakfast for us. Okay, and then when I go to my husband’s house visiting them, I see my father-in-law preparing breakfast for my mother-in-law. And then, my brother-in-law also, because my husband all of them, all of his siblings are boys, his brother also preparing breakfast for their wife, it’s like ‘okay, alright’. So I ask them like, is this normal, you all preparing breakfast for your wives? And then my husband said mostly they would prepare for breakfast for the family, while wife will get ready for the kids...” (Aina)

“...Food wise he’s OK. The food that he cook like pork curry, so many more Indian food like dhal curry, sometimes like thosai, ha, there’s a lot lah Indian food that he made. Auntie try lah, to get used to eating them...” (Diana)

“...It's always fun, you know, like ohh today I'm going to cook something Asian or something, you know Swazi and it's always fun...” (Edith)

Another way to showcase that their household is a mix of several different cultures is with their children's experience. Children born out of interracial marriages usually experience and practice both cultures of their parents. This is the case for a few of the interviewees, who believed that their children are adjusting well to two distinct cultures from their father and mother, such as sharings by Jojoe and Rafidah who has children who are half Malay and half Bidayuh.

“...They naturally have that culture then they know, because we never stopped them from going to the...which side. Yeah, it's Malay. Iban. Because uh, my second daughter, really good in Iban. Umm. And then my son I think is um English, and Bidayuh more. Some is Malay, so I let them explore themselves. So they learn the culture, a lot of culture themselves also...” (Jojoe)

“...They are used to it, like going visiting to my family, they will wear clothes, Malay clothing that's appropriate. It's normal, visiting to other people's. From small they are already trained like that. No...no, they are not confused seeing, 'why other people dressed like that? And I'm dressed differently?' No...” (Rafidah)

Nonetheless, some children may also have a preference or lean towards one culture more than the other due to several reasons, as mentioned by Ika, Diana and Lina.

“...Hmm, you know she's still two years old, she haven't show, sign of which culture she follows more. But I slowly tried to teach her Malaysian culture, like we salam adult. Uh, more to Turkish people, everytime eating and all that, she would also say 'afiyet olsun', which is enjoy your meal.. And she speaks two language now, but of course uh baby language, but more to English, I speak English with her. And she speaks also Turkish from the father. What else so far? The obvious one. Eat with hands. And uh, she likes, she doesn't like Malaysian food. She likes Turkish food...” (Ika)

“...Language wise, they are Bidayuh lah. Speak Bidayuh, but their father, he will speak Tamil with them, but they understand, they answer their dad in Bidayuh. Like that. Food wise, my children, all kinds of food they eat. Their

father's food they will eat, Bidayuh food too. They don't pick and choose..."
(Diana)

"...They're more to Chinese. Because, uh, my kids study in Chinese school. Cause we both agreed to send them to Chinese school, once they're older, they of course will go to secondary school, go to a Malay school anyways. After that, over here, it's just us only, we don't have other family members, cause we are at Miri. So, they're always with me too, since my husband works. So, they are more to the Chinese people. But, they also follows the Malay culture because their father wants them to follow it too, just, between Malay and Chinese, they're more to the Chinese tradition lah..." (Lina)

To conclude, a few of the coping strategies that are effective in reducing the amounts of stress these women have experienced in their mixed marriages are to communicate it out with people they trust, taking a moment to themselves and to also share their respective cultures, easing the process of toleration and assimilation.

4.5 THEME 3: The Collective Vision

Table 6

Theme 3: The Collective Vision

Main Theme	Subthemes	Category
Theme 3: The Collective Vision	Destigmatisation	<i>a. Education & Awareness</i>
		<i>b. Religion ≠ Race</i>
	Messages of Support	<i>a. Government Support</i>
		<i>b. Like-Minded Community</i>
	Words of Wisdom	<i>a. Be Ready & Smart</i>
		<i>b. Be Strong, Do it for Love</i>

The third and final theme is named “The Collective Vision”, which includes 3 subthemes that were generated: Destigmatisation, Messages of Support and finally,

Words of Wisdom. Every subtheme is also further divided into 2 different categories as seen in the table provided above. The subtheme entitled ‘Destigmatisation’ describes what every participant wishes would change in terms of society’s negative beliefs on interracial marriages. Next, the following subtheme, ‘Messages of Support’ shares opinions and ideas from participants on what type of social support should be implemented for those going through challenges in their mixed marriage. The final subtheme, ‘Words of Wisdom’ dives into what kind of expectations and advice the participants wish to tell other Sarawakian women who may marry a partner of a different race in the future. Hence, this final main theme chooses to provide perspectives from experienced women on their hopes and expectations for the future regarding the topic of interracial marriages.

4.5.1 Destigmatisation

From extractions of the interview sessions, most, if not all of the participants have experienced some form of social stigma from their loved ones, or outsiders just for marrying someone of a distinct ethnicity than they are. This type of social stigma comes in many forms, such as microaggressions in the shape of unnecessary and unkind comments or outward discrimination, lessening amount of support for their matrimony and so forth.

a. Education & Awareness

When asked what they would say to those who still stigmatised interracial marriages and view it as something negative, most participants hoped that these people would be more educated and aware of different cultures in and out of Malaysia before passing judgment on those who married people of other races. This includes getting more

information on a particular ethnicity through knowledge sharing or personal experiences and shedding off any stereotypes or prejudice against different races.

“...Try to live with other cultures also. It's really good thing actually we, know new culture ,you know it's really good thing. Yeah try to live with them or try to understand them. Once you understand them, then they will understand you back. It's like give and take, yeah, it's a give, give and take. Try to, you know, live among them. You know, try to understand and doing things Um, it's a good thing, I think. Like that...” (Jojo)

“...Um, read a book. I would tell them to educate themselves. Because not everyone living in the same bubbles as theirs. Hmm. So they should, uh, meet people more and try to educate themselves on these things...” (Ika)

“...You have to have that desire to change. Otherwise this, education and awareness, whatever. It doesn't help. But um, there must be this desire and interest, this curiosity. I would say curiosity maybe would be the easiest entry point. Like you're curious as to why this Asian person wants to marry an African person or vice versa. Why does African person even finds Asian people attractive or interesting enough to marry? You know you, you want that curiosity, which will then lead you to asking questions, which then leads you to asking or questioning your own beliefs. But some people don't have that curiosity, which is unfortunate. I don't know what to say to those kind of people. Um. But definitely, if you come down to it, curiosity, positive curiosity, um, education, awareness...” (Edith)

“...We have, don't be too...what, too...saying bad stuff about the races, especially the Indians. I hope these people can...cause even our own race, like that also. So please don't ostracise the other races. Because not all of them, not all of them do things like that. Behave badly...” (Diana)

There is also an emphasis on being more open-minded and accepting towards different cultures as it is a plus to be able to embrace and experience the many cultural practices and tradition found worldwide. In essence, they also wished that people would see mixed marriages as a positive thing too.

“...So I do wish that it was actually more normalized and more like not so frowned upon because yeah, there's not something bad out of it, actually. If

anything, you actually embrace a whole different, you know, a whole different, like, culture altogether. Not that it's a bad thing also. Yeah, I don't think it's a bad thing..." (Shania)

"...So they, have to accept the fact that they, just accept, what do they call it, this mixed marriage. It won't be a waste to anybody, it won't hurt anybody. Cause we don't know, our soulmates can be anywhere, with anyone. So, don't look negatively at this mixed marriage, cause maybe...this mixed marriage has benefits behind it all..." (Rafidah)

b. Religion ≠ Race

For participants who have either personally converted or have their spouses converted to Islam, they emphasized that aside from relearning a whole new religion, the stigma they faced from loved ones for the conversion was a challenge by itself. However, these participants also stated that it is important that we separate religion and race as two different things. They believed most people could not differentiate between the two, especially for the Malay race and Islam, thus leading to discrimination and lack of support for those who converted for marriage.

"...Last time quite that one lah, because last time people said you know um, Islam is Malay, always relate to like that. Uh, it's different. They always relate Islam is Malay and the culture..." (JoJoe)

"...We don't change our traditions, our race. We change, just change religions only. These traditions, like my children now. They're Bidayuh, not Malay. Ah, don't get it wrong. Because it's, from following their father, converted to Islam, even though he converted to Islam, their father's race is still Bidayuh. So our children still Bidayuh, not Malay..." (Rafidah)

"...For outsiders, don't be too negative lah. Have to understand people like, understand other religions, understand other races. Because, a lot of people misunderstand, traditions and religions, people don't understand, because it's all mixed up now. Like what Malay people cannot do, actually their religion does not allow it. Only a lot of people don't understand. So I think, I hope they will understand it more lah.." (Lina)

4.5.2 Messages of Support

One of the major challenges most participants of the research faced in the early stages of their marriage was the lack of support from people in their surroundings. When prompted with the question on what type of support they wished they would have had in those days, half of the participants stated that they wished their family and friends had just been more accepting and positive even when they disagreed with the marriage.

“...Never give the negative things to the friends or the cousin who who, marriage. mixed marriage like this. Ohh yeah. It affects them mentally. So hopefully they support in just giving the good, good vibes, yeah, yeah, just give the good vibe. For the early, early stage like that. Just good, good vibe and then good um, support lah. No need so much. No need to give the negative one also, just like that. It's enough already. Yeah, yeah No, no, negative thinking...” (Jojo)

“...But, a strong support, has to come from the family group. Not from others. So, family, like, family of a different race, like Bidayuh family...have to get support from my husband's family, and support from my family. So mixed marriage can happen, agreed upon, no more challenges again lah...” (Rafidah)

“...Definitely for my family, I needed support from them. For other people, I can be like, 'I don't care', just my family only. At the time my husband also tried to convince my parents, so in the end my parents also accepted lah...” (Lina)

a. Government Support

On the other hand, for couples who marry someone of a different nationality and have plans to reside in Malaysia, their wishes for social support are more to having the government support in legal processes regarding marriage registrations or obtaining permits and visas for their foreign spouses. It is a tedious, long-winded and confusing process in Malaysia's immigration system. Thus, they wished that the government would assist in ensuring everything was standardised and easier for them.

“...I need to have a clear goal, clear perspective and clear SOP. Because basically, I, I deal with immigration in West Malaysia, that is the reason why, I

don't expect that totally different with uh, immigration in Sarawak. So we slowly slowly get up, don't give up easily, get married with someone...get married and settle down in Sarawak is not easy..." (Aina)

"...Um, basically, I would say that I unfortunately do not trust the government to be non-racist. Yeah, that's my point. Yeah. Yeah, I don't trust them. Um. And it's really sad because you should trust. You should think...you should, it should be in, like they should have your best interests at hand, right? You should feel like they're gonna protect me, they're gonna fight for me, They're going to have my best interests. They're gonna support me and encourage me. Unfortunately, it feels as if, um, the world is out to get you instead. So, um, yeah, social support. I would say, um, maybe more support in immigration just because I'm, we're an international couple. Not necessarily just interracial, but our closest, our, our most recent obstacles were immigration related. So definitely more support there..." (Edith)

b. Like-minded Community

In addition, a few of the interviewees also mentioned that they wished they could have had support from a community that recognises their experiences and struggles. This would include clubs, NGOs or gatherings of people who are also in interracial marriages or groupings they feel they belong to. This helps to lessen the fear and provides them relief and advice to go through the challenges they have faced throughout the marriage.

"...I think the best thing that you can have is actually to have sort of, it's either you have a role model, who is in sort of a similar boat as you or you have a community like a group of you, who like, you know of somebody who is also in a mixed marriage situation..." (Shania)

"...Like me, I join the group right in Facebook, about mixed marriage, and it really help me. Everyone get through the same as me, and it makes me feel relieved at first. But for other people that don't have access, so they feel alone. Like they don't feel, what...other people. And maybe, go, be friends with people with the same situation, like someone who...I me at first, before I got married, I go to uh, Malaysian women in Turkey. Most of them married with Turkish, so I join, uh, talk to them lah. This kind of thing, I can ask them question. Like how is it, life? How is it, do everything?" (Ika)

4.5.3 Words of Wisdom

The participants also has their own advice that they wish to share to other Sarawakian women who will also embark on the journey of interracial marriage in the future. They provided statements of what to expect when going forward with marrying a spouse of a different racial and cultural background, as well as imparting wisdom on how to get through with the challenges they will inevitably face.

a. Be Ready and Smart

Many of the women talked about how before committing oneself to something major, such as getting married to someone who is not of their own race, it is vital that they make sure they are truly and wholeheartedly ready to make such a decision. This may include knowing your potential spouses inside and out and also yourself, to see whether you yourself are prepared for this new change. They agreed that as the woman in the relationship, one should be smart before committing to a lifelong partnership with the person they chose.

“...It helps to actually like talk to people and ask around and or maybe just hang around with his friends or get to know each other for a while to see what you're getting yourself into. Because you know of course ultimately yes you want to be with the person but it helps to...I am the kind that for me, it helps if I know what I'm getting myself into at the same time...” (Shania)

“...Um, think about yourself actually. Think about yourself. Yourself and your partner. Will he be the one? The one that you will live with, uh, forever until the end? And then you...trust. And there's a trust issue here also. Uh, yeah, trust him. If you trust him, if he looks promising, just go for it...” (Jojo)

“...I cannot ignore this one thing. If let's say you would like to get married, doesn't matter with outsider or with a local guy, you need to do background check. Do background checking before you would like to proceed another step. Doesn't mean that you need to pick a rich guy, no...but, uh, follow your gut,

OK. Yeah, make sure that guy willingly to learn, to respect our culture and on...yeah..." (Aina)

"...They have to really think first. Think rationally, is the husband you chose really responsible? Really nice? Really gives attention to his family? Have to think those things first before they continue their marriage because if you're married later you cannot reverse and go back. Like you have to, be honest with each other. Look at his attitude, how he behaves, cause once it happens later, their marriage on later days, they will regret..." (Diana)

"...Uh, the most important thing, you yourself must...like I said before, don't rush. Cause a lot of people...there's a few from my side, because she likes that man, she switches her religion. After that divorced, and she regrets it. So I don't think it's a good thing. Cause, we get married, not just marrying that one guy only. We will also marry into the husband's family. Like I married my husband, I also have to face his side of the family, I have to face the religion that I will convert to later. So I think, before marriage, you have to have understanding. Must understand yourself first. This is my opinion lah. Don't be blinded by love lah..." (Lina)

b. Be Strong, Do it for Love

In terms of facing the many shortcomings and issues in mixed marriages, the participants who were interviewed also agreed that it is important for any Sarawakian woman who wishes to marry interracially to be strong and brave and are ready to fight against those problems. To them, it is also a good reminder to always tell oneself to accept the cultural differences as a learning experience that can enrich their lives.

"...But, but you must have this, um, how do you say, um, you have to be a strong woman. That's the thing. So you have to be a strong woman. If anything happened also, you have to think about this also. If anything happened also, you must be strong either with him, or might be alone like that because we don't know about the future. You must be strong. That's the thing. As a woman, you must be strong. Mentally, mentally or physically like that..." (Jojo)

"...I must say that celebrate your differences, actually the uh, the difference, different culture and custom actually, uh...something that I really like about, I really love about. At least in our life we learn something new. Oh, my husband culture is like this, ya, my husband culture is like that. And then you must get ready, especially women, they must get ready for the consequences, such as uh, negative thinking from people. And then, um, not everyone, like myself, my personal experience, not everyone is happy for you..." (Aina)

“...I think don't be afraid lah, you know don't be afraid for all this obvious differences because I don't, differences are not necessarily a bad thing. So and ultimately I think what's more important is that yes the person can be of a different race or even a different religion but if the person's character is something that you are attracted to the most you know, attracts you the most, and because I mean like I can say that like for example, Chinese you know Chinese people have a certain way of doing things but not everybody is you know you know not everybody's the same right. Every race got good and bad. So if you know this person well enough and you know that this is character that you were attracted to you want to be with, I would say just go for it, don't be afraid....” (Shania)

Besides, they mentioned that one should always remember that their love for their spouses drives the marriage, and to use that love that they have to fuel their hearts and minds as an armour against the challenges they will go through.

“...Go for love. How to say oh, if you love someone, their culture is...it's at the back, how oh? Uh, don't matter how his culture is, what race he is, what religion he is, but if you love that person, love him as the one he is, not like love his culture. Because he is not, he didn't ask to be born like that right? You love him as a person, personality...” (Ika)

“...People don't think, when you're going through really, really hard times, you...people don't think, keep going. That's not the first natural thing that they think about. The first natural thing that their body and their humanity tells them is stop, go away, run, don't do this, you know? Um, so you need to be really, really strong to sit and realise that you're similar in a lot of ways and that your love is strong in not just the stereotypical sense, but actually is strong and solid...” (Edith)

Thus, it can be concluded that the advice the research participants wish to give to Sarawakian women in the future who will also enter an interracial marriage is to firstly ensure this is what they wanted, and to be strong-willed when faced with the challenges that may appear. Lastly, it is also important that they remind themselves that their marriage is done out of love, not anything else.

4.6 Summary

This chapter synthesises the findings of the research using the process of thematic analysis. From there, several main themes were generated from the data pool.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings obtained from interview sessions with Sarawakian women in interracial marriages. The discussions focus primarily on the **challenges of interracial marriages experienced by Sarawakian women, coping strategies employed by Sarawakian women in interracial marriages, and the future expectations and hopes of Sarawakian women in interracial marriages** alongside the related theory, the PERMA model. These discussion sections are consistent with the research objectives and questions in Chapter 1. In addition, this chapter includes a summary of every chapter of the research project, as well as the implications and recommendations of the research.

5.1 Challenges of Interracial Marriages Experienced by Sarawakian Women

Marriage is a tumultuous experience. Choosing a partner that a person wishes to love and vows to share a life is an eye-opening experience for almost everyone. Getting tied down improves one's life satisfaction compared to getting a job or being in good health (Heller et al., 2004; Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017). Nonetheless, many challenges may arise from marriage itself, ranging from having to learn to live with someone else under the same roof (İlhan & Işık, 2019), to raising children together. However, it must be said that interracial marriages have their own unique set of issues. According to Calderon et al. (2022), couples in mixed-race relationships reported poorer physical health and psychological wellbeing, alongside increased verbal aggression from their partners compared to those in a same-race partnership.

First and foremost, one of the biggest challenges for those involved in an interracial marriage is the **cultural differences** that both husband and wife would have to tolerate or assimilate into eventually. The finding of the present study is parallel with Furnham (2019) who defined the phenomenon as part of culture shock, a dramatic adaptation challenge towards different stages of life, that may ensue when both partners try to practice one another's cultural traditions, especially when it is something they are not used to or have never been aware of. The participants in the current research typically experience this culture shock during the early days of marriage which includes several different aspects of life such as food, traditions during special celebrations, religious duties and everyday habits of their spouses. For example, Aina was surprised to see that English men would prepare breakfast for the whole family when she was used to the Malaysian culture where women would typically cook instead. While culture shock is a normal occurrence, it is not a long-lasting phenomenon as eventually most spouses would get used to it, even participating in the traditions they were unfamiliar with. Such is the case with Diana, a Christian who attended Hindu prayers and Indian weddings with her husband, even learning how to pray like the Hindus do. Perhaps getting assimilated into a whole new culture is not difficult for Malaysians, since Malaysia is a multicultural country after all. This finding is consistent with a research study conducted by Abu Bakar et al. (2018), whereby everyday interactions and cultural exchanges from the different ethnic groups in Malaysia proved to be beneficial as similar norms and values have enriched one another's culture. Due to this, the effects of culture shock may quickly diminish even if the participant has never practised their husband's cultural traditions, as it may seem familiar or normal and something they are already aware of in the first place.

On the other hand, some people still have difficulties adjusting to their spouses' foreign culture. This is more relevant to those who married husbands of a different nationality. This could be attributed to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, which is a framework developed to compare and contrast the cultural differences between countries. This framework includes 6 categories: Power Distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, Masculinity versus Femininity and Indulgence versus Restraint. Taking Ika's experience into account (who married a Turkish man), she stated that she found difficulty when first moving to Turkey, where the Turkish are so exceptionally warm and kind to strangers, while back in Malaysia, she and her family did not act that way, hence, affecting her new relationships with others in Turkey. These differences in warmth and openness towards others may be related to the collectivistic culture both countries practise. Pelham et al. (2022) describe collectivism as a type of cultural orientation that focuses primarily on relationships with others, emphasising the community and their roles in society or groups. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory compares the level of collectivism of Malaysia and Turkey (The Cultural Factor Group, n.d.), and reports Turkey with a higher score of collectivism (46) than Malaysia (26). Being raised as Malaysian, and having to fly across countries to start a new stage of life where things are very different back home, may contribute to culture shock and a harder and longer time to adjust to the new normal. Despite the obvious differences in their beliefs, traditions and habits, assimilation, tolerance and incorporation of the two cultures are things that all participants have learnt to practice throughout their marriage. They stated that it is a compromise that both parties must adhere to when it comes to being in an interracial marriage if they were to work together as a unit. This realisation from the

participants is consistent with findings from a study by Anaelechi et al. (2022), whereby tolerance of a new culture can ensure that harmony is kept consistent in their marital life.

Furthermore, **support and encouragement**, or the lack thereof from significant people in the interracial couple's life are vital aspects that may make or break the marriage. Based on the current research finding, most, if not all of the women had gone through a lack of support and approval towards the proposal of a marriage with their husband of a different ethnicity. This showcases that interracial marriages are more often met with rejection from one's social circle, as compared to marriages of couples of the same race (Midy, 2018; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). This differs by reasons of disapproval, such as the inevitable conversion of religion for the women (Jojoe and Lina were two who shared their struggles in having their marriage with their husband approved by loved ones, as they would need to convert to Islam as per Malaysia's laws) or having to move across states or countries, far away from their immediate families (Ika's plan to get married with her Turkish husband was most strongly disapproved by her father as she would have to uproot her whole life to stay in Turkey). At other times, it is simply because of prejudice or racial discrimination that taints their perspectives on a loved one choosing to marry their partner who is not the same race as they are. For instance, Lina's parents did not blessed her decision to get married to her Malay husband, as they were worried that he will choose to marry additional wives and toss her aside, since Muslim men are allowed to practice polygamy. These are racial stereotypes that can decrease the level of support being given towards those in mixed marriages, thus contributing to feelings of distress for the women in the relationship.

It is vital that adequate support and encouragement is given to interracial couples wishing to embark on a new journey in life with their desired partner. A large level of exposure on discriminatory stressors, such as a fervent lack of support towards an interracial marriage can bring about a decreasing level of psychological resource for the couple (Bratter & Eschbach 2006; Gabriel & Espocito, 2017). This is especially true for those who have received negativity from closed ones and other people in their community just because of their decision to marry their husband. Diana recalled how stressed out she feels when people would suggest that her husband might leave her for another woman while he was working far from her. Whereas, Aina expressed how uncomfortable she felt seeing the Malaysian society glorify men who married Caucasian women but vilify women who married Caucasian men. These comments, while on the surface may seem harmless, can translate to a long period of shame, worry and stress that eventually will affect the women's psychological wellbeing.

Moreover, the low level of support from the Malaysian government towards international marriages also poses a threat to the wellbeing of these individuals. The long and mundane process of applying for a marriage certificate or a work visa, paired with unclear standard operating procedures (SOPs), meant extra effort and time is sacrificed for the government to recognise their marriage. This can be seen in Edith's case where her husband has to travel to different places in a short time just to go through the lengthy immigration process, making her worry about his safety and wellbeing while being away from her. These inconveniences in the immigration and legal system have also produced a ripple effect on other aspects of the international couple's lives, for example, affecting their spouse's ability to find work to sustain their life, or to even stay in the same household as their lawfully wedded wife.

When discussing interracial marriages in Malaysia, the topic of **religious differences** would inevitably come up. In Malaysia, the intersection between race, culture and religion is a tight-knit one. According to Beyers (2017), “religion is determined by culture, but religion also influences culture” (p. 2). As an exemplification, Christie and Noor (2017) stated that Islam, a faith practiced by most Malays, was declared the country’s official state religion. This would mean that a Malay Malaysian is also a practising Muslim. As such, any non-Muslims who wish to marry a Malay partner would have to convert according to the laws of the Malaysian constitution. This is another challenge that the participants stated they have encountered, most particularly for those who are new converts. Jojoe, a Bidayuh who converted from Christianity to Islam admits that she still finds it difficult to practice the faith as it is an entirely new thing for her. The same can be said for the spouses who have also converted to Islam after marrying their Muslim wives. Aina’s husband who is relatively new to Islam is slowly but surely trying to learn and immerse himself in the new religion, however, she has noticed that the Malay community around her is not so supportive, urging Aina to press her husband to quickly learn to adapt to Islam teachings without caring about how much willpower goes into it at all.

The conversion from a particular Christian denomination to another may also be difficult for those who choose to follow their husband’s religious faith. While the essence of Christianity stays the same throughout several denominations, some practices and regular occurrences in church services may differ from one to another. This change in Shania’s life who was Anglican and now a Methodist, has also impacted her on a large scale.

The challenges that come with conversion to a religion after marriage is the process of assimilation and adaptation. Growing up a certain way and only being aware of how one's previous religion works may affect the person's ability to adapt to the change of a new faith. However, it is better for converts to truly immerse into their current religion and understand the teachings and lessons portrayed step by step, as religion plays a giant role in one's life. Namely, religion assists in forming an individual's identity in the context of building their own ideology, spirituality and social standing (Ebstyne King, 2019). Besides, religion is also a pivotal tool in maintaining the general wellbeing of its believers. Much research has been conducted to understand the correlation between religion and mental health, for instance, a meta-analysis by Garssen et al. (2020) concluded that religion or spirituality has a positive effect on mental health, albeit only a small percentage of it. Moreover, it was also found that religious and spiritual beliefs were associated with lower and less occurrence of depressive symptoms (Braam & Koenig, 2019). Ensuring both parties in the interracial relationship have religious homogamy, also known as an occurrence where people share the same religious beliefs, was also found to affect the wellbeing and quality of the relationship for married couples (Heaton & Pratt 1990; Henderson & Brantley, 2019; Lehrer & Chiswick 1993). This is especially beneficial for interracial couples, as mentioned by Vazquez et al. (2019), religion is a valuable tool that can be used to build up their strength in overcoming social stigmas and negativity from others about their partnership. Thus, it is important that enough support and encouragement is given to new converts during this journey, so that they may reap the benefits from the engagement with a religion that they have chosen to immerse themselves in.

Last but not least, participants of the study also agreed that one of the issues they faced in their marriage was the **experience of being the wife**. Most participants in the research confided that they sometimes feel tired having to keep up the image of the perfect wife - who does the house chores and take care of their children, while others do not seem to mind. For Shania and Edith, they acknowledged that they are juggling two distinct albeit important roles at once, being a wife and also being a working woman. This shows that while traditional gender roles are still widespread, especially in the continent of Asia, there is also a new shift towards these gender stereotypes whereby women can also provide income to their household, consistent with the study done by Oláh et al. (2018). However, the pressure imposed by society and others about their roles as the wife in a marriage still managed to make Shania and Edith conform to these gender roles, hence, making them feel stressed out as their responsibilities start piling up. This phenomenon is best explained by the term, cognitive dissonance. Coined by Leon Festinger in 1957, it is a term used to describe a situation when two types of cognition or thoughts are different and clash with one another, inciting psychological discomfort (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Shania and Edith's cognition and behaviour are polar opposites, whereby the two know that it is quite impossible to be perfect at wife duties and their work, yet still feel the need to take on typical roles of the wife due to social stigma.

Apart from that, some research participants tend to feel more pressure to adhere to society's gender norms than others. This may be due in part to the patriarchal viewpoint that certain community chooses to uphold (Choi et al., 2021). As an example, Ika and Diana felt distressed when they were the only ones who had to pick up child-rearing duties much more often compared to their husbands who were busy with work. This

finding correlates with a study by Hori & Kamo (2017), where Asian wives are expected to be responsible and hard-working mothers for their kids.

Conversely, some participants expressed that the prevalent gender norms are not an issue because of their husband's constant support and assistance. For example, Rafidah mentioned that cooperation between her and her husband is a normal thing, whereby they both split house chores evenly. The same can be said for Lina, she and her husband often work together in taking care of the kids, laundry and much more. This shows that some couples chose to abide by egalitarian gender norms, which is defined as the practice of gender equality in households, whereby women can make choices to either take on the role of their children's caregiver solely, or to also participate in the workforce, with an emphasis on their free will to decide (Cotter et al., 2011; Scarborough et al., 2018). As these women rarely face issues when it comes to performing their responsibilities as the wife in the marriage, thus, they feel more satisfied with playing this role, consistent with a study by Soltanpanah et al. (2017).

5.2 Coping Strategies Employed by Sarawakian Women in Interracial Marriages

Interracial couples face a myriad of challenges in their relationship, ranging from differing cultural beliefs and traditions that they may find hard to navigate, and for some, the conversion of religion may also be a challenge for them to properly get adjusted to such a large change, as well as a lack of support of their union from those who matter most. For the women in this type of relationship, they may also experience hardships in juggling their duties as the woman and wife, on top of trying to resolve any intercultural issues that may arise. Hence, these women must find an outlet or strategies

to cope with the pile of problems that they have to go through to ensure their partnership remains loving and fruitful.

One of the coping strategies typically used by women facing problems in their mixed marriages is practising constant **communication**. In the context of this study, communication serves as one of the solutions to the couple's troubles as it promotes mutual understanding and respect for one another's situation. For instance, Shania recalled sitting down with her husband and explaining why the Gawai celebration is very important to her, and why she feels the need to return home to Kuching for that. Meanwhile, after discussing with her husband on his country's norms and traditions, Edith agreed to compromise and cover up her hair while visiting her in-laws as a gesture of respect towards his rich Swazi culture. The type of communication that best fits to resolve conflicts depends on the severity and the situational context. According to Overall and McNulty (2017), direct opposition is needed when serious problems arise and need to be solved immediately, whereas a softer approach concerning emotional wellbeing and validation is applied for minor issues that are also resistant to change, or when one's partner gets very defensive. Relating this theory to the current research study, Aina is seen to use the softer communication style by advising other guests to use the guest bathroom to ensure that they will not make the floors wet and upset her English husband who grew up having dry bathroom floors rather than wet ones. It is difficult to change one's habits if the surroundings and routines are typically the same, thus, they will also behave as usual (Carden & Wood, 2018). Knowing this, Aina chose to resolve this issue by communicating with her husband first and trying to understand his needs. Afterwards, she provided him validation by making sure his environment in Malaysia was not a drastic shock to him. Communication with spouses in reducing the

stress of challenges in their mixed marriage is very important, and this is supported by a study by Sappor & Affum (2023), where initiating a discussion to talk about these issues together is one of the best ways to cope.

Furthermore, communication can mean sharing one's worries with trusted ones, where they can vent out what they feel dissatisfied with, to let go of bottled-up negative emotions. Venting is a normal occurrence since venting is "a basic belief that catharsis, or letting off steam rather than bottling it up inside, is a healthy way to manage anger" (Behfar et al., 2019; Bushman et al., 2001, p. 610). As such, talking it out with one's loved ones or people they trust can make one feel much better as they no longer have to keep the anger inside. Besides, doing so can also enable the process of validation by the other party, ensuring that the anger and disappointment one feels are normal and justified. In addition, communication can also mean asking for advice from people they look up to on how to solve or lessen the severity of certain pressing marital issues. One of the research participants, Aina ranted out about her marital shortcomings with her best friends, where she felt distressed that people always commented negatively on her marriage with her English husband and that he may divorce her just because divorce is normalised in Western countries. Her best friends often validated her and told her not to let negative comments get to her, assuring her that none of this was her fault, while another reminded her that stereotypes people have about Caucasian men are not necessarily true most of the time, and that she should focus more on her marriage and embracing the differing culture together. Another example is that of Ika's, who often communicate with Malaysian women who married other Turkish men in an online community, asking for advice on how to deal with their mother-in-laws who may be too much to handle. The women all went through the same experience and thus were able

to provide Ika with constructive tips and tricks. Venting out pressing issues can make one feel validated by others, alongside being given insightful advice that helps them to see things from a new perspective as well. Therefore, one's mindset is changed and it also lessens their worries about certain things.

Some participants have also gone and searched for professional help when things get too much for them. They would attend sessions with licensed therapists or psychiatrists and tell them about their worries and issues faced in their marriage. However, Edith disclosed that she has terminated her therapy session after receiving a judgmental comment on her choice to marry her Black husband. This shows that some professionals working in the mental health field still need to brush up on their cultural competency, in line with what Daniel (2023) mentioned in the study. According to McGregor et al. (2019), training on cultural competency for those serving in the healthcare sector is very much needed as it enables more effective communication with clients rather than subjecting them to potential stereotypes or prejudices that may prevent clients from receiving the help they truly need.

Another coping strategy utilized by these women in facing the problems of their interracial marriage is through **distractions**. Distraction provides a person an avenue to temporarily forget about the troubles at hand and to come back to it with a fresh, new mindset and feel more confident in resolving their shortcomings. Distractions may include immersing oneself in respective hobbies or taking some time to sit down and relax. Relating it to the experiences of the research participants, both Edith and Lina agreed that finding a place to be alone and to just take a breather was effective in assisting them in sorting out their jumbled thoughts and negative emotions, before

returning to try and tackle those issues. On the other hand, Diana would busy herself with her favourite pastimes such as fishing. Edith and Lina will also seek distractions such as playing video games or visiting the beach and eating snacks. In a quantitative research project studying the positive effects of distractions towards chronic life stressors, Waugh et al. (2020) found that distractions have high correlations with higher wellbeing and positive emotions, and lower correlations with depressive symptoms. Thus, it can be said that distracting oneself from the problem at hand can be an effective tool and coping strategy for overcoming issues that arise from a mixed marriage.

Moreover, another way for these women to cope with the challenges found in their mixed marital life is the **incorporation of cultures**. This is when both husband and wife practise both cultural traditions in the household, including introducing their distinct cultures to their mixed-race children. As an exemplification, Jojoe and her family would usually visit her hometown for Gawai, and the same goes for her husband's hometown during Raya. Appreciation for one another's culture is also prominent in every participant's household, showcasing that both husband and wife eventually were able to adapt and assimilate with the other's cultural norms as time went by. Shania's husband would bring her along to visit his Peranakan side of the family, where she was able to truly experience living in a Peranakan-style house and see his family member's interactions with one another. Whereas Edith finds it fulfilling and satisfying whenever she has the choice to decide whether to cook something Chinese or something Swazi for their family dinner together. Tolerance, acceptance and the willingness to incorporate several cultures altogether must be constantly practised in mixed-race households because "it broadens people's horizons by recognizing the value of other cultures and thereby putting their own taken-for-granted cultural

standards into perspective, making them less in-group centric” (Galinsky, 2002; Verkuyten et al., 2018, p. 11). This mindset also extends into how the spouses choose to raise their children. Participants with kids have no issue in introducing both their own culture and their husband’s to their children, even encouraging them to healthily explore their rich heritage. Take, for example, Jojoe’s children who are mixed Malay-Iban and Bidayuh, whereby they are allowed to stay in their grandparent’s places and experience the typical life of the Bidayuhs or the Malays. They are also given the opportunity to learn the many languages they can learn, such as the Iban and Bidayuh languages. It is crucial that mixed-race children have the chance to embrace and experience the abundance of their own cultures, to ensure that they are proud of their ethnic identity and willing to practise egalitarianism, and hence, understand that people are on an equal plane regardless of their racial profile (Doucet et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006).

5.3 Future Expectations and Hopes of Sarawakian Women in Interracial Marriages

It is undeniable that women in interracial marriages go through many more issues than couples who are of similar racial makeup, thus affecting their general wellbeing and mental health. As society continues to evolve towards a more advanced and equal life for all layers of humankind, mixed-raced unions are projected to keep soaring, especially in Sarawak where mixed marriages and mixed-race individuals are a common thing. As such, it is best that we, as a multicultural society here in Malaysia acknowledge and understand the expectations and hopes these women may have for others who will also embark on a journey of interracial marriages. Only then we can

fully provide better and improved support to these individuals in ensuring they can keep up with the challenges that may present themselves during their marriage.

First and foremost, one of the most common expectations and wishes from the participants is the act of **destigmatization**. Stigma, in general, is defined as “stereotyped beliefs, prejudiced attitudes, and discriminatory behaviors toward outgroups—but transcending each component, given the global nature of the aspersions cast—resulting in reduced life opportunities for those who are devalued” (Hinshaw & Stier, 2008; Neubaum et al., 2020, p. 2). Negative stigmas about interracial marriages manifest in three distinct forms: stereotype, prejudice and discrimination. For instance, despite how normalised interracial marriages are in multiethnic Malaysia, marrying someone outside of one’s own race is still frowned upon, especially for those who chose to marry Malays as that would mean having to leave their previous religion and embrace Islam. This aligns with a study by Reddy & Selvanathan (2020), whereby mixed marriages are generally still seen as taboo in Malaysia. Participants like Lina and Rafidah hoped that Malaysian society would have the awareness to realise that one’s race does not equal religion, especially for them as Muslim converts. This type of thinking contributes to the poor stigma about interracial marriages in Malaysia. They believe that there needs to be a distinction between the two aspects and that a person would not ultimately lose their racial identity just because they have converted to Islam.

Apart from that, destigmatising interracial marriages is also an important cause to assist the community to be more open-minded towards those who may look and act differently than they do. Learning new cultures is inherently not a bad thing, as stated by Shania. Being open to understanding and practising a foreign culture can assist in shedding off

ethnocentrism, and in turn, lessening the formation of negative stereotypes against other races and decreasing the number of intercultural conflicts (Keith, 2019). Apart from that, tolerance is a core concept that can be used as a tool to raise awareness and educate the masses on the importance of destigmatizing interracial marriages. Based on an article written by Hjern et al. (2019), tolerance only shows up when prejudice is present, and that these two constructs are often interrelated with one another. Once an individual realises that they are being prejudiced towards a community that is different from their own, they would then be prompted to change this negative perception through the act of tolerance. To achieve this level of open-mindedness in their society, participants of the research expect others to educate themselves and to be more aware of the experiences of people in mixed marriages. For instance, Ika recommends finding people to ask about intercultural relations, or simply put, to conduct their own research. Edith also agrees that education is vital, however, people must first have the desire to change and the curiosity to understand why some are willing to venture into an interracial partnership.

Next, **social support** is also among the most talked about expectations and hopes the participants wish could be implemented, for the benefit of those who will come after them and marry someone outside of their race. Mostly, they wished that they had adequate support from their social circle when they were first married, such as Lina who expressed that she felt sad and was distressed that her parents were unsupportive since their opinions were what mattered the most compared to opinions from outsiders. Her experience is consistent with findings from research conducted by Henderson and Brantley (2019), whereby having low support from parental figures can contribute to poor mental health and a higher risk of suffering from depressive symptoms. Therefore,

people must be supportive towards the interracial marriage of those they care about, regardless of how they feel about it. Support from those that matters about one's marriage can contribute to better wellbeing overall, in accord with a study by Grether and Jones (2020), whereby encouragement from one's loved ones can also strengthen the couple's love and commitment towards each other.

In addition, governmental support was also among the type of social support participants wished was easily available. Mostly, this applies towards those involved in multinational marriages and when their spouses decide to move to Malaysia with them. Edith and Aina, who married international spouses, agreed that the immigration system, both in Malaysia and Sarawak, has its flaws and wishes it could be improved on. The long-winded and sometimes confusing process has made them exhausted and feel unsupported in their decision to get married to the person they love. Besides, Franck (2018) also stated that the immigration process in Malaysia lacks transparency, which poses several other issues. As such, more support by the Malaysian government in terms of a more reliable and standardized process for immigrants who marry Malaysian spouses is needed.

Furthermore, another social support the participants agreed on was to have more like-minded communities that can assist them in their marital troubles. Ika cited joining a Facebook group about interracial marriages and mentioned that it was very beneficial for her. Whereas Shania wishes that there were more role models she could look up to, such as the fact that she was able to find vital support from a much older couple who are also in a Peranakan-Bidayuh marriage. People tend to unconsciously flock and find comfort in others who have similar characteristics to them (Scribbr, n.d.). This is a

psychological phenomenon called similarity bias. Having a community that understands the trials faced by those in an interracial marriage can ensure that one does not feel alone in resolving these issues, but also as a platform to ask for advice and vent out, thus, also enabling them to take care of their wellbeing.

Last but not least, the participants also had some **words of wisdom for Sarawakian women** who may marry interracially in the near future. Firstly, rational thinking is needed for deciding to marry someone who is of a different race. Aina and Shania recommend doing a background check on the person you wish to marry, while Jojoe, Diana and Lina mentioned that it is important to understand what it is that you really want before proceeding, and whether one is ready to share a life with another person in such close proximity. The Relationship Receptivity Theory (RRT), founded by Hadden et al. (2018) may best explain the feeling of ‘readiness’ before embarking on something as grand as marriage. According to Hadden et al. (2018), a person who is ready to pursue romantic relationships while still single, feels more satisfied when they find a partner and are willing to invest more in their relationship, thus, contributing to a higher sense of commitment towards their partners. As such, a person must first understand themselves, as stated by Lina, to find their purpose in what they want in a partner and whether going further with them is something they are willing to venture into. The RRT can also be applied in interracial partnerships exclusively. Learning new and foreign cultures, as well as the possibility of converting to another religion is another question a person may need to ask themselves, on whether it is something they can cope with. These are all valid concerns and it all boils down to one question: are you truly ready to enter a marriage, with all its potential challenges, especially for those who are in an interracial partnership?

This question brings another perspective to the table, whereby the participants also believe that love conquers all. Despite all the issues that may surface afterwards, it is important that those in an intercultural marriage keep consistent reminders that love is what matters the most. Ika argued that love is important, that she loves her husband not because he is Turkish, but because of who he is as a person, his personality, attitude and behaviour that are uniquely his. While most of these aspects can inherently be influenced by culture, whereby “culture influences how people view themselves, and how people view themselves may determine their behavior” (Allik et al., 2023), their cultural identity is not the focal point for the purpose of marriage, but rather, who they are as a person that contributes to the romantic feelings involved.

Next, most participants also have the belief that being strong-willed is necessary in countering all the challenges in their mixed marriage. Any woman who decides to marry interracially in the future must be prepared for all the social stigmas, negative comments and whatsoever. For instance, Aina believes that one must be mentally ready to face all the negativity, but that it is worth it if one reframes their mindset into celebrating the differences between husband and wife rather than letting it be a point of argument. Tolerance towards these differences can assist in this aspect, it which it “includes acceptance of, respect for, and appreciation of difference” (Hjerm et al., 2018, p. 897). Meanwhile, Shania said that one should not be scared to go for marriage, if their potential spouse shows promising character. This interrelates with the points above, whereby the women must always remind themselves to push on despite the hardships encountered because the love they have for their partner is above everything else.

5.4 Related Theory/Model Discussion

The PERMA model is a theoretical model developed as a measurement for psychological wellbeing, which includes both aspects of psychological wellbeing: hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing. It was first created by Martin Seligman in 2011, a positive psychologist. The PERMA model can be applied to the challenges faced by Sarawakian women in interracial marriages, whereby all five aspects of the PERMA model can be incorporated into their marriage to ensure a higher level of psychological wellbeing and overall fulfilment and enjoyment in life.

5.4.1 Positive Emotions

Positive emotions typically include feelings of enjoyment, happiness and pleasure. In the context of this research study, participants reported feeling more negative emotions than positive ones due to the overwhelming issues in their mixed marriages. However, as time goes on and participants manage to find coping strategies that can accommodate their needs, they gradually find happiness and joy in their lives with their respective spouses. Overall, participants do not regret marrying interracially as the benefits of being together with a person they love far outweigh the bad, thus, enabling their psychological wellbeing to be at a consistent, good level.

5.4.1 Engagement

Engagement in the PERMA model is defined as activities that help one to feel immersed in the process of doing those activities. For the research participants, engagement comes in the form of relaxation techniques used to cope with the complications of their interracial marriages. This includes doing their favourite hobbies and travelling to

comfort places. These activities have enabled them to take their mind away from worries relating to challenges in their married life, which may also indirectly contribute to increased positive emotions.

5.4.3 Relationships

Relationships with people are inevitable, and an integral part of what it means to be a human being. Participants who have a good relationship with their spouses typically receive constant support and communication, hence, encouraging them to go through the difficulties faced in their marriage bravely. Besides, the same can be said for relationships with other significant others in their lives, such as friends and family. Steady and stable relations with people outside of their marriage provide a platform for these participants to receive support and advice when things go awry in their marriage.

5.4.4 Meaning

Meaning, in the context of the PERMA model, is the pursuit of the true meaning of what “life” is, whereby a person can achieve self-actualisation and feel satisfied with all the choices they made in life. Relating this to the research study, participants felt that life is meaningful when they are given the opportunity to understand a culture different from their own, finding comfort and meaning when practising new and foreign traditions. They believe that it is a good thing to get as much knowledge as possible about the distinct cultures in the world.

5.5.5 Accomplishment

Accomplishment is the sense of satisfaction and pleasure derived from one's capability and skills in doing something that aligns with one's goals. For the research participants, a feeling of accomplishment is achieved when they can resolve the issues in their mixed marriage, whereby the challenges they first faced no longer pose a threat to their wellbeing. With the appropriate strategies to cope with the challenges as well as a persistent mindset of perseverance, the participants managed to accomplish this objective in their lives to find joy in their marriage with the person they love.

5.5 Summary of the Study

Malaysia consists of people from all walks of life, Malaysians of distinct racial backgrounds and unique cultural traditions and customs. As such, it is no surprise to see and hear of interracial marriages in the multicultural society of Malaysia, especially in Sarawak. This research study was designed to understand the lived experiences of Sarawakian women in an interracial marriage, thus, the study was conducted qualitatively. Three research objectives were formed, mainly: exploring the challenges they have faced, understanding their coping strategies, and identifying their hopes and expectations for the future regarding interracial marriages.

In **Chapter 1**, the background of the topic of the research and the significance of conducting this research are discussed. Subsequently, a conceptual framework was developed alongside formulating the research objectives and questions. Whereas for **Chapter 2**, vital research on the concept of marriage, interracial marriages, its challenges, coping strategies employed by those involved and the relevance of the

PERMA model were extensively researched from different and relevant journal articles to conclude the literature review of this study. For **Chapter 3**, the methodology of the research was planned out, whereby a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews was conducted. 8 participants who fit the inclusion criteria were interviewed alongside one pilot study, and participants were recruited through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. **Chapter 4** focuses on the findings of the research, and subsequently, the data analysis using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, **Chapter 5** dives into a thorough discussion of the findings obtained, as well as the research's implications and recommendations.

5.6 Implication of Research

This research study contributed to three main aspects: the body of knowledge, research methodology and society.

5.6.1 Implication to Body of Knowledge

This research study primarily contributes to the existing body of knowledge by shedding more light on the type of challenges typically faced by women in interracial marriages. However, this research focuses the scope on women in Malaysia, thus, being able to obtain more information and knowledge on the topic of issues commonly faced by those in interracial marriages in a Malaysian context. The research also provides a fresh perspective of those in the Asian regions compared to the abundance of literature that was more Westernised. Besides, since this research project specifies the lived experiences of Sarawakian women, it ensures that Sarawak in general can be put on the map and given more opportunities to shine in the domain of scientific research.

Moreover, the findings obtained and subsequently analysed towards the progression of this research bring forth significant insights towards the shortcomings and issues that show up in a mixed marriage, compared to a marriage with people of the same racial makeup. This body of knowledge, taken from the actual experiences of the participants enables readers of the research to be more aware of the potential challenges those in interracial marriages may go through. While mixed marriages are common and are gradually accepted in Malaysian society, most people still need to be made aware of the negative implications that come with it, as there was a lack of research conducted on this topic in general. As such, this research study serves as a platform to provide more awareness of the experiences of those in mixed marriages.

This research project can also be projected as a catalyst for future researchers interested in further research on multiculturalism in Malaysia. This research can be used as a reference point for other researchers in the pursuit of understanding the intersection of culture and mixed interactions for the many races in Malaysia, as well as relevant literature, to be used in dissecting the topic of interracial relationships and marriage. The strengths and limitations in this study can also be a reference for researchers to refine the topic and develop an improved and more valid version of a research instrument dissecting the construct of multiculturalism.

The findings concluded from this study are also beneficial for therapists, psychologists and mental health professionals who may encounter clients with issues of culture assimilation and adaptation. This is especially relevant towards marriage and relationship counsellors who may receive patients who marry interracially and are

having problems because of their differing cultures. Hence, this research can assist those working in the mental health field to brush up on their cultural competency, acknowledging the inevitable and important role one's culture plays in their cognition, thoughts and behaviour.

5.6.2 Implication to Research Methodology

This qualitative research study enables participants to give more in-depth answers regarding their experiences of being in an interracial marriage, thus, ensuring that the findings of the research have high validity. The guided questionnaire created can be used by future researchers to be modified and reused by those interested in covering this topic as a whole. Furthermore, the thematic analysis that was applied in the data analysis process proved to be an empirically sound method in qualitative studies.

5.6.3 Implication to Society

The study brings to light the coping strategies typically used by participants when challenges of their interracial marriages start affecting them negatively. They also shared examples of social support they wished could be implemented to assist them in overcoming these difficulties. Therefore, these insights can be utilised for all layers of society to do their part in helping those in mixed marriages to feel less fearful of their matrimony and the eventual challenges it may bring. In addition, it may also raise awareness in Malaysian society to destigmatise the taboo and negative stigma surrounding mixed marriages, but instead, to be supportive of friends and family venturing into a relationship with others of a different culture. This will also encourage their communities to be more open and willing to embrace and respect cultural norms

and traditions that may not be something familiar to them, rather than acting close-minded. Therefore, a more united and harmonious Malaysia can be formed.

5.7 Recommendations

Several limitations of the research study can be modified to provide better and consistent results. Hence, there are a handful of recommendations from the researcher regarding this study for future researchers to conduct more relevant studies.

5.7.1 Recommendation to Future Researchers

First and foremost, researchers who are interested in understanding more about the unique challenges faced by women in interracial marriage can widen the scope of this current research study. As only 8 participants were interviewed, it is considered to be a small number of samples, thus, it may not be able to represent the feelings and experiences of other women who are in the same boat. Besides, it is also recommended that researchers conduct more research studies on interracial marriage in other states in Malaysia as well, to make potential comparisons of research findings between people in mixed marriages in West Malaysia and East Malaysia. Another recommendation would also be to focus solely on the experiences of Malaysians who married spouses of a different nationality, as it may provide more insights into their respective challenges compared to marriage between Malaysian citizens.

Furthermore, researchers can also opt to employ the mixed method of research rather than just exclusively conducting the study qualitatively. Quantitative research surveys or questionnaires can reach a wider audience rather than the semi-structured interview

which is time-consuming and difficult to find willing participants. It is recommended that surveys be distributed to interested individuals and includes instruments and items that can assess the level of psychological wellbeing of individuals in interracial marriages. Next, a selected few respondents will then be invited to be interviewed, to expand on their answers in the survey and provide more in-depth explanations or anecdotes that can contribute to a richer and much more meaningful collection of data.

Lastly, the guided questionnaires can also be improved. Certain questions can be added on or removed to ensure high reliability and validity across all samples when data collection is conducted.

5.8 Summary

This chapter covers a wide array of topics, ranging from discussions on the findings of the research to the application of the PERMA model to interracial marriages. Apart from that, a short recap of all 5 chapters in this research project was summarised alongside the research's implications to the relevant parties. Recommendations for future researchers were also included in this chapter.

REFERENCES

- Abdul Aziz, A. R., Ab Razak, N. H., Perdani Sawai, R., & Husin, H. (2020). Seks sebelum nikah: Konsep janji temu dan cinta mengikut perspektif Islam. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 5(12), 131–143. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v5i12.590>
- Abu Bakar, H., Bahtiar, M., Halim, H., Subramaniam, C., & Ling, S. C. (2018). Shared cultural characteristics similarities in Malaysia's multi-ethnic society. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 47(3), 243–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1460274>
- Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, 1(4), 492–505. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19>
- Alkayid, M., & Awad, Y. (2019). Family members and marital (in)stability of cross-cultural marriage in Jamal Mahjoub's Travelling with Djinns. *The International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies*, 17(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0055/cgp/v17i02/1-13>
- Anaelechi, O. E., Yahya, F., & Velina, V. (2022). Exploring the intercultural marriage between Malaysian women and African men in Sarawak. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(3), 2028–2055. <https://www.journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/view/1922>
- Antony, S., Khadirnavar, A., Birudu, R., Raman, K., & Thirumoorthy, A. (2019). Persons with mental illness and their caregivers: What do they think, feel, and perceive about marriage? *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 35(4), 238. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijsp.ijsp_98_18
- Baker, J. J. W. (2019). Persons. *Oxford University Press EBooks*, 517–539. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198812609.003.0028>
- Behfar, K. J., Cronin, M. A., & McCarthy, K. (2019). Realizing the upside of venting: The role of the “challenger listener.” *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2018.0066>
- Beyers, J. (2017). Religion and culture: Revisiting a close relative. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 73(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i1.3864>
- Bojanowska, A., Kaczmarek, Ł. D., Urbanska, B., & Puchalska, M. (2022). Acting on values: A novel intervention enhancing hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 23(8), 3889–3908. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-022-00585-4>
- Braam, A. W., & Koenig, H. G. (2019). Religion, spirituality and depression in prospective studies: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 257, 428–438. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.06.063>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brooks, J. E., & Morrison, M. M. (2022). Stigma and relationship quality: The relevance of racial-ethnic worldview in interracial relationships in the United States. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.923019>
- Brown, C. C., Williams, Z., & Durtschi, J. A. (2018). Trajectories of interracial heterosexual couples: A longitudinal analysis of relationship quality and separation. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 45(4), 650–667.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12363>
- Calderon, P. S. P., Wong, J. D., & Hodgdon, B. T. (2022). A scoping review of the physical health and psychological well-being of individuals in interracial romantic relationships. *Special Issue: Transformative Family Scholarship: Theory, Practice, and Research at the Intersection of Families, Race and Social Justice*, 71(5), 2011–2029. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12765>
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652–661. NCBI. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>
- Carden, L., & Wood, W. (2018). Habit formation and change. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 20(20), 117–122.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2017.12.009>
- Choi, H. R., Ha, B., Jeon, Y. J., Youm, Y., Kim, H. C., & Jung, S. J. (2021). Gender role stereotypes, patriarchal attitudes, and cognitive function in the elderly rural Korean population: A cross-sectional study. *Epidemiology and Health*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.4178/epih.e2021023>
- Christie, D. J., & Noor, N. M. (2017). Humanising and dehumanising the other: Ethnic conflict in Malaysia. *Enlarging the Scope of Peace Psychology: African and World-Regional Contributions*, 109–157. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45289-0_7
- Damin, Z. A., Abdullah, K., & Omar-Fauzee, Mohd. S. (2021). Ethnic and religious tolerance: Barrier factors and improvement measures based on Malay youth perspectives in Malaysia. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)*, 12(2), 622–635.
<https://doi.org/10.17762/turcomat.v12i2.916>
- Daniel, S. (2023). Negotiating the challenges of an interracial marriage: An interpretive phenomenological analysis of the perception of diaspora Indian partners. *Family Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12888>

- Dayak Daily. (2024, June 14). *16 Padawan residents from mixed marriages granted native status*. DayakDaily. <https://dayakdaily.com/16-padawan-residents-from-mixed-marriages-granted-native-status/>
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2023, November 23). *Marriage and divorce*. Ministry of Economy Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal. <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/marriage-and-divorce-malaysia->
- Doucet, F., Marcella Runell Hall, & Giraud, M. (2019). Parenting mixed-race children. *Springer EBooks*, 131–158. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96160-6_7
- Ebstyne King, P. (2019). Religion and identity: The role of ideological, social, and spiritual contexts. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7(3), 197–204. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532480xads0703_11
- Ercan, E. U., & Uçar, S. (2021). Gender roles, personality traits and expectations of women and men towards marriage. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 16(1), 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.29329/epasr.2020.334.1>
- Fallahchai, R., & Fallahi, M. (2019). Gender differences in expectations, purposes and attitudes to marriage in university students. *Iranian Evolutionary and Educational Psychology Journal*, 1(1), 42–50. <https://doi.org/10.29252/ieepj.1.1.42>
- Feng, X., Lu, X., Li, Z., Zhang, M., Li, J., & Zhang, D. (2020). Investigating the physiological correlates of daily well-being: A PERMA model-based study. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 13(1), 169–180. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1874350102013010169>
- Franck, A. K. (2018). Corrupt(ing) borders: Navigating urban immigration policing in Malaysia. *Geopolitics*, 24(1), 251–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1422121>
- Furnham, A. (2019). Culture shock: A review of the literature for practitioners. *Psychology*, 10(13), 1832–1855. Scirp. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2019.1013119>
- Gabriel, R., & Esposito, M. H. (2017, April). Interracial couples and the association among marriage and health. In *Population Association of America 2017 Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL*.
- Garayová, L. (2021). The protection of families in the Slovak legal system. *Studies of the Central European Professors' Network* /. https://doi.org/10.54237/profnet.2021.tbblfl_7
- Garssen, B., Visser, A., & Pool, G. (2020). Does spirituality or religion positively affect mental health? Meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *The International Journal*

- for the *Psychology of Religion*, 31(1), 1–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1729570>
- Goodman, F. R., Disabato, D. J., Kashdan, T. B., & Kauffman, S. B. (2018). Measuring well-being: A comparison of subjective well-being and PERMA. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 13(4), 321–332.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2017.1388434>
- Greene, M. E., & Stiefvater, E. (2019). Social and gender norms and child marriage. *Advanced Learning and Information on Gender Norms*.
- Greif, G. L., & Saviet, M. (2020). In-law relationships among interracial couples: A preliminary view. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2020.1732254>
- Grether, S. T., & Jones, A. (2020). Examining the relationship between social support and interracial divorce in Louisiana. *Journal of Family Issues*, 42(8), 1831–1851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x20957363>
- Grover, S., & Helliwell, J. F. (2019). How's life at home? New evidence on marriage and the set point for happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20(2), 373–390. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-017-9941-3>
- Gui, T. (2022). Coping with parental pressure to get married: Perspectives from Chinese “leftover women.” *Journal of Family Issues*, 44(8), 2118–2137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x211071053>
- Hadden, B. W., Agnew, C. R., & Tan, K. (2018). Commitment readiness and relationship formation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 44(8), 1242–1257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218764668>
- Hamzaoui, A. (2018). Are interracial marriages an indicator of integration in the American society? *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society*, 1(1), 85–100.
- Hannemann, T., Kulu, H., Rahnu, L., Puur, A., Hărăguș, M., Obućina, O., González-Ferrer, A., Neels, K., Van den Berg, L., Pailhé, A., Potarca, G., & Bernardi, L. (2018). Co-ethnic marriage versus intermarriage among immigrants and their descendants: A comparison across seven European countries using event-history analysis. *Demographic Research*, 39(17), 487–524. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2018.39.17>
- Harmon-Jones, E., & Mills, J. (2019). An introduction to cognitive dissonance theory and an overview of current perspectives on the theory. *Cognitive Dissonance: Reexamining a Pivotal Theory in Psychology (2nd Ed.)*, 1(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000135-001>
- Hassan Mydin, S. A., & Saidumasudu, M. S. (2018). The changing identities of the Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel coast to Malaysia: An etymological

- analysis. *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research, 1*. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0008891906500656>
- Helgeson, V. S. (2020). *Psychology of gender*. Routledge.
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003016014/psychology-gender-vicki-helgeson>
- Henderson, A., & Brantley, M. (2019). Parent's just don't understand: Parental support, religion and depressive symptoms among same-race and interracial relationships. *Religions, 10*(3), 162. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030162>
- Himawan, K. K., Bambling, M., & Edirippulige, S. (2018). What does it mean to be single in Indonesia? Religiosity, social stigma, and marital status among never-married Indonesian adults. *SAGE Open, 8*(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018803132>
- Hjerm, M., Eger, M. A., Bohman, A., & Fors Connolly, F. (2019). A new approach to the study of tolerance: Conceptualizing and measuring acceptance, respect, and appreciation of difference. *Social Indicators Research, 147*(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-019-02176-y>
- Holden, L. R., LaMar, M., & Bauer, M. (2021). Evidence for a cultural mindset: Combining process data, theory, and simulation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.596246>
- Hori, M., & Kamo, Y. (2017). Gender differences in happiness: The effects of marriage, social roles, and social support in East Asia. *Applied Research in Quality of Life, 13*(4), 839–857. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-017-9559-y>
- Hsu, T.-L., & Barrett, A. E. (2020). The association between marital status and psychological well-being: Variation across negative and positive dimensions. *Journal of Family Issues, 41*(11), 2179–2202.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x20910184>
- Huntington, C., Stanley, S. M., Doss, B. D., & Rhoades, G. K. (2021). Happy, healthy, and wedded? How the transition to marriage affects mental and physical health. *Journal of Family Psychology, 36*(4), 608–617.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000913>
- Husain, W., Ibrahim, S., Wan Sallha Yusoff, Rashid, A., & Hanie, I. (2021). Introductory analysis of factors affecting intercultural couples in the context of Malaysia. *Proceedings of 8th International Conference on Advanced Materials Engineering & Technology (ICAMET 2020)*.
<https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0052040>
- İlhan, S. T., & Işık, Ş. (2019). The marriage life experiences and perceptions on the early years of the marriage: Problems, difficulties and needs. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education, 7*(4), 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.14689/issn.2148-2624.1.7c.4s.6m>

- Interracial. (n.d.). In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved October 23, 2023, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/interracial>
- Jana Saim, N., Sarnon, N., Abbas, A., Mohamad Aun, N. S., & Idris, A. (2023). Transnational marriage in Malaysia: Case study and a critical review based on convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and narrative analysis of topical stories. In *Women's Health Problems - A Global Perspective*. IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.112146>
- Keith, K. D. (2019). Ethnocentrism. In *Cross-Cultural Psychology* (pp. 23–38). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119519348.ch2>
- Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., & Wilson, S. J. (2017). Lovesick: How couples' relationships influence health. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 13(1), 421–443. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032816-045111>
- Kerney, A. (2021). Interracial relationships: The history, growth and effects on individuals and society. *Integrated Studies*, 323. <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/bis437/323>
- Kirkinis, K., Pieterse, A. L., Martin, C., Agiliga, A., & Brownell, A. (2018). Racism, racial discrimination, and trauma: A systematic review of the social science literature. *Ethnicity & Health*, 26(3), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2018.1514453>
- Leavy, P. (2020). *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Oxford University Press.
- Leow, H. M. A. (2023, March 9). *Keeping the Baba-Nyonya culture of Penang alive*. JSTOR Daily. <https://daily.jstor.org/keeping-the-baba-nyonya-culture-of-penang-alive/>
- Lino, M., & Hashim, I. H. M. (2019). Racial microaggression in multicultural Malaysia: Ethnic-specific experience of university students. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 6(3), 81–97. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48710233>
- Lips, H. M. (2020). Sex and gender: An introduction, seventh edition. In *Google Books*. Waveland Press. https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xgjaDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=sex+and+gender&ots=WqmPqkEi0a&sig=TR8BrMzf9cMRyxCy46wSyeYYa-Y&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=sex%20and%20gender&f=false
- Livingston, G., & Brown, A. (2017, May 18). *Trends and patterns in intermarriage*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/05/18/1-trends-and-patterns-in-intermarriage/>

- Loh, A. C. Y., & Karubi, N. P. (2018). Malaysian hybridity: Issues of kinship practices and identity crisis. *Trends in Undergraduate Research*, 1(1), 19–24. <https://doi.org/10.33736/tur.1180.2018>
- Loh, L. (2021a, September 15). *Malaysia Day 2021: Interracial Malaysian couples on cross-cultural love*. Tatler Asia. <https://www.tatlerasia.com/the-scene/people-parties/malaysia-day-2021-interracial-couple-mixed-marriage-malaysia-love-stories>
- Lowe, N. K. (2019). What is a pilot study? *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, 48(2), 117–118. [https://www.jognn.org/article/S0884-2175\(19\)30006-1/fulltext](https://www.jognn.org/article/S0884-2175(19)30006-1/fulltext)
- Majumdar, A. (2022). *Thematic analysis in qualitative research*. Research Anthology on Innovative Research Methodologies and Utilization across Multiple Disciplines. <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/thematic-analysis-in-qualitative-research/290815>
- Malki, I. (2021). A discursive examination of White Americans' attitudes about White-Black interracial marriages in USA. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(1), 86–105. <https://doi.org/10.26417/831kva96x>
- Malmqvist, J., Hellberg, K., Möllås, G., Rose, R., & Shevlin, M. (2019). Conducting the pilot study: A neglected part of the research process? Methodological findings supporting the importance of piloting in qualitative research studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919878341>
- Marriage. (n.d.). In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved October 23, 2023, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/marriage>
- Matkarimova, A. I., & Kabakova, M. P. (2020). Features of psychological health of married and unmarried individuals. *BULLETIN Series Psychology*, 65(4), 143–148. <https://doi.org/10.51889/2020-4.1728-7847.26>
- McGregor, B., Belton, A., Henry, T. L., Wrenn, G., & Holden, K. B. (2019). Improving behavioral health equity through cultural competence training of health care providers. *Ethnicity & Disease*, 29(Supp2), 359–364. <https://doi.org/10.18865/ed.29.s2.359>
- McKenna, L., & Gray, R. (2018). The importance of ethics in research publications. *Collegian*, 25(2), 147–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.colegn.2018.02.006>
- Middleton, F. (2019, July 3). *Reliability vs validity in research*. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/reliability-vs-validity/>
- Midy, T. (2018). *The examination of discrimination and social bias toward interracial relationships* [PhD Dissertation]. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/examination-discrimination-social-bias-toward/docview/2112361040/se-2>

- Mohd. Razif, N. H. (2020). Intimacy under surveillance: Illicit sexuality, moral policing, and the state in contemporary Malaysia. *Hawwa*, 18(2-3), 325–356. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341381>
- Moroz, T. S., Agapov, V. S., & Kuchina, T. I. (2019). Specific features of personality psychological wellbeing in situations of uncertainty. In Perelygina EB, Zotova OYu, Drozdova AV, & Tarasova LV. (Eds.), *Wellbeing and Security in the Face of Social Transformations: Collection of Academic Papers from the 10th International Symposium (Yekaterinburg, July 9–10, 2019)* (pp. 72–80). Yekaterinburg: Liberal Arts University – University for Humanities; 2019. <https://doi.org/10.35853/LAU.WS.2019.SP07>
- MyGovernment Portal. (n.d.). *Religion*. MyGovernment. <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/content/30116>
- Nagaraj, S. (2009). Intermarriage in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies*, 46(1), 75–92. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/312317967?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>
- Neubaum, G., Sobieraj, S., Raasch, J., & Riese, J. (2020). Digital destigmatization: How exposure to networking profiles can reduce social stereotypes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 112, 106461. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106461>
- Nor Hafizam, E. N. F., Ridzuan, A. R., Abdul Ghafar, N. A. E., Abdul Haqq, M. A. F., Mohd Azizi, M. A. I., Prawira, I., & Yahaya, F. Y. (2023). The level of acceptance towards interracial marriage among Malaysian. *I-IECONS E-Proceedings*, 845–852. <https://doi.org/10.33102/iecons.v10i1.121>
- Notice, M. (2019). *“We’re Together”: An Exploration of Interracial Couples’ Perceptions of Support and Relational Therapy* [PhD Dissertation]. <https://aura.antioch.edu/etds/505>
- Oh, R. (2018). Fear of a multiracial planet: Loving’s children and the genocide of the White race. *Fordham Law Review*, 86. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Fear-of-a-Multiracial-Planet%3A-Loving%E2%80%99s-Children-and-Oh/19368c38c5e0dcc1be50ef08d1d17c629cc68be4>
- Oláh, L. S., Kotowska, I. E., & Richter, R. (2018). *The new roles of men and women and implications for families and societies* (pp. 41-64). Springer International Publishing.
- Osanami Törnngren, S. (2018). Playing the safe card or playing the race card? Comparison of attitudes towards interracial marriages with non-white migrants and transnational adoptees in Sweden. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-018-0074-6>

- Overall, N. C., & McNulty, J. K. (2017). What type of communication during conflict is beneficial for intimate relationships? *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 13(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.03.002>
- Parker, C., Scott, S., & Geddes, A. (2019). Snowball sampling. *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/>
- Pelham, B., Hardin, C., Murray, D., Shimizu, M., & Vandello, J. (2022). A truly global, non-WEIRD examination of collectivism: The Global Collectivism Index (GCI). *Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cresp.2021.100030>
- Pessin, L. (2018). Changing gender norms and marriage dynamics in the United States. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(1), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12444>
- Pittman, P. S., Kamp Dush, C., Pratt, K. J., & Wong, J. D. (2023). Interracial couples at risk: Discrimination, well-being, and health. *Journal of Family Issues*, 0(0), 0192513X2211509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x221150994>
- Pretorius, M., Biyase, M. E., & Fisher, B. (2021). Anticipation and adaptation of subjective well-being to marriage in South Africa. *Journal of Economic and Financial Sciences*, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/jef.v14i1.676>
- Provost, N. (2023). Mixing: A history of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States. *History in the Making*, 16. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1284&context=history-in-the-making>
- Puah, J. M. J., Roslan, A. J. B., Weng, A. O. (2021). The inevitable journey: Understanding the conversion process of Muslim converts in Malaysia and how they overcame the challenges from interracial marriages. *Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research*, 7(2), 45-48.
- Reddy, G., & Selvanathan, H. P. (2020a). Multiracial in Malaysia: Categories, classification, and campur in contemporary everyday life. *The Palgrave International Handbook of Mixed Racial and Ethnic Classification*, 649–668. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22874-3_34
- Rich, B. (2023). Marital satisfaction among interracial and intercultural couples. *Family Perspectives*, 5(1). https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/familyperspectives/vol5/iss1/3/?utm_source=scholarsarchive.byu.edu%2Ffamilyperspectives%2Fvol5%2Fiss1%2F3&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages
- Robinson, J. J. (2019). *Mindfulness, tolerance of ambiguity, and attitudes toward interracial relationships* [PhD Thesis]. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/cea0e511e59c14b2756fa353faac720a/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

- Robinson, R. S. (2017). Purposive sampling. *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, 5243–5245. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2337
- Roslan, A. J. B., Puah, J. M. J., Cheang, A. W. O. (2021). All-embracing nurture: Understanding the child-rearing experience of Muslim converts from interracial marriages in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research*, 7(2), 32-44.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.57.6.1069>
- Sappor, C. A. S., & Affum, P. K. (2023). Ethnic related challenges and coping strategies of couples in intercultural marriages in Elmina. *European Modern Studies Journal*, 7(3), 435–446. [https://doi.org/10.59573/emsj.7\(3\).2023.41](https://doi.org/10.59573/emsj.7(3).2023.41)
- Sarawakian. (n.d.). In *Vocabulary.com Dictionary*. Retrieved October 23, 2023, from <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/Sarawakian>
- Scarborough, W. J., Sin, R., & Risman, B. (2018). Attitudes and the stalled gender revolution: Egalitarianism, traditionalism, and ambivalence from 1977 through 2016. *Gender & Society*, 33(2), 173–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218809604>
- Scribbr. (n.d.). *What is similarity bias?* Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/frequently-asked-questions/similarity-bias/#:~:text=Similarity%20bias%20or%20affinity%20bias>
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish : A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Atria Paperback.
- Shimizu, Y. (2020). Parenting together in the child-rearing stage: On mutual criticisms of each other's child-rearing. *Journal of Japan Academy of Midwifery*, 34(1), 103–113. <https://doi.org/10.3418/jjam.jjam-2019-0009>
- Shimizu, Y. (2021). 育児期にある夫婦関係の自覚と夫婦ペアレンティングへの思い. *日本助産学会誌*, 35(2), 145–154. <https://doi.org/10.3418/jjam.JJAM-2020-0027>
- Siva Kumar, F. D., Vaingankar, J. A., Sambasivam, R., Abdin, E., Jeyagurunathan, A., Seow, E., Picco, L., Chong, S. A., & Subramaniam, M. (2019). Marital status and positive mental health of psychiatric outpatients. *Annals of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore*, 48(12), 429–434. <https://doi.org/10.47102/annals-acadmedsg.V48N12p429>
- Smoliński, T. (2019). Istotne cele małżeństwa katolickiego. *Ius Matrimoniale*, 30(3), 111–124. <https://doi.org/10.21697/im.2019.30.3.05>

- Soltanpanah, J., Parks-Stamm, E. J., Martiny, S. E., & Rudmin, F. W. (2017). A cross-cultural examination of the relationship between egalitarian gender role attitudes and life satisfaction. *Sex Roles*, 79(1-2), 50–58.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0859-3>
- Statista Research Department. (2023, September 13). *Malaysia: breakdown of population by ethnicity 2023*. Statista.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1017372/malaysia-breakdown-of-population-by-ethnicity/#:~:text=As%20of%20July%202023%2C%2070.1>
- Sumiati, S., & Jamaluddin, J. (2023). Dampak sebuah nikah bawah tangan prespektif hukum Islam. *Journal on Education*, 5(3), 9594–9604.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v5i3.1833>
- Tenny, S., Brannan, J., & Brannan, G. (2017). *Qualitative Study*.
<https://europepmc.org/article/NBK/nbk470395>
- The Culture Factor Group. (n.d.). *Country comparison tool: Malaysia and Turkey*. Hofstede Insights. <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=malaysia%2Cturkey>
- The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. (2019). marriage | Definition, Customs, Laws, & Facts. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/marriage>
- The Official Portal of the Sarawak Government. (n.d.). *Sarawak Administrative Division and Districts*. Sarawak.gov.my. Retrieved October 19, 2023, from https://sarawak.gov.my/web/home/article_view/358/298/
- Ting, S., Alvin, Y. A., & Jerome, C. (2023). Blame it on my parents! - Parental heritage influence on Iban popular music consumption and ethnic identity among Iban youths in Malaysia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 109–128. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/1512>
- Tomko, J. (2018). La familia cristiana: cuestiones ante el Sínodo de Obispos de 1980. *Scripta Theologica*, 12(2), 337–358. <https://doi.org/10.15581/006.12.20755>
- Trudel-Fitzgerald, C., Millstein, R. A., von Hippel, C., Howe, C. J., Tomasso, L. P., Wagner, G. R., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2019). Psychological well-being as part of the public health debate? Insight into dimensions, interventions, and policy. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-8029-x>
- Urbueva, J. (2019). Opportunity, social mobility, and women's views on gender roles in Central Asia. *Social Work*, 64(3), 207–215.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swz011>
- Valiquette-Tessier, S.-C., Gosselin, J., Young, M., & Thomassin, K. (2018). A literature review of cultural stereotypes associated with motherhood and fatherhood. *Marriage & Family Review*, 55(4), 299–329.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2018.1469567>

- Vazquez, V., Otero, I., & Goodlow, J. (2019a). Relationship stigma and Black-White interracial marital satisfaction: The mediating role of religious/spiritual well-being. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 22(3), 305–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2019.1620189>
- Verkuyten, M., Yogeeswaran, K., & Adelman, L. (2018). Intergroup toleration and its implications for culturally diverse societies. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 13(1), 5–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12051>
- Walker, B. N. (2020). Societal influences on relationship satisfaction in Black-White interracial couples [MSc Thesis]. In *hammer.purdue.edu*. https://hammer.purdue.edu/articles/thesis/Societal_Influences_on_Relationship_Satisfaction_in_Black-White_Interracial_Couples/12215621/1
- Walter, M. (2022). *An examination of public affection sharing and its health associations in interracial and intraracial relationships* [MSc Thesis]. <https://library-archives.canada.ca/eng/services/services-libraries/theses/Pages/item.aspx?idNumber=1369198544>
- Waugh, C. E., Shing, E. Z., & Furr, R. M. (2020). Not all disengagement coping strategies are created equal: Positive distraction, but not avoidance, can be an adaptive coping strategy for chronic life stressors. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 33(5), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2020.1755820>
- Williamson, H. C., & Lavner, J. A. (2019). Trajectories of marital satisfaction in diverse newlywed couples. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 11(5), 597–604. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619865056>
- Woman. (n.d.). In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved October 23, 2023, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/woman>
- Wong, J. S., & Penner, A. M. (2018). Better together? Interracial relationships and depressive symptoms. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 4, 237802311881461. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023118814610>
- Yeung, H. Y. M. (2021). What the future America will look like: Interracial dating and marriages. In I. Management Association (Ed.), *Research Anthology on Empowering Marginalized Communities and Mitigating Racism and Discrimination* (pp. 99–117). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8547-4.ch005>
- Zainal, H. (2018). The irony of Islamization: Sexuality, piety and power on Malaysian screens. *Continuum*, 33(1), 16–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2018.1536778>
- Zainul Abidin, R., Ismail, K., Sariah Syed Hassan, S., & Ahmad Sudan, S. (2018). Marital satisfaction, communication and coping strategy among Malaysian married couples: Factors prediction and model testing. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7(3.21), 408. <https://doi.org/10.14419/ijet.v7i3.21.17202>

Zambelli, E. (2021). Interracial couples and the phenomenology of race, place, and space in contemporary England. *Identities*, 30(5), 725–743.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289x.2021.1993007>

APPENDIX

GUIDED QUESTIONS

Section A: Building Rapport and Explaining the Purpose of the Interview

1. Hi, how are you today?

(The researcher conducts a self-introduction and explains the objectives of the interview)

Section B: Understanding the Demographics of Participants and Their Spouses

1. What should I call you during this interview session?
2. How old are you? And your spouse?
3. Where is your hometown located? What about your spouse's?
4. What are you and your spouse's occupation? What is your income range respectively?
5. What is your ethnicity? What is your spouse's ethnicity?
6. What are you and your spouse's highest educational background?
7. What is your current religion and your partner's?
8. How did you meet your current spouse? What's the story behind it?
9. How long have you been married to your spouse? How many children do you have?

Section C: Exploring the Challenges Faced in Interracial Marriages

1. Are there any challenges that you have experienced related to marrying a partner of a different ethnicity than your own?
2. Do you find it challenging to adapt to/adopt your partner's own cultural beliefs and norms?
3. How do you and your partner try to tolerate or incorporate one another's culture into your married life together?
4. How did your loved ones react when knowing that you are marrying into a different race?
5. Do you think social stigmas surrounding interracial marriage have affected your relationships with your spouse and loved ones?
6. (For those who switched religions due to interracial marriages) Do you find the experience of converting to another religion after marriage hard?

7. As the wife, do you find that it is more challenging to navigate married life, especially in the context of interracial marriage when compared with your spouse?
8. What are the challenges you have faced as a woman in your marriage?
9. (For those with children) Do you think that your child, having mixed cultural and racial identity may face challenges in these aspects as well? If so, what type of challenges?

Section D: Understanding the Coping Strategies Employed by Women in Interracial Marriages

1. What would you usually do in dealing with these challenges?
2. Are the coping strategies effective in assisting you?
3. Do you have any support system that you turn to for help in navigating these challenges? What kind of assistance/support do you need?
4. How do you and your spouse work together to overcome these difficulties?

Section E: Understanding Their Hopes and Expectations for the Future

1. What do you wish for in the future in terms of society's perception/stigma on interracial marriages?
2. What type of social support do you anticipate for other people in interracial marriages?
3. What are your expectations for women in the future who may marry a partner of a different race?



Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

Please take some time to read through the following information.

Research Title

Love Knows No Boundaries: Exploring the Challenges in Interracial Marriages Among Sarawakian Women

Research Purpose

I am from the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). I am interested to study about the challenges experienced by Sarawakian women in interracial marriages. Therefore, I would like to invite you to take part in this study and share your experiences, that you think is relevant regarding this matter.

Your Role

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be involved in an interview session that may take 1 to 2 hours of your time. However, the time allocated for the interview depends on you and we can set the time and place according to your liking.

Participation Agreement

Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw yourself from the study anytime you want. I will be recording the interview session and once it has been transcribed, the information will be destroyed. I will not disclose your name or any other private information that can reveal your identity in any records and information that we will use in this study.

Confidentiality

All your information is guaranteed confidentiality and I am the only one to know your participation in the study. I will be using your information for the study's findings, report, and presentation. However, I will make sure that the information used will not

reveal your name and it stays confidential. This includes extracts written in the article and during the presentation.

If at any point you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher, Effinie Anak Handi Wander or contact me at 011-2507 0047 or email me at 77944@siswa.unimas.my. You can also contact the supervisor of this study, Dr Jamayah Saili at 082-584507 or email her at sjamayah@unimas.my.

I highly welcome your cooperation and participation in this study and appreciate your sharing of experiences. Thank you.



Informed Consent Form

Love Knows No Boundaries: Exploring the Challenges in Interracial Marriages Among Sarawakian Women

Please ensure that you have consented to the followings before being interviewed:

- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study
- I was given the participant information sheet beforehand
- I understand that my participation is voluntary
- I understand that my name, address, and other private information will not be used
- I understand that my answers and reactions will be kept confidential
- I agree and consented to be a part of this study
- I agree and consented for my interview session to be recorded for the use of this study

Signature : _____

Date : _____

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #1

Researcher: OK, nice. So mainly if you have any issues, you prefer to communicate it out with either your husband or like someone you trust.

S: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: And then in terms of like, because you did mention that one of your challenges before is to like properly understand the different cultural practices that you guys do. So how do you and your husband work together to like overcome this challenge?

S: Oh, in actual fact, I learned a lot from his parents. Yeah, I think recently we make it a point to visit his hometown more. So he, even though he is, he was born and raised in KL, his parents are not from KL, his parents are from Malacca. Yeah. So when, so recently, not during Chinese New Year, we went back to Malacca to visit some relatives. And to be honest, just by interacting with relatives you can pick up a lot of things already. So, oh yeah, because, because his relatives are like really pure Baba wearing the *kebaya* and staying in the very ancient house and all that. So I think it was, I think it was quite interesting for me because I've never stepped into a house, a Peranakan house like a you know what, like you know what you see on TV? Yeah, that's the same. It's the same. So and then hearing them interact among each other in Malay because you know Peranakan, they speak Malay among each other. They don't speak Chinese necessarily. So it was quite an experience for me. I personally enjoyed it. But it was one of the things that I think helped me to understand my husband's side even more. I think it's only by that by doing that, that you can actually pick things up. If you are like, you know, like for me, if I just tell him about certain things, it's very hard for him to like, think, like or experience. He has to experience it himself lah, yeah.

Researcher: And then do you also do the same for your husband like getting him immersed in the Bidayuh culture for example?

S: He does. He does try actually...he actually tries to talk to my uncles also you know, my dad's siblings and but, you know, they...I think guys, among guys they're quite chill they'll just offer you a beer and they'll start talking to you anyway. But he does like, he does like, for example there are times when we go back and there are certain things that so...before we meet family or before we do any activity he would...

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #2

Researcher: OK yeah. Yeah that's true. So basically you and your husband would like support each other throughout these challenges by talking to each other like...

J: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's a communication. Communication. Yeah, yeah. We used to do the communication, actually. And then it's good also. We, uh, normally friends, you know, best friends. So we don't have much secret among us, stuff like that. So then he knows how I was, how I am. And then I know also him, uh, how is his, uh, the, the....everything.

Researcher: So it's easy like that to, like identify if someone's feeling....

J: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So easy to talk to. Easy to talk to. Yeah.

Researcher: OK. Thank you for sharing. And then I think I'm going into the last section already, which is to understand what you hope for. What are your expectations for those who are going to marry a different race in the future? Yeah. So as I've talked about before, which is society's point of view or their own stigma on those who are involved in interracial marriages, if you could say something about this, like you could say, if you could say something to people who still have, like this negative view or um not, not very kind um, beliefs on people who are marrying into different race, what do you want to say to them? Yeah, what do you wish for will change?

J: Will change this kind of people right? Yeah try, try, try to live with other cultures also. It's really good thing actually we, know new culture ,you know it's really good thing. Yeah try to live with them or try to understand them. Once you understand them, then they will understand you back. It's like give and take, yeah, it's a give, give and take. Try to, you know, live among them. You know, try to understand and doing things Um, it's a good thing, I think. Like that. Hopefully they understand...how to say, I can't remember. Because marriage is uh, is about you live with that person, uh, it's not about you live, then if you live with that person, you need to know everything. The culture, the religion, uh, the races, everything. Because we're not come with the same, um, races, religion, everything. So we are totally different. But we are still human being. We are the same human beings. That's what I mean. Like it's the same from the beginning actually, only the culture, religion. Yeah, that's all. You just need to be give and take, understand. Then they will understand you back.

Researcher: Ohh, yeah, that's true.

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #3

Researcher: So, hearing from you, the things that...your coping strategies when you face these type of challenges is...you would find someone to let out your worries, and also communicate with your husband to find a solution together. Ya, do you think this is effective in assisting you in lessening your worries in relation to these challenges?

A: Um, yeah for me, I'm the one who need to stand tall and strong. Because um, the one...my husband already sacrifice his life such as *tinggalkan agamanya untuk agama kamek*, and then leave his own country for me. Because, basically when I visit UK for one month, I cannot cope. I cannot cope with the weather, very cold. And then, so, my husband choose Kuching. So um, I know that most of the time, I will, just say that, *mengalah lah*, for certain things, like for example the toilet thing, I surrender, OK sorry. Um...and then, um, what else ya? Uh...so if let's say someone asking about how his progress in being Muslim, even though that my husband a bit slow in his progress, I will just tell them that he is doing well, because I don't want to have any pressure between us, any tense between us. Because um, I know my husband, I know his capability, because um, the moment he convert during that time, he told me that it's not easy to read this...surah, because his tongue, is, you know only used to Bahasa Inggeris, not like us. We can talk, not like...like uh, Sarawakian, we have, at least master like 3 languages. For him, for the rest of his life, only for English. His tongue really don't have tongue like us. Like yourself, maybe you can talk Bidayuh, maybe you can talk in Orang Ulu maybe, ya, like you can talk 4 languages in one time, like he, 1 language only. So, because in our solat we are using Arabic, and even until now he cannot...read certain surah, certain ayat, I don't mind. Because I'm the one who live with him, I'm the one who deal with it. Ya. And of course, some people like, they really want to know about my husband's progress, especially our society, I don't know, Muslim community lah, it's not Muslim community lah, Malay community especially, they will...they will accept your spouse as a *mualaf* who have progress as fast as they can. They don't see about the challenge that they need to cope. What they accept, OK, *kau mesti jadi Muslim, sebaik-baik Muslim*. In fact, those who are born as Muslim, *nya orang pun belum tentu boleh jadi perfect Muslim*. Ya, that is the challenge I always facing, just like fasting, they asking about my husband's progress and so on. I can let my husband not eating, but, for...for drinking, I don't want something happen to my husband. Ya. So I tell my husband, if..

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #4

Researcher: Hm. OK. OK, so last section. Um, banyak perception, masih banyak stigma pasal mixed marriage tok, macam...yang negative lah. So, mun kitak ada peluang untuk kelaka ngan orang yang masih ada belief macam tok, apa yang kitak harap in the future pasal society pun belief pasal mixed marriage? Like, apa yang kitak mok cakap ngan orang yang masih ada pemikiran camya?

R: Uh, huh...OK. So, tentang mixed marriage tok, nya bukan nya, kita di Sarawak tok jak nak. Kamek rasa throughout the world memang ada mixed marriage. Jadi, sidak nya, harus accept the fact that sidak nya, terima jak lah, apa yang dikata orang, mixed marriage tok. Nya sik akan merugikan siapa-siapa, sik akan menyakitkan siapa-siapa. Sebab kita sik tahu jodoh kita di sine sine, dengan siapa pun. Jadi, jangan kita memandang negative dengan mixed marriage tok, sebab mungkin...mixed marriage tok ada hikmah di sebalik nya ka. Macam kamek, kamek dapat kahwin dengan laki kamek, sampai masa tok. Masih bersama masa tok, alhamdulillah, bahagia jak, sikda apa-apa yang berlaku. Jangan memandang negative, ya jak.

Researcher: OK. So jangan, jangan pandang negative lah, sebab uh, nang dunia tok full ngan banyak culture, so perlu cam...sama-sama lah, hidup bersamalah, camya. OK. So next question, uh, what type of social support, so maksudnya, apa jenis support yang kitak berharap dapat diberikan to those yang berkahwin dengan lain bangsa, like what support you wished you have had also time ya juak?

R: Mun nak support mixed marriage tok, memang kamek, 100% kamek akan support. Tapi, kamek support sidak nya dari segi, uh, benda positive. Think positive, jangan apa, pandang serong apa yang berlaku, ataupun sidak ya kahwin ngan siapa-siapa pun. Jadi apa yang dipelajari kita juak, macam husband kitak, Islam...nya pun mendalami juak, macam...macam ne lah, nya dari Kristian dolok bukan senang dolok nak pergi belajar Islam. Jadi, yalah. Harap sidak ya yang dalam mixed marriage tok, kamek advice kitak, uh...apa sige word dipake ya...berhidup dalam bahagia lah, dalam apa jak. Apa yang dilalui, kita terima jak lah. Ya jak, jadi kita bahagia.

Researcher: Hm, I see, I see. OK, uh lepas ya, um...apa jenis support yang kitak harap kitak dapat dolok, or untuk orang yang akan masuk mixed marriage in the future? Uh, support dari segi, siapa-siapa jak, maybe family ka, dari kerajaan ka. Camya lah...

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #5

Researcher: I see. OK, nice to know that. Umm, and this one is more to, OK. This next question is more to, um, how, how did your loved ones react when knowing that you're marrying into a different race or different nationality?

I: Umm, at first they object it. My father especially because kamek, uh, he likes that I work as a teacher here. Stable. Uh, and nya madah, apa pergi jauh-jauh apa semua, and that kind of thing. At first my father...my mom accepted because she, she's more to open minded and she accepted. And, and my father lah. Nya sik terima, it takes time and after nya jumpa my husband that time, then nya dapat terima. Nya madah lah, my husband explain, 'I love your daughter. I want to make her my wife. Don't worry I'll take care of her', or something like that. After nya kenal, then...OK nya, apa, boleh terima. But still hard. Little bit because my mum sedih, nangis, bukan nangis, sedih lah I'm far away from her. Ya, so, slowly, they accept it now. At first, nang susah lah. I have to beg, beg him and explain, like how can I tell him that, I love him, I love my husband and he cannot separate us.

Researcher: Understand. Alright. I see. But now it's OK lah kan, your father?

I: Ohh, now. OK, Everything's OK now because uh, my husband, macam pande ambik hati nya. Yalah. Nya, apa, last time when we go there, when they went to Istanbul, and my husband embak nya pergi basketball match and he enjoyed it so much and he loved my husband more. Up til now, he's...pandai ambik hati lah. But at first, memang, 'eh apa mok kahwin orang jauh-jauh? Sikda orang Malaysia gik ka? Bagus-bagus kerja sitok, camne kelak kerja?' camya lah.

Researcher: Faham. OK, and then what about reaction dari your friends? Or maybe like cousin or auntie?

I: Umm, they're fine. Sidak nya OK la. Because my auntie, my auntie pun, kahwin ngan orang US. So yeah, kind of support me like, uh, you know you, 'if you love him, it's OK'. My friends, ada a few of my friends yang macam object a little bit, because nya takut apa? Takut mun, mun jauh-jauh kelak, if something happen, I don't have anyone to go to. Told me like, you have to be careful, because you...it's not easy to move countries. You don't just move home, states, not states, bukan ke Semenanjung. It's far away. 11 hours flight. So my friend, some of my best friends, macam, madah lah, iboh...think, think twice, not twice, more than twice. Because kelak, um...

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #6

Researcher: OK. Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing. And uh, so you did mention that you tried to like understand one another's culture, like in terms of food. So have you and your husband also tried to maybe like, practise culture together, like, um, you introduce like what you guys do for Chinese New Year or Gawai, for example, and he shows you. Yeah. Is there anything that you guys do together as a couple in relations to, like, each other's, experiencing one another culture together?

E: Yeah, it's a really good one. OK, OK, let me think about it. So obviously we had Christmas together, but it's not very cultural. That's more religious, Um, Chinese New Year? Yes. I didn't. Uh, I couldn't fly back to Kuching. Uh, mainly plane ticket prices but also because of work. So what, uh, we did was my, uh, my husband had to fly to Kuching because at the time, he was still on a tourist visa or a visit pass, which is only valid for one month. And then he has to keep flying back to Kuching every month to renew it and then fly back to KL. OK Yeah. So during that time, he stays with my family, which I think really contributes to the bonding experience that they have, like, you know, without me in the picture, they're able to communicate and, and, you know, just enjoy their time together. So, um, so while he was there and he came back to KL, he brought this bag of goodies from my mom, who is the Chinese one. And she bought, like, random, you know, Chinese decorations like tiny lanterns and angpau and all that stuff. Um, and he was the one...see, that's the bad thing about me, for me, I'm a little bit more Westernised, so sometimes these things slip my mind if my mom didn't remind me. So he actually was the one to hang up these small Chinese New Year lanterns and tiny, like lockets and all these, you know, you know, the stuff I'm talking about, right? The, , hanging decorations, the coins, you know, um, so he, he was the one who hung up everything. And he was the one who insisted that we decorate the house. So we did. Which I really appreciate because he really is interested in embracing my, my culture. Um, besides that, he is also well, he has always been keen on learning Asian culture. For example. um, he is really, really good at chopsticks. And I know that's a really random fact, but it's very obvious, because when he and I go to a coffee shop or a restaurant and then we order and then I'd be the one be like, can I have a fork and spoon and they go like, ohh, just you? Or then they look over at my husband, right? But he's already busy with his chopsticks and I'm like, yeah, just me, I don't use chopsticks. So you know, stuff like that....

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #7

Researcher: OK. OK. Faham. Soalan seterusnya, sebab anak kan mixed Bidayuh Indian, so sidak ya macam, lebih kepada Bidayuh ka or Indian ka or sama-sama, sama rata jak?

D: Dia...mereka, lebih kepada Bidayuh. Lebih kepada bangsa kita, Bidayuh. Dari segi percakapan dia, memang Bidayuh lah. Cakap Bidayuh, tapi bapa dia, memang dia cakap Tamil dengan mereka, tapi mereka faham, dia orang jawab bapak mereka dalam Bahasa Bidayuh. Macam tu. Dari segi makanan dia, anak-anak Aunty memang, semua makanan dia makan lah. Makanan bapa dia pun dia makan, makanan Bidayuh pun. Dia orang tak pilih.

Researcher: OK. So kiranya anak Aunty macam lebih, uh, Bidayuh lah?

D: Mhm, ya. Bidayuh. Sebab mereka semua kan, agama dia orang tiga-tiga pun Christian RC juga.

Researcher: Mhm, faham. OK. Tapi kalau macam perayaan Deepavali macam tu pun dia orang ikut saja lah?

D: Ya, dia orang ikut. Dia orang pergi kat rumah, turun dekat rumah mak cik dia dekat Kuching. Adik suami Aunty ada dekat Kuching. Perayaan Deepavali kalau dia suruh turun, memang dia orang ikut, dia orang turun ikut sambut sama-sama. Macam tu.

Researcher: OK. OK, so, bahagian ya dah habis, kamek masuk bahagian baru. Macam memahami, uh, apa perkara yang Aunty polah untuk mengatasi cabaran yang Aunty padah tadi lah. So, apa Aunty selalu polah mun, contohnya, kan, Aunty padah awal-awal tek, macam family sik sokong gilak, perkahwinan Aunty, mesti stres lah kan? Pasya Aunty pun padah macam susah sikit untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan makanan India, ataupun perayaan sidak ya, macam ya. So, mun benda tok macam stres, polah Aunty stres, polah Aunty rasa sedih camya, apa Aunty akan selalu polah untuk menurunkan perasaan sedih tok? Mungkin Aunty akan cari orang untuk kelaka ka, or Aunty polah benda lain yang boleh, macam, beri Aunty, sik fikir gilak benda ya sebab Aunty tengah polah benda lain. Ya, apa jak benda yang Aunty selalu polah mun cabaran yang Aunty pernah padah tek makin memberi stres?

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT WITH PARTICIPANT #8

Researcher: Oh, OK. OK;. Terima kasih. Saya masuk section yang lain, ini yang baharu punya. Bagaimana kamu...sebab orang yang dalam perkahwinan campur mesti banyak cabaran, macam yang kamu kongsi tapi, macam awal-awal tak ada support yang banyak. Jadi, semua cabaran ini mungkin akan buat kamu rasa stres, kalau kamu rasa stres, rasa macam tak boleh lagi, apa yang Puan selalu lakukan untuk mengurangkan stres?

L: Makan. Makan lepas tu pergi pantai. Benda dua ni lah saya selalu buat.

Researcher: Jadi semua benda ini macam, bantu kamu distract diri dari isu yang ada lah?

L: Ya. Saya akan pergi pantai lah, saya akan makan, lepas tu pergi pantai. Lepas tu saya pun tak peduli sangat apa orang cakap, saya akan sendiri nasihat sendiri lah. Saya rasa down, saya juga akan cakap dengan diri sendiri.

Researcher: OK. Kalau Puan rasa macam ada perkara yang perlu cerita dengan orang, Puan selalu cari bapa, atau ibu, atau ahli keluarga, atau kawan, kamu akan ceritakan masalah dengan siapa?

L: Kakak saya. Kalau saya ada...saya jarang cakap dengan mereka sebab kami suami isteri jarang ada masalah, cuma ada masa, kami dua akan gaduh juga lah, husband and wife memang akan gaduh juga. Yang kami selalu gaduh, lebih macam pendapat kami tak serasi lah, contohnya saya lebih ajar anak lebih tegas, dia ajar mereka lebih relax sebab dia tak nak anak dia stres. Jadi kami akan gaduh, ada masa saya tidak setuju, saya pun cari kakak saya. Saya akan cakap dengan kakak saya, lepas tu, dia akan slow talk dengan saya. Kalau saya ada masalah saya akan cari kakak, tapi jarang juga lah.

Researcher: I see. Jadi, kalau cakap dengan kakak kamu pasal masalah kamu, kamu cuma perlu dia dengar luahan masalah sahaja? Ataupun kamu perlukan advice dari dia?

L: Saya cuma akan cari kakak saya apabila saya perlu pandangan dia. Contohnya, kalau pendapat saya dengan suami berbeza, saya rasa anak saya perlu pergi art school, suami saya rasa tak perlu, tak penting sangat, saya pun akan cari kakak, tanya dia mana satu lagi penting. Kalau pasal masalah, saya jarang cakap dengan ahli keluarga saya. Sebab saya rasa, memang kami dua akan bergaduh, tapi jarang...