

KEY SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN MULTIETHNIC MARRIAGES

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Introduction

Marriage patterns in the United States are changing. According to research, one of the most noticeable developments is that multiethnic unions are becoming more common in the United States. At greater numbers than ever before, individuals who originate from differing ethnicities and cultures are choosing to enter marriage covenants with one another.

In 2013, Joshua Tom and Brandon Martinez, researchers at Baylor University, analyzed the data from 12,000 marriages and made an interesting observation regarding current wedding trends. They concluded evangelical and mainline Protestants are as likely as their non-religious counterparts to marry someone of another ethnicity.² The significance of this statistic is that biblical counselors should expect to handle counseling cases in which Christian husbands and wives are ethnically dissimilar. One of the driving forces for this change in marriage patterns is the 1967 Supreme Court Case *Loving v. Virginia*. Prior to this ruling, numerous states prohibited marriages between people of differing ethnicities. Richard Loving, an Anglo, and Mildred Jeter, an African American with Rappahannock heritage, were a Virginia couple who faced prison and expulsion from their home state because of their marriage. After considering their case, the Supreme Court decided unanimously in favor of the Lovings. Chief Justice Earl Warren opined, "The Fourteenth Amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discriminations. Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not to marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the State."³

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² David Briggs, "The Ties that May Not Bind: Race, Religion, and Marriage," Association of Religion Data Archives, January 14, 2013, <http://blogs.thearda.com/trend/featured/the-ties-that-may-not-bind-race-religion-and-marriage/> (accessed January 8, 2018).

³ U.S. Supreme Court: *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967), Justia, <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/388/1/case.html> (accessed January 8, 2018). The court heard the case on April 10, 1967, and issued a decision on June 12, 1967.

As a result of this groundbreaking decision, multiethnic marriages became legal in all fifty states. The immediate consequence of *Loving v. Virginia* was an uptick in multiethnic marriages. Like a locomotive that begins its journey haltingly, yet gains momentum as it presses forward, the percentage of multiethnic marriages in the United States has risen markedly since the late 1960s. One 2012 study determined that at the time, roughly 15 percent of new marriages were between people of dissimilar ethnicities.⁴ Six years later, multiethnic marriages are more plentiful than ever.

In spite of these relatively new matrimonial patterns, few resources exist that consider the challenges of multiethnic Christian couples in a systematic manner. This deficit of material is lamentable because numerous stressors unique to multiethnic marriages beset spouses, threatening to derail their unions. The failure to understand these dynamics affects couples negatively and prevents biblical counselors from realizing their optimal efficiency.

Jay Adams wrote in 1983 that pastors who provide counseling for their church members reported, “marriage and family problems outnumber all other counseling problems combined.”⁵ Thirty-five years later, this observation remains true. One of the evidences for this somber reality is that in the twenty-first century, the divorce rate in the United States remains painfully high.⁶ Lamentably, studies indicate marriages of multiethnic couples dissolve at an even higher rate than their monoethnic counterparts.⁷

⁴ Wendy Wang, “The Rise of Intermarriage: Rates, Characteristics Vary by Race and Gender,” Pew Research Center’s Social and Demographic Trends Project, February 16, 2012, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/the-rise-of-intermarriage/> (accessed January 8, 2018).

⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Solving Marriage Problems: Biblical Solutions for Christian Counselors* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 1.

⁶ Matthew J. Astle, “An Ounce of Prevention: Marital Counseling Laws as an Anti-Divorce Measure,” *Family Law Quarterly* 38.3 (Fall 2004): 733; Jeffrey H. Larson and Thomas B. Holman, “Premarital Predictors of Marital Quality and Stability,” *Family Relations* 43.2 (April 1994): 228.

⁷ Jenifer L. Bratter and Rosalind King, “‘But Will it Last?’ Marital Instability Among Interracial and Same-Race Couples,” *Family Relations* 57 (April 2008): 160. Bratter and King noted, “[A]lthough entering an interracial marriage tends to carry less social stigma [than in past decades of American history], these relationships are less likely to remain intact [than monoethnic unions].” M. D. Bramlett and W. D. Mosher, reporting for The National Center for Health Statistics, related that after ten years of marriage, intermarried couples had a 10 percent higher rate of divorce than couples originating from the same ethnic group. See M. D. Bramlett and W. D. Mosher, “Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States,” *Vital and Health Statistics* 23 (July 2002): 19.

Because of this troubling statistic, counselors competently must prepare themselves to serve multiethnic couples who experience problems.⁸ Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to identify the primary external and internal dynamics that threaten multiethnic marriages. Understanding these unique challenges will help biblical counselors to apply scriptural principles in a more precise manner.

A Note about Race

In Acts 17:16-21, Paul articulated the fundamentals of Christianity to an intrigued crowd in the city of Athens. The resulting discourse, commonly called “the Sermon on Mars Hill,” contextualized the Christian message for people who hailed from pagan backgrounds. One of the points Paul developed was the common ancestry of mankind: “And from one⁹ He made all of the nations of mankind to inhabit the entire face of the earth” (Acts 17:26a).¹⁰ The statement also has ramifications for the manner in which Christians should understand the subject of race.

Paul defied the reigning Athenian opinion concerning the origin of mankind, denying that different civilizations were the products of distinct acts of creation. Rather, all people groups (παῖν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων) stemmed from one source. The apostle’s usage of the word one in this verse refers not to God in His role as Creator, but rather to His creation of Adam, the first man.¹¹ Paul’s sermon appealed to the book of Genesis as well as the historicity of Adam as witnesses to the unity of mankind.

The anthropological consequence of mankind’s oneness is such that it is erroneous to refer to multiple races of humans. Nevertheless, earlier generations of Western naturalists and anthropologists employed the terminology of zoology to

⁸ Wayne F. Oates, *Premarital Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), 6.

⁹ Instead of reading “from one” (ἐξ ἑνός), certain Greek manuscripts contain the phrase “from one blood” (ἐξ ἑνός αἱματος). Ultimately, the editorial committee of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament gave the first option a {B} rating because they held αἱματος to be one of the “typical expansion[s]” they believed were characteristic of Western Greek texts. See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft United Bible Societies, 1994), 404-5.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, each biblical quotation is the author’s translation of the text.

¹¹ Kenneth D. Litwak, “Israel’s Prophets Meet Athens’ Philosophers: Scriptural Echoes in Acts 17:22-31,” *Biblica* 85.2 (2004): 207.

categorize humans into different “races.”¹² This approach resulted in “a general hierarchy” similar to the Athenians’ estimation of diverse people groups.¹³ Only relatively recently have geneticists and anthropologists begun to “agree with the idea that human races, in any kind of biological sense, do not really exist,” a point Paul established two millennia ago.¹⁴

The implication of humanity’s ancestral oneness is significant. Since multiple races of people do not exist, the phrase interracial marriage is a misnomer. More appropriate is the term multiethnic marriage, since people stem from a large assortment of cultures, worldviews, and language groups rather than unrelated genetic stock. Accordingly, except in quotations, the author of this study generally has avoided using race and interracial marriage, opting instead to implement the terms ethnicity and multiethnic marriage.

Challenges of Multiethnic Couples

Couples who are multiethnically married face numerous, unique challenges that threaten their relationships. This section of the study will consider why multiethnic couples experience so many difficulties, classifying the sources of conflict into two broad categories. External challenges that derive from outside of the marriage are one source of contention, while internal challenges that result from intercultural struggles between husbands and wives are another wellspring of trouble.

¹² Paul Lawrence Farber, *Mixing Races: From Scientific Racism to Modern Evolutionary Ideas*, in *John Hopkins Introductory Studies in the History of Science*, ed. Mott T. Greene and Sharon Kingsland (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴ Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 300. Scientific research has proven “there are no genetic traits that are exclusive to one race.”

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1999), 27.

External Challenges

The Legacy of Poor Race Relations

In William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (ca. 1610-11), the famous playwright coined an expression that English speakers still are fond of quoting four centuries later. In this drama, a would-be assassin named Antonio insisted, "what's past is prologue."¹⁵ Antonio's intention was to justify his and Sebastian's desire to slay king Alonso by insisting that all of the events of the past had brought them to the present moment. This chain of events, according to Antonio, had provided them with an opportunity to act on their murderous urges. In the twenty-first century, this expression has come to mean former events strongly shape and influence the present.¹⁶ Long after incidents supposedly fade into the shadows of history, they continue to exert an influence on contemporary people's thoughts and actions. Nowhere is this principle truer than the sphere of ethnic relations.

A cursory familiarity with United States history reveals the nation has experienced consistent and bitter ethnic conflict since its inception in 1776. In reality, the problems began well before the dawn of the late eighteenth century. Early in the Colonial Era, bloody skirmishes erupted as a result of increasing numbers of European settlers encroaching on Native American land. One example of the enmity that developed was the war Pocahontas's uncle, Opechancanough, waged against the Jamestown colony in 1622, and once again in 1644.¹⁷

Native American resistance to Anglo colonization periodically took the form of warfare until the late nineteenth century.¹⁸ Although these military engagements no longer are a factor, discord remains. Numerous Native Americans resent their loss of

¹⁶ E.g., Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Gary B. Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," *Journal of American History* 82.3 (December 1995): 941-43; cf. J. Frederick Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides,' England's First Indian War, 1609-1614," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98.1 (January 1990): 3-56; Jane Carson, "The Will of John Rolfe," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 58.1 (January 1950): 62.

¹⁸ Louis H. Roddis, "The Last Indian Uprising in the United States," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 3.5 (February 1920): 273-90. Some place the end of the skirmishes as late as the Posey War in 1925. See Jessie Embry, "A Wise Choice," *Oral History Review* 29.2 (Summer 2002): 26.

culture and way of life, and the squalid conditions on most Reservations does not help the matter.

Another source of frustration is the typical conception of Native Americans that resulted from faulty information. Stereotypes such as the “noble savage,” the “enlightened savage,” and the “bloodthirsty savage” abound in American society.¹⁹ Not only are these misinterpretations apparent in the general populace, but also find their way into “museum displays, text books [sic], literature, and the media.”²⁰ Furthermore, the usage of caricaturized Native American mascots in the world of sports teams often draws the ire of the peoples they depict.²¹

Until the last few decades, the majority of Native Americans lived on Reservations²² and in non-urban locales.²³ By 1980, over 50 percent had moved to cities,²⁴ and in 2010, the number had risen to 71 percent.²⁵ The Native Americans who remain on Reservations are more isolated from other populations,²⁶ tending to marry other Native Americans.²⁷

¹⁹ Michael K. Green, “Images of Native Americans in Advertising: Some Moral Issues,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 12.4 (1993): 323-24.

²⁰ Moira G. Simpson, “‘Native Americans’: An Exhibition of North American Indian Culture,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 3 (October 1991): 133; cf. Jesus Garcia, “Native Americans in U.S. History Textbooks: From Bloody Savages to Heroic Chiefs,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 17.2 (January 1978): 15-19.

²¹ Justing P. Grose, “Time to Bury the Tomahawk Chop: An Attempt to Reconcile the Differing Viewpoints of Native Americans and Sports Fans,” *American Indian Law Review* 35.2 (2010-2011): 695-728; Green, “Native Americans in Advertising,” 324, 28.

²² For a helpful map of Native American Reservations, see “Indian Reservations in the Continental United States,” National Park Service: Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/nagpra/DOCUMENTS/RESERV.PDF> (accessed January 11, 2018).

²³ In 1900, only 0.4 percent of Native Americans lived in cities, and in the 1950s that number rose to 13.4 percent. See Russell Thornton, “Tribal Membership Requirements and the Demography of ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Native Americans,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 16.1/2 (April 1997): 38.

²⁴ Rima Wilkes, “The Residential Segregation of Native Americans in U.S. Metropolitan Areas,” *Sociological Focus* 36.2 (May 2003): 129.

²⁵ “U.S. Census Marks Increase in Urban American Indians and Alaska Natives,” February 28, 2013, Urban Indian Health Institute, http://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Broadcast_Census-Number_FINAL_v2.pdf (accessed January 8, 2018).

²⁶ Diane C. Keithly, “Native Americans, the Feudal System, and the Protestant Work Ethic: A Unique View of the Reservation,” *Race, Gender & Class* 12.2 (2005): 105.

²⁷ Kimberly R. Huyser, Arthur Sakamoto, and Isao Takei, “The Persistence of Racial Disadvantage: The Socioeconomic Attainments of Single-Race and Multi-Race Native Americans,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 29.4 (August 2010): 544.

Individuals who reside in cities, however, often wed people from other ethnic groups.²⁸ Nevertheless, research suggests they “are not completely spatially assimilated with whites”²⁹ in urban areas, meaning they have a tendency to live in separate neighborhoods. In other words, numerous Native Americans remain largely beyond the pale of mainstream United States culture. While marriages between urban Native Americans and Anglos are relatively frequent, certain members of society do not always accept these unions.³⁰ The volatile past, coupled with contemporary cultural conflicts, may be sources of consternation for intermarried couples.

The introduction of slavery to the colonies led to yet another clash of people groups. Due in large part to the Virginian colonists’ fondness for growing tobacco, and their perception that too few Europeans resided in the so-called New World to sustain the burgeoning enterprise, they began to import slaves in 1619 to perform the backbreaking work of plantation life.³¹ This decision created a new set of challenges that continues to influence present relations.

Potential African-European marriages of the seventeenth century faced an almost insurmountable obstacle. Intimate associations between the two ethnic groups threatened the perpetuation of slavery, so the colonies fought vociferously against this threat to the status quo. Concern also arose concerning whether the children of multiethnic marriages should be slaves or free. Virginian lawmakers addressed this matter on December 14, 1662:

Whereas some doubts have arisen [sic] whether children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or free [sic], Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne [sic] in this country shall be [sic] held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother, And that if any christian shall commit [sic] fornication [sic] with a

²⁸ Edward E. Telles and Christina A. Sue, “Race Mixture: Boundary Crossing in Comparative Perspective,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 135.

²⁹ Wilkes, “Residential Segregation,” 139.

³⁰ An anecdotal example of the sometimes unpopular nature of these unions occurred a number of years ago when the author and his wife were traveling through South Dakota. In a restaurant, both Native Americans and Anglos mistook his Hispanic wife for a local Native American. Numerous individuals from both groups glared angrily at what they perceived to be an Anglo man wedded to a local Native American woman.

³¹ Walter Wadlington, “The Loving Case: Virginia’s Anti-Miscegenation Statute in Historical Perspective,” *Virginia Law Review* 52.7 (November 1966): 1191.

negro man or woman, hee [sic] or shee [sic] soe [sic] offending shall pay double the ffines [sic] imposed by this former act.³²

Historians recognize this legislative edict as the “first law prohibiting intermarriages” in the British colonies.³³ Other colonies soon followed Virginia’s lead, developing their own restrictive policies regarding intermarriage.³⁴

What began as a method to maintain an optimal number of slaves transformed into something more insidious. In large part, colonists ultimately divided their society along racial lines. Granted, “wide variance in . . . attitudes” toward intermarriage existed in the earliest days of the British colonies.³⁵ As time passed, however, each governing body gradually developed a general distaste for any intermingling between Anglos and African descendants. By 1725, colonial law had developed into a mechanism for preserving Anglo racial purity that did not dissolve entirely until *Loving v. Virginia* legalized multiethnic marriages in 1967.

Although the Civil War (1861-1865) resulted in the liberation of the slaves, relations between African Americans and Anglos did not improve. The Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) saw initial gains for African Americans in the realms of political representation at the state and federal level, as well as voting rights. These advances did not continue for long, however, because during this period “both whiteness and blackness had to be renegotiated and reconstructed, since slavery was no longer a yardstick.”³⁶

³² William Waller Hening, *Statutes at Large of Virginia*, vol. 2, <http://vagenweb.org/hening/vol02-09.htm#bottom> (accessed January 11, 2018).

³³ James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia & Miscegenation in the South: 1776-1860*, with a foreword by Winthrop Jordan (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 166.

³⁴ Examples include Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. See William Hand Browne, ed., *Archives of Maryland: Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland: January 1637/8-September 1664* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1883), 533-34; *Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay: To Which are Prefixed the Characters of the Province with Historical and Explanatory Notes, and an Appendix*, vol. 1, 1692-1714 (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869), 578; William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 2, 1713-1728 (Raleigh, NC: Josephus Daniels, 1886), 212; *Laws of the State of Delaware, from the Fourteenth Day of October, One Thousand Seven Hundred, to the Eighteenth Day of August, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety Seven*, vol. 1 (New Castle, DE: Samuel and John Adams, 1797), 108-9; James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1862-1801*, vol. 4, 1725-1744 (Harrisburg, PA: C. E. Aughinbaugh Publishers, 1801): 62-63.

³⁵ Gary B. Mills, “Miscegenation and the Free Negro in Antebellum ‘Anglo’ Alabama: A Reexamination of Southern Race Relations,” *Journal of American History* 68.1 (June 1981): 18.

³⁶ Julie Novkov, “Racial Constructions: The Legal Regulation of Miscegenation in Alabama, 1890-1934,” *Law and History Review* 20.2 (Summer 2002): 227.

The disintegration of Reconstruction principles, along with the rise of Jim Crow laws in the 1890s, proved to be a dangerous mix. The early 1900s “marked a venomous turn in relations between blacks and whites.”³⁷ These hostilities came to a head during what scholars refer to as “The Red Summer” of 1919. From June to December of that year, at least twenty race riots erupted throughout the United States.³⁸

A generation later, in large part due to the tireless efforts of African Americans to draw attention to their plight, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964. The new legislation guaranteed African Americans equal opportunities, but unfortunately did not change people’s hearts. The troubled race relations of the past continue to affect present interactions, and this environment is challenging for couples who do not belong to the same ethnic group. Although any multiethnic configuration in the realm of marriage can elicit criticism from others (e.g., African American and Hispanic; Asian and Anglo), African American and Anglo couples bear the brunt of this antagonism.³⁹

More Recent Conflicts

For the first time in history, in the 1960s more non-European immigrants arrived in the United States than from Europe.⁴⁰ Asian and Latin American people groups dominated this new wave.⁴¹ The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Celler Act), which replaced the outmoded Immigration Act of 1924, drove this change by ending the era of preferential treatment of European immigrants.⁴²

³⁷ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor, 2008), 305.

³⁸ O. A. Rogers Jr., “The Elaine Race Riots,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 19.2 (Summer 1960): 142.

³⁹ Anita Kathy Foeman and Teresa Nance, “From Miscegenation to Multiculturalism: Perceptions and Stages of Interracial Relationship Development,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29.4 (March 1999): 541.

⁴⁰ Richard Lewis Jr. and Joanne Ford-Robertson, “Understanding the Occurrence of Interracial Marriage in the United States through Differential Assimilation,” *Journal of Black Studies* 41.2 (November 2010): 408.

⁴¹ David A. Hollinger, “Amalgamation and Hypodescent: The Questions of Ethnoracial Mixture in the History of the United States,” *American Historical Review* 108.5 (December 2003): 1373.

⁴² For a digital copy of this text, see Public Law 89-236—October 3, 1965: An Act to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act, and for Other Purposes,” U.S. Government Publishing Office, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-79/pdf/STATUTE-79-Pg911.pdf> (accessed January 13, 2018)

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, people from all points of the compass continue to make their way to the United States. During the first two quarters of 2017, the number of individuals who obtained lawful permanent resident status was 560,150. These immigrants derived from the following countries: 219,270 from Asia, 197,931 from other parts of North America (including Mexico), 59,287 from Africa, 41,204 from Europe, 39,185 from South America, 2,484 from Oceania, and 789 from parts unknown. The foremost countries from which naturalized people hailed were Mexico, India, the Philippines, China, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba.⁴³ At the current rate of immigration, by the year 2050, “36 million children in the United States will be descendants of immigrants who arrived after 2005.”⁴⁴

The sheer diversity the newest wave of immigration represents has troubled not only American citizens in general, but also some Christians as well. The nation’s obsession with ethnicity also influences the manner in which many perceive newcomers: “Americans tend to categorize immigrants by their racial or ethnic heritage. This is especially true given America’s experience with slavery and the civil rights moment—ethnic/racial distinctions have been historically more important in the United States.”⁴⁵ In other words, the degree to which immigrants mirror the established ethnic, cultural, and linguistic paradigms of the United States often dictates how readily Americans embrace them.⁴⁶

According to research, Anglo evangelical Protestants “stand out as the only religious community in which a majority (53%) believe that immigrants threaten traditional American customs and values.”⁴⁷ African American Protestants also tend to

⁴³ This information, along with a wealth of other immigration statistics, is available at the following location: “Legal Immigration and Adjustment of Status Report Fiscal Year 2017, Quarter 2,” Department of Homeland Security, https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/special-reports/legal-immigration#File_end (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁴⁴ Sandra Hughes-Hassel and Ernie J. Cox, “Inside Board Books: Representation of People of Color,” *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 80.3 (July 2010): 213.

⁴⁵ Phillip Connor, *Immigrant Faith: Patterns of Immigrant Religion in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 21.

⁴⁶ Antony W. Alumkal, “American Evangelicalism in the Post-Civil Rights Era: A Racial Formation Theory Analysis,” *Sociology of Religion* 65.3 (Autumn 2004): 204-5; Connor, *Immigrant Faith*, 73.

⁴⁷ Betsy Cooper, Daniel Cox, Rachel Lienesch, and Robert P. Jones, “How Americans View Immigrants, and What They Want from Immigration Reform: Findings from the 2015 American Values Atlas,” Public Religion Research Institute, May 29, 2016, <https://www.ppri.org/research/poll-immigration-reform-views-on-immigrants/> (accessed December 13, 2018).

view immigration ambivalently.⁴⁸ One likely reason for this attitude among African Americans is the perception that immigrants “are able to jump ahead of [African Americans] in a hierarchy” and take advantage of opportunities that are more difficult for them to obtain.⁴⁹ Overall, 10 percent of Americans would not want immigrants living next door to them.⁵⁰ Because of the above factors, multiethnic couples that consist of a natural born citizen and a foreign spouse almost certainly will experience some level of external pressure related to their multiethnic marriage.

Conflict between Different Minority Groups

Within the confines of this study it would be impossible to consider the interethnic struggles of every minority group that calls the United States home. For this reason, the author has selected two representative cases to explore. One current area of concern is the interrelationship of African Americans and Hispanics. Some centuries old material hints at prolonged strained relations.⁵¹ Furthermore, current research indicates that the “gulf between Mexican Americans and African Americans is similar to that between whites and African Americans.”⁵² The implication of this observation is that significant barriers exist between Hispanics⁵³ and African Americans.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Benjamin R. Knoll, “‘And Who is My Neighbor?’ Religion and Immigration Policy Attitudes,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48.2 (June 2009): 322.

⁴⁹ Lee and Bean, “American’s Changing Color Lines,” 237.

⁵⁰ Connor, *Immigrant Faith*, 37. Connor noted this percentage is even higher in Europe: “For example, in Finland, Great Britain, and Germany, nearly two in ten people don’t want an immigrant neighbor, while the ratio is about four in ten for those living in France. Canadians are the most willing to have immigrants as neighbors as fewer than one in ten of them would not want an immigrant neighbor.”

⁵¹ For example, Gary Nash wrote concerning centuries old depictions of multiethnic marriages in Latin America, “[S]ome of the casta paintings registered domestic discord, and they are especially revealing in associating marital turbulence with the mixing of African and [Mexican] Indian bloodstreams.” In other words, the implication was that Africans and the indigenous ancestors of modern day Mexicans did not get along. See Nash, “The Hidden History of Mestizo America,” 953.

⁵² Joshua R. Goldstein and Kristen Harknett, “Parenting across Racial and Class Lines: Assortative Mating Patterns of New Parents who are Married, Cohabiting, Dating or No Longer Romantically Involved,” *Social Forces* 85.1 (September 2006): 122.

⁵³ Given the considerable number of Mexicans in the United States (63 percent of Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican origin according to the 2010 United States Census), their marriage rates with African Americans are a good indicator of the rate at which other Hispanics in the United States marry African Americans.

⁵⁴ Research shows that “intermarriage has traditionally represented one of the most accurate indicators of assimilation. For minority-group individuals, the choice of a spouse from the majority group suggests that structural and interpersonal barriers inhibiting interaction between minority and majority groups have been reduced significantly.” The same is true for members of two minority groups (such as African Americans and Hispanics) who intermarry. See Rogelio Saenz, Sean-Shong Hwang, Benigno E. Aguirre, and Robert N. Anderson, “Persistence and Change in Asian Identity among Children of Intermarried Couples,” *Sociological Perspectives* 38.2 (Summer 1995): 176.

Because the majority of scholars have focused almost exclusively on Anglo and African American relations, they largely have ignored, or have been unaware of, the opinions that some members of each group have of one another. For example, representing the view that certain Hispanics hold, author Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. said concerning Houston, Texas in the 1970s, “Racial prejudices between Mexican and African Americans . . . was very much a reality in the barrio. [Hispanic] students were afraid of going to schools that were predominantly black because ‘black kids are always bossing us around, picking fights.’ Adults also expressed these sentiments.”⁵⁵ This anecdotal account is not an isolated occurrence. A percentage of Hispanics who reside in the United States believe African Americans bear them ill will.

To bolster their claim, Hispanics cite stories such as the case of David Rivas Morales, who, on June 20, 2017, was murdered by a group of African Americans. Morales had been riding in a vehicle that struck a two-year-old African American boy in an apartment complex parking lot, causing non-life-threatening injuries to the child. When the assailants began to attack the driver, Morales tried to help, and was beaten to the point of death.⁵⁶ Reports placed the number of aggressors between twelve to twenty people.⁵⁷ Ultimately, ex-Golden Gloves boxer Kurtis Colvin received ten years of probation for his role in the death, and an unnamed juvenile who was sixteen years old at the time of the attack received eight years of probation for punching Morales.⁵⁸

Some African American also express misgivings about what they see as a Hispanic infiltration of their neighborhoods. On August 2, 2007, the following account appeared in *The Economist*:

⁵⁵ Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston*, vol. 3 in *University of Houston Series in Mexican American Studies*, ed. Tatcho Mindiola (Houston: University of Houston, 2007), 105-6.

⁵⁶ Alfonso Serrano, “Cops Seek Witnesses to Car Mob Killing,” CBS News, June 20, 2007, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cops-see-witnesses-to-car-mob-killing/> (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁵⁷ Polly Ross Hughes, “Police Change Accounts in Austin Beating Probe,” *Houston Chronicle*, June 22, 2007, <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Police-change-accounts-in-Austin-beating-probe-1805633.php> (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁵⁸ “Ex-Boxer Gets Probation for 2007 Death,” ABC 13 Eyewitness News, November 3, 2008, <http://abc13.com/archive/6485924/> (accessed January 13, 2018).

We're being overrun," says Ted Hayes of Choose Black America, which has led anti-immigration marches in south-central Los Angeles. "The compañeros have taken all the housing. If you don't speak Spanish they turn you down for jobs. Our children are jumped upon in the schools. They are trying to drive us out," Not, Mr. Hayes emphasises [sic], that he has anything against illegal immigrants personally, or against Mexicans who are in America legally. Indeed, he says, in that useful old phrase, he is friendly with many of them.⁵⁹

It is striking that accounts from such distant cities indicate a portion of the Hispanic and African American populations view each other in a similar, negative light.

The Pew Research Center released the results of a groundbreaking survey in early 2008 that reinforced conflicts between African Americans and Hispanics are not optimal. First, while only 18 percent of African Americans stated that relations between the two peoples were "not too well" or "not well at all," almost one-third of Hispanics (30 percent) thought relations were "not too well" or "not well at all." Additionally, almost 50 percent of African Americans answered that immigrants were responsible for reducing the number of job opportunities available to African Americans.⁶⁰

A 2007 Gallup poll showed 29 percent of African Americans saw relations between them and Hispanics as somewhat to very bad, while 38 percent of Hispanics viewed interrelations negatively.⁶¹ In 2013, a similar Gallup poll revealed that the relationship between African Americans and Hispanics was the most problematic of any people groups in the United States, surpassing the interrelations of African Americans and Anglos.⁶²

⁵⁹ "Where Black and Brown Collide," *The Economist*, August 2, 2007, <http://www.economist.com/node/9587776> (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁶⁰ "Do Blacks and Hispanics Get Along? Yes, But Not Always, and Not about Everything," Pew Research Center, January 31, 2008 <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2008/01/31/do-blacks-and-hispanics-get-along/> (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁶¹ Joseph Carroll, "Whites, Blacks, Hispanics Assess Race Relations in the U.S.," Gallup, August 6, 2007, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/28312/Whites-Blacks-Hispanics-Assess-Race-Relations-US.aspx> (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁶² Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans Rate Racial and Ethnic Relations in U.S. Positively, View Black-Hispanic Relations Least Positively," Gallup, July 17, 2013, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/163535/americans-rate-racial-ethnic-relations-positively.aspx> (accessed January 13, 2018).

In an article in which he explained the context of the 2013 Gallup survey, Jeffrey Jones noted to readers that polling occurred around the time a jury acquitted George Zimmerman (a man with Hispanic and Anglo ancestry) of the death of African American teenager Trayvon Martin.⁶³ While this event may have had some impact on people's perception of African American and Hispanic relations at the time, it is worth noting that two years later in 2015, statistics remain unchanged.⁶⁴ These dynamics led Earl Ofari Hutchinson, an African American author and social commentator, to state in 2007, "Animosity between Latinos and blacks is the worst-kept secret in race relations in America."⁶⁵

Another area of concern is the interrelation of Asians who reside in the United States to other ethnic groups. Historically, because American Anglos typically thought in terms of White and non-White peoples,⁶⁶ fourteen states prohibited marriages between Anglos and Asians.⁶⁷ As a result of the United States' conflict with Japan in World War II, Japanese people, as well as other Asians, endured widespread suspicions in the United States. This unease culminated in President Roosevelt's order on February 19, 1942, to place over 110,000 Japanese Americans in detention camps.⁶⁸

Because Asian Americans often are considered "model minorities" or "honorary whites,"⁶⁹ at times other minority groups consider them to be "inauthentic people of color" who do not do not experience the full brunt of discrimination.⁷⁰ Proponents of this view insist Anglos use the relative success of Asian Americans as a sort of "racial

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See the chart included in the following article: Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans' Views of Black-White Relations Deteriorate," Gallup, August 6, 2015 <http://news.gallup.com/poll/184484/americans-views-black-white-relationsdeteriorate.aspx> (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁶⁵ Earl Ofari Hutchinson, "The Black-Latino Blame Game," November 25, 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/la-op-hutchinson25nov25-story.html> Los Angeles Times (accessed January 13, 2018).

⁶⁶ Lewis and Ford-Robertson, "Occurrence of Interracial Marriage," 412.

⁶⁷ Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 83.1 (June 1996): 49.

⁶⁸ Moon H. Jo and Daniel D. Mast, "Changing Images of Asian Americans," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 6.3 (Spring 1993): 425; cf. Daizaburo Yui, "From Exclusion to Integration: Asian Americans' Experiences in World War II," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 24.2 (December 1992): 55-67.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean, "Reinventing the Color Line: Immigration and America's New Racial/Ethnic Divide," *Social Forces* 86.2 (December 2007): 567.

⁷⁰ Elaine H. Kim, "'At Least You're Not Black': Asian Americans in U.S. Race Relations," *Social Justice* 25 (Fall 1998): 4.

wedge” to downplay the country’s ethnic issues.⁷¹ This so-called “Asian privilege” has the ability to create tensions between Asians and African Americans.⁷²

Asian Americans also have found themselves in the middle of ethnic conflicts of which they have no part. For example, one elderly Chinese American man related to the author that in the wake of Martin Luther King’s assassination in 1968, the subsequent riots that beset Memphis resulted in significant damage to his downtown store. Rather than reacting to the loss with bitterness, the aged man explained that he had decided it was more important to pray for an end to the bitter ethnic strife that affected the United States.

In the twenty-first century, countless ethnic groups call the United States home, and each of them relate to one other in a number of overlapping ways—sometimes positively and sometimes negatively.

The brief investigation in this section of the article is sufficient to propose that twenty-first century interethnic challenges are not merely Black-White issues. Multiethnic couples who derive from two minority groups may face difficulties just like their Anglo-Minority counterparts.

Acceptance

One of the greatest potential impediments multiethnic couples might encounter is denunciation by parents or other family members who are troubled by the relationship. While some relatives may express outright prejudicial inclinations because of differences in skin color, cultural practices, or national origin, others sincerely may believe they have their relatives’ best interest at heart. Additionally, Christian family

⁷¹ Kat Chow, “‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used as a Racial Wedge between Asians and Blacks,” NPR, April 19, 2017 <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks> (accessed September 21, 2017).

⁷² Kelly Chung Dawson, “Why Black-Asian Tensions Persist,” China Daily, January 10, 2014, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-01/10/content_17228648.htm (accessed January 13, 2018).

members who misunderstand scriptural teachings regarding multiethnic marriage spuriously may object to the union on biblical grounds.⁷³

Past and present difficulties in the realm of North American race relations also may influence family members' objections. For example, one American Anglo who excitedly reported to his parents his intentions to propose to a Nigerian woman was flabbergasted when he heard the following response: "We're not racists . . . but with all the problems there are in a marriage between two people, you have no business adding another dimension."⁷⁴ This tentativeness is not the exclusive purview of Anglo fathers and mothers. Minority parents who have experienced racial injustice may perceive their child's choice of a spouse as ethnic betrayal, or a case of "dominant-group men exploiting subordinate group women."⁷⁵

While some parents ultimately grow accustomed to their children's intermarriage, even learning to love and accept their offspring's spouse, others never acclimate to the multiethnic aspect of the relationship. Renee Romano noted, "[S]trained relations with their families" might persist for several years, or, in extreme cases, permanently.⁷⁶ Endorsement or denunciation at the familial level is important. Studies show "social acceptance of the couple is, to some extent, dependent on how easily the couple is accepted into primary relationships."⁷⁷

Judy Scales-Trent, an African-American woman whom strangers often mistake for an Anglo because of her relatively light skin and European features, observed that for some, "my very existence unsettles expectations of 'race.'"⁷⁸ The same statement holds true for multiethnic couples. Because intermarriage bridges a so-called racial gap

⁷³ Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 110. For a biblical defense of multiethnic marriage, see Matthew R. Akers, *Equally Yoked: A Premarital Counseling Primer for Multiethnic Christian Couples* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 7-72.

⁷⁴ Dugan Romano, *Intercultural Marriage: Promises and Pitfalls*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2008), 91.

⁷⁵ Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 364.

⁷⁶ Renee C. Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 70.

⁷⁷ Lewis and Ford-Robertson, "Occurrence of Interracial Marriage," 410.

⁷⁸ Judy Scales-Trent, *Notes of a White Black Woman: Race, Color, Community* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 7.

(that in reality is a “social construct with no natural or biological quality”),⁷⁹ society has at times viewed ethnic intermingling as a threat to the status quo and/or racial purity.⁸⁰

As a whole, American culture has grown more supportive of intermarriage.⁸¹ Individuals, however, do not always adhere to current societal practices of acceptability. As a result, multiethnic couples should expect a variety of reactions from people in their day-to-day encounters. These responses often are directly proportionate to the degree of dissimilarity between spouses’ physical appearances.⁸²

Research indicates Anglo-American society usually is more accepting of relationships in which Anglo men wed non-Anglo women, than instances in which Anglo women wed non-Anglo men.⁸³ The reverse is true in non-Anglo cultures. They might perceive marital unions in which women from their particular ethnic group outmarry as a rejection of cultural standards of attractiveness in favor of whiteness (i.e., betrayal).⁸⁴ Non-Anglo men also might find outmarrying as a threat to their own marital prospects. One Salvadoran man expressed to the author, “Why do so many gringos (i.e., Anglo Americans) like you marry Salvadoran women? If this trend continues, there will be no women left for us to marry.”

Strangers serve as another potential source of consternation. People in stores and restaurants often stare at intermarried couples out of sheer curiosity, unaware their inquisitiveness causes discomfort. Husbands and wives will have to endure the knowledge that a whispered conversation nearby may relate to their multiethnic status. Occasionally, unfriendly gazes or comments from people who disapprove of intermarriage may sour an outing.

⁷⁹ Rafael Pérez-Torres, “Miscegenation Now!” *American Literary History* 17.2 (Summer 2005): 373.

⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” in *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*, ed. Werner Sollors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 499.

⁸¹ Kevin R. Johnson, “A Mixed Race Society: The End of Racism?” in *Mixed Race American and the Law: A Reader*, ed. Kevin R. Johnson (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 469.

⁸² Spickard, *Mixed Blood*, 363-64; Nash, “The Hidden History of Mestizo America,” 948. Nash explained that as early as World War I, in the United States diverse ethnic groups such as Punjabis and Mexicans experienced little discrimination because their skin color often possessed a similar tone. Husbands and wives whose skin tone is markedly different from one another do not possess this type of camouflage.

⁸³ Judith Wilson, “Optical Illusions: Images of Miscegenation in Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century American Art,” *American Art* 5.3 (Summer 1991): 101; cf. Margaret D. Jacobs, “The Eastmans and the Luhans: Interracial Marriage between White Women and Native American Men, 1875-1935,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23.3 (2002): 31.

⁸⁴ Romano, *Race Mixing*, 219-21.

Summary of External Challenges

Prolific writer and New Testament scholar Craig Keener realized as a young man that ethnic problems in the United States are not fully resolved: “I had long assumed that the civil rights movement had mostly resolved the real racism, except for a few crazy white supremacists.”⁸⁵ Keener’s interactions with people who were ethnically different from him caused him to realize that his earlier suppositions were inaccurate. While many accomplishments resulted from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legislation did not change people’s hearts or erase the painful memories of horrendous injustices that have occurred on United States soil.⁸⁶

The wounds of the past have failed to heal properly, and in many ways they have festered with time. Multiethnic couples who choose to marry will find that the past continues to exert an influence on how others see them, as well as how they interrelate to one another. These stresses can put great pressure on multiethnic marriages.

Internal Challenges

Not all challenges that beset multiethnic couples originate from external sources. Individuals who derive from dissimilar people groups usually exhibit marked differences in certain aspects of their outlook on life as well as their cultural practices. This section considers some of the weightier internal challenges that affect multiethnic couples.

Worldview

Much like missionaries who labor cross-culturally experience some degree of culture shock, multiethnic couples will encounter significant cultural differences within the

⁸⁵ Craig Keener and Médine Moussounga Keener, *Impossible Love: The True Story of an African Civil War, Miracles and Hope against All Odds* (Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2016), 67.

⁸⁶ One should note that race-related difficulties are not exclusive to the United States. See, for example, Richard Graham, ed. *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Mitchell Rolls, “The Changing Politics of Miscegenation,” *Aboriginal History* 29 (2005): 64; Telles and Sue, “Race Mixture: Boundary Crossing in Comparative Perspective,” 133; Keener and Keener, *Impossible Love*, 81.

marriage covenant. Regardless of how long husbands and wives have been acquainted with each other prior to their wedding, subsequent interactions inevitably will reveal innumerable cultural practices of which they were unaware. Committed Christians possess a spiritual kinship and a theological system of belief that is common to them, but the ways in which representatives of unrelated cultures approach certain matters may be worlds apart.

Missiologists, anthropologists, and theologians refer to this phenomenon as worldview. Apologist James Sire provided an excellent definition of this important concept:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁸⁷

Multiethnic couples cannot prepare themselves for every conceivable cultural difference that awaits them within the bonds of matrimony, but they can enter their marriage with the knowledge that worldview disparities will arise. Believers who marry people who originate from dissimilar contexts almost certainly will contend with issues such as identity, values, concept of time, and male and female roles.

Identity

Christians find their identity “in Christ”⁸⁸ as they crucify their old sinful way of life and “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:24; cf. Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20). In the context of this treatise, however, the term identity refers to the manner in which members of a culture interrelate to one another. Each population exerts a strong influence on its members’ associations from birth onward. Because participants

⁸⁷ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 17.

⁸⁸ E.g., Romans 3:24; 6:3, 11, 23; 8:1, 2; 8:39; 12:5; 15:17; 16:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 4:15.

consequently pay little conscious attention to the manner in which they interact with each other,⁸⁹ this aspect of worldview functions as “the silent language of culture.”⁹⁰

Depending on their cultural background, people may belong to individualistic societies, community-based societies, or fall somewhere between these extreme positions. Western civilization is an excellent example of a culture in which “excessive individualism” exists.⁹¹ In addition to displaying a strong sense of autonomy that rejects any perceived personal intrusions, adherents run the risk of exhibiting narcissistic tendencies. They often quantify their sense of worth in terms of their personal achievements.⁹² Consequently, commodities such as one’s occupation and net worth become intertwined with one’s identity.

Community-based societies (Latin America being a prime example), on the other hand, “view themselves as part of a group, which usually is their family, tribe or community. People in these cultures [are] . . . part of a greater whole.”⁹³ Ethnic groups who subscribe to this worldview value family and social connections greatly,⁹⁴ with the practical result that people tend not to make significant decisions apart from the collective influence of their society.

Marriages in which husbands and wives originate from opposite ends of the identity spectrum must overcome considerable and persistent challenges. Spouses who operate individualistically may become irritated by what they perceive as unnecessary intrusions and meddling by their partners’ immediate family. Conversely, spouses who originate from community-based societies may agonize over their companions’ apparent disregard of their families’ good-natured interactions. In either case,

⁸⁹ Gerald A. Klingbeil, “Between ‘I’ and ‘We,’ The Anthropology of the Hebrew Bible and its Importance for a 21st-Century Ecclesiology,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.3 (2009): 322.

⁹⁰ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 27.

⁹¹ Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 32.

⁹² Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 123.

⁹³ Patty Lane, *A Beginner’s Guide to Crossing Cultures: Making Friends in a Multi-Cultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 87.

⁹⁴ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: Office of Overseas Operations, Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.), 37.

multiethnic couples must learn to come to terms with each other's respective cultures according to scriptural mandates.⁹⁵

An honest examination of both spouses' belief sets likely will reveal areas that are in accordance with Scripture. Other practices (e.g., worldview, values, gender roles, communication) will not be compatible with biblical teachings. Husbands and wives from disparate worldview systems will have to manufacture a hybrid system of identity that does not violate the precepts of God's Word.

Values

As the name of this category suggests, the concept of values as it pertains to ethnic groups⁹⁶ refers to that which a society cherishes or considers a core tenet of its ideological makeup.⁹⁷ Admittedly, this element of culture is somewhat elusive because every member of a specific people group does not necessarily assess all commodities equally.⁹⁸ This segment of the study need not examine all possible permutations of a particular culture's value, however, because its primary purpose is to make biblical counselors and multiethnic couples aware of potential value differences.

The two fundamental types of capital are material and nonmaterial assets.⁹⁹ Each culture regards one of these resources as more important than the other. For example, citizens of the United States normally focus heavily on the conversion of time into income. Because residents of Mexico do not devote the same amount of energy to this goal as their northern neighbors, Mexican satirists sometimes ridicule the intensity with which Americans pursue this objective. One immensely popular comedic television show of the 1970s and 1980s, *Chapulín Colorado*, featured an American superhero

⁹⁵ Jill M. Bystydzienski, *Intercultural Couples: Crossing Boundaries, Negotiating Difference* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 79.

⁹⁶ One should note in a business context the phrase *cultural values* commonly refers to the economic affinities that a people group exhibits. For this application of the concept, see Andy S. Choi, Franco Papandrea, and Jeff Bennett, "Assessing Cultural Values: Developing an Attitudinal Scale," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 31.4 (2007): 312.

⁹⁷ Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 115.

⁹⁸ Sheila E. Henry, "Family Structure, Social Class, and Cultural Values," *Comparative Family Studies* 8.3 (Autumn 1977): 293-94.

⁹⁹ Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions*, in *The William Carey Library Series on Applied Cultural Anthropology*, ed. William A. Smalley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1954), 42.

whose name was Super Sam. This riches-obsessed champion wore a Superman costume that sported a dollar sign as a chest insignia, but his hat and goatee mimicked Uncle Sam's iconic appearance. Super Sam's catchphrase was the clichéd expression, "Time is money!" The program's titular character, Chapulin Colorado, always bested his American counterpart because Mexicans believed their approach to life was superior to the materialistic philosophy of the United States.¹⁰⁰

The concept of freedom is a suitable illustration of an intangible value sundry people groups visualize differently. Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt highlighted this principle by relating the story of an individual who lived in a communistic country: "An old woman in Saigon told one of the authors that she felt that she could not tolerate the lack of freedom in the United States. In Vietnam she was free to sell her vegetables on the sidewalk without being hassled by police or city authorities."¹⁰¹ While an American doubtlessly would lament the elderly Vietnamese woman's lack of political freedom, she bemoaned the inability of Americans to participate in sidewalk business ventures at will.

Perceptions of directness contrast greatly as well. While certain cultures value blunt honesty, others seek to appease their hearers at the cost of truthfulness. For example, a man might agree to meet a friend at a designated hour without intending to keep the appointment. For him, his well-intentioned lie is preferable to frankness. Without question, values are one of the most difficult subjects to reconcile in a cross-cultural context.¹⁰² To exacerbate matters, ethnically diverse spouses may not be able to anticipate areas in which challenges will arise until the dissimilarities emerge in everyday situations or conversations. Intermarried couples will need to remember love is patient as they sort out their distinct cultural values in a way that glorifies God and contributes positively to their status as one flesh (1 Corinthians 13:4; Mark 10:8).

¹⁰⁰ "El Chapulin Colorado vs Super Sam," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7Du8_SIH8Y (accessed January 17, 2018). Roberto Gómez Bolaños and Ramón Valdés, the actors who portrayed Chapulin Colorado and Super Sam respectively, are two of the most recognizable comedians in Mexico. Over three decades after their program originally aired, the television show remains popular throughout Latin America and portions of the United States in which Spanish speakers reside.

¹⁰¹ Everett M. Rogers and Thomas M. Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1999), 84.

¹⁰² Bruce Bradshaw, *Change Across Cultures: A Narrative Approach to Social Transformation*, with a foreword by Paul G. Hiebert (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 232.

Concept of Time

People's concepts of time vary appreciably depending on the worldviews they inherit from their parents and society.¹⁰³ Cultural anthropologist Paul Hiebert remarked that in a missiological context "cultural differences can lead to humorous situations."¹⁰⁴ In the bonds of matrimony, however, conflicting perceptions of time can be a source of irritation. Multiethnic couples may find themselves grappling with two issues pertaining to time: time-orientation versus event-orientation, and opposing notions of punctuality.

Time-oriented cultures, to which Anglo societies chiefly belong, structure their lives according to their clocks.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, they place high premiums on qualities such as organization and preparation. Adherents to this way of thinking spend much time planning for the future,¹⁰⁶ sometimes to the detriment of focusing on the present. The event-oriented mindset, to which much of the Third World adheres, focuses on the present as well as "the relationships between people and events."¹⁰⁷ In other words, the fact that an event occurs is more important than the time in which it occurs. Because devotees often think little about planning for the future, they may be unprepared when tomorrow arrives.

Because time-orientation and event-orientation are largely incompatible,¹⁰⁸ representatives of either position frequently will exasperate adherents of the opposite philosophy. For example, at the author's wedding, his Anglo family and his bride's Salvadoran family converged for the ceremony in Houston. When the wedding did not begin at the scheduled hour because few attendees had arrived, some of the author's relatives despaired because of the delayed proceedings. This anxious reaction was a curiosity to the bride's family. As far as they were concerned, these activities fit the

¹⁰³ Carolyn M. Brown and Richard Segal, "Ethnic Differences in Temporal Orientation and its Implications for Hypertension Management," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 37.4 (December 1996): 350-51.

¹⁰⁴ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 63.

¹⁰⁵ J. Herbert Kane, *Life and Work on the Mission Field* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 101.

¹⁰⁶ James Breckenridge and Lillian Breckenridge, *What Color is Your God? Multicultural Education in America: Examining Christ and Culture in Light of the Changing Face of Culture* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint Books, 1995), 140.

¹⁰⁷ Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 131.

¹⁰⁸ For an excellent resource that highlights the differences between time-orientation and event-orientation, see Charles H. Kraft, *Worldview for Christian Witness* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 233.

characteristic pattern of a Latin American wedding ceremony. An hour later, with a full auditorium, the service began and the tensions of the time-oriented and the event-oriented societies momentarily dissolved as two cultures became intertwined in marriage.

One's perception of promptness also is a subjective function of worldview. Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers provided helpful insight regarding varying approaches to this matter:

Americans and Germans ... have a very short time-fuse and experience anxiety when there is a delay of five or more minutes. The concept of being late varies significantly from one culture to the next and from one individual to the next. ... Most North Americans will begin to experience tension when others are fifteen minutes late; most Latin Americans will have tension when others are more than one hour late, whereas Yapese [a Micronesian people group] will not experience tension until the expected party is about three hours late.¹⁰⁹

Since punctuality (or the lack thereof) touches upon nearly every aspect of one's day-to-day routine, multiethnic couples who do not share a corresponding pattern of timeliness will discover this contrast early in their relationship.

In their courtship phase, couples' timekeeping routines already begin to emerge. Boyfriends and girlfriends, however, usually overlook behavior that is eccentric from their standpoint more readily than do husbands and wives.¹¹⁰ When the demands and adjustments of abiding together on a permanent basis begin to materialize, and spouses persistently insist their matters conform to their personal concept of time, clashes inevitably will occur. Husbands and wives will have to learn how to address the conflict in a Christ-like manner that pays particular attention to the attitudinal tone they express toward one another.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 38.

¹¹⁰ Howard A. Eyrich, *Three to Get Ready: Premarital Counseling Manual*, 3rd rev. ed., with a foreword by D. James Kennedy (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2005), 84. Eyrich rightly noted that engaged couples tend to think in terms of romantic feelings rather than the concrete realities of married life.

¹¹¹ Jay E. Adams, *Christian Living in the Home* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1972), 39.

Male and Female Roles

Before surveying this topic, a qualification about male and female roles is necessary. In Western culture, the matter has garnered much interest and generated countless volumes that examine the subject from every conceivable angle. Often, these discussions unfairly accuse Christianity of demeaning women by regarding them as inferior to men.¹¹² For evangelical Christians who believe in the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, this depiction is unacceptable (e.g., Joel 2:29; Galatians 3:28).¹¹³ Rather, “Scripture is the final judge of all cultural forms,” including the subject of male and female roles within the context of marriage.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, certain roles are ambiguous as far as Scripture is concerned, varying greatly depending on one’s cultural heritage. In some societies, only women prepare food, while in other locales both men and women share the burden interchangeably.¹¹⁵ In certain contexts, society considers agricultural endeavors like gardening and agriculture to be the work of females, whereas in other regions males exclusively engage in these activities.¹¹⁶ The question of whether women should work outside of the home is perhaps one of the most culturally divisive issues, and distinct people groups provide dissimilar answers.

Multiethnic couples who find themselves in disagreement over gender roles will need to perform two tasks. First, they must examine Scripture in order to determine whether either of the spouses have beliefs that are incompatible with God’s Word. Second, if this investigation reveals any unbiblical attitudes regarding the

¹¹² Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 274-75; cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza “Public Discourse, Religion, and Wo/men’s Struggles for Justice,” *DePaul Law Review* 51 (Summer 2002): 1077-1101; Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Theological Vision of Letty Russell,” in *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell*, ed. Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 22; Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 28-29.

¹¹³ For an excellent rejoinder to this unwarranted portrayal, see Dorothy Patterson, “The High Calling of Wife and Mother in a Biblical Perspective,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 364-77.

¹¹⁴ Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 181.

¹¹⁵ Bystydzienski, *Intercultural Couples*, 98.

¹¹⁶ Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 130.

responsibilities of husbands and wives, spouses must amend their views in order to reflect scriptural teachings. In the event that couples discover areas of divergence that are culturally (rather than biblically) derived, they will need to agree on a resolution that is: 1) consistent with scriptural standards, 2) satisfactory to both the husband and wife, and 3) conducive to producing the marital harmony Christian spouses should enjoy.

Communication

In its most basic sense, “communication is the transmission of information from a ‘sender’ to a ‘receiver.’ It may occur between humans, animals, and even machines.”¹¹⁷ In the context of this paper, the primary focus is upon the manner in which people exchange their thoughts and ideas with one another in a multiethnic relationship. Other types of discourse fall without the bounds of this examination. Interpersonal communication consists of two components that help to express one’s thoughts and emotional state: verbal interchange and nonverbal signals.

Spoken language naturally is an indispensable feature of the communicative process, but it is not the only component at work within a given oral transaction. For example, diverse ethnic groups possess differing standards of acceptability in regard to the tone of voice suitable to a particular type of conversation.¹¹⁸ Consequently, when husbands and wives originate from dissimilar backgrounds, their standards of appropriateness may or may not correspond to their spouses’ notion of proper and improper etiquette.

Gail Benjamin conducted an experimental study comparing the perception of tone by Japanese and American subjects. Participants listened to prerecorded Japanese audio exchanges that did not include a visual representation of the orator. Not surprisingly, the findings indicated Japanese speakers accurately recognized the significance of tonal quality more readily than their American counterparts.¹¹⁹ This high

¹¹⁷ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 142; cf. Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 122-25.

¹¹⁸ Melanie Sperling, Deborah Appleman, Keith Gilyard, and Sarah Freedman, “Voice in the Context of Literacy Studies,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 46.1 (January-March): 74.

¹¹⁹ Gail R. Benjamin, “Tone of Voice in Japanese Conversation,” *Language in Society* 6.1 (April 1977): 11.

prediction rate was the result of the Japanese language's heavy emphasis on timbre, as well as the Japanese participants' familiarity with these unwritten rules. The study's predictable results draw attention to the role cultural competency plays in the accurate interpretation of clues accompanying verbal communication.

Two other facets of oral communication that may prove to be sources of bewilderment in multiethnic marriage situations are ironical statements and idiomatic expressions. Verbal irony refers to utterances meaning "the opposite of [their] literal form[s]." ¹²⁰ Studies show that as much as 8 percent of interactions between friends contain ironical observations, which even in this familiar setting may cause confusion because of their ambiguous nature. ¹²¹ One should expect a similar reaction within the bonds of marriage, especially when conflicting worldviews are at play.

Idiomatic expressions are unique figures of speech in that "their meanings cannot be predicted from the literal meaning of their parts and the choice of component lexical items is largely a matter of convention." ¹²² Because idioms are an outgrowth of culture and worldview, they make little sense to outsiders. ¹²³ Spanish speakers are fond of the phrase, "las palabras se las lleva el viento." The expression's literal translation, "words are taken away by the wind," does not convey the actual spirit of the saying. Only an individual versed in Spanish and English realizes the adage actually means, "Actions speak louder than words."

Tone, irony, and idioms are but a few of the instruments of verbal communication with which multiethnic couples often contend. Knowing of their problematic nature beforehand will help intermarried husbands and wives recognize miscommunication when it occurs and respond in a biblical manner instead of taking offense hastily. "A gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1a), and Christian spouses who put this principle into practice in their marriages will disarm possible altercations before they escalate.

¹²⁰ Rebecca Clift, "Irony in Conversation," *Language in Society* 28.4 (December 1999): 524.

¹²¹ Penny M. Pexman, "It's Fascinating Research: The Cognition of Verbal Irony," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17.4 (August 2008): 286.

¹²² William O'Grady, "The Syntax of Idioms," *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 16.2 (May 1998): 280.

¹²³ Wolf Leslau, "Harari Idioms," *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 19 (1963): 150.

Nonverbal communication denotes “the process whereby a message is sent and received through any one of the senses without the use of language.”¹²⁴ Eugene Nida explained that numerous speakers do not realize the influence their gesticulations have upon the messages they wish to relate:

Their failure to understand what they really are communicating usually results from a misconception as to the true nature of communication. They presume that their words are the message, while in reality their words are only part of the message, in fact, a relatively small part. For along with the words, they are always transmitting another message, by tone of voice, gestures, stance, eye contact, and distance.¹²⁵

In other words, nonverbal signals strongly influence the recipient’s comprehension of the speech act. Communicators who desire to convey a particular thought unknowingly may impart another idea altogether if their gestures do not accord with the hearer’s perception of these signs.

In a multiethnic context, one also must be aware that a harmless hand movement in one culture may be a vulgar insult to another people group. One example of this phenomenon is the use of one’s hands to relay messages.¹²⁶ Stephen Grunlan and Marvin Meyers explained, “The hand motion with fingers extended down from the palm and moved in rhythm toward the speaker signifies ‘goodby’ [sic] to someone from the United States but means ‘come here’ to most Latin Americans.”¹²⁷ One fascinating—and potentially mortifying—point the authors did not disclose, however, is that the gesture Americans use to call someone (the hand motion with fingers extended up from the palm) is inappropriate in a Latin American environment. Rather than serving as a suitable manner by which to request someone’s attention, Hispanics use the gesticulation to call their dogs.

If intermarried husbands and wives are not aware every culture possesses unique nonverbal communication, they may inadvertently demean each other if they

¹²⁴ Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 96.

¹²⁵ Eugene A. Nida, “The Other Message,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3.3 (July 1979): 110.

¹²⁶ Another example of nonverbal communication is facial expressions. See Rogers and Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication*, 163.

¹²⁷ Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 97.

innocently make rude gestures that possesses no such stigma in their native society. Employed haphazardly, such signals are capable of causing great offense. A frank, but courteous conversation about culturally unacceptable nonverbal signals, along with a measure of forbearance when the occasional faux pas occurs, will prevent this considerable challenge from becoming a source of contention.

Day-to-Day Issues

Food

Sustenance is a universal requirement of humankind, but that which people consider palatable varies greatly from culture to culture. In the author's international travels, his gracious hosts have offered the author local delicacies such as toasted ants (Guatemala), guinea pig (Ecuador), boiled cow intestines (Peru), and chicken embryo (The Philippines). Undoubtedly, many Americans would find at least some of these items repulsive. Representatives of the above countries likewise would turn their noses at some examples of typical American cuisine. Because of the subjectivity of food preferences, one people group's banquet is another's scraps,¹²⁸ or in certain circumstances, a beloved pet.¹²⁹

In addition to the exotic dishes a particular culture enjoys, multiethnic spouses may find other aspects of their mates' mealtime habits unfamiliar as they begin to establish a collaborative dining routine. Dugan Romano listed three other potential areas of discord: 1) the time of the main meal (breakfast, lunch, or supper); 2) the location of the meal (a table or a mat on the floor); and 3) the instrument one uses to place food in one's mouth (fingers, silverware, or chopsticks).¹³⁰ Individuals with limited cross-cultural experience are unlikely to anticipate all of these divergences without the assistance of a knowledgeable biblical counselor to guide them proactively through this assortment of items.

¹²⁸ For a list of ethnic delicacies that some people groups find abhorrent, see Marla Alupoai, *Your Intercultural Marriage: A Guide to a Healthy, Happy Relationship* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 139-40. Some of the strangest foods (from a Western perspective) Alupoai itemized include owl soup, calf's head, fermented shark meat, monkey toes, and sheep brains.

¹²⁹ Fred E. Jandt, *Intercultural Communication: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 177.

¹³⁰ Romano, *Intercultural Marriage*, 41.

Two practical observations are worth noting. First, since New Testament dietary instructions are almost nonexistent (cf. Acts 10:1-35), for the most part food preferences are culturally dictated and, hence, morally ambiguous.¹³¹ Second, neither spouse should expect mealtime in a multiethnic house to reflect only one of the participant's cultures. Consequently, thoughtful, mutual compromise will help to develop a menu and a schedule with which both spouses are comfortable.

Finances

The manner in which couples manage their finances is a crucial feature of monocultural marriages,¹³² and multiethnic unions are no different. Multiple studies suggest that "the number-one area of conflict in a marriage . . . is money. How money is to be earned and spent, and by whom, and who manages it, are questions which every couple needs to ask."¹³³ Spouses who possess a similar cultural heritage bicker over finances because their ideologies do not always correspond. One should expect multiethnic couples to experience even greater trials when their worldviews do not align with one another.

In cultures in which participants plan for the future, a larger percentage of capital will find its way into savings and retirement accounts. Civilizations in which the present takes precedence over days to come will focus more on contemporary considerations. To presume all members of a particular ethnic group think analogously about a given subject is a gross simplification. To some extent, however, a population's predominant worldview influences decisions regarding the acquisition, investment, and expenditure of money.¹³⁴

For example, one's financial commitment to family members other than spouses and children tends to vary according to ethnicity. In some cases, this obligation

¹³¹ Two exceptions would be the consumption of blood and strangled animals, prohibitions the apostles placed on Jews and Gentiles alike (Acts 15:19-20; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31-32).

¹³² Carrie Yodanis and Sean Lauer, "Managing Money in Marriage: Multilevel and Cross-National Effects of the Breadwinner Role," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69.5 (December 2007): 1307-8.

¹³³ G. Shelling and J. Fraser-Smith, *In Love but Worlds Apart: Insights, Questions, and Tips for the Intercultural Couple* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008), 89. Unfortunately, disagreements over money are a leading cause of divorce.

¹³⁴ Maria Julia, "The Need for Cultural Considerations in Examining Puerto Rican Financial Retirement Planning," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 28.2 (Autumn 1998): 18-19.

manifests itself in the form of sending a portion of one's earnings to relatives who reside outside of the United States.¹³⁵ Such remittances may be difficult for fledgling marriage partners to afford, and one spouse may question the practice of distributing their resources altogether.

Another financial responsibility that varies from culture to culture relates to the amount of in-house caregiving couples provide their elderly parents:

A 2001 survey on multicultural boomers by AARP [The American Association of Retired Persons] found that Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics are more likely to have three generations under one roof or extended family living in the home than Whites. Furthermore, Asians (42%) were more likely to care for an older relative than Hispanics (34%), Blacks (28%) or Whites (19%).¹³⁶

One ramification of these statistics is that people who marry across ethnic lines are prone to deviate on the issue of how much caregiving is appropriate.

Furthermore, spouses may feel trapped between the expectations of aging parents and the desires of their marriage partners. In this case, couples will need to recall scriptural principles regarding the preeminence of the marital relationship (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6). They cannot allow varying cultural norms to drive a wedge between them. Instead, they must apply biblical passages regarding finances and caring for the elderly (e.g., Luke 14:28; Mark 7:9-13; 1 Timothy 5:8) to their situation so they can be certain the Bible directs their path.

¹³⁵ Cf. Phyllis J. Johnson and Kathrin Stoll, "Remittance Patterns of Southern Sudanese Refugee Men: Enacting the Global Breadwinner Role," *Family Relations* 57.4 (October 2008): 431-43; Devesh Kapur and John McHale, "Migration's New Payoff," *Foreign Policy* 139 (November-December 2003): 48-57; Debbie Nathan, "Sending Love and Money: A Photo Essay on Mexican Migration," *New Labor Forum* 18.2 (Spring 2009): 52-59; Moshe Semyonov, "Labor Migration, Remittances, and Household Income: A Comparison between Filipino and Filipina Overseas Workers," *International Migration Review* 39.1 (Spring 2005): 45-68; Hung Cam Thai, "Money and Masculinity Among Low Wage Vietnamese Immigrants in Transnational Families," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 32.2 (Autumn 2006): 247-71.

¹³⁶ Sheel Pandya, "Racial and Ethnic Differences Among Older Adults in Long-Term Care Service Use," American Association of Retired Persons, http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/livable-communities/info-2005/fs119_ltc.html (accessed January 23, 2018).

Childrearing

Parenthood brings great changes to the lives of married couples. Intermarried spouses who have begun to grow accustomed to each other's idiosyncrasies should expect to revisit these distinctives as they prepare to bring a new life into the world. Issues to consider include the child's cultural identity (i.e., monocultural or bicultural),¹³⁷ language acquisition (i.e., monolingual or bilingual when parents speak multiple dialects),¹³⁸ and even the infant's official racial designation as recorded on the birth certificate. Couples should discuss these items thoroughly as they begin to think about raising a family.

In some cases, intermarried spouses also will need to ready their parents for the arrival of a multiethnic child. Marla Alupoicei offered the following practical questions for consideration: "Are the grandparents and other family members prepared to accept a biracial, bicultural, and bilingual child? Do they understand that the child may not look like their side of the family?"¹³⁹ On a positive note, parents who have had difficulties accepting their child's multiethnic marriage often reconsider their reservations at the birth of their grandchild.¹⁴⁰

Intermarried parents also must decide what type of training is necessary to help their offspring manage any insults others may direct toward them because of their multiethnic heritage. Terms such as *oreo* and *zebra* that were common insults a generation ago usually are not a part of an antagonist's vocabulary today, but each generation has its own derogatory remarks.¹⁴¹ Multiethnic parents cannot shield their offspring from ridicule, but they can emphasize the advantages of belonging to dual heritages. Furthermore, they also can underscore the manner in which God employed multiethnic Christians such as Timothy to reach multiple people groups with the gospel.

¹³⁷ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 242.

¹³⁸ Alupoicei, *Your Intercultural Marriage*, 170.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Lewis and Ford-Robertson, "Occurrence of Interracial Marriage," 410.

¹⁴¹ Foeman and Nance, "From Miscegenation to Multiculturalism," 548.

Cultural Implementation

Missionaries who move to exotic environments struggle to adjust to unfamiliar languages, customs, and worldviews. Similarly, multiethnic couples will have to acclimate to mates whose cultural underpinnings are altogether strange from their perspective. The technical term for the frustration that accompanies this realization of dissimilarity is culture shock.

Louis Luzbetak aptly described culture shock as “the constant jolting and the consequent stress and fatigue associated with living in a society that has different ways and values from those that have become second nature to the outsider.”¹⁴² Mercifully, missionaries who undergo this type of tension find momentarily relief in the refuge of their homes. In the case of multiethnic marriage, however, no such haven exists because the home is the primary place in which culture shock occurs.

Many anthropologists and worldview experts doubt an outsider ever can become fully habituated to another set of cultural proclivities,¹⁴³ but familiarization and accommodation is possible for spouses who intermarry. Patty Lane reminded readers that the acculturation process certainly “impacts our application of God’s truth, but does not change the absolute nature of God’s truth.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, believers must learn to jettison any cultural practices that contradict Scripture. Neutral behaviors and mindsets, however, are negotiable.

If multiethnic spouses are to have joyous, Christ-honoring marriages, they must not allow differences to become causes of strife. They must learn to live with each other in an understanding way despite any cultural peculiarities (cf. 1 Peter 3:7a). While “adjusting one’s lifestyle and thought patterns to fit a new culture is a . . . stressful experience,”¹⁴⁵ especially in the context of matrimony, participants who view the enterprise properly will not become exasperated. Couples can learn to appreciate—and even enjoy—the uniqueness that each mate has to offer.

¹⁴² Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: An Applied Anthropology for the Religious Worker* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970), 204.

¹⁴³ Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 121.

¹⁴⁴ Lane, *A Beginner’s Guide to Crossing Cultures*, 137.

¹⁴⁵ Myron Loss, *Culture Shock: Dealing with Stress in Cross-Cultural Living*, 3rd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1983), 47.

G. Shelling and J. Fraser-Smith, the authors of a work that addressed the topic of multiethnic marriage, likened the assimilation that inevitably transpires within marriage to a masterpiece on which two artists collaborate:

Each partner brings a different set of tools to the task of creating an art piece. Does that mean that neither can learn to appreciate or use those of the other? Of course not. Each partner learns to understand how the tastes and preferences of the other function, what good they can bring to the project, and how they can enrich the whole picture.¹⁴⁶

The consequence of this optimistic outlook is what missiologists refer to as “150 percent persons,”¹⁴⁷ that is, people who learn to operate in other cultures with a degree of ease. As multiethnic couples cleave to one another and weave a new life together, they will learn not only to tolerate differences, but also to enjoy each other’s food, customs, and unique contributions to the marriage covenant.¹⁴⁸ Apart from God and adherence to His biblical principles, this type of intimacy may be unobtainable for intermarried Christians. However, when couples remember that as believers they are one in Christ Jesus regardless of ethnic heritage, they will realize no cultural challenge is insurmountable if they follow the scriptural model of marriage.

Summary of Internal Challenges

At first glance, external challenges to multiethnic marriages may appear to be the most prodigious stressors that couples encounter. Nevertheless, this section of the article has demonstrated potential internal factors are both abundant and capable of engendering catastrophic damage if couples do not handle them well. Biblical counselors would do well to familiarize themselves with these issues so that they know which areas they should explore with counselees as they gather data regarding multiethnic couples’ marital discord.

Of course, the above difficulties are not the only factors multiethnic couples endure. Some matters they experience are the same concerns as those of their

¹⁴⁶ Shelling and Fraser-Smieth, *In Love But Worlds Apart*, 53.

¹⁴⁷ Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 124.

¹⁴⁸ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 76.

monoethnic counterparts (e.g., self-centeredness, priorities, patience). However, given the propensity for multicultural conflict, couples who marry across ethnic lines are likely to grapple with one or more of the internal challenges that this section considers.

Conclusion

Scripture is a sufficient and perfect resource for addressing any counseling problems that affect multiethnic marriages (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21). In His infinite wisdom, the Holy Spirit directed the human authors of the Bible to write their texts for the benefit of readers (2 Corinthians 4:15). For this reason, Scripture is replete with marriage propositions that addresses any conceivable issue couples experience.

Counselors must be careful not to apply haphazardly the lessons of Scripture. Not every verse applies to any particular situation. Rather, only counselors who apply Scripture accurately provide the balm by which counsees can learn what they must do to please Christ and to address their problems in a manner befitting of God's children.

If counselors are to point their charges in the right direction, they must: 1) know Scripture well; 2) rightly handle Scripture in a manner that does not violate its meaning (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15); 3) possess an accurate understanding of counsees' marital problems; and 4) apply the proper biblical axioms to counsees' marriages in a concrete manner. The focus of this article has been to examine significant external and internal stressors that jeopardize the stability of multiethnic marriages. Biblical counselors who familiarize themselves with these challenges will receive the benefit of better recognizing the multicultural issues at hand when they emerge in the counseling room. This knowledge in turn will help the counselor to identify appropriate biblical principles by which to help multiethnic Christian couples love one another and honor Christ with their marriages.