Where Does Culture Fit in? A Discourse Analysis of Intercultural Couples’ Talk

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Where Does Culture Fit in? A Discourse Analysis of Intercultural Couples’ Talk

by

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Abstract

The number of intercultural couples in Canada has been on the rise in the last few decades, making it increasingly likely that family counsellors will work with such clients. There is extensive research outlining the challenges that intercultural couples face due to their cultural differences. This study adopts a strengths-focused approach to study intercultural couples, by recruiting self-defined healthy intercultural couples. In this research I studied the way that couples conversationally construct their experiences of being in an intercultural relationship. Seven intercultural couples were interviewed as to the role that culture plays in their relationship. I approached this research from a social constructionist paradigm, and used Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) method of discourse analysis. Couples spoke from three interpretative repertoires when they constructed the role of culture in their relationship: (a) *culture isn’t defining*, (b) *culture plays a part sometimes*, and (c) *cultural differences add to the relationship*. The results indicate that healthy intercultural couples acknowledge cultural differences but they do not make them central to their relationship. The results are discussed in the context of the available literature, and they are used to make recommendations for practice and further research.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Tom Strong, for your guidance and patience throughout this process. I do not think this thesis would be what it is without your time and dedication. Thank you for introducing me to the world of social constructionism, and for the countless conversations that got me a step closer to actually understanding it.

I would like to thank my family, for their unconditional love and support. Words cannot describe how grateful I am for you. You have always been there for me, no matter how hard things got. Every time I doubted myself, you were there to remind me what I am made of, and to give me the push I needed to stand up and keep going. Thank you for believing in me.

I would like to thank my friends. Thank you for believing in my ability to make it through this journey, and for reminding me that there is always time to have fun. My support system would not be complete without you, and I am truly lucky to have found you. A wise friend once said that you go through life meeting people, some of them are gems, and you have to keep them. You are my gems.
Dedication

To those who doubt themselves. Find your power and persevere.

You are braver than you believe,
Stronger than you seem, and
Smarter than you think.

-A. A. Milne
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Interest in researching relationships is not new. From social researchers to lifestyle bloggers, it appears as though the key to romantic success is a topic that puzzles many people. Perhaps it is due to the western romantic ideal of finding someone to spend our lives with, and to live happily ever after. These claims are not completely unfounded, as research suggests that there is a strong link between being in a healthy romantic relationship, overall life satisfaction, and a number of health benefits (e.g., Grover & Helliwell, 2014). With so much research out there, it may seem as though all the important questions regarding relationships have been answered. However, as the world changes, the landscape of relationships change with it, bringing up new questions for researchers to answer.

One of the ways in which relationships have changed is in the increase of intercultural couples. These are romantic relationships in which partners belong to different cultural, ethnic and/or religious backgrounds (Bystydzienski, 2011). Despite the cultural push to marry within one’s own culture, intercultural couples are becoming increasingly common (Killian, 2002). Mixed unions in Canada account for about 4.6% of couples, according to the last available data (Statistics Canada, 2011). Although this is still a small percentage of Canadian couples, there was almost a 50% increase since 1991, a trend which is expected to continue (Statistics Canada, 2011). Other countries, such as the United States, are experiencing a similar pattern (Bystydzienski, 2011). With such an increase, it is safe to assume that counsellors are more likely to work with intercultural couples now and in the near future than ever before. This is what makes the present thesis relevant. The more information available on how intercultural couples succeed, the more tools counsellors have to help couples who may be struggling.
A large portion of past research has focused on the negative aspects of intercultural relationships (Bratter & King, 2008; Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen, & Monakes, 2011; Cools, 2009; Fu, Tora, & Kendall, 2001). These studies show that many intercultural couples face unique challenges such as dealing with differences in gender role expectations, child-rearing practices, differences in communication styles, and higher conflict with extended family (Bustamante et al., 2011; Leslie & Young, 2015). Some researchers have also reported higher levels of relationship dissolution among intercultural couples (Fu et al., 2001). However, there has been a recent shift of focus in the literature to the study of strengths of these couples, while still acknowledging their challenges (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). The present thesis adds to the strength-focused literature on intercultural couples. My goal was to find out how happy intercultural couples talk about their relationship, in order to better understand how they construct their experiences, and what helps them succeed. Throughout this thesis I have used a social constructionist perspective. I understand that people construct their reality through language use and in their interactions with others. There is no universal “truth” when it comes to understanding human experience, and therefore there are different understandings and ways of speaking about the world (Burr, 2006). Therefore, I was interested in how intercultural couples construct meaning through language use.

Discourse analysis is a theory and methodology within the umbrella of social constructionism. It is based on the understanding that language is more than just words that are spoken, language is the way in which people shape and transform their reality (Gee, 2011). The way we speak, and the discourses we use, are the ways in which we think about, construct, co-construct, negotiate, and understand our lived experiences (Gee, 2011). Although discourses have many definitions, I used Jorgensen and Phillips’ (2011) definition as “a particular way of
talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world” (p. 2). While in the past, researchers have described the strengths and challenges for intercultural couples (Bustamante, et al., 2011; Kim, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2017; Seshadri & Knudson Martin, 2013), I wanted to understand how these strengths and challenges are constructed in the ways that couples talk about their relationship. In order to do this, I used Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) method of discourse analysis to find interpretative repertoires in my interviews with seven intercultural couples. Interpretative repertoires are set ways of understanding, or building blocks for speakers “to construct versions of actions, cognitive processes, and other phenomena” (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172). With this method, I answered the following research question: “How do couples talk about their experiences of being in an intercultural relationship?” This is an important question because therapy is a place where a therapist and client(s) construct and co-construct social realities through conversations (Rogers- de Jong & Strong, 2014; Tseliou & Borsca, 2018) Therefore, by having a better understanding of the discourses that intercultural couples use, counsellors can remain more aware of them during therapy, and invite clients to shift positions in their discourses to help move the therapy process forward, if needed.

**Positioning Myself as a Researcher**

For as long as I can remember, the way people relate to others has fascinated me. When I was in second grade, my teacher asked my class what we would ask a prominent Argentinean historical hero. Although most of my classmates responded with “Were you afraid in battle?”, “How long did it take to cross The Andes on horses?”, my response was that I wanted to know whether he had been happy with his wife. My mother always reminds me of this story because it captivates my relational and systemic understanding of the world. I see how the ways in which people are connected to one another affects almost every aspect of their lives, especially when it
comes to romantic relationships. This research was a way of studying an aspect of relationships that I have always been interested in.

The second focus of this thesis, culture, came to me much later in life when I moved to Canada at 14 years old. Before this time, I had not thought of culture and how it affected the way I understand my life. This did not become evident to me until I moved to a new country and needed to get used to a whole new place, language, and way of living life. The best way I could describe this feeling was like being a fish out of water. Culture may not have been obvious to me growing up, but trying to understand, and become part of another culture, made all aspects of it impossible to ignore. I realized that culture is much more than just language, there are many subtle aspects of it that change the way an event, or life in general, is constructed and experienced. I did not have the terminology to make sense of these differences I observed until I was introduced to the world of social constructionism. This paradigm offered a way for me to understand cultural differences in a way that was non-judgmental. It was a way to make sense of how people from different cultures may construct reality slightly different, and finding value in these differences. Thus, this project is like a marriage of its own, between two topics that have fascinated me for a long time, romantic relationships and culture. I wondered how the small (or not so small) nuances of different cultures may play a part in a romantic relationship, and how couples make sense of these differences.

Finally, this project turned out to be more personal than I had initially expected. I was part of an intercultural marriage when I began this study. Unfortunately, in the middle of conducting this research I was faced with the painful decision of ending my marriage. As a researcher, I was stuck in the irony of studying couples who had been able to achieve something that my partner and I were not able to. Although my experience could have clouded my
judgement as a researcher, I chose to turn it into something positive. My experience broadened the way I understood intercultural couples. It allowed me to see the duality in the fact that although some unions work, others do not. Even though my participants spoke of their relationship positively, I remained aware that this was not the reality for all intercultural couples. Although I studied couples who were happy, I also understood the experiences of at least one couple that had not succeeded. I certainly cannot use my experience to make generalizations about all intercultural couples that decide to part ways. However, I was in a position to look at how my participants dealt with culture in their relationship, and compare it with the ways I had understood my own relationship. This ability to take a step back, provided me with a unique perspective when it came to interpreting my data and its usefulness for counselling psychology.

**What to Expect in This Thesis?**

The next chapters detail how I have gone about answering my research question: “How do couples construct their experiences of being in an intercultural relationship?” Chapter two is a more in-depth literature review on my topic of study, including literature on culture, and intercultural couples. Chapter three is a description of my method and methodology. It is a more detailed explanation of social constructionism, discourse analysis, and what these paradigms looked like in the context of my study. Chapter three also deals with issues around the quality of my analysis and reflexivity. Chapter four is a description of my results and how I arrived to them. Finally, chapter five is a discussion of my findings in light of the literature, my study’s strengths and limitations, as well as recommendations for research and counselling psychology.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research has increasingly focused on intercultural couples in the last 10 to 15 years. This comes as no surprise, given that intercultural couples are becoming increasingly common. In Canada, according to the latest census data, 4.6% of married and common-law couples are considered to be in a mixed union (Statistics Canada, 2011). A mixed union, according to Statistics Canada, only includes couples where there is a “difference in visible minority status of the two persons in a conjugal relationship” (Statistics Canada, 2011, para. 3). However, for the purpose of my thesis, an intercultural couple is a relationship in which the two people differ in their ethnic background, race, religion, and/or nationality (Bystydzienki, 2011). With this broader definition, it is safe to estimate that the percentage of intercultural relationships in Canada is actually larger than 4.6%, with this number expected to increase as Canada becomes more multicultural (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Culture is a concept that is present and informs almost every aspect of our lives. The most obvious way in which we often differentiate between cultures is through language. One usually assumes that when someone speaks another language, they are likely from a different culture. However, there are cultural variations even between people who speak the same language. Think about greeting someone, do you kiss the other person on the cheek? Even if it is someone that you just met or is the same gender as you? or do you just give people a handshake? Do you take your shoes off when entering a home? These are cultural practices that differ even between people who speak the same language. If one was to meet someone who also spoke English as their first language but happened to be from Australia, it is likely one would encounter ways in which their culture is different. So, what exactly makes cultures different, even if we speak the same language? Throughout this thesis I use the language of discourses to
explain these subtle differences in culture, and how they inform the way people relate to one another and their environment. In this chapter, I will outline the literature on several areas relevant to my study. First, I will define the concept of discourses and how this pertains to my thesis. Secondly, I will review the literature on culture and why I decided to take up a social constructionist methodology when studying it. Third, I will review the discursive literature on couples and families. Finally, I will review previous research done on intercultural couples. The goal of this review is to present relevant research findings from different areas pertaining to this thesis, and then try to piece together a rationale for why and how I conducted my study.

**Discourses**

Discourse analysis belongs under the theoretical umbrella of social constructionism. Social constructionism and discursive studies are based on the assumption that meaning is co-created through interactions. Thus, discourse analysts use conversations and texts between people to understand how they “make sense of each other, and what is constructed in and by sense-making interactions” (Strong, Sametband, Gaete, & Lopez Bilbao, in press, p. 104). A more in-depth discussion of social constructionism can be found in chapter three.

The main goal in using discourse analysis is to identify how people create meaning through dialogue. Discourse is a term that has taken on several meanings throughout the years (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012). Jorgensen and Phillips (2011) give a general definition of discourses as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world” (p. 2). In order to understand this definition, however, one needs to understand that people use language in order to achieve things (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). A marriage commissioner pronouncing two people as married is an example of language at work. However, declaring someone as a married couple only carries that meaning because the words are said in
ceremony, by someone who has been granted power to do so by the government and/or a religious body. Furthermore, as a society, people normally recognize what these words mean and what they achieve for the two people who are getting married (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourses work in the same way, they are systems of meaning that are available in society. People take up these discourses to make sense and construct their reality (Scollon et al., 2012). At the same time, they are negotiating and modifying their discourses through their use, and thus and re-constructing their reality (Gee, 2011). Discourses are cyclical in this sense, because they are never static. People are always negotiating different ways of making sense.

In many ways, discourses can be seen as tools for people to achieve different goals when they speak. There are many different tools that they can draw from at different times. Their choice to use a particular tool not only depends on what they want to do with their talk, but also the position they want to take in that situation (Scollon et al., 2012). For example, if I consider myself a gamer, I may use the discourses that identify me as part of that group. I may want to speak to other gamers in a way that not only conveys a message but that also identifies me as part of the in-group (Scollon et al., 2012). Further, these tools or discourses have historical roots, and they are also constantly being changed by the people who use them (Scollon et al. 2012). There are many discourses, or sets of meaning, available in the larger society and culture. People choose, consciously or unconsciously, which sets of meaning to draw from at different times. Also, discourses are relational, that is they are used with others, people are modifying them, and thus constructing and co-constructing their lived realities (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Some authors have distinguished between different types of discourses. It is useful to think of studying discourses as if we had a camera lens, through which we can zoom in or out to capture different levels of discourses (Sametband & Strong, 2018). Gee (2011) differentiated
between Big “D” discourses and Little “d” discourses. Big “D” discourses refer to discourses in a macro sense. That is, “socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting in the ‘right places’ and at the ‘right’ times with the ‘right’ objects” (Gee, 2011, pp. 34). Scollon et al. (2012) described Big “D” discourses as a “self-contained system of communication” (p. 110). Speakers that use these discourses have to learn the specific jargon, the ideological position and ways that they should interact with others intrinsic to that same discourse (Scollon et al., 2012).

I personally went through these steps as I was introduced to the Big “D” discourse of social constructionism and discourse analysis. I learned the specific ways in which social constructionists and discourse analysts talk about language and constructions of the world. Also, in order to be recognized as a social constructionist myself, I needed to learn the ideological stance of other social constructionists (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1985), and speak in a way that was congruent with such. Social constructionism is one large meta-discourse (a discourse for making sense of discourses) that psychologists have available to understand how people make sense of their world. Other psychologists might use a cognitive-behavioural discourse, for example. Neither of these is incorrect, they are just different ways of talking about and understanding human psychology. Each discourse, has its own language and rules to refer to similar phenomena.

Little “d” discourses refer to language-in-use, and it is more focused on the way that people use language during conversations (Gee, 2011). Little “d” discourse is a micro-level approach to the study of language use. Studies based on conversational analysis, for example, would be considered as studying little “d” discourses because they look at turn taking and analyze the function of each turn of speech (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011). For example, there
could be a conversational analysis study to understand how a teenager negotiates an independent identity during an argument with their parents. The study would entail an analysis of each turn in the conversation that explains why and what happens when participants use a specific language in the way they do, and analyze the function of each turn in the conversation. Conversation analysis has been criticized by some due to its narrow focus and inability to make inferences about why people use certain discourses or language (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011; Wetherell, 1998). Micro approaches to discourse analysis help explain how social realities are constructed, while macro approaches help explain why participants negotiate their reality in the ways that they do (Strong et al., in press). Most recent discursive studies focus on a combination of these micro and macro views of discourses (Ong, Barnes, & Buus, 2019; Wetherell, 1998).

In between these Big “D” and Little “d” discourses one finds interpretative repertoires. Interpretative repertoires are coherent and identifiable set of terms, metaphors, and stylistic and grammatical constructions, which are usually used together to represent an aspect of a discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). They are conceptualized as identifiable systems of meaning within larger discourses. For example, under the larger discourse of multiculturalism, it is possible to find different interpretative repertoires, or systems of meaning. In a study of Finnish locals and immigrants, four interpretative repertoires emerged for talking about multiculturalism: (1) Immigrants as polite guests, (2) securing the majority culture, (3) stigmatizing multiculturalism, and (4) individualism (Nortio, Varjonen, Mahonen, & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016). Participants positioned themselves in all four repertoires at different times during the focus group. Thus, the interpretative repertoires that people draw from may vary from time to time. In other words, they are situated and action-oriented (Potter, 2012; Wetherell, 1998). The present thesis focused on analyzing the different interpretative repertoires that healthy intercultural couples used as they
talked about their relationship. There is more information on the method of analysis in chapter three.

**Issues in Studying Culture**

Culture, like many socially constructed concepts, can be difficult to define and pin down. Even in everyday conversations, the word culture is used in different settings and with different meanings. For example, someone may use the word culture to refer to the set of rules and values that are historically learned and passed down through generations. Another individual may use it to refer to knowledge a person may or may not have when it comes to history and the arts (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012). All of these definitions may be correct, as they draw from different discourses available and employed at different times. The next section is a short review of the study of culture in psychology from different theoretical lenses, including social constructionism.

**Issues in defining culture.** The field of psychology has struggled to define culture (Ho, 1995; Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). The term has evolved, from merely referring to different nationalities, to encompassing a more flexible view of the word (Kiesling, 2015). What further complicates matters is that many terms have been used interchangeably in the literature, such as race, ethnicity, and culture. However, it is important to draw differences between these terms.

Race is often used to describe a person’s physical characteristics. Although race has been seen as a biological factor in the past, the current consensus in the field of psychology is that it is a social construction (Hays, 2016). APA (2003) defined race as “the category to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations and stereotypes made as a result” (p.9). Notice that this definition focuses on the fact that race is externally defined rather than self-defined. In relating to this thesis, race is
important to mention because many previous studies on mixed unions were more focused on racial differences than cultural ones (Bratter & King, 2008; Killian, 2002; Zhang & van Hook, 2009). Although there is value in looking at how racial differences play a part in romantic relationships, I was interested in how cultural differences play a role in couples’ constructions of their relationship. Furthermore, because differences in race do not necessarily mean differences in culture, and vice versa, focusing solely on couples’ racial differences would have given me little relevant information as to how they negotiate cultural differences to construct a joined reality (Atkinson, 2004; Ho, 1995). Thus, although the topic of race was relevant for some of the couples I interviewed, it was not my main focus.

Ethnicity is a word that is often used interchangeably to describe an individual’s race, or their culture. It is defined as “the acceptance of the group norms and practices of one’s culture of origin and the concomitant sense of belonging” (APA, 2003; p.9). Unlike race, ethnicity is an internally prescribed term, which may change over time and in different situations (Arthur & Collins, 2010). For example, I may describe my ethnicity as Latina while in a group formed mostly of Canadian peers, but later describe myself as Argentinean when surrounded by a group of Colombians. Another important factor of ethnicity is that it is not a categorical term such as “White” or “Asian” (Arthur & Collins, 2010). Instead, people may use a variety of terms to describe their ethnicity, such as “Canadian-Filipino”, or “White Latino”. This was important because when I collected information about my participants’ ethnicity, I followed guidelines updated by APA, encouraging researchers to have an open-ended field for individuals to define their own ethnicity, rather than having closed-ended categories (APA, 2017). Ethnicity may encompass part of a person’s culture but, just like the term race, it does not tell us much about which aspects of a culture a person identifies with, the values, and the way in which said culture
informs their constructed reality. Therefore, I need to further flesh out the term culture and what it means for the purposes of this thesis.

Culture is a more dynamic and inclusive term than ethnicity. It involves a person’s subscription to a language, customs, values, spirituality, and gender roles, to name a few factors (Taylor & Smith, 2011). Culture is also fluid because how a person describes and constructs their culture can change over time and throughout the lifespan. An individual may also choose which aspects of their culture to identify with at different times (Arthur & Collins, 2010). For the purposes of this study, culture is defined as a socially constructed, historically situated set of values, norms, beliefs, practices, perceptions, and symbols that shape how individuals do their world (Bystydzienski, 2011; Misra & Gergen, 1993; Pettigrew, 1979). Furthermore, these ways of doing things are passed down generations through language, while at the same time continued to be modified through language use (Misra & Gergen, 1993; Scollon et al., 2012). This is a definition consistent with the social constructionist assumptions of this thesis.

**Studying culture through different lenses.** Historically, cross-cultural studies in psychology have focused on distinguishing between groups of people by using a positivist epistemology (Cruz & Sonn, 2015). This is what Matsumoto and Yoo (2006) called “Phase I” of cross-cultural research. The approach for these studies has been to compare different cultures to the “litmus test” of Western, Eurocentric ways of knowing (Gridley & Breen, 2007). Although this wave of cross-cultural research was useful in understanding how Eurocentric knowledge applied, or not, to other cultures; it was not without some significant limitations (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006). This gave rise to Phase II of cross-cultural research, where researchers attempted to create theoretical models to explain cultural differences (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006). One such model is Hofstede’s four dimensions model, which categorizes cultures along four different
dimensions. The most famous of these dimensions is “Individualism vs. Collectivism” (Hofstede, 2001), and has been used to explain cultural differences in many different areas, such as cognition, and emotional expression (Matsumoto, 1991). Even though this type of research provided a better understanding of how culture influences behaviour and cognition, the concern remained that the research did not account for individual differences within each culture (Kiesling, 2015). Some of the limitations of a typological view of culture include the risk of “lumping”, or making rough generalizations about groups of people. This conceptualization does not honour individual differences in each culture (Scollon et al., 2012). Also, by drawing differences between other cultures and Eurocentric ways of understanding the world, one increases the risk of portraying culturally diverse individuals as being exotic, while not addressing issues of power, colonialism, and whiteness (Little & Skott-Myhre, 2012). Ultimately, dividing cultures into types has resulted in a very dichotomous view of a construct (culture) that in reality can be seen as very fluid (Kiesling, 2015).

A different, and more recent theoretical approach to understanding cultural identity is the theory of intersectionality (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw, 1994). Defenders of intersectionality understand that “no matter how similar we are, there will be differences. No matter how different we are, there will be similarities” (Pedersen, 2001, p. 18). The theories previously mentioned, were unable to capture the fact that an individual may identify with more than one culture at a time (Cross, 1995). An intersectionality approach to cultural identity accounts for the interaction of different factors when people define their cultural identity; such as that of nationality, cultural customs, gender, and sexual orientation; to name a few (Ludvig, 2006). This theory is a move away from previous ones that merely categorized cultures (Anthias, 2012). Intersectionality has been a step forward in recognizing how each individual can be seen
as unique. However, it does not explain how intersections of identity play a part in interpersonal interactions. It does not explain how or why people bring up certain parts of their intersectionality and not others in conversations with others.

Discourse analysts attempt to answer this question by looking at the data in a slightly different way, based on the sets of meaning that people use to construct their world (Nortio et al., 2016). As Anthias (2012) argues, intersectionality is also based on categories, even though it is now recognized that there are *multiple* categories that individuals use to construct a story of who they are and how they relate to the world (Anthias, 2012). As a scientist and future practitioner, I value the intersectionality perspective to make sense of what a person brings to each of their interactions. I have understood intersectionality as another discourse for constructing the concept of cultural identity. However, I wanted to know how intercultural couples construct their relationship *together*, with the couple’s conversations with me being the unit of analysis. Therefore, I did not think intersectionality was an adequate theory to answer my research question, which is why I have chosen social constructionism and discourse analysis to inform this thesis.

*Culture and cultural identity seen through social constructionism.* Qualitative and interpretive studies are an alternate way to understand and study cultural identity. These studies include those that use discourse analysis (Strong et al., in press).

Studies adopting a social constructionist lens have attempted to address the disadvantages of the previously mentioned research (Kiesling, 2015). How cultural identity is defined is one way in which social constructionists differ from those adopting more traditional psychological approaches to research. Traditionally it was theorized that cultural identity was formed by being born and raised in a particular geographical location and cultural context (McGoldrick, 1982;
McGoldrick and Hardy, 2008). Cultural identity was also viewed as a trait that people have, rather than a construction that changes through time and situations. In contrast to this view, I have aligned myself with the social constructionist perspective, which postulates that cultural identity is “generated, maintained, and reproduced discursively in social interaction” (Sametband & Strong, 2018, p. 202). Thus, people’s cultural identity is not fixed but rather negotiated in meaningful, and situated interactions (Ochs, 1993).

From a social constructionist perspective, the development of a cultural identity has several aspects to it. Each individual does not construct their cultural identity on their own, but rather they co-construct it with others through conversations and language use (Ochs, 1993). That is, cultural identity is the story people normally tell themselves about the cultural group to which they belong. This story is created individually and in conjunction with those around them through the use of language (Scollon et al., 2012). Furthermore, it is not enough for an individual to simply consider themselves part of a cultural group; others must also recognize them as belonging to that culture (Sametband & Strong, 2018; Scollon et al., 2012). This occurs through practices such as, using similar language, meeting certain cultural expectations, and generally behaving in a way that shows others that they belong.

I included information as to how cultural identities are co-constructed because it informs the way I understood the cultural identity of each partner that I interviewed, as well as how the couple constructs their relationship identity. The important aspect of these constructions relates to how couples use language to construct and negotiate their individual and joint identities (Rogers-de Jong & Strong, 2014; Gordon, 2007b). Some researchers have called this joint relationship identity “we-ness”. “We-ness” refers to a couple’s articulated sense of being together, having a joint identity that represents the couple as a unit, rather than their individual
identities. It also involves a shared sense of understanding (Fergus & Reid, 2001; Gergen, 2001). Rogers-de Jong (2012), interpreted “we-ness” as “a form of ‘self’ that does not belong to one partner or another, but that is jointly constructed and shared between them” (p. 27). We-ness is a way of recognizing what occurs in a discursive sense when two people enter a relationship. In a study of with young married couples (couples who married before the age of 29), the couples reported that factors such as being on the same page, compromising, and treating their marriage as the first priority, contributed to feelings of we-ness (Strong, Rogers-de Jong, & Merritt, 2014). In terms of my study, I invited partners to share a sense of we-ness in my interviews with them. Furthermore, I sought to find out more about how culture plays a part in the way they speak about and negotiate their joint identity.

I approached this study with the understanding that, through talk and conversations, couples negotiate a joint identity, but their own personal identities may shift as well (Gergen, 2009). In a previous qualitative study, participants reported that their identity changed as a result of being in an intercultural union. Furthermore, they specified that the language that they used in their relationships was a driving force for the development of this new cultural identity (Leppanen, 2016). My study goes one step further by taking a closer look at the specific ways in which intercultural couples talk about and, therefore construct, their relationship. By taking a social constructionist stance I assumed that through social interactions, people are constantly changing and revising their cultural identities.

For the purposes of this literature review, I will zoom in my social constructionist lens in order to focus on discursive studies to look at culture. The most common type of these studies look at how individuals communicate in different cultures. Much of the research is based on conversational analysis, the most micro type of discourse analysis, to study how people from
different cultures take turns, how they use silence, and their intonation (Kiesling, 2015). Deborah Tannen has contributed significant research to this area. In one of her studies, she looked at the use of pauses among a group of American friends who belonged to different areas of the United States, and therefore were part of different micro-cultures (Tannen, 2012). Tannen found that the friends who were from New York used and expected shorter pauses in the conversation, while those from California used longer ones. As a result, those from New York had more overlap in their conversational turns. The interesting fact about these results is not only the differences in conversational styles, but also that the Californian friends felt like they did not fit in. This study shows that there are differences in the way that people speak between cultures, or in this case, micro-cultures. Not only that, the differences in conversational styles can affect how people are perceived by themselves and others.

Discursive studies have also shown differences in how cultures construct arguing. Some cultures appreciate arguing as an effective form of conversation, while in different cultures, arguing is seen as disrespectful and avoided at all costs (Tannen, 1998). These studies have gone further than just describing differences, they have helped to understand how different language practices can be seen through different cultural lenses. Furthermore, the researchers propose how these practices can shape the constructions that a person may have about themselves and others (Tannen, 1985). Given these subtle cultural differences in conversational styles, we may expect intercultural couples to face similar differences in communication, and this study is focused on understanding how they make sense of them.

Other studies have used discourse analysis to demonstrate how these small cultural differences in communication can bring about significant consequences for speakers. More specifically, cultural differences in discourses and conversation styles can be invoked to
perpetuate differences in power and the oppression of certain cultural groups (Kiesling, 2012). Eades (2000) found that aboriginal witnesses tend to be silenced by judges and lawyers, due to differences in communication styles and a misunderstanding of cultural values. Aboriginal witnesses tend to use longer silences in their speech and tend to be more focused on telling their story of events. However, in this particular study, they were constantly interrupted and unable to tell their narrative (Eades, 2000). As a result, the power differences between aboriginal witnesses and white judges/lawyers is perpetuated. Similar patterns have been shown on studies focused on discourses and culturally-based conversation styles when applied to classrooms and workplaces (Fant, 2012; Philips, 1976; Wortham, 2004). Discursive studies on cross-cultural communication have helped to promote understandings of how small differences in the way people communicate can have a significant impact on how they construct their reality, both individually and as part of the larger society.

Discursive work on culture allows researchers to highlight the variability, not only between cultures, but also within them (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This is what drew me as a researcher to approach the study of culture from a social constructionist perspective. More specifically, it allowed me to look at the different shades of what culture means for these couples, rather than simply categorizing how they see the world. It also allowed me to focus on how my participants use the discourses that are available to them in their respective cultures to construct their relationships together. Although one of the drawbacks of using discourse analysis is the fact that findings from such studies cannot be generalized to every situation and every individual, when it comes to culture, “It is neither pertinent nor legitimate to claim culture-free generalizations” (Misra & Gergen, 1993, pp.237).

**Discourse Work with Couples and Families**
The aim of the previous section was to explain how social constructionism and discourse analysis can contribute to a new way of looking at culture. The next section explores how discourse analysis has been used as a method to study couples and families, and what this literature adds to my study.

Discourse analysis has been used in previous research to identify how the discourses that families and couples use influence their constructions about the world and social networks. Furthermore, the role that culture plays in the use of said discourses has been highlighted. For example, Sametband and Strong (2018) conducted a study using discourse analysis to understand preferred cultural identities in family therapy sessions. They used videotaped sessions and interviews to study how immigrant family members conversed about their preferred cultural identities and how these identities were either confirmed or misrepresented by others in therapy sessions, even by the therapists. They found that in sessions with immigrant families, cultural identities can be negotiated between how individuals position themselves, in how others position them, and in tensions arising between the misrecognition of others and the resistance that comes with being misrecognized. In terms of my research, although not about immigrant families, it is focused on two people with different cultural identities, that somehow must still negotiate their own and each other’s cultural selves. From a social constructionist perspective, couples carry out these negotiations in everyday conversations. Although studying how these negotiations are carried out in everyday conversations is out of scope for this thesis, my study will likely shed some light as to how couples have done this in the past, and how the process now presents in the way they speak about their relationship.

Based on the existing literature, families and couples are constructed differently across different cultures (Singh, 2009). In Anglo-American and Anglo-Canadian systemic therapy,
emphasis is placed on using genograms to depict familial relationships. This way of conceptualizing families may underestimate other types of relationships that are part of what constitutes a family in other cultures. For example, relationships with extended family has a more prominent role in some cultures than others (Singh, 2009). There have also been discursive studies conducted on how immigrant families may have different constructions of family, when contrasted with their therapists’ constructions (Sametband & Strong, 2018; Singh, 2009). Singh (2009) found that sometimes differences in the construction of family between family therapists and their clients can have implications for how therapy is conducted and the issues that are attended to. Even though therapists are aware of cultural differences and are encouraged in their training to remain open to cultural differences and not make assumptions (Taylor & Smith, 2011); according to Singh’s (2009) findings, it can be difficult to be completely aware of the discourses that make up our worldview. Moreover, therapists’ lack of awareness of their preferred discourses for how families are or should be, may inadvertently affect the ways they approach sessions. Studies that employ discourse analysis as their method can shed some light on these discourses and bring them to the forefront, so that family therapists can be more aware of how their discourses shape their work in sessions (Strong et al., in press).

Deborah Tannen has used discourse analysis to understand how families construct their family identity. In her two books You just don’t understand (1990) and Family Talk (Tannen, Kendall, & Gordon, 2007), she described how language use changes the ways that couples and families communicate with one another and how they construct a role for each person in the relationship. Tannen et al. (2007) found three themes in their study of discourses, positioning, and stances used in families: (a) dynamics of power and solidarity in the family inform each member’s shared and individual identity, (b) a negotiation of gendered identities and shared
identities, and (c) parents negotiate shared beliefs and values in the presence of their children so as to create a shared family identity (Kendall, 2007). The studies in this book, in ways similar to my thesis research, studied how individuals construct their identities through conversations and discourses. For example, Gordon (2007a), found how a mother’s identity is shaped by knowing details about her children’s lives, exemplified by a discourse of being the “nerve centre” for personal and relational information in the family. Further, she highlights sociocultural forces in how mothers construct this identity, with women generally taking responsibility for their children’s shortcomings (Tannen, 2001). Thus, although identity construction is taking place in every family and couple through their conversations, some of the discourses being used have deeper roots in larger cultures. Families employ these larger discourses available to construct smaller discourses as these pertain to their everyday lives (Killian, 2013; Ochs, 1993). This begs the question as to what type of socio-cultural forces are at play when intercultural couples construct their relationship, and how each partner may construct their place in the relationship accordingly. Similar patterns occur across families as they construct a joint identity and set of values and beliefs that normally the whole family subscribes to (Gordon, 2007b). More specifically, the negotiation of identities occurs through socially recognized, and goal-directed behaviour, such as interrupting someone or making a request (Ochs, 1993). These discursive ways of studying family identity construction adopt a stance similar to the one I have taken for this thesis, where I assume that couples construct their individual and joined identities through talk.

Research on the discourses employed by families and couples to construct their relationship has been useful. However, one of the main criticisms of discourse analysis is the question of its practicality when it comes to real-life therapy. This criticism has been met with
further research in the last few years, drawing attention to how therapists can benefit from looking at their sessions from a discourse analysis perspective (Ong et al., 2019). For example, discourse analysis can help therapists slow down what is happening in a session, in order to pay attention to how the discourses used continue to feed into some of the family’s presented concerns (Couture, 2007; Patrika & Tseliou, 2016). Further, a discourse analysis of therapy sessions can give therapists information as to whether their clients are moving forward in therapy and change is occurring (Avdi, 2005; Avdi & Georgaca, 2007). In terms of my own research, although I did not analyze naturally occurring conversations, studying the discourses used by couples as they talked about their relationship with me was helpful for understanding the types of conversations that help these couples succeed. This information that may help therapists be more effective with couples that are struggling.

The Study of Intercultural Couples

This next section is specifically oriented towards understanding how intercultural couples have been previously studied in the literature, to inform the present research. First, there is a review of the literature on intercultural couples as pertaining to the challenges that they may encounter. Then, the strengths of intercultural couples are presented.

Despite the societal push to marry within one’s culture (Killian, 2002), individuals seek out cross-cultural relationships for a number of reasons, such as looking for someone who complements their culture rather than matching it, chasing a romantic ideal, or rebelling against their own social and cultural norms, among other reasons (Romano, 2008). Other theorists propose that certain characteristics make it more likely for an individual to enter an intercultural relationship. For example, immigrants who have lived in another country for longer, higher levels of acculturation, individuals whose culture is more accepting of cultural diversity, and
those living in urban areas are more likely to find a partner from another cultural background (Silva, Campbell, & Wright, 2012). Earlier studies on intercultural couples tended to focus solely on interracial couples (Bratter & King, 2008; Brummett, 2017; Fu, et al., 2001; Killian, 2002; Leslie, & Young, 2015). However, more recently, the literature has expanded to include couples who differ in other domains such as ethnicity, religion, and nationality (Bystydzienski, 2011; Maynigo, 2017). Newer studies also tend to be more strength based rather deficit-based. Both sides of the literature are reviewed below.

**Challenges for intercultural couples.** The literature on the longevity of intercultural couples is conflicting. There are some claims that intercultural and interracial marriages face higher levels of conflict than same-culture couples (Bustamante et al., 2011; Fu et al., 2001); with others even claiming that they face higher rates of divorce (Bratter & King, 2008). However, not all studies have arrived at the same results (see Zhang & van Hook, 2009). Troy, Lewis-Smith and Laurenceau (2006) conducted a study with intercultural couples and found that interracial couples reported similar levels of relationship quality when contrasted with intracultural couples (couples with two people from the same culture). Further, intercultural couples reported similar levels and styles of conflict as intracultural couples. One of the limitations of this study was that the couples were quite young (undergraduate students) and dating, with no reference as to whether they were cohabitating. However, these results have been replicated by studies looking at married couples. For example, it was found that intimacy among intercultural couples was about the same as for same-culture couples (Heller & Wood, 2000). Therefore, there is evidence to challenge the previously held assumption that intercultural couples face more conflict and dissolution than their same-culture counterparts. This is not to
suggest that they do not face unique tensions that arise from cultural differences, which will be discussed below.

Challenges or tensions for intercultural couples tend to show up in different aspects of the relationship. Many studies have described difficulties related to the differences in cultural expectations for both partners. Perhaps the most studied expectation, has been differences over gender role expectations, and how these can be a source of tension for intercultural couples (Maynigo, 2017). In a study where couples were asked to describe situations in which they felt their different cultural values played a role in relationship tensions, many participants described differences in gender roles, and a need for negotiating those roles in the relationship (Bustamante et al., 2011; Cools, 2006; Frame, 2004). These findings appeared to apply more specifically to couples where one of the partners came from more traditionally male-dominated culture (Bustamante et al., 2011; Frame, 2004). These roles may have to be negotiated once they enter an intercultural relationship (Wu, 2014).

A related source of tension for intercultural couples pertains to differences over child rearing practices. Partners bring to the relationship assumptions about how children should be raised, assumptions usually stemming from their original family and cultural contexts (Wu, 2014). For example, different cultures have different assumptions about how strict parents should be. Couples mentioned that child rearing practices can be a source of tension because of diverse “cultural values and experiences” (Bustamante et al., 2011, p. 158). Similar themes emerged when I interviewed members of intercultural couples in a pilot study (Lopez Bilbao, 2017).

In many cases, it is not only internal challenges that intercultural couples face, but also outside pressures, such as from family members or the community (Maynigo, 2017). There are a number of ways in which outside factors can play a role in tensions for an intercultural couple.
First, it can be difficult if one of the partners and their extended family speak a different language than the second partner. This can make the second partner feel like an outsider in gatherings (Bustamante et al., 2011; Lopez Bilbao, 2017). A second reason for external factors to play an important role pertains to a difference in discourses used to define “family.” One partner may consider their grandparents to be extremely important to their definition of family and they may involve them in important family decisions, while the other partner may perceive the grandparents to be overly involved (Bustamante et al., 2011; Singh, 2009). However, a third reason as to why external pressures may increase challenges within intercultural couples is based on cultural or community views on intercultural relationships (Cools, 2016). When it comes to approval from families, young adults reported that their families were more likely to approve an interracial relationship, rather than an intercultural one (Shenhav, Campos, & Goldberg, 2017). They also reported higher levels of conflict with family members when they entered an intercultural relationship than when entering an interracial one (Shenhav et al., 2017). Other studies have replicated these findings, with participants describing situations in which their families and/or communities have not been open to them entering an intercultural relationship (Killian, 2002; Seshadri & Knudson Martin, 2013). Racial differences appear to play an important role in how the couple is seen by the larger community. Participants have described receiving “looks” from others, being treated as an outsider by the community, or experiencing discrimination for looking different to their partner (Killian, 2002; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). A participant from the study conducted by Cools (2016) described this by saying, “love is blind but the environment usually isn’t” (p.271).

It is important to note that interracial couples are not always intercultural couples, and that not all intercultural couples are interracial. Many studies in the literature do not make this
distinction, and therefore it can be difficult to discern the experiences of intercultural couples from couples who are only interracial. However, the evidence, overall, suggests that intercultural couples, whether interracial or not, may deal with external pressures from their larger social circles that may not fully accept their relationship. Romantic relationships do not exist in a vacuum, they influence and are influenced by larger systems, such as their extended families, community, and friendship circles (Wu, 2014). Therefore, when the larger systems reject the relationship, the couple must develop coping strategies to overcome such challenges (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). These coping strategies are even more salient for intercultural couples, because they may experience higher levels of disapproval from the larger community.

Some intercultural couples can also face differences and difficulties in communication, which may add another layer of challenges, especially when partners do not share a common mother tongue (Leppanen, 2016). Participants in a pilot study I conducted reported how tensions can arise when one or both of the partners are unable to express themselves as freely as they would in their first language (Lopez Bilbao, 2017). One participant reported that, especially at the beginning of their relationship, it was more difficult to feel confident during arguments because they did not have the appropriate vocabulary to do so (Lopez Bilbao, 2017). Cools (2006) reported similar results among Finnish intercultural couples, adding that one partner having a lower language proficiency in the relationship was sometimes perceived as a disability by partners. Furthermore, participants described language difficulties as contributing to a feeling of being more powerless in the relationship, which can be difficult to cope with (Cools, 2006).

It is important to note that differences over the languages being spoken in the relationship is not the only aspect contributing to tensions. There are nuances of communication that are inherent to a culture. As mentioned previously in this chapter, it is not only necessary for
individuals to speak an understandable language, but also to understand that language’s
unwritten cultural nuances in order to communicate effectively (Tannen, 1998). For example,
cultures can have differences regarding taboo topics, such as politics, differences on how
individuals use silence, or how much to share with others. Partners in intercultural couples have
identified these areas as sources of tension in communication with their spouse (Cools, 2006). I
found similar themes when I conducted a focus group with partners of intercultural couples who
lived in Canada. Participants described “Canadian politeness” as an occasional point of
contention for the couple, especially for those participants who came from a culture that was
more direct in their communication (Lopez Bilbao, 2017).

**How do intercultural couples succeed?** One of my biggest questions as I began this
thesis was, “despite the tensions, what helps intercultural couples succeed?” A big part in the
creation of healthy relationships are aspects that are well documented in the literature, such as
good communication and trust. However, there is another layer to succeeding as an intercultural
couple, because as mentioned previously, these relationships bring up unique tensions that may
need some negotiation. Nevertheless, researchers have found factors that contribute to the
strength of intercultural couples and increase their chances of success.

When I conducted a focus group with the immigrant members of intercultural couples, I
heard from participants that they and their partners worked hard to turn their challenges into the
strengths for the couple. It was mentioned that, over time, they learned to see their cultural
differences in a different light. Couples who struggled with language barriers for example,
learned to use humor to diffuse tension (Cools, 2015; Leppanen, 2016; Lopez Bilbao, 2017).
Other participants reported that they began seeing differences in cultural expectations as chances
to get to know another culture and as a way to better understand their partner, rather than as a
challenge to overcome (Lopez Bilbao, 2017). In a different study, couples who acknowledged their cultural differences, scored higher on intimacy measures, rather than those who minimized them (Heller & Wood, 2000). This indicates that simply putting “blinders” on and ignoring differences in values and expectations may not be beneficial to construct life as a couple (Heller & Wood, 2000). Instead, it appears that the most satisfied couples tend to respect and embrace cultural differences, while also downplaying the role that these differences have in the relationship (Wu, 2014). Thus, it is a delicate balance between acknowledging cultural differences, while also not letting them play a central role in the workings of the relationship.

There is also evidence to suggest that being part of an intercultural couple helps build a stronger bond between partners and to build a more inclusive view of culture (Frame, 2004; Lee, 2006; Leppanen, 2016). In fact, in one study, participants who reported thoroughly exploring their and their partner’s values scored higher on intimacy than those who did not make as much of an effort in understanding their partner’s cultural background and values (Heller & Wood, 2000). It is not uncommon for partners in intercultural unions to cherish the opportunity to be able to choose which values their family adheres to (Heller & Wood, 2000; Lopez Bilbao, 2017). This can be achieved through open communication, defined as communicating with openness, honesty, understanding, respect, open-mindedness, and willingness to express thoughts and emotions (Wu, 2014). In fact, couples often state that one of the advantages of being in an intercultural relationship is the fact that important values and roles in the relationship cannot be assumed, and thus need to be discussed and negotiated constantly (Bustamante et al., 2011; Lopez Bilbao, 2017). This openness to cultural differences fosters open communication and family cohesion (Bustamante et al., 2011; Wu, 2014).
The idea of being able to examine cultural practices and values, and consciously make an effort as to whether to adhere to them or not, relates to the concept of intercultural couples constructing a third culture, or a hybrid culture where each partner is represented (Lee, 2006; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Creating a third culture has three components. First, each partner must be open to the other partner’s culture and they do not have the desire to dominate on the basis of their own culture. Secondly, partners must be able to find common ground between cultures. Third, partners are able to find values and activities that are new to either one of them and each of their respective cultures (Lee, 2006). This can be achieved through open communication (Wu, 2014). In fact, couples have reported that open communication is one of the ways in which they maintain family cohesion (Wu, 2014).

Third culture is only one way in which couples cope with cultural differences. Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) studied seventeen intercultural couples, with their study being one of the first that was mostly focused on the strengths of these unions. The authors used grounded theory to better understand how intercultural couples come together despite cultural differences (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). They found that intercultural couples have four methods in which they primarily organize their relationship to each other in regards to their culture:

- Integrated couples, who are able to respect and value the culture of both partners. Partners feel heard and understood in this type of organization.
- Coexisting couples, who appear to have an “agree to disagree” attitude towards their cultural differences. Couples who fall into this category perceive their cultural differences as attractive.
- Singularly assimilated couples, in which one partner has almost completely assimilated to the other partner’s culture and they do not embrace their own cultural
customs. It is important to note that the partner who has assimilated does not have negative feeling towards the relationship.

- Unresolved couples, who have not come to terms as to how to negotiate cultural differences, which oftentimes causes conflict in the relationship.

Interestingly, despite claims from previous studies that intercultural couples create a third identity, the coexisting category had the highest number of couples (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). It is possible that the assumption that intercultural couples naturally create this third identity is inadequate, and therefore more research is needed into how couples exactly arrive to this compromise, or not. My study adds to the existing literature because, by exploring the different discourses that intercultural couples use to talk about their relationship, enabling better understandings of how couples sometimes position themselves in this third identity, but also pointing to how they can organize their relationship in different ways at different times. Furthermore, discourse analysis facilitates identifying and understanding how these variations may contribute to a healthy relationship. Discourse analysis offers an opportunity to understand how variability in discourses occurs, and raises hypothesis as to the purpose of these variations (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature on the different areas that have informed this thesis. I began with an introduction of discourses and discourse analysis, as this concept is what informed the analysis of my data, and will provide more information on how I conducted the actual analysis in chapter three. I then reviewed the literature on culture, and different theories or discourses about this concept. The third part of this literature review was focused on studies done on families and couples, including ways in which they have been studied using a
social constructionist approach. Finally, I reviewed the existing literature on intercultural couples. The goal of this review was to get the reader to think about intercultural couples through a social constructionist lens, and to begin thinking about culture in the same way. In other words, to begin thinking of how language use is the tool through which intercultural couples construct their relationship. The aim of this study was to identify the different interpretative repertoires that intercultural couples used to construct their relationship and negotiate cultural differences. The research question driving this study was “How do intercultural couples talk about their experiences of being in a cross-cultural relationship?” Chapter three further describes the methodology and method I used to analyze my data.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

In this thesis I have posed the question of “how do couples talk about and understand their experience of being in an intercultural relationship?” It should be noted that I am not only interested in how couples communicate, or what is said, but in how communication helps the couple construct their relationship. The following chapter outlines the methodology and method of my thesis. I will first describe the social constructionist paradigm that I have taken up to understand my research. Next, I will explain the theoretical framework that I have used to analyze my data, discourse analysis. Finally, I will describe how data collection and analysis was conducted, while providing information about my participants, and participant recruitment. Lastly, I will outline how the validity and quality of the data were addressed.

Research Paradigm: Social Constructionism

I have approached each step of this thesis from a social constructionist paradigm. Social constructionism is an umbrella concept with common theoretical underpinnings for many social theories (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985). Social constructionist theories grew as a response to other types of epistemology such as positivism and empiricism (Gergen, 2001). The view that knowledge could only be arrived at through observation and controlled experiments failed to capture lived reality for many people, especially those from minority and marginalized groups (Gergen, 2001; Lock & Strong, 2010a).

Although the theories that fall under the umbrella of social constructionism are varied, they all share a set of common assumptions. The first of these assumptions is that every experience is subjective to the person. There is no such thing as purely objective knowledge, given that our interpretations of it will shape the way we construct it (Burr, 1995). Secondly, our interpretations or constructions of our world are set against a historical and cultural background.
(Burr, 1995). This second point is especially relevant to my research, given that interpretations of the world are mainly rooted in culture, one could expect partners in intercultural couples to have different interpretations of the world (Burr, 1995; Kiesling, 2015). This leads to a third assumption of social constructionism, in that constructions are created and sustained by social processes, and this is mostly achieved through the use of language (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985). This assumption helped me understand how, within each culture, there are different constructions of reality and experiences, and that these constructions are created, modified, and sustained by discourse. Finally, constructions are not passive objects that exist in the world, rather they inform action. For example, the way we perceive certain groups of people would depend on the constructions we have about them, in turn, these perceptions would influence the way we interact with people from that group (Burr, 1995). This assumption also applies to each person’s view of themselves, as the self is both, socially and individually constructed (Lock & Strong, 2010b).

Within the realm of Social Constructionism, I have taken a Relational Constructionist approach. The assumption in this approach is that meaning is not constructed internally by oneself, but that it is instead constructed by and within our relationships (Gergen, 2015). Gergen (2015) argues that people’s thoughts and constructions of themselves are not private, but are created as meaningful with the people to whom they relate. Moreover, people carry with them multiple selves, which are influenced by past and present relationships (Gergen, 2015). The actions individuals take are usually in context of their relationships, and thus they create meaning with those they relate to (McNamee, 2012). For intercultural couples, partners are constantly creating meaning together (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). In this study I have attempted to capture how intercultural couples create such meanings, and how this has helped to create a stronger relational bond, that allows them to keep their relationship alive (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).
Methodology: Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is one of many methodological approaches that fall under the umbrella of social constructionism (Gee, 2011; Gergen, 2015; Keller, 2013). Discourse analysis is defined broadly as the study of language use (Gee, 2011; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011). Every relationship that we are in is, for discourse analysts, constructed through language. Furthermore, the discourses used by intercultural couples are of particular interest because two people coming from different cultures, with different individual discourses, use language and talk in order to construct a life together. The purpose of this study was to find out more about how this life constructing occurs in intercultural couples, and discourse analysis provides an adequate way of doing so.

Discourse analysis, in congruence with its social constructionist premises, takes up the assumption that language plays a central role in how people create meaning for their experiences (Gee, 2011).Traditionally, language was seen as a means for people to share their thoughts with others. According to this line of thinking, individuals would find and use the words that describe their internal states (Burr, 1995). However, according to discourse analysis, language is a way for people to achieve different purposes (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). The words that people use are not just a reflection of internal states, instead, these internal states are constructed through language (Burr, 2015). Similarly, for couples, their experiences are also constructed and interpreted through language and language use (Leppanen, 2016). In conversations, couples construct and re-construct what their relationship is like, and how they interpret it. An example of this is seen in Tannen’s (1990) work when looking at how, in heterosexual relationships, men and women communicate differently, and how their conversations shape the role that each person has in the relationship. According to Tannen’s work, the ways that men speak help to
construct a role of protector, while women’s talk constructs a role of nurturer (Tannen, 1990). Therefore, for my thesis, I was interested in learning more about how the language that intercultural couples use helps them make sense of and construct their experience. I am also interested in the relational aspect of discourse, or how couples construct the meaning of their relationship together.

Based on this assumption of how our understanding of the world is constructed, discourse analysts attempt to shed some light into how different discursive resources are used to construct events, states of mind, relationships, and identities (Potter, 2004). In other words, a basic theoretical assumption of discourse analysis is that discourse is action-oriented, and discourse analysts attempt to understand what the discourse is doing, and how (Potter, 2004). Secondly, discourse analysts assume that discourse is constructed. Similar to the assumptions of social constructionism, discourses are not pre-packaged ways of speaking about our world; rather, they are adaptable ways of doing life that constantly evolve; being constructed and re-constructed by people (Potter, 2004). Thirdly, discourse analysis assumes that discourse is situated. That is, individuals will use different discourses to achieve different things in different contexts (Gee, 2011; Potter, 2004). Thus, as discourse analysts, it is important to not only study what is being said, but also the context in which discourses are used (Gee, 2011; Wetherell, 1998). When studying how people talk, one can observe that the same person may draw from different discourses on the same topic at different times. Although this was initially seen as problematic in explaining attitudes, discourse analysts propose that it is normal for individuals to assume different positions in their talk at different times. Furthermore, these different positions may sometimes contradict each other (Wetherell, 1998). Through the study of this variability, one can better understand the function of discourses (Wetherell & Potter, 1988).
I chose this method because discourse analysis offers a way to qualitatively study how individuals construct and co-construct their lived experiences (Gee, 2011; Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005). Although other methods such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis or Grounded Theory also focus on understanding people’s subjective experiences, none of these focus on the role that language use in relationships plays on these experiences and constructions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Strong, et al., in press). Discourse analysis is an attempt to solve this problem by identifying ways in which people use discourse to construct their reality. Secondly, studies using discourse analysis can help counsellors identify the discourses that their clients use to communicate about their issues as well as the discourses that they can use in sessions to facilitate change (Spong, 2010).

**Participant Recruitment**

After receiving ethics approval for this study from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, I recruited participants from a few means, including posts on the social media site Facebook (see appendix A and B for English and Spanish posts, respectively), e-mail through a listserv (see appendix C for a copy of this e-mail). Participants were also recruited through a snowballing technique, with previous participants recruiting interested acquaintances. Interested participants were invited to e-mail me if they met the following criteria at the time of participation:

- Currently involved in a committed intercultural couple.
- One partner was born and raised in Canada and the other was an immigrant to Canada.
- Considered their relationship to be healthy.
- Lived together for at least 2 years.
- Both partners were willing to participate.
These criteria allowed for couples to have undergone an adaptation period in their cohabitation.

**Participants**

Seven couples participated in the study. Participants’ ages ranged from 25 to 60, with an average age of 37.92 (SD=10.89). Couples had been together between two and a half to 20 years; mean length of relationship was 7.35 years (SD=6.03). Three out of the seven couples had children. All demographics are listed in Table 1. Names have been changed to pseudonyms.

Table 1.

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Time Together</th>
<th>Kids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Guatemalan</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viviana</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>Mestizo</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avery</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Jewish/secular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Pseudonyms were used, and some demographic information has been simplified to protect participant’s confidentiality.

**Method for Data Collection**

Once the interested couples were e-mailed (see appendix D for a copy of this e-mail), I reminded participants of the participation criteria and answered any questions participants had about the study. Together we set up a date and time to conduct a semi-structured interview with both partners present. I e-mailed participants a copy of the written consent form (See appendix E
for a copy of the consent form) in order for them to review it before the interview and provide them a chance to discuss and ask questions if needed. The majority of the interviews took place at the University of Calgary in a private room. One of the interviews took place through the video conferencing service Skype because the couple lived out of town. Before starting the interview, I explained the study to participants and why I was conducting it. Each participant signed the written consent form and given a chance to voice any questions or concerns.

I engaged in semi-structured interviews with the couples where I asked them about their experiences of being in a relationship with someone from a different culture. Interview questions were focused mainly on how culture is relevant for the couple, how they find compromise in these differences, and what are the easiest vs. more difficult situations to find common ground (see appendix F for the interview guide). Interviews were audio-recorded and took between 50-90 minutes. As compensation, participants entered into a draw for a $100 Visa gift card. The winning couple was informed through e-mail and the gift card mailed to them.

Potter and Wetherell, in more recent papers, have advocated for the use of naturally occurring data with discourse analysis because it allows for the researcher to see more of the action-orientation and situated nature of discourses (e.g., Potter, 2004). While acknowledging the usefulness of naturally occurring data, I chose to conduct audio-recorded interviews due to time and ethical constraints. Ideally, it would have been useful to have access to actual therapy sessions of intercultural couples, as several other studies have done (e.g., Rober, van Eesbeek, & Elliott, 2006). However, this would have required the approval of a counselling agency, as well as the couples and therapists in sessions, which would have proven difficult to do for a master’s thesis. Secondly, I wanted to focus on how healthy couples construct their relationship, and saw our interviews as a means to do so. Studying couples seeking counselling may have had the
opposite effect. Finally, other researchers have also argued that there is still value in conducting discourse analysis with interviews because interviews are still a glimpse into people’s lived experiences and constructions (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2012).

For this study I chose to interview the couples together for a number of reasons. First and foremost, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, I am interested in the way that couples use language to negotiate how they do their relationship; in agreement with the social constructionist assumptions of this thesis (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Secondly, Bjørnholt and Farsad (2014) have argued for the advantages of joint interviews, such as giving each participant control over the information that is shared during the interview, thus, ensuring confidentiality. They also mentioned the production of rich data as being an advantage of joint interviews. Partners are able to cue one another during the interview, thus co-constructing a joint narrative of their experiences. A third advantage is the ability for the researcher to get a glimpse into the communication style and dynamics of each couple (Bjørnholt & Farsad, 2014). At times, small tensions may arise during the interview which can provide a glimpse into how couples resolve conflict and how they relate to one another (Bjørnholt & Farsad, 2014). This is similar to what Finch (2007) has called “displaying family”, the concept that being part of a family consists of actions that indicate one chooses to belong or that display that they are part of a family. Examples of “displaying family” that come up during joint interviews can help the researcher understand how couples “do” their relationship and life together. Finally, there are logistical reasons as to why joint interviews can be advantageous. Time can be used more efficiently when interviewing both people at once (Bjørnholt & Farsad, 2014). Additionally, previous couple studies have encountered difficulties in recruiting and retaining participants when interviews were separate, with female partners being more eager to participate than male partners. However,
Researchers found more success recruiting participants when both partners were interviewed together (Bjørnholt & Farsad, 2014; Piller, 2002). Given these reasons, it seemed appropriate to conduct joint interviews for the present study.

Audio recordings from my interviews were transcribed by me, using transcription software called “F5 Transcription”. Transcriptions were completed manually, but the software facilitated the process in terms of being able to slow down the audio, and placing automatic time stamps after each turn of talking for ease of reference. My transcriptions included features based on Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) and adapted by Kogan (1998) (see Appendix G for transcription notations). These notations were done in order to depict behaviors such as interruptions, and longer pauses, which are helpful for the analysis.

Analysis

The present study adapted Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) approach to discourse analysis. In order to study how people construct their world through language, discourse analysts focus on studying the variations in language, which provide us clues about its function (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). More specifically, I first identified interpretative repertoires in my data. Interpretative repertoires are defined as “a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 138). They include a coherent and identifiable set of terms, metaphors, and stylistic and grammatical constructions, which are usually used together to represent an aspect of a discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The goal of this methodology is not only to identify different interpretative repertoires, but also to provide hypotheses as to why different repertoires are used at different times – as a means to test the functions of these repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).
It is also important to distinguish interpretative repertoires from discourses, and sub-discourses. In my results, I speak of interpretative repertoires to refer to the larger sets of meaning making. These would be the largest building blocks when people are constructing meaning. Within repertoires, people may position themselves in smaller patterns of talk that are distinguishable distinct from one another, called discourses. These discourses are used to achieve a similar function as the larger repertoire. However, they achieve these functions in slightly different ways, and therefore it made sense to separate them as different ways of constructing meaning. Then, some discourses may be composed of even smaller language patterns, which are called sub-discourses. Again, sub-discourses are used to achieve a similar function as the discourses and the repertoire that they belong to. However, the way these functions are achieved are slightly different, and therefore it made sense to separate them. There is more information on how I divided these different levels in chapter four. Figure 1 on page 55 also shows a graphical representation of the organization of repertoires, discourses, and sub-discourses.

In order to analyze the data of this thesis, I followed the steps outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) in their book, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. Their analysis is done in three stages. After interviews are completed and the data is transcribed, the first step is to conduct initial coding. During this stage, I went through my data several times identifying codes pertaining to my research question. This stage is not meant to be part of the actual analysis, but serves as an initial way to organize data. As a researcher, I looked for instances in which couples talked about their cultural differences and how they deal with them, as well as ways in which culture is evident in their relationship.

The second stage involved analysis of data. During this step, I read already coded passages in detail while asking myself: “Why am I reading this passage this way?” and “What
features produce this reading?” At first, I looked for patterns in the data, which included ways in which couples’ accounts were similar and ways in which they were different. These patterns occurred not only within each couple’s talk but also between couples. The second part of analysis was to begin making hypotheses about the functions of these ways of speaking. My hypotheses were supported from passages I identified in the data itself, by going through the transcriptions and finding ways in which couples used similar ways of speaking to achieve similar results.

During the third step, validation, I attempted to test my hypothesis. This stage was an attempt to stay close to the data and to make sure that my hypotheses about the function of different discourses was based on the data and not on my preconceived notions. The next section deals with ways in which I have ensured the quality of my analysis.

**Quality of Analysis**

There are many descriptions of what constitutes good quality of discourse analysis. Georgaca and Avdi (2011) listed five criteria to evaluate the quality of analysis for a discourse analysis study. First, the criterion, initial coherence, requires that the findings are consistent with the data. Throughout this thesis, I made sure to remain close to my data by conducting the interviews, and transcribing them myself. This allowed me to listen to the interviews a second time before I began my analysis. During analysis, I remained curious and did not become set on a specific finding until I could substantiate my claims with my data.

A second way of ensuring quality of analysis is through rigor (Georgaca & Avdi, 2011). This is the process of paying attention to any inconsistencies and diversity in the data. In my analysis, I looked for exceptions in the use of a particular discourse, and questioned why these exceptions existed. The findings I report on in chapter four were presented only after a long
process of “false starts”, and reconsidering my analytical hunches. Other times, these exceptions helped me to (re-)define the “boundaries” of the interpretative repertoires and/or discourses. Chapter four provides further details about the analytical process, including these false-starts and how I arrived to my final results.

The third criterion, involves being able to be transparent and situated about the analysis (Georgaca & Avdi, 2011). Throughout this thesis I have attempted to remain as transparent as possible about my process. In chapter four this becomes more obvious, as I take the reader through a detailed example of my analysis. This was done to show a step by step process of how and why I arrived at my results. I am hoping that the reader can understand my rationale throughout the later presented process of analysis. I also provide detailed examples from my interviews that illustrate my results, and explain how I arrived to my conclusions.

Fourth, is to maintain the idea of reflexivity in mind throughout the process (Georgaca & Avdi, 2011). Part of conducting a study from a social constructionist perspective is understanding that as a researcher I am co-constructing accounts with my participants (Rogers-de Jong & Strong, 2014). As researcher I was not an objective or detached observer, because throughout the process I have made decisions that affect the type of data that I invited and received (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Rogers-de Jong & Strong, 2014). As mentioned on chapter one, my own identity as an immigrant and as a member of an intercultural relationship were part of the research process. This could have affected the way I related to my participants and my data. Working with a researcher who has probably gone through similar experiences most likely affected the ways my participants responded to my interview questions. In social constructionism, reflexivity is not seen as a negative aspect of research, but rather as a natural, if
not inescapable, part of the process (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I have remained aware of my role in this research, and taken this into account when interpreting my results.

The fifth and final way to ensure the quality of analysis in discourse analysis relates to the usefulness of the findings (Georgaca & Advi, 2011). That is, do the findings add a new perspective to the literature and do they add useful knowledge with practical applications? I believe that although my study is not groundbreaking, it adds a new perspective to the ways we understand intercultural couples. These applications are further discussed in chapter five.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I described how I collected and analyzed the data for this study. I studied how couples talk about and understand their experience of being in an intercultural relationship. In order to do this, I adopted an overarching social constructionist approach (Gergen, 2015). In other words, I was interested in looking at how intercultural couples use talk and language to construct their experiences. I interviewed seven intercultural couples. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I identified different interpretative repertoires that couples use. Furthermore, I also analyzed the function that these repertoires, and their related discourses (and sub-discourses) play when constructing the relationship.
Chapter 4: Findings

I conducted this study with the aim of answering “How do intercultural couples talk about their experiences of being in a cross-cultural relationship?” This question was my guide throughout the analytical process. In this chapter I review the findings of my study. I begin by taking the reader through a detailed account of my analysis to illustrate the nature of the process.

Through my analysis, I identified three different levels of discourses, which are worth clarifying. The larger, more macro level discourses I identified refer to interpretative repertoires. As defined in the previous chapter, repertoires are the “building blocks speakers use for constructing different versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena” (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, pp. 172). As a reminder, I use the term repertoire from now on to refer to these broader levels of linguistic patterns that participants used. Within these large patterns, participants used what I will be referring to as discourses. Discourses are smaller and identifiably distinct ways within a repertoire that participants used to speak about their relationship. Then, within these discourses, some have smaller and distinguishable underlying language patterns that I will refer to as sub-discourses. These are visually depicted in Figure 1 (p. 55).

The first part of this chapter illustrates the general analytical process of finding variability, consistency, and function of discourses. Then, I will provide an analytical example for the first interpretative repertoire, as well as its discernible, underlying discourses and sub-discourses. Subsequently, I present the rest of the interpretative repertoires by defining them, and providing examples of each level of linguistic patterns.

Looking for Variability and Consistency

The goal in discourse analysis is not to find agreement or patterns across different participants but to explain how individuals, or couples, used language to construct their
understandings of their relationship. In fact, variability in discourse analysis provides useful information as to the different discourses used by participants, extending to the functions of the discourses they used (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Once I transcribed my participant interviews, I used the qualitative research software NVivo 13 to assist me in organizing and conducting the analysis process. The first step was the initial coding of the data, with the goal of condensing the large amounts of data into more manageable pieces before proper analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For this stage, I read each of the transcripts carefully, paying close attention to the ways in which participants talked about, or accounted for their experiences. I focused on the words used, the intonation, and the order or organization of accounts. I created codes based on initial hunches, as to what the speakers were doing with their speech. These were meant to group seemingly similar language patterns into more manageable groups before proper analysis. For example, I noticed that participants spoke in a tone of appreciation and admiration for their partner and their culture. Therefore, I coded these utterances as “appreciation for relationship.” I tried to be as inclusive as possible in this stage. Therefore, I even included accounts that tentatively belonged to a code, and later went back and reviewed them accordingly (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Throughout the coding process, I highlighted portions and made notes as to why these accounts appeared to belong together. For example, participants often used the words “sharing”, “learning”, or they spoke in a way that indicated being appreciative of cultural differences. I wrote down all of these curiosities and interpretative hunches as memos in NVivo (see Appendix H for an example), while also remaining open to the fact that my codes would likely change as I moved through the analysis. Furthermore, in my memos I wrote down my reflections as to whether certain codes were related. I later came back to these memos during analysis and
attempted to test out my hunches with the data. The memos served as a starting point for the analysis stage. NVivo allowed me to link memos to relevant codes, and to add notes directly on to the transcripts, regarding my curiosities about language use. Although I completed the first stage of my analysis in NVivo, I found the software was too cumbersome for visualizing and organizing patterns. Therefore, I used Microsoft OneNote to assist me in the later parts of my analysis. This process is further explained later in the chapter.

The next step in analysis was to begin looking for patterns in the data. I used the initial coding and my notes to begin guiding this process. I looked for both variability between and within accounts, as well as consistency or shared features in different accounts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I started off with some of my interpretative hunches from the coding process. For example, I noticed that participants had a tendency to say that cultural differences played a small (or no) part in their relationship. However, at other times, they were able to speak as to how cultural differences can sometimes be relevant in the ways they relate to one another. I read and re-read portions of the transcripts that were coded similarly, paying close attention to the language being used. Throughout this reading and re-reading, I wondered why or how people used certain words, and whether different utterances belonged to the same interpretative repertoire. There were many false starts during this stage, which is not uncommon when using discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I would become excited when it appeared that I had found a pattern of speaking, thinking that I had discovered a discourse. However, upon further analysis, I realized that my interpretation did not quite fit the data. For example, I realized early on that participants spoke about remaining flexible when it came to their culture and to their partner’s culture. I initially thought this was a discourse that belonged to compromising (see Figure 1 for reference). However, when I read the passages more closely, I realized that
participants spoke of flexibility as a personality characteristic, and partly attributed the health of their relationship to said characteristic. Other times, patterns that I had noticed during the coding stage did not recur sufficiently to be categorizable as a significant discourse. For example, I initially thought that participants used similar linguistic constructions of culture and family values/traditions. However, when I began organizing the data, I realized that this hunch did not account for enough of the data. There were simply too many exceptions, most couples did not take up this kind of language, and only a few utterances in interviews belonged to this type of language pattern. In fact, most couples used language referring to personality, rather than family. It seemed as though there was not an established pattern that could be grouped as a discourse.

**Looking for Function**

After finding patterns and variability in my data, the next step in my analysis was to begin looking for the function of discourses. A basic premise in discourse analysis is the fact that language is used to do things in conversations with others, this is what is referred to as the function of a discourse (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). In order to do this, I used my initial coding from NVivo to create color-coded brain maps on Microsoft One Note (See Appendix J for a sample of one of these maps). The brain maps helped me to organize and visualize how different discourses fit together. I started off with one of the initial larger patterns that I noticed and looked for quotes that supported the reasoning as to why I perceived that particular pattern. I noticed that when participants were asked about the role of culture in their relationship, they often said that they did not automatically think about culture being important in the relationship. For example, Viviana said, “I think, you know, just because we are from different cultures, doesn't mean that we talk about, you know, the differences?” To me, these utterances suggested that my participants did not construct their relationship based on their culture, and therefore I
began grouping these quotes. What is more, I began noticing that whenever they spoke about culture not playing a major role in the relationship, they then offered alternate explanations as to what appeared to be more relevant. For example, consider the following exchange between James and Bianca when asked about what aspects of their partner’s culture appears more evident in the relationship:

James: I don’t know if it’s a cultural thing or if it’s just a personal thing, because there are things that cultures would have, I mean, there’s also things that a personality will have as well, on their own, whether they are English, you know east Indian, whatever, I believe we’re gonna have

Bianca: [We’re both stubborn]

James: We’re both stubborn, yes.

In order to analyze for function, I read this passage closely and reflected on the words being used. I asked myself, why did James choose these words? What was he trying to say in this passage? How did Bianca answer to what James proposed, and how did this affect the function of the utterance? My gut feeling became somewhat of a driver in the process. I would ask myself, what are my first reactions when reading this quote? This gave me a hint as to the possible function of the talk. My gut feeling in this case told me that James was minimizing the role of culture in the relationship. So I began looking for specific words that either supported or rejected my hunch. He stated that he does not know if he notices so much cultural aspects as he notices personality characteristics. He then stated that no matter where the other person is from, there will be personality differences, indicating that personal differences are more important than cultural ones. Another source of information as to the function of a discourse came from others’ responses to what was said (Gee,2011). In the passage above, when Bianca spoke, she appeared to take up James’ way of talking by offering that they are “both stubborn.” She used a word that describes a personal characteristic to explain why sometimes they may have tensions or
disagreements in the relationship. James replied by agreeing with the comment that they are both stubborn. This passage showcased how a couple may use discourses relationally to construct a version of being in an intercultural relationship. I went through a similar process with the rest of the relevant quotes for the interpretative repertoires. I created hypotheses as to what couples were achieving when using a particular repertoire, discourse, or sub-discourse.

It is also important for me to review how and why I identified different discourses and sub-discourses as part of each interpretative repertoire, as this decision was based on the function of utterances. As I reviewed the quotes that I deemed relevant for each repertoire, I noticed that within the larger patterns of speaking, people achieved similar functions in slightly different ways. For example, consider the following quote from Elijah:

Elijah: So we started like, I think the reason why we’re good together is because we’re very like, we’re very much at the same level when it comes to the major sort of thing. When it comes to morality, religion, anything in terms of that nature, that’s something that, dictates you, sort of like, your, what you think is right or wrong, and what you think it’s. We’re very much in the same level when it comes to that kind of stuff. So like, we sort of deal with that stuff in a very like, even level. Like we basically don’t have to like, we don’t really have those kind of, (.) sort of conversations, where is this the right thing or is that the right thing? We usually the answer is the same for both of us

In this quote, Elijah emphasized the similarities between he and Avery, on what he called “the important stuff”. Elijah did not emphasize culture and the role that it plays in his relationship. He also stated that there is no need to negotiate or have conversations about topics such as religion or morality, because he and Avery both know that they are on the same page. Other times, participants continued to minimize the role of culture, but focused on other aspects of the relationship. The following exchange between Bianca and James illustrates that:

Bianca: I don’t know if its culture, but um, I think it’s, we trust each other so we talk a lot, whether it’s on the phone or in person

James: [Yea]
Bianca: You know if something, if we don’t feel it’s something, you know, whether it’s (. we hesitate on something so small, we’ll talk about it

Bianca again, appeared to downplay the role of culture when she says “I don’t know if it’s cultural,” and then stated that she and James usually talk about any disagreements they may have. This to me was identifiably different from talk about how partners are similar to one another, which Elijah had taken up in the previous quote. Although participants downplayed the role of culture in both excerpts, they did so in slightly different ways. Thus, although the quotes belonged to the same interpretative repertoire, I placed them in different discourses. These were the kinds of distinctions I made as I decided the discourses that were part of each repertoire. I engaged in a similar process when it came to finding sub-discourses. My decision to divide my participants’ speech patterns into these different discourses and sub-discourses was based on the function of the utterances made.

From my analytical process, it became clear to me that participants drew from three main interpretative repertoires, (a) culture isn’t defining, (b) culture plays a part sometimes and (c) cultural differences add to the relationship. Each repertoire had within it, a number of discourses and sub-discourses. These have been illustrated in Figure 1 below. I will use the first repertoire (culture isn’t defining) as an analytical example, and walk the reader through a more in-depth description of my analysis. The goal of this is to make my analytical process as transparent as possible, to ensure the quality of my findings (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). After my analytical example, I will provide definitions and examples for each interpretative repertoire, and all of their underlying discourses and sub-discourses.
Analytical Example: Culture Isn’t Defining

I started off my analysis with the awareness that, at some point in the interviews, all participants mentioned that culture does not play a significant part in their relationship. Thus, I recognized that this was a significant pattern in their accounts. When participants were asked about the role of culture in their relationship, they usually stated that culture is not important, and that cultural differences do not contribute to any tension or conflict for them. Participants often
used words such as “small things” or “silly things” when referring to situations in which culture differences were evident in their relationship. Thus, I had grouped these utterances under a code titled “downplaying cultural differences.” I created a memo in NVivo regarding this observation, as well as certain hunches I had for how different codes could be related to the overall pattern, and to each other. For example, one of my notes drew attention to the fact that when participants stated that culture was not important, they often spoke about personality instead. Therefore, I wondered if these two ways of speaking about their relationship were somehow related. Appendix H is an example of one of these memos.

Using my memos as a starting point, I began plotting quotes from the code of “downplaying cultural differences” (created during the initial coding process), on to a mind map on Microsoft OneNote. I initially called this mind map “culture doesn’t play a big part” and later changed it to *culture isn’t defining*, to better capture the nature of the interpretative repertoire (see Appendix I for a portion of this mind map). Out of all the codes I had, “downplaying cultural differences” appeared to be most similar to the pattern that I had noticed, and therefore the easiest one to begin with. I then combed through the rest of my codes to see if any of them fit a similar pattern. The common thread for the quotes I selected was the eagerness of couples to downplay the role of cultural differences, while focusing on what helps them succeed. These quotes often included wording such as “culture isn’t the backbone of our relationship,” “the way we deal with things is more about personality,” or “I feel like I don’t use my culture a lot.” These ways of speaking indicated that the quotes belonged together as part of the same repertoire.

I then paid close attention to any possible exceptions in my codes. I wanted to make sure that I was not accidentally forcing my data to fit my pre-conceived notions of how participants
organized their speech. For example, consider the following exchange between Elijah and Avery regarding areas where cultural differences contribute to tensions:

Elijah: We haven’t had anything like that, that, like sort of like, that taxing on the relationship per say?

Avery: no (.). I also agree, I don’t think there’s very much in the way of tensions, if anything it’s more (.). I think the longer we are together the more there’s a comfort and that release for greater cultural sharing and cultural (.). appreciation, for, for each other.

I had initially coded this quote into “downplaying cultural differences.” However, I had also flagged it as a possible exception to the repertoire of *culture isn’t defining* because Avery stated that cultural differences have actually benefitted the relationship by helping them feel more comfortable with one another. To me, there were two parts in this exchange that seemed at odds with each other. While Elijah said that cultural differences have not created significant tensions, Avery somewhat contradicted what he said, by proposing that the differences have influenced the relationship, but in a positive way. I asked myself whether this quote proved that my interpretative hunches had no grounds, or whether there was another explanation for the variation in discourses. I also asked myself whether it was possible that Avery drew from more than one repertoire in the same quote. In this case, I concluded that Avery changed positions throughout her utterance. She initially agreed with Elijah’s proposed discourse of “we haven’t had anything like that … that taxing on the relationship.” Avery responded to his statement with “I also agree. I don’t think there’s very much in the way of tensions.” However, I then understood that for the rest of her utterance she switched positions to understand cultural differences as a positive influence on their relationship, not just a neutral one. When she said, that cultural differences have given way to “greater cultural sharing and cultural appreciation.” She indicated that the cultural differences are there, but rather than creating tensions, they are understood as an opportunity to further the connection with Elijah. Therefore, I divided this
quote into two codes, part of it belonged to “downplaying cultural differences,” and the second part I re-coded to “cultural differences make things interesting” (which eventually became part of the repertoire cultural differences add to the relationship, discussed later in the chapter). I understood these variations in the ways the couples spoke about their relationship to indicate that they had more than one repertoire to draw from (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Even after checking for any exceptions, a big portion of my data suggested that couples often spoke of culture as not being a big influence in their relationship. Therefore, I could safely conclude that this way of talking was one of the ways by which they constructed their relationship.

After going through the codes, and plotting relevant quotes to my mind map, I noticed that participants used the repertoire culture isn’t defining in a number of different ways. They spoke about the similarities between partners, about how they compromised with one another, or about how their personal characteristics were a driving force for the health of their relationship. To deal with this variability, I initially kept these ways of speaking as separate groups in my mind map (as marked by the different colors in Appendix I), but I eventually needed to decide how or if these different ways of speaking related to one another. For example, Avery said that she and Elijah were flexible by stating, “… We’re both so easy going and accepting that we can just be like ‘ok, cool, let’s do that.’” I needed to decide whether a quote like this was an example of a separate discourse, or whether it was part of the larger speech pattern of it’s all about personality. In order to make this decision, I maintained my research question in mind, and I continued to ask myself things like “What did Avery try to do with this particular utterance?” “how exactly did she say that culture is not important?” “Why may she be speaking in this particular manner?” This proved to be a more difficult task than simply recognizing the larger interpretative repertoire. In the example above, I understood Avery as speaking about a
personality characteristic regarding her and Elijah being flexible. She appeared to attribute flexibility to a stable personal characteristic when she said “we are both so easy going” and described themselves as “accepting.” To me it appeared that Avery was not using language to suggest a behaviour, that she and Elijah engage in to achieve flexibility. To me this quote was evidence that the being flexible belonged to a discourse about personality. I therefore grouped these quotes together under the same discourse, which shall be discussed later in this chapter.

There was a lot of back and forth in creating the discourses and sub-discourses needed. For example, I had initially placed it’s all about personality and similarities over differences as completely separate from the discourse compromise. However, when I went back to the quotes that I had assigned to each discourse, I could not separate them completely based on their functions. For example, in the following quote, Chris spoke about how he and Kelly reach an agreement when tensions come up:

Chris: yeah, there was a lot of conversation. there’s a lot of (.) frustrations with it, but (.) I don’t think we compromise, I think we came to an agreement.

I felt that when participants spoke about compromise, as in the quote above, they also spoke about how they were like any other relationship, while also downplaying the role of culture in any tensions. Chris and Kelly, in other parts of the interview used words such as “we talk think out,” or “we communicate,” to indicate that they try to resolve tensions much like any other couple would. Therefore, I needed to revise the organization of the larger interpretative repertoire (culture isn’t defining), to also include compromise as one of its smaller discourses. Once revised to its current version (as seen on Figure 1), all of the data fit nicely in this model of interpretative repertoires, discourses and sub-discourses. I could concretely explain and differentiate each discourse. Therefore, I knew my analysis for this portion of my data was completed.
Now that I have provided a walk-through of how I arrived to the interpretative repertoire of *culture isn’t defining*, and its underlying discourses, I will define the repertoire, provide an example, and then further define the discourses and sub-discourses within it.

**Interpretative Repertoire: Culture Isn’t Defining**

Participants used the repertoire of *culture isn’t defining* to downplay the role of culture in their relationship, while drawing attention to ways in which they are successful at constructing a healthy relationship. Their conversations suggested that they construct their relationship as being much like any other. They often associated differences between partners with personality attributes, rather than with cultural influences, and they focused on the positive aspects of their relationship. For example, participants often stated that their relationship works because they are “flexible” or “rational” people. They also emphasized that, at the end of the day, although there may be small cultural differences, they have shared goals which are more important to them than any possible differences. This repertoire suggests that when couples look at their relationship, they do not see the cultural differences first. Instead, they see themselves as a normal couple, with their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. Seen through this lens, their relationship is not much different to any same-culture relationship. It is important to note that when employing this repertoire, participants did two things: they downplayed the role of culture, while emphasizing the ways in which they make their relationship work. The following is an excerpt from the interview with Elijah and Avery as they are talking about planning a wedding in the future:

Elijah: I think we haven’t really discussed the nitty gritty of this, I feel like just the way we are, it would not necessarily be dictated by our culture, but more by our personal, sort of, what we want (.) and location would be where we want to do it, and food would be what we like to eat. Music would be what we like to dance to. It wouldn’t be dictated necessarily by (.) our families or you know
Throughout their interview, Elijah and Avery had a tendency to minimize the role of their respective cultures in their relationship. They mentioned that planning a wedding may be one situation in which there might be some compromise in order to honour both of their cultural backgrounds. There are a number of things that Elijah mentioned in this passage that suggest that culture is not the main aspect of his and Avery’s relationship, or at least it is not the first thing that comes to mind when they think about their relationship. He first stated, “just the way we are,” which brings to the conversation an aspect of who he and Avery are as individual people. It alludes to some kind of intrinsic characteristic that plays a part in how they both show up in the relationship, how they do things together, and how they make decisions. This interpretation is further supported by his statements of “it would not necessarily be dictated by our culture,” and “sort of what we want.” Through these last two utterances he suggested that their personal preferences are more salient than any cultural traditions that he or Avery may have grown up with. When it comes to wedding planning, each decision made is based on Elijah’s and Avery’s individual preferences. That is, they choose based on what represents them as individuals, rather than culture taking a central part in making these relational decisions. Elijah is suggesting that they are two people who are not necessarily tied to their respective cultures. Instead, they prefer to do things that they personally want, and that represents them both. Weddings can often be a context in which people resort back to their traditions, where they want customs to be honoured and things to be done in a more ritualistic way. However, even in that context, Elijah and Avery both agreed that the most important thing is to remain loyal to what they both personally want, rather than following any strict cultural norms.
Now that I have outlined the repertoire *culture isn’t defining* and my analytical process to define it, I will explain the discourses and sub-discourses within *culture isn’t defining*. For each section, I will define each of the language patterns and provide quotes to illustrate them.

**It’s all about personality.** The discourse of *it’s all about personality* was a common one used by participants when they were asked about how culture influences their relationship, or when asked about any potential tensions in the relationship due to cultural differences. Participants used the discourse *it’s all about personality* to indicate that culture was not a defining aspect of their relationship. Instead, they emphasized the importance of intrinsic personal characteristic when it came to how partners behaved in the relationship. In other words, they often preferred to use the language of personality to explain why tensions arise, and how these get resolved. Couples also used a language of personality to talk about the health of their relationship. The following is an excerpt of my interview with Tyler and Katie. Tyler is speaking about when culture plays a part in their relationship:

Tyler: I think, generally whenever it has to do with, the piece has to do with family, or religion, I think the two big, I guess the two biggest conflict areas is that I think what it really (.) what I really see. So, I don't know, if I'll ever take a disagreement too, like, ‘oh is it a cultural thing?’ Like I understand that like culture may have played a role in it? But for me at the end of day, Katie is Katie and like {trails off}.

Tyler began this section of the interview by naming a couple of areas where culture may play a part in tensions or disagreements between him and Katie. He stated that when it comes to Katie’s family, or religion, she appears to have closer ties to her culture. In other parts of the interview, Katie agreed with this view, stating that she has a hard time compromising when it comes to her family and how close she is to them. However, then Tyler stated that whenever there are disagreements, he does not automatically think about culture as being the main culprit. He can be seen as minimizing or ignoring the role of culture in an argument. Furthermore, he
stated “at the end of the day, Katie is Katie,” suggesting that he approaches his relationship by thinking of Katie as her own individual person, not necessarily as a product of her culture. That is, when disagreements do come up, what is most salient for Tyler is who Katie is and how they can move past disagreements together.

When using the discourse of *it’s all about personality*, participants often used language referring to character flexibility. That is, the personal ability to remain flexible about their cultural customs. They used this type of talk when speaking about how who they are as people plays a part in their success as a healthy couple. They often reported that this personal characteristic was more important than any cultural practice. Furthermore, being flexible was seen as important regardless of whether the relationship was inter- or intracultural. Take for example the following excerpt from Bruce’s and Teresa’s interview:

Bruce: I think with any marriage, whether it's multiracial or not, it comes down to the personality, the flexibility of the individual

Teresa: [that's right]

Bruce: [person], so whether it's a cultural difference, or a financial view difference, or raising a child difference, it still comes down to your personality and your flexibility.

Teresa: But I think going into a multicultural relationship. It’s a given that you’re flexible, because otherwise you wouldn’t. Why would you put yourself through something if you’re very rigid? you would look for somebody in your culture.

interviewer: Or as similar as you, because then you don’t really have to compromise that much. Whether they are part of the same culture or not.

Teresa: Exactly!

Here, both Bruce and Teresa agreed that there has to be a certain level of flexibility when it comes to culture in order to be construct a healthy intercultural relationship. Bruce stated that he considers flexibility to be a stable personal characteristic, rather than a behaviour that people may engage in from time to time. He proposed that flexibility is a good characteristic to have,
even when in a same-culture relationship. Teresa, however, positioned herself slightly differently when referring to flexibility. She described this characteristic as “a given” when going into an intercultural relationship, and that someone who is rigid would likely go into a same-culture relationship instead. Her account indicates that flexibility may not be necessarily present in same-culture unions. This positioning highlights that for Teresa, cultural differences do show up in the relationship. Nevertheless, in this instance, she used the discourse of personality, to highlight that these differences are not an issue for her and Bruce. She sees herself and Bruce as flexible people, which contributes to the health of their relationship. Through this utterance she also indicated that both of them had this characteristic even before they got together, providing further evidence that flexibility is constructed as a relatively stable characteristic. Notice also how Bruce used language referring to flexibility to minimize the importance of cultural differences, which ties the discourse of it’s all about personality to the larger repertoire of culture isn’t defining. He stated that it does not matter whether the differences in the couple are cultural, or otherwise. Being flexible is the key to resolving any disagreements between partners.

The concept of personality has a long and complicated history with discourse analysis (Burr, 1995), as the two ideologies appear to be at odds with one another. Traditionally, psychologists referred to personality to describe stable traits in people that can be difficult to challenge and change. Further, according to social psychologists, any discrepancies between a person’s attitudes, and/or their behaviours can create cognitive dissonance, and therefore discomfort (Festinger, 1957). People then attempt to resolve the dissonance by either (a) changing their behaviour to match their cognition, (b) attempt to justify the behaviour through changing one of the dissonant cognitions, or (c) try to justify their behaviours by adding another cognition (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance theory is adequate in explaining some
variations in attitude and how these affect behaviours and behavioral change (e.g. Ciao & Latner, 2011; Freijy & Kothe, 201). However, I felt that discourse analysis was a better way of explaining the social aspect of how attitudes; or in this case, relationships; are constructed through talk, thus aligning better with my research question (Van Dijk, 1990). Further, discourse analysis provides a slightly different understanding of variation in talk. Rather than understanding variation as problematic, or something to be corrected by speakers, it is seen as a natural occurrence in talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysts study how variations are used in order to achieve different functions in talk, while not necessarily attempting to understand how people perceive and then deal with the inconsistencies in their speech (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As explained in chapter three, discourse analysis offers a way to see psychological terms and constructs from a different perspective. For discourse analysts, use of psychological language illustrates how people can position themselves differently at different times, and that they may not necessarily experience cognitive dissonance (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This variation in people’s discourse positioning shows them employing different discourses to construct the world around them and their experiences in it (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

In the context of this thesis, my participants positioned themselves in all three interpretative repertoires at different times during their interviews. Given the rejection of the concept of personality by discourse analysis, it may be difficult to understand why I chose to call one of my discourses it’s all about personality. It is worth noting that I have used the language that my participants used in their interviews. In psychology, the construct of personality has been restricting; reducing the complexity of what it is to be human to a set of traits and personal characteristics purportedly relied on consistently, across all situations. However, my participants
used the discourse of *it’s all about personality* to describe freedom. Their use of this language suggests that they construct personality as being more influential than the construct of culture. *It’s all about personality* gives them the agency to step back and consciously choose which parts of their culture they wanted to make relevant in their relationship. The following is a quote by Elijah, supporting this view:

Elijah: I think we are both very rational people? We don’t really succumb to that kind of stuff? (. ) um, (. ) we are very like, we think with our minds, not with sort of, like, not with our upbringing.

The words Elijah chose to describe the role of culture exemplify how participants used the discourse of *it’s all about personality* to indicate freedom. He first mentioned that both he and Avery are rational people, inferring that acting solely based on culture makes people irrational. Elijah favored a language that positioned himself as being rational and free, and later in the interview used the word “emancipated,” when he described the role he has given to his culture in regards to his relationship with Avery. He also spoke about them “thinking with their minds and not their upbringing,” supporting this construction that, who they are as people makes them more rational. Elijah then stated that he and Avery do not “succumb to that kind of stuff;” in this case, referring to cultural customs and ways of doing things. With the word “succumb,” Elijah suggested a lack of control when either he or Avery act according to their culture, and not according to their personality.

The discourse of *it’s all about personality* is one of the ways in which participants construct their relationship as *culture isn’t defining*. It is a discourse that couples used to emphasize personal characteristics that they bring into the relationship, and how these characteristics help them succeed in an intercultural relationship, more so than their culture. Furthermore, participants used the discourse of *it’s all about personality* to describe the freedom
they have to choose how they make culture relevant in their relationships. It is a discourse that gives them agency and power, rather than the limitations implied by a discourse of culture being important, where their actions would be seen as externally dictated.

**Similarities over differences.** The discourse of similarities over differences refers to speech patterns that highlight the similarities between partners, rather than their differences. Like other discourses within the repertoire of culture isn’t defining, this discourse is also used to minimize the importance of culture in the relationship, but in a different way than the discourse of it’s all about personality. When participants used the discourse of similarities over differences, they referred to similarities in values and goals, which made them a good match for each other. Whenever they spoke about their different cultures, they highlighted areas where these cultures are more similar than they are different. The following is an example to illustrate how participants used the discourse of similarities over differences:

Fernando: It doesn't matter if you're from two different countries. I'll give you an example, when I went to school in Europe, my friend {friend’s name}, she came to visit me and she loved this Dutch guy that I went to school {with}, And they dated even long distance for a couple of years. And he came to Calgary that summer to visit her. And they talked to each other in English, right? But, I feel like there's a lot more (.). Where even if you worked from two different cultures, there's a lot of differences about both of you, and even if you don't speak the same language, which I have seen before. There's still, if there's chemistry, like you will find away, like you said it's more about someone that you relate to you are similar to, and that you like, and less about the culture that they come from. That's just more like an added something to it.

In this quote, Fernando minimized the role that culture plays in an intercultural relationship. However, he did this not by mentioning the personality of each partner, but rather he used the word “chemistry”. This is an interesting word choice, referring to a combination of physical attractiveness, spontaneous communication and similarities that are part of an interaction between two people (Peretti & Abplanalp, 2004). Fernando suggested that culture really does not matter; if there is chemistry between two people, there is motivation to make the
relationship work. Language about “chemistry” is common in western society to refer to romantic relationships. It speaks about a match of energy between two people, a certain connection that cannot be measured but can be felt. The cultural messages received about the concept of chemistry are oftentimes related to the construct of “love at first sight”, or finding a soulmate. The belief is that, if two people have chemistry with one another, the relationship is more likely to work. In this example, Fernando dismissed the relevance of culture to favour the similarities between partners. He stated that as long as one can find common ground, or chemistry, with the other person, cultural differences fall into the background. Other participants spoke in a similar pattern, by highlighting how they are “compatible with one another”.

In the next quote, Avery used a similar linguistic pattern to highlight the similarities between her and Elijah:

Avery: Yeah, at the end of the day, we have very clear shared goals, and we help each other work towards those goals. So I think there’s definitely some cultural influence in them, like how we perceive say things like money and whatever, but at the end of the day what’s more important is our shared goal of what we want to achieve together, so, we just work towards that, so. I don’t know if it overrides anything that could potentially come up.

In this case, Avery highlighted not just chemistry but also shared goals. Most healthy and happy relationships are based on trust, and a sense of shared goals for a life together (Miller, 2018). Therefore, it makes sense that individuals in a happy intercultural relationship draw from similar or shared discourses. Avery also acknowledged that there may be some cultural differences that show up in her relationship with Elijah. However, she quickly dismissed the relevance of these differences by drawing from the discourse of being similar, having shared goals and working towards them. For Avery, this sense of working together towards something is more meaningful than what she considers small cultural differences. She made this point clear by stating that their similarities “override” differences that may come up.
Other participants also used similar words and concepts to highlight the relational similarities between partners:

- “Chris: {We have} very similar beliefs, (.)”
  “Kelly: on the important things.”
- “Indian families, Jewish families. It’s very similar.”
- “The end goal I think for both of us is the same and that I want, we want both for us and each other to be happy.”

The discourse of similarities over differences was one that participants often used to convey that culture isn’t defining. Their emphasis continues to be on how culture is not the most important aspect in their relationship. Their success in the relationship is attributed to partners being able to see themselves as similar to one another, and/or having common goals to work towards. This discourse was often used as a way to show that cultural differences are not important in the way that partners relate to one another. Despite such differences, they are just like any other couple. Participants used this discourse to speak about how they are successful in constructing a healthy relationship because they collaboratively work towards a shared life.

**Compromise.** The discourse of compromise became apparent soon after I began my analysis. Participants often mentioned the importance of finding compromise in order for the relationship to work, despite any cultural differences. What I thought was interesting in this case was how the use of the discourse of compromise was usually brought up in order to minimize the role of cultural differences in the relationship, rather than to highlight them. Therefore, I felt that compromise was a good fit under the interpretative repertoire of culture isn’t defining.

Furthermore, part of the function of this discourse was to normalize the experience of being in an
intercultural relationship. *Compromise* was used to construct the relationship as similar to being in a same-culture relationship.

It is important to note at this point, that I invited the language of compromise with my interview questioning (the interview guide can be found in Appendix F) (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Rogers de-Jong & Strong, 2014). I asked couples about the easiest and most difficult areas to compromise due to cultural differences. Many couples initially rejected the language of compromising. To do this, they often said things such as, “I don't think there’s a lot of compromising?” or “I don’t feel like I’m compromising.” However, whenever participants rejected the word compromise, they used a very specific definition of the word. That is, they believed that to compromise is for both partners to give something up, with neither partner being fully satisfied with the outcome. In that context, participants felt that they were not compromising. Still, on different occasions, they used language of compromise to refer to an agreement between partners, and as a way for them to further their relationship and to make things work. They also used the discourse to highlight ways in which they find their own way of doing things, that may or may not be culturally based. This was a way to again highlight that, even though partners may be used to certain cultural practices, they can consciously evaluate these practices and do what is best for their relationship.

As I looked for patterns in the different uses of the discourse of *compromise*, I realized that participants had a tendency to reject the idea of compromising when I brought it up through my questioning. However, when they brought up the discourse of *compromise* on their own without being prompted, it was done in a way to highlight the strengths of the relationship. I decided to report on how participants used the language of compromise when they brought it up on their own, rather than how they responded to my use of the word.
Participants used the discourse of *compromise* in two different ways, which were fundamentally different in the processes that they spoke about. Therefore, I decided to report them separately. The next section is a description of the identifiable sub-discourses I discerned within the discourse of *compromise*. The first way was to speak of compromising as a *negotiation*. The second way was to speak in support of the idea that partners do what is best for them, no matter which culture they come from, I called this the sub-discourse of *we do us*.

**Negotiation.** The sub-discourse of *negotiation* includes ways of speaking from a discourse of *compromise* by highlighting the back and forth aspects of compromising, while also speaking from the larger repertoire of *culture isn’t defining*. Participants used wording such as “negotiating,” or “talking things out” in order to decide what was right for them. The following quote is an example of this sub-discourse from my interview with Viviana and Will:

Will: We compromise!

Viviana: We compromised, that's what it is.

Will: (incomprehensible) we sit down in the middle, but if we have to take more from this side, or that side, then we do … yeah, we try from different angles and see what works the best.

The quote above is just one example of couples speaking about compromise in a way that is consistent with the sub-discourse of *negotiating*. In this case, Viviana and Will accepted the term compromise, but notice how they talked about the concept with a sense of cooperativeness. For example, they use words such as “we sit in the middle,” and “if we have to take more from this side.” Their language use suggests that both Viviana and Will are willing to open up a conversation about what is best for their family, and find a middle ground together, which may include parts of both of their cultures. Will added to this by stating that they may try things from
different angles and see what works best for them. This suggests a certain level of flexibility in their negotiation, and permission to change things as different situations call for it.

The sub-discourse of negotiation was used by participants to explain how they function well as a couple. They often attributed their relationship’s health to their ability to negotiate with one another and to compromise. For example:

Bruce: Like if you stick to your guns and you want every single holiday, every single (.), where you got raised, in the Latino culture, The Argentine culture, I don't know if that's going to work for most couples. I think you kind of have to take what you can get, but also compromise for the most part. I think that's probably where we have been successful.

In this quote, Bruce stated the need for openness in an intercultural relationship. He proposed that there needs to be some compromise between partners in order for the relationship to be successful. Bruce mentioned that neither partner can expect to always get their way; there has to be some give and take and negotiation in terms of what works best for them. Bruce also made a generalization from his relationship with Viviana to all couples. He stated “I don’t know if that’s going to work for most couples,” indicating how he sees negotiation as a crucial skill for all couples. Bruce emphasized that in order to have a healthy intercultural relationship, there needs to be an openness to talk things out, negotiate, and create a flexible dynamic for how things work in the relationship.

Negotiation also has an aspect of open communication. Couples often used language such as “we talk things out,” or we “discuss” things. Their emphasis continues to be on a cooperative process where both sides are heard, and as a unit they make a decision as to how to proceed on any given topic. The relationship’s health hinges on how they can discuss any differences and come up with collaborative solutions. In many ways, this is a similar process to what a same-culture couple would have to go through when tensions or disagreements arise. Thus, the
intercultural couples that took part in this study see their relationship as unremarkable, and like any same-culture relationship.

**We do us.** *We do us* was a second way in which participants spoke from *compromise*. In this case, this sub-discourse was different than *negotiation* because participants focused even less on the role of each of their respective cultures. Instead, they focused on their personal preferences on ways of doing things, and how as a couple they have found new ways of doing things that fit or represent their relationship, but not necessarily their culture.

Teresa: For me it’s more important to have a tradition, as a family, what are we going to eat every for Christmas, than to have my mom’s recipe. I did my mom's recipe for chicken with cream, and he was like ‘okay, I veto this, this is disgusting’. You know, I was like, okay come on let's go. And it was a couple of years, like 4 years until we got kind of like a meal, that we all like. And now, this is our Christmas eve dinner celebration.

In this quote, Teresa used the sub-discourse of *we do us* in the context of finding or coming up with new family traditions that represent her relationship with Bruce, rather than strictly Argentinean or Canadian customs. Teresa minimized the role of culture in the relationship by stating that, for her, it is more important to find things that fit her immediate family, rather than traditions that fit their respective cultures. She also stated that finding their own ways of doing things as a family took time, and it was a trial and error process. In this quote, readers can see how in the beginning, Teresa and Bruce were more focused around trying things that culturally they grew up with, such as a Christmas meal. However, over the span of “4 years,” they were able to come up with new traditions that are different from either of their respective cultures.

David and Fernando used a similar way of speaking about how they find compromise on how to do things:
David: We want to, we want to do it, kind of thing like, I don't feel there's anything that we're doing that (.) That's like (.) Strictly Colombian. Like we have to engage in something strictly Colombian, or we have to engage in something that is strictly Canadian kind of thing (.) It's just (.) Kind of what we want to do. And, and you know (.) if (.) If it something more Colombian, I guess, it's not something that's been called out …

David: right, like we’re just going to do it because we want to.

In his description of how they compromise on their cultures, David stated that he and Fernando tend to do things because they want to, and not because it is dictated by either of their cultures. Again, through the sub-discourse of *we do us*, participants are speaking from *culture isn’t defining* by minimizing culture’s importance in their relationship. They instead focused on ways of doing things that represent the uniqueness of their relationship.

**Interpretative Repertoire: Culture Plays a Part Sometimes**

Participants used the repertoire of *culture plays a part sometimes* to recognize that there are cultural differences that sometimes are relevant in their relationship. When they employed the repertoire of *culture plays a part sometimes* couples were able to draw from instances where cultural differences have created tension or frustrations, either in the relationship or with others. *Culture plays a part sometimes* was not as widely used as in the previously reported repertoire. When participants did use *culture plays a part sometimes*, they did so for brief periods of time and then they moved on to a different repertoire that spoke of their relationship in a more positive way. There are a number of possible reasons for this, including the nature of being interviewed, and the design of my study, which I recognize as being part of the reflexive process. I decided to report on this repertoire because there were enough instances of participants using *culture plays a part sometimes* and I could not ignore it. I also felt as though reporting only on the positives of being part of an intercultural relationship was not an accurate depiction of how these couples understand and make sense of their relationship.
I arrived at the repertoire of *culture plays a part sometimes* through the same analytical reasoning described for the first repertoire. I remained curious about the patterns in the use of the present repertoire. It is important to note that although I am speaking of this repertoire as if cultural differences sometimes cause tensions for the couples I interviewed, these tensions were not something major for the couples. All participants continued to emphasize that they are a healthy, happy and successful couple. Therefore, although they recognize that culture may sometimes play a part in some disagreements, these are not central, and they do not fully define the relationship. I provide more details on this in the next section. Now that I have described the general parameters of *culture plays a part sometimes*, I want to further define and provide examples for the discourses that fit into the larger repertoire.

**Acknowledging and accepting.** Participants used the discourse of *acknowledging and accepting* when speaking about cultural differences that have become relevant in their relationship. I realized that oftentimes, participants drew attention to these differences when talking about important topics in the relationship, such as raising children, the importance of extended family, and preferred communication styles. While using this discourse, participants brought up areas where they are not completely on the same page about a topic, and attributed these differences to cultural values. Participants’ emphasis on the cultural differences is what places *acknowledging and accepting* within the larger repertoire of *culture plays a part sometimes*. However, it is important to note that they acknowledged these differences from a place of acceptance. For example, they acknowledged that they may never fully understand the other person’s point of view or ways of doing something. Partners recognized that the differences were there and sometimes they caused tension between them, but at the end of the day, the differences are not large enough to cause a rupture in the relationship. The following is
an exchange between Chris and Kelly regarding the different ways in which each of them relate to their extended family. In this particular passage, Chris is speaking about Kelly’s father:

Chris: He’s very, um, conservative in his words (.) and his approach of, expressing his emotions and feelings? if he’s not pushed a little bit? and uh, I can see that, why she’s trying too hard a lot of times to (.) impress (.) her father. for, while for me, it’s like, well, I don’t care about a lot of things. like my parents, like, I don’t really think of what they think. I ask them for advice, and what they think but I think it’s advice and I think it’s something I can act on, or I can, you know, I collect all this information and then create my own decisions.

Kelly: That’s also my approach too

Chris: yeah, it’s not.

Kelly: [I’m not looking for answers.]

Earlier in the interview Kelly reported that she grew up with traditional Spanish and Asian views on family, and both she and Chris recognized that differences in these views can occasionally cause tensions for them. In this passage, Chris described how Kelly has a very different way of relating to her father and extended family than he does. He reported that Kelly tries hard to impress her family. He then described his way of relating to his parents as “I think it’s advice and I think it’s something I can act on, or I can, you know, I collect all this information and then create my own decisions.” He suggested that he has a certain level of independence from his parents’ opinions. Further, Chris presented both his and Kelly’s approaches as opposites when he says “well, for me…” This utterance can be interpreted as a way to compare and contrast both ways of doing things. Chris’ way of comparing his and Kelly’s relationship with family leads to some tension in the interaction. Chris proposed his own narrative of Kelly’s relationship with her parents, meaning that she follows their advice without necessarily considering what is best for her. In response, Kelly challenged Chris’ narrative of her by saying “that’s also my approach,” and in the tone of her last utterance, when she emphasized
the word “answers.” This suggests some level of defensiveness on Kelly’s part. It indicates that for her, considering herself independent from her family is important, and she does not appreciate being seen as someone who follows what they say without questioning it. At the end of this passage, Chris and Kelly did not necessarily agree as to how to relate to their extended family. Chris positioned himself as being more independent than Kelly, and Kelly challenged this narrative. There was certainly a moment of tension between the two partners as this exchange took place. However, a few lines later in the interview, Chris and Kelly stated the following:

Chris: … her relationship with her family is more (. . .) more traditional than mine. so for me, (. . .) there’s things that I don’t understand, like why does she have to do things that way? just because

Kelly: [it’s hard to explain too] (. . .) because as good as you explain things, the person will never, like, (. . .) it’s difficult to understand

Although it can be difficult to depict in text, the tone of the conversation changed in this last quote, as both partners acknowledged that their way of relating to family is different. In this latest quote, notice how neither partner appears to be accusing the other, nor becomes defensive. They stated that their understanding of family relationships is different, and they accept the fact that it can be difficult to understand the other side, no matter how much they try to explain their views to one another. In a way, it appears that Chris and Kelly “agree to disagree” on the role that extended family plays in each of their lives. Oftentimes when participants used the discourse acknowledging and accepting they reached a point of “agree to disagree.” They acknowledged that they may never fully understand each other’s positioning, but accepted that they can continue to have a meaningful relationship despite this difference.

The discourse of acknowledging and accepting was also used to describe the ways in which the couples’ way of dealing with cultural differences has changed over time. Couples used
language suggesting that they expect some cultural differences to show up in the relationship, but they have learned to accept these differences and deal with them as they come. Bruce illustrated this in the following excerpt:

Bruce: I think all these {differences} are exposed when you're dating the person. I don't think there's, there's a few surprises but, you know that there's enough differences in there … it's almost like you never say that, ‘where does that come from?’ Because you expect that. … It doesn't mean they are going to accept it right away. But you're aware (.) It's not a surprise to you.

In this quote, Bruce mentioned acknowledging cultural differences in his relationship with Teresa. According to him, both partners are aware that they will find differences at some point. However, in this quote and other points in the interview, he emphasized that the differences were not a surprise, which allowed him and Teresa to move past them. What is interesting in this particular quote is that he directly spoke to the acceptance of cultural differences. Bruce made it clear that acceptance may not always be automatic. However, this kind of acceptance is something that can be achieved with time. Other participants appeared to support this view, by statements such as “It's not easy, when you marry someone from a different culture, it's not easy at the beginning. Then everything just kind of starts falling into place,” or “The first year and stuff like that yes, it was more like, more like clash of cultures, which that slowly just goes off.”

At this point I believe that it is important to briefly compare and contrast the discourse of acknowledging and accepting (within the repertoire culture plays a part sometimes), with the discourse of compromise (within the repertoire culture isn't defining), and further explain why I placed them in different interpretative repertoires. It could be argued that most couples, whether inter- or intracultural, must compromise and occasionally agree to disagree in order to be healthy. However, my participants spoke about these two strategies in slightly different ways,
especially in the context of culture. More specifically, they gave culture a different role when positioning themselves in either of these discourses. *Compromise* had an emphasis on the role of each partner when compromising, regardless of their culture. When using the discourse of *compromise*, participants spoke from a place of culture not playing a big role in the relationship, which prompted me to place the discourse under the repertoire of *culture isn’t defining*. In contrast, when participants used the discourse of *acknowledging and accepting*, they gave culture a more central role in disagreements and tensions between them. They showed that culturally they do things differently sometimes, and while they may not fully understand this different construction of the world, they accept the differences. Therefore, that was my rationale for placing it under the repertoire of *culture plays a part sometimes*.

Although participants acknowledged that cultural differences may occasionally play a role in their relationship, they did so from a place of love and acceptance. At no point did participants describe their relationship as being harder or having more challenges than a same-culture relationship. The discourse of *acknowledging and accepting* was used to describe how their relationship may sometimes be slightly different than a same-culture relationship, but it was not to express any dissatisfaction. It is important to make this distinction because the use of this discourse was not about venting or complaining about cultural differences, it was about making evident that cultural differences are present.

**Tensions with outsiders.** The discourse of *tensions with outsiders* was used when participants spoke about how cultural differences sometimes affect how they related to people outside of the relationship. When using this discourse, participants often raised issues such as differences in race, as well as culture. They highlighted how tensions with others, such as family and friends, over their cultural differences, can be part of the experience of being in an
intercultural relationship. This discourse was also used to highlight the unity of both partners, even when facing hurtful comments or discrimination from outsiders. Tensions with outsiders fits under culture plays a part sometimes, because it is used to describe how culture influences the relationship. However, in this case, it is more about the couples having to deal with outsiders’ perceptions of their relationship, which is a unique challenge that same-culture couples may not face. For example:

Katie: He's got a lot of, conservative family in Saskatchewan, and uh, (.) they’re very (.) eccentric?

Tyler: [no, they’re]

Katie: They're racist. But it's always very interesting to me because they're never. It's never, you {to Tyler}, or me, right? Like, ‘we really like you, it's just all the other ones.’ And I’ m like ‘well, that's not how that works’ (laughing).

interviewer: (laughing)

Katie: You can't change where I come from. I'm also one of those? … yeah, and so I find that, sometimes hard to navigate. And like, we laugh about it because, what can you do right? Some people I just, that's what they are and that's okay. There's nothing you can do about it. I think sometimes he {Tyler} gets more upset than I do. I’m like, it's fine, it’s too (incomprehensible) now, you're not gonna change their views. They're very nice to me! and that's important.

In this exchange, Katie explained that Tyler’s extended family can be “racist.” She first appeared to be avoiding that kind of judgement and instead said that they are “eccentric.” Then Tyler encouraged her to speak openly and honestly when he interrupted by saying “no, they’re.” Only then, after being encouraged, Katie admitted that Tyler’s extended family is racist. Katie suggested that although the racist remarks are usually not targeted at her personally, she does feel hurt by them. She stated “I find it interesting how…,” which can be interpreted as a discourse marker to attempt and minimize the impact of the family member’s words, and how hurtful they really are. Discourse markers are utterances that speakers make to build coherence in their
discourse or “how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said” (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 49). After using this marker, Katie admitted that she has a hard time navigating situations where she perceives Tyler’s extended family as racist. It can be difficult to call people out on their racist remarks when these remarks are not specifically directed towards her. This circumstance can be especially difficult because it involves her partner’s family. Katie suggested that she deals with these comments by letting them go. She used utterances such as “what can you do, right?” and “you’re not gonna change their views,” as a way of indicating some level of resignation that Tyler’s family is unlikely to change in this regard. However, Katie also spoke about the sense of unity that she has with Tyler. She stated “we laugh about it,” and that sometimes Tyler gets more upset than she does. These utterances indicate a level of understanding, camaraderie, and companionship between Tyler and Katie in these situations. Even though the comments that outsiders make may be hurtful for Katie, she knows that her partner has her back, and they can laugh about it and brush it off together.

The discourse of tension with outsiders was one of the ways in which participants spoke about culture as being relevant in their relationship. This discourse is a little different from the rest, because while culture is seen as playing a role in the relationship, it is doing so by impacting how others perceive and respond to the relationship. The couples however, used this discourse to bring attention to how they deal with pressure from outsiders in a positive way, and how they act as a united front when it comes to prejudice or judgement from others.

**Interpretative Repertoire: Cultural Differences Add to The Relationship**

The third and last repertoire labeled Cultural differences add to the relationship was used when participants positioned themselves as being in a place of appreciation and celebration of
cultural differences. Participants used this repertoire to highlight how cultural differences have added to their relationship and their life, rather than create tensions. Cultural differences add to the relationship is different than both of the previous repertoires because unlike culture isn’t defining, participants’ focus was on cultural differences, rather than on trying to minimize them. Furthermore, it is different from culture gets in the way sometimes, because the cultural differences were seen in a positive way, rather than as a source of tension in the couple or with others. The repertoire of cultural differences add to the relationship, was comprised of two discourses, which further illustrate the nature of the repertoire. These are defined and illustrated in the next two sections, supported with examples from my interviews.

**Balance.** Participants used the balance discourse when speaking about the role of cultural differences to find a balance between both partners. When participants employed this discourse they often referred to a process of learning about each other’s culture, appreciating what each partner brings to the union in terms of cultural ways of doing things, and building a more “well-rounded” relationship. Their positions of appreciation for what each partner adds to the relationship through their culture placed balance as a discourse within the repertoire cultural differences add to the relationship. When using the balance discourse, participants also spoke about using each partner’s strengths in making the whole relationship better. It is important to note the discourse of balance in the context of this study, was tied to the cultural strengths of each partner, rather than to personal characteristics. In the following example, Teresa spoke about the qualities that Bruce brings into the relationship, and how she admires and has learned from them:

Teresa: I feel like before I met with Bruce I was not able to unwind, and I didn't know how to relax, to, you know not to be worried about everything all the time, you know. He certainly has a lot of qualities that I admire, but he's very, steady, especially, he's cool under pressure. And that's a great asset in a partner (laughing) … for me, you know my
personality is I (.) as a person that I want things to work? And I like that here in Canada things work. You know, Bruce as a person, as a Canadian person, he gets the job done.

In this quote, Teresa attributed some of Bruce’s qualities to his culture. She stated “as a Canadian person, he gets the job done,” suggesting that she perceives Bruce’s reliable qualities as a cultural characteristic. She showed appreciation for Bruce’s ways of doing things by saying that his ability to remain calm is an asset. Teresa used similar ways of speaking in other parts of the interview, where she appears to appreciate how Bruce in some ways embodies Canadian culture. For example, she stated, “what I love about Bruce is his laid-back Canadian attitude that we love about Canada. While I'm like feisty, like you know, typical Argentinian.” In these two quotes, Teresa not only spoke about how culture shows up in the way that Bruce does things, but also expresses admiration for these differences, and that through them she has become a more balanced person. This claim is supported by Teresa saying that she has learned from Bruce to slow down in life. Through the discourse of balance participants conveyed admiration and respect for some of their partner’s qualities. Bruce mirrored Teresa’s use of the discourse in the following excerpt:

Bruce: I think that the differences are actually, like she said earlier, it’s strength of the other person. Like for me, I’m very quiet and reserved, an she’s trying to get me more open and using my talents to get better jobs and stuff. Something that perhaps I wouldn’t do right? I wouldn’t do. Whereas for her, she’s very spontaneous and I make her more calm

Teresa: [relaxed]

Bruce: and patient. So I think those differences can work to your advantage

While Teresa may find balance through Bruce’s calm demeanor, Bruce considered Teresa’s spontaneity as providing that balance for him. He also used the discourse of balance to convey respect for the uniqueness that Teresa brings into the relationship. He conveyed this appreciation in the lines “she’s trying to get me more open … something that perhaps I wouldn’t
do.” Further, in his last line, when he said “I think those differences can work to your advantage,” Bruce not only employed the discourse of balance, but he also provided further evidence of his belief that cultural differences are an advantage to the relationship. Balance is a way to use cultural differences for the relationship’s advantage, tying the discourse of balance to the larger repertoire of Cultural differences add to the relationship.

**Connection.** Participants used the discourse connection to speak about how they have bonded as a couple over their cultural differences. Once again, partners emphasized the advantages of cultural differences in the relationship, placing the discourse of connection under the repertoire cultural differences add to the relationship. Quotes that I sorted as being part of this discourse dealt with how learning about each other’s culture helped build a sense of intimacy for couples. Participants reported that learning about their partner’s culture helped them “have a better context,” and “better understand where they {their partner} come from.” When participants used the discourse of connection, they did so to show their openness and appreciation for their partner’s culture. For example, in the following quote, Kelly is talked about what it felt like to visit Romania with Chris:

Kelly: {vampires}, That’s all I knew about Romania! and garlic right? that’s all I knew, so I think I was always intrigued by his culture and I wanted to, you know, meet the whole family and that sort of thing. And understand where he comes from and what does that mean to be Romanian? and what is? like I had some Romanian food because of being with his family and stuff. But what does it mean to be Romanian? And what does the countryside look like? And how can I appreciate the history? and things like that … it’s good because it gave me a greater perspective, in terms of culture, and the way he thinks, and it lent me a little bit more insight into, a portion of who he is, and that’s kind of what was a big deal for us.

This quote is an example of how learning about Chris’ culture provided Kelly a context for who Chris is, and a greater understanding for the person that she is in a relationship with. Kelly used the words “it gave me a greater perspective,” and “lent me a little bit more insight.”
She also followed up these two utterances with “that kind of was a big deal for us,” indicating that her trip to Romania and learning about Chris’ culture was in some ways a changing experience or a turning point for the relationship. Being able to have a greater understanding for a partner’s culture may create a sense of closeness and intimacy. Elijah shared a similar experience through the following excerpt:

Elijah: (laughing) I wanted to learn more about her culture and I wanted to be a part of you know, her family and the traditions, and, so I think it felt really good and it felt like I was learning. Like a learning experience but also like a bonding experience. Like we were talking about it afterwards ‘oh! you know that thing we did, and you know, that song, sing a song,’ and all that stuff, so it becomes a bonding experience and it’s a new experience, so it. you can learn, you know, new things.

In the quote above Elijah talked about the opportunity that he has had to learn about Avery’s culture. Although Avery considers herself Canadian, her family observes many Jewish traditions. Elijah used words such as “it was a learning experience but also like a bonding experience,” indicating that through learning more about Avery’s background and traditions, he was able to better understand her and feel closer to her. In other words, learning about Avery’s culture helped the couple build intimacy. He further supported that learning by reporting that they liked to reminisce about their experience, in a way creating a joint narrative of what it is like for them to be in this relationship together. Joint narratives have been shown to increase intimacy between partners (Wamboldt, 1999). Through the discourse of connection, participants emphasized the role of cultural differences in building closeness and connection in their relationship. Through understanding each other’s background, they were able to feel closer to one another.

**Chapter Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to give a walk-through of my analysis and results. I used the method outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) to identify three main interpretative repertoires
in the ways that couples talk about their experience of being in an intercultural relationship. I named these repertoires *culture isn’t defining, culture plays a part sometimes, and cultural differences add to the relationship*. Participants used these three repertoires to position themselves in slightly different ways when speaking about their relationship. They mostly spoke of their relationship in positive ways, by stating that culture does not play a big part in how they do the relationship, or that it plays a positive part, by helping them feel more connected to one another. Participants also spoke about culture sometimes contributing to small tensions in their relationship, either by forcing partners to acknowledge and accept that they sometimes do things differently, or by the need to deal with outsiders’ prejudice over their cultural and/or racial differences. Overall, partners used these three discourses to highlight how they have been able to succeed as a couple, despite the unique challenges that being in an intercultural relationship may bring. The implications of these results are further discussed in chapter five.
Chapter 5: Discussion

I conducted this study to answer the question “how do couples talk about and understand their experience of being in an intercultural relationship?” This final chapter is a way of bringing everything together through (a) summarizing my study and findings, (b) discussing my findings in light of the literature, (c) providing recommendations for research and practice, and (d) listing the strengths and limitations of my study.

Purpose and Overview

For this study I used a social constructionist perspective and, more specifically, discourse analysis, to analyze seven interviews with intercultural couples. A large portion of the research done to date on intercultural couples has been focused on the challenges or difficulties of such unions (Bustamante et al., 2011; Fu et al., 2001). I wanted to take a different perspective on the topic, because I believe that, although finding what can go wrong in a relationship is helpful, it is also helpful to look at how couples succeed. Discourse analysis allowed me to look into how couples construct a healthy intercultural relationship through talk. My interview questions encouraged my participants to talk about the role of culture in their relationship from three interpretative repertoires: (a) culture isn’t defining, (b) culture plays a part sometimes, and (c) cultural differences add to the relationship. Participants moved back and forth between these three repertoires throughout the interviews.

Participants used the repertoire of culture isn’t defining in three different ways, called discourses. The discourse, it’s all about personality, was used to emphasize the role of personal characteristics as being more important than culture for the relationship. It was also used to describe a level of agency apart from culturally prescribed practices. Participants employed the discourse of similarities over differences to highlight how, despite growing up in different
cultures, they are more similar than different. Furthermore, they emphasized that this is part of the reason why their relationship works. Finally, participants positioned themselves in a discourse of compromise to describe two processes through which they find agreement. The first sub-discourse within the discourse of compromise, was negotiation. It was used when they spoke about a back and forth process of negotiating what was important to them. The second, related sub-discourse, we do us, was used when participants described finding ways of doing things that represented their relationship, rather than their respective cultures.

The repertoire of culture plays a part sometimes was used by participants to recognize how culture can sometimes create small tensions in the relationship. They did this through two discourses. First, they spoke of acknowledging and accepting, when they accepted that they had different ways of doing things, and that they sometimes have to agree to disagree. Second, tensions with outsiders was a discourse used to talk about the pressures that intercultural couples face with others, and how they come together to overcome these tensions as a couple.

Within the repertoire of cultural differences add to the relationship, participants used the discourse of balance, to describe how they can have the best of both worlds by valuing each of their cultures. They also used the discourse of connection to speak of the bonding experience of learning about their partner’s culture. Now that I have summarized my study, I want to turn to the next section, where I contextualize my findings in light of the literature on inter- and intracultural couples.

Relationship to The Literature

The findings from this present study have parallels with information in the literature reviewed in chapter two. My participants re-counted similar challenges and strengths to those described by other intercultural couples in previous studies (Maynigo, 2017; Seshadri &
Knudson-Martin, 2013; Wu, 2014). However, my findings offer new perspectives on how intercultural couples may deal with challenges in order to succeed. For consistency’s sake, I divided this section into three parts, one for each of the interpretative repertoires in my findings.

**Culture isn’t defining.** The repertoire of *culture isn’t defining* was largely used by my participants to indicate that they see their relationship as similar to those of others. Participants minimized the role of culture and portrayed their relationship as being like that of any other couple in a number of ways. These are discussed below.

**Similarities as the key to a healthy relationship?** Findings from this study suggest that intercultural couples may have a tendency to focus on aspects of their relationship that highlight similarities between partners, rather than differences. It is common to hear people say “opposites attract.” I heard this from a couple of my participants. Previous studies with intercultural couples have found that sometimes the differences between partners were important in the initial attraction phase (Bystydzienski, 2011; Romano, 2008). These differences were initially seen as exotic and valuable by the partners. Further, individuals believed that these characteristics would be rare in someone from their own culture, making an intercultural relationship appealing (Bystydzienski, 2011). However, while the discourse of “opposites attract” is common in western society, research appears to suggest otherwise. Similarities between partners seem to be a good predictor of attraction and marital satisfaction (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966; Tidwell, Eastwick, & Finkel, 2012). In fact, while cultural differences may be an initial point of attraction for some intercultural couples (Bystydzienski, 2011), the findings from my study suggest that the reported similarities between partners may be what help to maintain the relationship longer-term. This conclusion is supported by other qualitative studies done with intercultural couples. For example, Inman et al. (2011) found that couples with one Indian and one Caucasian partner also
focused on how their values and communication styles were similar. Further, couples in my study used these reported similarities in order to highlight the strengths of their relationship. In Bystydzienski’s (2011) study, although some couples stated that they were initially attracted to the fact that their partner was culturally different, most couples actually considered their similarities as being more important in the relationship.

Although it appears as though there is a consensus that perceived similarities between partners are important for a healthy relationship, more recent discursive studies offer an alternate explanation (Baxter, & West, 2003; Brummett, 2017). In one dialogic discursive study of interracial couples, the findings suggested that participants focused on their similarities to speak from the dominant discourse of “racial differences are bad” (Baxter & West, 2003; Brummett, 2017). The discursive method used for that study was slightly different than the one used for my thesis. The goal was to find the different discourses available in the larger culture, and then explain why people may use different discourses at different times. However, the researcher found that there was only one discourse of “racial differences are bad,” with no other discourses opposing it (Brummett, 2017). In fact, she claimed that the literature on relationships favors a discourse of “similarities being good” while differences are associated with more conflict. Thus, her participants highlighted similarities in the relationship in order to maintain the dominant discourse that “racial differences are bad”. There is a possibility that my participants also worked to minimize their cultural differences and highlight their similarities in order speak from a general discourse of “similarities are good and differences are bad”. This was not the conclusion that I reached because my study design and research question were different. I wanted to know about couples’ own constructions of their experience through their language (i.e., discourse) use, rather than turning to society to find the available discourses about intercultural couples. By
identifying the repertoires that couples used to describe and understand their relationship, I was focused on what they consider important, or how they construct the relationship. Thus, I chose to interpret the couples’ attempts to downplay cultural differences as a way for them to speak about how they manage to be in a healthy relationship, despite the unique challenges that they may face.

Culture or personality? Participants in the present study spoke from a discourse of it’s all about personality as a way to minimize cultural influences, and to speak from a sense of agency over how they do things in the relationship. Furthermore, my participants considered that being able to choose how they act in the relationship was considered an asset. Baxter and West (2003) also found that same-culture couples often spoke of personality characteristics to emphasize positive aspects of their relationship. In order to do so, they reported that personal traits such as being agreeable, and easy-going attributed to the relationship’s health (Baxter & West, 2003; Watson, Beer, & McDade-Montez, 2014). Similarly, in their use of the discourse it’s all about personality, my participants used language that referred to partners being flexible and easy-going. Further, they showed that they consider this characteristic as important for the relationship to succeed. Therefore, a shared discourse of personal characteristics, such as being agreeable or flexible, can play a role in how healthy intercultural couples understand their relationship. My results suggest that despite cultural differences, the perceived health of intercultural couples may be based on aspects similar to those enabling the health of same-culture couples.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, when it came to the discourse of it’s all about personality, I was not concerned with pinning down the “traits” that help intercultural couples succeed. I was more interested in finding out how my participants used a discourse of it’s all about personality to construct their relationship. I concluded that this discourse provided my
participants with a sense of agency over how they do things in their relationship. This conclusion appears to be at odds with how we usually understand the concept of personality in psychology (e.g. Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; McCrae, 2004). However, my participants’ language use indicated an aspect of choice when they spoke of the role of personality. Contrary to this, their language indicated a feeling of lack of control when they considered acting only based on their culture. Previous research has shown that the concept of power and choice are interrelated. That is, an individual’s perception of choice can also provide a feeling of power, and vice versa (Inesi et al., 2011). In this case, participants used the discourse of it’s all about personality to identify and highlight useful attributes over their choices in the relationship. As part of discourse analysis, my job was to analyze and report on the ways that my participants used language, even if that usage was not congruent with common discourses in the field of psychology. Thus, I believe that intercultural couples sometimes jointly use the discourse of it’s all about personality to position their personality attributes as useful in overcoming any cultural differences.

**The creation of an identity.** The topic of identity building and identity maintenance can be a complex one. Different theories have different ways of explaining how identities are built and transformed (e.g. Goncalves, 2013; Moodley, 2007; Ochs, 1993; Piskacek & Golub, 1973). I have taken a social constructionist view, where cultural identities are not determined by the geographical place where one is born, rather they are co-constructed through language use in interactions with others (Gee, 1999; Ochs, 1993). Relationships are a context to construct and co-construct relational identities (Gordon, 2007b). My participants can be understood as going through this process when they speak about: we do us. They are not necessarily prioritizing their cultural practices; instead, through talk and negotiation, they are creating a new identity and culture that represents their relationship. Similar findings have been reported in other studies.
involving intercultural couples (Bystydzienski, 2011; Wu, 2014). Bystydzienski (2011) found that over time, intercultural couples became less concerned with their cultural differences and began to transform their independent cultural identities into more of a hybrid identity. This hybrid identity represented both partners as a couple. These claims would be congruent with reports from my participants stating that finding their own subculture took time and negotiation.

Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) came to similar conclusions. However, they categorized couples according to how they dealt with cultural differences. They called one of these categories “Integrated”, where partners integrated both of their cultures into one unique way that represented their relationship. In contrast to their results, I found that couples were not static in the ways that they dealt with cultural differences. Although we do us is about minimizing the role of culture and finding or developing a unique subculture, the same couples used other discourses to refer to the ways in which culture plays a more prominent part in their relationship. This difference in results can be attributed to the different methods used. Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) used grounded theory, while I used discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is based on the premise that couples will position themselves in different discourses throughout the interviews (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, this view is reflected in my results.

It is important to add that the couples in my interviews spoke from negotiation as being different from we do us. They focused more on open communication and a back and forth process to find a middle ground when they did not agree. This is not unlike reports from same-culture couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1992), which furthers my conclusion that intercultural couples often do not see culture as the main aspect of their relationship. Researchers have long understood compromise as a helpful way of resolving any conflict or tensions in a relationship (e.g., Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Peterson, 2002). However, my participants rejected the
language of compromise, and instead chose words that indicated a cooperative problem-solving process. Similar distinctions have been made in the literature, comparing compromise; where each partner gives something up; to integrative agreements; where partners work together to reach a solution without either of them giving up their goals (Peterson, 2002). It appears that the discourse of negotiation is more related to finding integrative agreements, than to compromise. Although it is difficult to say from the present study, it is possible that negotiation also helps in the construction of a joint identity for intercultural couples. A positive resolution of any tensions can help in creating a sense of closeness in the relationship (Gottman & Silver, 2015).

Another relevant body of research that helps to contextualize my findings is the concept of “we-ness”, which was discussed in chapter one. As a quick reminder, we-ness is about a couple’s articulable sense of shared lived experience. It is characterized by a linguistically shared identity that represents the relationship as a whole rather than its separate partners (Fergus & Reid, 2001). Through previous studies it has been found that couples who are able to create a sense of we-ness are more satisfied in their relationship (Reid et al., 2006). In a study of South Asian couples, researchers found that after receiving therapy that aimed to increase feelings of we-ness, participants focused less on the negative aspects of their partner’s culture (Ahmad & Reid, 2016). Similar results were reported among intercultural Chinese-White couples (Wu, 2014). The findings from these studies support how my participants spoke about we do us. In other words, when speaking from this shared identity, participants focused more on how they do things as a couple and less on aspects of their respective cultures. Furthermore, they used this discourse to emphasize how they have successfully come to identify the mutuality of their relationship (Strong et al., 2014).
Taken together, these findings support my claim that when participants use any of the discourses within the repertoire of culture isn’t defining, they are constructing their relationship as being normal and unremarkable, and much like the relationships of other couples. Although I cannot generalize to all intercultural couples from my study’s findings, it is possible that at least some intercultural couples construct their relationship as if they shared a same-culture relationship, and this may help them overcome any challenges that arise.

**Culture plays a part sometimes.** As mentioned above, participants did not consistently speak from only one interpretative repertoire. They used the repertoire of culture plays a part sometimes to acknowledge that, although they may not always focus on their cultural differences, there are areas where these differences are apparent. My participants, like other intercultural couples, mentioned situations such as child rearing practices, and communication styles as the main areas where cultural differences become evident (e.g. Leslie & Young, 2015; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013; Tili & Barker, 2015). Further, they reported that cultural differences can create tensions with others, such as with friends or extended family. These tensions have also been well documented in the literature (Bustamante et al., 2011; Inman et al., 2011). Results from previous studies suggest that couples who set good boundaries with extended family members are better able to deal with these outside pressures (Camilleri Galea, 2015), and that couples tend to minimize cultural differences when they are not being constantly reminded of them through interactions with others or in their environment (Bystydzienki, 2011). Couples in my study dealt with pressures from others in a similar way. They used the discourse of tensions with outsiders to highlight how they deal with these tensions together, as a unit. Perhaps seeing themselves as a unit against others was a way to set healthy boundaries with outsiders. Despite culture playing a role in some unique situations, partners generally continued to see themselves
as united. This recognition goes back to the concept of we-ness, although it is hard to say from this study, whether we-ness invites a united front in the face of challenges or vice versa.

When participants used the discourse of *acknowledging and accepting*, they recognized that there are areas where they understand things differently due to their cultural backgrounds. The literature on relationships often associates differences between partners with negative outcomes (Baxter & West, 2003). Even in the literature of intercultural couples, there are extensive discussions of how cultural differences bring about challenges to these couples, which often contribute to dissolution (e.g. Bhugra & De Silva, 2000; Troy et al., 2006). More recent studies have provided information as to how intercultural couples thrive, despite their differences. Bystydzienski (2011) found that cultural differences become more of an issue between partners when they lived in an environment where one or both partners felt unaccepted. Although at least some of my participants have experienced discrimination against them, they describe their environment as generally accepting. This may explain why, despite them acknowledging cultural differences between partners, they did not consider these differences as major issues in the relationship. According to participants’ reports, their cultural differences did not necessarily cause conflict. On the contrary, through acknowledging and accepting their differences, many participants stated that they can remain aware of potential areas of tension and deal with them before they become a conflict.

Other times, participants stated that they accept the fact that they are going to disagree on certain topics due to their different cultural backgrounds. This is similar to findings in other studies where authors recognized that one way of dealing with cultural differences is to live in agreement that the differences are there, without trying to resolve them (Killian, 2013; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Although cultural differences may show up in the relationship, they
do not necessarily mean major conflict, and it is possible for couples to be healthy despite having individually different ways of understanding and doing the world. When speaking from a discourse of acknowledging and accepting, partners prioritized a discourse that served the relationship, rather than prioritizing their own individual discourses. According to a social constructionist perspective, families may take up competing discourses to understand aspects of their lives, but it is possible to find harmony despite such differences (Couture, 2007). My study shows that couples can often reach this point of acknowledgement and acceptance of cultural differences without professional intervention. The couples I interviewed were able to reach a point of being able to acknowledge and respect where their partner stands in terms of differing cultural practices, while not letting these differences interfere in the relationship. The implications of this insight for therapy will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Cultural differences add to the relationship.** The third repertoire I identified in my participants’ talk was cultural differences add to the relationship, which was used to highlight how cultural differences are seen as something positive, and how they help to further the connection between partners. This repertoire adds to the body of knowledge about why people may seek out intercultural unions.

Intimacy is an important aspect of any relationship. Leslie and Morgan (2011) conducted a discourse analysis of the way people spoke about relationships and found that intimacy is one of the main goals for people when they enter a relationship. It is important to acknowledge that different cultures prioritize different practices in creating intimacy in a relationship. For example, while some cultures may value self-disclosure to build closeness and intimacy, others may value interpersonal responsiveness (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004). In the present study, I was mostly concerned with my participants’ constructions of intimacy and closeness, rather than the
general, culturally-situated, definitions of these constructs. I arrived at my conclusions by remaining close to the words that participants employed to speak about intimacy and closeness. More specifically, my participants spoke about building a sense of closeness and intimacy through sharing cultural knowledge and practices with one another. Kim, et al. (2017) studied Korean-American couples and found that a greater understanding of each other’s culture increased feelings of closeness. Furthermore, like my participants, the couples considered the ability to learn and connect over cultural differences as a strength of intercultural couples.

Another way to understand why couples may see their cultural differences as an asset to the relationship comes from self-expansion theory. Self-expansion theory proposes that people may enter a relationship with others that have characteristics that would help them expand their self-efficacy. In other words, they may look for a partner that brings a complementary way of understanding the world. Furthermore, authors of this theory propose that if people only create relationships with those who are like them, they miss out on opportunities for self-expansion (Aaron & Aaron, 2004). This theory may account for my participants speaking from a discourse of finding balance through their intercultural union. The couples I interviewed reported that each partner brings in unique ways of understanding life and that oftentimes, these different ways of understanding actually complement each other. The discourse of balance suggests that partners consider themselves as being better together, because each of them bring a different, but valuable, point of view.

**Recommendations for Counsellors**

The present study shows that many intercultural couples are able to make their relationship work without professional help. They are able to develop discursive ways of dealing with the challenges brought by cultural differences. This information has important implications
regarding the way that these couples may be perceived in a therapeutic setting. The present findings serve as further evidence that cultural differences do not automatically mean that a couple will struggle. On the contrary, culture can play a complex role in how people construct their intercultural relationship. The following is a discussion of recommendations for counsellors in light of my findings.

The results of the present study have implications in relation to culturally infused counselling (Arthur & Collins, 2010). It is important for counsellors to be aware of their own cultural background, world-views, and assumptions about different cultural groups and intercultural couples. This would help counsellors remain aware of assumptions and judgements as they come up. A counsellor’s cultural awareness can be useful in gaining a clearer understanding of where to go next in the counselling process, rather than moving therapy in a direction based on their own preconceived notions of intercultural couples (Singh, 2009; Taylor & Smith, 2011). It is important to not assume a causal role for culture in the clients’ presenting concerns. The results from this thesis underline the importance of suspending judgement regarding the role of culture on relationship issues, given that this role may change depending on the situation and/or concern. Allowing the clients to be the experts in their experience can help counsellors gain a better understanding of how each couple may understand the influence of culture slightly different. Remaining open and receptive to the way that clients understand and enact culture can help with the working alliance, and ultimately in moving therapy forward (Arthur & Collins, 2010).

One of the biggest findings from this study is that healthy intercultural couples appear to construct their relationship much like same-culture couples. They are able to compromise, create a unique relational identity, and focus more on their personalities and similarities instead of any
cultural differences. As Sullivan and Cottone (2006) put it: “Couples in crisis see their differences as driving them apart, leaving marital therapists with the challenge of working with the couple to discover similarities, uncover strengths, and build areas of consensus” (p. 224). My findings appear to support this line of thinking. As previously mentioned, counsellors should be aware of previously held notions regarding the differences between partners in intercultural couples, and how those affect the relationship. For healthy intercultural couples, it is not their cultural differences that appear to define them, but rather their ability to find similarities between partners, and their ability to appreciate any differences. In some cases, counsellors may need to move couples towards a greater appreciation of their cultural differences, and their similarities.

In this thesis, I have identified several ways in which healthy couples talk about and construct their relationship. These ways of understanding can serve as a primer for counsellors to identify the same or similar discourses in therapy, and use them to facilitate change forward. Counsellors can use the discourses I identified as a starting point, in order to invite couples to try out new ways of understanding their relationship. These new ways of understanding, may serve the relationship better than the discourses that they have previously used (Couture, 2007; Rogers-de Jong & Strong, 2014; Spong, 2009).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In terms of future research, only a few studies so far have used discourse analysis to study intercultural couples. Thus, I believe that this methodology can offer something valuable in terms of understanding how intercultural couples can come to a place of greater harmony through their uses of language. Although this was a study of how couples talk about their experience, it would be interesting to find out more about how exactly everyday cultural negotiations take place in a more natural environment, such as during therapeutic conversations,
or at home. In fact, discourse analysts advocate for using naturalistic interactions rather than interviews whenever possible (Potter, 2004).

Because of the interpretative nature of discourse analysis, one cannot make general assumptions about how all intercultural couples develop (or not) relational identities. Thus, future research could focus on discourses used within different types of intercultural relationships. For example, studying conversations between couples that seek counselling would be worth exploring, to find out whether they employ different discourses than my participants.

I believe that studies employing conversation analysis would be helpful in better understanding how meaning is co-constructed on a turn-by-turn basis (Ten Have, 1999). Conversation analysis would provide the literature with a more micro view of how cultural negotiations occur within intercultural couples. One study used such a method to study how conversations between parents and their adolescent children overcame differences to create change in therapy (Couture, 2004). It would be interesting to gain a better understanding of how therapists and intercultural couples use conversations during therapy to construct and re-construct, both the therapeutic relationship and the couples’ relationships.

Finally, future research can study different aspects of intercultural couples. For example, it would be worth interviewing partners of intercultural couples separately. Their accounts of being part of an intercultural relationship may be different than the accounts provided when both partners were interviewed together (Lopez Bilbao, 2017). Findings from a such study could further our understanding of how partners construct intercultural relationships, both, together and separately. Future research could also focus on gaining a better understanding of gender and/or power dynamics within these couples, and how discourses play a role (Brummett, 2017).
Strengths and Limitations

Like any other study, my study had its strengths and limitations. In terms of limitations, I used interviews to collect the data I later analyzed, rather than finding data through naturalistic conversations. Therefore, it can be claimed that my results do not necessarily reflect how couples construct their relationship (Potter, 2004). My data relies heavily on recollections of past events, which has been reported to be an issue for the validity of any type of research (Trochim, 2005). Thus, I cannot claim exactly how these couples go through the process of constructing their relationship, but I can speak as to how their language use shaped ways in which they understand what they have experienced.

Secondly, my results suggest that the intercultural couples I interviewed saw their relationship under a positive light. Participants seemed to downplay the importance of cultural tensions while highlighting their strengths. There is a possibility that participants were motivated to present themselves under a positive light due to the nature of being interviewed about the nature of succeeding as an intercultural couple. I attempted to create rapport during each interview to try and minimize this effect. However, it can be difficult to open up about marital tensions to a complete stranger with whom there is no therapeutic relationship. I have taken this reflexive possibility into account as I interpreted my results.

I cannot generalize my findings to all types of intercultural couples. Although generalization is not a goal of discourse analysis, there was an element of homogeneity in my sample which could have affected the variation in the discourses used. As a quick reminder, the researcher in discourse analysis is looking for a variation in the discourses used within and between accounts. This variability provides an indication of the larger discourses available in society for people to take up and position themselves in (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). However,
with a highly homogeneous sample, as it was the case for my study, there is the possibility that there was less variability in the discourses being used because the experiences constructed through these discourses were also more homogeneous.

This study also had its strengths. Some of these strengths related to my role as a researcher. First, as recommended by Potter and Wetherell (1987), I remained close to my data throughout the whole process. The fact that I personally conducted the interviews, transcribed them, and analyzed them, allowed me to discern and use paralinguistic aspects of the interviews during analysis. For example, I could recall gestures that participants used which was all extra information at the time of analysis. Remaining close to my data also helped me when it came to coding and organizing different parts of the interviews. It allowed me to think about possible connections between different interviews and even between different sections of an interview.

Secondly, although I remained aware of this, I had my own experiences as being part of an intercultural couple and as an immigrant, to refer to throughout the research process. This was not only useful during analysis, as I could better place myself in the position of these couples when they spoke about their relationship. It also eased rapport building with my participants during interviews, as there was a felt sense of shared experiences and mutual understanding.

Finally, using discourse analysis to study intercultural couples adds a new perspective to the current literature. Discourse analysis allows understandings of “the shades of grey” in terms of how intercultural couples work. Rather than simply categorizing the challenges faced by these couples, discourse analysis allows us to see how there are different gradients of tensions and how they are conversationally overcome. By studying language use, we can better understand the complexities of what it means to be in an intercultural relationship. Although there are times where differences lead to tensions, there are also times when these differences are celebrated.
Closing Comments

I would say we acknowledge our backgrounds and upbringing but we, in a way have felt, like an emancipation from it too? Where we have freedom and autonomy to celebrate some of these things in the way in which we want to. - Avery

This was a study done to investigate how couples understand their experiences of being in an intercultural relationship. I used a social constructionist paradigm to conduct a discourse analysis of interviews with seven intercultural couples. Through this analysis I concluded that intercultural couples organize their relationship around three main ways of understanding. They understand culture as playing different roles in the relationship. They either do not see culture as important, they see culture as playing some part in the relationship, or they see their cultural differences as an asset.

My results shed light into how the role of culture in intercultural relationships can be a complex one, which shifts depending on the situation. Intercultural couples use these different discourses to help them shape a narrative of who they are as a couple. According to my results, through the three interpretative repertoires that I identified, they web a narrative of unity despite the differences.
References


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Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-49500-2_6


Appendix A: Facebook Recruitment Post (English)

Hello. I am a student in the MSc. in Counselling psychology program at the University of Calgary working under the supervision of Dr. Tom Strong. I am looking for participants for a study examining how cross-cultural couples engage in conversations about their relationship. Participation in this study would involve an audio-recorded interview with you and your partner, that would take approximately an hour of your time. You can choose whether you would like the interview to take place at the University of Calgary, through video conferencing, or in your home.

To qualify for this study, you need:
- Be currently involved in a committed cross-cultural couple, where one of you is Canadian and the other is an immigrant.
- Consider your relationship to be healthy.
- Need to be living together for at least 2 years.
- Both you and your partner need to be willing to participate

As a thank you for participating, couples will be entered in a draw to win a $100 Visa gift certificate.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

If you are interested in participating, or if you have any questions, please contact me by e-mail at XXXX
Appendix B: Facebook Recruitment Post (Spanish)

Hola, mi nombre es Sofía y soy estudiante en la Universidad de Calgary haciendo un MSc. en Counselling Psychology bajo la supervisión de Dr. Tom Strong. Los estoy contactando sobre la posibilidad de participar en un estudio que estoy llevando a cabo, sobre como parejas multiculturales se comunican acerca de su relación. Si desean participar en este estudio, tú y tu pareja serian entrevistados por aproximadamente una hora. La entrevista será grabada. Podrán elegir la locación de la entrevista, ya sea en la Universidad de Calgary, por video conferencia, o en su casa. La entrevista será en Ingles.

Para calificar para este estudio, tú y tu pareja:
- Necesitan ser parte de una pareja multicultural. Uno de los dos debe ser canadiense, y el otro inmigrante a Canadá.
- Son una pareja estable.
- Necesitan haber vivido juntos por un mínimo de dos años.
- Tú y tu pareja están disponibles a participar.

Para agradecer su participación, las parejas entrarán en un sorteo por una Visa gift card de $100.

Si están interesados, o si tienen alguna pregunta sobre el estudio, por favor no duden en contactarme por e-mail a XXXX

El University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (la división de ética de la Universidad de Calgary) ha aprobado este estudio.

Muchas gracias.
Appendix C: Recruitment E-mail

To Whom It May Concern:
My name is Sofia Lopez Bilbao; I am a student in the Master of Science in Counselling at the University of Calgary, working under the supervision of Dr. Tom Strong. I am contacting you about potentially participating in a study to examine how cross-cultural couples engage in conversations about their relationship. Participation in this study would involve an audio-recorded interview with you and your partner, that would take approximately an hour of your time. The interview can take place at the University of Calgary, through video conferencing, or at your home. You will get to choose between these three locations. Questions in the interview would ask about how you experience your own respective cultures, as well as each other’s, and how both of your cultures have shaped your experiences of your relationship.

To qualify for this study, you need:

- Be currently involved in a committed cross-cultural couple, where one of you is Canadian and the other is an immigrant.
- Consider your relationship to be healthy. Need to be living together for at least 2 years.
- Both you and your partner need to be willing to participate.

If you express interest, we will be in contact to further discuss the nature of this research, and to answer any questions you might have about the process.

As a thank you for participating, couples will be entered in a draw to win a $100 Visa gift certificate.

Please note that this is not a form of therapy, and as such, participating couples should not expect any sort of counselling during the interview session.
If you are interested in participating, or have questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at XXXX. The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sofia Lopez Bilbao, MSc. Student
Appendix D: Letter of Initial Contact

Hello ______ and ______,

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. We are booked for ______(date)_________ at ___(time)_______ in room____________. The interview will take about an hour of your time. The best place to park is _________________. I am looking forward to meeting you both.

Thank you,

Sofía Lopez Bilbao
Appendix E: Consent Form

Sofia Lopez Bilbao, Counselling Psychology, Werklund School of Education

Supervisor: Dr. Tom Strong

Title of Project: Cross-Cultural Couples: Using Talk as a Ways of Understanding

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how Cross-Cultural couples experience their relationship by understanding how they talk about it.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

For this study, you and your partner will take part in an interview with the main researcher where you will be asked about your experiences of being part of this relationship. Some of the questions include things like, “What culture does each of you identify as your host culture?”, “When you bring your cultures together to make decisions, what are the easiest points to compromise? Which are the hardest?”, “What is most important to you when negotiating cultural differences?”. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time, and will be audio recorded so that the researcher can later transcribe your conversation for analysis. Participants will be given a choice as to the location of the interview. Interviews can take place at the University of Calgary in a private office, at the participants’ home, or through video conferencing.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, you may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study, you may decline to answer any and all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age, ethnicity/cultural background, the amount of time you have been with your partner, whether you have children, and
whether you are in a relationship with someone of the same or different gender than your own. This information will be kept separate from your name and other directly identifying information.

Only the research team will have access to the audio-recording of this interview. The recording will never be played in public.

Please note, if you are participating through a videoconferencing service, such as Skype, Skype video calls are encrypted. However, Skype protocol allows Microsoft and government agencies to monitor Skype sessions.

In the dissemination of the results, I might quote parts of our conversation. In order to preserve your anonymity, you can choose a pseudonym. If you do not choose one, a pseudonym will be chosen for you.

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: ___________________________________________________________________

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Participation in this study might bring to light certain issues between you and your partner that you are still be struggling to resolve. If this occurs, you might want to seek consultation at the University of Calgary Wellness Centre (403) 210-9355, www.ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre, The Calgary Counselling Centre (403) 265-4980, or contact me for further resources.

Participation might also bring to light areas in which you are both successfully working together and act as a cohesive unit, which might strengthen your relationship. In addition, through this interview, you will be contributing to the existing knowledge on cross-cultural couples, and therefore might be indirectly helping others.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you will still be entered in the draw for the $100 Visa gift card, and you will receive the $20 to cover your transportation costs.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The interview will be transcribed and kept electronically. This information will be encrypted and password protected and it will be kept for five years after the completion of the research study. At this point, all information will be completely destroyed. All physical information (consent form and demographics information) will be scanned, encrypted and password protected and kept for the same amount of time. All physical information will be destroyed. Only the research team will have access to this information.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, all information that you have provided until that point will be deleted/destroyed. Withdrawal from the study can occur until data analysis begins.
Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant’s Name: (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ____________________________________________ Date: __________

Researcher’s Name: (please print) ____________________________________________

Researcher’s Signature: ____________________________________________ Date: __________

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Ms. Sofia Lopez Bilbao,
Counselling Psychology/Werklund School of Education

and Dr. Tom Strong, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology/Werklund School of Education,

If you have any concerns about the way you’ve been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email efreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.
Appendix F: Interview Guide

Today I am going to ask you different questions about your relationship and how both of your respective cultures play a part. I am hoping to better understand how culture plays a part in how you talk about your relationship together.

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. What made you interested in participating in this study?
2. Can you tell me how you got together as a couple?
3. What culture does each of you identify as your home culture? Or the culture that you came from?
   a. In what way does this culture continue to be relevant in your everyday life?
   b. What aspects of your partner’s home culture are most evident in your relationship?
4. When you bring these two cultures together to make decisions, where are the easiest points to compromise?
   a. Where do your cultural differences naturally complement each other?
   b. Which ones are more challenging?
5. What areas do you feel like your cultures are less compatible?
6. What helps you overcome these cultural tensions when they arise?
7. When you notice differences, what part does culture play in them and what part do you think has more to do with personality?
   a. How do you differentiate between the two?
8. Have these cultural tensions in your relationship changed throughout the years?
   a. Has the way that you approached these tensions changed?
9. How do you celebrate cultural differences?
10. What is most important to you when negotiating cultural differences?
11. Tell me about times when it felt like XXX (Canadian partner) acted as a liaison or a bridge between Canadian culture and YYY (immigrant partner’s) culture?
   a. What happened?
   b. What was that like for both of you?
   c. Have the roles ever been reversed? If so, how?
12. Do you think we have dealt with this topic thoroughly? Is there anything missing?
## Appendix G: Transcription Notation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Symbol Indicates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>A pause which is noticeable but too short to measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.5)</td>
<td>A pause timed in tenths of a second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Overlap of talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{ }</td>
<td>Added by the writer to clarify quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Indicates a stopping fall in tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlined</td>
<td>Indicates an extra emphasis on the word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Excerpt from Memo Regarding *Culture Isn’t Defining*

- Fernando mentions how culture plays a part in their lives in many ways. However, others mention things along the lines of culture not playing a central role for them, they're just two people making it work and culture doesn't really play a major part.

- Are these different reality tunnels through which they see their relationship?? - on the one hand, culture is important to them, it's part of their identity and what they bring to the relationship, but also seeing their relationship as two people trying to make it work may serve some function too. Seeing personality differences as the driving forces for differences rather than culture perhaps provides some sort of agency in the whole thing?

- Creating a we, and finding a hybrid identity appear to be related. Perhaps a hybrid identity or a totally new cultural way of doing things as a family is a way of creating a we.
Appendix I: Portion of Mind Map for "Culture isn't defining"

Bruce: I think of my marriage, whether it's multicultural or not. It comes down to personality: the flexibility of the individual.

Teresa: That's right.

Bruce: It's less about who you are, whether you have a cultural difference, or whether you have a financial difference, or a sexual orientation difference. It's all about your own personality and your flexibility, and your personality, and your flexibility, it's a blend. I think that's where you have to be, to be able to do something.

Teresa: I think we're the same person that looks for something that is the exact same as you. It's not going to work. If you have to be with someone with an open mind, that there are enough differences. So, when a difference, you lose sight of that before, unless. It doesn't shock you; Teresa: Exactly. You are kind of waiting for that to happen.

Bruce: I don't really think that that is... This is why I think the survey difficult, because there need to be a cultural thing in personality flexibility. For this, you cannot. Yeah, there's a kind of traditions and some values, some values, some values, that you need to have. But, it's kind of blending, a bit of a challenge. I think that's where you have to be, to be able to do something.

Teresa: I am more like quiet, reserved, and she's more open to having serious and friends, and stuff like that.

Bruce: I think if I have to go all the ways, wherever she is or she has to come all the way to me, I think I would think I would be a bit of a movement. I don't think think I'd be the worst. Most people.

Bruce: I think that's a fair way of putting it. If 00:35:31:44, creating a new culture, the successful interpersonal couples would create a new culture. They would create one person's way to the other. They will create a new culture, which is a blend of both. I think that's the only way, long term.

Teresa: So far, it hasn't been like that. And now, this is our Christmas dinner celebration? Teresa: Yeah, this is our Christmas dinner celebration. Teresa: Yeah.

Bruce: I think that's probably the best. Teresa: Yeah.

Bruce: That's why some people don't get it. Teresa: Teresa: Yeah.

Bruce: We still haven't done it. That's something. Teresa: Yeah, we haven't done it. Teresa: Yeah.

Bruce: And that's how I see it. Maybe you couldn't expect it. It's not as simple.

Teresa: Yeah, it's not as simple.