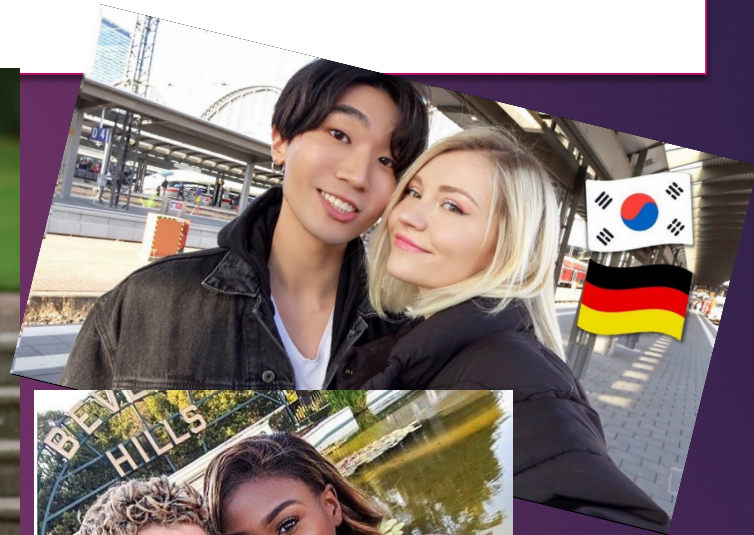


CLINICAL PRACTICE WITH INTERCULTURAL COUPLES



Dr. Reenee Singh
PPS
25th March 2022



Roadmap

- ▶ Theoretical and Research Overview
- ▶ Themes and Processes in Intercultural Couples
- ▶ Vignettes and Clinical Interventions
- ▶ Questions and Discussion

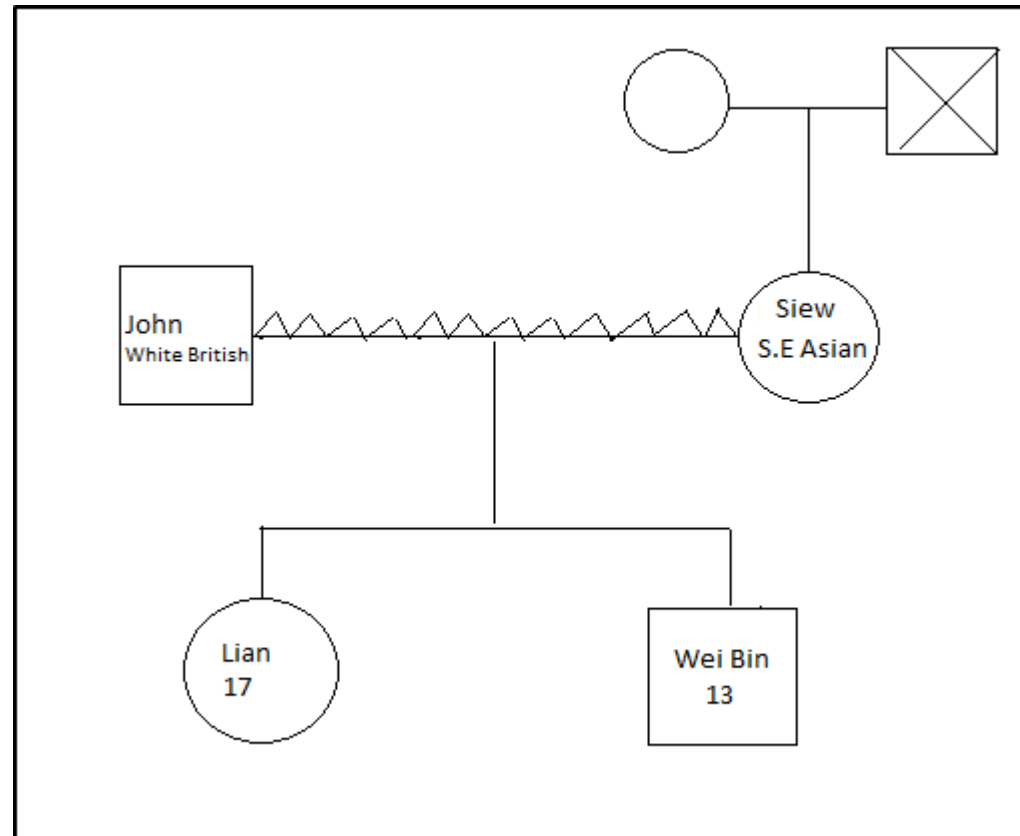
Impact of the Pandemic on family and couple relationships

- Across the family life cycle
- Economic repercussions
- 'Doing' family differently
- Dissolving of boundaries between work and home
- Bereavements and difficulties in marking rites of passage.
- Difficulties for children going from one household to another.
- Exacerbation of physical and mental health conditions
- Intimate partner violence
- Gaming and risky online behaviour in young people.
- Reduced support for childcare from grandparents.

Clinical Vignette 1

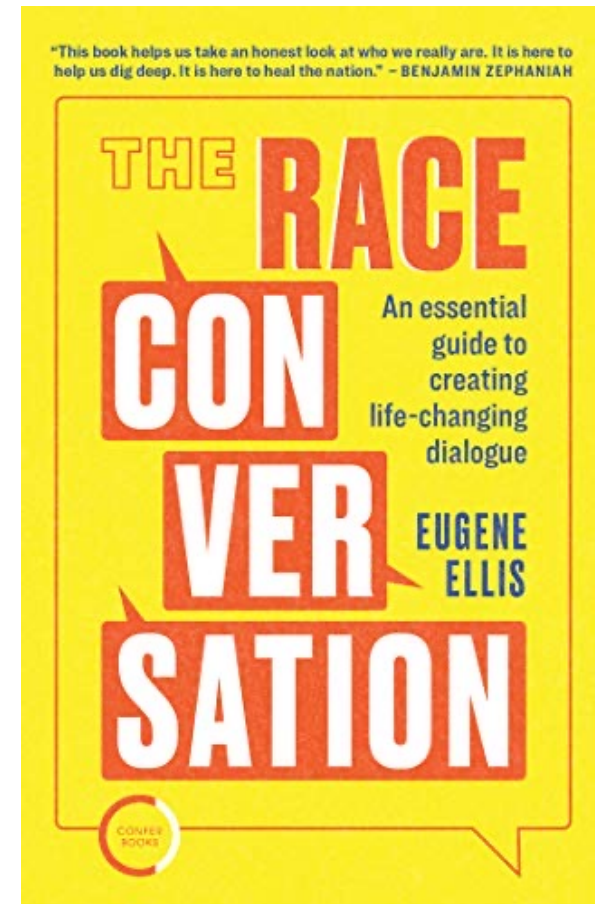
- JOHN AND SIEW– INTERCULTURAL COUPLE /PARENTS, PROFESSIONALS
- THREE GENERATIONAL FAMILY, INCLUDES SIEW'S 78 YEAR OLD MOTHER AND THEIR TWO CHILDREN- LIAN, 17 AND WEI BIN, 13
- SIEW SUFFERS FROM DIABETES, CONTRACTS COVID-19 BUT RECOVERS SLOWLY
- SHIELDS MOTHER WHO IS MISSING HER OWN SIBLINGS AND THEIR CHILDREN, BACK IN CHINA
- LIAN CAN'T DO HER A LEVELS AND IS RECRUITED AS MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER'S CARER
- WEI BIN MISSES HIS FRIENDS AND BECOMES ADDICTED TO GAMING
- JOHN OVERWHELMED WITH WORK, FINANCIAL WORRIES AND HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES.
- INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND (MIS) USE OF ALCOHOL

Genogram



Conversations about 'Race' and Racism

- ▶ 'Black Lives Matter'
- ▶ The Race construct
- ▶ It is hard to look at race as an issue of itself, the temptation is to widen it to other differences.
- ▶ Ignoring colour difference could be seen as a denial and defence against uncomfortable emotions such as anxiety, guilt, shame, fear and envy but could be seen as good practice.



Clarifying terminology: 'intercultural' and 'interracial'

- At one level, all couples could be described as intercultural.
- Intercultural couples as 'consisting of partners from different countries, nationalities, ethnicities, and religions who may possess quite divergent beliefs, assumptions and values as a result of their socialisation in different sociocultural spaces.' (Killian, 2009)
- An intercultural couple is regarded as two adults in a relationship who have significant differences in nationalities, race, religion, ethnicity and language (McFadden and Moore, 2001; Perel, 2000; Sullivan and Cottone, 2006).
- Interracial is defined as "relating to, involving or representing different races" (Karis, 2009)
- Important to keep in mind the notion of 'intersectionality' – for example that social class might override other racial and cultural differences.

What are intercultural couples?

- ▶ The growth in immigration, changes in social mores and expectations, and advances in global technology have contributed to an increase in intercultural relationships worldwide, including interracial, interfaith, interethnic, and international partnerships (Singh et al, 2020).
- ▶ 2.3 million people in the U.K are living or married to somebody from a different culture and 1 in 10 relationships is intercultural
- ▶ By 2030, 50% of people living in London will be foreign born.
- ▶ In 2011, 23,000 people in England and Wales could be classified as mixed race.
- ▶ In the U.S, almost 4 in 10 (39%) of Americans who have been married since 2010 have been to those from different ethnic/cultural groups.
- ▶ According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), about 28% of couples were Anglo Australian born with overseas-born partners.

What are intercultural couples?

- ▶ Challenges of parenting, step families, single parents, mixed race identities
- ▶ Higher rates of divorce and more children in care – recent literature has challenged these views.
- ▶ Intercultural couples mean different things in different cultures
- ▶ Same sex couples – same sex couples tend to have intercultural relationships in higher numbers than straight couples.
- ▶ An analysis of the 2010 U.S Census data found that 20.6% of same-sex couples were interracial, compared to 18.3% of straight, unmarried couples and 9.5% of straight, married couples.
- ▶ Interracial relationships provide us with microcosm of race relations in our societies

The London Intercultural Couples Centre

- ▶ Founded in May 2016 by Dr. Reenee Singh, Professor Janet Riebstein and Mr. Adrian Clarke
- ▶ Clinical and mediation services, groups
- ▶ Couples and families
- ▶ Research
- ▶ Focusing on the strengths and resiliencies while recognising the unique challenges

Overview of the literature

- ▶ Until recently, the literature on intercultural relationships has focused on psychosocial challenges, such as barriers to communication, conflicts over parenting and differences in cross-cultural values.
- ▶ Killian 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2008, 2012, 2013.
- ▶ Colour-blind, 'post-racial' discourses and crossing the borders
- ▶ Bhugun 2016 – Intercultural parenting and strengths based factors.
- ▶ Singh, Killian, Bhugun and Tseng (2020) Comprehensive overview of literature.
- ▶ Reibstein and Singh, (2018, 2020) The Intercultural Exeter Model

Colour Blindness and Hypersensitivity

- ▶ Killian's (2001) research on ten black-white married couples in the U.S
- ▶ Married for at least one year and had at least one child together
- ▶ Interviewed individually and conjointly
- ▶ All ten couples agreed that black spouses were more likely than white spouses to notice and be emotionally affected by negative public reactions.
- ▶ In contrast, white participants said that they "don't look for", "don't notice" or "are oblivious to" negative reactions to the couple in public situations.
- ▶ 'Crossing the borders' – racial discrimination
- ▶ Please take a minute to think about what 'crossing the borders' might mean to you in your cultural contexts.

Positioning, semantic polarities and cohesion

- Each partner contributes to the construction of meaning in the couple and the family
- Different cultures give central importance to different semantic polarities and construct different positions inside the polarities.
- Developmental trajectory – How do partners negotiate meaning if they come from families with very different semantics?
- Are intercultural couples formed on different semantics?
- How do they overcome the enigmatic episodes so that they can 'co-position' themselves?

Participants and Data

10 monocultural couples

- Both partners from the same country (British or Italian)

10 intercultural couples

- Cross-cultural couples: intercultural heterosexual couples where one partner is from the West (U.S, Europe, the U.K and Australia) and the other is a second generation migrant from Asia, Africa or Latin America. (The migrant partner should have arrived in the Europe since the age of 12 and the couple have co-habited for at least a year- max 20yrs).

All sessions were recorded

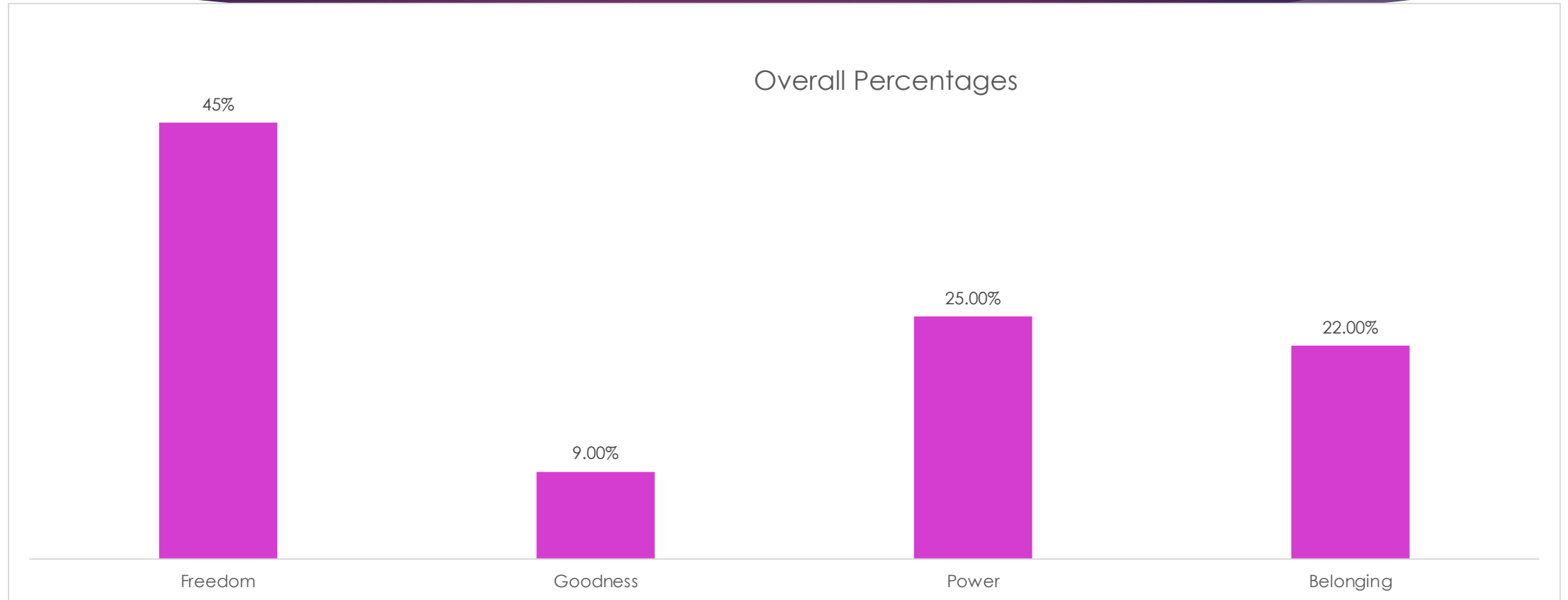
- The transcripts were analysed using the Family Semantics Grid (Ugazio and Guarnieri, 2017).

Sample – Intercultural Couples

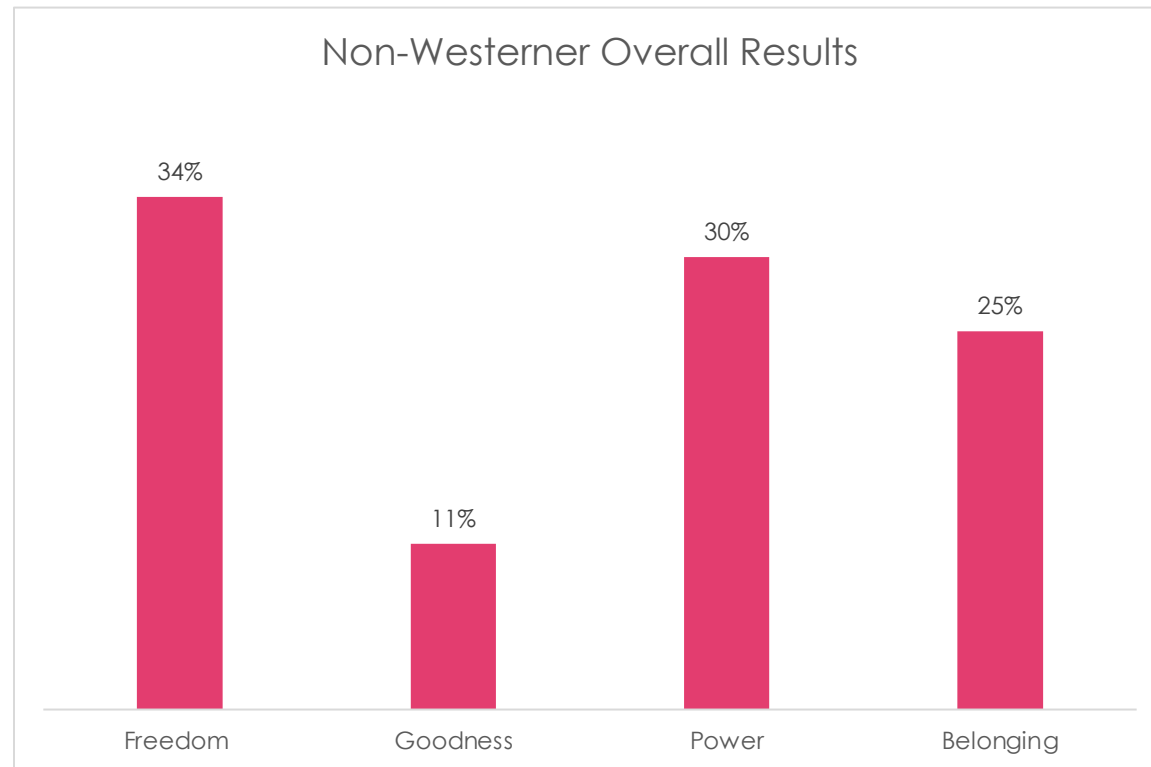
	Couples' Initials	Countries of Origin
1	K&O	England and Argentina
2	M&P	Palestine and Denmark
3	B & I	Argentina and Norway
4	E&S	Zimbabwe and England
5	Y & N	England and The Congo
6	M & G	Italy and Senegal
7	S & C	Bangladesh and England
8	C & B	Ghana and England
9	L & N	Denmark and Morocco
10	T&M	Italy and Japan

Findings

Overall Percentages

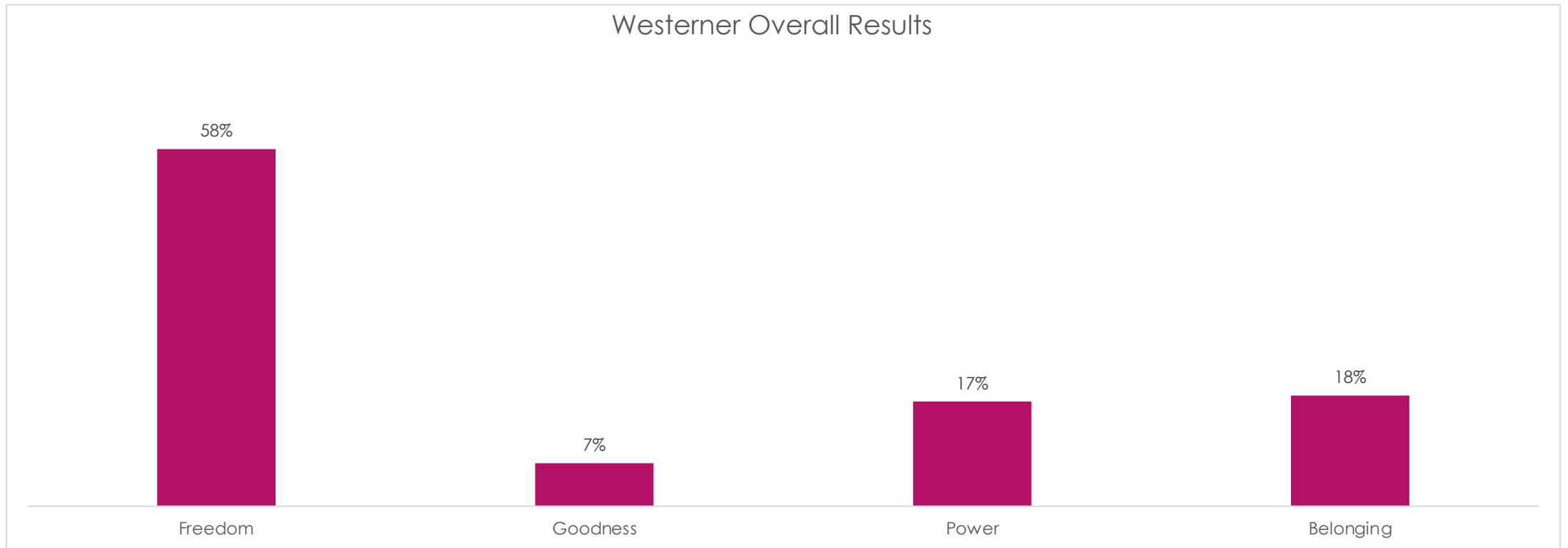


Findings



Findings

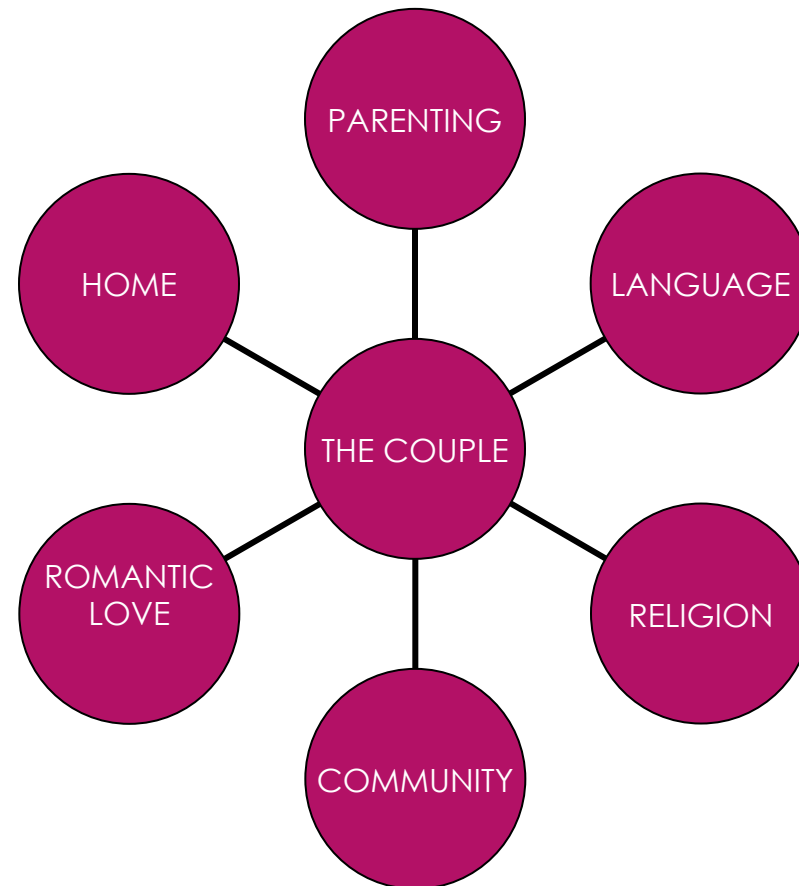
Westerner Overall Results



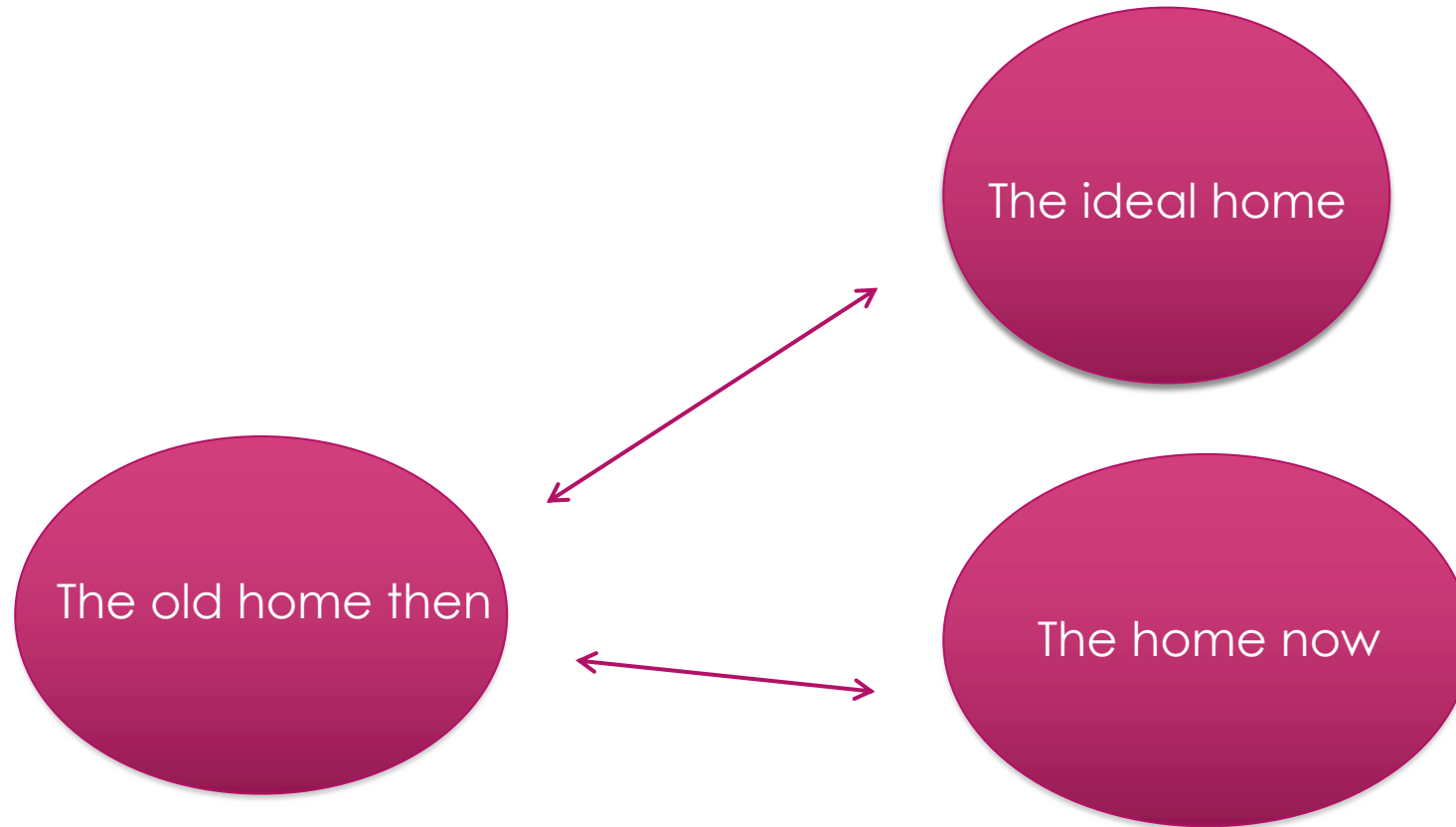
Roadmap

- ▶ Introductory Exercise
- ▶ Theoretical and Research Overview
- ▶ **Themes and Processes in Intercultural Couples**
- ▶ Vignettes and Clinical Interventions
- ▶ Questions and Discussion

Themes and Processes in intercultural partnerships



Theme 1: The meaning of home



Whose territory are we in?

- ▶ Literally or symbolically, both partners may have come a long way from home
- ▶ Loss and nostalgia
- ▶ Migration and acculturation in partners from the same 'culture'
- ▶ Stigma, discrimination and racism
- ▶ “Double lives” - case vignette of Anna and Mohammed
- ▶ Life cycle stages – grandparents, elderly parents
- ▶ Racism and power
- ▶ What does home mean to you in your couple relationship?

Emotion map of a South Asian family



Theme 3: Language and Communication

- ▶ Language can be used in intercultural couples to regulate distance and closeness
- ▶ To mark power differences (Burck, 2005)
- ▶ Bi-culturalism and burden on the minority partner and parent (Ting-Toomey, 2009).
- ▶ Language as an escape from their own country and culture
- ▶ Sonia and Carl –case vignette

Theme Four: Religion, faith and the family life cycle

- Symptoms arise when the family is stuck in moving from one life cycle stage to another.
- Intercultural or interfaith differences can emerge at these transitions.
- Transitions have cultural meanings.
- The use of culturally appropriate rituals.
- Conversion and themes of estrangement from one's own family and suspicion/mistrust of the 'Other'.
- 'Cut offs' from one's family of origin and consequent mental health effects.

Theme Five: Parenting

- Couples often present with a child focused problem
- Clinical needs of children in intercultural families.
- Issues of faith and language
- Home and migration
- Dealing with racism as a couple/family
- Differences in culturally based parenting styles
- Problems in step or 'blended' or adopted families

Roadmap

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Clinical Interventions

- ▶ Addressing racism in the relationship
- ▶ Cultural Genograms
- ▶ Culturegrams
- ▶ Internalized other interviewing

Addressing Racism

“Love and prejudice can coexist within the same relationship, and it is sometimes the task of the clinician working with intercultural couples to provide a safe context in which the partners can explore the unsaid, without fear of being judged as racist by their partner or their therapist.” (p. 167, Singh et al).

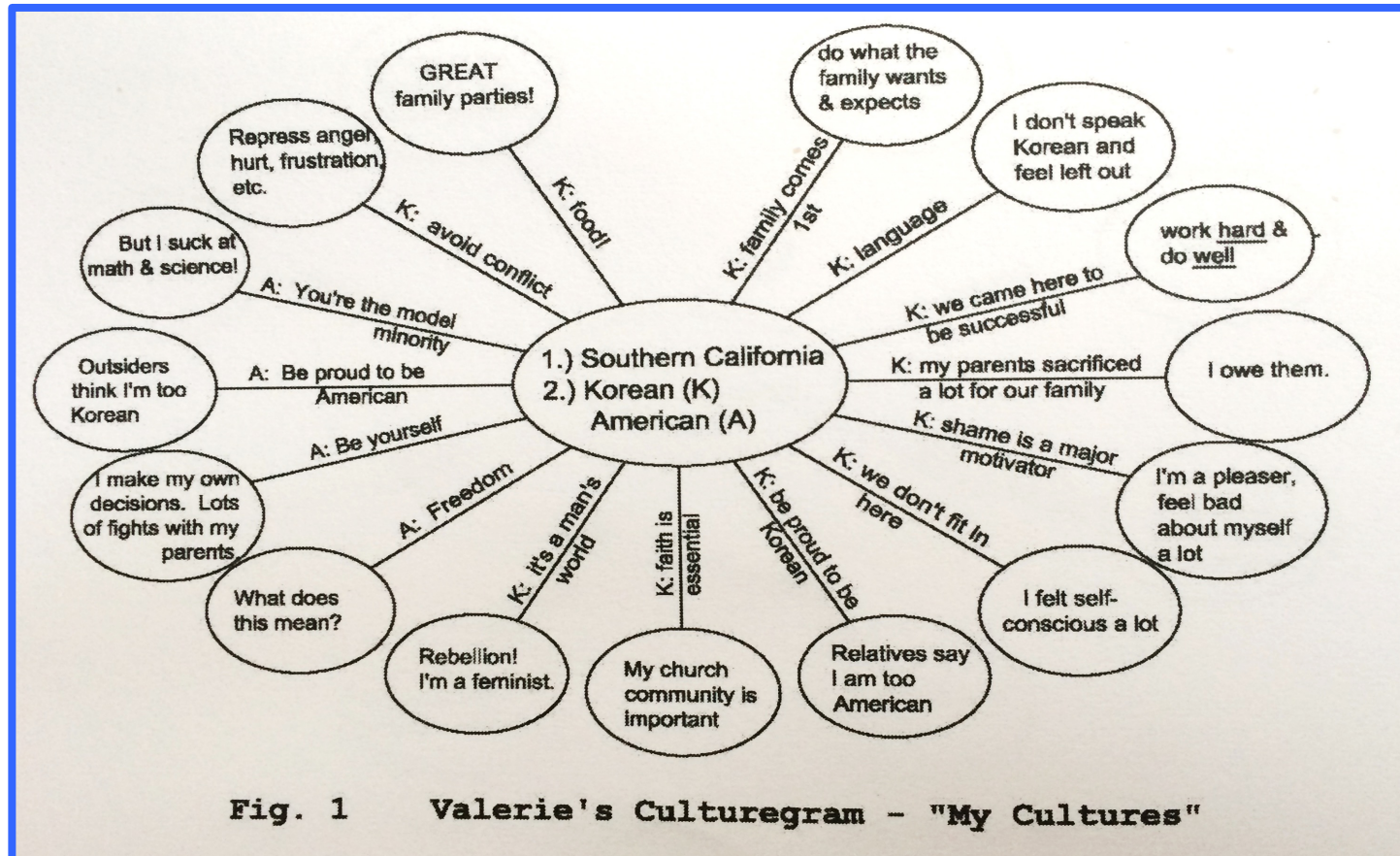
Cultural Genograms

- Devised by Hardy and Laszloffy (1995)
- Different colours are chosen to represent differences in culture, class, political opinion, north and south differences.
- Identifying principles and issues of pride and shame (in a key)
- Transgenerational patterns, replicative and corrective scripts
- Respect confidentiality and go slowly with family secrets

Culturegram

- ▶ Agree on a theme to focus on, for example, religious values.
- ▶ Draw a circle and within the circle, write the answers to the following questions:
 - ▶ Where are you from?
 - ▶ What cultural and/or ethnic heritage do you identify with?
- ▶ Draw spokes. On each of these, write a belief or value about your theme that you picked up from the family you grew up in.
- ▶ In a circle attached to the end of each spoke, write about how the belief or value affects you now in your daily life (e.g. I go with it, I reject it etc.)
- ▶ Compare and contrast your culturegram with that of your partner/supervisee.

Culturegram



Complexity of intercultural work

- ▶ Cultural content (values, beliefs)
- ▶ Sociopolitical and economic inequality
- ▶ How these affect interactional processes
- ▶ Do not assume that the problem is always related to intercultural/interfaith differences

Clinical Consultation and Discussion



References

- ❖ Mellis, E. (2021) *The Race Conversation: an Essential guide to creating life changing dialogue*. London: Karnac.
- ❖ Reibstein, J. and Singh, R. (2020) *The Intercultural Exeter Couples Model. Making Connections for a Divided World through Systemic- Behavioural Therapy*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- ❖ Singh, R., Killian, K., Bhugun, D and Tseng, C. (2020) *Clinical Work with Intercultural Couples*. In K.S.. Wampler and A. Blow. (Ed) *The Handbook of Systemic Family Therapy*. Volume 3. Wiley.
- ❖ Singh, R. and Sim, T. (2021) *Families in the time of the Pandemic: Breakdown or Breakthrough?* *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1445>.
- ❖ Ugazio, V., Singh, R. and Guarnieri, S. (2022) *The “Arab Spring” within an intercultural couple. Does the unmentioned ‘racial difference’ matter?* *Journal of Family Therapy*. In press.

The Intercultural Exeter Model: Making connections for a divided world through systemic-behavioral therapy

Increase the efficacy of your treatment interventions in intercultural couples therapy

The Intercultural Exeter Couples Model: Making Connections for a Divided World Through Systemic-Behavioral Therapy provides practitioners with a thorough guide to effectively treating intercultural couples. The book consists of a systematic effort to translate systemic ideas that take into account a cultural perspective into a highly useable and practical form.

The Intercultural Exeter Couples Model also attempts to marry two, often distinct, forms of practice: the systemic and the behavioral. Both approaches have much to contribute to effective couples' counselling but they are often theoretically siloed. This book demonstrates the value of using both approaches simultaneously.

This book provides concrete and practical strategies for implementing systemic and behavioral approaches to intercultural couples' therapy in a manner consistent with clinical best practice. Rather than ignoring the significant and complex impacts that differing cultures can have on a relationship, *The Intercultural Exeter Couples Model* puts those differences front and center, encouraging the therapist to engage with the cultural mismatch that can be at the core of many couples' ongoing friction.

The book's chapters tackle both the model itself and a variety of interventions, covering topics including:

- Teaching couples how to break patterns and prepare them to establish new ones
- Training couples to communicate effectively
- Establishing new modes of behavior in couples
- An explanation of empathic bridging maneuvers
- A description of the use of life-space explorations

Perfect for clinicians, students, and professors interested in or practicing in the field of couples' therapy, *The Intercultural Exeter Couples Model* provides readers with an in-depth exploration of an increasingly important model of couples therapy and describes, in painstaking detail, the interventions necessary to achieve positive patient outcomes.

JANET REIBSTEIN is a psychologist, psychotherapist, and family therapist. She is Professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Exeter. She has authored six books and several articles on a variety of subjects, and contributed to radio and television documentary series.

REENEE SINGH is the CEO of Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice, UK and Founding Director, London Intercultural Couples Centre at the Child and Family Practice. She is also co-director of the Tavistock Family Therapy and Systemic Research Centre and visiting Professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Bergamo, Italy.

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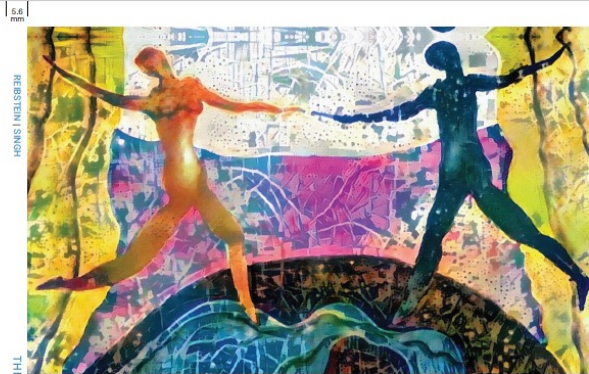
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THE INTERCULTURAL EXETER COUPLES MODEL

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