Intercultural Relationships: Living outside the comfort zone

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Definition:

Intercultural couples are partners are of different racial, ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds (Gordon, 1964; Ho, 1990)

Much of the ‘comfort’ some people have with their own race/nationality is about a ‘shared culture’
‘Man’s mind once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimension’
Oliver Wendell Holmes

• World view is like a pair of glasses that colors how we see & interpret reality

• Marrying from different cultures means removing the glasses & taking a fresh look at the world
Who are these ‘Intercultural couples?’

**TYPES:**

- Non-Traditionals
- Romantics
- Compensators
- Rebels
- Internationals

Dugan Romamno, 2003)
Basic phases of marital life

- Honeymoon phase: Attraction & Positivity

- Setting-In phase: Differences vs similarities

- Life Patterns phase: Managing & Resolving
Types of Intercultural Marriages

(Dugam Rumano, 1997)

- Immersion
- Obliteration
- Compromise
- Consensus
Common risk factors for marital discomfort & divorce

1. Young age
2. Low educational & income
3. Instable income sources
4. *Intercultural marriage*
5. Poor home life from family of origin
6. One partner with earlier divorce
7. Premarital pregnancy, children or step-kids
8. *Different family backgrounds*
9. *Communication, problem-solving, conflict-resolution*
Potential Trouble Spots

- Food / Dining
- Time
- Values
- Sex / Gender Roles
- Communication
- Finances
- Religion
- Social Class
- Residence
- Children
- Expat Spouse
- Friends
- In-Laws
- Politics
- Stress / Conflict
- Illness / Loss / Death
Before Getting Married

• Live together
• Make a home visit
• Socialize with friends
• Learn the language and culture
• Read about other’s country & visit
• See movies & consider cultural impacts
• Study the religion
• Eat the food
• Seek resources (ie. pre-marital counseling)
Chinese symbol for active listening
Factors for Success

1. Commitment to relationship
2. Ability to communicate
3. Sensitivity to each other’s needs
4. A liking for each other’s culture
5. Flexibility
6. Solid, positive self-image
7. Love as main motive
8. Common goals
9. Spirit of adventure
10. Sense of humor
Best wishes and thanks