

Narratives of Identity Negotiation among Intercultural Couples: A Qualitative Study of Cross-Cultural Psychological Adjustment

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Abstract

The study explored the lived experiences of intercultural couples through a narrative qualitative approach within the field of cross-cultural psychology. Drawing on acculturation theory, identity negotiation theory, and narrative identity perspectives, the research examined how couples construct meaning, negotiate cultural differences, and navigate psychological adjustment. In-depth narrative interviews revealed four interrelated themes: cultural conflict and negotiation, resilience through shared storytelling, construction of hybrid identities, and adaptation within broader social contexts. Findings indicate that intercultural adjustment is not a linear process but an ongoing narrative of identity reconstruction and relational adaptation. The study contributes to cross-cultural psychology by highlighting the storied nature of acculturation, the relational dynamics of identity negotiation, and the role of meaning-making in fostering resilience. Practical implications for marriage counsellors, educators, and policymakers are discussed, emphasising culturally sensitive interventions and inclusive policies that support intercultural couples. Directions for future research include longitudinal narrative studies, gendered analyses, and mixed-methods approaches to further enrich the understanding of intercultural psychological adjustment.

Keywords: acculturation, adjustment, cross-cultural, intercultural, marriage

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Introduction

Globalisation, transnational migration, and cultural mobility have significantly increased the number of intercultural marriages worldwide (Fiorilli et al., 2021). Such unions offer a rich platform for exploring how individuals navigate cultural differences and construct hybrid identities within intimate relationships. From the perspective of cross-cultural psychology, intercultural marriages provide a natural laboratory for studying how individuals negotiate cultural values, traditions, and identities in their everyday lives (Ward et al., 2021). Intercultural marriages often involve the intersection of diverse languages, belief systems, family expectations, and social norms (González et al., 2018). These intersections can enrich the couple's experiences but may also pose challenges such as cultural conflict, miscommunication, and difficulties with social acceptance. While intercultural unions may enrich the psychological lives of partners through broadened perspectives and exposure to multiple worldviews, they are also marked by potential challenges. Studies have documented difficulties such as religious incompatibility, communication barriers, divergent family expectations, and societal prejudice (Killian, 2013). The challenges are not merely interpersonal but are shaped by broader cultural, structural, and social forces. For instance, in collectivist societies, extended families often exert considerable influence on marital decisions, creating additional layers of negotiation for intercultural couples (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Negotiating these differences requires ongoing psychological adjustment, identity negotiation, and resilience (Berry, 2005).

Narrative research provides a unique lens to study cultural and social processes because it foregrounds the stories through which individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narratives help reveal how intercultural couples construct meaning, cope with challenges, and reconfigure their identities in light of cultural encounters. In particular, stories of cultural negotiation highlight the psychological processes involved in creating shared values, hybrid identities, and adaptive coping strategies (Bruner, 1990).

Existing research on intercultural marriages has often been dominated by quantitative approaches, focusing on variables such as marital satisfaction, acculturation levels, and conflict resolution styles (Janicka, 2025; Machette, & Cionea, 2023; Sharaievska et al, 2013). While these studies provide valuable generalizable data, they frequently neglect the *subjective voices* and *storied experiences* of couples themselves. Quantitative indicators may measure levels of adjustment but do not fully capture the lived, contextualised processes by which partners construct meaning around cultural difference and sameness. Although intercultural relationships have been widely examined in Western societies, particularly in Europe and North America, relatively limited empirical attention has been directed toward African contexts. Much of the existing literature on intercultural marriage and cross-cultural adjustment has been developed within individualistic societies where personal autonomy and individual choice in partner selection are strongly emphasized (Berry, 2005; Ward et al., 2021). In contrast, many African societies, including Nigeria, are characterized by collectivist social orientations in which family systems, communal identity, and cultural traditions significantly shape interpersonal relationships and marital decisions.

Nigeria presents a particularly complex cultural environment for examining intercultural relationships. As one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, Nigeria consists of more than 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct cultural norms, languages, and social expectations (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Marriage within this context is not solely viewed as a union between two individuals but often as a relationship between families and

communities. Consequently, intercultural couples in Nigeria may experience unique forms of negotiation involving cultural expectations, extended family involvement, and religious traditions. Furthermore, religious identity plays a significant role in shaping marital expectations and family acceptance within Nigerian society. The coexistence of major religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous belief systems, may create additional layers of identity negotiation for couples from different cultural or religious backgrounds (Nwoye, 2017). These sociocultural dynamics suggest that intercultural relationships in Nigeria may involve distinct psychological processes of adaptation, identity negotiation, and meaning-making compared to those documented in Western contexts.

Research on intercultural relationships has been extensively conducted in Western societies, particularly in North America and Europe. Scholars in cross-cultural psychology have examined how individuals in intercultural unions navigate cultural differences, identity negotiation, and psychological adjustment within multicultural environments (Berry, 2005; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2021). Much of this body of research is grounded in acculturation theory, which emphasizes how individuals adapt when exposed to a new cultural environment. These studies have shown that intercultural couples often face challenges related to communication styles, cultural expectations, and differing value systems, but may also develop adaptive strategies that promote resilience and mutual understanding.

In Western contexts, intercultural relationships are frequently understood within the framework of individualistic cultural values. Individual autonomy, personal choice in partner selection, and egalitarian relationship norms are widely emphasized (Triandis, 1995). Consequently, the psychological experiences of intercultural couples in Western societies often revolve around issues of identity integration, cultural adaptation, and negotiation of personal values (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Narrative research has further highlighted how individuals construct personal stories that integrate multiple cultural identities and foster a sense of coherence within intercultural relationships (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995). However, scholars have noted that findings derived from Western societies may not necessarily generalize to non-Western cultural settings. Cultural norms governing marriage, family involvement, and social expectations vary considerably across societies, thereby shaping the experiences of intercultural couples in different ways (Berry, 2005). This limitation underscores the need for contextually grounded research that examines intercultural relationships in culturally diverse societies outside Western contexts.

Compared with Western countries, relatively fewer empirical studies have examined intercultural relationships within African societies, including Nigeria. Yet Nigeria represents a particularly important setting for cross-cultural research due to its remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity. The country comprises over 250 ethnic groups with distinct cultural traditions, languages, and social norms (Falola & Heaton, 2008). These diverse cultural identities influence interpersonal relationships, including expectations surrounding marriage and family life. In many Nigerian communities, marriage is not viewed solely as a personal relationship between two individuals but rather as a social institution, that involves extended families and broader kinship networks (Adegoke, 2010). As a result, decisions regarding partner selection and marital roles may be shaped by family expectations, cultural traditions, and communal values. This collectivist orientation contrasts with the individualistic orientation prevalent in many Western societies, where romantic relationships are often framed primarily as private decisions between individuals (Triandis, 1995).

Another significant cultural dimension shaping intercultural relationships in Nigeria is the role of religion. Nigeria is characterised by a strong religious presence, with Christianity, Islam, and indigenous belief systems playing influential roles in shaping social norms and marital expectations (Nwoye, 2017). Religious affiliation can influence partner compatibility, family approval, and community acceptance, particularly in cases where couples come from different religious or ethnic backgrounds.

Furthermore, ethnic identity and cultural heritage remain central components of personal and social identity within Nigerian society. Intercultural relationships may therefore involve complex processes of cultural negotiation as individuals navigate expectations from their families, ethnic communities, and broader social networks. Such negotiations may involve reconciling differences in language, traditions, food practices, religious beliefs, and gender role expectations. Despite these unique sociocultural dynamics, psychological research examining how individuals in Nigeria experience and narrate intercultural relationships remains limited. Existing African scholarship has primarily focused on broader themes such as marital stability, family systems, and cultural values rather than the lived experiences of intercultural couples themselves (Adegoke, 2010). Consequently, there is a need for qualitative approaches that foreground individuals' narratives and subjective meanings within these relationships.

Narrative approaches provide a valuable framework for understanding intercultural relationships because they emphasize how individuals construct meaning from lived experience. Narrative psychology suggests that people make sense of their lives by organising experiences into stories that shape their identities and guide their interactions with others (Bruner, 1990). Within intercultural relationships, storytelling becomes a means through which individuals interpret cultural differences, negotiate identity boundaries, and develop shared understandings of their relationships. Narrative inquiry is particularly useful in cross-cultural research because it allows participants to articulate their experiences within their own cultural frameworks (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Rather than imposing predetermined theoretical categories, narrative approaches enable researchers to explore how individuals themselves interpret the challenges and opportunities associated with intercultural relationships.

For intercultural couples, narratives may reveal processes of cultural negotiation, identity integration, and relational resilience. Through storytelling, partners may develop shared meanings that bridge cultural differences and foster mutual understanding. These narratives also illuminate how individuals construct hybrid identities that incorporate elements of multiple cultural traditions.

Given the limited empirical research on intercultural relationships within Nigeria, narrative inquiry offers a culturally sensitive methodological approach for exploring how individuals experience and interpret intercultural unions within their sociocultural contexts. By examining the stories that couples tell about their relationships, the present study seeks to contribute to cross-cultural psychology by providing deeper insight into the psychological processes through which intercultural couples in Nigeria negotiate identity, culture, and relational adaptation. Narrative identity theory emphasises how individuals create coherent life stories that integrate cultural experiences and personal meaning (McAdams, 2001). Bruner (1990) argues that narratives are central to human meaning-making, while Polkinghorne (1995) highlights their analytic value in qualitative research. For intercultural couples, narratives of adjustment and resilience provide insight into how they interpret

cultural challenges and construct hybrid identities that integrate multiple cultural perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Acculturation Theory (Berry, 2005), Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2015) and Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams, 2001). Acculturation theory, as articulated by Berry (2005), remains a cornerstone in cross-cultural psychology. Berry identified four acculturation strategies: assimilation (adopting the dominant culture), separation (maintaining heritage culture only), integration (maintaining heritage culture while adopting aspects of the dominant culture), and marginalization (loss of both cultural affiliations). This model underscores that cultural adaptation is not a uniform process but varies according to individual choices and social contexts. In intercultural marriages, partners often navigate differing strategies simultaneously. For example, one partner may favour integration while the other leans toward separation, creating potential sources of tension (Hiew et al, 2016). Thus, within the dyadic context of intercultural marriage, acculturation is best understood as a continuous negotiation of cultural practices and identities rather than static strategies.

Ting-Toomey's (2015) Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) posits that successful intercultural interactions depend on achieving identity security, inclusion, predictability, and mutual respect through communication. Identity negotiation is an ongoing process in which individuals assert, validate, or adapt aspects of self in response to relational and cultural contexts. In the context of intercultural couples, identity negotiation takes on heightened significance, as partners must balance cultural loyalty with the creation of a shared relational identity. Recent applications of INT in intercultural romantic relationships reveal that communication competence, facework, and mutual validation are critical for relational satisfaction (Dorjee & Ting-Toomey, 2020). This framework informs the present study by highlighting communication as both a tool and a site of identity negotiation. Couples' narratives provide evidence of how they engage in this communicative identity work, thereby linking micro-level interpersonal dynamics with broader cultural structures.

Narrative identity theory emphasises the role of personal stories in constructing meaning and coherence across cultural transitions. McAdams (2001) proposed that individuals construct narrative identities through internalised and evolving life stories that provide meaning, coherence, and continuity. Narratives are central to identity development, as they integrate past experiences, present realities, and future aspirations into a meaningful whole. In intercultural marriages, narrative identity construction involves integrating cultural differences into a shared story that affirms both partners' identities. Riessman (2008) emphasised that narratives are not merely descriptive but performative, revealing how people actively construct meaning and negotiate power and identity in social interactions. Recent methodological developments, such as Staged Narrative Analysis (Breheny et al, 2022), underscore the value of narrative approaches in uncovering the complex layers of identity negotiation. This framework aligns with the present study's focus on capturing couples' lived stories as data for psychological analysis.

By integrating these perspectives, the study situates intercultural marriage as a site of dynamic cultural negotiation, identity construction, and psychological adjustment, best understood through the narratives couples use to frame their experiences.

The Current Study

This study focuses on the narratives of intercultural couples to explore how they manage cultural differences, build resilience, and foster adaptation. It is situated within three key theoretical lenses: acculturation theory (Berry, 2005), identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2015), and narrative identity (McAdams, 2001). Together, these frameworks illuminate how intercultural couples negotiate the psychological complexities of cultural diversity. Despite these unique cultural characteristics, empirical psychological research exploring the lived experiences of intercultural couples within the Nigerian context remains limited. Existing African studies have primarily focused on broader themes such as marital stability, family dynamics, and cultural values rather than the narrative experiences of intercultural couples themselves (Adegoke, 2010). As a result, there is a need for contextually grounded qualitative research that explores how individuals in intercultural relationships construct meaning, negotiate identity, and adapt within the sociocultural realities of Nigerian society.

Despite advances, several gaps remain. First, there is a shortage of studies focusing on intercultural marriages in non-Western contexts, particularly Africa. Second, quantitative dominance in the literature has left subjective, storied accounts underexplored. Third, few studies integrate acculturation, identity negotiation, and bicultural identity integration frameworks simultaneously, limiting theoretical synthesis. Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative narrative approach to foreground the voices of intercultural couples and to theorise identity negotiation in context. The present study therefore contributes to cross-cultural psychology by examining the narrative experiences of intercultural couples within Nigeria. By foregrounding participants' lived experiences, the study provides culturally situated insights into how individuals navigate cultural differences, construct hybrid identities, and develop resilience within a socially complex and culturally plural environment.

The purpose of this study is to explore the identity negotiation processes of intercultural couples through their lived narratives. Rather than imposing predefined categories of acculturation or adjustment, this research foregrounds participants' voices, privileging how they themselves frame cultural differences, challenges, and relational strategies. The study seeks to illuminate the psychological mechanisms through which couples make sense of their intercultural experiences, particularly in a Nigerian urban context. This study makes three key contributions. First, it enriches cross-cultural psychological theory by situating identity negotiation within real-life narratives rather than abstract models. By integrating Berry's (2005) acculturation theory, Ting-Toomey's (2015) identity negotiation theory, and McAdams' (2001) narrative identity perspective, the study demonstrates the centrality of meaning-making in intercultural relationships. Second, the research has important practical implications for counselling and psychotherapy. Third, the study contributes to policy and social discourse by foregrounding the voices of couples in non-Western contexts. However, the study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do intercultural couples narrate their experiences of cultural differences and similarities?
2. What identity negotiation strategies emerge in their stories?
3. How do these narratives reflect processes of psychological adjustment within intercultural marriage

Method

Participants

The study involved 15 intercultural couples (30 individuals) living in Abakaliki metropolis, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria are: (a) couples from different national, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds, (b) at least three years of marital or cohabiting experience, and (c) fluency in English for interview purposes. Demographic variation in age, gender, cultural pairing, and socioeconomic background were sought to capture diverse perspectives.

Instruments

Data for this study were collected using a semi-structured narrative interview guide designed to elicit participants' lived experiences within intercultural relationships. The interview questions were developed based on key theoretical perspectives in cross-cultural psychology, particularly acculturation theory (Berry, 2005) and identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2015), as well as prior research on intercultural relationships and cultural adjustment. To ensure content validity and cultural appropriateness, the interview guide was reviewed by two scholars with expertise in cross-cultural psychology and qualitative methodology. Their feedback focused on the clarity of the questions, their alignment with the study objectives, and their cultural sensitivity within the Nigerian context. Based on their recommendations, several questions were refined to improve clarity and to encourage richer narrative responses.

In addition, the interview guide was pilot-tested with two individuals who met the study inclusion criteria but were not part of the final sample. The pilot interviews helped to assess the comprehensibility of the questions and the flow of the interview process. Minor modifications were made to enhance the sequencing and wording of the questions. The final interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to narrate their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies within intercultural relationships. The complete interview guide is provided in Appendix A to enhance transparency and allow readers to evaluate the instrument used in the study.

Procedure

Participants were contacted through referrals and invited to take part voluntarily. After obtaining informed consent, individual interviews were conducted first, followed by joint couple interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. Interviews were conducted in English language. Interviews took place in private, comfortable settings chosen by participants. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect confidentiality. Field notes and a researchers' reflexive journal were maintained to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage and provided with counseling referrals in case of emotional distress. No incentives were given to them rather the researchers were thankful to the narrators for their time.

Design

The study adopts a qualitative narrative research design within a constructivist paradigm. Narrative inquiry is chosen because it emphasises the storied nature of human experience and highlights how individuals make meaning of cultural differences and relational adjustments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). The design enables an

exploration of identity construction, acculturation processes, and relational adaptation within intercultural marriages.

Analysis

Narrative thematic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) was employed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded iteratively, and analysed for emerging themes. Credibility was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation.

Results

Thematic narrative analysis of the 15 intercultural couples' interviews generated four overarching themes: (1) Cultural Conflict Narratives, (2) Resilience and Adaptation Stories, (3) Hybrid Identity Constructions, and (4) External Influences of Family and Society. Each theme reflects how intercultural partners negotiated identity and psychological adjustment.

Cultural Conflict Narratives

Many participants narrated early stages of their relationships as marked by cultural misunderstandings, particularly regarding communication styles, gender roles, and religious practices. For example, one participant described:

"In his family, decision-making is collective, but I was raised to be more independent. At first, it felt like he wasn't supporting me, but later I realised he was trying to balance two expectations" [Couple 3]

These narratives echo Berry's (2005) acculturation theory, illustrating tensions between assimilation and cultural maintenance. Such conflicts were often interpreted by couples as "tests" of their relationship strength rather than insurmountable barriers, suggesting that conflict itself becomes a formative narrative in intercultural marriages.

Resilience and Adaptation Stories

Couples narrated resilience through adaptive coping strategies such as humor, intercultural dialogue, and developing "new family rules." One participant reflected:

"We laugh about our differences now. Early on, it was a struggle, but humor became our way of surviving" [Couple 11]

These stories highlight the psychological flexibility emphasized in cross-cultural adjustment research (Ward et al, 2021). Importantly, resilience was not described as the absence of conflict, but rather as the capacity to transform challenges into growth opportunities. This aligns with positive psychology's notion of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), reframed here as "post-cultural conflict growth."

Hybrid Identity Constructions

Another theme centred on the creation of a shared, hybrid identity. Couples often described themselves as neither fully belonging to one culture nor the other, but instead as cultivating a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994). For example:

"We don't say, 'this is his way' or 'my way.' We've created our own way that mixes both traditions. Our children will grow up in this new culture we're building" [Couple 6]

This resonates with Ting-Toomey's (2015) identity negotiation theory, which posits that intercultural interactions involve ongoing negotiation of identity boundaries. The hybrid identity narrative was particularly salient for couples raising bicultural children, as parenting became a key site for blending traditions.

External Influences of Family and Society

Participants emphasised that intercultural adjustment was not solely dyadic but embedded in broader societal contexts. Extended family expectations, community attitudes, and stereotypes shaped their relational experiences. For instance:

"My parents were against it from the beginning. They thought she would never respect our customs. Even now, every holiday is a negotiation" [Couple 4]

These external pressures reflect Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, where macrosystem forces such as cultural norms and societal prejudice intersect with microsystem interactions in the family. Societal acceptance or its absence often determined whether couples framed their stories as struggles for legitimacy or as narratives of cultural bridge-building.

Discussion

The present study explored the lived experiences of intercultural couples in Nigeria using a narrative qualitative approach. The findings revealed four major themes: cultural negotiation and conflict, resilience through shared meaning-making, the construction of hybrid identities, and adaptation within broader sociocultural contexts. These findings provide valuable insights into how individuals in intercultural relationships navigate cultural differences and construct relational meaning within a culturally diverse environment. One of the central findings of the study was that intercultural couples frequently encountered cultural differences that required ongoing negotiation. Participants described differences in traditions, communication styles, family expectations, and religious practices that occasionally generated tension within their relationships. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that intercultural couples often face unique relational challenges arising from differing cultural norms and values (Berry, 2005; Ward et al, 2021). However, the findings also suggest that these cultural differences were not necessarily detrimental to relationship stability. Instead, participants often framed cultural negotiation as an opportunity for mutual learning and growth. This observation is consistent with studies showing that intercultural couples frequently develop adaptive strategies that facilitate cross-cultural understanding and relational resilience. In this sense, cultural differences may function not only as sources of conflict but also as catalysts for intercultural competence and relational development.

Another important finding was the role of shared meaning-making in promoting resilience within intercultural relationships. Participants frequently described how storytelling, open communication, and mutual support helped them navigate cultural challenges. Narrative exchanges allowed partners to better understand each other's cultural backgrounds and experiences. This finding resonates with narrative psychology, which emphasises that individuals construct meaning and identity through storytelling (Bruner, 1990). Within intercultural relationships, narrative processes appear to play a critical role in helping partners integrate diverse cultural experiences into a shared relational narrative. Through these narratives, couples may develop a collective understanding of their relationship that transcends cultural differences. Furthermore, the emphasis on resilience

aligns with research on intercultural adaptation, which suggests that successful cross-cultural relationships often involve the development of coping strategies that facilitate psychological adjustment (Ward et al., 2021). In the present study, participants' narratives demonstrated how emotional support, communication, and cultural openness contributed to relational resilience.

The findings also revealed that intercultural relationships can contribute to the development of hybrid cultural identities. Participants described how their relationships influenced their perspectives, values, and cultural practices. Over time, many individuals reported integrating elements of their partner's cultural background into their own sense of identity. This process reflects what scholars have described as cultural hybridity and identity negotiation within intercultural contexts (Ting-Toomey, 2015). According to identity negotiation theory, individuals in intercultural interactions continuously negotiate their identities in response to social and relational dynamics. The narratives in this study illustrate how such negotiations occur within intimate relationships, leading to the emergence of hybrid identities that incorporate elements of multiple cultural traditions. These findings also support previous research suggesting that intercultural relationships can foster broader cultural awareness and identity flexibility. By engaging with multiple cultural perspectives, individuals may develop more inclusive and dynamic understandings of identity.

The findings also highlight the importance of broader sociocultural contexts in shaping intercultural relationships. Participants often discussed the influence of family expectations, community attitudes, and religious norms on their relationships. In some cases, couples experienced social pressure or skepticism from family members who preferred culturally homogeneous marriages. This finding reflects the collectivist nature of many African societies, where marriage is often viewed as a union between families rather than solely between individuals (Adegoke, 2010). Consequently, intercultural couples may face additional social negotiations as they attempt to reconcile personal relationship choices with community expectations. At the same time, some participants reported that family members gradually became more accepting of their relationships over time. This suggests that intercultural relationships may also serve as sites of cultural exchange and social change within communities.

Implications of the Study

The study makes several contributions to cross-cultural psychology. First, it deepens understanding of acculturation processes by illustrating how adaptation unfolds not only at the individual level but also within the intimate domain of marital relationships. Second, it extends identity negotiation theory by showing how hybrid identities emerge through relational storytelling. Third, it reinforces the narrative identity perspective, positioning intercultural couples as active agents who reconstruct their sense of self and relationship in response to cultural diversity and social pressures. Collectively, these contributions enrich theoretical discourse by highlighting the centrality of meaning-making in intercultural adjustment.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative narrative design and relatively small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the participants involved in the study. Second, the data relied on self-reported narratives, which may be influenced by participants' subjective interpretations and recall biases. Third, the study was conducted within a specific Nigerian sociocultural context;

therefore, the experiences described may differ across other regions or cultural settings. Future research may benefit from larger samples, comparative cross-cultural studies, or mixed-method approaches to further deepen understanding of intercultural relationships.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the findings and the limitations of the present study, several recommendations are proposed. First, future research should consider employing larger and more diverse samples across different regions of Nigeria in order to enhance the transferability of findings and provide broader insights into intercultural relationship dynamics. Comparative studies across African contexts may also contribute to a deeper understanding of how cultural environments shape intercultural relationships. Second, researchers may benefit from adopting mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative narrative techniques with quantitative measures of intercultural adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Such approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological processes involved in intercultural relationships. Third, practitioners such as marriage counsellors, psychologists, and family therapists should develop culturally sensitive counselling approaches that recognise the unique challenges and strengths associated with intercultural relationships. Interventions that promote open communication, cultural awareness, and mutual respect may help couples navigate cultural differences more effectively.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry explored the lived experiences of intercultural couples and their processes of psychological adjustment. Findings revealed that couples framed their lives through stories of cultural conflict, resilience, hybrid identity construction, and negotiation with external influences. Rather than depicting adjustment as a linear process, participants presented it as an ongoing narrative in which identities, values, and practices were continually renegotiated. This underscores the argument that intercultural marriages are dynamic sites of identity transformation, where partners construct shared meanings through dialogue, compromise, and creative adaptation. Finally, educational and community programs that promote intercultural understanding may help reduce social stigma and increase acceptance of intercultural relationships within diverse societies such as Nigeria.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me the story of how you and your partner met?
2. How would you describe your cultural background and that of your partner?
3. What cultural differences did you notice when your relationship began?
4. Can you describe any challenges you experienced because of these cultural differences?
5. How did you and your partner manage or resolve these cultural differences?
6. In what ways have your families or communities responded to your relationship?
7. How have cultural expectations influenced your relationship or daily life as a couple?
8. Have you experienced any changes in your sense of identity since entering this relationship?
9. Can you describe any positive experiences that have emerged from being in an intercultural relationship?
10. What strategies have helped you maintain understanding and harmony in your relationship?
11. How do you and your partner handle differences in traditions, beliefs, or practices?
12. Looking back, how would you describe the journey of your relationship so far?
13. What advice would you give to other couples who are entering intercultural relationships?

Is there anything else about your experience that you think is important for researchers to understand?