

Patience key to interracial marriage success

By JOAN KORINEK

Differences — without them, a marriage would be awfully boring.

Some marriages, however, have differences — in culture, in race — that can add both to the problems and joys of a marriage.

All the problems of any relationship exist in interracial and intercultural marriages but they are compounded by differences in culture, said Peter Levitov, director of UNL's International Educational Services.

For example, Levitov said, some people may grow up in a culture that places a high value on efficiency and achievement. In contrast, people in another society may place paramount value on harmonious relationships between people, he said.

Each of these values make sense and "may have some universal appeal," Levitov said, but a situation may arise where one value may take priority over the other. In building a harmonious and caring relationship, the spouse who places high value on the relationship may be obtaining his/her goal, while the other spouse may suffer anxiety by having to put off the attainment of a material goal, he said.

Another basic value difference could involve each spouse's conception of marriage. According to Luis Diaz-Perdomo, a psychological counselor at the UNL Counseling Center, interracial and intercultural married couples can have different conceptions of what a marriage is and involves. One spouse may come from a culture where divorce is looked down upon, he said, while the other spouse may see divorce as a common and accepted thing.

Tensions also can develop in an interracial or intercultural marriage

GROOM	TOTAL	BRIDE				
		WHITE	BLACK	INDIAN	MEX.	OTHERS
White	13,624	13,493	14	27	44	46
Black	445	73	366	2	0	4
Indian	49	25	0	20	4	0
Mexican	162	95	1	5	60	1
All Other	70	28	2	0	0	40
TOTAL	14,350	13,714	383	54	108	91

Marriage statistics from the Nebraska Health Data and Statistical Research Office indicate there were 371 interracial and intercultural marriages in 1982. A decade earlier, there were 215. This indicates an increase of about 1 percent in interracial and intercultural marriages.

when one family is opposed to the marriage, Diaz-Perdomo said. This is especially true when a white person and a black person marry, he said.

As a general rule, Diaz-Perdomo said, society is harder on an interracial marriage consisting of a minority male and a majority female. Two possible reasons for this attitude could be that society perceives the male as supposedly the one who decides to marry or that women have stronger ties to the family, he said.

Another aspect of culture is the number of children in each family. Levitov said some cultures value large families while others don't. Also, child-rearing ways can differ, Diaz-Perdomo said.

Communication styles also can differ from culture to culture. One spouse may be talkative while the other is reserved, Levitov said. This difference in communication styles can conflict when the couple disagrees, he said.

"People move from differences to making judgments," Levitov said. If both persons resent each other's words,

then qualitative judgments no longer are being made, he said.

Interracial and intercultural couples need to consider the continuing relationship with their families, Levitov said. One spouse may be independent of the family while the other spouse may have been raised in an extended family where an ongoing family relationship is important, he said.

Because one or both spouses may be a great distance from family members, Diaz-Perdomo said, homesickness may result. People need to decide in advance how often they will need to visit their families.

Although there may be cultural differences for interracial and intercultural couples, Levitov stresses that these differences do not have to cause problems.

Diaz-Perdomo suggests that a person who plans to marry someone from another culture should go through premarital counseling to learn the motive for marrying that person.

"When a person is marrying a cause, you can get into trouble sometimes,"

he said.

To help avoid sources of conflict, Diaz-Perdomo said, each spouse should be conscious of the other's background. But this can be harmful if carried to the extreme. Levitov said that if a spouse changes himself/herself to be just like the other spouse, then the person has given up too much of himself/herself and therefore may suffer an ego loss and lack of identity with any social group.

Interracial and intercultural couples should be aware of the additional problems that can arise from their different walks of life, Levitov said. They should think about what issues may arise and what can be done to prevent them from occurring.

"A successful intermarriage shows the ability of both partners to adjust," Diaz-Perdomo said. "It can be a positive experience."

People who marry intercultural should have no extra problems as long as Americans do not force their beliefs and values upon the foreigner, said Vaughn Robertson Jr., a counselor at the UNL Division of Multi-Cultural Affairs.

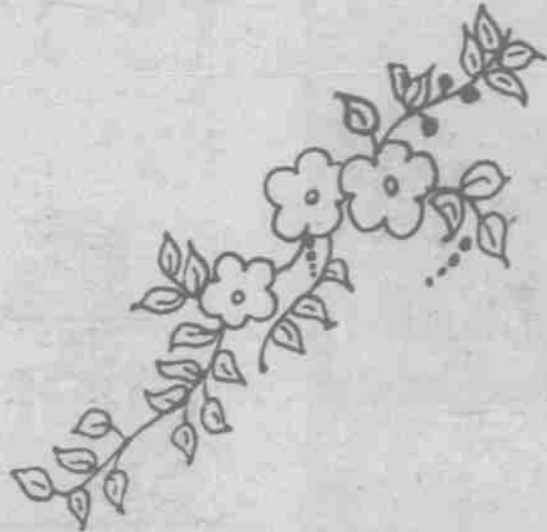
Some cultures have more tensions regarding interracial and intercultural marriages, while other cultures have fewer tensions. Traditionally, intermarriage is more common in Latin cultures, Diaz-Perdomo said, especially in Cuba.

Attitudes in the United States have changed for the better regarding interracial and intercultural marriages, Diaz-Perdomo said. There seems to be less emphasis on the melting pot concept, he said.

If everyone is happy and willing to deal with problems, Robertson said, love will transcend and conquer all.

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