

All-Embracing Nurture: Understanding the Child-Rearing Experience of Muslim Converts from Interracial Marriages in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Interracial marriages are on the rise, leading to an increase in the number of multiracial individuals. However, these marriages are often seen as taboo in Malaysia due to the obstacles that may arise specifically from interracial marriages. The obstacles towards child-rearing practices that Muslim converts have from interracial marriages were centred in this study. One of the reasons stems from differences in racial and cultural backgrounds between interracial married couples that may have unintended effects on a child's development. The aim of this study was to understand how Muslim converts in Malaysia have overcome the challenges of interracial marriages in raising their children. A basic qualitative design utilising semi-structured interviews, that consisted of open-ended questions was utilised, whereby a total of seven participants were recruited. Analysis of this study was done using thematic analysis. Results manifested seven themes: (1) Sincerity to Practise, (2) Cultural Integration of Celebrations, (3) Hybrid Discipline, (4) My Child, My Responsibility, (5) Enculturation, (6) Questionable Faith versus Respect for Harmony, and (7) Incongruence Between Practise and Action that discerned concordance in facilitating child-rearing in Malaysia. These themes are explored and further examined in the study. This study can contribute to the literature in the Malaysian and Asian context on how Muslim converts from interracial marriages raise their children as research conducted in this area is limited. The findings may aid relevant mental health practitioners, such as family or marriage counsellors and psychologists to produce appropriate therapeutic interventions for Muslim converts who may face challenges regarding child-rearing.

Keywords: Muslim converts, interracial marriages, child-rearing, challenges, overcome

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INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, there is an increasing population of multiracial individuals from the number of births through interracial marriages, which are also on the rise (Reddy, 2020). Interracial marriages generate an increase of social coherence within a society and produce novel generations that are accepting of people from various religious and cultural backgrounds, which are considered as plus points to a society (Giok & Sulaiman, 2013). Thus, civilised co-existence between individuals that have different views, beliefs and faith can be reinforced among Malaysians (Rahman & Khambali@Hambali, 2013).

Regrettably, interracial marriages are deliberately dissuaded and seen as taboo in the eyes of the public in Malaysia due to having different beliefs, cultures, and even religions, which leads to societal and filial tension (Dorall, 2019; Reddy, 2020). Bratter and King (2008) reported an elevation in the proportion of interracial couples divorcing by the 10th year of marriage when compared to single-raced couples. Based on the data from 2002

NSFG, Cycle VI, from the year 1980 to 2000 and onwards, the average divorce rate for interracial couples was about 31.2%, whereas for single-raced couples it was approximately 23.6% (Bratter & King, 2008).

It is essential for parents from interracial marriages to hand down their cultural heritage of origin from one generation to the next. However, the legal requirement of conversion of a non-Muslim into Islam when marrying a Muslim may indicate conformity to Malay culture or Islamic identity, which leads to confusion for non-Muslim parents from interracial marriages. Malaysia’s Department of Statistics reported that among interracial marriages in 2018, 48.3% were Muslims and 51.7% were non-Muslims. There was also an increase in the Muslim divorce rate by 1.4% in 2018, whereas non-Muslims had a decline in divorce rate by 4.9% (Tang & Ling, 2019).

In addition, parents in interracial marriages have to deal with further concerns on several aspects of child development, such as differences in their children’s racial identification, physical appearances and cultural factors (Tan, 2012). Although the rearing behaviour of parents is universal, varying goals of upbringing and expectations between parents due to distinct cultural values tend to promote culture-specific parenting strategies within their environment (Whiston & Keller, 2004).

Literature Gap

Several studies have described parents’ views on interracial marriages and their experiences with multicultural parenting. A study done by Xiang and Colson (2018) reported that interracial couples constantly have negotiations on child-rearing such as on the perception of learning, parent-child relationships, and daily practices. However, this study was conducted in the United States and limited studies are focusing on the Asian context, with the closest study done by Kartikasari (2017) in Indonesia on how parents from interracial marriages practise parenting. Findings reported a tendency of parents to give their children freedom of expression and a pattern of a family that is in accordance with a Western culture of parenting.

Limited research has been conducted on parents’ perception of child-rearing in Malaysia, especially in an interracial marriage context where one spouse must convert to Islam by law because the other spouse is a Muslim. Studies that centre on the experiences of Muslim converts from interracial marriages regarding the presence of challenges and how they raise their children are limited, especially from a qualitative approach. Thus, this study aims to find out the experience of Muslim converts from interracial marriages in Malaysia on how they manage child-rearing.

Theoretical Approach

Figure 1 shows Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theoretical framework that states experiences and characteristics of the primary caregiver and child are critical in understanding the development of children (Tan, 2012). The first system, the microsystem, is where each child develops within the context of several other systems. The immediate family unit is an example of a microsystem where there is direct interaction involving the child. The second surrounding system focuses on several roles a child possesses (daughter/son, student, etc.) that are of importance in succeeding within several other microsystems and are known as the mesosystem. An example would be how an incident that occurs at home may affect a child’s progress in school.

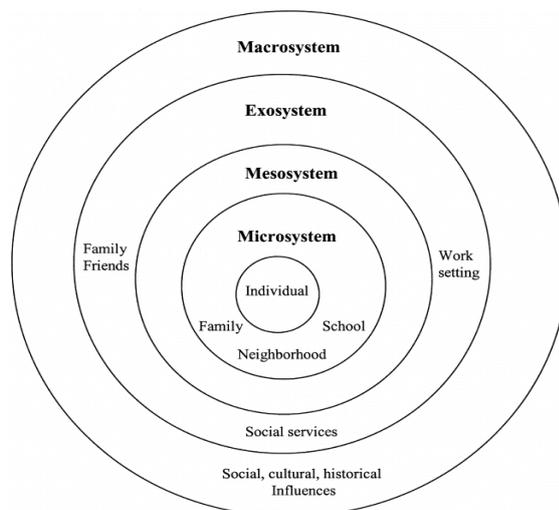


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theoretical framework

The exosystem is the third system that represents environmental effects where the first-hand influence by children is unlikely, but where they are nevertheless affected. For example, children do not have a direct impact on their parents' workplace or their neighbours but do experience indirectly the effects of what occurs to their parents at their workplaces as well as being affected by their neighbours. The final overarching system is the macrosystem, which includes the norms, values and beliefs being manifested through religious/cultural organizations as well as concepts and practices such as social class (Kocayörük, 2016). Therefore, cultural elements of society, in which a child is brought up, will affect the development of the child (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). As per the cause-and-effect concept of the ecological framework, a change in one system will affect all other systems (Kocayörük, 2016).

The spillover hypothesis (Martin, Sturge-Apple, Davies, Romero, & Buckholz, 2017) proposes that negativity from the disturbance in one family subsystem will be carried over into other subsystems. Unease from marital relationships between interracial marriages may be brought over into the parent-child relationship (Pearce-Morris & King, 2012). Extreme feelings of discomfort over disputes on parenting may overcome the self-regulatory capability of parents and give rise to their tendencies of being aggressive during interactions with their children (Martin et al., 2017). Due to endless engrossment over both spouses' dissatisfaction with their parenting decisions, the sense of self-efficacy as parents is diminished (Merrifield & Gamble, 2013). A child's development and well-being will then be negatively affected by unreliable parenting (Pearce-Morris & King, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interracial Marriages and the Link to Child-Rearing Practices

Any individual who marries a Muslim must convert to Islam and a Muslim is not allowed to convert into a different religion in Malaysia (AsiaNews, 2018). Due to marriage, many non-Muslims convert, however, there is no guarantee of high-level marital satisfaction as the process of conversion is complex and provides converts a new identity that involves the change of thoughts, belief system, and values (Yee, Elias, & Abdul-Ghani, 2019). Upon the arrival of a couple's first child in interracial marriages, challenges such as parenting style and religion come to light where cautious negotiations are required. If not, disputes may ensue when a couple is incompetent in deciding on the belief system being handed down to their children (Skowronski et al., 2014).

Parents in Malaysia tend to use an authoritarian parenting style on their children to encourage optimal development (Skowronski et al., 2014; Sumaco, Imrie, & Hussain, 2014). Authoritarian parenting is characterised by using aggressive control or severe punishments to gain obedience from children, without providing explanations for their actions (Bi et al., 2018). In Malaysia, being a primarily collectivistic society, authoritarian parenting is not perceived as negative, whereas in individualistic societies, authoritarian parenting tends to be seen in a negative light since it contradicts the values of an individualistic society (Skowronski et al., 2014). A study done by Lee (2005) found that Koreans preferred to use punishment if their children were unsuccessful in academics, but their Western spouses were lenient, which caused distress to their Korean spouses (Skowronski et al., 2014). With such conflict between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, one parent will tend to be dominant in handling the child's development and this may lead to a disconnected pattern of communication between both parents (Kartikasari, 2017).

Interracial Marriages and the Integration of Cultures

Despite the challenges, interracial couples have their methods of dealing with issues of being in a mixed family. According to an article in The Star Online (2017), an Indian husband and his Chinese wife stated they make their children spend alternate weekends in each of their parents' homes. The married couple raised their children in terms of language, celebrations, and food with equivalent respect to both cultures. The couple wanted to relay the message to their children on how both cultures were important and both families should be given uniform priority (Anantan, 2017). Instead of seeing mixed marriages as clashing between two different cultures, it should be seen as a collaboration between two cultures (Goh, 2016).

Dorall (2019) described a case in Malaysia where a Malay-Muslim husband and his Chinese convert wife had a family that grew to be less traditional and more westernised. They conversed in English more in their daily lives and were not too rigid on old traditions. The couple did not have any conflicts in raising their children and this could be attributable to the fact that they shifted away from traditional rearing and therefore their children never had to be entangled between two divergent cultures.

METHODOLOGY

Design

A basic interpretive qualitative study was conducted to understand how participants constructed meaning in a situation or phenomenon, as well as the perspective and worldviews of the people involved by utilising the

researcher as the instrument. This approach uses an inductive strategy to analyse patterns or common themes from the interviews and observations (Merriam, 2019, 2002). This research utilised a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of a list of open-ended questions as a guide. The main method of data collection was through qualitative interviews, which ensured high-quality meanings constructed by unique individuals who have various methods in interpretation and perception of the world. This method allowed researchers the potential to gain insightful perspectives of Muslim converts to capture detailed information of their experience (Pang, 2018).

Participants

Participants who have met the specified inclusion criteria of the study were recruited voluntarily through online platforms. Those recruited in this study fulfilled all the inclusion criteria below:

- i. Married a Muslim in Malaysia and is a Muslim convert
- ii. Aged 21 years and above
- iii. Have a minimum of one child together who is at least 12 years old
- iv. Able to speak and communicate in basic English
- v. Is a Malaysian or Permanent Resident of Malaysia (through marrying a Malaysian)
- vi. Successfully managed to overcome challenges of the conversion process

Seven participants were recruited based on the inclusion criteria above. Demographic information of participants is provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

Alias	Gender	Age	Race	Years of Marriage	Number of Children
Iago	Male	51	Eurasian	>20	1
Naomi	Female	55	Chinese	>30	4
Sierra	Female	51	Filipino	>20	3
Salvatore	Male	52	Chinese	>20	2
Lucia	Female	65	Chinese	>30	4
Natalia	Female	40	Chinese	>10	2
Daniella	Female	55	Chinese	>20	2

Procedure

Ethical approval from the International Medical University Joint Committee on Research and Ethics was attained before data collection. Participants were recruited voluntarily through an online recruitment form by advertising on social media platforms and through snowball sampling. To ensure the suitability of participants, a screening process by phone call was conducted for each potential participant to confirm that they met all the inclusion criteria. Once consent was obtained, participants were briefed on thirteen interview questions, which were developed based on the spill over hypothesis (Do you think issues between you and your partner have affected your relationship with your child/children?) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theoretical framework (May I know what your social support system is like?). Participants who were comfortable with answering the questions were then recruited. Food vouchers were given at the end of the interviews as a token of appreciation to all participants.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted for two participants, while the rest of the interviews were conducted online for safety precautions through Microsoft Teams as lockdown measures were implemented due to rising cases of COVID-19 infections. The face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded, while online interviews were video-recorded, and each interview lasted for approximately 60-90 minutes. Written notes were recorded down with consent from participants for transcription and analyses. All recorded information was compiled for further analysis with the information of each participant being transcribed on the interview day.

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

Thematic analysis as documented by Braun and Clarke (2006) is a qualitative method used to analyse large qualitative data sets. This method is useful in examining the perspectives of participants, where uncommon insights are to be generated through focusing on similarities and differences. During the analysis of the data, the following six-phased method was used:

1. Researchers familiarised themselves with the data through elongated exposure to the data and registering potential themes of data collected.
2. Initial codes were generated across the entire data set by jotting codes down together with the constant reflection of the codes.
3. Potential themes were searched and identified through codes by creating diagrams and making sense of connections between themes.
4. Identified themes were reviewed by the team of researchers and then refined to reach a consensus on themes developed.
5. Themes were defined through additional analysis and named according to the detailed experience of participants for each theme.
6. Final analysis was conducted on the findings and a report was produced to manifest the analysis.

To establish the trustworthiness of data, three strategies – member check, triangulation, and bracketing were implemented. Member check was done by presenting each participant with transcriptions of their data that was transcribed by the researchers to guarantee the accuracy of the data. Data triangulation was conducted through comparison of the experiences, perspectives and transcripts of all participants until consistency across collected information was reached. Lastly, bracketing was done whereby the primary researcher had continuous reflection with the guidance of the research team to minimise personal biases or beliefs, ensuring the validity of the data. Personal biases that were identified by the primary researcher were: (1) Being an offspring from interracial marriage, where one parent is a Muslim convert and, (2) Being the same religion as the participants. Continuous discussions were held with the research team to manage the aforementioned biases or beliefs.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Precautions were constructed to address potential risks or concerns associated with the study:

1. Ensuring participants’ well-being: Information given by participants was only accessible too participants themselves, and to the research team. Also, a safe and comfortable environment for participants to communicate their experiences was provided.
2. Protecting the identity of participants: The identity of participants was safeguarded by establishing aliases for all participants.

RESULTS

Seven themes emerged from the Muslim converts from interracial marriages in facing the challenges of child-rearing. The seven themes are further categorised into three clusters; some themes mainly involved the individual, some involved the immediate family, and the third cluster involve the extended family/society. Figure 2 shows the relationship between the seven themes and the three clusters.

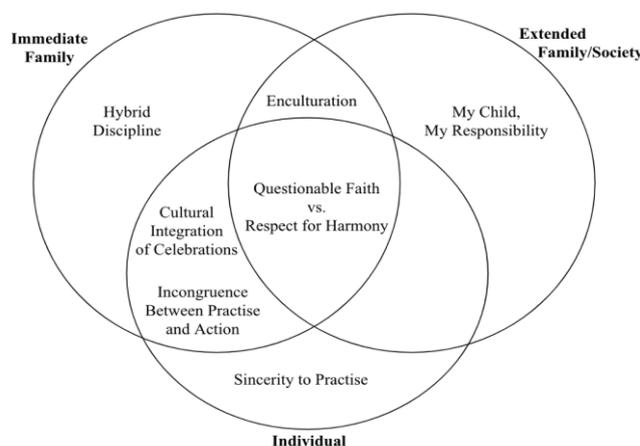


Figure 2: Features of Muslim converts experience in overcoming challenges of child-rearing

A unique characteristic of these themes is that there is an overlap between some of the themes between the three separate clusters. This means that some themes either involve only one cluster, overlaps between two clusters, or overlaps among all three clusters which directly explain the dynamic interaction and effect of one cluster upon other clusters among the individual, immediate family, or extended family/society.

Theme 1: “Sincerity to Practise”

Participants confessed that although their children were born as Muslims, they did not force the religion, beliefs, and values onto their children in hopes their children would practise Islam with sincerity. Lucia mentioned that she wanted her daughter to wear the hijab (headdress) for God, and not anyone else.

“My husband wanted my daughter to wear hijab, but I say no, it must come from her heart. When she is ready to wear, she wears it for Allah.” (Lucia/F/15)

Other participants were concerned that their children would go against the religion, which may disrupt the peace of the household.

“I don't want to be imposing (religion) on my kids. Because (they will) just reject everything, and become rebellious. I realised that peace was better.” (Salvatore/M/14)

Lucia stated that just because someone manifests that they are religious, it does not equate to being holier than others.

“You don't judge people (by) how much they practise on their religion; you judge by character and way of life. Just because you wear a hijab doesn't make you holier than others.”(Lucia/F/15)

Theme 2: “Cultural Integration of Celebrations”

Participants' families celebrated events from both sides of their cultural backgrounds because parents wanted their children to remember that they were the product of two different cultures collaborating into one. Participants also mentioned that their children enjoyed celebrating festivals from both cultures.

“I still celebrate both Chinese New Year and Hari Raya. I also celebrate other Chinese festivals like the Mooncake and Dumpling festival. My children celebrate together with me happily.”(Naomi/F/12)

“I still celebrate Christmas here at home in Malaysia together with my husband. My kids are so happy when it is Christmas. Gift-giving is very different from Hari Raya. When we celebrate Raya, we receive money.”(Sierra/F/13)

Participants did not seem to lose aspects of their cultural identity and managed to pass them down to their children, who were of mixed heritage, leading to a richer cultural experience.

Theme 3: “Hybrid Discipline”

Participants admitted that for disciplinary action, they used what they described as ‘Asian style’ discipline which included elements of aggression and strictness. Concurrently, they also held Western values, such as wanting their children to be independent and direct in their communication.

Salvatore admitted that he becomes aggressive when he disciplined his children.

“When I do scold my children, I'm quite aggressive. I'm really ugly.”(Salvatore/M/14)

However, he also wanted his children to seek solutions by themselves without the need for guidance from parents.

“My wife and I don't try to remedy things that my children can discover themselves when we discipline them.”(Salvatore/M/14)

Participants indicated that they did not hesitate to impose physical punishment on their children to discipline them. An example is Lucia, who used a ‘rotan’ or light rattan cane to punish her children.

“My discipline to my children in those days was ... I use stick-lah, Chinese way. I smack the hand.” (Lucia/F/15)

However, consistent with the theme of 'hybrid discipline', she also raised her children to speak up for themselves.

"My children question, they answer back, they argue with you. This is how I bring them up to be. Always to be able to question." (Lucia/F/I5)

Participants portrayed a disciplinary style that held elements from both Asian and Western cultures. The reason being as reported by Iago was the recognition that discipline using the Asian way exclusively was not effective.

"Being confrontational always never works-lah. If you want a sustainable change in his behaviour, you have to have him on your side rather than confront." (Iago/M/I1)

Theme 4: "My Child, My Responsibility"

Some participants admitted that they were vexed when a third party questioned their parenting approaches. Daniella conveyed displeasure at the insensitivity of her sister-in-law who questioned her on the decision to include a Chinese name for her daughter.

"One of my sisters-in-law asked, 'Why do you want to give your daughter a Chinese name? She is the daughter of a Malay man?' I said, 'Of course, her mother is Chinese. That's my right to put any name for my kids. You have no right to comment about that. They are my kids, not yours!'" (Daniella/F/I7)

Participants mentioned that they were no longer bothered by interference from third parties because parents were the ones responsible for their children, not anyone else. Therefore, comments from third parties such as from neighbours were disregarded, as stated by Sierra.

"My children are mine. They are my responsibility. Why should they question my actions? I respect them, so they should respect us." (Sierra/F/I3)

Theme 5: "Enculturation"

Some participants admitted that the differences in language and way of living from two varying cultures led to language or cultural barriers due to insufficient enculturation, which was to mingle into and maintain the norms of both parents' cultural heritage.

Naomi revealed that her sons were exposed to the Malay culture, which is her husband's culture, hence why her sons did not manage to learn Mandarin, which is a language from her own culture.

"Both my sons don't know how to speak Mandarin because they get along with Malays when they were young. When I speak Mandarin, they turn to their father and ask, 'Dad, what is mom saying?'" (Naomi/F/I2)

Sierra confessed that her children were unfamiliar with the paternal side of the family who was Malays because her children were different compared to their Malay cousins, making it hard for them to socialise.

"My kids are more modern. They don't know how to relate or interact with their cousins from my husband's side." (Sierra/F/I3)

Other participants incorporated their own cultural heritage with their spouses' cultural heritage while raising their children to ensure that their children would be able to communicate with both paternal and maternal sides of the family and would be familiar with the different ways of living.

"Whenever we're back at my husband's hometown, my children and I will follow the Malay culture, if we're back at my hometown, we follow the Chinese culture. My children have no issues communicating with their Chinese cousins because they know how to speak Mandarin." (Natalia/F/I6)

"When my child was with his grandparents, he would be in the Malay culture, when he was with us, it would be Malaysian (Eurasian and Malay) culture." (Iago/M/I1)

Participants who exposed their children to both sides of their cultural heritage and educated their children on the different spoken languages seemed to be better at enculturation.

Theme 6: “Questionable Faith versus Respect for Harmony”

Despite opposition from pious Muslims who stated that it was against the religion to celebrate events like Christmas or Deepavali, participants encouraged their children to celebrate such events. Participants themselves have non-Muslim family members and to them, not allowing their children to celebrate events outside of Islam was a sign of disrespect.

Sierra expressed disapproval for Muslims who impudently rejected going to non-Muslim houses.

“Some Muslims don't want to go to Chinese or Indian houses because they eat non-halal. I told my children, ‘Don't mind’ because when we go back to the Philippines, we don't say, ‘We won't eat.’ When you say that to your friends, you're not respecting their family.”
(Sierra/F/13)

Some participants' manifestation of respect is through enjoying the celebrations as a means to not disrupt the peace among the various races.

“If you're a non-Muslim guest in the Malay household, and there's an old lady there, you greet her and kiss her hand. If I was non-Muslim and that's what everybody else is doing, just follow the flow, why disrupt?” (Salvatore/M/14)

Likewise, Daniella celebrates events together with her friends to maintain harmony.

“Every year, we go to our Indian friend's house to celebrate Deepavali, no problem. We are Malaysian, we're multiracial, isn't it? I greet my friend to cheer him up, that's all.”
(Daniella/F/17)

Participants brought their children up to celebrate occasions with individuals from other religions and ethnicities as a form of respect and to not disrupt the harmony between devotees of differing religions.

Theme 7: “Incongruence Between Practise and Action”

Participants exhibited incongruence stemming from the differences in their private and public images, whereby in public settings, they were aware of the necessity to conform and comply with stricter Islamic practices, in comparison to private settings.

Daniella revealed that when she is at home with immediate family members, her daughters and she would dress in a way that does not adhere to proper Muslim attire.

“We wear shorts at home, sleeveless, but once we step out from the door of our house, we don't do that. We wear hijab, long sleeves.” (Daniella/F/17)

Although relatives questioned the attire at home, she attributed the behaviour to the scorching weather of Malaysia.

“My daughter told me her cousins said wearing shorts is very sexy and not appropriate, but it's not like we want to wear sexy, it's very warm.” (Daniella/F/17)

Similarly, Naomi expressed similar incongruence towards religious practice for herself and her children.

“I cannot wear short sleeves but when at work, it's warm and long sleeves are not convenient. My children don't pray or don't wear the tudung (headdress) often, but I will try to instill awareness that they cannot be too open.” (Naomi/F/12)

Although the presence of incongruence was displayed, participants made sure that the actions did not stray too far away from Islamic practices through a constant reminder of their Muslim identity to the self and their children.

DISCUSSION

Seven themes emerged from the study and all themes appear to be crucial in the child-rearing practices of parents from all marriages, except for the themes, “Enculturation” and “Cultural Integration of Celebrations”, which were specific to the child-rearing practices of Muslim converts from interracial marriages.

Sincerity to Practise

Participants acknowledged the fact that their children were not necessarily religious because they found it pointless if their children practised Islam regularly, but their heart was not into it. The research found that it was impossible for Muslims to be successful in accomplishing the message of Islam as commanded unless they were sincere enough to practise (Engku-Alwi, Abubakar, & Subki, 2014).

Participants admitted that the Muslim parent and convert parent did have disputes on religion as a topic, which brought upon negative feelings in the relationship, but realised they should let their children absorb the religion naturally to ensure their children’s well-being. This is in accordance with the spill over hypothesis whereby negative emotions between married couples would be carried over into the relationship between parent and child (Martin et al., 2017). When being forced, children tended to reject the religion. Hence, parents allowed their children to practise Islam at their own pace but emphasised the fact that it had to be sincere as it would purge impure actions of wishing to satisfy oneself and others. If the performed action was to pleasure an individual, worship would not be validated nor righteous as they are directed to attain humdrum motives (Al-Islam.org, 1995-2020).

Cultural Integration of Celebrations

Cultural integration is a fusion of two or more cultures (Boski, 2008). Goh (2016) reported that in Malaysia, mixed families produced great opportunities for their children to celebrate cultural diversity. Participants and their spouses are from different cultures which bestows their children with a richer cultural experience. All participants celebrated Hari Raya and maintained the celebrations of their own cultures, such as Christmas, Chinese New Year, etc. with their families. The participants changed only their religion and not a race, therefore the cultural and racial aspects of identity still existed. Participants communicated that their children enjoyed the celebrations since each festival had differing customs and styles. Furthermore, Giok and Sulaiman (2013) found that in Muslim-non-Muslim marriages, cultural elements from the non-Muslim side were integrated to a varying degree as long as the elements did not conflict with Islamic teachings, such as festive cultural practices like giving and receiving of red envelopes. Children from mixed families should learn from their parents to appreciate their mixed heritage so that they could enjoy the best of both worlds (Goh, 2016). Participants ensured that their children, albeit being Muslim, never forgot that they were born to parents from different races, which led to their unique identity of being mixed.

Hybrid Discipline

Hybrid is to have an amalgamation of two or more different elements (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), therefore hybrid discipline is combining both Asian (collectivistic) and Western (individualistic) elements in terms of discipline. Collectivistic and individualistic elements are part of the macrosystem, and changes in the macrosystem will affect the microsystem where a child is developing, through family interactions as per Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theoretical framework (Ettelka & Mahoney, 2017). How parents aim to manage unacceptable behaviours and encourage acceptable behaviours displayed by children notably impacts their children’s mental health (Teoh, 2004). Participants recognised that during discipline, only using elements from an Asian culture such as demanding for obedience, tended to receive negative responses from their children; therefore the additional use of elements from Western cultures, such as the freedom of speech was incorporated to manage such responses. Research done in Malaysia reported that coercive discipline with harsh punishment would damage the development of children and is correlated with problematic behaviours (Kanan, Arokiasamy, & Ismail, 2018). It is not unusual for Asian parents to have individualistic values as research found that individuals growing up in Asian societies like Malaysia can hold individualistic values (striving for individual achievement) and those growing up in Western societies can be high in collectivistic values (collaborating with family members) (Baharudin, & Keshavarz; Rumpf, 2016; Skowronski et al., 2014). All participants, despite raising their children in an Asian country, portrayed a common Western value, which was to raise their children to be vocal with their matters and this was revealed to be effective in satisfying both parent and child.

My Child, My Responsibility

According to Breheny, Stephens and Spilsbury (2013), when grandparents or in-laws interfere with parenting behaviours, they are viewed as dominant and controlling. Participants verbalised their irritation when individuals questioned, in a negative manner, on matters that were relevant to their children since parents should be the ones to make the final decision. When someone acts like a third parent and begins making decisions for children who are not theirs, it undermines the parent’s abilities. Extended family members are in the exosystem where children

do not have a direct impact. Nevertheless, if changes occur between extended family members in the exosystem, it will influence the roles of the child as a relative, which will impact family interactions in the microsystem (Kocayörük, 2016). According to Sheppard (2018), children would end up in bewilderment on household rules and start to question who is in charge and would affect the actual parents' relationship with their children in a negative way. Participants however did share that the words from other people were not enough to affect the relationship with their children because, at the end of the day, non-parents were only outsiders. They were the least bothered because third parties played minimal roles in their lives and their children's lives. Participants were clear on what they should do as parents and concluded that parents would be the ones to know what was best for their own children. Therefore, it was essential for parents to have the final word in parenting and to set clear boundaries for their own families (Bruce-Eddings, 2020; Sheppard, 2018).

Enculturation

Enculturation is the procedure where individuals are mingled into and maintain the norms of their cultural heritage (Kim & Alamilla, 2019; Sun, Hoyt, Brockberg, Lam, & Tiwari, 2016). Enculturation happens during childhood and is assisted by parents' efforts to socialise their children racially and ethnically (Ferguson, Costigan, Clarke, & Ge, 2016). The ideologies of culture within a macrosystem are being handed down to influence the microsystem in which the child is developing. The children of the participants were exposed to two cultures from childhood. The amount of exposure and education given to these children would affect the children's perceptions of how familiar they were with both cultures. Participants must spend an effort to ensure that their children are familiar with all cultures rather than being familiar with only one. The reason being is that when one culture is preferred over the other, both participants and their children would not be able to communicate with the less preferred culture, as reported by participants. This then becomes a cultural or language barrier that could have been prevented from the start. Research reported that being enculturated into a cultural heritage allows for individuals to establish connections with family history and to develop ethnic identities (Ferguson et al., 2016). The children of the participants have two cultural identities, one from the mother and one from the father. Enculturation helps them to connect with cultures from both parents, to appreciate heterogeneity and aids to strengthen cultural identity and family communication, thereby promoting the well-being of children (Ferguson et al., 2016).

Questionable Faith versus Respect for Harmony

Participants reported that they were reprimanded on their identity as Muslim because they should not allow their children to celebrate the festivals of other religions as pious Muslims declared, 'It is against Islam'. Research by Abdul-Hamid (2015) stated that certain individuals claiming to be the protectors of Islam voiced that cues of religious pluralism (a belief that faith is subjected to interpretation and there is not a single way, but several ways of practicing faith) being recognised jeopardised the faith of Muslims, which then leads to a questionable Muslim identity (Ibrahim, 2015). Participants defended themselves and their children, stating that they were celebrating the events culturally and not religiously, therefore their faith was never compromised. Besides that, harmony among Malaysian citizens may only continue if the newer generation in Malaysia appreciates the culture of other religions (Rahman & Khambali@Hambali, 2013). Participants noted that if citizens of Malaysia only remained within their circle of religion or race, it would disrupt peace and harmony because Malaysian citizens are multiracial and multireligious (Abubakar, 2013). Participants complained that if their children did not celebrate events outside of Islam, they were disrespecting their non-Muslim family members and that they refuse to accept for their children to be raised in such away. Parents need to know where they stand to expel negativity between spouses that could spill into the subsystem of parent-child relationships (Pearce-Morris & King, 2012).

Incongruence Between Practise and Action

Rogers (1959) explained incongruence as being in a position of internal perplexity that generates disagreeing or unfathomable behaviours (Proctor, 2017). Participants had sufficient knowledge to realise that as Muslims, their actions of not fully adhering to the rules of Islam would be reprimanded by other Muslims. This could in turn create feelings of displeasure for the convert parent and affect the relationship between spouses. If arguments arose, the parent's unenthusiasm will seep into the interactions between their children and themselves, which will implicate the children. Nevertheless, participants had their rationale to justify their actions of non-compliance. According to Hoffstaedter (2015), Muslim individuals in Malaysia aspire to be good followers of 'true' Islam, which leads them to aim for and partake in the inner battle of self-enhancement. These individuals may then realise their own inability to accomplish such aspirations and end up assuming a scheme of superficially obeying Islamic rules, in which they manifest religious tasks that were mandatory in the eyes of the public but go against these actions elsewhere especially where it is not mandatory. This relates to the fact that participants and their children adhere to the rules of Islam in the presence of others and public view but allowing for much more flexibility when among close individuals such as among the immediate family. This demonstrates how participants developed the behaviour of rationalizing their actions. That being said, participants assured that their families did not go against the rules of Islam.

CONCLUSION

This study manifests that Muslim converts from interracial marriages were faced with confusion and distress during certain moments in raising their mixed children, but were able to push through the difficulties by finding a happy medium where both parent and child were content while doing one's utmost to absorb knowledge and maintain a duty to the Islamic religion. The participants' experiences were explained by the seven themes, which manifested the features of child-rearing, challenges underwent, and how participants managed such challenges.

Nonetheless, there are limitations to be addressed in this study. Information gathered from participants during interviews was mostly focused on the maternal perspectives of child-rearing, which led to a lack of information obtained from paternal perspectives. Other potential participants may have had their own rich experiences, however, they may not have been able to participate in this study due to being unable to communicate this experience in English. Participants generally spoke about the challenges of child-rearing from their perspectives and rarely about the challenges faced by their children growing up as mixed. Therefore, it is recommended that future research inquire about the challenges experienced based on the perspectives of children through conducting interviews with children from interracial families to gain insight into the challenges faced while growing up.

In conclusion, child-rearing in interracial marriages does not vary much from child-rearing in single-raced marriages. The additional distinction was the combination of two cultures, one from each parent, that was incorporated into child-rearing, which allowed children the opportunity to comprehend, appreciate, and embrace their mixed cultural heritage. With that being said, there is no right or wrong answer to parenting; it is a continuous process of trial and error with a focus on nurturing what is best and what is right for each unique family.

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