

## **Intercultural Parenting and Relationships: Challenges and Rewards**

**Dharam Bhugun (2019)**

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Dr Dharam Bhugun is an Australian Psycho-Social Therapist and Counsellor, author and writer, as well as a Guest Lecturer at Southern Cross University, Gold Coast, Australia. His latest book *Intercultural Parenting and Relationships: Challenges and Rewards*, provides a balanced overview of the challenges as well as the strengths and resiliencies of intercultural parents living in Australia. It explores the couples' meaning-making process of everyday interactions and their own experiences of cultural differences. The book is based on an exploratory study focusing on intercultural couples living in Australia and considers the current academic knowledge and understanding regarding intercultural couples. The book provides an excellent overview of the literature and theory in this area and convincingly unpacks many of the key perspectives thus helping to identify gaps in the existing research.

Dr Bhugun's own research considers a wide range of mixed marriages, including inter-cultural, inter-racial, inter-ethnic, inter-national, and inter-faith couples and parents, and explores how they bring up their children and manage their relationships. Through the reader-friendly structure of the book, Bhugun explores the challenges and benefits these couples encounter, and the strategies they use to negotiate their differences and belongingness. By portraying the lived experiences of these couples and parents, Bhugun considers contextual and external factors such as individual and personality traits, the environment, gender and power, religion, socio-economic status, extended family, friends, and diasporic communities. This book also moves the reader from beyond the usual negative stereotypes and assumptions in society about intercultural relationships and mixed children, to a more vibrant and balanced representation of both the challenges and benefits of being in a mixed relationship. This exploration of the challenges as well as the strengths and resiliencies of intercultural parents, is refreshing, and as convincingly argued by Bhugun, remains an under-researched field within this topic area. Furthermore, Bhugun focuses on the parents' own experiences of cultural differences rather than what the experiences 'should be'. He recognises that the couples' experiences will vary depending on their individual background, culture and upbringing. This approach is in my opinion, the main benefit of this book. The author's focus is on the couples' relationship, rather than the couple's relationship with their wider community and the way communities perceive such couples.

As Bhugun argues, earlier studies of intercultural couples, focused on a specific group of ethnic, cultural or religious composition of the couple. For example, white – black, white – Hispanic or Christian – Muslim. Such selection has provided a limited insight into the relationships of all

intercultural marriages. For this study, Bhugun recruited participants to represent a rich mix of various ethnicities, cultures and religions. This allowed him to generate a rich description of how intercultural couples manage their cultural differences, as well as to recognise that intercultural couples are keen to make their experiences positive by acknowledging their differences in their interpersonal domains, negotiating, respecting and accommodating each other's parenting styles, practices and relational dynamics.

The book provides the couples' intimate testimonies, bringing rich and very individual experiences, which in return offer innovations in theory and practice. The findings of this study can be utilised by counsellors, therapists, as well as social workers to increase their understanding of intercultural relationships and parenting. The literature review and the findings of this study have revealed the challenges and benefits of intercultural marriages and parents, it is therefore crucial that practitioners explore both these dynamics, so they are better informed and more able to strengthen their clients.

Although Bhugun's study is greatly beneficial in our understanding of inter-cultural couples' distinctive life challenges and strategies, it is based on the multi-cultural Australian context, which might not be easily transferable to other parts of the World. Additionally, the selection of the study participants is based on couples where one partner is native and therefore familiar with the Australian context and culture. It could be beneficial to explore how couples where both partners are migrants, deal with the challenges of their own culture, as well as the culture and context of the country they had chosen to live in.

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