

TOPICS OF CONFLICT WITHIN INTERETHNIC COUPLES:
THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
Of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major Department:
Human Development and Family Science

June 2012

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University

Graduate School

Title

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which gender, ethnicity and the interaction of gender and ethnicity impact reports of conflict for interethnic couples. This study focuses on differences in reports of conflict by examining topics of conflict including: division of household labor, children, financial management, leisure, sex, love and affection, religion, drinking, other women or men, and in-laws. Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS- B) were used to examine the roles that gender, ethnicity and their interaction play in marital conflict within interethnic couples. The results indicated significant gender differences with men reporting more conflict about chores, money, affection, leisure, and other women and men. Significant ethnic differences were reported about sex, money, chores and affection. Findings indicate unique interactions between gender and ethnicity suggesting greater conflict about chores in Minority wife/White husband pairings and greater conflict about sex in White wife/Minority husband pairings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee (Dr. Fuller-Iglesias, Dr. Burnett, Dr. Fitzgerald and Dr. McGeorge) for their assistance with this project. I would also like to thank my parents for all of the financial and emotional support they have given me during the last three years. They repeatedly adjusted their schedules and became like a second set of parents to my children. I would also like to thank my kids (Mady, Izzy, Elly and Sophie) for their patience and support. Mady and Izzy have grown up over the last couple of years and Elly and Sophie were babies when I started school. I can't wait to be mom again and have time for school functions and volunteering for field trips. Last of all, I would also like to thank my cohort sisters for all their support because they became like family.

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INTRODUCTION

Interethnic marriage has historically been a topic of controversy. Miscegenation laws explicitly denied interracial heterosexual couples the right to marry until the Supreme Court revisited the issue in the 1967 case of *Loving v. Virginia* and deemed these laws unconstitutional (Soliz, Thorson & Rittenour, 2009). Despite legal changes, research suggests that challenges persist for interethnic couples (Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2009).

Research focused on conflict in interethnic couples indicates that these couples are more likely to divorce than mono-racial white couples (Bratter & King, 2008). However, Zhang and Hook (2009) found that the risk of marital dissolution for Black/White couples was not higher than the risk for mono-racial Black couples. The risk of divorce was similar to divorce rates for the higher risk mono-racial group across all interethnic pairings. Therefore, the risk of divorce was based on the highest risk partner. Previous research has indicated that ethnic minority individuals are at greater risk for divorce, which may be a result of stresses related to societal racial discrimination (e.g. poverty, access to services, institutional discrimination, etc.) (Bratter & King, 2008). This research indicates that the risk of divorce for interethnic couples may be related to macro-level risks such as poverty and discrimination which are experienced more often by ethnic minorities rather than the status as an interethnic couple.

Despite higher divorce rates (Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2009; Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002), the number of interethnic marriages has steadily increased in recent decades and now accounts for 7.4% of all heterosexual marriages (Soliz et al., 2009). Interethnic marriages include individuals with differing racial and/or ethnic identities. Although research typically focuses on interracial couples, interracial unions are only a subset of interethnic unions (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). The term interethnic acknowledges that

culture extends beyond race and includes individuals with a Hispanic ethnic identity (a distinct ethnic group who may come from any racial background).

The number of interethnic marriages has been increasing, but the rates of intermarriage differ by ethnicity. Although certain ethnicities account for large absolute numbers of intermarriages, these numbers can be deceiving. A large percentage of Asians, Native Americans and Hispanics intermarry, but the actual number of couples that include a partner of each ethnicity varies based on the ethnic population. For example, most interethnic unions include one White partner, but White individuals intermarry at a rate of only two percent (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010). Native Americans traditionally have high rates of intermarriage and intermarry at a rate of 57% in 2000, but represent only 1% of the U.S. population and therefore represent a lower proportion of interethnic marriages when compared to other ethnicities (Lee & Edmonston, 2006). Asians represent 4% of the U.S. population, but intermarry at a rate of 14% percent (Wright, Houston, Ellis, Holloway & Hudson, 2003). The Black population intermarries at a rate of only 5% percent (Fryer, 2007), continuing to be underrepresented in intermarriages. Hispanic/White interethnic marriages are relatively common and occur five times more often than Black/White marriages (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010). In addition, Hispanic individuals are much more likely to intermarry if they are third generation Hispanics in the U.S. (Lee & Edmonston, 2006), but continue to have low intermarriage rates with other minorities (Gonsoulin & Fu, 2010). Hence, the demographic statistics demonstrate there is great diversity in the ethnic combinations within interethnic marriages, though most interethnic marriages include one White partner.

Although ethnicity influences intermarriage rates, gender appears to have an effect as well. Black men report approval of interethnic relationships at higher rates than Black women

(Jacobson & Johnson, 2006). According to Lewis & Ford-Robertson (2010), Black men also consistently have higher rates of intermarriage (9.7%) than Black women (4.1%). Women account for a majority of Asian intermarriage and most often marry White men (Wright et al., 2003). Asian women intermarry at a rate of 21.6% while Asian men intermarry at a rate of 9.5% (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010). However, gender does not appear to affect intermarriage rates for Whites, Native Americans or Hispanics (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010). Although rates of intermarriage appear to be affected by the unique interaction of gender and ethnicity, little is known about how these individuals function as a couple and negotiate conflict within the relationship. The role that the intersection of gender and ethnicity play in relationship conflict is not fully understood. Because research on conflict within interethnic relationships has been limited to small qualitative studies, this study seeks to examine the potentially unique conflict dynamics within a representative sample of interethnic couples.

The current study seeks to employ an ecological theoretical perspective to examine the roles that gender, culture, and their interaction play in marital conflict within interethnic couples. The current study examines differences on each of ten topics of conflict assessed in the marital conflict scale of the ECLS-B: division of household labor, children, financial management, leisure, sex, love and affection, religion, drinking, other women or men, and in-laws. Comparisons are made between men and women within interethnic couples as well as between ethnic minority and white partners of these interethnic couples. Finally, this study addresses whether the intersection of ethnicity and gender within interethnic couples predicts conflict levels.

History of Interethnic Conflict Research

Despite the increase of interethnic marriage in recent years, little is known about dynamics within these relationships. Quantitative research on couple conflict has traditionally focused on mono-racial couples often addressing cultural distinctions by comparing ethnic minority couples to White couples (Orbuch et al., 2002). There has been a focus on cultural distinctions between couples, but little attention has been paid to the cultural distinctions within the couple. Qualitative research on interethnic couples has focused on the formation of individual ethnic identity within an interethnic union. This research explores how couples learn to negotiate with larger social systems (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006), but has not addressed how issues within the larger systems impact the couple. Hence, the focus of conflict is conceptualized as either an internal individual conflict about ethnicity or a conflict between the couple and the system. The couple is rarely the unit of analysis in current qualitative research and the intersection of ethnicity and gender is infrequently addressed in quantitative research. Therefore, addressing various levels of interaction is necessary to expand the research literature on interethnic couple conflict and assist clinicians working with interethnic couples in therapy settings.

The increase in interethnic marriage signals that clinicians will begin seeing more interethnic couples in their practices. The current research literature on marital conflict does not adequately address the macro-level stressors, such as racism, that interethnic couples face. In addition, literature focused specifically on interethnic couples as a group may not address the specific marital conflict experienced by the couple. Marital conflict research with interethnic couples would benefit from including both macro- and micro-level factors in the research.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Theory

An ecological systems theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of recognizing the impact of the larger social context for the individual, or in the current case the couple. Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1998; 2007) identifies four levels of environment that influence individual development and family processes: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. For the purposes of this study, the marital dyad represents the microsystem, or the principal context in which human development takes place. The mesosystem encompasses the interactions between the couple and the other principal settings in which they engage (such as extended family or work settings). The exosystem includes external environments in which one member of the dyad participates but the other does not (e.g., the spouse's work place). The macrosystem then is the broad ideological values, norms and institutional patterns of a particular culture (e.g., racism, legal barriers). As individuals of distinct ethnic groups, interethnic couples bring values and experience from distinct macrosystems to their relationship. When applying this ecological perspective to interethnic marriage, it becomes evident that an essential and unique task for interethnic couples is negotiating these environmental differences, particularly with regard to this macrosystem. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the importance of examining contextual differences, particularly in gender and ethnicity/culture when examining marital conflict within interethnic marriage.

Marital conflict in general is influenced by both macro- and micro-level factors. However, conflict occurring within interethnic marriage is often affected by factors between and within macro-level systems such as a history of miscegenation laws, lack of social support,

cultural values and obligations to extended family. Micro-level, individual factors such as attachment style, age, gender, and differences in working models from the family of origin also affect couple interactions (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry & Rubin, 2010; Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman & Larsen-Rife, 2008; Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). Moreover, macro- and micro- level factors may interact to produce a variety of opportunities and barriers for individuals within interethnic unions. The complexity of negotiating interethnic unions has often been cited as a possible reason for the high rates of dissolution and divorce (Lucas, Wendorf, Imamoglu, Shen, Parkhill, Weisfeld, & Weisfeld, 2004).

Homogamy vs. Intersectionality

There are many benefits for couples with similar backgrounds. Research indicates that homogamy of characteristics, values, and interests provide benefits for the couple and increase the stability of intimate relationships (Kang Fu, 2008; Lucas et al., 2004). Homogamy refers to “marriage of persons from the same economic, social, or cultural categories, [which] facilitates agreement and understanding, and should therefore result in shared interests and life goals” (Thomson, 1990, p. 131). In addition, homogamous unions are more fertile (Kang Pu, 2008) and report reduced levels of conflict (Lucas et al, 2004). Theorists have extrapolated this research to suggest that lower levels of conflict may be a result of a shared cultural background which increases the likelihood of agreement. Zhang and Van Hook (2009) state that “with respect to marital stability, the basic assumption of the homogamy perspective is that couples with similar characteristics have fewer misunderstandings, less conflict, and enjoy greater support from extended family and friends” (p. 96). Thus, from this perspective, the expectation is that an interethnic couple would have more potential topics of conflict due to their lack of a shared cultural background and social support.

Similar backgrounds and worldviews may assist couples with negotiating conflict by providing models of acceptable relationships within the community (Ellison, Burdette & Wilcox, 2010). Religious and social systems reinforce homogeneity by providing or withdrawing the support necessary for successful couple relationships (Ellison, Burdette & Wilcox, 2010). Hence, these couples appear to have a more cohesive understanding of social expectations for marital relationships in their context.

In addition, the homogamy perspective suggests that conflict within interethnic couples may be a result of a societal bias towards homogamy. Partner choice and rates of intermarriage may be impacted by the varying levels of support and acceptance given to minority groups by the majority group which may be based on a social perception of similarity. Lewis and Ford-Robertson (2010) stated that “racial and ethnic groups perceived to be socially different from the dominant group will encounter more barriers to social acceptance” (p. 408). Although the homogamy perspective suggests that interethnic couples may have more conflict in general, this perspective has not, as of yet, been used to describe relationship dynamics in depth. For instance, though the homogamy perspective suggests overall differences in conflict, more specific conclusions about the types of conflict within interethnic marriage have not been confirmed.

While homogamy is a valuable perspective, it is limited in that it does not fully address the complexity of interethnic marriages. Interethnic relationships are more complex than just the interaction of the two cultures; heterosexual “marriage is a gendered institution” (Timmer & Orbuch, 2001), and gender roles must be considered when researching conflict within interethnic couples. Each individual experiences a unique combination of privilege and oppression based on personal attributes such as ethnicity and gender (Johnson, 2006). For example, although all women experience sexism, ethnicity and gender intersect differently for minority women and

White women (hooks, 1984). Minority women are often marginalized in regard to relationship and conflict issues in fear that “the statistics might permit opponents to dismiss domestic violence as a minority problem” (Crenshaw, 1997, p. 536). Men of color may experience male privilege in addition to the oppression derived from ethnic identity (Mitchem, 2004). Individual experiences are influenced by the individual’s position within the social context and impact couple relationships.

Expectations for fulfilling the male and female role may differ based on ethnicity. Men of color must learn to negotiate “racialized masculinity” which creates opportunities for privileges within the home as well as multiple oppressions faced in social contexts (Ferree, 2010, p. 429). A woman “may discover that her gender identity or her gender politics conflict with those of her partner’s culture” (Hill & Thomas, 2002). White women, in particular, often feel pressure to conform to the male partner’s cultural expectations to avoid appearing racist or dominating (Luke, 1994). Because the relationship is heterosexual, gender roles are not assumed to be in need of adjustment and race becomes the focus of negotiation (Hill & Thomas, 2002). Although individual traits differ, ethnicity largely influences the socialization of each gender which includes expectations for behavior and access to privileges (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew & Freeman, 2010). Individuals must learn to negotiate not only with their partner but within their social context as well. Culture is conceptualized as a macro-level factor which affects micro-level interactions in marital conflict.

While the homogamy/heterogamy perspective is focused on macro-level factors and views the couple in relation to their environment, the intersectionality perspective focuses on smaller levels of analysis. Rather than compare similarities and differences, intersectionality concepts acknowledge that each individual and each couple is positioned differently in society.

The intersectionality perspective acknowledges that it is impossible to fully understand experience based on one aspect of an individual's positionality (Johnson, 2006). Hurtado (2003) notes that importance of understanding how context influences personal identity, while later research incorporates a lifespan perspective, which has shown that context may be influenced by time (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008). Intersectionality theorists propose that an individual's experience with privilege and discrimination is based on the intersection of identity categories such as ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender (Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2009).

Research on interethnic couples continues to focus on ways the couple negotiates interactions with outside systems (Hill & Thomas, 2002; Killian, 2002). However, little attention has been paid to the micro-level gender interactions that traditionally influence research on couple relationships. Therefore, it is important to expand the research concerning interethnic couples to include interactions within the marital dyad, rather than making inferences about marital relationships based on macro-level interactions focused on race or ethnicity alone.

Silverstein (2006) noted that researchers often exclude intersections based on gender, sexual orientation, and class to focus on race and ethnicity. Therefore, the complexity of intersections is often overlooked and "the old paradigm of looking at one domain, rather than several, remains firmly in place" (Silverstein, 2006, p. 23). Without addressing the intersection of gender and ethnicity, researchers risk excluding the female experience (Reid, 2002). Although there is a wealth of research on conflict within intimate relationships, there are two distinct sets of literature exploring gender and cultural differences separately. Interethnic heterosexual marriage is a unique relational context in which the unique interaction of gender and ethnicity can be addressed.

Marital Conflict

The study of marital relationships has primarily focused on relationship satisfaction and conflict styles (Braithwaite, Selby, & Fincham, 2011; Gottman, & Levenson, 2000). However, satisfaction and conflict impact outcomes for both the relationship and individual. The ecological approach provides valuable insight for examining conflict within marriage by emphasizing the importance of examining the entire context. The continued focus on individual micro-level factors does not account for the larger contextual factors which influence conflict within marriage. Integrating the effects of macro-level factors such as racism, poverty and relationships with larger social systems is especially relevant when examining conflict within interethnic marriages.

Ecological theory emphasizes the interaction between systems and indicates that changes within one system ultimately impact every other system. For example, stress within the marriage affects the individuals. Marriages with high levels of conflict more often end in divorce, and individuals within these marriages experience higher levels of depression (Whitton & Whisman, 2010). In addition, the relationship between parents and children has been shown to be affected by conflict (Mitnick, Heyman, & Smith Slep, 2009). Despite possible negative consequences, conflict is a natural part of couple relationships (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003), and the ability to resolve conflict is a predictor of marital quality for men and women (Wheeler, Updegraff & Thayer, 2010). Past research indicates that individuals tend to engage in less conflict when they feel they are being treated fairly and the marital relationship functions as they expected (Matthews & Clark, 1982). Expectations for marriage are largely influenced by cultural patterns and are sustained by the couples' interaction with the larger social systems. However, more recent research on dual-earner families indicates that expectations for marital relationships may

be changing (Johnson & Zabriskie, 2008). This shift may be related to the renegotiation of traditional gender roles and the necessity of managing work and family responsibilities (Higgins, Duxbury & Lyons, 2010). Shifts within the family ultimately impact aspects of the macrosystem (social policy, gender roles and work/home boundaries) and create conflict within the larger system as well. Because systems attempt to maintain homeostasis, any change within a part of the system ultimately requires either resistance or change from each of the other parts (Watzlawick Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). In fact, the variability rather than the level of conflict more often predicts outcomes.

Gender and Conflict

From an ecological perspective, gender largely influences marital conflict because understandings of gender roles are held at the individual, familial, and cultural level. Gender is heavily influenced by context and especially relevant at the couple level. Society prescribes expectations and stereotypes for each gender, which may increase marital conflict in certain areas. In general, women are encouraged to be more understanding, emotional and collaborative while men are encouraged to assert independence, keep emotions hidden and take control of situations. These gendered social scripts are reinforced by macro level systems and impact couple conflict. For example, much of the literature focused on marital conflict and gender indicates that household chores are a source of conflict. The ecological and systemic perspective indicates that conflict about housework represents a struggle between expectations from the macrosystem and microsystem. Women consistently complete and feel responsible for a larger proportion of the household work. However, women are increasing the hours spent working outside the home. Ecological theory indicates that as women change their relationship with the macrosystem, adjustments will increasingly need to be made on the microsystemic level as well.

These changes within the microsystem will ultimately impact both members of the couple and conflict will persist until a new level of homeostasis is met. Though couples live within the same societal context, gender largely influences the topics of conflict.

Gender differences are evident in the topics of conflict in which men and women engage (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Kim, Capaldi & Crosby, 2007). However, perception and reports of conflict are more often impacted by the way each sex has been socialized to interact with and view the other sex (Onishi & Gjerde, 2002). The ways that couples choose to negotiate marital conflict are often influenced by macro level expectations for traditional gender roles as well as expectations for men, women and the marital relationship itself. Frisco and Williams (2003) found that men with traditional gender roles engaged in less negotiation of traditional gender roles and defined fairness in the couple relationship differently than men in dual-earner couples. Women with non-traditional gender roles reported more conflict which was related to renegotiation of traditional family roles in regard to housework and childcare have reported higher levels of conflict (Frisco & Williams, 2003). These findings indicate that when an individual's relationship with the macrosystem changes the level of conflict within the marriage changes as well. In addition, these findings suggest that individuals and microsystems attempt to maintain homeostasis when faced with pressure from the macrosystem. In addition, men who strongly identified with traditional male roles perceived higher levels of conflict with women in general while women's perceptions of conflict were not influenced by group demographics (Randal & Jaussi, 2008). Attempts to renegotiate traditional roles have been shown to increase conflict in marital relationships in the short term, especially when the female partner requests changes (Higgins, Duxbury & Lyons, 2010). Marital separations and an increase in men's negativity were found when discussing topics of conflict chosen by their female partner, such as

level of intimacy and housework (Kim, Capaldi & Crosby, 2007). These findings indicate that women who do not maintain traditional gender roles and request changes in the marital relationship may experience or have partners who experience more conflict.

The patterns that couples use to negotiate conflict are often rooted in the level of power women have in society and intimate relationships. Christian and Heavey (1993) state that the pattern of conflict in which one partner requests change and the other resists change is related to the adjustments that women want in regards to responsibility for housework, childcare and intimacy. Research has established that the individual wanting changes the relationship “demands” while the individual that prefers the current situation tends to withdraw (Christian & Heavey, 1993). Research indicates that displays of negativity are perceived differently based on gender. Roberts (2000) found that women became more distressed if their partner displayed hostility during conflict, while men became distressed if their partner withdrew. It appears that the demand withdraw pattern is consistent in intimate heterosexual relationships, but may be heavily influenced by macro level expectations for gender.

Ethnicity and Conflict

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory emphasizes that larger systems, such as culture, influences microsystemic interactions and may impact how topics of conflict are interpreted within the couple. Because each culture is built upon a system of values and assumptions about gender and marital relationships, there are differences in the topics of conflict reported by each culture. For example, cultures that place an emphasis hierarchy based on age may negotiate conflict differently and report differing topics of conflict than those cultures that emphasize gender divisions. In addition, the macrosystem or culture may influence the reporting of conflict because conflict about some topics may be less disruptive to the macrosystem than others. For

example, an Asian man traditionally has a high level of responsibility to his parents while maintaining a large amount of control over his wife. Research has indicated that sex is often a topic of conflict within Asian marriages. Because each macrosystem function on a system of values and expectations for behavior, Asian women may feel more able to engage in conflict about sex than in-laws due to cultural expectations.

Research on intercultural conflict styles has emphasized the importance of interpreting the macro level differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures. Cultures with more collectivist values tend to focus on ties to larger social systems which “protect them in exchange for unquestioned loyalty” while cultures with individualistic values are loosely connected to the larger society and focus on the immediate family (Hammer, 2005, p. 680). Members of individualistic cultures appear to focus on micro level factors (e. g., personality, individual flaws) and be more likely to blame their partner while those from collectivist cultures often blame the situation for marital conflict (Stander, Hsiung & MacDermid, 2001). The perception of whom or what is to blame for the conflict may influence reports of conflict and have differing impact on divorce rates and marital satisfaction. For example, conflict about money may be interpreted differently by the partners based on whether the problem stems from a flaw perceived to be located in the partner or the system (e.g., partner incapable of maintaining a job vs. the economy is bad).

Osborne, Manning and Smock (2007) stated that cultural background may influence the conflict resolution techniques used for maintaining relationship stability. Wheeler, Updegraff, and Thayer (2010) note that each culture employs strategies such as nonconfrontation (silence and concealment of ill feelings), solution orientation (compromise and attempts to integrate other’s needs) or control (attempts to dominate and persistence in promoting one’s own

position). The use of these strategies may influence how conflict is negotiated and perceived by members of the couple and those outside the relationship (e. g. researchers, extended family members).

Bermudez and Stinson (2011) state that conflict styles within current literature may not accurately describe ethnic couples. For example, cultural values may influence whether behavior is viewed as hostile or passionate. Despite ethnic and gender differences in conflict, research indicates that most couples report conflict in areas such as division of household responsibilities, intimacy, allocation of resources and child care. Although conflict is likely similar across couples, the impact that the intersection of gender and ethnicity has on topics or frequency of conflict has not been adequately addressed.

Distinctive Topics of Conflict

Division of Household Labor and Childrearing

The perception of an equitable division of housework is associated with less conflict and lower divorce rates (Frisco & Williams, 2003). However, the perception of fairness is closely related to social and macro level understandings of marital and parenting responsibilities. Couples attempting to create a more equitable division of household labor often have to employ strategies that enable them to meet the demands of household labor and childrearing in addition to full-time work schedules. These couples often engage in multitasking (Offer & Schneider, 2011) or work from home (Gimenez-Nadal, Molina, & Ortega, 2012) to ensure that family tasks are completed. Therefore, both parents are more often attempting to balance work and family responsibilities rather than divide responsibilities strictly along traditional gender lines.

Gender. Research has found that women are consistently less satisfied in couple relationships, especially when children are present (Whitton & Whisman, 2010). Gender appears

to influence reports of conflict, especially during the first year after a child is born. The parenting role differs for men and women and is structured by macro level cultural expectations about responsibilities for mothers and fathers. Although studies have shown similar declines in satisfaction for newly married couples with and without children (Mitnick, Heyman, & Smith Slep, 2009), Cowen and Cowen (1992) found that when new parents were asked to self-identify, the role of *parent* often replaced *lover* or *partner*. This finding indicates the importance that macro level systems place on the parenting role and indicate that conflict within the couple may be heavily influenced by social expectations. Claxton and Perry-Jenkins (2008) found that, particularly for husbands, the parenthood role often leads to reports of loving their spouse less and engaging in more conflict one year later. In addition, access to leisure time with a spouse or others reached the lowest point precisely between nine months and one year after a child's birth (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). Integrating the roles and responsibilities associated with parenting increases conflict for couples, but leads to different conflict outcomes and reports for men and women. These outcomes may be related to gender specific socialization in regard to parenting and marital responsibilities.

Women, regardless of ethnicity, report conflict about an unequal division of household chores at higher rates than men (Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007). However, Fuwa and Cohen (2007) found that in countries where women have macro-level support in the form of family friendly social policies, division of household chores is more equitable between the partners. Many women have increased the number of hours spent working outside the home with little change in the level of responsibility for work within the home (Malinen, Kinnunen, Tolvanen, Ronka, Wierda-Boer & Gerris, 2010). Women with the fewest resources (i.e., money, access to paid employment, family or social support) often report that an unequal division of housework is

fair, and women's perceptions of fairness are "primarily related to men's time spent on female tasks" rather than equity in time and resource allocation (Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003, p. 183).

Ethnicity. Cultural differences may affect the way division of household labor is perceived and negotiated. Orbuch and colleagues (2002) found that a husband's participation in household chores decreased the likelihood of divorce for African American couples; while an increase in participation for White husbands often increased this risk. For instance, African American couples have been found to place an emphasis on collaboration while White couples prefer compliance. African American husbands more often were expected to participate in household chores and childcare (Orbuch & Eyster, 1997). Social expectations and support for men's participation within the home resulted in more equitable division of labor. In addition, this participation did not appear to have an impact on African American men's sense of masculinity (Dade & Sloan, 2000).

Parenting styles have also been shown to differ by ethnicity. Childrearing practices within African-American families more often divide household chores according to age and ability than sex (Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007). Weis and Toolis (2010) found that parenting practices concerning levels of warmth, control and hostility were related to ethnicity. Specifically, African American and Latina mothers have been shown to use authoritarian styles of parenting (which includes more physical punishment and less overt showing of affection) more often than White mothers (Weis & Toolis, 2010). Although parenting requires individuals to meet the needs of their children in regard to safety and socialization, these practices are mediated by cultural standards and often reflect dangers inherent within the macro system (Trask & Hamon, 2007). For example, differences between White and African American parenting styles may reflect a socialization process that prepares children for the dangers or supports that

may be part of the larger social system. Cultural differences in parenting styles may suggest potential conflicts over parenting choices within interethnic relationships.

Financial Management and Leisure

Money management and access to leisure time are common areas of conflict for couples (Johnson, Zabriskie & Hill, 2008). Recent research indicates that although money is not the most frequent topic of conflict for couples, “marital conflicts about money were more pervasive, problematic, and recurrent, and remained unresolved, despite including more attempts at problem solving” (Papp, Cummings & Goeke-Morey, 2009). Conger, Conger and Martin (2010) found that economic pressure increases the risk of emotional distress and level of conflict in couples. Economic pressure led to an increase in angry responses and couple conflict. Despite these findings, arguments about money are not based on income alone. Minority individuals often face discrimination and poverty due to structural inequity that may impact the couple’s economic prospects. Money issues may also be related to rising expectations (Myers, 2007) and often trigger more emotional and defensive reactions (Papp, Cummings & Goeke-Moyers, 2009).

Gender. Couples with higher socioeconomic status reported less conflict, higher marital satisfaction and the lowest risk for divorce (Conger et al., 2010). However, research has found that the gender of the individual with economic resources has a differing effect on relationship outcome. When males obtain wealth and secure resources it appears to stabilize relationships and decrease conflict, while increased female earnings has been found to be associated with higher rates of divorce (Lucas et al., 2004). This finding reflects the influence of macro level social expectations for gender roles within marriage.

Although resources are typically defined in terms of money, access to personal resources such as leisure time has also been identified as a common topic of conflict. Expectations

concerning one's access to leisure and the role it plays in the marital relationship have changed in recent decades (Johnson, Zabriskie & Hill, 2008). Leisure is divided into three categories: individual, parallel and joint couple leisure. Johnson and colleagues (2008) found that individual leisure, defined as activities that do not involve one's spouse, often causes more conflict in marital relationships. However, the conflict is balanced by the level of spousal support for the activity.

Ethnicity. Culture impacts conflict concerning finances in marital relationships (Woelz-Stirling, Manderson, Kelaher, & Gordon, 2000). More traditional cultures often place an emphasis on a husband's wealth and ability to control finances (Hunler & Gencoz, 2005). In some cultural contexts, the husband's financial security is considered of greater value (Hunler & Gencoz, 2005), whereas ethnicities with relatively equal relationships and bilateral kinship ensure that men and women have equal access to inheritance and family support (Woelz-Stirling et al., 2000). These differences in valuation of financial control within cultural contexts may suggest that the frequency of conflict regarding finances will depend on the cultural context. One example suggests that in certain contexts (e.g., low socio-economic status exacerbated by lengthy unemployment) ethnic minority couples may report higher rates of conflict about money (Oggins, 2003).

Sex, Other Men and Women, and Love and Affection

Breaches of expectations for sexual exclusivity have been shown to increase couple conflict (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011). However, these expectations are influenced by macrosystemic expectations for marriage and social scripts about sex and gender. Research indicates that infidelity may be both a cause and a result of marital conflict (Previti & Amato, 2004).

Christensen and Miller (2006) found that 29% of couples wished to spend more time together and 15% desired change in their sex lives.

Gender. Women have been shown to perceive conflict differently than men in regard to sexuality (Rehman, Janssen, Newhouse, Heiman, Holtzworth-Munroe, Fallis, & Rafaeli, 2011). Sexual satisfaction has been related to lower levels of conflict and higher rates of satisfaction in intimate relationships (Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011). In addition, sexual topics were rated as more difficult to solve and produced more negative reactions (e.g., contempt, blame) than non-sexual topics such as household chores or parenting (Sanford, 2003). Women have been found to rate sexual topics as more important and difficult than non-sexual topics (e.g., household chores, childcare) while men reported no difference (Rehman et al., 2011). Men, on the other hand, reported more conflict about the frequency of sex than their female partners (Christensen & Miller, 2006). Sex is an important aspect of the marital relationship, but conflict about sex may be interpreted differently by men and women. Cultural understandings of men's and women's sexuality largely impacts conflict about sex within the marriage. Zurbriggen, Ramsey and Jaworski (2011) found that high levels of objectification led men to have lower levels of sexual satisfaction and difficulty forming intimate relationships with women.

Ethnicity. Conflict about sexuality and affection may be related to cultural expectations, and intimacy is often regulated by cultural perceptions of the marital relationship (Kellner, 2009; Nemoto, 2008; Youn, 2009). Kellner (2009) noted that culture influences personal boundaries and expectations in addition to "the distance that a couple strives for or can tolerate" (p. 224). The importance of romantic love is often associated with individualistic Western cultures (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007) while collectivist societies place more emphasis on the role marriage plays in regard to community (Kellner, 2009). Sex, infidelity, and access to sex are

important aspects of the marital relationship. However, culture influences the role sex and access to sex plays in the marriage by placing restrictions on when (i.e., after marriage) and with whom (e.g., one partner, multiple partners) sex will occur (McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005).

In some cultures, men report high levels of sexual frustration which led to conflict and in some instances violence when their wives did not respond to sexual advances (Youn, 2009). This frustration was reportedly increased by beliefs about engaging in sexual activity and its role in maintaining masculinity (Youn, 2009). Beliefs about personal pleasure and traditional ideas about the sexual activities of honorable women may also impact the couple's sexual relationship (Kellner, 2009).

Other Topics of Conflict

Topics such as religion, drinking, and relations with in-laws are less studied, but can be sources of conflict in intimate relationships. Problem drinking (Keller, Gilbert, Koss, Cummings, & Davies, 2011) has been associated with increased marital conflict regardless of gender or ethnicity. However, topics of conflict concerning extended family or religious beliefs and attendance are more complicated.

Gender. An increase in marital conflict was associated with differing levels of attendance at religious institutions between husband and wife (Curtis & Ellison, 2002). Religious practices may also differ in regard to family structure and gender roles. Conflict often increases when women are expected to take on a traditional gender role (as interpreted by her partner's culture) and gain approval from in-laws within interethnic marriages. Durodoye and Coker (2008) describe how responsibilities and practices concerning in-laws are rarely addressed before marriage, and women from less traditional societies report conflict concerning the role of in-

laws. For example, men and women often find that they are unprepared to fulfill the expectations for being a good husband or wife in within their partner's culture.

Ethnicity. Mahoney (2005) found that religious conflict was related to differing ideas about the meaning of marriage and was based on levels of conservatism. Conservatism appeared to impact views on labor force participation, fertility and domestic responsibilities (Mahoney, 2005), suggesting that resulting conflicts were not just about religious differences but also other topics such as household tasks.

Cultural orientation influences how conflict about intimacy and responsibilities to in-laws is perceived by couples. Research indicates that ethnic minorities often place obligations to their family of origin (financial responsibility and caretaking roles) before their personal life (Sánchez, Esparza, Colón & Davis, 2010). For example, high rates of familism are documented within Hispanic culture (Oropesa & Landale, 2004). Additionally, conflict over obligations to extended family has also been observed between interethnic couples of the same race (Durodoye, & Coker, 2008). These cultural differences within the same ethnic or racial community speak to the complexity that interethnic couples encounter when negotiating conflict topics.

Ethnicity and gender impact topics of conflict within marital relationships, but the interaction of gender and ethnicity is not well understood. This interaction of ethnicity and gender presents unique challenges to interethnic couples and may impact marital conflict. Topics and frequency of conflict are influenced by gender and ethnicity. Research indicates that ethnic individuals place a great deal of importance on obligations to extended family which may have implications for the marital relationship, especially if the partner is from an individualistic cultural background. Culture may also play a role in conflict about sex as minority men report a belief that sex and masculinity are interrelated. However, women in general report that conflict

about sex is more difficult than other topics. Conflict about money and access to resources may be related to macro level expectations about how responsibility should be divided between men and women within marriage. Finally, childrearing and household work often impact marital conflict. This may be due to the changes in social roles with the addition of a child or feelings of responsibility for the housework. It is clear that the research indicates differences in reports of conflict based on gender and ethnicity. However, it is unclear whether these differences are specifically related to either gender or ethnicity or if they are more heavily influenced by the interaction of gender and ethnicity.

Marital Conflict and Interethnic Couples

Little is known about marital conflict within interethnic couples; however, there are unique challenges faced by interethnic couples that likely influence their marital conflict. Interethnic couples face a variety of obstacles as a result of historical events and the overall social climate. Research indicates that interethnic couples receive less social and family support. However, this lack of support may be based on the varying levels of majority or cultural acceptance of different ethnic groups. The macrosystem provides support for marital relationships that enhance or support the values and structures created by the macrosystem. Therefore, interethnic relationships may cause stress for the macrosystem and force change within the larger systems. In addition, the level of support may be influenced by the specific gender and ethnicity of the members of the couple. Because men traditionally have more support and privilege from larger systems, gender may influence the impact that interethnic relationships have on the macrosystem. Men who choose interethnic relationships often experience a lack of overt support for the relationship, but they do not report the high levels of abandonment from their family of origin that women report (McClain, 2011). Also, ethnic cultures may support

interethnic relationships with ethnicities that receive more support from the majority culture. For example, Hispanics have high intermarriage rates with White individuals but not with other ethnicities. Blacks consistently have lower levels of intermarriage and notably lower levels of intermarriage with other ethnic minorities. Research indicates perceptions of social distance may partially account for these differences. Cultures that differ greatly from the majority culture may cause more stress and demand more change from macrolevel systems than those that are viewed as similar. The intersection of gender and ethnicity create unique experiences for the couples which are further complicated by the social atmosphere including stereotypes resulting from racism.

Culture largely impacts marital relationships and even topics that may appear to be couple level decisions are influenced by social expectations. Expectations about responsibilities to in-laws, sexuality, responsibility for housework and financial decision making are most often complicated by the unique interaction of gender and ethnicity so that our understanding of conflict may not apply to interethnic couples.

Heterogamy

The homogamy perspective indicates that heterogamous couples will experience more challenges and therefore more conflict. Interethnic couples are culturally heterogamous, bringing with them different cultural orientations. Simons and Peterson (2000) state that these cultural differences affect relationship conflict because individuals may impose their own views on their partner, which causes a misinterpretation of their partner's behaviors. Interethnic couples face struggles to negotiate cultural practices that will define the family's values and largely impact the family's interaction with larger social systems. As delineated in the previous section, each partner in an interethnic union may have distinct cultural perceptions and expectations that

influence marital conflict. Bringing these distinct ethnicities together may magnify the levels of conflict. Negotiation of family identity and expectations may be complicated by heterogamy.

Chinitz and Brown (2001) state that conflict within interethnic couples is most often related to the level of disagreement about the minority cultural practices. The couple's ability to negotiate cultural differences is often related to the majority's choice or ability to integrate minority cultural practices. The ability to integrate cultural differences on the couple level may lessen the adjustments that must be made within the larger system. Qualitative research indicates that many White individuals involved in interethnic unions learn to identify with the ethnicity of their partner. This establishment of cultural literacy is considered imperative for a successful partnership (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006). However, both partners bring cultural values into the relationship, and the intersection of gender and race likely influences both partners.

Social Support

Qualitative research indicates that interethnic couples feel an increased pressure to make the relationship appear conflict-free and present a perfect image to outside systems (Killian, 2002; Twine & Steinbugler, 2006). This is often referred to as perception management (Luke, 1994) or being "on stage to society" (Hill & Thomas, 2000). The couple's ability to lessen conflict and integrate within the macroystem appears to have a large impact on cultural perceptions of interethnic relationships. It is important to note that lack of social support does not create a neutral experience and that couples do not return to a baseline when support is withdrawn. Because marital relationships are highly valued in most cultures, the lack of support sends a negative message to the couple which indicates that their relationship is not valid. The effect of society's withdrawal of support has been shown within the literature on LGB couples as many LGB individuals and couples learn to develop a family of choice in response to society's

lack of support (Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2007). The couple's ability to integrate and maintain the values and practices of larger cultural systems lessens the effect on the macrosystem and ensures a higher level of support from cultural systems.

Macro level systems create an atmosphere that either supports or maintains barriers for interethnic relationships. Cultures provide models and social support for marriages that the culture supports. Because interethnic marriages have historically been discouraged, many interethnic couples experience "cultural homelessness" due to the lack of social support (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). Couples with similar backgrounds can often expect to receive acceptance from their families of origin and exist within systems that support relationships of this type (Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010). Interethnic couples continue to face macrosystemic barriers to the community and family support, which has been shown to stabilize homogamous marriages (Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2009; Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998). McClain (2011) stated that White women in intermarriages specifically endured a lack of support from their families of origin; many reported that they were cut off until the birth of their first child. Lack of support is often experienced outside the immediate family as well and may be partially based on the specific partnering. White women report experiencing more racism with Black husbands than other interethnic couples (Yancey, 2007). In addition, members of interethnic unions report looking for signs of racism in others before disclosing their interethnic relationship (Hill & Thomas, 2000).

Researchers have found that many individuals in interethnic relationships appear to focus on similarities and emphasize the normality of the relationship (McClain, 2011). David and Lavee (1996) found unique dynamics among couples who must learn to negotiate macro-level social stressors (e.g., war, discrimination) for an extended period of time. These couples reported

less conflict in general, stating that nothing could be done about the macro-level stressors, and discussions about these stressors caused problems within the marital relationship (David & Lavee, 1996). Couples facing social stressors outside the home find strategies to minimize stressors within the household and focus on similarities between the partners to reduce marital conflict which increases the chances that the marriage will be viewed as legitimate by larger social systems.

The need to negotiate couple conflict is an important aspect of any marriage. Although conflict topics often differ by gender and ethnicity, it is unclear how conflict topics may be affected by the unique interaction of gender and ethnicity that is found within interethnic heterosexual marriage. Each individual entering a marital relationship comes to the union with preconceived ideas about what the relationship may be like based on hopes, cultural values and past experiences. However, each gender is socialized differently within each culture. Conflict within interethnic marriage is unique because the couple must negotiate conflict which may be based on cultural differences as well as gender differences.

Objectives of the Present Study

The present study provides a valuable addition to the research concerning marital conflict by examining the unique interactions of gender and ethnicity within interethnic couples concerning topics of conflict. This study employs an ecological theoretical perspective to examine the multiple levels of context, including gender and ethnicity, which influence marital conflict. While previous research has examined how individual attributes, such as race/ethnicity or gender, may influence couple conflict, these attributes have typically been studied separately within mono-ethnic marriages. Research that addresses couple conflict in general continues to focus on primarily White partnerships (Wright et al., 2003). To a lesser extent, conflict research

has focused on minority couples and compared findings to those of White couples. The few studies conducted with interracial or interethnic couples have primarily focused on race and the couple's techniques for negotiating ethnic differences within larger social systems (Hill & Thomas, 2002; Twine & Steinbugler, 2006). Although research is beginning to address the complexities of interethnic unions, the role gender plays in conflict has not been adequately addressed. The present study examines the role that the intersection of gender and ethnicity plays in conflict dynamics within interethnic relationships contributing greatly to the literature concerning interethnic couple conflict.

The present study addresses the following research questions:

First, which topics of conflict are the most common for men and women and are there gender differences in conflict reports within interethnic marriages? Based on past research on gender and conflict, it is expected that there will be differences in the reports of the frequency of conflict across various topics between women and men in interethnic partnerships. Based on previous findings within mono-ethnic couples, it is presumed that women will report higher levels of conflict in areas such as household chores and childrearing than the men. Men are predicted to report more conflict over access to leisure time and relationships with other women.

Second, are there ethnic differences in the topics and frequency of conflict within interethnic marriages? Based on past research concerning conflict and ethnicity, it is predicted that there will be differences between White individuals and those with minority ethnic status in topics and frequency of conflict. It is expected that the topics and frequency of conflict will be consistent with previous research which suggests that ethnic minorities engage in conflict more often about responsibilities to extended family than White individuals. Ethnic minority

individuals are also expected to engage in less conflict concerning household chores due to an increased likelihood that couples adhere to traditional gender roles.

Finally, Research Question three asks: Do gender and ethnicity interact to predict topics or frequency of conflict within interethnic marriages? While it is expected that the intersection of ethnicity and gender will influence the type or frequency of conflict in interethnic couples, because there is little research concerning the intersection of gender and ethnicity for couple conflict, it is unclear in what direction or to what extent the intersection may influence conflict.

METHOD

The data used for the current study were taken from the first wave (collected in 2001-2002) of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-B). The ECLS-B is a restricted-use dataset housed by the National Center for Education Statistics that is available for use by qualified academic researchers and their research teams. To access this restricted-used dataset, applicants must have the rank of Post-doc or above and be a full-time employee of the institution to serve as the Principle Project Officer (PPO). In addition, the PPO must submit an application and follow all security guidelines required by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). The sample for the current study was taken from this nationally representative study of 10,688 children born in 2001 and their families.

Purpose of the ECLS Study

The sample of families in the ECLS-B was representative of the U.S. population in 2001 and included people with a variety of economic and cultural backgrounds. An oversampling of Asian and Native American children provided for a very ethnically diverse population.

The primary focus of the study was early life social, cognitive and physical development and well-being of young children. Direct observations and assessments of the children as well as surveys of parents, childcare providers and teachers were completed throughout the four waves of data collection (nine months old, two years, four years and kindergarten). Because the study focuses on the role families play in early childhood experiences, the parental surveys included assessments not only of the parents' interactions with the child, but also the parents' relationship with one another (marital quality).

Data were collected by computer-assisted interviews (CAPI) and self-reports. The mother and resident fathers completed self-administered questionnaires during the nine month, two year

and preschool wave. Parents were asked about aspects of the couple or parenting relationship in addition to those questions directly targeting child development. The current study focuses only on the conflict scale completed by both parents. Only couples in which both partners completed the marital conflict scale were selected for the current study.

The study originally focused on child development and school readiness. However, the current study conceptualizes the data from a unique perspective by focusing specifically on the parent data and couple functioning within the large culturally diverse sample. Because minority individuals were oversampled, the ECLS-B provides the present study with an opportunity to focus on conflict within interethnic unions.

Sample

The present study sample consisted of couples that completed the survey, were currently living together and were married. The sample was selected from a larger sample of parents in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-B). Only couples whose self-reported ethnicity did not match one another were selected for the current sample. In addition, the interethnic couples included one White partner due to the limited number of interethnic couples comprised of two minority individuals. Due to limited numbers of gay couples available in the sample, only heterosexual couples were selected. Using these criteria, 603 total couples (1206 individuals) were selected.

Measures

Gender. Participant gender was self-reported. Females were coded as 1 and males were coded as 0. There were equal numbers of men and women because each individual was part of a heterosexual interethnic couple.

Age. Participants reported their date of birth and this was used to calculate the respondents' age in years. Separate variables for wives' and husbands' age were created.

Education. Participants reported highest grade of school completed. Education level was coded into 5 categories: 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school graduate, 3 = some college, 4 = Bachelor's degree, and 5 = graduate degree. Separate variables for wives' and husbands' education were created.

Familial Demographics. Respondents reported the number of years living together, the number of years married, and the number of children. Because theoretically these variables should be equivalent for wives and husbands, only one variable for each was created. The variables were based on wives' reports because the mothers were considered the primary parent.

Ethnicity. Participants self-identified as one of the following: 1) white, non-Hispanic, 2) black or African American, non-Hispanic, 3) Hispanic, race specified, 4) Hispanic, no race specified, 5) Asian, non-Hispanic, 6) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic, and 7) American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic. In order to ensure sufficient numbers of participants in each group, the following categories were collapsed into one: Hispanic, race specified and Hispanic, no race specified were condensed into "Hispanic" and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic and American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic were combined into "Native American". Separate ethnicity variables were created for wives and husbands. In addition, a dichotomized variable was created with White ethnicity coded as 0 and Minority ethnicity (including Hispanic ethnicity) coded as 1.

Marital Conflict. Both women and men rated the level and type of conflict in the spousal relationship. Rather than focus solely on parenting conflict, the scale included items such as chores, money and relationships with extended family. Items for the scale were adapted from

other marital communication and satisfaction scales such as the Beier-Sternberg Discord Scale (1977), Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (1959) and Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976). These scales report similar topics of conflict, but focus on the level of agreement reported by individuals within the couple (e.g., how often do you and your partner disagree about money?).

The marital conflict scale used in the ECLS-B expands the research by documenting the level of conflict by type and frequency as reported by each member of the couple. The conflict scale reflected topics of disagreement within the couple. Both the wife and husband reported their perceptions of conflict within the couple relationship. The present study compares the conflict scores based on type and frequency rather than focus on perceptions of agreement reported.

Each partner was asked, "Do you and your spouse/partner often, sometimes, hardly ever, or never have arguments about each of the following areas: 1) chores and responsibilities, 2) your child(ren), 3) money, 4) not showing love and affection, 5) sex, 6) religion, 7) leisure time, 8) drinking, 9) other women or men and 10) in-laws". Responses were given on a Likert-type scale with scores ranging from 1 = *never* to 4 = *often*. Wives and husbands thus had distinct scores for each item for a total of 20 items (10 for wives and 10 for husbands). For proposed analyses in this study, these items will be analyzed individually.

Couple Ethnic Makeup. An interaction variable was created between the gender and ethnicity in which two different couples types were identified: White Female/Minority Male couples and Minority Female/White Male couples. There were insufficient numbers of each type of minority/minority interethnic couple; therefore, couples in which neither partner was White were excluded.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics are first presented to describe the sample and variables used in this study and then results are presented by research question. PASW 18.0 statistical software was used for all analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and ranges for demographic variables are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. *Means, standard deviations and range of demographic variables.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Female	50%		
Husband's Age	32.53	7.52	17-66
Wife's Age	29.75	6.35	16-51
Husband's Education	4.08	1.10	1-5
Wife's Education	2.98	1.28	1-5
Years Living Together	5.68	3.76	0-22
Years Married	5.11	3.55	0-22
Number of Children	1.99	1.00	1-8

N= 603 couples, 1206 individuals

The statistics in Table 1 show that husbands on average were older and had more years of education than their wives. The education categories were coded as 1) less than high school diploma, 2) high school graduate, 3) some college, 4) bachelor's degree, 5) graduate degree. Men's education levels were as follows: 1= 12.1%, 2= 21.6%, 3= 32.6%, 4= 18.6% and 5=

15.1%. Women’s education levels were as follows: 1= 16.3%, 2= 19.9%, 3= 29.5%, 4= 19.1% and 5= 15.3%. In addition, these couples had relatively similar mean scores for time living together ($M = 5.68$) and years married ($M = 5.11$).

Correlations among the study variables are presented in the appendices. The following Pearson’s Correlation Matrices are presented: wives in Appendix A, husbands in Appendix B, and wives and husband variables correlated with one another in Appendix C.

The interethnic makeup of the couples in the sample is described in Table 2. Couples consisting of a White wife and minority husband made up 43.8% of the sample, whereas couples consisting of a minority wife and White husband made up 56.2% of the sample. The frequency and percentages of couples of each of the various interethnic combinations can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. *Description of interethnic makeup of sample: Frequency and percentages of ethnicities of husband/wife pairs.*

		<u>Husband</u>					
		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native	Total
	White		42(7)	117(19.4)	53(8.8)	52(8.6)	264(43.8)
	Black	18(3)					
<u>Wife</u>	Hispanic	117(19.4)					
	Asian	122(20.2)					
	Native	82 (13.6)					
	Total	339 (56.2)					

Note. Interethnic couples consisting of two minority members were not included due to small sample size.

Table 3. *Paired samples T-test results for gender differences in conflict items.*

	Wives			Husbands			Significance
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>P</i>
Chores	2.34	.88	587	2.50	.87	587	.000***
Children	2.03	.86	583	2.03	.85	583	.859
Money	2.33	.91	580	2.46	.90	580	.000***
Affection	1.79	.87	580	1.93	.92	580	.002**
Sex	1.77	.88	585	1.92	.94	585	.000***
Religion	1.30	.58	579	1.36	.66	579	.051†
Leisure	1.81	.83	583	1.93	.84	583	.006**
Drinking	1.28	.64	586	1.33	.65	586	.116
Women/Men	1.26	.58	583	1.33	.65	583	.010*
In-Laws	1.92	.93	588	1.99	.97	588	.082†

***Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

† Correlation trend at the 0.10 level

Gender and Conflict

The first research question asked: which topics of conflict are the most common for men and women and are there gender differences in conflict reports within interethnic marriages? For both men and women, chores and money were reported as the most frequent topics of conflict, and religion, drinking, and other men/women were the least frequent topics of conflict. Paired sample T-tests were completed to assess differences in conflict reports for wives and husbands. For all analyses, age of husband and wife, years of education of husband and wife, years living

together and number of children were included as covariates. Results including means, standard deviations, and p-values are reported in Table 3.

Significant gender differences were found in the following conflict variables: chores, money, affection, sex, leisure, and other women and men. Contrary to expectations, husbands reported more conflict than their wives for each significant variable. Moderate effects were shown for religion and in-laws with husbands reporting more conflict in these areas as well. There were no significant gender differences for conflict about children or drinking. As hypothesized, gender appears to impact reports of conflict. The data showed that husbands report significantly more conflict than their wives in nearly all areas.

Ethnicity and Conflict

Research question two asked: are there ethnic differences in the topic or frequency of conflict within interethnic marriages? Multiple Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) tests were used to examine ethnic differences in men's and women's conflict reports followed by Tukey post-hoc analyses to further examine significant results. Two separate MANCOVAs were conducted. The first tested whether there were differences in wife conflict reports (across the 10 conflict items) based on wife ethnicity. When predicting wife conflict reports, wife age, wife education, years married, time living together, and number of children were included as controls. The second MANCOVA tested whether there were differences in husband conflict reports (across the 10 conflict items) based on husband ethnicity. When predicting husband conflict reports, husband age, husband education, time living together, and number of children were included as controls. Results of both analyses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. MANCOVA of ethnicity predicting wives' and husbands' conflict variables.

Conflict Variables	Wives		Husbands	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Chores	2.19	.07†	.26	.90
Children	2.89	.02*	.39	.82
Money	.75	.56	.26	.91
Affection	2.56	.04*	2.14	.08†
Sex	1.62	.17	2.94	.02*
Religion	1.34	.25	.81	.52
Leisure	.30	.88	.59	.67
Drinking	.99	.41	.91	.46
Women/Men	.15	.96	1.09	.36
InLaws	.64	.64	1.26	.28

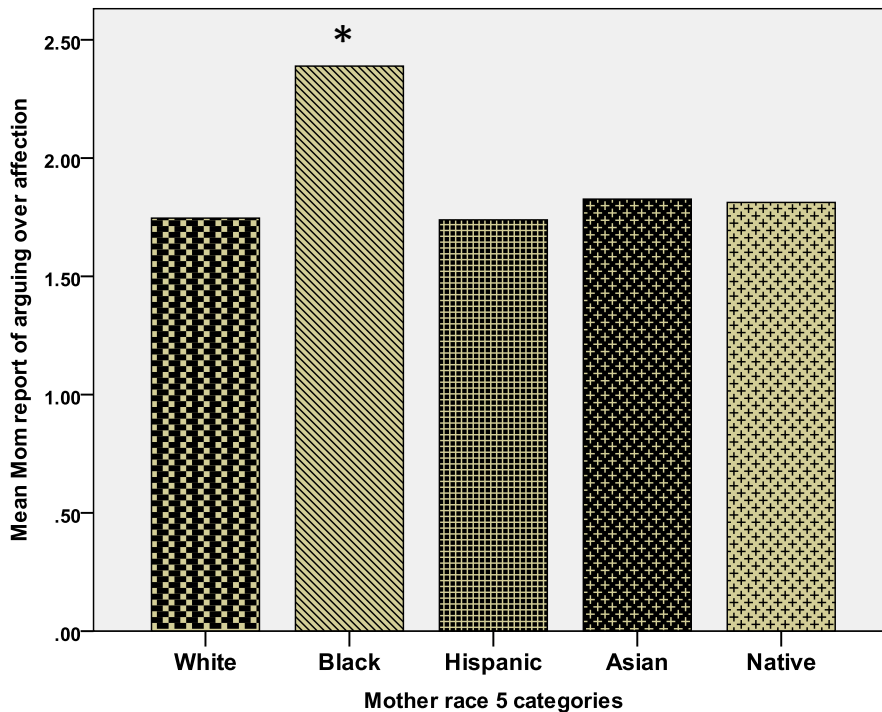
Note. All analyses controlled for education, number of children, age, and years living together. *p*-values are significant at $p < 0.05$. Trends are indicated at $p < 0.10$.

For wives: results demonstrated significant ethnic differences in conflict concerning childrearing ($F = 2.89$, p -value = 0.02) and affection ($F = 2.56$, p -value = 0.04). A visual representation of these significant relationships can be found in Figures 1 and 2.

Post hoc analyses were conducted using Tukey's test to further investigate these significant relationships. The relationships between wives' conflict scores indicated that Black women's scores were significantly higher than all other ethnic groups regarding affection (Tukey SHD significant results only: White-Black = .02, Hispanic-Black = .02, Asian-Black = .07, and Native-Black = .08). Native women's scores were significantly lower than Black women and Hispanic women regarding childrearing. (Tukey SHD significant results only: Black-Native =

.03 and Asian-N For husbands: results indicated significant differences in reports of conflict regarding sex (p-value = 0.02) based on husbands' ethnicity. This significant relationship is demonstrated graphically in Figure 3. Native = .03).

Figure 1. Ethnic differences in women's reports of conflict over affection.



*Significantly different
 **Categories from which there were significant differences

Post-hoc analyses (Tukey's, Dunnett C, Dunnett T-3 tests) to determine which ethnic groups were significantly different from one another did not demonstrate significant differences between any ethnic groups and hence were inconclusive. Further investigation suggests the inconclusive results may be due to a lack of sensitivity resulting from small numbers of men in some of the ethnic groups (see Table 2). Contrary to hypothesized, ethnic minority individuals did not report more conflict concerning in-laws and household responsibilities.

Figure 2. Ethnic differences in women's reports of conflict over childrearing.

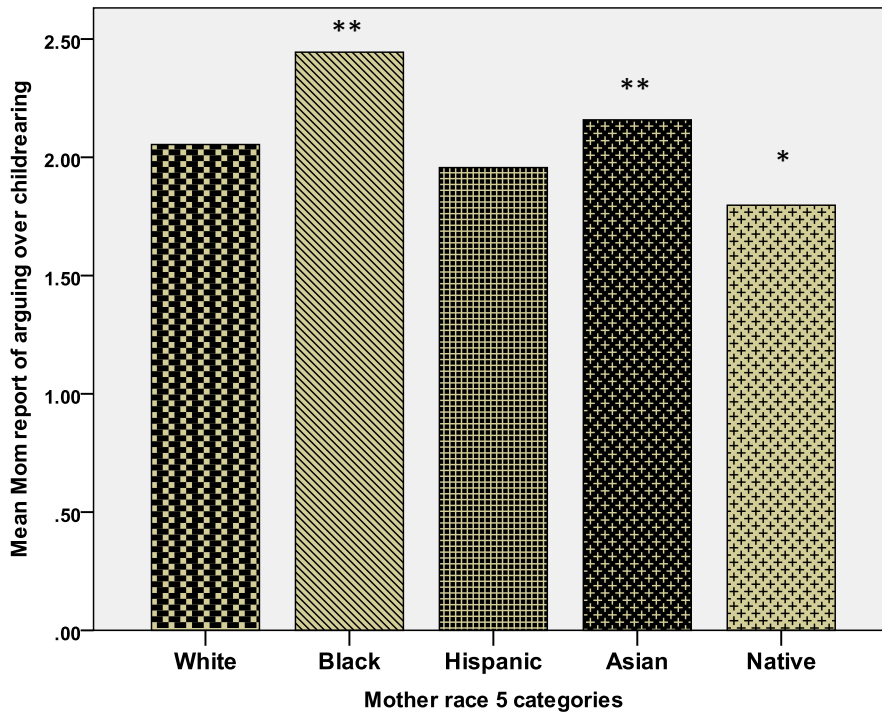
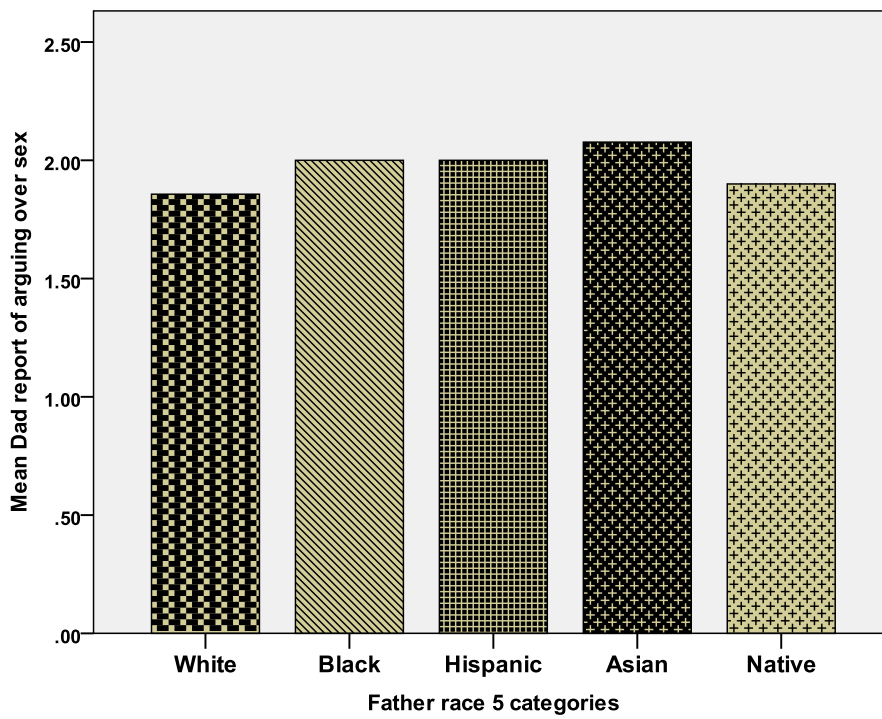


Figure 3. Ethnic differences in men's reports of conflict over sex.



Intersection of Gender and Ethnicity

Research question three asked: do gender and ethnicity interact to predict type or frequency of conflict within interethnic marriages? Again, MANCOVAs were used to examine whether the interaction of ethnicity and gender predicted men's and women's conflict reports. This last analysis assessed differences in wives' and husbands' reports of conflict between the two types of couples (minority wife/white husband and white wife/ minority husband). Preliminary analyses were first conducted of interaction effects without including any control variables. The final analyses included the following control variables: When predicting wives' conflict reports, wives' age, wives' education, years married, time living together, and number of children were included as controls. When predicting husbands' conflict reports, husbands' age, husbands' education, years married, time living together, and number of children were included as controls. Results are reported in Table 5.

Analyses revealed two significant results. Women of color married to White men reported significantly more conflict regarding household chores ($F = 4.45, p = .04$) than White women married to men of color. Men of color married to White women reported significantly more conflict regarding sex ($F = 4.99, p = .03$) than White men married to women of color. White men did not report higher levels of conflict than men of color in any area.

Though not reported in Table 5, it is of note that White women married to men of color reported more conflict regarding money ($p = .000$) than women of color married to White men when education was not included as a covariate. It is apparent that this finding is indicative of White women's higher education levels as this finding became non-significant when controlling for education. The interaction is accounted for by education and therefore is not indicative of ethnic differences. However, there are clear demographic differences indicating that White

wife/minority husband couples have higher education and thus more conflict about money, that are worthy of discussion.

Table 5. ANOVA results of interaction of ethnicity and gender predicting wives' and husbands' conflict reports.

Conflict Reports	Interaction of Ethnicity X Gender of Couples		Conflict Reports	Interaction of Ethnicity X Gender of Couples	
	<i>Wives</i>			<i>Husbands</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Chores	4.45	.04*	Chores	.54	.47
Children	.16	.69	Children	.002	.96
Money	2.21	.14	Money	.57	.45
Affection	.92	.34	Affection	1.34	.25
Sex	.18	.67	Sex	4.99	.03*
Religion	.35	.55	Religion	.48	.49
Leisure	.90	.34	Leisure	.04	.85
Drinking	3.71	.06†	Drinking	1.21	.27
Women/Men	.34	.56	Women/Men	.08	.78
InLaws	.07	.79	InLaws	.01	.93

Note. P-level is significant at 0.05. Trends are indicated at $p < 0.10$.

DISCUSSION

Previous research indicates that although conflict is a natural part of marital relationships, reports of conflict differ by gender and ethnicity (Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003; Pinderhaus, 2002). Most of our understanding of conflict comes from research on couples who share an ethnic identity and therefore have increased levels of macro level support within their community. This is important because although topics and frequency of conflict may differ by ethnicity and gender, the macro systems (ethnic and majority) maintain stability. The intersection of culture requires researchers to analyze the macrosystem and its direct effect on the couple rather than study conflict within each macrosystem separately. However, interethnic unions are unique in that the pairs differ by gender and ethnicity. Despite the large amount of research on marital conflict, the unique interaction between ethnicity and gender within interethnic couples is not well understood (Forry, Leslie, & Letiecq, 2007). Findings from the current study highlight the unique implications of gender and ethnicity within interethnic marriages.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, each system interacts and must adjust to changes within all other systems. Therefore, each microsystem (individual) interacts differently with the macrosystem (culture). Interethnic unions offer the possibility of interpreting couple conflict on a much larger level and force researchers to reevaluate ideas about the causes of conflict within marriage. The unique interaction of gender and ethnicity within interethnic marriage ensures that macro and microlevel factors are analyzed due to the complex nature of the relationship. Because current research on ethnic and gender differences do not fully account for conflict within interethnic marriages, ethnicity and gender must be analyzed within the context of larger social systems.

Implications of Findings

Gender Implications

Though the most frequent topics of conflict (chores and money) were similar for men and women, the present study's findings indicated that within interethnic marriage gender influences reports of conflict. In general, husbands reported more conflict than wives in regard to household chores, money, affection, sex, leisure, other women and men, religion and in-laws. This finding is in contrast to previous research among primarily mono-ethnic couples that has found that women often report higher levels of conflict, especially in household chores (Frisco & Williams, 2003). This suggests that there may be unique gender effects occurring within interethnic marriage which may be influenced by macro level and cultural expectations for each gender. Traditionally, research has suggested that women perceive more relational conflict than men. However, this research also indicates that reports of conflict are heavily influenced by perceptions of unfairness or violation of expectations. Men within every culture experience more benefits from marriage (i.e., health benefits, partner support, and economic resources) and it is possible that the reports of conflict reflect men's perception that the benefits are not consistent with his expectations because his partner does not view marriage in the same way (Lindsey, 2005).

The macrosystem creates a system of values and structures that increase the likelihood that marriage will be structured to benefit the system and maintain homeostasis. Those with the most power within the macrosystem are more likely to notice changes within the system and more likely to support maintenance of the status quo (Johnson, 2001). Therefore, men, regardless of ethnicity, may report more conflict within interethnic marriages based on their experience of male privilege within the macrosystem with which they are most familiar.

It is important to note that husbands and wives did not report conflict specifically based on their own anger or initiation of conflict, but rather the participants reported levels of perceived conflict within the marriage. The perception of conflict may be directly related to the topics of conflict. Each culture has different values which may affect the topics of conflict that each partner feels are worth arguing about within the marriage. These findings suggest that within the context of interethnic marriage it is men who perceive more relational conflict. Thus, it is possible that women in interethnic marriages have a higher threshold for what they perceive as normal marital conflict, or that men in interethnic marriages may be more sensitive to the way conflict is handled or initiated within the relationship.

One possible explanation for this gender difference is that there may be a selection effect, in that women and/or men who choose an interethnic partner may be unique in their gender roles or expectations. For instance, it could be that women who choose interethnic marriage may be more flexible, open, or patient and because of these qualities less likely to engage in or perceive conflict. In addition, these differences may indicate conflict with their culture of origin or perceived connection with values typically held by the partner's culture. Additionally, it may be that the men who choose interethnic marriage may be particularly sensitive to or perceptive of conflict or possibly have had higher expectations for the interethnic marriage. A selection effect would suggest that the gender difference precedes the interethnic union.

In contrast to a potential selection effect, the unique context of the interethnic marriage itself may account for the gender differences in marital conflict reports. As mentioned previously, there is some suggestion that interethnic marriages may face more stress due to external contexts (racism, lack of support, etc.) as well as within marital stress related to integrating two cultural backgrounds (Durodoye & Coker, 2008). This is consistent with

Bronfenbrenner's assertions about the influence of the macrosystem on microlevel interactions. The finding of gender differences may suggest that women adapt better to these stressors than men or that the expectations for women (e. g., traditional womanhood) is more similar across cultures and therefore decreases the stress felt by women. Men may be more sensitive to these external stressors and because of this perceive more marital conflict than women. Because men traditionally have more interactions with the macrosystem in the form of work and head of household, men may feel more pressure to represent the interethnic couple in public settings (Lindsey, 2005). Additionally, when facing a lack of support reported to be common with interethnic marriage, it could be the case that women within interethnic marriage are better able than men to replace unsupportive social support by accessing alternative support networks such as friends and fictive kin.

The differences in conflict reports may also be influenced by the sample which consisted of new parents. It is possible that the transition to parenthood is more difficult for men than women as women's parenting role is more clearly defined within the macrosystem. In addition, the addition of a new baby may cause men to perceive more conflict within the marriage. It is possible that men's higher reports of conflict may be indicative of changes within the marital relationship and additional responsibilities (financial, extended family, and emotional support). Stress caused by men's traditional provider role may be compounded due to differing cultural expectations and influence reports of conflict.

Ethnicity Implications

Additionally, results of the present study indicated that there were some ethnic differences in conflict reports within interethnic couples. The findings suggest that ethnicity affects reports of conflict more often for wives than for husbands. For women, there were ethnic

differences in reports of conflict concerning affection and childrearing. Post-hoc analyses revealed that Black women reported significantly more couple conflict about affection. This finding may be reflective of cultural specific gender roles, such as the “Strong Black Woman” gender role which is commonly discussed within the Black feminist literature (Wyatt, 2008). This literature on gender roles within African-American culture indicates that Black women are more often the head of household and have been exposed to strong independent female role models (Pinderhaus, 2002). Mitchem (2004) stated that Black women have upheld traditional patriarchal beliefs by taking on the traditional male role when head of the household. This gender role encourages independence and strength, which may be perceived by cultural outsiders as expressing less affection.

It is important to note that the creation of this gender role has been largely influenced by historical and macrosystemic policies that removed Black men from the home (slavery, economic stressors, and high levels of incarceration) which forced Black women to take on the provider role. Macrolevel structures and policies have ensured a larger social distance between Blacks and Whites which has maintained low levels of interethnic marriage between these two groups. Consistent with the ecological perspective, intermarriage between cultures with large social distance may create more stress and demand more change from the macrosystem. Therefore, it is likely that the creation of the stereotypical Strong Black woman, as influenced by the macrosystem, continues to influence the micro level interactions during marital conflict about affection. Black women’s adjustment to pressures from the macrosystem may in fact continue to influence interethnic relationships and reinforce the social distance that hinders interethnic marriage for Black women. Perceived lower levels of affection may create strain especially when

paired with a non-Black partner, resulting in conflict over the way affection is expressed within this unique interethnic relationship.

Native women reported less conflict in regard to childrearing than Black and Asian women. This difference may be indicative of unique cultural expectations and parenting practices. Numerous studies have indicated that African-American and Asian-American parents are more likely to have authoritarian parenting styles (e.g., Julian, McHenry, & McKelvey, 1994). In contrast, Native women may have more flexible parenting styles. Research indicates that many Native American tribes adhere to noninterference which meaning that they promote allowing things to happen as they are meant to happen (BigFoot & Funderburk, 2011). These differences in conflict may suggest that Native women and White men have more similar ideas about parenting which results in less conflict. In fact, some qualitative literature indicates that many Native women have adopted or integrated White parenting styles as a result of exposure to boarding schools (Rand, 2008). The high intermarriage rates between Native Americans and Whites may be reflective of similarities in culture due to level of social support and the long history of intermarriage between White men and Native women (Thompson, 2009).

High levels of agreement about parenting between Native women and White men may be directly related to cultural assimilation which lessens differences at the macrolevel. The cultural differences have been lessened by policies that ensured the obliteration of Native culture. White culture specifically targeted Native cultures by creating laws that criminalized many aspects of Native culture (e. g., religion, language, family structure, and access to tribal land) and created similarities between macrosystems. Therefore, similarities between Native women and their White husbands may simply reflect the outcome of policies that support and maintain the macrosystem.

It is interesting that reports of conflict may reflect possible reasons for differences in intermarriage rates for women. Black women have the lowest rates of intermarriage, while Native women have the highest rates (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010). The current sample is consistent with the literature; Black females represented only 3% of the sample ($n = 18$). Although Native women represented only 13.6% of the sample, this may be deceptive as Native Americans are 1% of the U.S. population ($n = 82$). It is reasonable to assume that conflict may impact rates of intermarriage and partially account for the differences between rates for Black and Native women.

Interestingly, for women there were no other significant ethnic differences in regard to money, sex, religion, leisure, other men and women, drinking and in-laws. The research from monoethnic couples indicates that money and sex are more often topics of conflict in ethnic couples (Pinderhaus, 2002), while White women report higher levels of conflict about housework (Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003). However, this does not necessarily transfer into interethnic relationships. These trends of marital conflict may be specific to relationships of monoethnic White or minority couples. In addition, differences in reports of conflict may be influenced by the specific stressors that interethnic couples experience based on their interactions with the macrosystem because of their interethnic status. The lack of significant ethnic differences indicates that women in interethnic marriages from varying backgrounds experience conflict within their relationships similarly.

As for men, the reports were less conclusive. Although, for husbands, results suggested significant differences by ethnicity in reports of conflict regarding sex, post hoc analyses were not able to clearly identify which ethnic groups were significantly different from one another. However, the trend appears to indicate that men of color reported higher levels of conflict than

White men. The reports of conflict may be related to gender norms regarding sexual activity. Previous research has suggested that men of color often relate sex with maintaining manhood or masculinity (Glass & Owen, 2010; Youn, 2009). One interpretation of the current study's finding is that men who relate sex with manhood perceive more conflict about sex. The reports of conflict may indicate that the husband feels frustrated about sex within the marriage or that he perceives that his wife is unhappy regarding sex within the relationship. It is also possible that White men simply perceive less conflict about sex or that these men have similar sexual expectations as their wives. It is interesting to note that reports of conflict may be reflected in the rates of intermarriage for men. There are significantly more Hispanic men (n = 117) in the sample than Black men (n = 42) or Asian men (n = 53). This sample is consistent with the literature stating that Hispanic men intermarry at much higher rates than Asian or Black men (Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2010). It is possible that these differences in levels of conflict partially account for ethnic differences in intermarriage rates for men.

Findings from the first two research questions demonstrate salient gender differences and to a lesser extent ethnic differences within the context of interethnic marriage. When considering both of the first two research questions together, it is interesting to note that men reported more conflict than women across many domains, whereas ethnic differences in conflict were more common for women. These differences in conflict within interethnic marriage highlight the complexity and lead nicely to the exploration of the interaction of gender and ethnicity.

Interaction of Gender and Ethnicity

The culmination of this study was the final research question which examined whether the interaction of gender and ethnicity predicted conflict within interethnic couples. Previous research has suggested that interethnic couples are unique (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008);

however, there was previously little understanding of the complex intersection of gender and ethnicity within these couples. The current study sought to go beyond simply extrapolating from the understanding of gender differences and ethnic differences in marital conflict from research on monoethnic marriages, but instead to focus on how the unique intersection impacts conflict within interethnic marriages. In practical terms, conflict levels were compared between types of couples (White Wife/Minority Husband and Minority Wife/White Husband). Findings suggested that the interaction of gender and ethnicity significantly impacted reports of conflict in three areas.

Minority women married to White men reported higher levels of conflict about household chores than White women married to minority men. The research literature regarding conflict about household chores consistently suggests that one of the most common topics of conflict reported by wives is chores and housework (Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007); however, this literature is based primarily on samples of White, monoethnic couples. The literature on ethnic minority couples has suggested that other topics of conflict, such as infidelity and finances are more common for minority women (Pinderhaus, 2002). The findings from the current study are discordant with previous findings, suggesting that conflict about household chores is somehow unique for women in interethnic marriages. In fact, these findings suggest that conflict over household chores is more common for ethnic minority women. One potential explanation for this effect is that the structure of White Wife/Minority Husband marriages may differ from that of Minority Wife/White Husband marriages. It may be that relationships between minority men and White women are more egalitarian than those between minority women and White men. The level of power women have within the interethnic marital relationship may differ based on ethnicity. Although all women experience sexism and pressure to conform to traditional gender

roles, White privilege may provide White women with the necessary resources to negotiate for more equitable relationships. The unique intersection of gender and ethnicity creates varying levels of privilege and discrimination for minority women, White women, minority men and White men (Almeida, Dolan-Del Vecchio, & Parker, 2008). In addition, women of color face intersecting discrimination based on gender and ethnicity which may inhibit their ability to initiate changes in the relationship.

White wives married to minority husbands reported more conflict about money than minority wives married to White husbands. Interestingly, this finding disappeared when controlling for wives' education level. Because White wives had higher education levels than minority wives, this effect is indicative of a demographic difference between White Wife/Minority Husband and Minority Wife/White Husband couples. Wives in the White Wife/Minority Husband pairings report more conflict over money directly related to their higher education level. This is consistent with previous literature indicating that women with higher education levels and incomes have a greater likelihood of divorce (Lucas et al., 2004). Women in dual earner couples more often share individual control over how some of the money is spent. In addition, money is often translated as an individual's contribution to the relationship and can be used for negotiation (Ludwig-Mayerhofer, Allmendinger, Hirsland, & Schneider, 2011). While this is an effect of education, it is important to note that this is one additional challenge that White Wife/Minority Husband pairings face because of the higher education levels that White women have.

This effect may result from White women's' distinct expectations for how money is spent and who makes decisions regarding financial matters. Many White women choose to have separate bank accounts when they earn money while men often want money placed in a joint

account yet maintain decision making authority (Atwood, 2012). It is also possible that conflict about money reflects larger social issues concerning minority men's access to higher paying jobs due to systemic factors such as racism which may create financial issues that minority wives with White husbands do not face. The macro level pressure on men to provide for the family may influence how each partner's contribution is perceived within the relationship. Macro level issues such as racism, stereotypes about men of color and expectations for how money is used may influence conflict about money within interethnic marriages. Conflict about money is reported in the literature, but is not often reported as the primary topic of conflict. However, Atwood (2012) states "couples would prefer to talk about sex or infidelities rather than how they handle family finances or how much money they earn" (p. 1). Conflict over money is related to higher levels of divorce and is more often a topic that lasts for a significant period of time and is more difficult to remedy (Papp, Cummings & Goeke-Morey, 2009).

Finally, minority husbands married to White women reported more conflict about sex than White husbands married to minority women. Although the literature on conflict suggests that husbands often report more conflict about sex than wives (Christensen & Miller, 2006), it is interesting that there is a significant difference between White husbands and minority husbands. This unique intersection indicates that marriages comprised of White women and minority men may face issues directly related to expectations about female sexuality. Although gender is often understood to be a microlevel factor, cultural interpretations of female sexuality are constructed at the macrolevel. The collision of macrosystems within intermarriage requires issues such as sexuality to be negotiated within the couple. The topics of conflict within couples often reflect what members of the couple feel are the most sacred cultural values. Most White women have been raised within individualistic cultures and may feel more comfortable voicing their thoughts

and feelings about sexuality. It is possible that White women are more likely to engage in conflict regarding sex than minority women, are less submissive or have higher expectations for negotiation regarding sex. In addition, minority men may also have higher expectations for sexual intimacy based on cultural norms and religious systems. In contrast, minority women, especially those from more patriarchal societies, have been found less likely to engage in negotiations about sex or may be heavily influenced about proper sexual conduct for women which results in submissive behavior or lessening of sexual initiation (Kellner, 2009). In effect, the expectations for sexual intimacy may be closer matched in Minority Wife/White Husband pairings than in White Wife/Minority Husband pairings.

The overall findings indicate that ethnicity and gender interact in unique ways and influence reports of conflict within interethnic couples. Findings indicated that men perceive greater conflict than women within interethnic marriage, suggesting that men may be more sensitive to stressors related to the interethnic marriage. Ethnic differences were also found with Black women reporting more conflict about affection and Native women reporting less conflict about childrearing. Most intriguing of all, unique differences between conflict in White Wife/Minority Husband and Minority Wife/White Husband pairings were found, confirming the intersection of gender and ethnicity.

These findings highlight the importance of using the intersectionality theoretical perspective to examine interethnic marriage. Though, from an ecological perspective, these conflicts may be related to differences within cultural value systems, it is clear that the unique intersection between gender and ethnicity is influential to an extent. However, this intersection was only found to be salient for certain topics of conflict, not consistently across conflict topics.

Although differences were found between the two couple types, it is interesting to note findings that were contrary to what was hypothesized. For example, it was hypothesized that gender would impact topics of conflict. However, the study indicated that men reported more conflict in general. In addition, it was surprising that ethnicity did not impact reports of conflict about in-laws. Although significant differences were found for chores, money and sex, no significant differences were found for children, affection, religion, leisure, drinking, other women and men or in-laws. It is possible that differences in conflict are directly linked to the status as an interethnic couple. It may be that these couples continue to have conflict about topics such as in-laws and leisure, but other topics are of greater concern. It may be that by the time couples are married issues such as religion and leisure have been discussed and a compromise has been reached. In addition, couples may be more aware of topics such as sex, money and household chores due to the adjustments that must be made after a child is born.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the current study makes significant contributions to current research concerning interethnic couples and conflict, the study had several limitations that suggest important directions for future research.

First, the study is limited by the measures. Because the marital conflict scale is a brief assessment, it is not clear how the respondents interpreted the measures. Although the questionnaire reports frequency and topics of conflict, the specific nature of the conflict is not known. For example, we know that minority men report more conflict regarding sex, but do not know whether the conflict is about the frequency of sex, type of sex or intimacy during sex. Moreover, we cannot be sure if the respondent felt upset about the issue and initiated conflict, or if the spouse was the upset one. Future studies should go into more depth and ask follow up

questions or include multiple questions about each topic of conflict to better understand how the question is being interpreted and whether the question's interpretation differs by gender or ethnicity. In addition, there is a need for further exploration of demographic differences. For example, future studies may include income categories to more accurately reflect the couple's financial situation. The initial significant findings of this study, suggest that exploring these issues in more depth is warranted.

Second, there were limitations of the sample. Couples within the sample were parents of at least one small child as the primary focus of the ECLS-B was child development rather than the couple relationship. Thus, couples without children are not represented in this sample. Moreover, the participants in the current study all had a child that was approximately nine months old. Parents have reported increased levels of conflict at precisely this time in a child's life (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008). Therefore, topics and frequency of conflict may be influenced by the timing of the data collection. It may be helpful for future studies to compare levels of conflict at different times during the family life cycle. The study also does not account for differences in conflict topics and frequency that may occur within interethnic unions with no children. Therefore, it may be necessary to compare conflict between couples with and without children. In addition, because the study focused on parents of young children, the sample included many younger couples with relatively short relationship histories. Many of the couples were recently married, which means that the reports of conflict may not reflect the experiences of long-term couples. Previous literature indicates that older couples are more likely to engage in negotiation and report less conflict (Story, Berg, Smith, Beveridge, Henry, & Pearce, 2007). Future studies should focus on the unique dynamics within older interethnic couples or those with longer relationships.

Finally, there were limitations due to the types of couples available for the study. The sample was limited to individuals that were currently married and living together. Because many interethnic couples choose to cohabit, the sample may not accurately reflect conflict within these couples. It is also possible that couples who choose to get married differ from those that choose to cohabit. Future studies should include couples that are currently cohabiting as the reports of conflict may differ based on living arrangement and type of commitment. The sample was also comprised of solely heterosexual couples though literature indicates that LGB individuals are more likely to enter interethnic unions (Rostosky, Riggle, Savage, Roberts & Singletary, 2008), suggesting that this is an important area for future exploration. The current study focused on heterosexual couples and was not able to address homophobia and heterosexual privilege within the larger systems that may impact conflict for LGB couples. It is important to recognize that intersectionality goes beyond gender and ethnicity. In addition, each couple contained one White partner due to low numbers of interminority couples. Therefore, the unique relationship dynamics within interethnic unions of two minority individuals are not addressed. The study may reflect dynamics that occur within majority/minority couples rather than interethnic couples. Future studies should focus on conflict within a more diverse population of interethnic couples to increase generalizability.

This study provides a unique contribution to the literature concerning conflict within interethnic unions. In addition, the ECLS-B dataset provides the ability to explore these issues longitudinally as well as compare interethnic and monoethnic couples. In future studies, the dynamics of interethnic unions can be addressed further across time. Moreover, this dataset permits the opportunity to study not only the couples, but the entire family unit including children. Future studies can expand these concepts to address the impact of conflict on the

children of interethnic unions. Because the number of interethnic marriages and families is increasing, it is imperative that researchers continue to focus on the unique dynamics of interethnic partnerships.

Clinical Implications

These findings suggest important clinical implications for professionals working with interethnic couples. The number of interethnic marriages is increasing, and therefore it is possible that more interethnic couples will be seeking out couples or family therapy. However, the research has not kept pace with these changes. The current literature may not adequately address the individual's experience of conflict within interethnic marriages. The majority of research has focused on monoethnic couples, but the current study has shown that conflict within interethnic marriages is unique. It is important that clinicians be aware of the unique challenges that interethnic relationships may encompass.

Literature focused on LGB and minority experience has shown that traditional approaches to therapy are often counter-productive when working with those outside White heterosexual marriage (Duran, 2006; Lev, 2004). Therapeutic approaches based on conflict within monoethnic couples may reflect a gender or ethnic bias, rather than an understanding of the complex interaction of ethnicity and gender within interethnic marriage. It is important that clinicians explore each individual's perception of their positionality and be mindful of the privileges and oppressions that he or she may experience. Couple and family therapists should be conscious that gender and ethnicity and their intersection are important aspects of an individual's experience and identity, particularly within interethnic marriages. Moreover, clinicians must be aware that lives intersect in a variety of areas, and each addition makes the individual's and couple's experience more complex (Johnson, 2001). For example, interethnic couples may be

faced with the intersections of more areas of potential adversity such as family structure, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, immigrant status, and religion.

Finally, therapists need to acknowledge their own stereotypes and internal biases that may influence the therapy process (Brown, 1994). For example, although housework has traditionally been seen as an issue between husbands and wives in general, the current findings indicate that there are differences between women's reports of conflict based on ethnicity. Although it is important for therapists to be knowledgeable about possible issues within interethnic marriage, therapists must avoid stereotyping couples based on the literature (Duran, 2006). Being intentional about how the literature influences the therapy process is necessary because "therapists regularly replicate and reinforce social prescribed norms" despite positive intentions (Almeida, Dolan-Del Vecchio, & Parker, 2008, p. 13). It is also important that clinicians be aware that gender and ethnicity interact in ways that the literature cannot predict. It is most important that topics of conflict are not stereotyped as either gender or ethnic concerns and the couple is encouraged to fully explore the conflict according to the clients' experiences as individuals and as a couple.

Overall Conclusions

This study has unique implications because of the specific focus on the interaction between gender and ethnicity within interethnic couples. The findings are important because they suggest that research on monoethnic marital conflict does not adequately reflect reports for interethnic couples. In addition, the present study showed that couple type (White Wife/Minority Husband and Minority Wife/White Husband) impacted reports of conflict and did not reflect findings in literature about monoethnic couples. These findings support the need to expand research concerning marital conflict. Interethnic couples face unique circumstances within the

macro-system that impact couple conflict. This examination of the intersection of gender and ethnicity expands the research on interethnic relationships, which has historically focused on couple interactions with outside systems, by examining dynamics within the interethnic couple. This study is also unique in that it integrates gender into the study of conflict within interethnic couples as the literature most often focuses on ethnicity specifically.

It is important to continue studying the way gender and ethnicity interact within intimate interethnic relationships. The intersectionality literature focuses on the unique privileges and discriminations faced by individuals. This study adds to that literature by exploring the complexity of social position and conflict within interethnic couples. Overall, these findings have important implications for continuing research on interethnic couples and demonstrate that the intersection of gender and ethnicity impact couple reports concerning topics and frequency of conflict within interethnic marriages.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. *Pearson's correlations matrix for wives' reports of conflict.*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Chores	1									
2. Children	.40**	1								
3. Money	.41**	.32**	1							
4. Affection	.42**	.41**	.33**	1						
5. Sex	.36**	.35**	.32**	.56**	1					
6. Religion	.19**	.17**	.17**	.16**	.26**	1				
7. Leisure	.32**	.30**	.21**	.29**	.20**	.18**	1			
8. Drinking	.19**	.12**	.20**	.21**	.27**	.25**	.19**	1		
9. Women /men	.16**	.17**	.28**	.26**	.22**	.21**	.18**	.39**	1	
10. In Laws	.15**	.20**	.25**	.22**	.14**	.10*	.19**	.17**	.20**	1

** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.*

* *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.*

Table A2. *Pearson's correlation matrix for husband's reports of conflict.*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Chores	1									
2. Children	.46**	1								
3. Money	.43**	.34**	1							
4. Affection	.35**	.36**	.32**	1						
5. Sex	.32**	.28**	.28**	.50**	1					
6. Religion	.21**	.28**	.21**	.24**	.26**	1				
7. Leisure	.36**	.30**	.26**	.40**	.27**	.34**	1			
8. Drinking	.15**	.15**	.23**	.20**	.21**	.22**	.30**	1		
9. Women /men	.19**	.17**	.30**	.23**	.19**	.19**	.18**	.34**	1	
10. In Laws	.20**	.19**	.30**	.15**	.10*	.18**	.19**	.14**	.22**	1

** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.*

* *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.*

Table A3. *Correlation between husbands' and wives' reports of conflict.*

	<u>Wife</u>									
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>
<u>Husband</u>										
1. Chores	.47**	.23**	.30**	.24**	.23**	.13**	.17**	.15**	.11*	.13**
2. Children	.22**	.40**	.16**	.23**	.18**	.04	.16**	.05	.07	.05
3. Money	.25**	.17**	.54**	.16**	.17**	.10*	.11**	.16**	.21**	.19**
4. Affection	.27**	.18**	.23**	.34**	.25**	.04	.21**	.08*	.18**	.08*
5. Sex	.16**	.22**	.25**	.26**	.48**	.07	.09*	.08	.11*	.07
6. Religion	.09*	.10*	.15**	.09*	.11**	.29**	.07	.11**	.08	.09*
7. Leisure	.26**	.14**	.15**	.18**	.16**	.08*	.21**	.07	.09*	.05
8. Drinking	.07	.07	.15**	.06	.09*	.03	.08	.35**	.10*	-.02
9. Women/men	.14**	.11**	.24**	.15**	.18**	.07	.17**	.16**	.41**	.09*
10. In Laws	.14**	.11**	.22**	.05	.05	-.05	.07	.06	.01	.46**

** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.*

* *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.*