

**Marriage Migrants:
American Women Navigating Immigration and
Intercultural Marriage**

**by
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Abstract

Based on eight semi-structured interviews from June 2016 with American women married to German spouses and living as immigrants in the state of Baden-Württemberg, Germany, the aim of this study is uncover how this group experiences immigration and integration. Taking a feminist perspective and grounded within standpoint theory, I argue that the combinations of their American citizenship, gender, position within intercultural marriage and immigration status, creates a unique immigration and integration experience for this group in Germany. Findings reveal the following intricacies within intercultural marriages, the challenges that female immigrants and mothers face, the importance of language in integration, the role that American citizenship plays in immigration and the emotional struggle to find a sense of belonging as immigrant newcomers.

Keywords: Immigration; Integration; Marriage Migration; Gender; Motherhood; Intercultural Marriage

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Introduction

American women married to Germans have largely been overlooked in immigration research in Germany and little is known about their immigration and integration experiences. A great deal of German immigration literature has focused on specific groups: guest workers (temporary foreign workers) and their children, immigrant groups seeking economic advancement, or refugees fleeing from political, economic, or personal hardships (Ellerman, 2015). While there are currently around 137,000 Americans living as immigrants in Germany, as a group they are far outnumbered by Turkish, Polish, or Italian immigrants, and have therefore received little attention in immigration research (Destatis, 2015; Yurdakul, 2009). Within research of marriage migrants in Germany, American women married to local Germans have also gone largely unnoticed. While marriage migrants in general have been overlooked in German migration literature, many studies focus on migrants who marry in order to access upward social mobility, economic opportunity, or use marriage as a means to gain entry into a politically stable and safe country. Marriage migrants moving for love and not economic gain are also overlooked in research (Charlsey, 2012, 7). Little is known about how women who migrate because of a marriage union from a developed nation such as the United States of America, to another developed nation such as Germany.

The aim of this study is to uncover how American women who migrate to Germany for marriage experience immigration and integration, by analyzing how intercultural marriage impacts their immigration and integration experience. This study is based on eight semi-structured interviews with American-born women who migrated to Germany to marry a German-born national. Taking a feminist perspective and analyzing basic details of everyday life, this project places particular significance on examining the impact that gender, nationality, motherhood, family, language, and marriage have on the immigration and integration experiences of these women. In this study, participants were recruited based on the following key identifiable variables: 1) female American citizen, 2) currently in a marriage relationship with a German, and, 3) legally living in Germany. After conducting semi-structured interviews with eight women who fit the above requirements, this research displays how this particular group experiences immigrant life in Germany. Guided by standpoint theory and Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography in particular, this project used interviewing as a means of giving immigrant women a

voice and their individual accounts, stories, and experiences are considered to provide valuable insight into the private lives of immigrants. As individuals live and experience the social world in similar and often predictable ways, the experiences of one individual are likely similar to many other individuals with whom they share similar features. From a theoretical perspective therefore, the experiences shared by each individual woman interviewed display larger social patterns, processes and institutional inequalities that immigrant women in Germany face.

This study is significant not only because immigrant American women in Germany are an overlooked demographic in immigration research, but more broadly because it challenges assumptions made towards immigrants based on their nationality or native country. In this case, in comparison with other immigrant groups, American wives are granted fairly easy entry into Germany and yet essentially left to integrate on their own (in contrast with strict integration measures taken for immigrants of most other nationalities). This may be the result of the German state assuming that Americans will easily integrate in Germany, or it may be an example of American political power whereby their governing officials have secured easier access to visa permits for its citizens. In the former case, governments are underestimating the various challenges that immigrants face. In the latter case, it is important to realize the vast cultural and linguistic differences between America and Germany, and how vital language and cultural proficiency are to integration and settlement in Germany. Based on the responses of participants, fast tracking the bureaucratic processes involved in attaining residency permits does not significantly increase the life quality or integration of American immigrants in Germany. As this research also displays, being American or having a local spouse does not result in a simple, easy or quick integration process. This study is therefore significant because it examines and challenges the broader assumptions and misconceptions about immigrants by gaining insight into American women in Germany.

The research findings display how American women married to Germans and living as immigrants in Germany uniquely experience immigrant life and integration apart from other immigrant groups. This is in part because they may not always identify as immigrants nor are they always seen as immigrants by the majority of their host society. In addition, because of their marriage to a German national, they tend to be the only foreign individual in their family. This exposes them to mainstream German culture in

unique ways that other immigrants may not have access to, but also contributes to a feeling of isolation and a lack of belonging. While their immigrant status may be disregarded in certain social contexts, legally, culturally, and socially, they often remain outsiders and must go through a process of acculturation and integration in their new host country. By ignoring or overlooking their immigrant status, especially during the early stages following their immigration, American women often feel like permanent social outsiders, isolated and alone in their challenges, and misunderstood by their family. Women reported that not having German language skills significantly caused distress in all aspects of their lives. From family gatherings, child rearing, socializing and gaining professional work experience, language is seemingly the most important factor that can enable or disable social integration in a new country. Yet as critics of Germany's integration course model claim that integration does not result from mere language acquisition, this research project sought to better understand what helps immigrants in the process of integrating and how that experience takes place (Daase, 2010). As women and mothers, participants came to appreciate Germany's family friendly policies and many claimed that their quality of life directly improved simply by experiencing parenthood in Germany rather than in the United States (U.S.). Yet, as immigrant mothers, they also felt judged for their different parenting techniques that were seen as conflicting with German norms.

Following a brief discussion of the literature, methodology, and theory applied throughout this research, this thesis is divided into five thematic chapters; 1) Americans in Germany, 2) Belonging, 3) Language, 4) Intercultural Marriage, and 5) Motherhood and Gender. Taking a feminist perspective, it was critical for me as a researcher to include the voices of the researched as much as possible, rather than having the researcher's voice dominating throughout. Therefore, the chapters heavily rely on interview excerpts to give voice to the women interviewed for this project. While I as the researcher had specific questions and themes that guided each interview, I placed more significance on allowing participants to respond and discuss topics that they considered important and relevant to their life experiences. The resulting thesis therefore reflects the recurring themes that emerged in the interview process and that women felt were important to their experiences as American immigrants and wives. Most women had very similar experiences, opinions and conclusions on what life is like for American women living as immigrants in Germany with German husbands, reflecting, broader social

structures, norms and institutions and displaying how they work to impact individuals in a very personal way.

Literature Review

Americans in Germany

With only two percent of Europe's foreign born population coming from North America, Americans in Germany are a minority group with a permanent resident population of about 137,000, in addition to U.S. military populations and those on short term visas for work or study (Destatis, 2015; Morokvasic-Müller, 2014, p. 174). Because of their small number in comparison with other immigrant groups, migration research has vastly overlooked Western, American, "White", or middle-class immigrants" (Leinonen, 2012, p. 213). Scholars have also noted that immigrant groups who come from nations with various cultural similarities to that of Germany, appear, "less 'problematic', and less interesting as objects of research" (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007). Therefore, as American women have generally been considered an "unproblematic" group for the host country, they have been considered an uninteresting or unimportant group for social research (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Leinonen, 2012, p. 213, p. 216). Thus, there is little known about the lived experiences of Americans in Germany. Researchers have found that throughout Europe, American immigrants can receive high social status due to them being, "representatives of a cultural, political, and economic superpower, and as speakers of a high-status global language", yet their legal immigrant status is still influenced by negative cultural stereotypes about immigrants (Leinonen, 2012, p. 213). Indeed, "the outsider status of immigrants makes them vulnerable to double standards, discrimination, and stereotyping", and in spite of the privilege that accompanies an American passport, American immigrants are not immune to the negativity associated with an immigrant status (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 270).

Nationality is a significant social identifier that holds meanings, expectations and assumptions for individuals. Indeed, "the idea of national identity is an important source of civic solidarity in all modern liberal-democratic states" (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 22). In Germany specifically, researchers have claimed that, "more Germans have an opinion on the U.S. than on any other country in the world", in part because America's largest foreign military presence is in Germany (Du Bois, 2007,

p. 212-213). Public opinions towards Americans in Germany have been influenced by America's role in rebuilding Germany after the destruction of WWII, their continued military presence throughout the country, their international military engagement, and through American media, music, and film. Scholars describe Germany's view towards America as a "patchwork paradox", where, "positive and negative stereotypes oppose and stand next to each other" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 213). Popular opinion of America is generally positive with older generations who remember the American occupation in Germany, while younger generations of Germans view American military presence with greater criticism (Du Bois, 2007, p. 213). While studies have shown that the majority of these opinions come from German media and are not grounded in personal experiences in America or with Americans, the presence of American companies, culture, and military have nevertheless played an important role in how Germans view America (Du Bois, 2007, p. 213). As public opinions towards America have changed over time, so does the degree to which Americans in Germany feel comfortable with disclosing or associating themselves with their American nationality, and impacts whether they experience a sense of pride or shame when disclosing their nationality with others (Du Bois, 2007, p. 220). Overall, Americans in Germany are not neutral individuals, and they must live with the stereotypes and assumptions that their nationality holds.

Fitting In

Because it takes time to identify, understand and adopt cultural norms, immigrants often struggle with fitting in socially in their new country. In fact, research shows that living geographically and emotionally between two countries, "means that individuals are "living between different cultures" and experience... "cultural hybridity", and the blending of their native and new cultures creates a unique place for immigrants (Goncalves et al., 2013, p. 16). Yet this does not always happen in one seamless transition. Scholars have noted that for transnationals, it is not always entirely clear when, "a person has finally left his or her society of origin and definitively immigrated to a receiving country" (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007, p. 276). For many participants in this study whose migration followed several years of long-distance dating and visits abroad, and who take regular trips back into the U.S. to visit family, their move to Germany was a process rather than one single event. Scholars have found that Americans tend to view themselves as an American abroad rather than as an immigrant, likely because in many respects, they do not relate to the stereotypical image of the migrant (Leinonen, 2012, p.

213). Because the immigrant identity is in fact, “not stable but contextual,” in that “a person who in one context is not considered an immigrant may be seen as such in the next”, immigrants may experience drastically varied levels of social acceptance or rejection as they go through their daily lives (Leinonen, 2012, p. 214). This may be a cause leading immigrants to feel as social outsiders. Therefore, immigrants often critically examine their own heritage upon migration which “creates new consciousness of migrants’ national or ethnic identities, which before migration often went unquestioned” (Leinonen, 2011, p. 197). Examining their national identity and adopting new cultural identities is a seemingly normal part of migration and integration. This often causes immigrants to feel distant from their homeland, while they simultaneously remain outsiders in their new country. Within intercultural marriages specifically, research displays how couples navigate differences by selectively adopting certain cultural norms from each other’s national culture in order to create harmony and fit in with each other (Mcfadden and Moore, 2001, p. 266).

Language and German Integration Courses

Much research shows that language acquisition plays a significant role in immigrant integration by allowing newcomers to enter the collective social world, enabling a positive sense of belonging and identity, and accelerating the settlement process (Braun, 2009; Fuchs, 2007; Schnuck, 2014, p. 258). Scholars have distinguished two categories of language learning and how they relate to different kinds of integration; the first being what they call the “hard” language skills necessary for participation in education and work, with the second being the “soft” language skills that are required to participate in “the common life, or to make friends” (Block, 2014, p. 251). The different kinds of language skills that a migrant acquires can impact their social and professional progress integrating. Indeed, language skills are vital in common, everyday life situations, such as interacting with children’s teachers and school administrators, participating in community events, or managing appointments such as dentists or doctors (Hasenfratz, 2009). One study showed that Americans living in Finland who did not learn Finnish felt like permanent tourists in Finland, displaying how language is a crucial factor to integration (Leinonen, 2011, p. 156-157). In many cases, without sufficient language skills, immigrants will remain as foreigners on the outside of society. Yet since language courses in Germany are often tailored to meet the needs of low-skilled populations with little formal education, scholars have found that there is in fact a

lack of “affordable, accessible and appropriate professional language courses for qualified immigrants” (Kofman, 2012, p. 70). Skilled immigrant women, and mothers in particular, face specific barriers to learning the language and integrating in Germany as, “the ability to attend professional language courses may be more limited for women who have childcare responsibilities” (Hasenfratz, 2009; Kofman, 2012, p. 70).

With the introduction of a German immigration law in 2005, a great majority of migrants are now legally required to participate in an Integration Course and successfully pass a language examination (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 261). Most notably, with the introduction of Germany’s Residence Act in 2004, “the federal government pledged to support the integration of legally resident foreigners through the introduction of integration courses established to impart “adequate knowledge of the (German) language” and information regarding Germany’s “legal system, culture and history”” (Triadafilopoulos, 2012, p. 156). These integration courses are mandatory to most “non-EU citizens who are drawing unemployment benefits or are otherwise deemed to require integration” (Jayaraman and Bauder, 2014, p. 6). The aim of the Integration Course is to train immigrants in German language, German history, Germany’s political and legal system, and cultural norms and traditions to help prepare immigrants for success in their new home country (Jayaraman and Bauder, 2014, p. 6). The requirement to participate in and pass the language examination is strictly enforced and those who refuse to participate face potentially severe consequences. In fact, “those who fail to comply with the new provisions are subject to sanctions, which can even affect secure residence rights and social benefits” (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 270). With the exception of a small administrative fee paid for by users, these Integration Courses, which include 600 hours of language instruction, are publicly financed by the federal government (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 269-270). The government has carefully framed the language used in reference to these courses, noting that social participation “presupposes that the immigrants acquire a basic knowledge of the host society’s language, institutions, customs and laws so that they can avail themselves of new opportunities” (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 262). The findings of this research absolutely support these claims, displaying how language is the beginning to cultural understanding and the rebuilding of a happy and fulfilling life in a new country. In 2007 revisions were made concerning immigrating spouses, meaning that, “incoming spouses now need to prove that they can

'communicate in simple German', usually by presenting a language certificate of the level A1" (BAMF, 2013; Block, 2014, p. 247). Some immigrants must prove their language proficiency upon arrival in Germany while citizens from certain nations are given a grace period (BAMF, 2013). In spite of the requirement that incoming spouses must prove German language abilities or enrol in an Integration Course, only one of the eight women participating in this research were required to participate in a course. This may be explained by a clause exempting certain categories of spouses from the language requirement based on their nationality (Block, 2014, p. 247).

The integration course reflects larger societal and cultural ideas around the presence of foreigners in Germany, whereby Germans expect, "the Other to integrate, to adapt to the norms of the 'host society', while the dominant populations are called upon to be tolerant" (Erel, 2016, p. 28). While critics of the integration course model claim that authentic integration does not simply come about through language acquisition, past research and many immigrants themselves are quick to claim how important language skills are for successful integration, cultural adjustment, and overall life quality for immigrants and society as a whole (Daase, 2010; Mohr and Klein, 2004). Critics often view the Integration Course as a result of "Germany's exclusionary policies towards foreigners", yet the findings of this research display how immigrant women themselves claim language to be an utmost vital and necessary skill in order to establish a successful and fulfilling life in Germany (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 261). This suggests that from the immigrant's perspective, the Integration Course is viewed in a positive light and can potentially play an important role in language learning, socializing with other immigrants, and learning German cultural norms. Germany's government has made it clear that, "rigorous German language and civics training" in the Integration Course results from a decisive intention for, "everyone to be able to speak the same language and share similar cultural values" (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 263). As the findings of this research display, immigrants who cannot speak the majority language or understand the cultural values within the country in which they live, find themselves feeling isolated, constant outsiders in society and frequently experience negative encounters due to their lack of linguistic and cultural understanding. Therefore, this research challenges critics of the Integration Course model by displaying how beneficial language and cultural training are for immigrants and the rebuilding of their lives within a new country.

Intercultural marriage

As the need for low skilled labour in Germany has dropped over time, restrictions to immigration have made marriage migration, as well as family reunification for some, one of the only legal routes for entry into Germany (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007, p. 278). Yet scholars have recently made note of the general disregard within immigration research in Germany to investigate certain dynamics of immigrant marriage (Kalter, 2010, p. 1). There has also been a lack of recognition of how the complex relations of power, gender, race, and citizenship between intercultural spouses result in “multiple hierarchies of power” that make intercultural marriages very diverse and unique (Charlsey, 2012, p. 6). In addition to the recognized need to better study the emotional aspects of intercultural marriage for the individuals involved, is a need to recognize the diversity of motivations for movement and look beyond the stereotype that female migrants in intercultural marriages choose to marry in order to escape poverty or gain entry into a more developed or economically thriving nation (Charlsey, 2012, p. 8). Indeed, studies that have focused on women in migrant marriages have generally studied women who were, “seeking out such marriages as an opportunity to exit undesirable situations, including downward mobility in host societies, poverty or sex work in countries of origin, or the stigma of divorce” (Charlsey, 2012, p. 7). Studies on intercultural marriages in Germany and Europe in general have often focused on couples where one member, typically a male from a wealthier nation, brings the other member, usually a female from a less developed Asian country or Russia, into Germany. While the majority of incoming spouses are female and only about “30% of spouses entering Germany are male”, representations of spousal migration have often represented female migrants as having little agency, victimized, forced into a marriage or simply agreeing to marriage in order to gain entry into Germany (Beck-Gernsheim, 2011; Block, 2014, p. 250-253; González-Ferrer, 2006). In recent years, various media outlets has brought attention to the poor treatment of foreign brides in Germany, particularly Turkish women who marry “socially estranged German-Turkish men”, perpetuating stereotypes of the immigrant and marriage migrants in a negative light (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 271). In addition, many studies on intercultural marriages or marriages with one immigrating spouse have viewed the migrating female as an, “unskilled migrant” or have studied women who leave their own children and families behind in order to find work in a wealthier country, and therefore overlook an entire group of educated or skilled individuals who migrate primarily for marriage (Leinonen,

2011, p. 164). Thus, little is known about spouses who immigrate for reasons beyond gaining legal entry into Germany or economic advancement (González-Ferrer, 2006). Additionally, European governments are increasingly regulating immigration options through marriage migration (Charlsey, 2012, p. 8). In general, marriage migrants in Germany have been overlooked in migration literature as past research has, “tended to neglect family migrants, treated dependents as motivated by their ties to the primary migrant, likely to be economically inactive and therefore of little concern” (Charlsey, 2012, p. 7). Therefore, academics from a variety of disciplines are increasingly turning their attention to the practice of intercultural marriage (Charlsey, 2012, p. 5). Overall, many studies of intercultural couples have represented a negative view of couples and presented them as problematic couplings (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 6).

American women marrying Germans and migrating to Germany represent a unique migratory group. For example, studies in Germany have shown how some of the main immigrant groups in Germany tend to marry others from the same country of origin (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007, p. 278; González-Ferrer, 2006; Kalter, 2010, p. 20). Studies have also shown that within immigrant groups in Germany, females enter into intercultural marriages with a spouse from outside of their country of birth or ethnic group at lower rates than males (Kalter, 2010, p. 20). The marriage of a female American immigrant with a German male therefore deviates from the common behaviour of other female immigrants who tend to marry a spouse from their country of origin. However, scholars have also noted that immigrants with higher levels of education are far more likely to marry native Germans and that “college-educated, intellectually and artistically inclined people are more likely than others to choose partners from social groups different from their own (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 6; González-Ferrer, 2006). Within intercultural marriages, scholars have classified four types of adjustment that couples from different cultures use to manage daily life. One partner will fully adapt to the culture of their partner; partners choose the time and context of when to adopt certain cultural patterns over the other; partners can compromise on a meeting between both cultures, or partners can agree on a permanent mix of both cultures (Mcfadden and Moore, 2001, p. 266). In terms of gender roles within intercultural marriages, research with transnational couples suggests that traditional gender roles are reinforced when the migratory partner within a marriage is the wife (Charlsey, 2012, p. 6).

While all couples will likely face significant pressure, for their individual differences and will need to adjust and accommodate for their differences, intercultural couples, “confront a more complex dynamic—not only a meeting of two unique individuals, but also of two carriers of seemingly distinct cultural expectations and understandings” (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 46). Scholars also note that in regards to personal identity, “one’s own cultural identity often becomes more salient when confronted with that of the “other”” (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 46).

Gender

In many German studies, migrant women have often been overlooked. Yet scholars claim that there is a “growing recognition of the ‘feminization of migration’”, in part because migration into Europe is increasingly female (Erel, 2016, p. 39, Rubin et al. 2008, p. 5). In fact, since women constitute nearly half of all immigrants in Europe, their experiences with integrating within the German system are significant in understanding the functionality and successes of settlement programs, services and regulations and can “contribute to our understanding and theorizing not only of migration but wider social phenomena” (Erel, 2016, p. 38; Rubin et al., 2008, p. 4). In the past, immigration research has often focused on studying the patterns of males, either ignoring females or labelling them as the “Other Other” based on their gender and foreign citizenship (Erel, 2016, p. 33). Yet more modern migration literature has found that women’s experiences are unique and very different from those of male immigrants, and their stories of immigration require specific attention as they are both marginalized through their gender and citizenship (Nawyn, 2010; Rubin et al., 2008). Past studies on immigrant women have frequently viewed them through their relations to men, for example those migrating as a dependent of a male family member and therefore in some cases are not legally permitted to work (Erel, 2016, p. 35). While historically female migrants in Germany were almost exclusively entering the nation as the spouses of migrant workers, today there are more routes in which women can enter Germany (Weber, 2005, p. 4). Regardless of their nearly equal workforce participation with males, immigrant women’s workforce participation has “often been absent in the discussions of immigrant women in Germany” (Weber, 2005, p. 5). Instead, immigrant women are often negatively labelled as a group that directly creates conflict with the German state by reproducing their own foreign culture within the home, and therefore hindering social and cultural integration and cohesion (Erel, 2016, p. 38). The labour market is not kind to immigrant women. Migrant

women find themselves overrepresented in low-skilled, part time jobs, and immigrant women work in low-skilled jobs at more than twice the rate of German nationals (Yurdakul, 2009, p. 113). Immigrant women in Germany are overwhelmingly employed within the “three C’s—cooking, cleaning and caring—experiencing lower pay, longer spells of unemployment and less job mobility than non-immigrant women and immigrant men” (Jayaraman and Bauder, 2014, p. 4; Rubin et al. 2008, p. 5).

Studies that do consider female perspectives on immigration in Germany overwhelmingly represent unskilled migrants, divorced migrants, Turkish women, visible minority groups, Eastern Europeans, and women from poorer nations who have married Germans as a means of attaining economic stability in a developed nation (Charlsey, 2012, p. 6; Erel, 2016, p. 107-108; Nawyn, 2010; Yurdakul, 2009). As immigrant women in Germany have come to be represented and imagined as Turkish and/or Muslim, women who do not fit those categories often go overlooked and little is known about their integration experiences (Weber, 2005, p. 12). While migrant women do experience varied degrees of agency based directly on their legal status and their right to work, for many immigrant women, their right to work is often tied to their relations with a male partner (Erel, 2016, p. 79). Targeting women, European governments are increasingly regulating marriage migrations (Charlsey, 2012, p. 8). Considering that women constitute nearly half of all immigrants in Europe, their experiences integrating in Germany are significant in understanding the functionality, successes, and flaws of settlement programs, services and regulations and can increase our, “understanding and theorizing not only of migration but wider social phenomena” (Erel, 2016, p. 38; Rubin et al., 2008, p. 4).

Contextualizing German Immigration

Germany has had a long struggle with acknowledging its identity as a country of immigration, as it has, “systematically refused to define itself as an immigration country” (Destatis; Rubio-Marin, 2000, p. 215; Schnuck, 2014, p. 180; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). The German legal system lagged far behind the influx of immigrants that came in two main waves; first in the 1950’s and 1960’s, labourers entered West Germany as Guest Workers primarily from Turkey, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Morocco, Tunisia, and the former Yugoslavia, and secondly in the 1980’s and 1990’s when migrants from Eastern Europe, the Balkan states and the former Soviet Union entered in large numbers (Erel,

2016; Hasenfratz, 2009; Jayaraman and Bauder, 2014, p. 6; Rubin et al., 2008, p. 4; Schnuck, 2014, p. 181; Triadafilopoulos, 2012; Weber, 2008, p. 3; Yurdakul, 2009). In spite of the government's intent to send guest workers back to their countries of origin, most stayed and were eventually permitted to bring their families to Germany in reunification (Schnuck, 2014, p. 180). A great deal of literature on immigration in Germany has dealt with the integration of and xenophobia towards Guest Workers and their children, with an additional focus on immigrants who enter Germany from poorer nations seeking upward social mobility or refuge from political, economic, or personal hardship (Ellerman, 2015). In fact since the 1970's, concerns over culturally inassimilable migrants, in particular those who threaten the "German way of life have dominated the immigration debate" in Germany (Triadafilopoulos, 2012, p. 126). In particular, disapproval of Turkish immigrants in Germany "has been applied to immigrant communities as a whole" (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. 255).

Without including the 12 million Ethnic Germans who migrated into Germany in the second half of the 20th century, "nearly one-fifth (19 percent) of the population in Germany had a migration background" (Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. xii). Yet the German government did not formally adopt an immigration law until the early 2000's when the Social Democrat and Green parties began the debate in parliament and finally in 2005, the government officially introduced the country's first immigration law (Erel, 2016, p. 24; Jayaraman and Bauder, 2014, p. 6). Because citizenship laws in Germany have traditionally been based the principle of *jus sanguinis*, where citizenship is attained through descent, from after the Second World War until the early 1990's, up to 12 million Ethnic Germans from mostly Eastern Europe were permitted re-entry into and citizenship in Germany while in that same time period, the children of Guest Workers who were born in Germany were not eligible to receive German citizenship (Erel, 2016, p. 26; Klusmeyer and Papademetriou, 2009, p. xii; Laversuch, 2008; Schnuck, 2014, p. 182; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). With the introduction of the immigration laws, immigrants can now legally naturalize and obtain German citizenship, which has in turn created a strong national debate and division over the meaning of German citizenship and identity (Erel, 2016, p. 25). Until this point in time, a great majority of the naturalizations have been by Turkish citizens, likely because the majority of immigrants to Germany today come from other European member states, who are less likely to value German citizenship or see any value in obtaining it (Erel, 2016, p. 26; Kahanec, 2009; Schnuck, 2014, p. 183).

While the laws regarding ethnic German citizenship have changed, the notion of nationality being rooted in ethnicity remains prominent in German culture. Erel notes that “although legally anyone without German citizenship is an *Ausländer*, socially the term coincides with racialization so that white West-Europeans are only occasionally labelled as *Ausländer*...On the other hand, for example Black Germans may experience being labeled as *Ausländer* despite their formal German citizenship and cultural competence” (Erel, 2016, p. 26-27). The construction of the ideal immigrant certainly relies of various external factors that individuals have little control over, such as citizenship and race. Language abilities, family structure, educational attainment and profession also play a role in evaluation of immigrants seeking permanent residence status. Yet with the introduction of the immigration laws of 2004, “unlimited residency was an exceptional status, granted in only individually justifiable cases” (Triadafilopoulos, 2012, p. 132). The fact that many participants of this research received unlimited residency permits, and often ahead of the regular scheduled order, is remarkable and displays how their American nationality, marriage with a German national, and language skills play an important role in the construction of the ideal immigrant. In fact scholars have noted that, “with increasing residence...social integration...consolidation of family ties and a professional status”, immigrants have access to, “a stronger constitutional status overall, including those rights initially reserved for citizens” (Rubio-Marin, 2000, p. 209). These factors of family, profession, social integration and length time spent in Germany are key factors that will likely impact the success of residency applications.

Methodology

Recruitment, Obtaining Consent, Researcher Reflexivity, Data Analysis Plan

Participants for this study were recruited through snowballing methods over email. I found suitable participants by passing my information, including my name, university affiliated email, and a brief summary of the study to personal acquaintances of mine in Germany. As my contact information was passed through various social networks and communities in Germany, potential participants emailed me expressing their voluntary interest in taking part in this study (See Appendix A for an example of the script). In total, eight research participants in various cities around the state of Baden-Württemberg were found in this manner and interviewed for this study.

Most interviews took place in the home of each participant. When arranging a meeting place with participants I allowed them to choose the setting, either in their homes for convenience or in a semi-public space for privacy. Most participants requested that I come to their home, to save them time commuting and also so that they could watch their children from home while taking part in the interview. Only one interview took place in a public space. Participants were given a selection of the dates that I would be in Germany and could select when, where and what time they would like to schedule an interview with me. Interviews took between one and two hours on average and were conducted in English.

Participants were required to sign an official consent form printed on paper, and were verbally informed that they could stop the interview at any time without any negative consequences. No participants chose to stop the interviews early. With the permission of each participant, interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Audio recording of each interview allowed for greater accuracy in the transcription and analysis. Recording also created a better dialogic conversation where I was not distracting the interviewee by taking notes throughout the interview conversation.

Both the interviews and the format of this thesis were carefully structured to best allow for the stories of participants to be heard and told in the most accurate and truthful manner possible. Semi-structured interviews allowed each conversation to be thematically guided while allowing each participant the time and space to elaborate on specific topics of interest and share their significant experiences related to the theme of this study. Researchers seeking to better understand immigration experiences in Germany and Europe tend to favour this method of data gathering (Hasenfratz, 2009). Appendix B includes a list of the themes that were covered in the interview as well as more in depth questions that were asked of each participant. This format of this thesis relies heavily on including excerpts from interviews in order to give voice to a demographic of immigrants whose stories often go unheard, a method that researchers have found effective when analyzing immigration experiences in Germany (Fuchs, 207).

This study took a feminist approach in analyzing, collecting and interpreting the data. Within this study, a feminist approach will be defined as seeking a mutual personal encounter in the interview process instead of the traditional approach where the researcher merely extracts knowledge in a one way manner. This is accomplished

through the semi-structured interview process, the inclusion of open-ended questions, honesty and openness to share on the side of the interviewer (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 177). The aim of this approach is to foster a safe and honest environment in order to allow an underrepresented group to tell their stories and experiences. It was also of the utmost importance for myself as a research to remain authentic and vulnerable throughout the interview process, meaning that I would share and react honestly, rather than manipulating the conversation to uncover specific responses. As a feminist researcher, I was very open with participants and made sure to share some important information about myself in order to display the commonalities between us. As a Canadian born, Caucasian female, who married a German at 19 and moved to Germany as an immigrant to live with him in his home country, I share many similar life experiences and commonalities with the participants. I was very open about my experiences and the challenges that I went through during the several years that I spent living in Germany and my efforts trying to integrate in German society and navigate life as an immigrant. My aim was that by sharing pieces of my story, participants would feel comfortable in the interview knowing that I understood their experiences. I considered this very important because as immigrant women married to Germans, their challenges with integration often go unnoticed or misunderstood by their German family or friends. Therefore, I wanted participants to know that they could be honest throughout the interview, knowing that I was someone who could understand and relate to their positive and negative experiences in Germany. Like many feminist scholars, I believe that my willingness to share my experiences with participants increased their interest in the research, resulted in more honest responses, and made the interview a shared conversation that was also rewarding to participants (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 179).

I also recognized the privilege and social position that I as the interviewer had and aimed to show my respect for the emotions, feelings and experiences of the interviewee throughout the interview process. However, in an effort to avoid influencing participants' responses at times during the interview, I was careful to project certain experiences of my own in a neutral manner. This ensured that my perspective or my experiences might not influence their responses, and that they could respond without feeling pressured or influenced any certain way. Additionally, I attempted to make it clear that I valued the life stories shared by each participant, and paid careful attention to various aspects of verbal communication that often go overlooked, such as tone,

repetition, or pauses (Sprague, 2005, p. 151-152). These techniques are crucial to the analysis in this study as significance is found not only in the words of each interviewee, but also in the manner in which they are verbalized and expressed. Considering some of the challenges discussed by participants, I will be maintaining participant confidentiality within the best of my ability and within reasonable measure in order to protect their identities.

In the process of analyzing the data collected through the interviews, the audio recordings were listened to several times each and interviews were transcribed word for word. This allowed for a textual analysis of the transcribed conversation. Taking a broad sociological approach, I looked for patterns, themes, and trends that participants brought up which displayed their common experiences. I then used the interview data to display the ways in which the experiences of individual immigrant women are connected, display patterns, and how they reflect on German society at large. I also show how this particular group differs from much of the existing research done with immigrant groups in Germany. While this research focused on one specific demographic of immigrants in Germany, I aim to connect findings to related research with immigrants and integration in general. For example, my findings can add to research on intercultural marriages, the impact of gender on immigration, integration into new cultures, and immigration experiences in a broad sense.

Theoretical Foundations

Taking a micro-sociological approach to understanding immigrant integration, this project focuses on the individual experiences that immigrant American women experience to display larger social patterns (Schnuck, 2014, p. 11). Schnuck defines integration as being a micro-sociological process of assimilation where individual migrants transform into becoming more similar to the native society, including the development of language skills, acquiring social norms and cultural knowledge (Schnuck, 2014, p. 11). Integration in this research project will be defined as the degree to which each individual participant claims that they feel at home in Germany and feel confident in their ability to function in day to day life without obstacles resulting from lack of cultural knowledge, social differences or language barriers.

For this purposes of this study, the term, “immigrant” will be defined as an individual born and raised in a country other than Germany, whose native language and culture is not German, and who has legally entered and is residing in Germany, is not seeking asylums, and is a non-German national, or a foreign-born individual, and is not considered to be an ethnic German (Rubin et al., 2008, p. 10). American women born and raised in the United States and who are living in Germany therefore may be labelled as immigrants. These women can also be classified as “marriage migrants”, since their migration into Germany was the result of a romantic relationship with a German national. For the purposes of this thesis, the term, “American” will be used in reference only to individuals from the United States of America, and will exclude all other North American nations. Throughout the body of the thesis, I often use U.S. to refer to the United States. In the interview excerpts, I use the letter “I” to refer to myself, the interviewer. The names of all participants were changed and pseudonyms were used for participants, their family members, and their place of residence. At times throughout the interviews, participants used a German word. I have included the English translations of any German words used in brackets and italicized directly following its use.

The term “culture” was frequently used in the interviews and throughout this thesis as a key component to understanding immigrant experiences in a new country. In this context, “culture” will be referring to the social norms, traditions, beliefs, values and characteristics that are commonly accepted, shared and acknowledged within a particular group in which one identifies (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 3). While asking participants to comment on various aspects of their American culture and their experiences with German culture, it is important to note that cultural identity is often rooted in, “symbolic or imagined communities” (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 49). This means that when participants discuss German culture they are commenting on their perception of German culture as they imagine it rather than one singular Culture that guides and connects all Germans. Any references to German culture are however important as they represent the interpretation of Germany’s culture by the respective participant. In addition, feminist scholars note that, “the memory of experience is not equivalent to truth; indeed, ‘there might be multiple truths about an event without diminishing either the significance of memory or the importance of finding out what ‘really’ happened” (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 182). This is especially important in references to their experiences in immigration offices and how they perceive themselves in relation to other

immigrant groups. It is also important in interpreting how participants often refer to a universal German culture, and traditional gender roles in particular. Rather than questioning the accuracy of participants' understandings of immigration laws, culture and social norms in Germany, understanding their perspectives and interpretations of their experiences in Germany are important to this research. In reference to cultural stereotypes of Americans, participants refer to political stereotypes of Americans that resulted from German media representations of American politics, in particular the election campaigns of summer 2016 when interviews were taking place. Other American stereotypes stemmed from German consumption of American media, film, literature, music and other cultural products in Germany. Experiencing a different personality in German was another important concept that came up in interviews. In this study, personality is used to refer to the ability to express ones' ideas, opinions, thoughts, and interests, as well as patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. The concept of identity is used to refer to the beliefs, values, perspectives, expressions and qualities that an individual embodies and their belief of where they place in society.

This research is theoretically grounded within sociological standpoint theories with a particular focus on Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography. Standpoint theory has been particularly well suited to studying women as it enables researchers to capture life from their often overlooked perspectives (Longino, 1993, p. 213). Smith's approach aims at "taking the everyday world as problematic" and grounds "ethnography in people's actual experience", connecting daily experiences to larger social patterns and structures and considering the perspectives of each individual participant valid and worthwhile for displaying larger social relations (Smith, 2005, p. 41). Standpoint theories are concerned with, "recognizing how power relationships help shape both the world we seek to understand and our efforts to understand it" (Rouse, 2009, p. 202). Furthermore, standpoint theories consider power, position, and privilege in social interactions as being highly significant and, "situate knowledge and epistemic warrant within the world, amid our interactions with other agents, rather than in an abstracted space of interactions" (Rouse, 2009, p. 202).

Institutional Ethnography grounds social analysis within standpoint theory while connecting micro-interactions to macro social contexts and therein finding greater social meaning. Indeed, the connection between macro and micro is essential within this theoretical approach which Smith claims, "pushes the boundaries of conventional

divisions between micro and macro, sociology” (Smith, 2005, p. 36). The experiences of individuals are thus vital to institutional ethnography, which, “advocates an alternate sociology that begins with “insiders’ knowledge”, that is, personal knowledge of one’s own lived experience” (Longino, 1993, p. 203). Therefore, within this framework, individuals, their daily routine interactions and experiences can become an abundant site for studying larger social patterns and institutions. By prioritizing everyday social interactions, potentially mundane experiences, as well as other overlooked aspects of life, institutional ethnography can uncover how complex social relations are present in the everyday and ways in which mundane activities or interactions are in fact closely connected to the broader social world (Smith, 2005, p. 39). Therefore, interviewing American immigrants in Germany and hearing stories of their daily life experiences can in fact reveal larger macro-sociological trends on immigration, transnational marriage, and integration. Institutional Ethnography also places significance on the role that various texts play in daily life (De Vault, 2006, p. 294-295). Of course for migrants, texts and bureaucratic documents have immense power over the individual’s right to stay, live, and work in their new country. For marriage migrants, their official marriage documents further provide special rights and privileges that they would not otherwise be entitled to. For Americans, their citizenship documents allow them further privileges that other immigrant groups may not receive due to their nationality. This research is therefore grounded in a recognition of the significance of various kinds of texts—such as residency visas, citizenship and passports, marriage certificates—and how vital they are to the daily lives of immigrants. Through these various labels, certificates and papers, individuals are connected to various governing institutions. Therefore, participant experiences tell much more than about the individual, they expose truths of the institutions they are connected to.

Institutional ethnography informed the topics that I asked participants to discuss and themes that I was interested in exploring. For example, I was interested in asking about the day-to-day experiences of participants, and understanding how they felt about various topics and why they felt how they did, considering their responses as social truths exposing broader social and cultural patterns. This contrasts from other perspectives which for example, may assess integration levels by testing language skills, looking at factors such as how many children individuals have, how many social contacts they have, or how much income they earn. Smith is also concerned with the role that

texts, such as bureaucratic paperwork, can have in displaying existing relations of power; in this regard, citizenship papers, marriage certificates, and visas are documents that situate participants in the social world and can have significant impacts on the lives of immigrant women in Germany (Longino, 1993, p. 203). In addition, recognizing that powers of ruling are not “experienced by all women in the same way”, I have maintained consideration of Hill-Collins’ adaptations to standpoint theory which advances it by at times bringing in considerations of race, gender, class and sexuality (Longino, 1993, p. 208). Overall, the framework of institutional ethnography has entirely shaped the nature of this research, from the topics and themes I asked about during the interviewing, to the style of interviewing and manner of casual interaction with participants, and the reliance on interview excerpts in the formation of this thesis to create social meaning and give voice to the individual participants involved in this research.

Participant Demographics

The range of age represented in this study is between 24 and 40. At the time of the interviews, the women in this study had been married anywhere from 8 months to 17 years and living in Germany from 4 to 18 years. Out of the eight women, six of them had children and they were all in their first marriage. Six out of the eight women hold a Bachelor’s degree from an American University, one woman is currently working on completing a Bachelor’s degree from a German University, and two of the women have or are near completion of a Master’s degree. At the time of the field work and interviews, one woman was a full time student, one was a self employed language teacher and the six other women were currently on maternity leaves, or unemployed stay at home mothers. All of the husbands of the women participants worked full time, most in the fields of technology and engineering while most women were educated and had previously worked in teaching or various office administration jobs. Two women came to Germany through short term contract positions through their American employers, and two came to Germany while taking a gap year holding various volunteer positions or taking on aupair work in Germany. Four of the eight women therefore met their husbands in Germany while they were living or travelling there on a short term basis. For these women, their decision to stay in Germany was entirely influenced by their relationship or marriage to a German man. The four other women met their German husbands in an international context where neither partner was in their homeland while

working, studying or volunteering. For some of these couples, meeting in an international context played a significant role in the harmony in their relationship and their husbands showed greater empathy when their American wives were experiencing homesickness and culture shock in Germany. The women who experienced the most distress and lack of empathy had husbands who had never lived outside of Germany. Therefore, international experience made a significant impact on surviving and thriving within an intercultural marriage.

Participant	Age	Years in Germany	Number of Children	Education Level	Employment Status	Spouses' Line of Work
Cara	28	6	2	B.A.	Stay at home Mother	Finance
Chloe	25	6	0	Current B.A.	Part-time job	M.D.
Dawn	40	18	2	B.A.	Stay at home Mother	Engineer
Jessica	30	8	3	B.A.	Part-time job	PhD Engineering
Kaley	24	5	3	High School	Part-time freelance	Office Worker
Rebecca	34	6	0	B.A., M.A., M.B.A.	Freelance	Engineer
Sam	36	10	3	B.A., partial M.A.	Stay at home Mother	Engineer
Stacy	25	4	1	B.A.	Stay at home Mother	Finance

Findings

Language proved to be a key factor in the integration experiences of all women interviewed. Language skills had the ability to either enable integration in society or to create widespread social and personal barriers. Without German language skills, participants were left struggling to complete even the most basic of daily tasks such as ordering food at a bakery, grocery shopping or asking for directions in public. For many women, these experiences quickly became degrading with the potential to have a severely negative impact on their emotional well being. With language acquisition, women were better able to understand German cultural norms, traditions and expectations. However, differences of language and culture were often cause for distress and conflict between participants and society at large, as well as in the home and in their intercultural marriages. Women who adopted German cultural norms experienced less social conflict overall, but often felt that their true American personalities were incompatible with German society. This left them feeling misunderstood, and generally caused complications with their sense of personhood. Those who maintained American social norms and failed to adopt German norms found that tension was more common in their close relationships and in society at large, leaving them feeling alienated and alone.

As Americans and English speakers, participants experienced both positive and negative sanctions in society. Their nationality and language usage often placed them in a privileged place in German society and often allowed participants to avoid the common stereotypes that immigrants frequently face in Germany. However, their foreignness still brought the common challenges, barriers and hardships that immigrants commonly experience.

As Americans, participants viewed Germany's social system with great appreciation and admiration, taking full advantage of services offered. Living outside of America and experiencing the widespread social benefits of a more socially minded government often led participants to experience a personal shift in their ideological and political views. For example, as mothers receiving monthly financial support from the government for each child, or taking advantage of free health care-including hospital birthing, midwife and doctor's visits, they were able to experience first-hand the benefits of different systems of governance. In addition, experiencing infrastructure that enables more walkable cities, having a food economy that encourages fresher food, and living in an environmentally concerned society were significant aspects of living in Germany that they also appreciated. Internalizing these German norms often led to broader changes in their worldviews. Subsequently, they often experienced culture shock when visiting America. In particular, massive grocery stores, the prevalence of highways, poor quality of healthy food options and lack of recycling led many to no longer feel at home in America.

As immigrants whose move was motivated by marriage and not financial gain, their expectations, and views of life in Germany reflect different values from other immigrant groups. Within intercultural marriages where one partner remains in their home country while the other becomes an immigrant appears to create a unique set of challenges and barriers to the marriage relationship. For the immigrant, they face many of their challenges and struggles alone as their partner may not recognize or simply cannot understand what it may feel like to immigrate and the struggle to integrate. However, as an immigrant, having a native partner also has many benefits. Participants are able to rely on their partners during the early phase of immigration when official forms, paperwork and other German language required tasks are necessary. Overall, life in Germany as an American immigrant motivated by marriage remained challenging for women regardless of their length of stay in Germany. While several participants

generally felt well integrated and satisfied with their lives in Germany, they too experienced daily interactions that reminded them of their foreignness. Overall, this research displays some of the common challenges that immigrant women and mothers face during the process of migrating and integrating into German society.

Chapter 1. Americans in Germany

American immigrants occupy a unique and interesting place in German society where they face stereotyping, receive social privilege, and are frequently viewed through the lens of the political and military climate of America. As American immigrants living in Germany, participants often experienced varied levels of privilege and stereotyping due to their American citizenship. They are often overlooked in immigration research due to their assumed privilege, however that privilege is unpredictable and they often still encounter many of the common barriers that immigrants face (Leinonen, 2012, p. 214). Most notably, American politics and the history and extent of American military presence in Germany has resulted in varied responses to Americans in Germany. Participants noted that because of their American nationality, they often felt alienated from the other large and more cohesive immigrant groups while also feeling alienated from the local German population. As Americans familiar in many of the basic norms in most Western societies, native English speakers and married to Germans, many women felt that they could at time hide their foreignness, and therefore avoid discrimination that outsiders would usually face. In general, most women also did not feel overly stereotyped or judged as being an immigrant by German society, noting that their American identity often acted as a buffer from discrimination or as a defence against conflict. Considering participant's positive and negative experiences and feelings about life in Germany, this section will make use of interview material to discuss the complex and unique place that Americans immigrants occupy in Germany.

As Americans, participants generally had a very positive view of Germany as a country and felt personally enriched by living there. When discussing their memories of Germany upon arrival in the country, all participants noted having positive first impressions. In particular, participants noted Germany's beautiful natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, impressive architecture and history, significant social benefits, and an international and diverse population as elements that contributed to their positive viewpoints. Researchers have shown that couples in intercultural marriages often feel a sense of personal enrichment from the "access and exposure to another world" resulting from their marriage, in particular because, "living with a culturally different partner allows for travelling across cultural boundaries and for gaining new and valuable perspectives

on life” (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 79). Most participants also mentioned that living in Germany had had various positive impacts on their individual sense of self. Some women in particular claimed that living in Germany had made them a more diverse, intelligent and open-minded individual than they were when they lived in America. The following excerpt from Kaley’s interview displays some of the ways in which participants felt that their time in Germany had benefitted and improved them as individuals:

I: Can you identify what has been the best thing about immigrating to Germany?

K: It was good to get out of the American bubble, and see more of, more of an international reality, an international perspective, to see racism differently, to see socially, everything differently, taxes, health care, um, to get a different perspective on that, to see refugees...and you know actually, I love knowing another language! It’s broadened my horizons, uh, I can identify with other people more... I really feel like the world is bigger and smaller at the same time, because I see things I never would have seen if I never would have moved to Germany.

Kaley’s response above displayed a very common theme amongst research participants. Most women experienced changed political and social views which caused them to feel less at home in America yet more content with their place in the world overall. Like Kaley, many also cited the great impact that learning German had on them. It opened up new social and professional opportunities, and helped them see the world through a different lens. Many participants also felt that their changed personalities made it more challenging to connect with family and friends back home in America. Overall, participants felt many positive benefits came from living in Germany.

Unless they broke a social norm or could not communicate in German, most women felt confident that they were able to hide their foreignness in certain contexts or use it to their advantage when needed. For example, Cara mentioned how she can use her American background as an excuse for violating minor social norms to accomplish tasks in her own way, much to the distress of her new German relatives:

C: It could be personality but I’m more like, “Oh we ran out of sugar let’s go ask the neighbour if we can borrow some.” And like this exact scenario has played out with Max and my mother in law, they were like, “Oh no”...they you know come up with every excuse, “It’s after 8 o’clock,” or, “It’s not the proper time to ask something,” or you know they come up with all of these things and I’m like look, so in some ways it’s freeing because it’s like “I’m American, I can get away with it.” But in another way I probably come off as a weirdo sometimes just

doing things like, "Hey can I ask you to borrow this" or "Hey do you um, I baked some cookies would you like some"...

Cara's comment displays how she makes use of her American identity to knowingly break social norms that she finds inconvenient, that she may disagree with, or that she may be dislike. Many other women also made note of common scenarios where they could draw upon their American cultural practices as an excuse for unexpected behaviour or when breaking a social norm. Drawing on ones' foreign background often came in handy when facing criticism over parenting styles, food or clothing choices or how holidays are celebrated. American immigrants in Germany can therefore use their identity as a means of negotiating potential conflict between their culture and German culture, displaying some of the privilege allowed American nationals.

Political events in America and German interpretations of American politics and American culture often had a significant impact on the reactions that Americans received when disclosing their citizenship or nationality in social situations. Scholars have noted that German perception of Americans tends to fluctuate with the political landscape of America and how their politics are viewed through the German lens, causing Americans to exist between feeling prideful or ashamed of their national identity (Du Bois, 2007). While several participants brought up these exact sentiments, the following excerpt from Dawn's interview displays these seemingly random responses well:

D: Bush president, Obama president, it was a difference between day and night. I'm telling you. Even in my work, when Bush was president, I had so many people all of a sudden say..."I don't want to go to the US"...So with Bush it was quite negative...ever since Obama became president it's become quite okay to be American...the political situation makes such a huge difference. Heaven forbid that Trump become president because I'm going to have to hide in a cave...

This excerpt displays how Americans in Germany often receive positive or negative attention due to their American status and the German view of American politics. Research with Americans living in Norway also displayed how speaking English in public during Bush's re-election could result in prejudice or even a verbal attack on an individual assumed to be American (Leinonen, 2012, p. 217). This suggests that when abroad, Americans individuals can find themselves being held accountable for the behaviour of their government or anything that local populations may find unpopular or inappropriate about their home nation. In addition, it supports scholarly findings that like most immigrants, American women are also reduced to positive and negative

stereotypes about their nationality (Du Bois, 2007, p. 213). Because of the way that Germans viewed Americans as representatives of their nation, the German response to American culture and politics became highly personal to participants. Like many others, Stacy noted that because of the political climate in America, she internalized the negative perception of America that the German media had:

S: ...And you know, now with the whole election season and everything all going crazy it's like...it's just embarrassing to me and it's like I just don't even want to think about it so, so yeah that's been an odd, an odd thing that's happened, I didn't think that was going to happen where I was like, "Oh I don't want to be American anymore"...

For Stacy, the political events taking place in America were embarrassing enough to cause her to want to abandon her American identity in order to escape repeated social critique. For most women, concealing their American identity generally resulted in less social criticism. The following excerpt from Chloe's interview further demonstrates the common criticism that Americans in Germany can face on a regular basis and how it can quickly become frustrating in social situations:

C: ...being like the token American...you are the target for, anything anybody has to say about America, like, "What's wrong with your country like with Donald Trump?" and I'm like, "I don't know" you know, the war in Afghanistan or, or, just all these things where people have all these things with Americans and they just like bring it to your table like, I don't know, I'm just one American, and I'm not, I didn't make that decision, I didn't say let's go invade here and there, and that is a frustrating thing that continues...

This excerpt illustrates how Americans can find themselves being the target in social situations for any issues that Germans may have with America as a nation. Several participants noted that because of the hassle that their American identity can cause them in Germany, at times they may prefer to hide it as best they can to avoid uncomfortable and unwanted debate or interrogation. Overall, Americans in Germany are often viewed through the political and cultural ideas that Germans hold of America as a nation, causing individuals to resent, avoid, or hide their nationality.

The American military presence in Germany also has a significant impact on the kinds of social reactions that American women face in Germany, with a particular impact on their use of language. The following excerpt from Rebecca's interview illustrates how American military presence in Germany can complicate the German public's view of American citizens in general:

R: I do really feel treated differently as an American because I think people have positive stereotypes of Americans generally...in general the older people love you because they remember the war, they remember the Americans handing out candy...they're not thinking, "Oh you're taking a job away from me"...and then with so many Americans, especially in the military communities they don't speak German, so if you speak any German,...they're like "You speak such good German!" Or, "Wow! You speak German!" So I can win, with my little German, I can win a ton of brownie points, and then now that my German is pretty decent it's different. And you hear Turkish or something and their German is as good as mine, but I don't think people would think the same. It would be like, "Ugh, they've been here twenty years and they still don't speak German" but with me it's like "Oh wow, you speak German!"

Rebecca's comment above brings up several notable dynamics of immigrant life for American women in Germany. She illustrates the ways in which American military presence past and present can influence German perceptions of Americans. She also makes note of the way in which she as a foreign woman is not viewed as a threat to local jobs. In fact, research shows that because immigrant women have typically been portrayed as family care takers rather than workers, they have been less subject to animosity over a supposed threat to local jobs (Kofman et al., 2000, p. 2). She also shows how German language skills can result in respect and admiration from the local German population, as well as symbolically and practically free her from common German stereotypes of Americans and immigrants in general. As Rebecca noted, Sam also made mention of the way that she is compared to the behaviour common of American military families in Germany. In the following excerpt, Sam comments on the difference between herself as an immigrant living in Germany and Americans affiliated with the American military bases in Germany:

S: ...We knew these Americans that live on base...they don't speak German, they don't even try to learn German they don't try and integrate, and they expect to come, to pass through with their American-ness and just be accepted because, "We're the Americans"...like I've gotten a lot of, "But wow, your German is so good" and you're like, "Well I've lived here for ten years, and why shouldn't it be good?"

Sam's comments display a duality within the image of Americans citizens abroad. American immigrants and American military communities are often viewed as the same because of their American citizenship. However, their reasons for residence abroad may reflect different values and worldviews. It should also be noted that the military culture of America does not necessarily reflect civilian cultural norms, beliefs, or values. For Sam

as an immigrant in a German city with a large American military community where stereotypes of Americans are commonly reproduced through interactions or observations of the military community, her language skills set her apart from other Americans and other immigrants. Stacy also experienced positive reactions when her American identity was exposed through her language skills or accent:

S: Like people are so positive when they find out about like, "Wow you're American, man your German is so good!" and they're always very encouraging yeah and that's really nice.... they don't think that I'm American, so that's kind of nice because you know the American stereotype unfortunately isn't the best right now.

From Sam and Stacy's comments above we see how Germans often base their ideas of Americans based on observations of the American military and often view them separate and often favourably in comparison with other immigrant groups. Both Sam and Stacy had past experiences socially engaging with Americans in Germany stationed through the U.S. military and they sought to distinguish themselves from the military population in Germany, and establish themselves as separate from that group. Based on feedback from participants, Americans attempting to speak in German also receive exceptionally positive reactions. While research shows that attempting to speak in the local language often exposes an individual as an immigrant rather than a tourist, Americans speaking German are often met with praise and approval (Leinonen, 2014, p. 217). Leinonen claims that immigrant visibility is, "contingent on specific national and temporal contexts, in which hierarchies based on race, class, nationality, and language intersect to produce different kinds of visibility for different groups of foreigners" (Leinonen, 2014, p. 214). Because so many American military families living in Germany do not attempt to learn German or integrate, American women in Germany who attempt to speak German in public situations are seen as displaying their willingness to integrate. The fact that their broken German is often met with enthusiasm and applause is no doubt related to a variety of assumptions about their identity. These positive stereotypes of Americans and English speakers that exist in Germany can result in Americans experiencing social privilege. Dawn noted that while at her local playground for example, other parents will comment with admiration over her use of English with her children: "They're like, "Oh you're raising your kids to be bilingual, well that's great!" You know and I'm thinking, well if I was raising my kids to speak German and Turkish how great would that be?" Dawn's comment illustrates the privilege that can come with speaking English and being

American in Germany. Kaley also referenced the privilege that can sometimes come with speaking English in Germany, and provided some examples from her own life:

K: ...People will also have conversations with me or in my presence and they'll talk, they will "Aufregend" (*become upset*) themselves about the Turkish people or anybody else and, "How dare they speak Turkish at home, that's just so terrible" and everything and if I bring up, "Well we speak English at home" then they say that it's good to speak your mother tongue at home. "Oh but you're American" they'll say, "That's different." I don't understand how that's any different than, you know.

Both Dawn and Kaley's comments above reveal the privilege that English speaking Americans can experience in Germany. They also outline how Americans are viewed through a comparative lens with other immigrant groups and suggests that American immigrants are labelled more positively than other migrant groups. In general, in spite of Germany's concern that immigrants speak German, Americans speaking English are treated with positivity.

The positive social stereotypes towards Americans extend into the bureaucratic realm as well. For example, after twice renewing the initial three year visa that American spouses of Germans can receive, immigrants are finally eligible to apply for a permanent residency visa. However, upon application to renew their first three year visas, three participants all received permanent residency status in Germany, saving them the second three year period of living in Germany on the temporary visa. In all three cases, it appears that the interplay of citizenship, marriage status, and language abilities led to these unexpected visa extensions. The following excerpt from Stacy's interview displays her experience in this scenario:

I: I've just heard that Americans get easier access to visas, like a three year visa and Americans can get unrestricted visas

S: Yeah, like that's actually what just happened to me um, last year, I'm I was supposed to get an Aufenthaltstitel (*residence permit*) that was supposed to be good for I think five more years, and she just gave me an Unbefristete (*unlimited*) one...

I: What! Really?

S: Mhmm, yeah, yeah, well because I went in there speaking German obviously I had all the paperwork and we were married and I think she just probably just looked at me and went, well...I mean she didn't say it...okay, my German is good enough that people pretty much think okay, you're good, you're a benefit to our society now...

Stacy's excerpt displays how she was able to skip the second three year visa period and receive a permanent visa after her first three year visa expired. She attributed this to her German language abilities and her marriage to a German. Kaley also received permanent residence three years early. In the following excerpt from Kaley's interview, we see the significant impact that American citizenship, in combination with German language ability, motherhood and skin tone can have in the process of attaining a visa in Germany:

I: Oh, okay, wow, how did you get that? (Re: Unlimited Residency)

K: Usually you have to do your three years visa and then another three years visa and then you get your permanent residency. But when I went in to renew the three year, um, they just gave me a permanent residency...I'm guessing it's because we already had children...and I spoke German when I asked them.

I: That's amazing...and is that because you have a German spouse?

K: Um, it's because I'm American, and because I'm married to a German, but when my husband called to ask about what we should apply for they said that as an American I can really get what I want. If I had a head covering when I went in, or if they could see that I was a Muslim then my chances would be very slim. We also have another friend, he is from Brazil, but he has Black skin, his English is perfect, they denied his permanent residency application.

I: Wow so it came down to skin color. Did they tell him that?

K: They told my husband on the phone...he called to ask just what we should apply for, they said: "If your wife is American, White, and non-Muslim then she should be able to just go ahead and just get the permanent residency"...

This excerpt clearly displays how Americans can experience institutionalized privileged above other migrant nationalities in Germany. It also shows the impact that marriage status, language ability, race and gender can have on individuals in an official setting. For Kaley, this experience receiving a permanent visa earlier than normal because of her American citizenship troubled her, as she witnessed the denial of her Brazilian friend's visa around the same time that she received hers. She credits her marital status, nationality, and race for receiving her visa early, yet those are the same grounds that prevented her friend from receiving his. Institutionalized ideas of race, citizenship, nationality, and what constitutes a "good immigrant" were clearly at play in Kaley's interaction with a state representative. The fact that she is a mother with half German children likely also played an important role in her fast track to permanent residency. While Kaley was aware of the privilege as an American, Stacy was less aware of her privilege until it came up during the interview and she had time to reflect on her own

experiences. In the following excerpt, we see how Stacy makes sense of her status as an immigrant while also acknowledging her distinction from other immigrants due to her American status, marriage to a German and ability to speak fluent German:

I: And do you think of yourself as an immigrant or do you prefer the term expat?

S: Yeah, no I do, I do identify as an immigrant definitely because I've had to I have to go through a lot of the processes that other people do so...but for instance I identify as an immigrant because when you go into the office to get your Aufenthaltstitel (*residency permit*) you are sitting in the row with the other people that are Turkish, you know the Muslims, the people from Poland, you know you're all there and you're all together, and so you're waiting there with this guy from Poland and this guy from Turkey and you're like, "I'm an immigrant, I am just like them". However, now that you mention it, I, we always did notice a difference, and I always just thought it was because I spoke German but I think it's also because I'm an American, now that you mention it because we always had the fastest waiting time like they always got me in right away and they always just stamped my stuff and I could leave and then in the next room the guy I was just sitting next to, you know it took a lot longer and they asked him a lot more questions and so yeah...

Stacy's comments demonstrate the unique place that American immigrants occupy in German society. On the one hand she feels a sense of privilege over other migrants in the visa application office because of her American citizenship. Yet on the other hand she identifies with the similarities that she has with other immigrants. Many participants mentioned feeling connected with other immigrants over their common place as newcomers in German society, yet they also noted a sense of distance from other immigrant groups that are larger and more cohesive than Americans in Germany, or those whose experiences in Germany they cannot relate to. Research with Americans and other immigrants from "Western industrialized nations" has shown that while they may not always identify as immigrants and in some social areas do in fact experience some privilege, their privilege is not a constant. In particular, having the immigrant label or not being a native born citizen is often a barrier to employment regardless of an immigrant's home nation (Leinonen, 2012, p. 214). Based on the experiences of the participants of this research, American women who are married to Germans experience privilege within bureaucratic matters in Germany.

Not all participants viewed themselves as immigrants but rather considered themselves expatriates or simply individuals living abroad. This likely stems from the different cultural meanings associated with the word, 'immigrant' in Germany and

America. In Germany, the term “immigrant” was one that many participants did not always relate to. Some felt torn between their immigrant status and the associated meanings of the term. Scholars have noted that Americans living abroad prefer to view themselves as expatriates rather than immigrants (Leinonen, 2012, p. 213). The following excerpt from Rebecca’s interview displays the unique way that Americans conceptualize and make sense of their status as immigrants:

I: So do you primarily associate with other immigrants, or Germans or international people?

R: It’s interesting that you’re saying this because I never think of my friends as immigrants. I would never, that’s really, I would never really use that word, which is interesting, like I haven’t thought of that, like I wouldn’t be like, “Okay so you’re an immigrant”

I: What word would you use you think?

R: I would probably say more like, internationals, or like, expats...like when I hear the word immigrant in the German context, I would say then I think of someone like, from the Middle East, from...cause I think like migrants, and this is just my own, like, how I understand the words, like an immigrant would be like maybe someone from Turkey or Syria who’s been living here for a long time, or and then like, like, and Romanians, and East Europeans, who are here for jobs, the biases that people have...but I would just say I’m more living here for a time...

According to Rebecca and several others, the term “immigrant” in Germany holds specific stereotypes, assumptions and categorizations based on nationality or ethnic heritage. Indeed, scholars have noted that regardless of legal recognition as a foreigner or national citizen, German notions of citizenship coincide with the concept of race (Erel, 2016, p. 26-27). This may explain why Caucasian American immigrants can at times easily hide their foreign identities. For them, exposing their language abilities or accent is the first and most prominent way that their American citizenship is exposed, rather than skin colour or physical appearance. Having the ability to blend with a part of the local majority is a luxury and privilege that many American immigrants experience that other immigrant groups currently cannot. American immigrants in Germany may even experience less negative reaction based on their physical appearance than citizens from other EU member states who have the legal right to move and work within Germany and other EU member states. This displays how nationality and legal rights can at times be seen as less important than physical appearance. Most participants selectively chose to identify with their official legal label of immigrant based on the current personal, social or political meanings associated with immigrant terminology. Like Rebecca, while Chloe

recognized her status as an immigrant, she identified more with the term, expat. The following excerpt explains her reasoning:

C: Yeah I mean I guess the question is where you end up where you're going to want to be for the long term, yeah if I think we were going to stay here for the rest of our lives then I would think more of myself as an immigrant whereas right now we have more of the luxury of choice where we could go anywhere we want...I think of myself more as an expat probably, than an immigrant, um, because like, if I ended up staying here long term I would think of myself as an immigrant...

Rebecca and Chloe's responses illustrate a common theme amongst Americans in how they seek to avoid labelling with the term, 'immigrant' (Leinonen, 2012, p. 213, p. 218). This suggests that Americans do not view themselves as immigrants, perhaps because of how they view America, the world and their place within it. Research shows that for Americans, the term expatriate "evokes visions of international globetrotters who are privileged, middle or upper class, separate from immigrant classes," perhaps something that Americans aspire to or already identify with (Leinonen, 2012, p. 218). Rejecting the immigrant label and identifying as someone "living in Germany for a time" is also rejecting the social meanings associated with the term immigrant. For many participants, the term immigrant was racialized and indicated a poor, uneducated, and desperate individual seeking refuge in Germany with hope for a better life. Participants however, chose to migrate for a romantic relationship and feel a sense of mobility between America and Germany. Self labelling as an expatriate on the other hand, may reinforce power relations that consider America as a superior nation or inform others of where you consider home to be. Rather than identifying as an immigrant in Germany, individuals draw on their citizenship to gain social privilege and identify themselves as American expatriates abroad. While the distinction between immigrant and expatriate is both significant and meaningful, to Germans participants are still generally labelled as immigrants. Overall, regardless of legal status, not all Americans considered themselves to be immigrants and generally preferred to avoid the social meanings associated with the term.

Americans in Germany, often viewed by others as representatives of their politically and economically powerful nation, experience a unique sense of privilege in Germany because of their citizenship and their native English proficiency. While they can relate to other immigrants as outsiders in German society, their American identity often gives them institutional and social privileges that other immigrants may not enjoy.

Americans may not always identify as immigrants and some prefer to think of themselves as expatriates as a way of disassociating themselves with the negative stereotypes surrounding immigrants in Germany. As Americans, they are often viewed within and held accountable for the political and military contexts of their country. Overall, Americans occupy a unique and fluid place in German society, sometimes being privileged while at other times socially excluded for their foreign ways.

Chapter 2. Belonging

American women living as immigrants within intercultural marriages in Germany struggle to feel a sense of belonging in both their native and new countries. As women adapt to life in Germany and adopt German customs, values, and traditions, they distance themselves from American culture and society. Yet in Germany, they are still outsiders due to their foreign status. When visiting America the women fail to feel fully at home in their native society as they have come to embody aspects of German society, leaving women to exist in a social space between both American and German cultures and feel a lack of belonging in both countries. As immigrants become proficient in performing and engaging within the majority German culture, they gain the ability to selectively display their American and their German personas as they wish. This chapter will be discussing the complex emotional experiences related to belonging as an immigrant in Germany.

As immigrants, participants struggled with feelings of belonging in both American and German societies. The more time they spent in Germany adjusting to and internalizing German culture, the more foreign the Americans felt to participants during their family visits back home to the U.S. This caused participants to feel like they did not fully belong in either society. An individual's identity can be defined as, "the meanings that she/he acquires through social interaction and thus is crucial to an understanding of an individual's sense of self" yet, "there has been much debate regarding the *stability* of identity" (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 47). The participants in this research display the fluidity of identity and how the individual can, in a very short time, experience significant changes within their identity. After 18 years of living in Germany, and acknowledging the personal impact that German society has had on her, Dawn still longs for a sense of home:

I: So there is that longing to go home?

D: Yep, yeah, for sure.

I: So that never goes away?

D: Mm-mm. (no) Although when I'm in the US there is that part of me that's German...

I: And you miss Germany then?

D: Certain things, yeah. There are certain things that I miss. Right, that's how it is to be a foreigner. You don't belong anywhere.

The sense that immigrants exist in spaces in between two or more countries or cultures may also be impacted by their intercultural marriages. Where some immigrants who are married to a spouse from their home nation may feel more at home within their marriage, immigrants within intercultural marriages face cultural conflict on a daily basis within their very homes. Sam also expressed feelings confused over her identity when visiting the United States:

S: Yeah, you don't belong, I think as a foreign partner too, there's nowhere that you belong after a while...

I: Oh?

S: After ten years, I'm not, I have reverse culture shock when I go home. When you walk into a Target, or you walk into a giant grocery store, you're like, at first I'm just overwhelmed and at first I want to buy all the things, and then you're like "wait a minute, oh my gosh", so and, but I'm not German, and I never will be 100% German. I like living here, I feel integrated, but I'm not German...

I: Yeah so you still feel like a foreigner?

S: Yeah, for sure, and I always will...so um, so yeah, in some respects you belong to two worlds and you'll never belong to either of them 100% again.

Like all participants in this study, Sam acknowledged the unique place that she occupies in the social world in Germany and America. As immigrants married to locals, these women exist in a seemingly permanent blend of two cultures. Similarly, Stacy noted that she experiences reverse culture shock when visiting home, displaying the internalization of German culture:

I: And when you go back do you feel culture shocked or missing Germany too?

S: Oh yes! Oh my gosh so bad! And I mean especially it's just the littlest things, the things you don't even think about, like the garbage, like holy shit, people don't think about anything! My sisters are throwing Dasani, thick plastic water bottles in the waste! And it's like not only is that recyclable but in Germany you could get money back for that because of the Pfand (*bottle return deposit*) and so it's just like my mind is blown every time I'm back there, like, "How is this even a thing here?" I mean the Germans are so anal about separating it. But then on the other hand it's sometimes enjoyable culture shock because um, stuff I really miss about the US like, drive thru coffee, oh that's great and I miss that so...

Stacy's comment also shows how immigrants, now being exposed to a different way of living, can both dislike factors about their homeland, but simultaneously miss other

aspects of life. Again, we see how immigrants are living in between cultures. Cara, who acknowledged not yet feeling a sense of integration in Germany, also mentioned feeling torn between two homes:

I: So would you say you feel at home in Germany?

C: It's weird, I kind of, I kind of do, especially when we come back from vacation or come back from the US, I feel like both, when we get there I'm like "Oh I'm at home, kinda" and then we get back and I'm like "Oh I'm at home kinda"...

Cara's use of the word, "kinda", reflects how immigrants combine various aspects of their native and their new host countries to become a blended individual. This feeling of being torn between two places was very common amongst participants. Regardless of how long participants had lived in Germany, how fluent their German, or how integrated they felt in society, all participants expressed feeling that they embodied both American and German cultures. While their lives in Germany impacted them to the point where they no longer felt entirely at home in America, their American heritage continued to create barriers in Germany. Indeed, research shows how immigrants at times feel more connected to their homeland, while at other times feel that they have adopted the culture of their host country (Leinonen, 2011, p. 204). While they can strongly feel a sense of longing for their home country, at the same time they can acknowledge no longer identifying with certain aspects of its culture (Leinonen, 2011, p. 204). These feelings reflect a perpetual state of living as an outsider, no longer at home in the US, but never at home in Germany either. Kaley's comments below display just that:

I: So you said you're as integrated as you want to be.

K: Yeah...

I: So does that mean you want to retain your home American culture, is that what you mean?

K: Yeah, and um, I'm not sure if I'll ever get to the point where people want me to be at, where I speak 100% German 100% of the time because I don't think people will ever really get to know me.

Kaley's comment reflects how she feels that her personality can only ever be truly expressed in English, and that in German she cannot express herself fully. Language is a vital means by which we express our personalities. Sam also expressed a desire to exist as a combination of both German and American cultures:

S: I don't want people to be like "Oh you're that American"...I don't necessarily need to be German either, you know...

I: Okay, what do you mean by that?

S: Like, I don't need them to be like, "Wow you have, you're perfectly accent free, your grammar is perfect" you know, I don't, I'm okay with being an American, so it's fine with me...you know, I still introduce myself as Sam (*spoken in an American accent*).

This excerpt displays the precarious nature of selectively choosing when to blend in and when to stand out. As immigrants whose family may not understand their struggles, American women often find social belonging primarily with other American immigrants.

The following excerpt from Cara's interview displays just that:

I: So do you primarily associate with immigrant women in Germany or a native Germans in your social circle?

C: I mean I guess to cherry pick, I associate best with like foreign American, other American women. The Turkish women and African women are also foreign, but our cultural background is so different, and the situations that we're in are so different...so I relate to them in the sense that we're both foreign, but I equally relate to the Germans um, that are not like too German, um, cause we have more in common culturally, like Western...

Cara's comments illustrate how American immigrants search for belonging and understanding and can find commonalities with various social groups in Germany. Like many immigrants, she finds the greatest commonality with other female immigrants from her country. Research has shown that immigrants find it easiest to make friends with other immigrants from the same country, with whom they could connect with over their shared common experiences (Leinonen, 2011, p. 202). Finding connection and belonging in friendships proved just as challenging as it was for women in their extended families. Generally, participants experienced a sense of longing for home, both in America and Germany, displaying how immigrants can adapt to their new culture to the point where they no longer feel a sense of belonging in their native country or in their new country.

Immigrants selectively express various German or American aspects of their identities based on social contexts and situations. Scholars have noted that personal identities are reinvented when people migrate and move between cultures, noting that people, "who have lived in more than one culture or who straddle two or more cultures are "hybrids" who create "counter-narratives" that both evoke and erase cultural boundaries" (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 50). Many participants expressed a sense of wanting to fit in with mainstream German society in order to avoid standing out as a foreigner while at other times feeling very defensive or proud of the aspects of

themselves that made them distinctly American. The decision to embody, express, or conceal aspects of their German or American identity varied based on social surroundings, environments and contexts. In some cases, concealing aspects of their foreign identity can help immigrants feel less of an outsider in society. For example, Kaley noted that when in public, she often attempts to reduce her visibility as a foreigner:

K: ...and now when we're in public, a lot of the time my husband will be speaking English louder than me. I'm very embarrassed to speak English in public and I try to be as quiet as possible.

I: Really? Why!?

K: Because I like to fit in, I like, I don't want people to stare at me, whereas he enjoys the attention, he is proud of his English and he is not at all afraid to let people see, and know that we're different...

As an immigrant, Kaley feels that her use of English in public will undoubtedly expose her as a foreigner. Indeed, Americans speaking English can make themselves visible outsiders by deviating from local language norms (Leinonen, 2012, p. 214). Her German husband on the other hand feels proud of his English and wants to use it in public to distinguish himself from the local population. For the immigrant who may face frequent social barriers because of their immigrant status, speaking German can help them feel empowered and less excluded from mainstream society. Like Kaley, Cara also tried to avoid standing out in public as a foreigner. However, over time she became more comfortable with exposing her American identity:

I: When you're walking through the streets or out in public just going about your day do you feel that you stand out as a foreigner?

C: I definitely felt that more before, like now I think I try to like fit in...I try to like be more German!...

I: You don't want to stand out?

C: You do, you do in a way, because I'm like well I don't want to be German, but...I find this interesting. I feel like I'm a new thing. I'm not German, I'll never fit in perfectly here, but I'm not American anymore either...I'm like my own new thing...

Understanding German norms, and being able to, anticipate, participate or knowingly reject them in everyday activities can feel empowering and makes immigrants in intercultural marriages a unique group. When discussing how she still feels somewhat uncomfortable with her life in Germany, Kaley made note of some of the factors that she feels have helped her reduce her visibly foreign identity:

I: So can you identify what, what in your life happened? Is it just that time passed and made things better over time or friendships or language?

K: Being able to fit in better, I didn't like it when people could immediately tell that I was foreign. I didn't like the feeling of being foreign. And the longer I've been here, the more I know how to dress, how to act in the grocery store, not to smile at people (laughs), just to get stuff done, and how to put things on the band at the grocery store as fast as I can...and the language too. I know what's going to happen when I go to the store, I know how to park the car, I know everything like that, and when I'm in a situation when it's totally new to me, I like my husband to go first so that I can see him model it and then I know what to do next time. Just the whole fitting in aspect.

I: Yup that makes sense, fitting in and feeling like you know what's going on.

K: I don't want to be visibly foreign...

This excerpt displays some of the techniques that newcomers adopt in order to mask their foreign selves. Other participants also made mention of how they made use of clothing and changed their body language as measures that they used to fit in socially. Indeed, scholars have found that successful immigrant integration relied not only on language abilities but also on learning how to imitate, "in the sense of taking on socio-cultural practices of daily life and performing them within society" (Goncalves et al., 2013, p. 16). Imitating German norms and customs also functions as a coping mechanism or a way of avoiding attention for being foreign. With cultural understanding, internalization and performance, immigrants also expressed more confidence and contentment with standing out as an outsider. The desire to fit in socially and display knowledge of German social norms fades over time. As immigrants become more proficient in the local culture and customs, they also become more comfortable with displaying the ways in which they are different.

As participants' level of acceptance of their foreign identity increases over time and with integration in German society, they also experience identity loss and a disconnection with American culture. Based on the comments that several participants made, it appears that upon initial migration when they have the least cultural knowledge of German society, immigrants try their hardest to fit in. As they acquire cultural understanding and language skills, immigrants begin to feel more secure with the ways in which they differ from mainstream German and American societies. Chloe noted that:

C: ...I guess I mostly try to like, not so much lately but once I've established that I'm a good German I feel more free to be an American if that makes any sense...

I: Yeah once you've proven yourself, then you can own it...

C: Right, cause I feel, like I didn't want to be like the American that only hangs out with other English speaking people or doesn't understand anything that my husband says when he's speaking with his friends or his family...and um, now that I have that I feel a little more freed up to be that American, but that's only like in very recent times, so um, cause I, I don't know for a while you feel like this struggle like, well I am American but I don't want to come off as American, because of all these stereotypes and opinions about America, so you try your very best to fit in and then you kinda reach a point where you're like okay they see that I don't have any accent when I speak German, they see that I've lived here for a long time, and I'm studying...

Chloe's comments reflect the complex emotions that immigrants can experience from concealing and revealing their American identities. This is likely because initially as newcomers, aware of their lack of German language skills and cultural proficiency, they involuntarily stand out as a foreigner. It seems that for many, the negativity associated with the foreigner label serves as motivation to try and avoid standing out as a social outsider. However, over time, with language development and as they begin to understand and embody German culture, they seem to feel more comfortable with owning up to their American identities. Once that point is reached and they feel comfortable with their place as an immigrant in German society, then they have the option to selectively choose when they want to expose that part of themselves rather than having it exposed involuntarily. Similarly, the following excerpt from Stacy's interview exemplifies the complicated relationship that immigrants may have with their native culture after adapting to life in a new country:

I: So for the stereotypes have you experienced just the positive or also negative?

S: For the stereotypes, I've experienced both, um, yeah and well sometimes it's kind of funny because the Germans have no problem about bad mouthing the Americans to me as an American, they'll start going like, "Well yeah and you guys, all you do is eat fast food" and all these stereotypes about Americans, it's like well actually that's not true but I'll just sit here and let you bad mouth me anyway. But on the other hand, the longer I live here the longer I or the more I stop identifying as an American, I don't really identify as an American anymore...I identify much more as a German, and it's kind of an odd shift because I feel like I don't know, I've really left that part of me behind, now since I've had him, my sort of patriotism is coming back quite a bit cause you know, he's half American so it's like okay. But for

a long time it was just like, you know I don't even want to be associated with the United States...

I: So for a while you just wanted to fit in you would say and then some times where you are more proud of it?

S: Yeah and there's the best example I have of that is that when I first moved here if I ever heard people speaking English I would like go up to them and be like "Oh are you an American?!" And now when I hear people speaking English I don't immediately go say hi to them because sometimes they're embarrassing themselves on a train full of Germans and it's like I'm not going to identify with them right now which is then it makes me feel a little bit guilty it's like oh I'm not identifying with my own people...

Stacy's comments provide a glimpse into the complicated emotional processes that immigrants can go through as they journey from immigrant newcomer to integrated foreigner. As many other participants noted, she experienced a change in her personal identity and where she saw herself fitting in socially. Interestingly, Stacy experienced a resurgence of national pride with the birth of her son and wanting to pass on that part of his heritage to him as he is raised in his father's country. However, since she feels more integrated and secure within her life in Germany, she feels a sense of disconnection with America and Americans that she may see in public. As immigrants integrate in Germany, they adopt German cultural norms and are able to distance themselves from their American identities. Like Stacy, Chloe also experienced significant changes within identity from her life experiences in Germany:

C: ...there are a lot of differences that if we ever did move back to America I would love to take with me. Cause it's kind of this love/hate thing now, cause when I go back to America and I don't feel at home there...like air conditioning for example. That doesn't exist here really (laughs) and I love it when I'm there to be like cool, but then at the same time I'm like, can we open the window because I would like some fresh air and not just this air conditioning, um, or I don't know, like, drinking water without ice, or um, drinking bubbly water, and I mean I don't even really like bubbly water...

I: So you don't feel at home when you go to America anymore?

C: No.

I: And do you feel at home in Germany?

C: Um, yeah I mean I kinda, feel at home in both places, you also feel like a stranger in both lands...it's a very strange thing...I think that happens, cause you have home in both places. And I've lived like a fifth of my life here now right...and my values changed a lot as well right...I became a lot more liberal I would say...I mean I just learned a lot through having international friends even friends from Afghanistan, Pakistan, people who are living in Germany, it's just such a cool place to see people from all over the world and it was just, just so new for

me and it was quite a struggle I would say in the first six months where my views were just completely being turned inside out and um, just learning and learning and it was painful, a painful growth process, but um, I came out of it with very different views...seeing how a social system can run and provide really good things for its citizens like education, I wouldn't have been able to get that in America...

Chloe's comments really speak to the challenges that immigrants can go through when they find themselves for the first time in their lives exposed to and immersed within another culture. On the one hand, while American women are torn between their new identities in Germany that encompass different perspectives of viewing the world, the internalization of new language and cultural experiences and personality that emerges from that, they also remain outsiders in Germany due to their American identities.

American women experience various complex phases of adjustment in the integration process. Initially after migration, when they had little German language skills, and did not fully understand German social customs or norms, their American identities were involuntary exposed. This visibility as a social outsider often led women to try and hide their American identity. With time, skill development and cultural adaptation, they began to feel more comfortable in German society and therefore more at ease with exposing their foreign identities. As they began to personally identify with German society, they began to feel at home in Germany and often distant from American society. Overall, they eventually came to a place where they did not feel fully at home or settled in either Germany or America. Rather, they felt that they occupied a place in between both countries, as their families, personal values, and identities resulted from a merging of both countries.

Chapter 3. Language

Language skills play a pivotal role in the integration and life quality of immigrants. As language is one of the most basic and significant ways through which humans experience the social world and engage with others, living in a country without proficiency in its official language can cause even the most mundane, everyday tasks to become challenging. Language barriers can also prevent immigrants from engaging in social interactions, finding skilled employment, and understanding and experiencing German culture. For immigrants learning a second language, the expression and interpretation of their personalities was different than when they spoke English. For all women, challenges resulting from the language barrier were the greatest source of frustration throughout the immigration and integration process. Particularly, language and language related issues caused tension and conflict within their marriages and relations with extended family. Without formal language courses suitable to the skill level of American immigrants, women often relied on informal means and casual conversation to learn German, which significantly slowed their learning. Based on the experiences of participants, this chapter will be discussing the critical role that language plays in immigrant life.

Most participants claimed that language was the single most significant factor in enabling social integration within German society. With the exception of the two women who came to Germany on work assignments, all of the women involved in this study met their husbands before learning German, and therefore their early friendships and dating lives took place entirely in English. About half of the women only began seriously learning German once they had married and moved to Germany when knowledge of German language became a necessary for surviving and thriving in their new country. Within intercultural marriages, unmatched language skills had the potential to create significant tension between spouses and in their interactions with their parents in law. Living as an English speaking immigrant in Germany with a German husband often resulted in husbands being ill-equipped to fully understand the linguistic or cultural challenges that their wives were facing. Lacking German language skills also resulted in participants feeling unable to properly express their personalities and engage socially. As culture is experienced through language, women also noted the vital role that

language played in understanding and participating in German society and culture. Scholars have also noted that, “language seems to play a major role in marking immigrants as visible” (Leinonen, 2012, p. 217). For Stacy, her German language skills, which often exposed her foreign identity, were directly related to the level of integration she felt:

I: So do you feel well integrated in Germany?

S: Um, well, sometimes, but um, you know people, they can, they know I’m a foreigner when I speak although not sometimes not right away...but yeah sometimes I feel pretty well integrated if people don’t immediately guess that I’m a foreigner but then people usually do so then that’s kind of hard...

For Stacy, integration became possible with German language skills, which she felt concealed of her foreignness. Being involuntarily exposed as a foreigner because of her accent caused her to feel less socially integrated. Stacy’s experiences with her language skills giving away her immigrant status led her to take her pronunciation very seriously, so much so that in addition to learning the language, she dedicated much time and energy into perfecting her accent in order to better conceal her foreigner status. Chloe also felt extremely frustrated by her accent exposing her foreign identity and she spent a great deal of time and energy working on her pronunciation in order to adopt a German accent. For immigrants, language skills impact every aspect of their lives and their entire immigration experience. For those seeking to integrate and settle in Germany and experience a full quality of life, German language skills are an absolute necessity.

Without knowledge of German, women also missed out on cultural norms. Language is one way that culture is experienced (Leinonen, 2012, p. 219). Chloe expressed this when she noted that, “you don’t really understand or get why it is that way until you really encounter the culture, and I feel like you can’t really encounter the culture without the language, because...I mean that’s the way their culture is expressed.” The connection between language and culture is one reason why women noted German language skills as essential in enabling their integration. For those who felt they had a strong command of the language, they credited their language skills for making them feel settled and at home in Germany. Those who still struggling with learning the language were very aware of the limitations and barriers that they faced because of their lack of German skills. Indeed, when asked what would be the most important factor contributing to integration, Cara responded with:

C: I would say language...culture, they go hand in hand, because there's only so much of the culture that you can understand, your language is going to hinder you to learn the culture, but also you have to learn the culture in order to fully get the language, it's so much more than language.

Here we see Cara expressing how language is crucial in understanding and experiencing culture, and in the process of integration (Leinonen, 2011, p. 156-157, Mohr and Klein, 2004). Indeed, research shows that lacking the local language skills can seriously hinder immigrant integration into society, as language and culture are so closely intertwined (Leinonen, 2012, p. 219). In regards to the integration course requirement that all but one of the women were exempt from, several noted that in addition to the language skills they would have also greatly benefitted from learning more about German culture from this course. Kaley was disappointed that her language skills surpassed the level allowing her to enrol in an integration course, in particular because of the loss of cultural knowledge that she could have gained throughout the course that could have helped her navigate her new culture:

K: ...It would have been helpful for me I think, to learn some of the things, just like, they talked about, on Sundays, what people do on Sundays, what to do when you go to the doctor's office, that stuff would have been beneficial other than the language part. If there had been another class of just tips and tricks...

Kaley's comment illustrates how cultural knowledge and understanding develop with the acquisition of language. Overall, language is critical for understanding and participating in the social world, and is fundamental to integration.

Language and integration courses in Germany are often tailored to low skilled migrant groups, which can leave skilled migrants to learn German on their own. Scholars have found that in Europe there tends to be a lack of suitable language training courses that are accessible and affordable for higher skilled immigrants, especially for immigrant women who are more likely to have limited time availability as domestic and childcare duties disproportionately fall upon women (Kofman, 2012, p. 70). Most participants made note of the lack of language courses suitable for an educated audience. Although Jessica took an integration course and Chloe took a language course and examination as a prerequisite for university acceptance, when most other participants tried to enrol in German language courses, they were often told that the courses were not well suited for them or their skill level. This lack of appropriate language training for skilled migrants is a major barrier to integration, as all participants claimed that language was the most vital

key to integration. In preparation for her move to Germany, Stacy took one year of German language courses while she was still at University. However, upon immigration to Germany, she never found a German language course appropriate for her skill level. Instead, she had to rely mostly on conversational experiences to advance her basic German language skills:

S: ...I wanted to take another German class at the Volkshochschule (*Community College*)...so I went in and I signed up for the class that they had that was the most advanced and I said okay you know here I am. The teacher for that class was Polish, and my accent was better than hers. And she told me, she's like, "Honestly you, there's no classes that we offer that you're going to be able to take" cause my German was too good to be able to take the class there but it's still not great, I mean my grammar's not good...so yeah that was not good because then it was frustrating because you know I want to learn German, more German, my grammar is pretty bad especially when it comes to talking about stuff that's more complicated like talking about the past and stuff, then it's harder for me to clarify but then yeah, that, that was really frustrating, so now I'm not learning German other than just by talking to people.

Without the official language course, Stacy has relied merely on conversation and immersion in order to learn German, which has unfortunately not brought her to a place of confidence with German grammar. Kaley, who was eager to enrol in a language course, also faced rejection to enrol because of her basic knowledge of German. When she attended a language course for a short time, she also noted that the teachers treated her differently:

K: ...Because I was too advanced, so they would skip, they would do rounds of questions, everybody answer your homework and they would skip right over me because, it was a bit frustrating...

With some basic knowledge of German, Kaley was unable to find a language course suited to her level. Like Stacy, when she did take part in a language course, the instructors treated her separately from the rest of the class. Because of the lack of available and appropriate language courses for skilled and educated immigrants, many women had no choice other than to learn German outside of a formal classroom setting. Scholars have claimed that, "the lack of support structures for newly arrived qualified immigrants forces them to rely on informal networks" (Kofman, 2012, p. 73). Without suitable language courses, many women relied on or sought language help through informal social networks and with their German husbands in particular. Most women in

this study could not rely on a formal language course for language learning, but were self-taught and learned through trial and error.

Insufficient language skills often led to significant challenges and frustration. In their daily lives, a lack of German language knowledge led to repeated difficulties and problems. Socially, without adequate German, women were restricted to finding English speaking friends, or having no one to talk to, relate to, or connect with. Even though women had their husbands, most felt a need for a friend who they could relate with and who could understand their experiences as an immigrant. For most, their German husbands failed to fully understand the challenges associated with immigrant life. With extended family, not knowing German often meant silently sitting around the dinner table, feeling embarrassed, unintelligent, and unable to understand, communicate or engage with others. These feelings would leave women feeling isolated, frustrated, and unhappy with their new lives and families in Germany. The following excerpt from Chloe's interview illustrates some of the challenges that come with not speaking German in social situations:

C: So I was like sitting there mute, and it, obviously it comes across as like, anti-social or timid, and that's not who I am at all, and so it was, it took a long time to feel like myself speaking German, and it took me a long time to even speak.

I: And was his family kind of surprised when you were actually able to start speaking German?

C: Yeah I think so, yeah I think so yeah, it was kinda like, "She speaks!?" (laughs)

Chloe's comment displays how immigrants can be misunderstood during the phase of settlement where language, culture and norms are observed, processed and digested. Before immigrants can learn to imitate and engage in German culture, many spend a period of time primarily observing and processing German culture. During this phase where immigrants are unable to communicate linguistically, any situation or context can become intimidating, and their personalities may be disguised through their efforts in learning and adapting to German culture. Participants noted how this period of adjustment and learning is especially challenging and even for the most outgoing, extroverted individuals, is an incredibly overwhelming phase. The following excerpt from Stacy's interview displays the internalization of negative feelings that are associated with not being able to speak German during this early phase of immigration:

I: Did you go through that phase in the early integration where you just want to fit in you don't want to stand out?

S: Oh yeah, for sure, for sure. I got to the point where, and I'm a very talkative person normally in English...but there was a point where I just didn't want to talk very much because I didn't want people to know that I was a foreigner, so yeah then that was sad... It's very, very demeaning or degrading not to be able to speak the language.

For Stacy, not knowing German caused her to feel inferior, stressed, and frustrated. From the mundane daily activities such as grocery shopping to highly significant moments such as giving birth, not having sufficient German language skills caused problems in the lives of participants. Indeed, for a newcomer still learning a new language, even the most mundane, everyday tasks can become intimidating. The following excerpt from Kaley's interview displays the impact that one critical comment can have on a newcomer, whose emotional state may not be as able to manage criticism, for a variety of complex reasons:

K: ...People don't realize how cruel they can be, cause, if they've never been through it, those comments that they make, it's happened so often lately I've spoken a whole entire day of German, and then people come over to the house, and they're in my home, and I'm speaking English with them, and they'll let loose with a comment like, "You should really start speaking German" and they really just have no clue...it's just, it's just difficult...

Kaley's comment illustrates the emotional strain that living in a new country with a new language can have on the individual. Not only is learning a new language mentally exhausting, but it can also be a very sensitive matter when one is constantly struggling to understand, participate in, and express oneself in a new language and culture. Insufficient language skills had the potential to cause great distress and difficulty in the lives of immigrants.

Within intercultural marriages, the unmatched German language skills between immigrant wife and local husband often resulted in tension and inequality within the relationship. Most women interviewed had experienced marital issues and conflict associated with their German husbands attempting to help them learn German. In the following excerpt taken from Rebecca's interview, she comments on the tension that arose between her and her partner during the period in which she was learning German:

R: I am very competitive, I mean I like to do well...but like he became a teacher, and it became this teacher student relationship a little bit, in the relationship, and it caused a lot of friction. And I would notice that

cause I would get mad if he corrected me...it's like your own shame, you don't want to be thought of as stupid, so it's like, "Wait you thought I didn't understand that!?"

Rebecca's comment illustrates the potential for conflict and frustration within a relationship where language abilities are not matched. Most research participants also expressed experiencing tension within their relationships that resulted from their insufficient German language skills. Therefore, in order to maintain a sense of normalcy within their relationships, most women spoke English in their homes and with their husbands. Stacy exemplifies this in the following excerpt from her interview:

S: ...Yeah I mean we still always speak English at home, and even though I can speak German, we never speak German together because it sounds so unnatural because we're always spoken English together which is interesting with him* now because we're trying to make him multilingual (**their baby*)

Stacy's comment demonstrates how intercultural couples tend to settle on using the language that their relationship developed in as it usually feels most natural to those involved. Even when speaking in English, the language skills of the participants' German partners can cause tension or conflict within the marriage. Chloe noted that most conflicts in her marriage are related to linguistic, and therefore also cultural, misunderstandings. The following excerpt from her interview illustrates the significance of language usage within communication:

C: ...There are just a lot of instances where I say something and he didn't hear the one key word which would have like, made the meaning completely different. I mean he speaks perfect English, he has an accent but he does, he speaks, like he knows more complicated words than I do sometimes, yeah so that's sometimes a little bit hard, or sometimes tone comes across differently in one language or the other...

Here, Chloe highlights some of the complex realities of communication between intercultural spouses. Whether speaking English or German, linguistic barriers and differences can cause misunderstanding, tension and conflict. In Sam's family of five where children's preferences for English and German are split, she noted that her language usage signalled different emotional responses:

S: ...It can be a little bit of a difficulty for sure, there are just little things that you express maybe, chose a different word that doesn't express it perfectly in the foreign language...and it's not always the easiest to formulate your feelings. Like if I get really angry or really hurt, I will tend to switch back to English...he notices right away then,

“Okay, she’s really emotional about this” you know, so there are, which isn’t a bad thing, but it’s little things like, we don’t have one common language...

Sam’s language usage signalled deeper meanings to her husband, reflecting another complex feature of communication that intercultural couples must navigate on a daily basis. For Sam, language usage not only had the potential to cause tension, but it signalled tension as well. For many women, speaking German with their husbands felt awkward, unnatural, and caused tension within their relationships.

Participant’s desire to communicate with parents-in-law and extended German family members was one of the key motivations for learning German. The need to learn a new language in order to communicate with extended family is a unique aspect of intercultural relationships that adds another dimension to immigration. Several women felt compelled or even obligated to learn German in order to communicate with their husband’s parents and extended family and friends. Many women mentioned that not being able to speak German at family gatherings and social events left them feeling overlooked and at times, even degraded. Research has shown that European grandparents who have American daughters-in-law can dislike it when English is spoken, especially with grandchildren, since they cannot always understand English (Leinonen, 2011, p. 180). With participants, this often led parents-in-law to assert their power as grandparents, and use their mutual residence in Germany as a reason to enforce German language usage around their grandchildren. Unfortunately, many women took offense to attempts to control over their language usage, claiming it as inconsiderate and ignorant. In Germany, the importance of “well-integrated, German speaking spouses (especially wives) for the integration of the entire family,” and for their children is often seen as a critical factor in creating social harmony (Block, 2014, p. 253). Therefore, based on German social expectations, female migrants in particular are expected to learn German in order to recreate German ideals in the home. This is one of the main concerns that women heard from their parents-in-law on a regular basis. Their speaking English with their husbands or children was seen as a threat to the success and harmony of their family life. Language is seen as a vital factor in integration and the success of the children of immigrants in Germany. This was seen as backwards by participants who believed that German language skills would develop as expected by living in Germany and attending public school. In general, correction or criticism over their language skills caused women to feel unwelcome, unwanted or annoyed with their

German family. As an example of the familial conflict that resulted from concerns over language usage, the following excerpt displays how Stacy's parents-in-law who cannot understand English, often make her feel bad for her lack of German skills:

I: And do you feel like you can express yourself accurately and your identity and everything in German?

S: Umm...yeah sort of when I'm comfortable with people it's a lot easier for me to say what I'm trying to say, but for instance even with David's parents, they have this bad habit if um, if I don't get right to the point because I'm trying to find the right words, they tune me out a little bit, they just don't they get frustrated because they don't know how to deal with people who don't speak German and even now sometimes I'll try to tell them something that Jacob did and if I can't figure out how to say it right away especially my father-in-law sometimes he'll just space out and not listen...

In Stacy's excerpt above, we see some of the daily challenges that can arise from the language barriers that can accompany intercultural marriages. Many participants experienced conflict or distress on a regular basis in their relationship with their parents-in-law because of the language barrier. Women were usually even more sensitive when receiving criticism from their parents-in-law than from their husbands. Language conflicts with parents-in-law often resulted in mistrust and an added difficulty to their relationship. When the German parents-in-law were able to observe participants speaking English with other Americans, or visit with them in the United States, their criticism often disappeared. Observing them outside of the German context and in their native culture often resulted in greater respect for cultural and linguistic differences. Within intercultural families, language usage tends to be mixed and a significant source of tension.

Language also impacts personality and personal expression. Through different languages, different aspects of personality and expression are exposed. Wanting to gain a better understanding of and experience the German side of her husband was a main motivation for Chloe to improve her German:

C: ...But I really wanted to be a part of him like and understand, like, cause he's more himself when he speaks German, obviously, and I love it, I love to see him, cause when he speaks English, I love him and it's great but he sounds, I mean he sounds like a German speaking English and he sounds a little bit nerdy cause he uses these big words and stuff, but when he speaks German it's just like it's him, it's him and I wanted to be able to understand that and be a part of that and like his family life...

Chloe's comments demonstrate how language is key to self expression and experience in the social world. Individuals appear, behave, and express themselves differently in different languages. As Chloe felt that her husband's true personality was better expressed in German, similarly, Rebecca also found that her husband expressed a different personality in German:

R: And that's what I wanted to say with Matthias, my husband, cause we always speak English, but when I hear him speak German, he talks different in German, like he really when he speaks German he speaks like a German...and when he speaks English he speaks like an American. More relaxed, easy going, so sometimes in German I'll be like, "Hey! Don't be a jerk!" (laughs) He seems more aggressive to me, even though he's probably not...

I: That's so funny your own husband seems like a different person?

R: Yeah, yeah!

Rebecca's comments illustrate the significance of language and how personalities and interactions are considerably impacted by language. Sam was the one participant who chose to speak German with her husband during their dating relationship. She chose to use their relationship as an opportunity to improve her German, and therefore she is the one participant who considers German to be the more natural language in her relationship. Like Rebecca, Sam noticed her husband's personality shifts with the use of different languages:

S: So then we started speaking German and since then our relationship is much more, is much better in German

I: Really? Can you kind of give an example?

S: Well he thinks he's, he is quite fluent, (laughs) but he can be, um, he still speaks German in English, like he speaks in a German style in English, so he can be a bit abrupt...and thinks that the way that he talks, we wouldn't speak like that to one another. And in German I'm used to it, it's normal, and in English I get offended.

I: Really? Even if it's your husband and you know what he means?

S: Yeah! Because it's still English. And so I'm like, no, no, no, uh-uh. So, um because he doesn't switch culturally, it's harder for me to accept it in English, it's easier for me to accept it in German. And maybe because I, that's how I learned German you know, and that's how our relationship was in German, that's how I know him, but in English it's like, it's, somehow it's offensive, I get offended more easily by it...we fight more when he speaks English.

Sam's comments further demonstrate how culture is communicated through language. They also illustrate how intercultural couples face a unique and complex environment

where language skills impact emotional interactions and understandings. Sam's husband expressed a slightly different personality in English than when he spoke German. Similarly, Kaley struggled with feeling able to express her personality in German:

K: But I don't know that I like the culture very much...I mean I can navigate everything just fine, I can communicate my needs, I can do all of that, but it isn't a very friendly culture, and it's very cold, and I can't express my personality very well.

I: So when you speak German do you feel like you express a different personality?

K: Yeah. And I don't like it at all...I definitely feel like I have a different personality in German and it's not a personality that I like.

I: That's so interesting, what don't you like about it?

K: Um, it's so, the German word would be "Sachlich" (*impersonal, factual*) and so, um, you only deal with the basics, there's no added friendliness. You know, I'm from the South, it's lively, extra friendly, warm, caring, and in Germany there is not much space for that. There is just get to it, get to the meat of what you want to say, skip the nice stuff, and I guess it also depends on where in Germany you live, or at least that's what people tell me. But where we live, it's very, just say what you need to say, no beating around the bush ever. Um, it's, it's very hard for me to feel, I can't be the warm, caring person that I want to be.

Kaley's comment demonstrates how self expression can be especially challenging for immigrants who are adopting a new language and culture. Kaley is struggling to accept the new persona that she exhibits through German language, as she feels unable to express an authentic version of herself in German. Like Kaley, Stacy struggled with the change of personality that she experienced through German:

I: And do you feel like you can express like the same personality in German?

S: Um, I don't know to be honest, I think I've gotten much more serious since I've gotten here, I used to be I don't know, more bouncy I guess like, more...much more silly, or um, yeah, and I would laugh a lot more...as far as my normal personality when we go home and visit my parents David says I'm like, much more goofy and laughy and whatever and in Germany I'm more just chill but even for the Germans that's pretty funny...

Stacy's change of personality also illustrates the complexity of language learning and how it can personally affect immigrants. For Rebecca, German language skills acquired over time were what allowed her to finally feel a sense of home in Germany:

R: It took a long, long, long time like, finally I feel like I'm myself, I mean I can't express myself nearly as well as in English and there's times I can't but I feel now at least my personality is the same. But it me like, six...it took a long time.

Rebecca's comment demonstrates how long it can take for immigrants to feel able to express an authentic sense of self in a new country. For Rebecca, it took her six years of living and working in Germany to get to the point where she feels able to express her personality in the German language. For some, those feelings of disorientation with the language may never fully go away. This is reflected in an excerpt from Dawn's interview:

I: Do you find that you express yourself differently in German, that you have a different personality when you speak German?

D: That could be. You know what I notice that when I go back to the US. I feel that, it takes a while to be able to get back into it, but after I'm there for like a week or so, then I start feeling like, (sighs) okay, now I can be me. Cause I don't realize it here that I'm not being me. I'm being a bit different...even though I understand lots of things, every day I still have to interpret things either, you know, I still have to concentrate on what somebody's saying to me, whether it's spoken in good German that I can understand or not, but it's still not my native language, it still requires a little bit more concentration than if it was regular English for me. I have to try to figure out what people are doing and why, if I'm doing the right thing, if somebody's understanding me the right way, I'm coming across the way that I want to. And it's just in the last couple of years that I realize, you know, this is nothing like how it was compared to the beginning, at the beginning you're just wiped out. But now, I don't think it ever ends, it never ends.

In this excerpt, Dawn illustrates the extent of concentration and attention that she requires for basic everyday interactions. This constant concern with communication displays the mental and emotional effort that living in a new country with a new language can require. Dawn notes that when she is in the U.S., she can finally let go of that extra mental stress and as she phrases it, be herself again. For immigrants, language played an important role in personality expression and linguistic challenges often caused personal and interpersonal barriers.

The ability to engage in humour displays mastery of German language and cultural norms. As women's language skills developed, they gained an increased level of independence, agency, and confidence. No longer relying on their German partner for translation, interpretation or communication, their self-reported quality of life significantly increased. Several participants noted understanding and engaging in humour as an important level of assessing their language skills. For those with a stronger command of

German, engaging in humour displayed their language abilities. Although for participants with less advanced German language skills, understanding and engaging in humour signalled their outsider status. Cara in particular struggled to engage in any kind of humour in Germany:

I: ...And do you find that the language is a challenge for you?

C: Oh absolutely...things like sarcasm things like humour...

I: People don't understand the jokes you mean?

C: No, they don't understand them, they don't joke! (laughs) They don't understand the joke...or they'll explain to me how that's not correct and I didn't understand... I'll just keep my mouth shut because well they didn't understand, I made a sarcastic comment and they thought I was being serious, so they think that I'm an idiot basically like that's how it turns into...

While Cara has attempted joking in German, she felt her jokes were not culturally relevant; while she knows the vocabulary required to tell American jokes in German, the associated cultural meaning is missing. Cara's struggles engaging in humour illustrates the high level of cultural understanding required to participate in German humour. As humour is the combination of language, everyday knowledge, culture and stereotypes, understanding or engaging in humour requires immigrants to also master the nuances of German culture and communication. Chloe on the other hand recalls the difference that being able to joke in German made in her confidence levels and the impact it had socially:

I: So you feel now that you can express yourself in German?

C: Yeah and I can make jokes sometimes, I'm always really proud of myself when I make jokes, that's something I'm always like, "Good job!"

I: That's a big thing!

C: People are shocked when I make a joke, they're like, "Wow! Chloe!" and I'm like, "Yeah...!"

Being able to engage in humour is clearly a turning point in linguistic mastery where individuals demonstrate an understanding of the more nuanced aspects of society through German language. Not only does the ability to engage in humour display linguistic mastery, but it reflects a deeper understanding and mastery of German culture.

Overall, language is a critical component that can hinder or enable integration and strongly impacts the quality of life that immigrants experience in Germany. When there are linguistic issues within an intercultural marriage, conflicts and cultural

misunderstandings are likely to arise. What language a couple chooses to speak with which members of the family, where, and how often they switch between German and English, also has a profound impact on family life. While these families are living in Germany and surrounded by German in public places and in schools, most of the German fathers prioritized speaking German with their children at least some of the time, while mothers were largely responsible for teaching children English and exposing them to their American heritage. The husband's skill level of English does seem to have an impact on the family harmony. Since most women did not feel entirely comfortable speaking German with their husbands, having a strong command of English resulted in a language that both partners felt confident and capable of full communication in. Language plays a critical role in the lives of immigrants, enabling integration, cultural understanding and participation, as well as causing frustration, conflict and significant barriers to the marriages, families, personal expression and social engagement of immigrants.

Chapter 4. Intercultural Marriage

While intercultural marriages reflect a unique blend of cultures, the mixing of different cultures within a marital relationship can cause significant challenges and misunderstandings. For the immigrant woman in Germany, she is often expected to conform and adapt to German culture by her native German husband and his family. Husbands who had spent time abroad studying or working outside of Germany displayed more empathy and understanding for the struggles that their wives were experiencing as immigrants. As they were living in and raising their children in Germany, participants often felt a loss of their American heritage and saddened that their own children viewed them as foreigners. In some ways, having a native spouse was helpful in the migration process, but it did not always benefit women in their efforts to integrate. Since their husbands often failed to notice cultural differences between America and Germany, women had to learn to adapt to German society through experience and could not rely on their husbands to prepare them for life in Germany. In general, immigrants within intercultural marriage face unique challenges and benefits.

Intercultural marriages represent a unique unit combining two or more different cultural traditions, values, beliefs and norms. Scholars have noted that within intercultural marriages, individuals live in a space between two cultures and that, “the foreign spouse not only faces a different cultural environment but also a new language or languages and local socio-cultural practices that differ from those of his/her homeland” (Goncalves et al. 2013, p. 16). These claims ring true for many participants in this research who claimed that they did not feel at home in either Germany or in America. Finding a balance within an intercultural relationship is often an emotional and challenging process. While there are many great benefits to intercultural marriage, there are also many challenges as well. The following excerpt from Kaley’s interview displays her view on how couples from different countries compromise to make a unique unit:

I: So, if you had to describe to an outsider what it is like being in an intercultural relationship, how would you describe that?

K: That’s really hard to explain...it’s like taking, it’s like taking, a lemon and an apple, and trying to keep enough of the lemon and enough of the apple but trying to mix them together to make something that tastes sweet, you keep enough of the place where you come from, but

are willing to blend enough to make something new, but still that works well.

Kaley's comment illustrates how both individuals within intercultural marriages must be willing to adapt, grow, and learn in order to survive and become a new, yet unified team. Unless one partner is willing to entirely assimilate into the culture of their partner, both partners must be willing to leave behind elements of their native culture and also be willing to adopt components of their partner's culture in their daily lives. Research shows that over time, intercultural couples, "became less concerned with cultural differences between the partners and their identities assumed an increasingly "hybrid" character." (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 47). Many couples consider the unique balance that they have established between two cultures to be a significant advantage, one in which they can take the best of two cultures and eliminate others elements that they dislike. The following excerpt from Jessica's interview displays what she appreciates about her intercultural marriage:

J: I love it because you're out of the box, nobody can hold you, you have to do it this way, you don't we have warm meals sometimes at night and we have bread sometimes at night, we celebrate whatever holidays we feel like, Christmas is, a mix and a match and we get to decide how we want to do it, you know there's the American traditions, there's the German traditions, then there's your own family traditions and then we get to decide.

I: So do you feel like you're your own kind of culture?

J: Yup really, we're a mix in between.

Jessica is not only content with her life with an intercultural marriage, but she is proud of and genuinely appreciates the freedom and flexibility that it allows her family. Each intercultural couple represents a unique blend of German and American traditions, norms, and cultures.

Within intercultural relationships, immigrant women face many challenges, including complicated relational and family dynamics. Research has shown that within intercultural couples, the foreign individual is "deemed to be at a disadvantage in the social, political, economic and in many cases also the linguistic, spheres of everyday life" (Goncalves et al., 2013, p. 16). Participants clearly communicated feeling all of these disadvantages on a daily basis regardless of how long they had already lived in Germany. As the immigrant within the relationship, women often experienced doubt regarding their decisions and their futures. The following excerpt from Sam's interview

displays some of the complicated dynamics that often accompany intercultural marriages:

I: Can you discuss the uniqueness of being in an intercultural relationship?

S: I think that the biggest problem is that you maybe don't realize what you're going in to...you don't realize what you're getting in for, like the fact that you're marrying him and having kids with him means that you're staying here or, that you decide together as a couple to pick up your whole life and move it to the States...and you look at long term, what are the advantages and disadvantages of living where and where and but this is something that we didn't consider at the beginning, it was just like, "Well we're here" we did say we're here and we want to stay here, but we didn't think about long term, what does it mean for the kids to have their grandparents there, and I had a, an identity crisis about a year ago...where I went like, okay, and I felt, I felt bad for keeping them away from their other family...So there are little things where you start thinking okay, are we making the right decisions...

Sam's comment illustrates some of the personal issues that may arise from immigration or intercultural marriages. In particular, when immigrating in order to marry a foreign spouse, the motivation of romantic love can seemingly overpower concern for the logistics and consequences that an intercultural marriage and migration may entail. While some challenges in life simply cannot be anticipated, for many entering intercultural marriages, the cultural differences and expectations are especially difficult to predict. Immigrant women in intercultural relationships face a variety of unique challenges.

As immigrant women and mothers, living and raising their children in Germany, participants often felt that their American heritage was forgotten or overlooked. In fact, women felt that because they lived in Germany, their families socialized primarily with other Germans, and their children attended German public schools, that their children embodied German culture far more than American culture. This challenges the common stereotype that immigrant mothers reproduce their foreign cultures within the home (Erel 2016, p. 38). For children, even very young children, the influence of mainstream German society was more powerful than influence from their foreign mothers. This often caused issues when visiting family on America, where children disliked the food, refused to speak English, or behaved in a German manner, breaking American social norms. Nevertheless, many women experienced interpersonal challenges with their extended family because of tension due to childrearing. In many cases the immigrant was

outnumbered by her husband, half-German children, and extended family, and therefore the woman was expected to adapt to German social norms. This often resulted in women feeling unwelcome or unable to express the American side of their personality. Most women felt that they conformed to German standards in their daily lives, although some couples took turns choosing which culture to conform to (Mcfadden and Moore, 2001, p. 266). When couples negotiated between American and German social norms, it often resulted in varying meal times and food choices, or affected the language used around their children. At other times, couples would negotiate and compromise on their children's clothing and its' suitability to the weather. Compromising also often took the form of the German husbands choosing to accept or to overlook an aspect of their American wives that deviated from German norms. For example, arriving to social events late, wearing overly casual clothing, or breaking other expectations around social interactions and behaviour such as talking loudly, or with great expression, could at times be seen as embarrassing for the German husbands. Living in Germany seemed to most often influence the cultural negotiation between couples, since integrating into German society often made life easier for women overall. In general, in order to establish and bring peace to their hectic lives as immigrants, most women considered it easier to conform to German norms than maintain their American patterns of behaviour. In the following excerpt, Kaley expresses concern for the lack of understanding that her husband and children have for her American culture:

I: Would you want to go back to the States (United States) ever?

K: It would be good for my husband to live in another culture, to understand my culture. Where I come from. I think for my kids it would also be important cause they're American too.

Kaley's desire for her husband and children to experience American life illustrates how immigrant women can feel a lack of appreciation for their national culture. Research shows that immigrants' desire to return home increased after having children, in order to be closer to supportive family, and to expose their children to their home culture (Leinonen, 2011, p. 167-168). Like Kaley, Cara, Jessica, Sam and Stacy also hoped for the chance to bring their husbands and children to the U.S. for an extended amount of time in order to establish a better understanding of her American background. Wanting to expose their children to American culture was very important for most of the participants, some of whom felt that their children viewed them as foreigners. For example, women felt viewed as a foreigner by their own children when children had to

help their mothers with German language or pronunciation, or when they made American food. Even young children around the age of three and four expressed an understanding that their mother was different from the majority culture. For participants, having their own child acknowledge them as a foreigner was troubling. As Americans in Germany, women often felt that their own family overlooked or disregarded their American heritage.

Having a German spouse did not always result in an easier integration process. While many scholars have noted that intercultural marriages can reflect well on integration, recent research displays how, “cultural assimilation through marriage is not automatic” (Bystydzienski, 2011, p. 46; Song, 2009, p. 338). Indeed, participants in this study felt that having a local spouse only helped in dealing with the technical aspects of the immigration process. Having a native spouse often helped women manage the immigration process as their husbands could manage the technicalities of the move such as applying for residence, setting up bank accounts, insurance, medical coverage and so on. However, beyond helping with language translation and paperwork, having a local spouse did not always help with social integration. Several women provided numerous examples of cases where their husbands failed to inform them on important social rules that they as newcomers were unaware of. The following is one example from Kaley’s interview, where she is discussing the mistakes that she made in her efforts to make new friends because her husband failed to inform her of Germany’s social expectations:

K: ...And it’s very much, there is a lot of keeping score, when you need to, when you’re trying to make friends. Like it needs to be, they invited me, and we need to immediately invite them back. And if that doesn’t happen, then they interpret that as you’re not interested in their friendship, then they’ll stop pursuing.

I: Wow, all these secret little things that you don’t know...

K: Yes. And I did know we don’t live close to my husband’s family or anything, so we moved away when we got married, and so there was nobody to kind of, teach me.

This example from Kaley’s integration experience illustrates how immigrants often learn through making mistakes. In this case, having a native German spouse did not benefit her any more than having a foreign spouse would have. When asked if having a German spouse made immigrant life easier, Kaley affirmed that in certain scenarios, it was indeed a bonus: “it helped in that for example, with doctors’ appointments and things, I was able to listen to how he made appointments and how he talked to doctors and

learned that sort of thing from it.” In other ways however, Kaley expressed that, “I think it made it harder...it was hard to figure out what was his family culture that he was teaching me and what was the German culture.” Here, we see how Kaley has mixed emotions, as on the one hand having a German spouse made the practicalities of daily life smoother and easier for her as the newcomer. On the other hand, she had the extra task of learning to distinguish between German culture, family culture and regional variations as well. Several other participants expressed this exact thought as well, as they sometimes struggled to differentiate between German culture and the culture within their husband’s family. Having a local husband did not always help women with their social integration.

As immigrants married to locals, women frequently had to learn through experience. Several participants made note of the importance of being courageous, vulnerable, stepping outside of their comfort zones and most importantly, learning through experience. Research has found that being open to difference was a crucial component to adapting to life in Germany, and is a necessity to thriving within an intercultural relationship. Being open minded or having a, “receptivity to learn and change,” in addition to socially interacting with locals and learning the language, are effective strategies for accelerating integration and cultural adjustment (Mohr and Klein, 2004). For many participants, having a German husband did not necessarily help with cultural integration. As locals, their husbands often lacked the ability to distinguish which aspects of German culture their American wives might appreciate advice about or preparation in. In the following excerpt, Stacy comments on the challenges she with a husband who did not always prepare her for areas or situations that might be challenging for a newcomer:

S: ...But the fact that they’re men and the fact that they’re German means that sometimes they aren’t like right on “Oh yeah by the way there’s this one cultural thing that you should keep you know, in mind”...and they just they don’t notice it’s just comes automatically, so you know, I had a lot of stress with that like “Well why didn’t you tell me I can’t do it like this?” “Oh well, you know, sorry that’s just how it is,” like, Okay!?! And actually my husband was really helpful for the most part but it was just one of those things where it’s just you just can’t learn that without trying it out..

Stacy’s comment illustrates the limitations in relying on a spouse for cultural knowledge and information. As the immigrant in the relationship, women were often expected to keep up with their husbands’ pace of life. This suggests that their husbands often

disregarded the overwhelming challenges that immigration can bring. Many felt that sometimes, their husbands entirely overlooked their status as immigrants, or at times forgot their inability to speak German, or did not consider their unfamiliarity with the culture, leading them into unpredictable, yet preventable situations of social discomfort or embarrassment. According to participants, there is no easy or accelerated route to integration. It requires dedication and serious work in learning the language, the vulnerability to make frequent mistakes in public situations, and openness to new ideas. All participants claimed that process was extremely challenging, but necessary, and even after years in Germany several women still do not feel fully integrated. This displays that having a German partner does not always accelerate integration as scholars have claimed (Song, 2009). It also shows that Americans greatly struggle with the cultural differences they face in Germany, suggesting that American immigrants do not necessarily have an easier time integrating than immigrants from countries with even greater cultural difference. Generally, the integration is a challenging process where immigrants must learn to be open, adapt and change on their own. Having a native spouse did not necessarily help foster integration.

As the immigrant spouse within intercultural marriages, women often felt that their husbands did not always understand their struggles with integration. Most women felt that their husbands could not relate to or express understanding or empathy for the struggles that they faced as immigrants. As native Germans, husbands did not always have an understanding for what their immigrant wives were experiencing. For many women, having other American friends with whom they could find empathy and understanding was a source of comfort:

I: So you know other American women and you're not alone.

D: Right, so if I experience any goofy thing that's specific to American feelings I can go to them and be like, "Can you imagine what happened to me!"

I: Oh that probably makes a big difference

D: It does. I wish I knew more people, I don't have such close contact with them which is kind of unfortunate.

Dawn's comments display how immigrants find comfort in knowing other immigrant women who can relate to and sympathize with the challenges they face as immigrants. When their native German husbands do not recognize or understand some of the unique challenges they face, they are left feeling isolated and alone. It seems that those with

international experience genuinely possess greater ability to empathize with immigrants.

Kaley noted that:

If people have that international experience, at least once in their life, I feel like it's easier for them to accept a different way of doing things and to understand that there's not one right way and one wrong way...I don't think anybody can even imagine what it's like, cold turkey, to be thrown into another culture and another language.

Kaley's comment demonstrates how immigration is a highly personal experience that is often difficult for others to understand if they have not experienced something similar.

The following excerpt from Stacy's interview displays her husband's inability to fully comprehend the impact that her immigrant status has on her daily life:

I: And what about your husband does he view you as an *Ausländer* (*foreigner*) or an immigrant?

S: Oh yeah, yeah, for sure yeah! And it's funny cause, like, that's never going to change. Even if my German was perfect and if I knew every in and out of German bureaucracy I will always be a foreigner to him...

I: It could be, but do you feel like he has empathy for you in hard times like in homesickness?

S: Um, not really, we had, or he had a hard time with that because like I would have embarrassing moments or something and I would try to tell him about it and he would just, he would not get it...

I: Yeah so you were kind of on your own...

S: Yeah but he, I mean he tried I mean he was sympathetic, but then he couldn't relate at all, and so then that was hard sometimes and the beginning yeah...so yeah at the beginning it was definitely tough...

Stacy's comment illustrates how women in intercultural relationships may feel hurt and alone when their partners do not display understanding for the daily cultural and linguistic challenges that they experience. The following excerpt from Kaley's interview exemplifies some of the ways that cultural differences are brought into marriages and the organization of households, and the profound effect that cultural misunderstandings can have personally:

K: The classic story for me and my husband, with the whole German perfectionism thing, is, I, we had just moved into our new house, and I had spent the whole day cleaning and I was so proud of the kitchen, and I had said, "Oh come look and the kitchen it's so clean," and he walked over to the sink to the place, the metal part where you lay the dishes to dry, and he said, "Come here I want to show you something," and he said, "You see these, these water drops here? You need to take a dish rag and polish it dry every time you wash the sink

so that there won't be any water spots." I was devastated. I was devastated. And that is our classic story that we always come back to to get to the clash of cultures, clash of everything! It's so bad, really, really hard.

This excerpt demonstrates the conflict that can arise within marriages involving spouses who hold different values and expectations of daily life that stem from their different cultures. In addition to the normal adjustments required when two individuals marry and learn to adapt, tolerate and find harmony within their differences, intercultural couples entering marriage with varied perspectives, values, norms, expectations and priorities, will experience additional stress to their marriage where they must learn to blend different cultures. This added stress can add significant strain to a marriage. Indeed, scholars have claimed that, "living in an intercultural marriage is a daily challenge," specifically in regard to the necessity to "negotiate new identities, accommodate differences [and] respond to negative reactions" (Goncalves et al., 2013, p. 205). This claim rings true for many of the participants involved in this study. Like many others, Chloe noted how details of everyday life created the most common tension within her intercultural marriage:

I: So how do you find being in Germany with a native German, does he understand or have empathy for you?

C: He did a little bit. I think it's harder though because I've spent more years here than he has there. It's like little things that kind of like, rub me the wrong way in that kind of like partnership...like, turn the heat down, save energy, yeah or like turning all the lights off or closing all the doors when you leave the room (laughs), I'm like "Just leave it!" and even his mom is like, "You have to put all the heat onto 2!" or like air out all the rooms every day, so it's like all these kinds of things...

Chloe's comment displays how she as the migrant is expected to adapt to German norms even within her own home. It also illustrates how spouses living in their own country fail to understand the challenges that their immigrant spouses experience. Men who had a little to no international experience in either travelling, working or studying abroad expressed little to no empathy for their wives' struggles with integration. They were also more likely to expect their American wives to assimilate within German culture to a much higher degree than those with international experience. More than half of the women mentioned a desire to relocate to another country so that their husbands could have an idea of what immigrant life entails and so that their marriage would be founded in a greater sense of equality as they would both know the challenge that comes with immigrating into a new society. Husbands who had spent time abroad knew firsthand

how it felt to live as a foreigner in another country. This experience often resulted in greater understanding and empathy for the challenges immigrants faced integrating. As international experience often resulted in greater openness to different ways of living, women whose husbands had spent time abroad claimed a greater overall happiness and satisfaction with their lives in Germany. In general, the challenges that immigrants living in intercultural marriages experience will not be met with understanding or empathy by their spouses who are living in their native country.

Immigrant women within intercultural marriages represent a unique blend of two cultures, yet they also experience specific challenges such as a lack of empathy for their struggles and pressure to adapt to their husband's culture. Since they were living in the husbands' country of birth, most women felt that their German husbands failed to understand the challenges they faced, and expected more cultural adaptation from them as the immigrant in the relationship. Tension often resulted from this pressure to assimilate within German society within marriages and families. As mothers, participants often felt that their American heritage was overlooked or lost as the German majority culture was more prevalent in the home than an equal mix of both American and German culture. Overall, while intercultural marriages represent a unique blend of two cultures, women living as immigrants within intercultural marriage feel greater loss of their native culture and an expectation to conform to their husband's culture.

Chapter 5. Motherhood & Gender

Immigrant women and mothers had to negotiate with German gender expectations in the home, with their families and in the workplace. While they faced criticism for mothering techniques, they came to admire and appreciate the benefits that result from more traditional gender roles. As Americans, women's views on gender and motherhood in Germany were framed through comparison with their experiences of gender and motherhood in America. Women noted that traditional gender roles in Germany are restrictive in many ways and that they faced judgement for not conforming to German expectations. Women also faced frequent and regular criticism for their parenting techniques in public and around friends and family. However, as mothers, they benefitted from the social and financial support that traditional gender roles have no doubt helped establish in Germany. As Americans who recognize the value in and privilege of having the option of financial and social support, they viewed it more positively and claimed to take more advantage of maternity benefits than Germans do. Women also noted that living in Germany, where support for parents and families is available and normalized, changed their perspectives on gender roles and expectations. Women also felt that the social and financial benefits offered by the government created a culture where women felt that they had the choice to stay home with their young children, rather than placing them in daycare and returning to work. In general, living as an immigrant woman and mother in Germany meant constantly renegotiating and adapting to different expectations, traditions, and biases in society.

Women found that the social benefits available for parents in Germany had a significantly positive impact in their lives. Women with children repeatedly brought up their gratitude for the financial and social benefits available to them as parents. In general, women felt that the generous parental leaves, financial support for parents, and the overall family friendly culture in Germany significantly improved their life quality and was one of the greatest benefits to living in Germany. The following excerpt from Sam's interview displays the general sentiment expressed by participants:

I: Okay, so how do you feel about maternity leave and benefits?

S: Amazing!!! Amazing! Like it's just, it's just yeah. I wouldn't have had kids anywhere else!

I: Really?!

S: Because in the States, I would have either had to have gone back to work or quit my job, and here, look it, I've been home for, my daughter just turned four, so I've been on leave for four years.

Sam's comments display the extent by which governmental policies can have an impact on families and mothers in particular. For Stacy, while aware of gendered stereotypes around women and motherhood, as an individual whose goal was to stay at home with her children, she viewed Germany's social incentives for parents and mothers in particular, with great positivity:

I: So do you have a personal opinion about where being a mother in Germany is it more oppressive or more empowering?

S: I'd say for me it's more empowering because the government, the government is extremely supportive of you trying to have a family and my husband says it's because people are so hesitant to have children here, they just don't want to do it, and so um, essentially the government is bribing people to have babies, and so I like that because I want to stay home with my children and I like that and they're paying me to do it...I'd say generally speaking I feel that it's a good system for parents, yeah I would say parents...And when I tell German women, especially the German moms that I know, that you don't get anything in the States, they're like "wait, what? Nothing?"

I: They can't fathom it!

S: No, they can't!...They don't take advantage of it like the American immigrants do...

Sam's comments illustrate how American women appreciate the benefits offered to families in Germany that are less common or unavailable in the U.S. In comparison, participants thought that because maternity benefits were normalized in German culture, that German women did not take advantage of them as enthusiastically. As a mother of three, Sam strongly appreciated the financial and social support given to parents from the German government to the point where she claimed that after living in Germany she would never consider parenting in the U.S. Jessica also noted that the overall family friendly culture makes her feel that her children are safer and she has more security knowing that the government would offers aid should she need it. For Dawn, who has a child requiring frequent and regular medical attention and hospital visits, she is extremely thankful to be living in Germany and receiving health insurance. Any return to the U.S. for Dawn and her family relies entirely on her ability to secure health insurance for her son, as his medical needs would be far too expensive to pay without insurance.

Overall, women felt that Germany's family friendly policies and support made parenting in Germany more possible and positive than in America.

Most women felt that in general women had more freedom of choice in Germany than in America. While there are regional, class, and ethnic variations within both America and Germany on the expectation or acceptability of women staying home, overall women felt a greater sense of freedom over their lives in Germany. They noted the social organization and benefits that Germany offers as making motherhood much more manageable in Germany. When asked if she noticed any differences between the perception of motherhood in America and Germany, Dawn noted:

D: In terms of the actual system itself regardless of society, I would say it gives women more choice. You have the freedom to do what you want. Society is another story.

I: Okay, so how is it culturally then in Germany?

D: Culturally it is in a period of change. It used to be more defined that the woman would stay home, and now they are trying to encourage women to be out in the workforce, they need workers so they're trying to encourage women to get out into the workforce and they're making this a big deal about balancing home and work life and in doing so they are encouraging more women to go back to work faster. I know lots of people who went back to work after one year. It's quite common I think to take family leave, family leave for one year is like, Oh yeah, but after that, and especially after two years.... I can remember I was in a playgroup with my kids and the playgroups actually go up to three years old because three is when they go back to kindergarten. And it was hard to get together that group between two and three years old because there just weren't enough moms.

I: Do you think that's because you're from the States though? You appreciate it maybe more than German women, do you think?

D: That could be that I appreciate having the freedom of being able to choose, very much so! And I wish that society here would be okay with women actually having a choice on their own and not saying: "Oh", looking down on the women who stay at home.

Dawn's comments display the common judgement that women felt for taking advantage of the full three year maternity leave or working as stay at home mothers. Participants felt that in Germany, they had more choice over staying home or working outside of the home. That sense of freedom to choose was what stood out as extraordinary.

Participants also noted the maternity leave, financial support, and low cost daycare as major factors that make motherhood more appealing in Germany. For participants, these maternity benefits were enjoyed in combination with having the financial support from their husbands, many of whom held advanced degrees and were employed in industry

or business. Nevertheless, participants felt that the availability of parental support, regardless of how well it actually functions in reality, created a general culture more open to mothers than in America. To emphasize the positive impact that Germany's governmental support for families has had on them individually, several participants even noted that if they were back in America, they would not have ever considered having children because of the lack of maternity leave, available health care, day care options, and the broader cultural expectations on women that makes motherhood and careers less compatible. Because their limited German and foreign credentials often prevented women from finding skilled employment, many participants choose to rather embrace being a stay-at-home mother. Yet overall, women generally felt that Germany provided them more freedom to choose to work, have children, or stay at home with their children.

Women also found that traditional gender role expectations in Germany could be restrictive. While the traditional gender roles in Germany often benefited the stay-at-home mothers involved in this study as they allowed them to stay-at-home with their children, participants did recognize how those very traditions were also in some cases restrictive. For example, while Germany offers fathers a generous paternity leave after the birth of a child, the traditional working culture made it so that not all men felt supported by their employers to take advantage of it. Dawn's husband for example, was mildly discouraged by his employers from taking a parental leave, and even when he did, he was still going into work two to three times each week and leaving Dawn on her own with their children at home:

D: The HR guy, the first time he applied for the leave, he said, "You know you're not legally obligated to take leave." And so he's saying you know, "You don't have to do this!" And I was like give me a break! (laughs)

I: Wow, is that just because you think he was a man, is that why?

D: Yeah. Of course.

Dawn's comments illustrate how employers may view male and female employees with gender biases. Employers may expect a female employee to take a parental leave, while they treat their male employees with disdain for wanting to take the same leave. The following excerpt from Sam's interview demonstrates the inequality that mothers and fathers face in Germany:

I: So what's your feeling about German culture in regards to gender, with regards to the whole staying at home, being paid to stay at home with your child, do you appreciate it, does it offend you, like, where do you fall on the scale?

S: I'm fine with it, I'm fine with it. I um, I don't think the whole equality thing that people are striving for, I don't think it works in the end and I think a lot of women are frustrated by it, unless you're married to someone who can really, really stay home. It's just not gender equality here, it's just not...look at it, a woman says I'm gonna stay home, I'm gonna have a baby and then I'm gonna stay home for a year, then most people are like, yeah okay. If she says, I'm gonna come back after um ten weeks or 12 weeks, I know one case for example where the woman was really mobbed out of her job because her boss just basically flat out said to her: "You are a bad mother for coming back so early."

I: Oh ouch!

S And I know a couple of cases like that where the people looked at them and said, you know, "Why are you, why are you coming back to work so early?"

I: Really?!

S: But if a guy comes in and says "I'm gonna take those two, two months", the 2 months are really typical right...then he goes in and wants to take more than 2 months-he's entitled to that, but his boss is usually like: "Is that really necessary?"

I: So the legal system has made it available but the culture is lagging?

S: Exactly! And it's a male dominated culture still...most people go back to work at one year.

I: Okay so now do people look at you like you should go back to work?

S: They wonder, they ask me when I'm going..."When does he finally start kindergarten?"

I: So these fine lines that are like secret rules about when you should go and come back.

S: Yup! There's like this like one year cut, but that's new. Cause when my first was 15 months old, I went back to work and a lot of people that I knew, at that point we lived out in a village, and we knew a lot of people more from the country side, even though it's just outside of the city, it's still outside of the city...and the women were like, "Oh really, you're going back to work...oh okay..."

Sam's comments demonstrate gender inequality in the workplace, and some very common reactions that many other participants also mentioned. Sam also demonstrates the divide between urban and rural communities and how they view norms around motherhood differently. Like Dawn, she also brings up the one year rule where mothers are expected to return to work, at least part-time work one year after the birth of a child. Essentially, while they opposed gender inequality, as young mothers most participants

choose to work within the gendered traditions in Germany and take advantage of the maternity benefits available to them in order to manage their family life, childcare needs and finances within a culture that promotes mothers staying at home rather than fathers. In the following excerpt, Stacy shares a story of her brother-in-law's girlfriend experiencing a common form of gender discrimination at her workplace:

S: Well as far as I know um...in the German workforce, they're very into gender roles in the workforce and so I've heard stories from women, especially when it comes to having children um, for instance I'll tell you I'll give you an example...his brother's his girlfriend works for a juice company. Well she did her um, *Ausbildung* (*apprenticeship*) with the juice company, and now she has a job with them. One of the things they look for when they hire people from the *Ausbildung* (*apprenticeship*) is whether or not they are a female in child bearing range, because they are worried that the person is going to get pregnant and they're going to lose an employee. And she said that she had to tell one of her bosses that she didn't have any plans to get pregnant any time soon.

I: So that's why she got hired!?

S: Yeah that's why she got hired, yeah so and the reason for this is, it's a pro and con, and the reason is in Germany as a mother, you have pretty much the world on a plate when it comes to having kids I mean, if I had a job right now I would be able to take five years off and go back...And if you think about the difference between that and the U.S., so it makes sense that the employers want to know if you're planning on getting pregnant because you might run off and be gone for five years. It's unfair though, like it's a gender stereotype, that if you are a young woman under 30, you might be at risk of getting pregnant.

I: ...Great services but culture lag, the great laws don't play out in a fair kind of way.

S: Exactly and you can see the, in the day to day career type world, the women are still sort of discriminated against, and the employers, even if your employer is a woman herself, cause she's just biased based on practicality because for her that means that if you get pregnant, that means I have to pay you pretty much for the next five years.

This excerpt from Stacy's interview demonstrates some of the challenges that women in face in the workplace. Alongside the existence of excellent laws protecting women and mothers, those laws have seemingly influenced the working culture that discriminates against women. It also demonstrates how Americans view Germany's family policies and benefits as extremely generous. Overall, traditional gender roles and expectations of parenthood in Germany were at times restrictive to both males and females.

Immigrant women were often critiqued or corrected for their foreign parenting techniques. Many women felt that they were constantly being corrected by their parents-in-law and other family members on their parenting skills and techniques. Women were even subject to criticism by strangers in public. The following excerpt from Kaley's interview displays how not only her family and friends critiqued her methods of motherhood, but even strangers in public:

K: It was very hard in the beginning because you reach another point of cultural difference...a lot of the older Germans will say that your children need to have socks on all the time, and I got stopped so many times in the grocery store, in the middle of summer when it was 90 degrees, where people would just blast me say, "You're a terrible mom, what are you thinking, look at your kids, they're freezing!"

I: What! People tell you that?

K: Oh yes, I cried in the car many times (laughs)! "You need to start taking care of your children!"

I: They said that? Strangers to strangers.

K: I guess strangers are better than people that you know though...that was very difficult though, the second time I knew to expect it...just say, "Oh, well feel their feet, they're fine, look at the child, does it look like it's dying?" That was very hard.

I: And did people give you advice on how to raise your children too?

K: Oh yes, they question a lot of the methods that are different...

Kaley's comment illustrates the criticism that foreign mothers in Germany frequently face. Techniques that appear different, or clothing that does not meet the standard expectation, are examples that Kaley uses. However, based on the responses of participants, as mothers, they can face criticism over anything. Most participants had several prominent examples of similar instances of receiving criticism in public over their parenting skills. Sam also experienced correction from strangers in public over her mothering skills:

I: The Germans have their own way of child rearing too, can you speak at all to that? Do people tell you what to do?

S: Oh yeah!!! Oh gosh! And now it doesn't bother me anymore, but at the beginning I thought "Oh my gosh these people think that they're entitled to tell me like, your child is not warm enough!"...Or um, "You forgot their hat," or, oh one time they were in the stroller and I was in DM (*DM is a German drugstore) and I had something hanging on the bar of the stroller and it was pulling, in this ladies opinion it was pulling the stroller down too much and she was like, "His head is too low compared to the rest of his body, you need to put your stroller up."...

I: So would you say that's like a normal thing on a day to day basis?

S: Oh yeah! It's what you hear from everybody...and I'm sure they think they're being helpful, but it just seems rude.

I: Yeah, and so how does it feel for you, as a foreigner to be told?

S: At first I was like, "Oh my gosh" like, you wouldn't you know, and I wasn't quick enough with my response to be like something sassy, I'd just be like, "Okaaaay". And now I don't care so I don't feel the need to respond, but at that point I was like, I can't even formulate a response quick enough to be defending myself.

Sam's experience as a mother in Germany demonstrates some of the common challenge that foreign mothers face in Germany. In Germany, public criticism of mothers appears to be an acceptable practice. As an immigrant still adjusting to the culture, Sam lacked knowledge and understanding on German parenting norms. As an immigrant still learning German, she also did not feel able to quickly defend herself from criticism. This reflects the common conflict that immigrant women may find themselves faced with on a regular basis because of their lack of cultural and linguistic fluency. While later in the interview Sam mentions that over time she was able to ignore the criticism, for some participants, one critical comment would leave them in significant distress. Participants also cited more frequent criticism and corrections in regards to their parenting practices violating other social norms. This suggests that in German culture, the correct form of parenting is a very important concern. As mothers, women were subject to frequent criticism and correction of their parenting techniques by family, friends and strangers.

Many women felt judged for their parenting choices, suggesting that women face higher levels of social scrutiny in Germany. Some women felt judgement for being stay at home mothers while others felt judged for being young mothers. As immigrant women, their values do not necessarily reflect mainstream German values. Germany's fertility rate is low and German women "tend to delay childbearing until they have completed their education and worked for a period in the labour market" (Trzcinski, 2006, p. 494). In Germany, the "average age at first birth is over 30 years of age for married women" (Trzcinski, 2006, p. 494). Many participants however had their first child in their early to mid twenties, soon after immigrating and therefore before establishing themselves professionally in Germany. In the following excerpt below, Kaley discusses how she feels looked down upon for her parenting choices that deviate from German expectations:

I: Do you feel that people look down upon or people admire you for being a stay at home mom?

K: They think I'm odd.

I: Really, I'm shocked to hear that, wow.

K: ...Uh, you're supposed to do your *Ausbildung* (*apprenticeship*) right after you finish your high school education...so I chose to have kids first, um and I'm 24 and have three kids, that's pretty bizarre...

Kaley often feels looked down upon for her choice to have children at a young age instead of pursuing a post secondary education. In this regard, she deviates from the widespread norm within German culture to have children after university and a well established career. To make sense of the judgement that she receives, Kaley noted that,

K: I think women have a hard time in Germany... because there are these expectations for education and career and just put you put family off until 40 years old or something and then, can't get pregnant... there is a lot of pressure on women to be career women...

Kaley's comments display how women, and mothers in particular, face unrealistic social expectations, and that when they deviate from those expectations, they are faced with criticism. Dawn, who has recovered from cancer, and has a child requiring frequent medical care, was able to quit her part time job in order to try and reduce some of the stress she faced from balancing work and family life. Like many others, she felt judged for her decision to stay at home with her children:

I: Do you struggle with that at all or do you feel stereotyped as a woman? And as a mother as well?

D: More as a mother, a little bit. Because and I think that this has maybe still more to do with this change in culture here, getting more women out into the workforce, almost feel a little bit more looked down upon, um staying home, because it's becoming more expected that you go back to work. And especially once the family leaves...I don't know hardly any Germans, native Germans that actually still stay home.

Dawn's comments display social expectations that women return to work once children reach a specific age. It seems that mothers in Germany face critique for many of their choices. Kaley also felt social pressure around the acceptability of her choice to stay at home:

K: In Germany its expected for you to stay at home six months after you give birth, it's very abnormal for you to stay at home after your child is one year or older...that's extremely uncommon. There's a lot of pressure on women to go back to work and they should like it and they should want to be career women.

I: Really, even though there's this generous three year maternity leave?

K: Yup they do the maternity leave but you don't get paid for the whole time, they hold your job for the three years and then they pay you for the first, and so, a lot of women, especially women who live in the city who have more expensive apartments, they really need to go back to work after the first year um, yeah. They, the thing that I hear and read the most is that there is a lot of pressure on women to be career women...

Kaley's comments display the reality of social pressures that mothers face. She also illustrates the challenge women face when they have financial responsibilities and therefore must return to work in order to maintain their jobs, pay and housing. Cara also noted that the German women she knows have returned to work while her friends within the international community have remained stay at home mothers:

C: And then it's more culturally accepted here to be a stay at home mom.

I: Really?

C: Well it depends like at least for my perspective and maybe that's because...a lot of people at my state of life right now are having kids and choosing to stay home...but I know there are German women who want their babies in the Kita (*daycare*) and they want to go back to work but...I feel like it's more here...more women stay home...

Cara's comments illustrate how some Americans feel that Germany is more socially accepting of mothers staying at home than Americans are. This displays the regional variations that women experience depending on where they come from in America and where they live in Germany. Like Kaley, Stacy also felt judged for her decision to have children in her mid-twenties and to be a stay-at-home mother. The following excerpt from Stacy's interview displays the clash of her American values and dreams of motherhood with German cultural values:

I: So you as a mother in Germany, do you feel that people treat you differently since you've had a baby?

S: Um...not necessarily, people were always really surprised when I told them that I was married and that I was trying to have a baby because I'm so young...German couples now, people do not usually have children before they're 30 here, and that's become a much more common trend. Because women want to study, they want to work, and then they want to buy a house, especially if you're from the area that my husband's from, it's really important to have a house first before you start a family, and yeah so people were totally flabbergasted when I told them, "Yeah I'm going to be 25 in this year", "Wait what, aren't you studying still", "Well nope I'm not studying", "Well aren't you

going to work?" "Well no I'm not going to work cause I said I want to have a baby", we tried for almost a year to try and get pregnant so you know I was telling people that we would like to have a baby, and they were so shocked like, "You're so young, you're so young" and I'm like, not really...so yeah, it's a totally different culture...as far as telling people I was interested in having a baby and then they would ask how old I was and they were just shocked.

Stacy's comments suggest that German women are expected to follow very organized, structured and particular expectations. As immigrant women who may be unaware of or have different expectations for themselves from German norms, their choices may conflict with the majority culture. These cultural norms may be influenced by government policies that aim to increase fertility rates. Scholars have noted that while, "family policy in Germany has traditionally favoured a breadwinner model with an emphasis on full-time care giving by mothers and full-time employment by fathers", there has been a more recent policy shift to include, "an emphasis on facilitating part-time work for mothers" (Trzcinski, 2006, p. 498). This may explain why many women felt judged for remaining stay-at-home mothers beyond one year following birth. Even the participants who were not parents were very aware of Germany's gendered traditions around parenting. Stacy, who is met with the critique that she's, "doing nothing with my life," feels that women in Germany face more cultural challenges than women in the U.S.:

S: ...I always knew I wanted to have children and to be a stay at home mom too after I had the children...but that whole traditional conservative idea, a lot of people are really turned off by it, like, "Well aren't you a stuck in the past person" and it's like, yeah it's weird they have kind of a double standard here.

I: Totally a double standard, do you feel like there're more traditional gender roles in Germany though?

S: Yeah that's what's ironic, they have totally traditional gender roles and yet when I say that I'm interested in doing things traditionally they're like, "What's wrong with you?"...yeah so I feel like it's kind of a hypocritical mindset, like we want you to, the Germans want you to do everything as a woman, I'll just say that. That's my kind of, my mission statement, like I have to do everything here. Because they want me to work, they want me to uh, have children, but they also want me to like maintain a sort of like social benefit, like okay you need to benefit society not just by having children but also by like going back to work eventually yeah so I feel a lot of pressure from a lot of sides...

Stacy's comments display a double standard that women in Germany face. They are expected to work and contribute to the economy while also having children and caring for family and domestic duties although those roles are not easy to manage at the same

time. Women who chose to either focus on motherhood or their careers are met with judgement. Stacy's comment also demonstrates that when women's decisions align more with traditional values, they are met with judgement for not following society's current expectations. Scholars have noted that immigrant women are often considered the "Other Other" in society (Erel, 2016, p. 33). In this context, American women are Othered for being foreign, and female. In Germany, the government aims to support families and gender equality by providing excellent financial and social benefits in order to balance the demands of work and family duties. Yet in spite of those attempts to support mothers, immigrant women still feel pressure to establish both successful careers and have children. In the following excerpt, Rebecca, who does not have children but has extensive professional work experience, reflects on the status of women in Germany:

I: So what do you think about German gender roles?

R: Well I always thought, "Oh liberal progressive Europe they're so liberal and open" and then I moved here and I thought, "Oh my gosh I'm back in the 1960's!" Like I went to this event, top women in business at Porsche. And I was like, "did this really just happen?" Like first off, there was like half men speaking to you, and then second, they gave out this book, and it was like "Porsche women" and I mean literally it was like women posing in front of cars...And I was like, this is like everything we've worked not to be! ...Well alright on the one hand the good things are that you value like, that there is like, *Elternzeit (parental leave)*, that you can take time off and the men do too, you can even split it, the men can take the 12 months off, like it doesn't have to be the woman, and that you can take time off and both parents can I think that's really good. Um, like the kindergartens, but like everything is organized for a mother who doesn't work, shop opening hours...but in terms of gender, I feel like I'm living in the 1960's the negatives are, probably a lot of women are underemployed, and it's great for the women who want to stay home, but what about the women who want to work, it becomes this cycle, this societal expectation, and then the men might work more than they should, which I think also hurts the kids...

Rebecca's comment illustrates how Germany's traditional gender roles and expectations that women stay at home with their children for a time can negatively influence women who do not want children and who want to focus on their careers as well as limiting fathers. Since many participants were stay-at-home mothers with young children, they accepted and embraced traditional gender roles, which allowed them to stay at home with their children. Rebecca's comments also demonstrate how society is structured with mothers and children in mind. When asked when they would return to work, participants

all expressed concern about their post-maternity return to the labour market. Many noted common challenges that women, and mothers in particular, face in the working world. Overall, in spite of the benefits that mothers in Germany can receive, gender role expectations had a negative impact in many women's lives.

As immigrant mothers in Germany, several women experienced new perspectives on gender roles. Before migration, most participants had goals of working and establishing their careers in Germany. Upon discovering the challenges that they faced learning the language and finding skilful employment, in combination with the social and financial support and taxation laws that encouraged families, many women decided that staying at home as a mother in Germany was in fact a positive and favourable occupation. This was the case for Jessica, who experienced a major shift within her own perspective and alignment with feminist values once becoming a mother in Germany:

J: So I came from Berkley, San Francisco mentality and I told everybody before we got married like, "Oh yeah Tobias cooks, he bakes, I'll wash the dishes, we're both gonna work"...well then I got married and I flipped out, I had an identity crisis, besides coming here he was like, he cooks, he shops, he irons, he cleans, what do I do? What is my role here...but I was so appreciative because being an immigrant I never worked a day in Germany and I still got *Elterngeld* (*government funded money for parents*), they gave me the 300 Euros a month and so I came with a very thankful heart because we were poor, we were poor we needed that 300 Euro a month so I am very thankful for that opportunity that they would just give us money and I don't deserve it! Because I come from the States, you earn your money you know, yeah...And that I don't have to fight in the workplace because you know, I was one of those girls like, "I can do this, I'm stronger, I'm better"...If a guy tells me no, it's not good...don't tell me no, don't even, no, no, I am not. And I fought that my whole life but now I feel so bad for my sister that her baby at 12 weeks, my sister's got to go back to work cause her husband's an immigrant who can only get crappy jobs that do not have health insurance so she has health insurance. She had a c-section and she had to pay \$6,000 to deliver her baby and my baby was free. Yup, Elliot was in the hospital for one whole month, we paid nothing...And my sister goes to work and cries cause, and now my mom quit her job to take care of the baby, so you know, then I look at what I have here and then my heart aches for women because I know I used to think that way...but then I learned how important it is to be that mom who has the time to take care of her kids, to listen to them...but I have learned that being a mom is worthy, it's a worthy calling and I didn't value it before, and to be a good mom, you know...but now that I have kids, you know everybody asks "Don't you want to move back to the States, like Tobias could earn more money, you could be back with your family"

it's like, "Guys, we were on lock down several times, there were bomb threats, there were shootings, there was lots of gang activity in Oakland, Berkley, that area where I lived, you know what, I can let my kids walk to school and I don't freak out, on their own...So, you know, just all these kinds of things, it's not perfect here, I know it, I don't live in that bubble, but compared to where I came from, I just really like it..

Jessica's comments illustrate a major shift in her perspective that resulted from her experiences living in Germany. Experiencing first-hand the benefits and support offered by the government, as well as the widespread cultural benefits of a more traditional culture that supports mothers, Jessica came to view motherhood as a valuable role for the first time in her life. Earlier on in the interview, Jessica noted that she had spent her whole life and early marriage fighting gender inequality. Once she became a mother and spent several years as a stay at home mother with three young children, Jessica came to understand the challenges that mothers face, and greatly appreciated living in a society that valued mothers. While acknowledging that German gender roles may be more traditional than those in America, Jessica noted that result of those traditions is a society in which individuals and families are more supported in their daily needs, which fosters a more balanced family life by allowing a parent to stay at home without significant financial losses to the family. Scholars have noted that within migrant marriages where the migrant spouse is the wife, traditional gender roles are more often followed reinforced (Charsley 2012, p. 6). Although women felt that German culture had more traditional gender roles than American, those who felt judged for not returning to work after several years at home can be seen as incorporating more traditional gender roles than others in society. In addition to generous maternity benefits, language and cultural barriers, the lack of recognition of foreign degrees and barriers to employment, were all factors that led women to embrace more traditional gender roles and stay at home with their children. Past studies have shown that while both American and German women tend to exit the paid workforce due to childbirth, "family structure plays a stronger role in women's working lives in Germany than in the U.S." (Drobnič et al., 1999). Overall, living in Germany gave women another view of gender and motherhood that they often embodied and benefitted from.

Women in Germany face specific barriers and expectations and as immigrants, in spite of the challenges, they also enjoy some of the benefits that come from traditional gender expectations. While they are expected to contribute to the economy and develop successful careers, they are also expected to bear children and contribute to growing the

population. With generous governmental benefits and support, immigrant women find Germany to be an excellent and extremely supportive country to be raising their children. While participants claimed to feel more gender restrictions in general, they also felt that living in Germany provided them more freedom to become stay-at-home mothers than life in America. Overall, women were grateful to be living in Germany where their circumstances allowed them to be stay at home mothers with their children. Staying at home was also an escape from struggling to re-establish themselves as immigrants in the German workforce and from facing downward social mobility in their careers. As immigrant women in Germany, their experiences of motherhood and opinions on gender were mixed. While they recognized the great benefits to parenting in Germany, they also felt a particular critique and scrutiny for their foreign ways of parenting.

Conclusion

The motivation for this research project was a desire to uncover and understand how citizenship, marriage and immigration impact daily life for American women living as immigrants in Germany and married to German nationals. American women in particular have been overlooked in German immigration literature and research on marriage migrants. Therefore to fill this gap, I sought to understand what their common challenges, perspectives and experiences may be as I consider them to be a unique demographic due to several factors.

Unlike many immigrant groups whose motivation for migration is in seeking financial gain, political stability, or personal safety, this demographic migrates out of love, and have often sacrificed successful careers, proximity to family and have left their entire lives behind in order to join their spouses in Germany. Additionally, as citizens of a politically and culturally powerful nation, and as native English speakers, Americans are often viewed in a positive light throughout Western Europe and therefore often receive some form of privilege. For example, American immigrants in Germany are often exempt from the basic and usually mandatory Integration Course requirement that most other immigrant groups must fulfill. Common cultural stereotypes and assumptions of Americans in Germany, as well as the legal benefits that American women married to German nationals experience in their immigration play an important role in labelling. The result is that American women in Germany are not always seen as immigrants, nor do they always associate themselves with the term, “immigrant”. However, as individuals settling in a new country with a distinct culture, unable to speak the local language, and who have few social connections, in many regards American women in Germany are not so unlike other immigrants and still face many of the common challenges and barriers that other immigrant groups face.

The findings of this study are relevant for immigrants and policy makers beyond those simply interested in American women in Germany. If immigration and integration is challenging for this demographic—as citizens of a culturally and politically powerful nation, educated, native English speakers, who have a local family network, and have professional work experience—then what can this tell us about immigration in general? And what can their experiences tell us about the kinds of challenges that uneducated,

unemployed, racialized or single immigrants from poorer, less developed nations may face upon migration. While race, gender, class, age, and a variety of many other factors are certainly significant factors influencing daily life experiences and should not be overlooked, this research shows that there are certain common immigrant experiences and challenges that newcomers face regardless of their citizenship, nationality, or race. While this project has focused on a specific demographic in a particular country, my aim is that the findings can shed light on some of the broader, universal challenges that immigrants and those within intercultural marriages face. By understanding the challenges that immigrants face, as a society, we can begin to search for the important solutions that can improve the quality of life for many individuals and families, and therefore, society as a whole.

My assumption was that because the American participants' migration was motivated by romantic love, their native spouse would provide a wide variety of support and that their integration process may be simpler than those who immigrate alone or with other foreign family members. While that was the case in some contexts and situations, such as in filling out official immigration paperwork and translating German documents, quite regularly in others situations, women felt alone, misunderstood and pressured to conform to German culture in nearly all details of their daily lives. As immigrants are surrounded by new and unfamiliar norms, traditions and languages in public life, the home becomes a place where their native cultural traditions and norms can safely emerge without judgement. Within intercultural marriages however, immigrant spouses are often left without even a sense of familiarity within their homes as they are often expected by their spouse and extended family members to conform to the local norms even within the home. It appears that the foreign spouse is unequally expected to replace their native cultural norms with the traditions, habits and expectations of the country in which they reside. While adopting the host country's cultural norms and language acquisition was vital to social integration in a new country, spouses felt the home should be a meeting place between the cultures of both spouses. With expectations to adopt German cultural traditions even within their homes and families, foreign spouses were expected to change and adapt more than their local spouses were for the foreign spouse. For participants, their marriages struggled due to conflict over household duties or habits such as cleaning, cooking, and child rearing, for example.

Overall, it was surprising to find that many women felt a lack of support or empathy from their spouses particularly in regards to their struggles and challenges as immigrants.

Overall, participants came to view Germany and its' social systems with great positivity, and they were grateful to live in a country with more widespread social support than in America. As Americans, participants often felt that they were able to hide their foreign identity in certain situations and contexts, which provided a sense of relief from the stress of being labelled as an immigrant. This was especially helpful for women as the stereotypes they faced as Americans were often based on America's political and military history. As Americans, women received privilege in bureaucratic matters and often preferred to view themselves as expatriates rather than immigrants, as they considered the term "immigrant" to hold a negative connotation that they did not identify with. As outsiders in Germany, women struggled to feel a sense of belonging, but as they adopted German cultural norms and ideals, they also experienced a separation from American norms and no longer felt a sense of belonging in America either. Living as immigrants in Germany, women selectively chose when to express their American or German personas in different contexts and situations.

All women expressed the vital importance of language skills, claiming language abilities were the one key component leading to integration and the ability to understand German culture. Women also claimed that language influenced personality and expression, which at times could impact the harmony of their marriages. They also noted that insufficient language skills caused extreme frustration on a daily basis and conflict within their families and marriages. As Americans who did not have to participate in an Integration Course, when women did seek out language course opportunities, they felt that the material was tailored to low-skilled and poorly educated immigrant groups and found it difficult to learn in those environments. Yet because participants were in intercultural marriages, learning German was essential in order to communicate with extended family and women often found no alternative to learning German on their own. While participants felt that their intercultural marriage was a unique blend of two cultures, they predominantly felt pressure to change and adopt their spouses' culture as they were the immigrant spouse in the relationship. Women also experienced a lack of understanding or empathy from their spouses for their immigrant specific challenges, and having a local spouse did not appear to greatly accelerate integration. Rather, social integration was a process of learning through trial and error. As American women,

participants struggled with what they claimed were more traditional gender roles in Germany. However as mothers, participants felt a greater sense of freedom over their decisions to work or stay at home in Germany than in America, and greatly valued the state support available to parents and children. Yet many mothers felt judged for having a foreign parenting style.

Overall, in the early phases of immigration, living in a country without adequate language skills caused great emotional, psychological and mental distress for participants and resulted in conflict within their marriages, as well as extended family and social relationships. Differences in cultural traditions, norms and expectations also were the cause of conflict and misunderstanding within intercultural marriages. In addition to adjusting to a new country and language, with the loss of social networks and the familiarity of their native country, participants felt great loneliness and isolation throughout the integration process. For most participants, as time went on and their language skills and social networks developed, so did their life quality and satisfaction with life in Germany. As all women struggled greatly with language issues and claimed language was the main factor leading to integration, American immigrants and other migrants with a more privileged background would greatly benefit from appropriate, formal language training. The current exemption from the Integration Course requirement in fact hinders their integration and life quality in Germany. As language skills develop, cultural understanding, the ability to imitate and engage in German society, make meaningful social connections and advance professionally follows. Without language skills, immigrants are likely to remain outsiders in their host society.

Limitations and Future Analytical Approaches

Certain limitations exist within this research, including the theoretical and methodological approaches that I employed throughout this research. For example, participants may have been misinformed or misunderstood certain aspects of German immigration policy or various aspects of German cultural practices or traditions. Women's perspectives do not necessarily reflect accurate patterns, trends or even laws in Germany, but rather their personal perception of those patterns, trends or laws. Participants also had varied levels of educational attainment, career goals and family support. These factors likely impacted their opportunities in Germany, their perspective of self in society, and their level of contentedness with life in Germany. Participants'

experiences and perspectives were also likely affected by the length of their residency and the extent of their experiences in Germany, their age and by their socio-economic class. All of these factors may account for some of the differences in their understanding of key social institutions within Germany and the U.S.

There are also certain limitations to the snowballing method of accessing potential participants. Those women who did reply to my requests to interview may represent women who feel confident enough to share their experiences. This limitation may have resulted in a lack of representation of other perspectives, standpoints, and immigrant experiences. Additionally, by only interviewing the foreign spouse within an intercultural marriage, we are only gaining insight into the experiences of one partner and may miss some of the complexities of intercultural marriages. This research was based solely within the state of Baden-Württemberg, and therefore in some ways only serves to represent immigrant experiences within this state rather than Germany as a whole. This is because immigration and integration programs are often regulated and facilitated by each state rather than federally, and therefore support offered to immigrants varies between the German states. Because parts of Baden-Württemberg were in the American Zones post WWII, public opinion towards Americans may have been different in other German states.

Future researchers may consider placing a greater significance on variables such as race, socio-economic class, and age in their participant recruitment and analysis. Looking for regional patterns of difference and variations between urban and rural communities and states may also be useful to explore. It may also be of significance to research the reasons as to why one spouse chooses to relocate and not the other, with a particular attention on how gender impacts that decision. Conducting several interviews over a longer period of time with each participant may also provide researchers the opportunity to gather more information about their life details and experiences as they go through different seasons of life, in order to gain a more in depth view into their experiences at the different phases of integration. A comparative study analyzing intercultural marriages or immigrant experiences from other nations would also add to our understanding of how immigration and intercultural marriages interact and construct both the immigration and integration experiences. All of these ideas for further research would advance sociological understanding of the interplay between intercultural marriages and immigrant integration.

This project has taken a feminist standpoint to analyze the details of everyday life of American women living as immigrants in Germany with local spouses. Particular attention was paid to the impact that gender, nationality, motherhood, language, and marriage have on their immigration and integration experiences. The findings illustrate how they experience immigration in a unique way due to their American citizenship and marriage to a German, but that they also experience many of the expected challenges of immigration and barriers to integration that immigrants in Germany and other countries commonly face. Overall, while American nationals enjoy certain privileges that other migrant groups do not enjoy, they also experience specific challenges and expectations unique to their nationality, and they also experience the common challenges, barriers and inequalities that many immigrant groups face.

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Appendix A. Email Script

An example of my initial email correspondence with women who have contacted me stating their interest in taking part is as follows:

Hello _____,

Thank you for showing interest in this study and telling me a bit about yourself. It sounds like you would make an excellent fit for this study and your experiences would be quite valuable to this project.

I am currently working on my master's in sociology at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada and my research topic for this project is immigration in Germany from a female perspective. As you might already know, I have decided to focus on women who have immigrated to Germany for a relationship with a German (like I myself did!). I am also wanting to focus on English speaking participants for the logistics of the interview process, and because more research has been done with other minority groups in Germany but English speakers are often overlooked in these studies. My question is if you would be interested in taking part in a 1-2 hour interview with me as a participant of this study and sharing a bit about your personal experience as an immigrant in Germany.

In addition, if you know of any other women who fit the criteria of being English speaking immigrants partnered with Germans and living as immigrants in Germany, who would be interested in taking part as well, feel free to share this email or my LinkedIn account with them and if interested they can feel free to contact me.

I will be based primarily between Mannheim and Stuttgart but am also available to travel to meet participants and in Germany from June 4 to 28.
Looking forward to meeting with you.

Best,
Sharlie

Appendix B. Interview Questions

Introductions:

Where are you from?

How old are you?

What is your educational background?

Work:

What are your legal rights to work in Germany?

Do you work in Germany?

What jobs have you done?

Did you work back home before moving to Germany?

Immigration:

Are your residence rights tied to your work, your spouse, or are did you obtain them independently?

When did you first move to Germany?

Why did you first move to Germany?

What was the process of moving internationally like for you? What challenges did you experience along the way?

What were your first few days in Germany like?

Had you been to Germany before moving here?

What were your first impressions of life in Germany?

How does your relational status impact or influence your immigrant status if at all?

Integration:

Have you met other immigrant women in Germany?

Do you primarily socialize with other immigrant women or Germans?

Do you have friends here in Germany or are you more connected with friends back home?

What are your impressions of traditional German gender roles?

Do you struggle with German gender roles?

Would you say that you maintain the culture of your home nation or have you adopted more to the German culture? Can you identify certain practices that reflect either German or your home culture?

Do you feel pressured to change daily practices of yours to comply with German culture?

Can you think of a time when you felt directly conflicted between German culture and your home culture?

Do you feel at home in Germany?

Do you feel like you fit in or that you stand out as an immigrant?

Do you feel integrated in your life in Germany?

If yes, can you identify what factors have contributed to your integration?

If not, can you identify why you do not feel integrated? What is missing?

If you had to summarize your experience as an immigrant in Germany, how would you summarize it?

What has been the absolute best part of immigrating to Germany?

What has been the hardest part of immigrating to Germany?

Has your perception of Germany been changed by living there?

How would you describe your partner's view on your immigration status?

Relationship:

Does your partner work?

What does he do?

How old is he?

Where is he from?

What is his educational background?

When and how did you meet your German partner?

Are you married?

How long have you been in a relationship?

What is it like for you being in an intercultural relationship, do you notice special attributes that others don't have?

How might you explain to an outsider what is unique about an intercultural relationship?

How has your immigration experience been influenced by the fact that your partner is German?

Does your partner empathize with you when experiences the common obstacles that immigrants usually face such as language issues, difficulty with the bureaucracy, culture, homesickness etc?

Compared to other immigrants you might know who came to Germany with their spouse, how has having a German spouse changed your immigration experience?

Family:

Do you have any children? How many?

If yes, did you give birth in Germany? What was that like as a foreigner?

What kind of school do your children attend? (international/local/homeschool)

If you are a mother, how does that influence your identity as an immigrant? Do you find that it helped you integrate and meet a larger community, or has it been challenging raising your child in a new country? If yes, in what ways?

Do you have contact with your partner's extended family?

If yes, how often do you see them?

How often do you see your family back home?

Language:

Do you speak German? If yes, how did you learn?

Did you attend an Integration course?

Were you legally required to attend an Integration course?

What languages do you speak with your spouse?

What language do you primarily speak at home?

What is your relationship like with your spouse's family? Can you communicate verbally in German or English?

What is daily life like for you being a female immigrant?

Power relations in the household...

Have you lived in America with your German partner?