



# Strengthening 'We-ness': Embracing Diversity in Intercultural Family Dynamics

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# Introduction

- In this study, the term **intercultural couple** refers to a committed relationship formed by partners of different ethnic backgrounds
- Couples where one person is Korean and the other is non-Korean in NZ
- Includes couples who are married or cohabiting
- An intercultural couple may present with several interracial, interreligious, or bi-national dimensions



# Intercultural relationships on the rise

## **Intercultural couple in NZ (Didham & Callister, 2014)**

- About 69% of Māori, 46% of Pacific people, 24% of Asian, and 12% of European in 2013. Particularly high among NZ-born Māori, Pacific people, and Asian
  - Asian women were more likely than Asian men to marry outside of their culture
  - European-Māori couples were the most common
  - Increased between Europeans-Pacific people, Māori-Pacific people, and Asians-Europeans couples
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# Korean population in NZ

- The fourth-largest Asian ethnic group, preceded by Chinese, Indian, and Filipino (Statistics NZ, 2018)

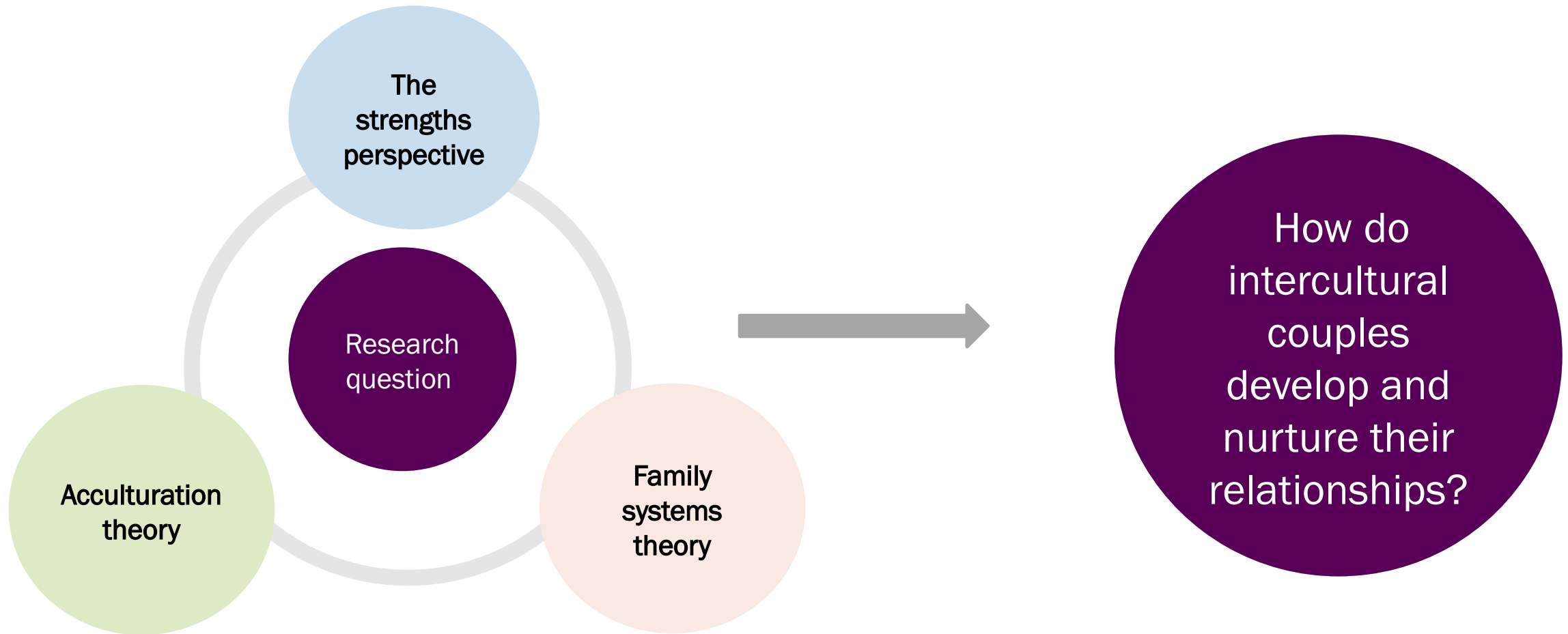
930 Koreans in 1991, subsequently expanded to 35,664 in 2018

- Among the growing Korean population, the number of intercultural relationships has also increased. However, limited information is available about Koreans in intercultural relationships
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# Problem statement

- A few studies have been conducted between Māori-European couples
  - Focused on demographic patterns, couple characteristics, and intergenerational transmission of ethnicity (e.g., Callister, 2003; Didham & Callister, 2014; Harré, 1968; Kukutai, 2007)
  - Need to understand other ethnic intercultural couples
  - A dearth of research involving Korean partner in NZ
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# Research question

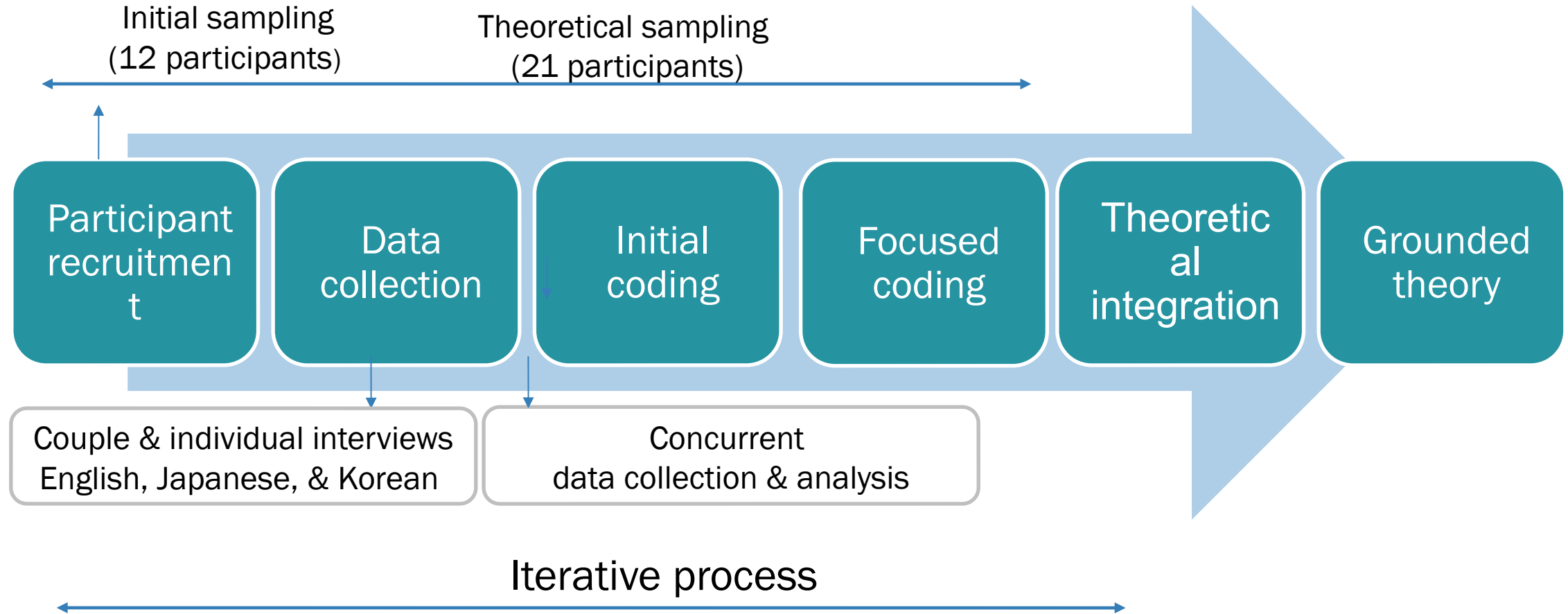


# Methodology

## **Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014)**

- A qualitative approach
  - Aims to generate a theory from the data
  - Focuses on a process inherent to the research topic
  - Acknowledges multiple meanings and realities, and seeks to understand how people's experiences are embedded in the context
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# Methods





# Participants

## **Total 33 participants**

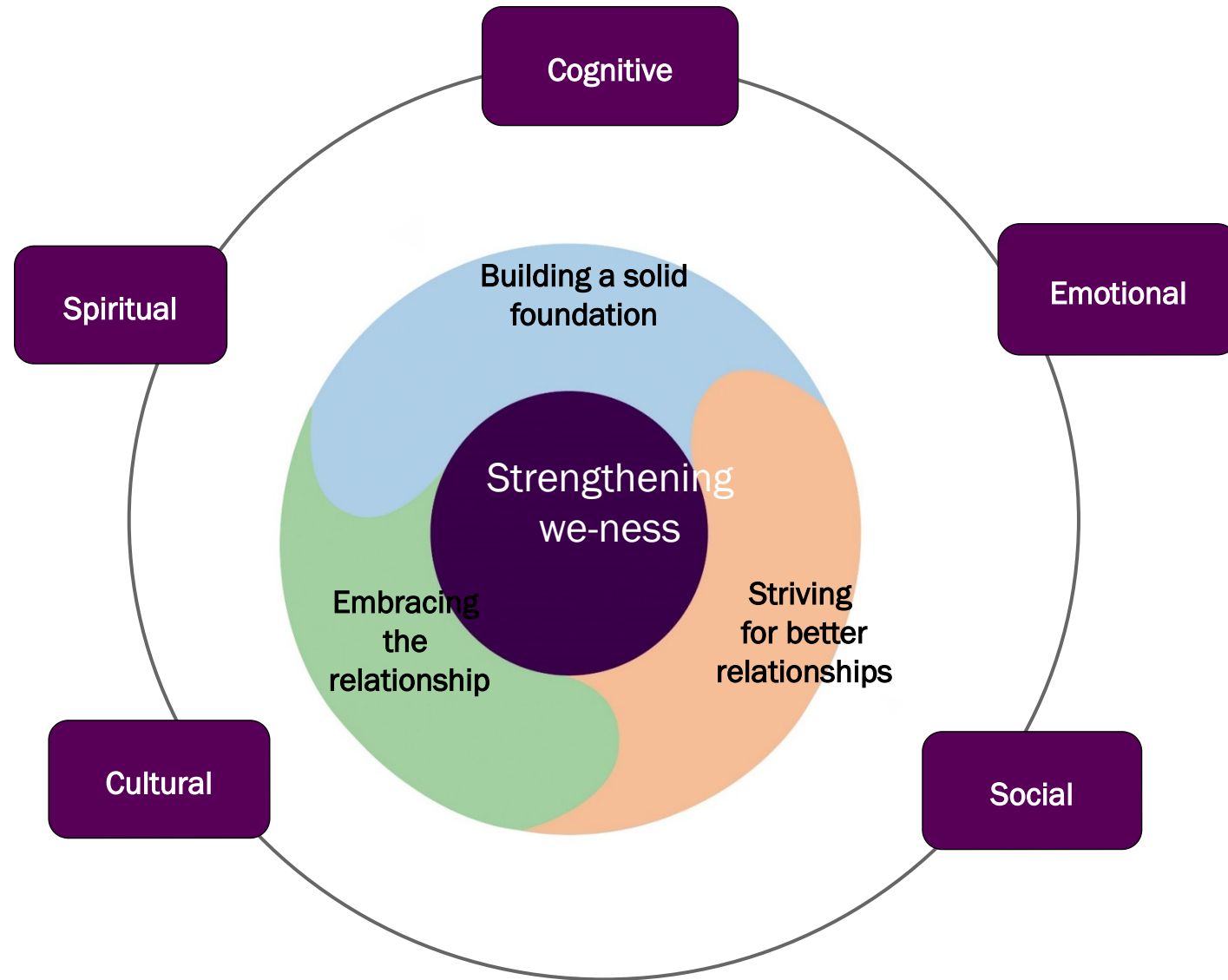
- 14 heterosexual intercultural couples and 5 individuals who are part of intercultural relationships
  - Married or had been cohabitating for 4-23 years. Ages: 32-67
  - 18 Koreans and 15 non-Koreans
  - Participants were from diverse cultural backgrounds
  - Mostly immigrants: Only 6 participants were born in NZ
  - Religion: Christian (23), Buddhists (3), Muslim (1), no religion (9)
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# Findings

## The theory resulting from the analysis: **Strengthening 'We-ness'**

- Strengthened we-ness across three iterative phases that were derived from the data: **Building a solid foundation, striving for better relationships, and embracing the relationship**
  - Multidimensional We-ness: A shared collective identity as a couple  
**Cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual**
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# The theory of Strengthening 'We-ness'



# Building a solid foundation

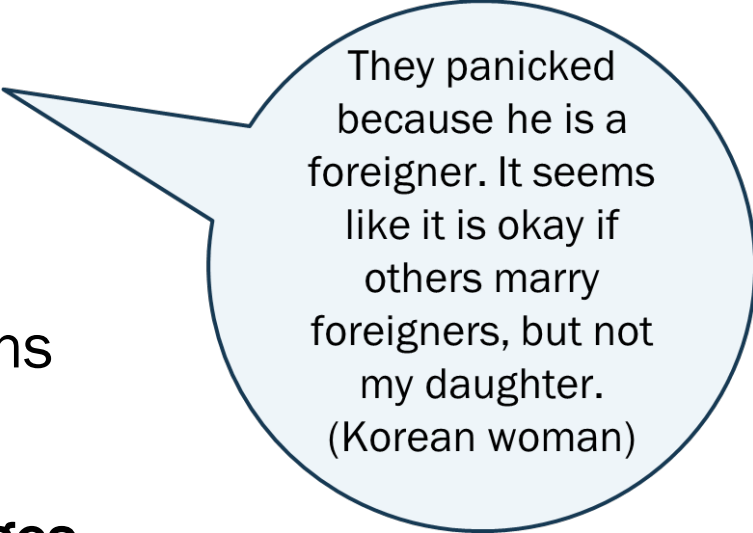
## Dealing with disapproval

## Developing a shared cultural understanding

- Acknowledged similar cultural values and beliefs
- Developed an understanding of different expectations and attitudes in everyday life

## Dealing with emerging cultural differences and challenges

- Cultural differences include food, language and communication barriers, postpartum care, gender roles, and extend family relationships
- Key strategies include communication, being respectful, being positive and flexible, and acceptance



They panicked because he is a foreigner. It seems like it is okay if others marry foreigners, but not my daughter.  
(Korean woman)

# Striving for better relationships

## Being willing to adapt

- Learned their partner's first language
- Participated in their partner's community

I am  
helping  
them out  
voluntarily

## Cultivating social connections

- Family, friends, and communities

## Practising spirituality

- Within religion or without any religious practices
- Prayer, meditation, and their own personal values



# Embracing the relationship

**Crating a hybrid family culture**

**Developing shared goals and values**

Prepared their children for diverse society

**Cultivating gratitude**

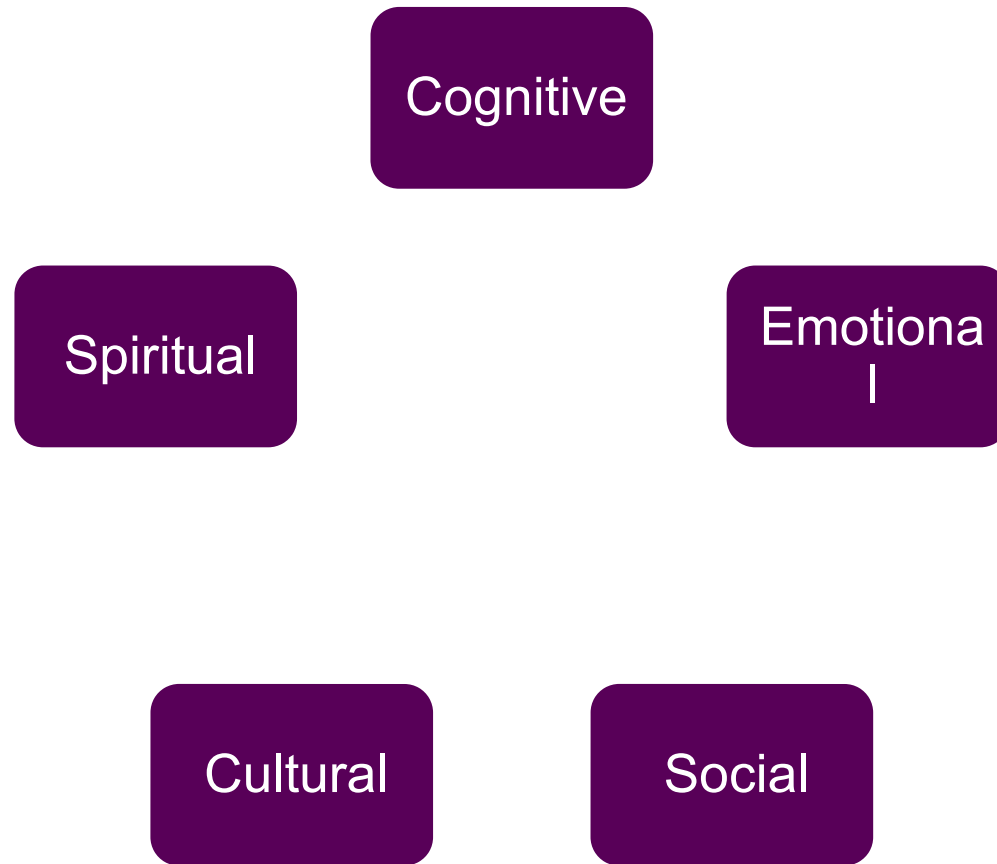
“I am so blessed”

We have  
good things  
from Korea,  
Japan, and  
NZ cultures

Kimchi  
on  
toast

We want to raise our  
daughter to know all  
languages and cultures

# Multi-dimensional 'We-ness'



# Summary and contributions

- Strengthening 'We-ness' is a way to develop and nurture intercultural relationships
  - The multidimensional aspects of 'we-ness'  
(Cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual)
  - A strength lens towards intercultural couples
  - Integrated part of the notions of individualism and collectivism
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# Implications

- It is important to access information about Korean intercultural couples living in New Zealand
  - Promote family diversity to foster an environment that is more inclusive, positive, and supportive for various ethnicities throughout communities in NZ
  - Reduce discrimination and prejudice toward intercultural couples and to increase acceptance of their relationships in NZ
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# References

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Thank you!

Questions?