

THE ASSIMILATION OF IN-LAWS: THE IMPACT OF NEWCOMERS ON THE
STRUCTURATION OF FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

In this study, 42 participants (including newlyweds, parents of newlyweds, and siblings of newlyweds) were interviewed about their relationships with their in-laws. Most of the participants reported that they liked their in-laws and wanted to maintain good relationships with them, while only four of the participants reported problematic in-law relationships. However, participants reported differing levels of discomfort with their in-laws when their routines differed for everyday life, holiday celebrations, religious practice, gift-giving, and interpersonal interactions. Families rarely communicated their routines directly. Instead they continued with their everyday routines and expected the newcomer to fit in. The newcomers found it easy to adjust to some routines that were similar to their own, but they felt confused or rebellious in response to other routines. The newcomers attempted to create roles for themselves in their spouse's families, and sometimes both the newcomer and the family of the spouse learned new values, created new routines, and found new ways to interact. Participants also reported that tensions existed between the married couple and their larger families regarding how much time the couple should spend with their families. These findings suggest that problematic in-law relationships may be due to differences in family routines and communication patterns.