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Family-of-Origin Influence on Relationship Satisfaction in Intercultural Couples

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Introduction

Family-of-origin (FOO) experiences have been found to be associated with later intimate relationship quality (e.g., Larson & Homan, 1994). A few studies with Caucasian samples (e.g., Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003) have found that female partners’ FOO experience has a stronger impact in that it significantly predicts not only female partners’ own relationship quality, but also that of male partners’ (cross-over effect). This, however, was not found in Asian couples (Yoshida & Busby, 2008). Therefore, the current study seeks to better understand the association between FOO experience and later relationship quality by examining the difference between Asian couples, Caucasian couples, and intercultural couples (between an Asian and a Caucasian).

Methods

Sample
75 Asian couples [AA couple]
39 Asian-Caucasian couples [AC couple]
99 Caucasian-Asian couples [CA couple]
136 Caucasian couples [CC couple]
• All Asian partners had their nationality in Asia
• Mean Age: 32 (SD = 9.07)
• Relationship Status: from casually dating to married

Measures/Procedures
• Participants completed the RELATIONship Evaluation questionnaire (RELATE; Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001), online between 2000 and 2007
• Multiple group analysis was performed using AMOS, with the couple as the unit of analysis
• Pairwise comparisons in direct, indirect, and total effects (within and across groups) were performed using Mplus.

The model for the whole sample fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 49.84$, df $= 28$, p $< .01$, $CFI = .97$, $TLI = .97$, $RMSEA = .05$). One path coefficient from male partner’s FOO Evaluation to female partner’s Relationship Satisfaction was not significant, but was retained for the multiple group analysis in order to test the differences in direct, indirect, and total effects between the four groups.

Multiple group analysis yielded the significant chi-square difference, $\Delta \chi^2 (42) = 81.40$, p $< .001$, indicating that the model for four groups are significantly different.

Total effects were all significant for all of the four groups at $p < 0.05$ level.

Results

The differences between direct and total indirect effect between Parents’ Marriage and FOO Evaluation were also all significant for all of the four groups indicating that Parents’ Marriage has stronger association with FOO evaluation than parent-child relationships.

The squared multiple correlations (i.e., $R^2$) for Relationship Satisfaction for Caucasian partners (.24 for male and .29 for female) in intercultural relationship are considerably greater than that for their counterparts CC group (.02 for both male and female). In addition, the differences in total effects between Caucasian females in AC and CC group were close to significant ($p < .06$) and the difference in total effects between Caucasian males in CA and CC group were significant ($p < .01$).

Discussion

Nonsignificant associations between Father-Child Relationship and FOO Evaluation for Asians are congruent with the previous findings on more distant and less involved Asian fathers (e.g., Ishii-Kuntz, 1994).

Contrary to the previous findings, cross-over effect was nonsignificant in CC couple. Thus, we need to replicate the study with another sample. However, cross-over effect was significant from Asian females FOO Evaluation to Caucasian males Relationship Satisfaction in CA couple although cross-over effect has been found only from Caucasian female to their Caucasian male partner in previous studies. This may indicate that degree to which cross-over effect present may be dependent on the cultural background of each partner.

Contrary to our hypothesis, Caucasian partners with Asian partners experienced greater impact from their FOO than do their Asian partners. In addition, the impact from FOO for Caucasian partners are stronger when they have an Asian partner than when they have a Caucasian partner. One possible explanation is “relationship effect” in that Caucasians perceive stronger connection toward their FOO experience when they have Asian partners than when they have Caucasian partners. Another possible explanation is “selection effect” in that Caucasians who perceive stronger connection toward their FOO experience tend to be attracted to Asians who perceive stronger connection toward their FOO. However, we do not know whether it is a manifestation of “relationship effect” or “selection effect” based on the results of the current study.

Thus, longitudinal and qualitative research investigating whether it is a “relationship effect” or a “selection effect” could further increase our understanding on the association between FOO experience and current relationship quality especially in cross-cultural contexts.

References