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# Relational and Social Contexts as Predictors of Satisfaction and Stability Among Asian-White Couples

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Relational and Social Contexts as Predictors of  
Satisfaction and Stability Among  
Asian-White Couples

Jerevie Malig Canlas

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

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## ABSTRACT

### Relational and Social Contexts as Predictors of Satisfaction and Stability Among Asian-White Couples

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Research suggests that interracial couples are more distressed and have lower stability compared to their endogamous counterparts. Interracial relationships involving Whites and Asians, however, seem to be an exception. To explore this exception, the pathways to relationship stability among endogamous and exogamous Asian-White couples were compared. Using Analysis of Covariance, partner empathy, social approval, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability for endogamous and exogamous Asian-White couples were compared, while holding length of relationship constant. Actor and partner effects of partner empathy and social approval on relationship satisfaction and relationship stability, as well as that of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability, were compared between the racial pair groups using structural equation modeling.

Endogamous Asian couples consistently scored lowest in relational and social factors, as well as in relationship outcomes. Relational factors more strongly predict relationship satisfaction and stability among White men regardless of partner's race than among Asian men. Empathy predicts relationship satisfaction and stability among exogamous women no differently than among endogamous women. Social contexts, however, influence relationship outcomes differently between endogamous and exogamous couples. Lastly, both actor and partner effects of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability did not differ across groups.

Keywords: Asians, interracial couples, empathy, social approval, relationship success.

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## **Relational and Social Contexts as Predictors of Satisfaction and Stability Among Asian-White Couples**

The racial lines in American society continue to blur as individuals have increasingly crossed racial boundaries in intimate relationships, individuals and families have crossed national borders, and children have been raised in a society where racial identity is no longer easily distinguishable and apparent at face value (Obasogie, 2010; Waters, 2000). The number of multi-racial families has risen in the recent years. The 2010 US census reflected that there was a 32% increase in the number of individuals identifying themselves as multi-racial, from 6.8 million in 2000 to 9 million in 2010 (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). The growth of this sector was initiated by an array of factors, with interracial marriage as a major source.

After immigration policies banning particular racial groups (e.g., Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) from entering the United States were lifted through the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and anti-miscegenation laws (e.g., Racial Integrity Act of 1924) were permanently repealed via the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Loving v. Virginia* [388 U.S. 1], interracial marriages have dramatically increased in numbers. In 1970, 310,000 interracial unions were reported; a number that was doubled ten years later. The number of interracial marriages have continuously increased over the last thirty years, from 964,000 unions in 1990 to 1.5 million in 2000, to 2.3 million in 2010 (Fryer, 2007; Lee & Bean, 2008; Qian, 1997; US Census Bureau, 2011).

Not surprisingly, the topic of race and ethnicity has heavily influenced the study of American families in the last few decades. In fact, this body of research has traversed across multiple scholarly disciplines, including family studies, economics, psychology, and sociology (Brown, 2003; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010; Gaines, Buriel,

Liu, & Rios, 1997; Mindel, Habenstein, & Wright, 1998). While the general conclusion among social scientists about exogamous marriages is that they are less stable than endogamous ones due to various relational and social contexts unique to them, such as not having cultural similarities and lack of social support (Bratter & King, 2008; Eeckhaut, Lievens, Van de Putte, & Lusyne, 2011; Heaton, 2002; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009), some researchers have found no differences (Gaines & Agnew, 2003; Gaines, Granrose, Rios, Garcia, Page Young, Farris, & Bledsoe, 1999; Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006).

Of particular importance, the relationship outcomes of interracial couples have not been generalized across all racial pairings (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006; Bratter & King, 2008; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Asian-White marriages, in particular, have been reported to have significantly high rates of marital success (Bratter & King, 2008). These divergent findings clearly indicate that there are many questions left unanswered and many issues unsettled in this area of family research. Such problems include non-representative samples (e.g., military samples) and factors (e.g., social context) relating to marital outcomes among interracial couples being likely to vary depending upon the gender and race of the minority spouse (Lee & Bean, 2008; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009).

The focus of this study is on the level of relationship satisfaction and stability among Asian-White couples, as well as the relational and social contexts of Asian-White couples as predictors of relationship satisfaction and stability. There are five reasons why the focus of this study on Asian and White couples is important. First, the Asian and Asian American population has grown faster than any other major race group in America in the last decade (Humes et al., 2011). In 2010, there were 14.7 million Asian/Asian Americans residing in the United States, accounting for five percent of the overall population. As their numbers have grown within the

larger American society, Asian/Asian Americans have ascertained themselves as a significant minority population (Leong, Inman, Ebreo, Yang, Kinoshita, & Fu, 2007).

Second, Asians and Whites have a reportedly high rate of intermarriage with each other (2010 Census; Fryer, 2007). Throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Asians have been consistently considered as the most intermarried race among American minority groups (Khanna, 2004; Kitano, Yeung, Chai, & Hatanaka, 1984; Hidalgo & Bankston, 2010; Lee & Bean, 2008). Asian women, in particular, have the highest rate of intermarriage with non-Asians, most often White Americans (Fryer, 2007; Ling, 2007).

Third, Asians and Whites come from two divergent cultures with different construals of self and other (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Asians, despite their cultural diversity, tend to hold common values of relational orientation and interdependence that are in sharp contrast with American values of attending to self and maintaining independence (Hirayama & Hirayama, 1984; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These differences in interpersonal disposition may influence the relational context of Asian and White marriages.

Fourth, historically, Asians and Whites did not experience extreme social distance from each other. While there were exclusion acts banning Asians from further immigrating to the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the extent of social ostracism against Asians was not as intense as it was for other racial groups (e.g., black slavery) (Fryer, 2007). Because Asians and Whites have had a relatively amicable relationship, Zhang and Van Hook (2009) suggested that the close social distance between the two groups offset the risks posed by their differences, thereby reducing the likelihood of relationship dissolution.

Fifth, Asian/Asian Americans are commonly referred to as the “model minority” (Petersen, 1966) because of their perceived exemplar assimilation to American society (Chou,

2008; Gao, 2008; Kao, 1995; Suzuki, 1989). Inman and Yeh (2007) suggested that this seemingly positive stereotype characterized Asian/Asian Americans as high functioning individuals resulting in relatively few psychological difficulties. This stereotype also highlights Asian families being stable and problem free (Glenn, 1983).

While the size of the Asian American population in the United States is growing, either by intermarriage or immigration, the amount of research concerning their psychological and relational functioning is meager and the findings are divergent. This could be due to the stereotypical depiction of Asian/Asian Americans being well-aculturated, stable, and problem-free. The purpose of this study was to probe the divergent findings concerning interracial relationship research and, at the same time, expound on the Asian American family research literature. This was carried out in the following ways. First, it looked at the levels of satisfaction and stability of Asian-White unions as predicted by relational and social contexts. Second, this study used data from non-military households. While most interracial marriage studies obtain their samples from ethnically diverse communities such as California and Hawaii (Fu, Tora, & Kendall, 2001; Hwang, Saenz, & Aguirre, 1994), with a focus on military families, the sample for this study came from the general community and represented all parts of the US. Third, data from both partners were utilized so that a more complete picture of the interracial couples' well-being could be portrayed. The dyadic data were fully utilized by exploring actor and partner effects, which allowed for an examination of gender differences across racial pairs. Also, the effect of the country of birth was explored as native-born Asians were compared with foreign-born Asians.

## **Intermarriage**

Broadly defined, intermarriage is a marriage wherein the partners' racial, ethnic, national, and/or religious backgrounds differ (McGoldrick & Garcia-Preto, 1984). Interracial marriage, in particular, refers to marriage between two people coming from different racial backgrounds. Chan (1997) made an important distinction between interracial and inter-ethnic marriages; the first one refers to marriage between individuals from different racial groups (e.g., Asians marrying Whites), and the latter refers to marriages involving different ethnicities, not necessarily of different racial group (e.g., Filipino-Chinese marriages). Most interracial marriages are also interethnic, but interethnic marriages are not necessarily interracial (Chan, 1997). Fu and colleagues (2001) similarly made the distinction between race and culture in respect to intermarriage by using the term "race" as it is defined by the U.S. Census, while culture is a way of life associated with a particular group of people. Fu and colleagues, however, suggested that in many occasions interracial relationships are also intercultural. In a more recent article, Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008), however, used the term interethnic to describe relationships between individuals of a different race or ethnicity.

Though the terms interracial, interethnic, and intercultural seem to be used interchangeably in the literature, couples from different racial backgrounds involved in this study were referred to as interracial couples. Unions involving partners who are both White will be referred to as endogamous White couples, regardless of the possibility of difference in ethnicities (e.g., German White and Irish White). Likewise, relationships wherein the partners are both Asians will be referred to as endogamous Asian couples. Although Asian ethnic groups vary considerably in terms of religion, language, and culture, most researchers suggest that Asians

have common experiences and values that enhance their pan-ethnicity (Min, 1995; Yee, DeBaryshe, Yuen, Kim, & McCubbin, 2007).

**Why do people outmarry?** Fryer (2007) explained that an individual's relative value in the marriage market is dependent on a combination of an array of characteristics including, but not limited to, physical characteristics (e.g., height, weight, skin color), gender, psychological disposition (e.g., sense of humor), and social status (e.g., family wealth, power). This suggests that people choose a mate on the basis on an individual's objective value and the marginal cost of coupling with that individual.

Hypergamy theory is based on social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), which posits that a person's value in the marriage market depends on a set of valuation characteristics that determine the costs and gains of the relationship. Hypergamy theory overtly assumes that there is racial inequality in the United States. In effect, racial minorities "marry-up" when they marry Whites, who are at the highest level of America's racial caste system (Cerroni-Long, 1985; Davis, 1941; Merton, 1941). Therefore, any marriage to a White individual brings gain in a relationship, given that Whites were believed to be at the top of the social hierarchy (Chow, 2007; Fryer, 2007; Nemoto, 2006). To offset the cost of intermarrying outside the group, Whites intermarry with minorities who possess desirable characteristics (e.g., income, education) during a time when the societal cost of marriage is not very high.

Contrary to the assumptions of hypergamy theory, Gordon (1964) suggested that the driving force behind interracial marriage was not necessarily the desire to "marry-up". Instead, it was the diminishing of social prejudice and discrimination that influenced the rise of intermarriage. Furthermore, crossing racial boundaries in marriage marked the final stage in the assimilation process to the dominant culture (Gordon, 1964). Also, with the permanent ban on

anti-miscegenation laws in United States, the legal system has recognized that it is constitutionally acceptable to marry people of a different race. McFadden (2001) suggested that the increased rate of intermarriages was a product of direct and continuing contact between groups with different cultural heritage, which can lead to a process of acculturation and assimilation. In the case of America, the increased number of minorities intermarrying with Whites indicated that minority individuals adapted and changed their cultural patterns to eventually assimilate into the American culture. Likewise, the dominant White culture has also accepted the minorities in the mainstream society.

**What is being intermarried like?** Park (1928) conceptualized the “marginal man,” an individual who is intimately immersed in two different cultures; in one he could not break free from and in the other he is not quite accepted because he “lives in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less of a stranger” (p. 893). Because of these two conflicting circumstances, the individual is marginalized in both cultures. In the United States, a minority of the population still frown on interracial marriages (Fusco, 2009; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; Ling, 2007; Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010; Yancey & Emerson, 2001). When an intermarried couple is marginalized from their respective cultures, they are more prone to confusion, loss of identity, alienation, and distress, an accumulation of which increases distress and conflict on the dyadic level and can eventually lead to heightened instability (Chan, 1997).

Because social norms regarding intermarriage have changed in recent years, and interracial marriage has become more prevalent (Fryer, 2007; Lee & Bean, 2008), some social scientists suggest that the conventional wisdom of marginalization theory (Park, 1928) might not apply to today’s society (Rosenfeld, 2005). While marginalization theory claims that intermarried couples are psychologically distressed due to their extenuating circumstances,

recent studies exploring the relationship between race and psychological health have found otherwise. Although the existence of context-specific stressors, such as enduring family opposition, cultural differences, and social prejudice may pose added stress and fuel more conflicts in interracial marriages, Chan and Wethington (1995) proposed that interracial couples learn coping and conflict resolution styles, which enable these unique challenges to facilitate personal growth and development. Likewise, due to the growing racial and ethnic diversity and increasing prevalence of interracial marriage in American society, coupled with changing social attitudes toward such unions, the sources of psychological distress for intermarried individuals may have diminished and/or couples have learned successful coping mechanisms to deal with these stressors in their relationship (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006). This resiliency perspective offers an explanation on why some interracial couples report positive marital quality and have more stable marriages than their endogamous counterparts (Bratter & King, 2008).

### **Asian/Asian Americans**

The Asian and Asian American population have grown faster than any other major racial group in America in the last decade (Humes et al., 2011). From the year 2000 to 2010 the Asian/Asian American population increased from 10.2 million to 14.7 million, a 43.3% increase over the past ten years, accounting for five percent of the overall population. In the last half-century, the major driving force behind the increase of the Asian American population was immigration that was facilitated by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (Fujino, 2000; Min, 1995). Prior to the 1980's, the majority of immigrants in the United States were Europeans. However, their numbers steadily decreased; between 1980 and 1988 Asians from the Philippines, South Korea, China, Japan, India, and Vietnam comprised almost 50% of the total U.S. immigrants.

Asian Americans are commonly referred to as the “model minority” (Petersen, 1966) because of their perceived successful socio-economic adjustment and their cultural mechanisms for success (Chou, 2008; Gao, 2008; Kao, 1995; Suzuki, 1989). This term is used to emphasize Asian Americans’ exemplar assimilation into American society, particularly their successful survival under the American capitalist system, as evidenced by earning higher average income and gaining higher education compared to other racial minorities, thereby upgrading their socioeconomic status (Chou, 2008; Min, 1998).

The first wave of Asians’ significant presence in America was between the late 1800s and early 1900s when Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos (and later on Koreans and Indians) arrived to work as laborers in railroads, gold mines, and sugar plantations. Because of the influx of Asian immigrants, several laws were enacted to put a limit on the number of foreigners that could enter the country based on their countries of origin (e.g., Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882). Beginning in 1920, the Asian population in America was kept to a relatively small number for forty years due to the immigration quotas set for Asian countries. It was not until after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was passed that the Asian population started to grow considerably. In the 1970s, Asians were immigrating to the United States mainly for economic reasons (Min, 1998; Segai, 1998). However, cultural and political dependency, coupled with a strong U.S. military presence in Asia (e.g., Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, Japan), were the strongest forces that facilitated mass migration (Min, 1998). Interracial marriage was also an eminent factor in the Asian migration, as military servicemen started coming home with “war brides” and Asian women were arriving as “picture brides” (Fujino, 2000; Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Jacobson & Heaton, 2003; Min, 1998; Nemoto, 2006; Saenz, Hwang, & Aguirre, 1994).

**Asian/Asian American families.** To describe the Asian/Asian American family is an arduous endeavor primarily because there is so much diversity within the broad Asian ethnic category (Min, 1995; Yee et al., 2007). The assumption held by many that Asians belong to a homogenous group maintains little legitimacy because Asian/Asian Americans are made up of various subgroups with diverse physical characteristics and cultural values. Although these differences do not ascertain Asians homogeneity as an ethnic category, Yee and colleagues (2007) explained that most Asians share four main cultural themes, namely; collectivism, relational orientation, familism, and family obligation. Other cultural values that Asians share amongst each other are filial piety, respect for authority, and self-restraint in emotional expression (Min, 1995).

The common thread that binds Asians is family interdependence, with emphases on strong kinship system and high levels of mutual obligation. Marriage in East Asia has been traditionally either arranged or consented by the families because marriage is perceived more as a means to perpetuate the family line than an affectionate relationship (Ebrey, 1984; Hershatter, 2004; Kitano & Kitano, 1998). Asian/Asian American families are also known for having intact families. The divorce rates for Asian men and women in the United States are 2.6% and 3.8%, respectively; moreover, of the 1.1 million children whose parents divorced in 2009, only 24,000 were Asians (Elliot & Simmons, 2011).

While there are common underlying themes in Asian family life, Asian ethnic groups have unique family dynamics influenced by cultural factors. Min (1995) suggested that there is no typical Asian family, because like American families, the Asian family is a product of the intersection between structural and cultural factors such that the Asian family system is constantly adapting to a continuously changing global society.

*Traditional Asian marriages.* Cultural values heavily influence marriage and family life among Asians. Confucianism, in particular, heavily influenced traditional East Asian societies (e.g., China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam). Confucian ideals clearly admonish women to become virtuous by upholding the “three subordinations,” which include being subordinate to one’s father before marriage, being subordinate to one’s husband once married, and then to her son after her husband died (Chan & Leong, 1994). Most Asian families are patriarchal because of a hierarchical family system (Glenn, 1983; Min, 1998; Tran, 1998; Wong, 1998); with a few exceptions, such as the Philippines, wherein family authority is more egalitarian, partly due to indigenous Filipino culture (i.e., legend of the first man and woman simultaneously emerging out of a bamboo tube) prior to Spanish colonization (Agbayani-Siewert & Revilla, 1995).

Among the Chinese, the father and the eldest son have the dominant role and the mother and the daughters have subordinate positions (Glenn, 1983; Wong, 1998). Because the traditional Chinese family is also patrilocal, a new wife lived with her husband’s family and she was expected to please and obey, not only her husband, but her husband’s parents, as well (Wong, 1998). Similarly, a wife in traditional Korean society was expected to obey and devotedly serve her husband and his family. She was also excluded in the family decision-making process (Min, 1998). The scenario is similar in Vietnamese society, mainly because their culture is heavily influenced by the Chinese. In traditional Vietnamese society, a woman is expected to obey her father when she is single and her husband when she gets married (Tran, 1998). Tran (1998) also explained that Vietnamese wives cannot initiate separation from their husbands because that is considered a crime, but husbands can divorce their wives if she cannot bear children or disobeys his parents. Also, it is acceptable in traditional Vietnamese society for the husband to hit his wife if he thinks she has done something wrong. A Vietnamese wife has very limited power until she

becomes a mother because she assumes second rank in the family and manages family affairs when her husband is gone. Traditional Japan also had a hierarchical family structure where men took on the dominant role. The head of the family was the one who made arrangements for children's marriages, making sure that the continuation of the family unit was prioritized above a child's individual desire for love. It was also common for couples to seldom display affectionate expressions to each other and to their children (Kitano & Kitano, 1998).

**Gender roles.** Closely tied to family ideology, gender role expectations among Asians are heavily influenced by cultural and structural factors. Structurally, most Asian societies are patriarchal because men are considered to be the head of the family (Glenn, 1983; Min, 1995, 1998; Tran, 1998; Wong, 1998). Because migration challenged traditional gender roles, such as when women became co-providers with men, Asian American families usually tried to maintain a patriarchal family structure by socializing their children toward traditional gender roles (Yee et al., 2007).

Espiritu (2008) explained that Whites' construction of gender of Asian Americans was highly influenced by racial relations between Asians and Whites in the early years of Asian immigration to the United States. Because gender norms in the United States are based on the ideal middle-class White family, where the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the homemaker, Asian men and women were excluded from the normative definition of gender in American society (Chua & Fujino, 1999; Espiritu, 2008; Liu & Chang, 2007). For example, from being asexual to oversexed to eventually being effeminate, perceptions of Asian men's gender and sexuality were constructed based on their status as dedicated plantation and railroad laborers who spent countless hours on the job, being bachelors who did not have access to Asian women and, therefore, pursued White women, and later on the emasculated men who took on women's

jobs as laundrymen, cooks, and houseboys (Espiritu, 2008). Asian women's gendered stereotypes were similarly constructed around their social class. Early Asian women immigrants were prostitutes, and this social standing fostered the image of a promiscuous foreign woman vis-à-vis the chaste White woman (Espiritu, 2008; Kawahara & Fu, 2007). This stereotype was only one end of the spectrum because White men's interaction with Asian women in Asia eventually propagated the image of a subservient and docile lady who was "submissive and dainty" (Espiritu, 2008; p. 107).

Liu and Chang (2007) described Asian men's task to constantly redefine their masculinity within the context of a dominant White male norm as usually conflicted and complex. Asian men's status as the stereotypical nerd and workaholic typifies them as "asexual", which complicates their effort to assert their masculinity. Because norms which serve as the backdrop upon which gender roles as defined are based on western ideals, Asian men's definition of masculinity stands in stark contrast when compared to White men's notions. Chua and Fujino (1999) reported that, while White males defined masculinity in terms of traditional gender roles (i.e., opposite to being feminine), Asian men's ideals of masculinity were closely related to cultural norms of filial piety, politeness, and willingness to do domestic tasks. These behaviors, while culturally acceptable and favored by Asian society, seem primarily effeminate when seen through a western perspective.

Stereotypes of Asian women are also prevalent in American mainstream society. These stereotypes, both positive and negative, are largely influenced by early race relations between the dominant White society and the immigrant Asian community (Espiritu, 2008; Kawahara & Fu, 2007). Asian women were depicted as a dichotomous woman who was both the "cunning Dragon Lady" and the "servile Lotus Blossom Baby" (Espiritu, 2008, p. 105). Espiritu (2008)

explained that while these depictions were polar opposites, both stereotypes propagated the idea of a sensuous Asian exuding womanhood. The manipulative and sexually aggressive stereotype stemmed from public perception in the early 1900s that Asian women were all prostitutes; this depiction sharply contrasted Asian women with the dependable and chaste White woman. On the other end of the spectrum, and the more strongly held stereotype, is the subservient and docile Asian woman. Rooted in traditional Asian gender role expectations, Asian women are depicted as stereotypically childlike and innocent, needing care, and preferring to be dominated.

Compared to the enlightened western woman of recent years, Espiritu (2008) suggested that the stereotypical subversive Asian woman serves as a better choice for the traditionally masculine White male. Kawahara and Fu (2007) explained that these stereotypes put Asian women in an inferior position, where their family and the larger society rewards them for being subservient and punishes them for being assertive.

Scholars argue that the proliferation of racialized gender stereotypes of Asian men and women influence the dynamics of mate selection among Asians and Whites ( Kim, 2011). Nemoto (2009) proposed that the superfemme portrayal of Asian American women and the emasculated image of Asian American men influence how American society perceives them as potential romantic partners.

**Acculturation in American society.** While the majority of Asian Americans are portrayed as successful socially and economically in mainstream America, their process of acculturation has not been without challenges, particularly in family life. Chao (2001) explained that within the context of family systems, people from different cultures have unique ways of dealing with each other. The contrast between Asian's traditional culture of family

interdependence and American individualism has sometimes posed acculturative stress among immigrants (Kim, 2010).

In the early years of their migration to the United States, Asians experienced a change in family dynamics, particularly in family roles (Espiritu, 2008). These cultural conflicts in family roles were closely tied in the economic reality of Asian immigrants. For example, previously domesticated Japanese wives started to participate in the labor market with their husbands. This socio-economic shift in gender relations within the Asian immigrant community did not, however, carry-over into the home front. Instead, patriarchy further surfaced as Asian men viewed their wives as “helpers”, even when the women’s contributions were equal or even greater than the men’s (Espiritu, 2008).

In recent years, issues of acculturation were more commonly reflected in the differences between immigrant generations. Asian Americans and their children are often caught in the middle of two varying sets of cultural expectations regarding family life, with the younger generation more quickly acculturating to the dominant US culture, thereby creating differences between the generations (Kim, 2010; Yoshida & Busby, 2012). For example, Suh (2007) found that daughters of Asian American immigrants were more likely than their mothers to emphasize independence and marital equality in marriage.

### **Asian American Intermarriage**

Interracial marriages involving Whites and Asians, in particular, have received critical views in recent years as cultural scholars contend that the popularity of this particular type of romantic relationship was embedded on the overly feminized portrayal of Asian American women, the desexualized image of Asian American men, and the emphasis of marrying-up through the superordinately masculine White men (Nemoto, 2009). These stereotypes, according

to Balaji and Warawongs (2010), were proliferated in the media portrayals of subservient Asian women having a relationship with a dominant White man (e.g., *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *The Last Samurai*). The different levels of pervasiveness of these stereotypes about minorities, particularly Asian Americans, continue to facilitate understanding and meaning-making within diverse groups of society (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000).

These stereotypes were particularly evident in Kim's (2011) interviews with White men who were interested in having a relationship with Asian women. White men claimed that they preferred Asian women because of their exotic appearance (e.g., black thick hair, smooth skin, almond eyes, petite frame) and culture (i.e., Asian women are family-oriented and intelligent, making them appealing and beautiful). Conversely, when Asian women were asked why they preferred White men over Asian men, they reported that most Asian men do not treat women as equals, while White men are more egalitarian, feminine, caring, and verbal (Fong & Yung, 1995). Espiritu (2008) similarly suggested that Asian women preferred White men over Asian men as sexual partners because White males were more desirable, while Asian males were perceived as passive and weak.

Asian men who reflected on the reasons why they did not prefer Asian women reported that Asian women usually represented everything they were trying to run away from (i.e., unequal relationships as exemplified by their parents), and they felt that marrying them was like marrying one of their sisters. Asian men preferred White women because they have physical features that were distinctly different from what they were familiar with (e.g., long legs, full figures, blue eyes, blond hair), they were more interesting, and marrying them gave Asian men the opportunity to have more access into society (Chow, 2007; Fu & Yong, 1995; Kim, 2011). Conversely, Liu and Chang (2007) explained that modern White women were attracted to Asian

men because, while they might be stereotypically feminine, they were educated and financially successful.

**Intermarriage patterns.** Asians have been consistently considered as the most intermarried race among American minority groups in the last fifty years, mostly with Whites (Khanna, 2004; Kitano et al., 1984; Hidalgo & Bankston, 2010; Lee & Bean, 2008). In a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, Passel and colleagues (2010) reported that 77% of Asian women and 71% of Asian men who out-married in 2008 married a White person. Chow's (2007) examination of subjective perceptions of how mate selection was affected by race relations suggested that Asian Americans' particularly high rate of intermarriage with Whites proved their successful assimilation into American society.

During the early wave of Asian immigration to the United States, intermarriage was uncommon, not only because it was illegal, but also because the proportion of Asian men to Asian women was skewed. Between 1880 and 1960, Asian female-White male pairings, particularly, were almost non-existent because the majority of Asians entering the country were men who were hired for cheap labor, and there was a shortage of Asian women in Asian communities in America (Espiritu, 2008; Fryer, 2007; Min, 1995). However, after immigration quotas were lifted, interracial unions between White males and Asian females consistently increased and have become the most common pattern of interracial marriage in America. Asian male-White female pairings, on the other hand, have experienced a waxing and waning pattern. Its highest peak was in the 1940s because Asian bachelors only had a handful of Asian women to choose from; consequently, forming intimate relationships with women of other races was inevitable (Espiritu, 2008). The rates, however, dropped during the 1960s and peaked again in the 1970s. After that peak, such unions had dropped continuously.

As soon as the number of Asian female immigrants started to increase, they noticeably out-married at a greater rate than males (Fryer, 2007; Hwang et al., 1994; Kitano et al., 1984; Lee & Yamanaka, 1990; Tinker, 1982). Social scientists suggest that Asian women out-married more because they resented their seemingly subordinate position in a male dominated society; thus, they chose to marry outside of their racial group (Fong & Yung, 1995; Tinker, 1982). Additionally, the post-war era also contributed to the growing number of Asian women immigrating into the United States either as “picture brides” or “war brides” of U.S. servicemen (Espiritu, 2008).

In the more recent years, second and third generation Asian Americans tend to intermarry more than first generation Asian Americans (Hwang et al., 1994; Tinker, 1982). Those Asian Americans who intermarried were more educated, had higher paying jobs, and lived in the western region of United States (Chen & Takeuchi, 2011; Fu & Heaton, 2000; Fu et al., 2001; Fujno, 2000; Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Qian, 1997, Qian, Blair, & Ruf, 2001; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009).

### **Relationship Outcomes**

Whether relationships flourish or flounder largely depend on couples’ personal, relational, and social contexts (Larson & Holman, 1994). Consequently, relationships involving individuals from different racial backgrounds have unique circumstances, given the social and historical contexts of interracial romance. For example, as hypergamy assumes the existence of a racial caste system, people who intermarry may deal with issues concerning marginalization due to racial inequality and social prejudice (Chan, 1997; Fusco, 2009). On the other hand, if it is true that intermarriage is simply a natural process of assimilation, then interracially married

couples will learn to cope with the additional stress and conflicts and function positively (Chan & Wethington, 1995).

A large body of research has found that interracial marriages are at greater risk for relationship distress and divorce than same race marriages (Bratter and King, 2008; Cerroni-Long, 1985; Heaton, 2002; Kalmijn, de Graaf, & Janssen, 2005; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Troy et al., 2006; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). The archetypal drawback in engaging in an exogamous relationship has been the need to reconcile two different cultures (Eeckhaut et al., 2011; Heaton, 2002; Liao & Stevens, 1994). Eeckhaut and colleagues (2011) explained that the reason exogamous couples have a lowered degree of stability in their marriages is the very same reason why the majority of the population continue to choose to be endogamous: not having cultural similarities between two individuals, coupled with lack of social support, put interracial couples at risk for marital dissolution. Heaton (2002) found that, after controlling for social and other demographic factors, interracial marriages were 13% more likely to end in divorce than same race marriages. These findings were suggestive of the possibility that race and ethnic background still mattered in intimate relationships.

Zhang and Van Hook (2009) found that White women who intermarried with minority men had a high risk of marital dissolution. Bratter and Eschbach (2006) similarly found that intermarried White women had significantly higher marital distress than White women with White husbands. These results were consistent with Bratter and King's (2008) findings, which indicated that, compared to endogamous White couples, White women with Asian husbands were 59% more likely to divorce. Exogamous Asian couples also experienced less marital stability compared to endogamous Asian couples.

Interestingly, White men with Asian wives were less likely to end their marriages compared to endogamous White couples. This is contrary to the majority of findings suggesting that exogamous couples are at a higher risk for divorce and marital distress. For example, Troy and colleagues (2006) found that the exogamous couples in their sample reported higher levels of marital satisfaction than the endogamous couples. Similarly, Gaines and colleagues found that interracial couples and intraracial couples had similar levels of secure attachment and relationship success (Gaines, Granrose, Rios, Garcia, Page Young, Farris, & Bledsoe, 1999). In addition, interracial couples were found to have better relationship functioning because of mutual respect and adaptive accommodation of each other's differences (Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

These results are intriguing, given that the bulk of research on interracial marriage processes and outcomes have found otherwise. A probable explanation is in the differences in samples. The participants in the latter studies were from ethnically diverse communities, such as a county in southeastern United States where the demographic composition was 80% non-White (Troy et al., 2006). Because of the apparent ethnic diversity among these populations, it is possible that there is a relatively high tolerance for interracial relationships in these regions. Troy and colleagues (2006) also suggested that the results they found among interracial couples were probably influenced by the fact that the younger cohort of interracial couples might not experience the same challenges faced by older cohorts (e.g., discrimination).

Also, culturally, Asians highly value familism and family obligations over personal interests (Min, 1995; Yee et al., 2007). From a demographic standpoint, Asian/Asian American families are known for having intact families. In general, Asians have divorce rates (2.6% for men and 3.8% for women). Zhang and Van Hook (2009) suggested that because, historically, Asians and Whites were not extremely socially distant groups, unlike African Americans and

blacks (i.e., slavery), their relatively amicable social relationship offset the risks posed by their differences, thereby reducing the likelihood of breaking-up. However, there is also a possibility that because Asians highly value filial piety, dysfunction within the family might be underreported or unexpressed, thereby creating a demographic picture of an intact Asian/Asian American family (Inman & Yeh, 2007; Kim et al., 2007; Yee et al., 2007).

**Predictors of relationship outcomes.** While it is important to gain insight as to who interracial couples with whom and how the rates of interracial relationships have increased over time, it is also worth exploring how these relationships operate on the level of relational functioning (Bischoff, 2005; McFadden, 2001) and within their social contexts.

Furtado and Theodoropoulos (2008) argued that, assuming all else was equal, people prefer someone with whom they share a similar culture. Coupling with those whom we share social and personal characteristics have been the primary pattern of selecting a mate in America (Merton, 1941). For instance, social scientists have consistently observed that, in general, people tend to marry endogamously within their race, religion, social class, and ethnicity.(Glenn, 1983, Hidalgo & Bankston, 2010; Kalmijn, 1991). Because cultural scripts provide us with gender roles and relationship expectations, relationship conflicts and tension may arise when cultural differences exist (Kim et al.,2007; Yee et al., 2007). Research has consistently found that similarity between partners is predictive of increased relationship quality (Fu et al., 2001; Larson & Holman, 1994). In other words, cultural homogamy is associated with greater relationship success.

**Interaction patterns.** Busby, Holman, and Taniguchi (2001) view couple interaction patterns as a part of a broader couple context which can be measured in matters of communication, conflict, and other shared activities. These interaction patterns are particularly

critical to the outcomes of interracial relationships because these partners bring greater contextual diversity to their relationship. Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002) found that among married, engaged, and cohabiting couples, negative interaction between partners weakened their relationship quality and increased the risk of thinking or talking about divorce. On the contrary, positive interaction patterns, such as effective communication and conflict resolution skills, may improve a couple's ability to effectively cope with their demographic risk factors (Stanley, Markman, & Blumberg, 1997; McGoldrick & Garcia-Preto, 1984; Stanley et al., 2002). The accumulation of positive emotional connections established through day-to-day interactions strengthen a couple's relationship (Driver & Gottman, 2003). In an earlier study, Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) found that the extent to which couples exhibit positive affect during their interactions was significantly associated with their relationship stability.

Bodenmann, Ledermann, and Bradburry (2007) suggest that the quality of communication between partners mediates the effect of relationship problems on relationship quality. Similarly, Ledermann and Macho's (2009) findings indicated that communication partially mediated the relationship between relationship problems and marital quality. These studies were reflective of the findings from earlier research on communication processes and relationship quality, which indicated that positive communication was significantly related to successful relationship outcomes (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Miller & Kannae, 1999; Rogge & Bradburry, 1999).

*Empathic communication.* Empathy is an "emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition, is congruent with the other's emotional state or condition, and involves at least a minimal degree of differentiation between self and other" (Eisenberg & Fabes,

1990, p. 132). This kind of emotional response emphasizes the subjective experience of feeling similarly with another person and at the same time maintaining a sense of self. Decety and Jackson (2004) defined empathy as involving, not only feeling the sentimental experience of the other person, but also “some minimal recognition and understanding of another’s emotional state” (p. 71).

Among intimate couples, perceiving one’s partner as someone who is similar to oneself fosters a feeling of understanding on the part of the perceiver (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). Because feelings of being understood enhance intimacy among couples, relationship satisfaction increases (Murray et al., 2002; Priem, Solomon, & Steuber, 2009). The relationship between feeling understood, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction seems to be bidirectional as well. Moorman (2011) found that when individuals felt very close to their partner, they felt that they were able to send their message across clearly and they were responsively understood. Thus, couples in high quality relationships perceive that their partner understands them, and the higher level of perceived empathy was predictive of higher relationship quality (Murray et al., 2002; Priem et al., 2009).

By virtue of empathy’s conceptual definition, empathic communication involves a transactional exchange of messages wherein both speaker and listener convey understanding and experience validation. Empathic communication has been found to increase relationship satisfaction by way of increased accommodation and positive perceptions of the partner (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007). Similarly, Wachs and Cordova (2007) found that empathy increased one’s ability to communicate feelings to others and relate to a partner’s feelings and experiences. In effect, empathy was positively related to relationship satisfaction.

In interviews conducted with 154 Asian Americans, Chow (2007) found that Asians who prefer Asians for intimate partners generally felt a greater comfort level and enhanced rapport with fellow Asians. These individuals felt that being with someone whom they shared a common background with, who tend to think like they did, made all the difference in making relationships manageable. One Chinese American woman aptly described why she preferred Asian men when she stated, “Relationships are hard enough even when you’re the same race. If you’re not, it just makes it that much harder. The instinctual connection you have with someone of the same race, the unspoken understanding, just isn’t there.” (p. 15).

Chow (2007) also found that a number of respondents who would rather have a relationship with someone of the same race particularly thought that Whites, even when they try to be empathic, would never understand what it feels like to be an ethnic minority. They also emphasized that a lack of common ground was a critical element in their selection process. The comfort level and enhanced dyadic relationships among those who share a common background were results of couple interactions that were characterized by understanding and acceptance (Chow, 2007). It is important to note, however, that there could be ethnic or cultural differences in how empathy is displayed or withheld. Chang and colleagues (2007) proposed that due to their culture of group harmony, perhaps Asian Americans would display greater empathy toward members of their own group but might withdraw emphatic behavior when doing so will jeopardize the group’s collective well-being.

***Social acceptance.*** Social contexts also have an important influence on interracial marriages. Based on the data from U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey in 2009, Passel and colleagues (2010) reported that, in general, more than six-in-ten Americans say it

would be “fine” for a member of their family to marry someone from any of the major race/ethnic groups other than their own. In a report from the Pew Research Center in 2009, America as a society has been increasingly more accepting of interracial dating and marriage particularly between Whites and Asian Americans. In 2001, 65% of Whites reported it was “fine” for a member of their family to intermarry with an Asian American. That percentage increased to 73% in 2009. While the majority of Americans say that they are “fine” with having a family member date or marry a person of a different racial background, a small portion reported that they would be bothered, yet accepting, or non-accepting at all (Passel et al., 2010). Yancey and Emerson (2001) found that being White and conservative positively correlated with an individual’s opposition to interracial unions. Several researchers found that interracial partnerships still face discrimination and prejudice and experience fear of social acceptance, albeit legal obstacles no longer prevent people to engage in such relationships (Gaines, 2001; Wang, Kao, & Joyner; 2006).

Gaines (2001) suggested that interracial couples feel psychologically distressed because they internalize certain levels of stigmatization, which hinders the development and maintenance of their relationship well-being. Using a national sample of adolescents involved in romantic relationships, Wang and colleagues (2006) found that those who were romantically involved with someone of a different race were less likely to reveal their relationship to their parents and to the public. They also were less likely to meet their partner’s parents.

Indeed, one reason why interracial unions often fare worse than same race ones is family opposition (Booth & Johnson, 1988; Gaines, 2001; Lewis, Yancey, & Bletzer, 1997). People involved in interracial unions report they felt ostracized from their families of origin, and they need to overcome family opposition to make their relationship work (Gaines, 2001; Lewis et al.,

1997). Because of this, most adults consider parental objection as a very critical factor when they are choosing a partner (Mok, 1999). For example, an American woman shared with Glenn (1983) during an interview that her Chinese fiancé broke off their engagement because his parents believed an American would ruin their son's life and not take care of his kin. This American woman also emphasized that her former fiancé's parents did not approve of her because they preferred a Chinese girl who would "do what the father wants." Ling (2007) also interviewed a woman whose mother was Korean and her father was American. She related that her father's family was not accepting of her mother, and they always put her down, made fun of her, and treated her almost like a servant. In an earlier work, Booth and Johnson (1988) found that parental disapproval was negatively related to a couples' happiness, thereby increasing their disagreements and decreasing their relationship stability.

Interracial couples also tend to not reveal their relationships in public, and most of them report that they get stared at and hear negative comments and slurs in public areas (Jean, 1998; Wang et al., 2006). In an interview conducted in 1996, a China-native woman relayed to Ling (2007) that when she introduced her American husband to other Chinese individuals in America, they would look at her as if they were saying she just "wanted to marry a foreigner so she could come to America." She also reported that she experienced the same social ostracism when she and her husband were in China, as people would sometimes say "Oh! That girl is dirty!" (p. 48).

Social approval seems to influence the outcomes of interracial relationships, particularly because they are a stigmatized group (Gaines, 2001). Kawahara and Fu (2007) explained that for most Asian women, particularly the Japanese, marrying outside of the group leads to being ostracized by the Asian community because intermarrying could be perceived as a sign of losing one's identity. For this reason, lack of social support and acceptance can jeopardize an interracial

couple's relationship dynamics. On the contrary, external support might help cushion interracial couples from stressors such as conflict and disagreements (Troy et al., 2006). For instance, Posadas (1989) found that White individuals who married Asians established their families only in communities where renters allowed mixed race households and where interracially married Asians clustered together.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Recent research on interracial romantic relationships have found that interracial relationships involving Whites and Asians do not necessarily have worse outcomes than their endogamous counterparts (Gaines & Agnew, 2003; Gaines et al., 1999; Troy et al., 2006). These challenge the long held notion of relationship dysfunction among interracial couples (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006; Bratter & King, 2008; Eeckhaut et al., 2011; Heaton, 2002; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Building upon these discrepant results, the pathways to partners' relationship stability among endogamous Asian couples, endogamous White couples, exogamous Asian male-White female couples, and exogamous White male-Asian female couples were compared.

To be able to explore how the relational and social contexts of interracial couples could pose risks to their marital outcomes, the current study first determined whether or not endogamous and exogamous couples differed in their relational interaction patterns and whether or not they experience social approval differently. Also, the study explored whether or not endogamous and exogamous couples differed in relationship satisfaction and stability. Extant research suggests that due to their unique circumstances, exogamous couples' relationships have a different experiential reality compared to their endogamous counterparts (Chan, 1997; Chan & Wethington, 1995; Fusco, 2009). However, interracial unions involving Whites and Asians seem to be an exemption. Therefore, our first four research questions are:

- a) Are exogamous Asian-White partners different from their endogamous counterparts in terms of empathic communication?
- b) Do exogamous Asian-White partners perceive social approval differently compared to endogamous couples?
- c) Are exogamous Asian-White partners different from endogamous couples in terms of relationship satisfaction?
- d) Are exogamous Asian-White partners different from endogamous couples in terms of relationship stability?

Not only is it possible that exogamous couples' relationships have a different experiential reality compared to their endogamous counterparts, it could be that relational and social factors influence relationship outcomes differently among different racial pairs. Therefore, the second set of research questions focused on exploring and comparing the influence of relational and social contexts on relationship satisfaction and relationship stability among the four racial pair groups. To achieve this, the dyadic data were fully utilized using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) strategy (Kenny & Cook, 1999). Using APIM allowed the investigation of the possible intersection of gender and race and how such juncture influences the relationship dynamics of interracial couples. One of the reasons researchers cite as an explanation for the divergent findings in interracial relationship research is that the relationship outcomes of interracial couples vary depending on the gender and race of the minority partner (Heaton, 2002; Lee & Bean, 2002; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). By employing dyadic data, this argument was explored, and the following research questions were addressed:

- e) Do the influence of men's perception of their partner's empathic communication and social approval on their own relationship satisfaction and stability differ among the four racial pairs?
- f) Do the influence of women's perception of their partner's empathic communication and social approval on their own relationship satisfaction and stability differ among the four racial pairs?
- g) Do the influence of men's perception of their partner's empathic communication, social approval, and relationship satisfaction on their partner's relationship stability differ among the four racial pairs?
- h) Do the influence women's perception of their partner's empathic communication, social approval, and relationship satisfaction on their partner's relationship satisfaction differ among the four racial pairs?
- i) Do the influence empathic communication, social approval, and relationship satisfaction on relationship stability differ among the four racial pairs?

It is worthy to note that while acculturation is not a variable of focal interest in this study, it is important to recognize that there might be differences between foreign-born Asians and native-born Asians in terms of behaviors and values (Eeckhaut et al., 2011; Kim, 2010; Yoshida & Busby, 2012). Because different cultures have different scripts for interpersonal relationships (Chao, 2001), the relational and social contexts of the two Asian subgroups in this study were compared to account for acculturation's potential influence on interracial couples' relational outcomes.

## Method

### Participants

The participants for the current study were married and cohabiting adults, as well as adults who reported being in a serious dating relationship, who took the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE; Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, & Loyer-Carson, 1997) questionnaire between 2009 and 2011. To address the focus of this study, the sample consisted of 6,093 Asian and White married, cohabiting, and seriously dating couples who were selected from the larger cohort, which consisted of 18,264 couples (36,528 individuals). The selection process resulted in 5,632 endogamous White couples, 173 endogamous Asian couples, 184 White male/Asian female couples, and 104 Asian male/White female couples. Because the larger cohort was predominantly endogamous White couples, it was necessary to randomly select a portion from the endogamous White couples group so that there was a relatively equal representation of each pair group in the final analysis. Also, only Whites from North America (i.e., USA, Canada) and East Asians (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, etc.), as opposed to South Asians (India, Pakistan, etc.), were included in the final sample so that potential differences within the broad White and Asian racial/ethnic category could be minimized. The random selection process resulted in 648 couples composed of 263 (40.6%) endogamous White couples, 146 (22.5%) endogamous Asian couples, 162 (25%) White male/Asian female couples, and 77 (11.9%) Asian male/White female couples.

These numbers do not reflect the national demographics in terms of married couples' racial categories. The 2010 US Census reflected that White endogamy is still the most prevalent type of marriage in the United States and endogamy within the Asian American community is rising in numbers. It was not possible to adapt the sample to reflect the most recent census trends

because doing so would influence the percentages of respondents from the different racial pairs in an unfavorable way (Busby, Gardner, Taniguchi, 2005).

The final sample consisted of 648 married, cohabiting, and seriously dating couples. There were 223 cohabiting couples (34.4%), 213 seriously dating couples (32.9%), and 212 married couples (32.7%). The majority of dating couples (73%) have been dating for two years or less. Among cohabiting couples, 32% have been living together for two years or less and 65% have been cohabiting for three to ten years. A small portion of cohabiting couples (3%) reported they have been living together for more than ten years. Among married couples, 26% have been together as a couple (i.e., dated and married) for a total of two years or less, 41% have been together for a total of three to ten years, and 33% have been a couple for more than ten years.

Thirty-seven percent of Asian men and 42% of Asian women were born in East Asia, while 63% of Asian men and 58% of Asian women were born in North America. All but four men and nine women who participated in the study were residing in North America at the time of the study. Overall, the average age of the sample was 30.76 years (*S.D.*=8.07) for men and 29.03 years (*S.D.*=7.82) for women. The majority of the respondents have either attended college or received a bachelor's degree (58% for men and 59% for women), and a good number have either attended graduate/professional schools or received graduate/professional degrees (38% for both men and women).

## **Procedure**

Data were collected via a relationship quality survey called the RELATionship Evaluation (RELATE), a 370-item comprehensive assessment of the couple relationship that evaluates individual, familial, cultural, and couple factors. The variables include ratings for both self and partner, allowing several points of input on marital functioning. RELATE is designed to

provide feedback to couples on their strengths and challenges within their relationship. RELATE was administered online at the RELATE website ([www.relate-institute.org](http://www.relate-institute.org)). (For a detailed account of the development, psychometric properties, and procedures of RELATE, see Busby et al., 2001.) Most of the men in the present study heard of the program through university instructors (25.9%), friends (16.1%), or family members (15.6%). For the women, information about RELATE came mostly from university instructors (42.6%). Those who heard about the program through other means (21% for men and 18% for women) learned about RELATE through the internet, participating in research study groups, or articles they've read citing the program (e.g., an article in the New York Times).

### **Measures**

For this study, the couples' partner empathy was measured using the Empathic Communication scale from the RELATE questionnaire. It was one of the three variables included in the foundational document for RELATE (Larson & Holman, 1994), which measured couple interaction patterns. Three items were designed to evaluate the extent to which the participants felt that their partners (a) understood what they were saying, (b) understood what they were feeling, and (c) were able to listen to them with understanding. These items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale with items ranging from "never" (1) to "very often" (5). A lower score on this scale indicated less frequent empathic communication and a higher score indicated more empathic communication between couples. This scale has a test-retest reliability score of .77 (Busby et al., 2001). For this sample, the Cronbach's alpha for men's partner reports was .87, respectively; and .89 for women's partner reports.

The Social Approval scale was used to evaluate the couples' social context. The participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which the following significant individuals

approved of their current relationship: (a) father, (b) mother, and (c) friends. These items were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from “not at all” (1) to “entirely” (4). A higher score on this scale indicated a higher level of social approval from significant others. This scale has a test-retest reliability score of .65 (Busby et al., 2001). For this particular sample, the Cronbach’s alpha were .80 and .82 for men and women, respectively.

Relationship satisfaction was measured by a scale consisting of seven items that were intended to assess how participants and their partners were satisfied with the following: (a) physical intimacy, (b) love they experience, (c) conflict resolution, (d) amount of relationship equality, (e) time spent together, (f) communication quality, and (g) the overall relationship. These items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale with items ranging from “very dissatisfied” (1) to “very satisfied” (5). A higher score indicated more relationship satisfaction. This scale has a test-retest reliability score of .78 (Busby et al., 2001). For this particular sample, the Cronbach’s alpha was .86 for both men’s and women’s relationship satisfaction.

Relationship stability was measured by a three-item scale that assessed how often the participants in the sample had the following issues in their relationship: (a) thought that the relationship might be in trouble, (b) discussed ending your relationship, and (c) have broken up or separated and then gotten back together. The items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, with items ranging from “never” (1) to “very often” (5). This scale has a test-retest reliability score of .78 (Busby et al., 2001). The responses for these items were recoded so that a lower score indicated less stability and a higher score indicated more stability in the relationship. For this particular sample, the Cronbach’s alpha was .77 for men and .75 for women.

Because of the potential influence of relationship duration on individual and relational disposition (Gibb, Fergusson, Horwood, 2011), length of relationship was included as a control

variable. Relationship duration for married couples was the combination of the number of months/years the couple dated and how long they have been married.

### **Analysis**

An analysis of covariance was conducted to evaluate the influence of racial pair on relational interaction patterns, social approval experience, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability, while controlling of length of relationship. Once significant mean differences between the groups were calculated, the next step was to explore and compare the influence of relational and social factors on relationship satisfaction and relationship stability among the four racial pair groups

Figure 1 represents the path model used to compare the influence of relational and social factors on relationship satisfaction and stability, while controlling for length of relationship among endogamous Asian couples, endogamous White couples, exogamous Asian male-White female couples, and exogamous White male-Asian female couples. The dyadic data were fully utilized by using an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) strategy (Kenny & Cook, 1999). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the path model. The statistical program Analysis of Moments Structure software (AMOS; Arbuckle, 2008) was used to conduct the analysis. The chi-square fit statistic, Tucker and Lewis Index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error (RMSEA) were considered in testing the goodness-of-fit of the model. The primary advantage of SEM is that it controls for measurement error, which reduces the bias in the regression coefficients (Kline, 1998).

As indicated in Figure 1, actor effects for the men were determined by testing the effect of men's perception of their partner's empathic communication and their own perception of social approval on their relationship satisfaction and stability. Actor effects for the women were

likewise determined by testing the effect of women's report of their perception of their partner's empathic communication and their own perception of social approval on their relationship satisfaction and stability. Partner effects for the men tested for the influence of the women's report of their perception of their partner's empathic communication and their own perception of social approval on men's relationship satisfaction and stability. Similarly, partner effects for the women were determined by testing the relationship between men's report of their perception of their partner's empathic communication and their own perception of social approval, on the women's relationship satisfaction and relationship stability. Actor and partner effects of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability were also tested for men and women.

The differences in both actor and partner effects were tested for significance based on the critical ratio difference method, which lists the critical ratios for the pairwise differences among all parameter estimates. The critical ratio is comparable to a table of the standard normal distribution to test whether two parameters are equal in the population (Byrne, 2001). Using this method, the critical ratio must exceed 1.96 on either directions for the paths to be significantly different.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analyses**

The mean score of partners' empathy for men and women was 3.97 ( $SD = .73$ ) and 3.96 ( $SD = .79$ ), respectively. Results of a comparison of means found that men's and women's report of their partner's empathy were not significantly different. The mean score of social approval for men and women was 3.69 ( $SD = .57$ ) and 3.59 ( $SD = .58$ ), respectively. The mean score of relationship satisfaction for men and women was 3.88 ( $SD = .71$ ) and 3.94 ( $SD = .73$ ); and the

mean score of relationship stability for both men and women was 4.20 ( $SD = .71$  and  $.70$ , respectively).

**Correlations.** The results of bivariate correlations shown in Table 1 indicated that all the main variables in the study were positively correlated. All reports of empathy were moderately correlated with both male and female relationship satisfaction, though the strongest associations were between male relationship satisfaction and males' report of partner's empathy ( $r = .73, p < .01$ ) and female relationship satisfaction and females' report of partner's empathy ( $r = .76, p < .01$ ). The association of males' and females' social approval with both male and female relationship satisfaction were moderate, as well.

**National origin differences.** To determine appropriate groups to be compared, scores among Asia-born Asians and North America-born Asians were compared. This was done in order to explore the likelihood that Asia-born Asians and North America-born Asians were distinct and separate groups, in terms of variable scores, instead of one Asian group. A series of analyses of variance were conducted to evaluate the influence of national origin on report of partner's empathy, social acceptance, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability. Separate analyses were conducted for men and women because research suggests that gender socialization and expectations are different for males and females (Chan & Leong, 1994; Yee, et al., 2007).

Results indicated that there were few differences between the Asian-born and American-born Asians. There were no differences for empathy, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability. However, results from the MANOVA indicated that national origin had an influence on social approval for both men and women. Asian men born in North America reported that their families and friends approved of their relationships significantly more so than Asian men born in Asia. Specifically, the differences in adjusted means between the Asia born-Asian men and

North America born-Asian men was .26 (3.64 - 3.37),  $p = .01$ . Similarly, Asian women born North America reported that their families and friends approved of their relationships significantly more so than Asian women born in Asia. The differences in adjusted means between the two groups was .26 (3.57 -3.31),  $p = .004$ . Since there were few differences between Asia-born Asians and North America-born Asians, these two groups were collapsed in the analyses.

### **Multi-group Analysis**

Group differences in relational and social contexts, as well as relationship outcomes, controlling for length of relationship, were explored using a series of MANCOVAs. The multivariate  $F$ -test for racial pair type was significant, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .85$ ,  $F(24, 1146) = 2.68$ ,  $p = .000$ , indicating that there was a significant difference between racial pair types on their relational and social contexts, as well as their relationship outcomes, while holding the length of relationship constant. To evaluate the effect sizes of racial pair type on the dependent variables, the partial eta squared statistic ( $\eta^2$ ) was used. The univariate  $F$ -test associated with racial pair type was significant for women's partner empathy,  $F(3, 402) = 4.39$ ,  $p = .005$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ; men's social approval,  $F(3, 402) = 6.82$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ ; women's social approval,  $F(3, 402) = 11.21$ ,  $p = .000$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ ; women's relationship satisfaction,  $F(3, 402) = 4.63$ ,  $p = .003$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ; men's relationship stability,  $F(3, 402) = 2.94$ ,  $p = .03$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ; and women's relationship stability,  $F(3, 402) = 4.24$ ,  $p = .006$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ .

With significant multivariate and univariate  $F$ -tests, the next step was to explore the specific differences between each racial pair group on the dependent variables using the Bonferroni method to control for multiple comparisons. As indicated in Table 2, men's partner empathy did not differ significantly between the four racial pair groups. However, endogamous

Asian women rated their partner's empathy (3.74) significantly lower than endogamous White women (4.13) and exogamous Asian women (4.12) did. In terms of social approval, endogamous Asian men felt that their relationships were approved by their family and friends (3.52) significantly less so than endogamous White men (3.77) and exogamous White men (3.81) did. Meanwhile, endogamous Asian women felt that their relationships were approved by their family and friends (3.32) significantly less so than endogamous White women (3.75), exogamous White women (3.61), and exogamous Asian women (3.60).

Men's relationship satisfaction did not differ significantly among the four racial pair groups, but endogamous Asian women reported significantly lower relationship satisfaction (3.71) than endogamous White women (4.08), exogamous White women (3.91), and exogamous Asian women (4.06). In terms of relationship stability, endogamous Asian men reported significantly less stable relationships (3.98) than exogamous White men (4.29) only. Meanwhile, endogamous Asian women reported significantly less stable relationships (3.94) than endogamous White women (4.30) and exogamous Asian women (4.24).

**Multi-group path model analysis.** The results of the goodness-of-fit analysis for the Structural Equation Model indicated that the model fit the data well. The Chi-Square was 670.23, with 229 degrees of freedom, which is an acceptable ratio. The CFI was .95, and the TLI was .94, which are well above the cutoff score of .90. The RMSEA was .05, which was the cutoff score.

Four racial pair types, namely; endogamous Asian couples, endogamous White couples, exogamous Asian male-White female couples, and exogamous White male-Asian female couples, were simultaneously compared using the fitted structural model. To test for racial pair group differences, the unconstrained model was compared with the constrained structural model

(Chi-Square=944.30, df=168). The difference in  $\chi^2$  values for the unconstrained model and the constrained structural model was 274.07 and was significant ( $p = .000$ ), indicating that the structural model was not equivalent for the four groups.

**Actor effects.** Table 3 presents the standardized regression coefficients of actor effects, as well as the differences across the four racial pair groups. Results of the examination of actor effects indicated that men's partner empathy was significantly predictive of men's relationship satisfaction for all racial pair groups. However, men's partner empathy was not significantly predictive of men's relationship stability. The influence of exogamous Asian and exogamous White men's partner empathy on their own relationship satisfaction significantly differed from that of endogamous White men, but not endogamous Asian men.

Men's social approval was significantly predictive of marital satisfaction among endogamous White ( $\beta = .12, p < .01$ ) and exogamous White men ( $\beta = .25, p < .01$ ). The influence of men's social approval on men's own relationship satisfaction was significantly stronger among exogamous White men than among endogamous Asian men ( $\beta = .01, p > .05$ ). Men's social approval was only significantly predictive of men's relationship stability among exogamous White men ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ). The influence of men's social approval on men's own relationship stability was significantly stronger among exogamous Asian men ( $\beta = .20, p > .01$ ) than among endogamous Asian men ( $\beta = .13, p > .01$ ), endogamous White men ( $\beta = .10, p > .01$ ), and exogamous White men ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ). As to the direct effect of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability, actor effects for men indicated that relationship satisfaction was significantly predictive of relationship stability for all the racial pair groups and they were not significantly different across groups.

Results of the examination of actor effects also indicated that women's partner empathy significantly predicted women's relationship satisfaction for all racial pair groups, and they were not significantly different across groups. Women's partner empathy, however, was not significantly predictive of women's relationship stability. Women's social approval was significantly predictive of marital satisfaction among all racial pair groups with the exception of endogamous White couples ( $\beta = .03, p > .01$ ). The influence of women's social approval on women's own relationship satisfaction was significantly stronger for exogamous White women ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ) than for endogamous Asian couples ( $\beta = .12, p < .01$ ) and endogamous White couples ( $\beta = .03, p > .01$ ). Women's social approval, however, was not significantly predictive of women's relationship stability for all the racial pair groups and they were not significantly different across groups. As to the direct effect of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability, actor effects for women indicated that relationship satisfaction was significantly predictive of relationship stability for all the racial pair groups and they were not significantly different across groups.

**Partner effects.** Table 3 also presents the standardized regression coefficients of partner effects, as well as the differences across the four racial pair groups. Results of multi-group analyses indicated that the influence of women's partner empathy was significantly predictive of men's relationship satisfaction for all racial pairs with the exception of exogamous Asian men ( $\beta = .15, p > .05$ ). Nevertheless, this effect was significantly different only from endogamous White men ( $\beta = .30, p < .01$ ). Women's partner empathy, however, was not significantly predictive of men's relationship stability for all the racial pair groups and they were not significantly different across groups.

Men's partner empathy was significantly predictive of women's relationship satisfaction for all racial pair groups with the exception of exogamous Asian women ( $\beta = .08, p > .01$ ). Nevertheless, this effect was significantly different only from endogamous White women ( $\beta = .35, p < .01$ ). Men's partner empathy significantly predicted women's relationship stability among endogamous women, but not among exogamous women. Yet these effects were not significantly different across the four groups.

Women's social approval did not significantly predict men's relationship satisfaction and stability for all racial pair groups and they were not significantly different across groups. Men's social approval, on the other hand, was significantly predictive of women's relationship satisfaction among exogamous Asian women only ( $\beta = .14, p < .01$ ). The difference of this influence was only significant between exogamous Asian women and endogamous White women ( $\beta = .04, p > .01$ ). Similarly, men's social approval was also significantly predictive of women's relationship stability among exogamous Asian women only ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ); and this relationship was significantly stronger than among endogamous White women ( $\beta = .04, p > .01$ ) and exogamous White women ( $\beta = .07, p > .01$ ).

As to the direct effect of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability, partner effects indicated that men's relationship satisfaction was significantly predictive of women's relationship stability for all racial pair groups with the exception of exogamous White women ( $\beta = .30, p > .05$ ). Nevertheless, the influence of men's relationship satisfaction on women's relationship stability did not differ significantly across groups. Conversely, women's relationship satisfaction was not significantly predictive of men's relationship stability across all racial groups and these effects did not differ significantly across groups.

## **Discussion**

The relationship outcomes of interracial couples involving Whites and Asians seem to be more reflective of recent research challenging the long held notion of marital dysfunction among interracial couples (Gaines & Agnew, 2003; Gaines et al., 1999; Troy et al., 2006). This study provides answers to some of the questions raised by the divergence in previous studies regarding interracial relationships. To explore the relationship outcomes of interracial romantic relationships involving Whites and Asians, this study compared the relational and social contexts of interracial Asian and White couples and their same-race counterparts.

### **Mean Differences**

Findings indicated that endogamous Asian couples consistently reported lower scores on partner's empathy and social approval. Specifically, there was some evidence that the mixed-race couples had higher empathy and social approval than the endogamous Asian couples. These results are very intriguing because it suggests that Asian men in particular, are perceived as low in empathy by both Asian and White women; while White men are perceived as significantly higher in empathy by both Asian and White women. Empathy in communication is essential in determining whether an individual is able to similarly feel and understand his or her partner. Past research has generally concluded that most individuals choose to couple with someone with whom they share a common ground with (e.g., similar culture) because there is an unspoken understanding in endogamous relationships (Chow, 2007; Furtado & Theodoropoulos, 2008). Based on this assumption we would expect that endogamous couples would rate their partners highly on empathy, being that it is generally easier for an individual to empathize with somebody with whom they share a common background.

While this assumption was found true for endogamous White couples, it was not the same with endogamous Asian couples. A probable reason for this is the traditional relationship dynamics of Asian families. Scholars have observed that it was common for Asian couples to seldom display affectionate expressions to each other and to their children (Kitano & Kitano, 1998; Min, 1995). It is possible that Asian couples are able to empathize, but because the way empathy was measured in the study was based on the individual's perception of his or her partner, it is probable that their partners do not necessarily perceive it as strongly as how the individual actually tries to express it.

It was also interesting that endogamous Asian couples scored low in social approval. The general understanding is that interracial relationships face discrimination, prejudice, and often fear social acceptance although legal obstacles no longer prevent people to engage in such relationships. If the exogamous Asian and exogamous White women in this study were compared only to endogamous White women, this assumption will hold true. However, the endogamous Asian couples scored lower in social acceptance than either groups of interracial couples. It is possible that familism and high regard for group harmony is influencing the way Asian couples perceive the level of social approval their relationships are receiving (Min, 1995; Yee et al., 2007). Culturally, Asians tend to highly value group interests over their own. Because of this, it is possible that Asians are more sensitive to cues that suggest disapproval from family members and friends; therefore perceiving social disapproval more strongly than others. Also, it is possible that Asians have a higher standard for social approval, which leads them to become highly critical to how other people approve of their personal decisions particularly those that are closely tied to family relations.

Endogamous Asian couples were also the least satisfied and least stable among the four racial pair groups. While the mean scores for men's relationship satisfaction did not differ across groups, the mean scores for relationship satisfaction among Asian women was significantly lower than any of the three other groups. Asian couples' evaluation of their relationship stability was also lower than any of the three other groups. One way we can interpret this is by relating to the previous findings that indicate that Asian couples are low in partner empathy and social approval. Since these factors are associated with relationship satisfaction and relationship stability, it is not surprising that Asian couples' scores on relationship satisfaction and relationship stability are also low compared to other groups.

It is interesting that the relational and social factors, as well as relationship outcomes, of both groups of interracial Asian-White couples consistently differed significantly from endogamous Asian couples, but not from endogamous White couples. The mean differences among these four groups suggest that Asian-White couples have similar relationship functioning and outcomes with endogamous White couples, but they are faring better than endogamous Asian couples. A possible explanation for this is that in interracial relationships one of the partners is part of a dominant group that is in the community. Researchers suggest that due to the growing racial and ethnic diversity and increasing prevalence of interracial relationships in American society, coupled with changing social attitudes toward such relationships, the sources of psychological distress for interracial couples may have already diminished and/or couples have learned successful coping mechanisms and became more resilient (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006; Bratter & King, 2008 ).

The case of endogamous Asian couples remains interesting, although some sociological research suggests that Asian couples and families experienced acculturation distress as

immigrants because their family dynamics changed upon settling in American society.(Espiritu, 2008). The endogamous Asian couples included in this study consisted of couples who were both foreign-born, both native-born, and one foreign-born one native-born. The level of acculturation for these couples could possibly provide some explanation as to why endogamous Asian couples reported lower relationship functioning and worse relationship outcomes, but this relationship was not were not directly measured in this study, although it is worthwhile to explore in the future.

It is important to note, however, that Asian couples' scores on these two relationship outcome variables do not fall in the low end of the scale. Actually, they scored highly, just not as high as the other groups. This distinction can be explained by the possible influence of familism and family obligation on Asian families' relationship dynamics. Some Asian studies scholars have suggested that dysfunction within Asian families might be underreported if not unexpressed because Asians highly value filial piety (Inman & Yeh, 2007; Kim, Lau, & Chang, 2007; Yee et al., 2007).

### **Path Coefficient Differences**

The main predictor variables in this study were empathy in communication and social approval. These factors proved to be critical in understanding the relationship outcomes of endogamous Asian couples, endogamous White couples, and exogamous Asian-White couples because as researchers have consistently pointed out, relationships involving individuals from different racial backgrounds have unique social and relational contexts that influence the outcomes of their relationships (Chan, 1997; Fusco, 2009; Larson & Holman, 1994). The results suggest that partner empathy, social approval, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability are significantly associated, indicating that relational and social contexts have an influence on

relationship outcomes. Also, these influences were not the same across groups, as indicated by the significant difference between the unconstrained model and the constrained structural model.

**Actor effects.** The results (shown in Table 3) indicated that the influence of partner empathy on relationship satisfaction was stronger for White men (endogamous and exogamous) than exogamous Asian men. These findings suggest that, regardless of their partner's race, the knowledge that their partners are able to empathize with them weighs heavily on White men's relationship satisfaction than it does for exogamous Asian men. On the contrary, empathy predicts relationship satisfaction and stability equally among endogamous and exogamous women. The trend for men imply that White men tend to be more attuned to their partner's feelings towards them than Asian men. This emphasizes the idea that White men trend to be caring and verbal in their relationships (Fong & Yung, 1995) while Asian men are more frequently passive (Espiritu, 2008). For women, it seems that regardless of race, it highly matters that their men understand them. This is not surprising since women, in general, tend to put a lot of their energy on relationship maintenance and are, therefore, more aware of what is going on in the relationship.

Compared to endogamous men and women, the influence of social approval on relationship satisfaction was particularly stronger for exogamous White men and exogamous White women. There are different ways to approach this. For exogamous White men, a possible explanation for this is the way White men are socialized. White men are socialized to be chivalrous and always taking care of the women. Therefore, when a White man's family and friends do not approve his non-White partner, he might feel like he is not able to take care of her, thereby negatively impacting his satisfaction in the relationship. The case of exogamous White women could be understood through an understanding of the trends in interracial dating and

marriage and society's attitudes toward such relationships. It is more common for Asian women to couple with White men than it is for Asian men to couple with White women (Espiritu, 2008; Fryer, 2007). If "common" translates to social acceptance, it is possible that families and friends of White women who date and/or marry Asian men still has trouble accepting such decisions. The emotional burden of being ostracized and possibly disowned coupled with being an outsider can pose considerable distress. Parental disapproval negatively influences relationship happiness (Booth & Johnson, 1998). Similarly, Gaines (2001) suggested that psychological distress brought about by certain levels of stigmatization hinders the development and maintenance of a relationship's well being.

However, when relationship stability is at stake, social approval matters more to exogamous Asian men. This could be explained, in part, by the traditional cultural expectations Asians have on their men. Not only are Asians expected to maintain group harmony within the family and the community, Asian men in particular are expected to maintain family ties (Ling, 2007). Because, traditionally, the wife takes care of her husband and his kin, the task for Asian men to find a bride whom his family approves of is crucial. This could be a particularly challenging predicament especially when an Asian man decides to form an intimate relationship with a non-Asian woman. Since family relationships among Asians are closely knitted down the generations, the long-term viability of one's relationship could be jeopardized if approval is not gained from family and close social circles.

The actor effects of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability did not differ across groups. These suggest that relationship satisfaction influences relationship stability is similar regardless of one's race.

**Partner effects.** The results for partner effects indicate that the influence of partner empathy on relationship satisfaction was stronger for endogamous White men than exogamous White and exogamous Asian men. These findings are similar to the actor effects of partner empathy on relationship satisfaction in that these suggest how the knowledge that their partners are able to empathize with them weighs heavily on White men's relationship satisfaction. In general, it also matters to women that their partners think they understand them. but for Asian women with White partners, it seems as though this doesn't matter that much. A probable explanation for this is that it is possible that it doesn't bother Asian women that their White partners think of them as low in their ability to understand and feel similarly because they can rationalize that by thinking about their apparent differences to justify why their partners perceive them as low in empathy.

In terms of the influence of one's social approval on one's partner's relationship satisfaction, the partner effects for men did not differ significantly among the groups. However, the influence of men's social approval on women's relationship satisfaction was significantly stronger for exogamous Asian women than it was for endogamous White women. One possible explanation could be how social approval was measured in this study. Social approval was only based from the individual's perception of whether or not his or her own family and friends approved of the relationship. Because social approval was not measured from the point of view of the partner, it is difficult to gauge how that influences the relationship dynamics. However, the strong influence of men's social approval on exogamous Asian women's relationship stability reflects the possibility that Asian women still feel as if they were outsiders and have to gain significant approval from their partner's family and friends.

While the influence of women's social approval on men's relationship stability did not differ across groups, the influence of men's social approval on women's relationship stability was particularly stronger among exogamous Asian women than endogamous and exogamous White women. Similar to the predicament of Asian men, this could be explained, in part, by the traditional cultural expectations Asians have on their women. When a woman marries, she is expected to serve her husband and his family. It is also expected of Asian women that they obey their men. The emotional burden of having to obey and serve people who do not necessarily approve of you can create psychological distress which may lead to thoughts that the relationship might not last.

The partner effects of men's relationship satisfaction on women's relationship stability, as well as the partner effects of women's relationship satisfaction on men's relationship stability, did not differ significantly across groups. Analogous to the actor effects of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability, these suggest that regardless of one's partner's race, couples' sense of satisfaction in their relationship plays an important role in determining whether or not the relationship will last. Perhaps because relationship satisfaction is also a relationship outcome influenced by an array of relational and social contexts much like relationship stability, the differences lie on the relational and social predictors.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study was limited in that it was cross-sectional, which means that temporal ordering of events was not possible. The nature of longitudinal research can significantly benefit the study of interracial couples because relationship dynamics tend to vary over the life cycle. Critical issues could be more salient at present, but might take backstage later on, and then might or might not resurface again. Such determination cannot be done with cross-sectional data.

It is possible that at present, interracial couples are able to tolerate and work with the challenges of their differences and adjust their perspectives in accordance to the existing differences which they cannot do anything about. The question is, how long can one tolerate misunderstandings and feelings of not being understood? Over the years, couples will face increasingly critical issues about their relationship. It is interesting to explore how much misunderstanding couples can bare, and how long interracial couples can use their given differences to justify misunderstanding.

Also, this study was not able to fully explore the influence of culture on interaction patterns and relationship outcomes. According to Asian studies scholars, Asians' high regard for filial piety and saving face can potentially cause distress in Asians' intimate relationships. The same family- and group-centered values can also potentially cause Asian couples to not report or express dysfunction within the family (Inman & Yeh, 2007; Kim et al., 2007; Yee et al., 2007). The scope of this study was not able to evaluate such associations, and therefore cannot ascertain if levels of familism influence Asian couples' relationship stability.

The data utilized in this study were from responses to the RELATE questionnaire. While the RELATE questionnaire explores many relationship factors and issues including family of origin processes (e.g., My parents currently try to run my life), it does not directly measure levels of familism. While it asks respondents whether or not their families give (or not give) them autonomy, it does not really ask if the respondents themselves let their families run the show. Extant research suggests that people involved in interracial unions report feeling ostracized by their families (Gaines, 2001; Lewis et al., 1997). Since most adults consider parental objection as a very critical factor when they are choosing a partner (Mok, 1999), it is important to explore how individuals adjust their mate preferences to the desires of their parents.

Also, social approval was based only from the individual's perception of whether or not his or her own family and friends approved of the relationship. Because social approval was not measured from the point of view of the partner, it is difficult to gauge how that influences the relationship dynamic. Unless disapproval is overtly expressed toward the other person, an individual can only assume if his or her partner's family and friends approve of the relationship. It could be worthwhile to include partner reports of social approval in future research so that the relationship between social approval and relationship outcomes can be further explored.

The study also did not fully explore issues of acculturation among the Asian couples living in the United States. The sample in this study included both Asia-born and North America-born Asians. However, these two groups proved to be similar enough to be combined into one Asian group. In addition, the group of couples and spouses who were both born in Asia was not large enough to provide statistically robust results.

Also, while Asians are perceived as emotionally stable and problem free (Glenn, 1983; Inman & Yeh, 2007)), the findings in this study suggest otherwise. This is an important finding to explore, particularly because America's Asian population is growing in a rapid pace and it is crucial for both the academia and the clinical field to understand the cultural underpinnings of Asian families' relationship dynamics. It is important for future relationship research to look into the psychological well-being of same-race Asian couples, not only because their numbers are growing but, more importantly, their social context is unique. Asians are interesting considering their culture and history both in Asia and in North America.

Asian studies scholars (Espiritu, 2008; Kim, 2007) have proposed that early Asian family immigrants faced acculturation distress when their tradition family dynamics were altered upon their settlement in America, and such psychological distress consequently negatively influenced

their relationship outcomes. It would be interesting to look at Asian immigrant couples today and examine whether the same psychological distress continues to exist in their relationships, and if it does, to what extent does it influence their relationship outcomes.

Finally, the study could be improved by using a mixed-methods approach. While quantitative methods can provide researchers with statistical results that can improve scholarly ability to predict human behavior and outcomes, I think that statistical trends can be better understood when first-hand accounts and personal experiences are available for reference. This is particularly important when studying issues related to race and ethnic relations because racial and ethnic experiences are context specific.

## **Conclusion**

This study found that the relational and social contexts of, as well as the relationship outcomes, exogamous Asian-White couples consistently differed significantly from endogamous Asian couples but not from endogamous White couples. This suggests that Asian-White couples have similar relationship functioning and outcomes with endogamous White couples, but they are faring better than endogamous Asian couples. This is not to conclude, however, that endogamous Asian relationships are failing compared to exogamous Asian-White relationships. This only implies that despite of the popular notion that Asians are psychologically stable and problem free, there could be traditional Asian values that possibly negatively influence Asian families' relationship dynamics.

As interracial relationships continue to rise in numbers, we continue to ask how similar or different are they from same-race relationships. Do they last? How long do they last? What makes them last? We ask these questions probably because racial endogamy continues to be the norm. These findings suggest that relational factors, such as empathy in communication, predicts

relationship satisfaction more strongly among White men, regardless of their partner's race, than among exogamous Asian men. On the contrary, empathy in communication predicts relationship satisfaction among exogamous couples no differently than among endogamous couples. Social contexts, however, influences relationship outcomes differently between endogamous and exogamous couples depending on which relationship outcome is at stake. For White men and women, whether or not their families and friends approve of their interracial relationship matters when assessing their relationship satisfaction, not necessarily if it will last. On the contrary, the long term viability of an interracial relationship matters more to Asians because they are socialized to enter relationships that not only involve them but their families and extended communities as well. Lastly, this study found that both actor and partner effects of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability did not differ across groups. These suggest that regardless of racial/ethnic background, couples' sense of satisfaction in their relationship plays a role in determining whether or not the relationship will last.

Overall, this study found that Asian-White couples have better relationship functioning and outcomes compared with their endogamous Asian counterparts, but not with their endogamous White counterparts. The significant influence of relational factors, such as empathy in communication on relationship satisfaction weighs more heavily among White men than Asian men. The influence of social contexts such as approval from family friends weighs heavily on White men's and women's relationship satisfaction while having a stronger effect on the relationship stability of Asian men and women. Interestingly, the influence of relationship satisfaction on relationship stability did not vary significantly across the groups. This implies that whether or not an interracial relationship between Whites and Asians will last depends not on the

couples' level of satisfaction, but on the differences in their relational dynamics and social contexts.

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Table 1. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Means	SD
1. Men's partner Empathy	1								3.97	.73
2. Women's partner Empathy	.53*	1							3.96	.79
3. Men's Social Approval	.27*	.21*	1						3.69	.56
4. Women's Social Approval	.29*	.28*	.26*	1					3.59	.58
5. Men's Relationship Satisfaction	.73*	.56*	.29*	.25*	1				3.88	.71
6. Women's Relationship Satisfaction	.60*	.76*	.26*	.25*		1			3.94	.73
7. Men's Relationship Stability	.48*	.33*	.36*	.30*	.56*	.46*	1		4.20	.71
8. Women's Relationship Stability	.44*	.51*	.39*	.37*	.52*	.55*	.75*	1	4.20	.70

*Note:* \* denotes significance at  $p < .01$ .

Table 2. Estimated Means and Standard Errors for the Four Racial Pair Groups on Eight Dependent Variables, Controlling for Length of Relationship

Race	Dependent Variables															
	Male partner Empathy		Female partner Empathy		Male Social Approval		Female Social Approval		Male Relationship Satisfaction		Female Relationship Satisfaction		Male Relationship Stability		Female Relationship Stability	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
a. Endogamous Asian couples	3.87	.64	3.74 <sup>b, d</sup>	.80	3.52 <sup>b, d</sup>	.67	3.32 <sup>b, c, d</sup>	.73	3.73	.59	3.71 <sup>b, c, d</sup>	.69	3.98 <sup>d</sup>	.88	3.94 <sup>b, d</sup>	.75
b. Endogamous White couples	4.10	.72	4.13 <sup>a</sup>	.73	3.77 <sup>a</sup>	.50	3.75 <sup>a</sup>	.42	3.99	.77	4.08 <sup>a</sup>	.68	4.23	.71	4.30 <sup>a</sup>	.67
c. Exogamous Asian male-White female couples	4.08	.78	4.05	.73	3.56	.62	3.61 <sup>a</sup>	.58	3.97	.68	3.91 <sup>a</sup>	.74	4.27	.67	4.25	.68
d. Exogamous White male-Asian female couples	4.00	.65	4.12 <sup>a</sup>	.80	3.81 <sup>a</sup>	.46	3.60 <sup>a</sup>	.56	3.94	.60	4.06 <sup>a</sup>	.65	4.29 <sup>a</sup>	.61	4.24 <sup>a</sup>	.69

Note: Letter designations indicate the means which are significantly different at  $p < .01$

Table 3. Standardized Regression Coefficients and Differences Between Endogamous Asian Couples, Endogamous White Couples, Exogamous Asian male-White female Couples, and Exogamous White male-Asian female Couples

Regression Path	a. Endogamous Asian Couples	b. Endogamous White Couples	c. Exogamous Asian male-White female Couples	d. Exogamous White male-Asian female Couples
Actor Effects				
Men's partner Empathy → Men's Relationship Satisfaction	<b>.62</b>	<b>.63<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>.61<sup>b,d</sup></b>	<b>.62<sup>c</sup></b>
Men's Social Approval → Men's Relationship Satisfaction	.01 <sup>d</sup>	<b>.12</b>	.20	<b>.25<sup>a</sup></b>
Women's partner Empathy → Women's Relationship Satisfaction	<b>.71</b>	<b>.61</b>	<b>.63</b>	<b>.72</b>
Women's Social Approval → Women's Relationship Satisfaction	<b>.12<sup>c</sup></b>	.03 <sup>c</sup>	<b>.31<sup>a,b</sup></b>	<b>.17</b>
Men's partner Empathy → Men's Relationship Stability	.20 <sup>c</sup>	.03	.07 <sup>a</sup>	.20
Men's Social Approval → Men's Relationship Stability	.13 <sup>c</sup>	.10 <sup>c</sup>	.20 <sup>a,b,d</sup>	<b>.18<sup>c</sup></b>
Women's partner Empathy → Women's Relationship Stability	.15	.04	.02	.20
Women's Social Approval → Women's Relationship Stability	.15	.07	.11	.07
Men's Relationship Satisfaction → Men's Relationship Stability	<b>.76</b>	<b>.70</b>	<b>.58</b>	<b>.83</b>
Women's Relationship Satisfaction → Women's Relationship Stability	<b>.66</b>	<b>.45</b>	<b>.57</b>	<b>.32</b>
Partner Effects				
Women's partner Empathy → Men's Relationship Satisfaction	<b>.24</b>	<b>.30<sup>c, d</sup></b>	.15 <sup>b</sup>	<b>.16<sup>b</sup></b>
Women's Social Approval → Men's Relationship Satisfaction	.02	.03	.02	.11
Men's partner Empathy → Women's Relationship Satisfaction	<b>.20</b>	<b>.35<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>.27</b>	<b>.08<sup>b</sup></b>
Men's Social Approval → Women's Relationship Satisfaction	.01	.04 <sup>d</sup>	.00	<b>.14<sup>b</sup></b>
Women's partner Empathy → Men's Relationship Stability	.11	.16	.16	.08
Women's Social Approval → Men's Relationship Stability	.08	.04	.12	.09
Men's partner Empathy → Women's Relationship Stability	<b>.26</b>	<b>.21</b>	.05	.15
Men's Social Approval → Women's Relationship Stability	.16	.04 <sup>d</sup>	.07 <sup>d</sup>	<b>.18<sup>b,d</sup></b>
Men's Relationship Satisfaction → Women's Relationship Stability	<b>.39</b>	<b>.56</b>	.30	<b>.40</b>
Women's Relationship Satisfaction → Men's Relationship Stability	.21	.23	.23	.04

Note: Bolded numbers indicate significant regression coefficients. Letter designation indicate the regression coefficients significantly different at CR ≥ 1.96

Figure 1. Fitted Structural Model

