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*Dariusz P. Skowroński* \*  
*Atifa Bte Othman* \*\*  
*Daniel Tan Wen Siang* \*\*  
*Gabriel Lum Wei Han* \*\*  
*Jeremy Wong Jia Yang* \*\*  
*Katarzyna Waszyńska* \*\*\*

### The Outline of Selected Marital Satisfaction Factors in the Intercultural Couples based on the Westerner and non-Westerner relationships

**Abstract:** *The paper investigates the various factors from a socio-cultural perspective that have a bearing on the intercultural couple's marital satisfaction in Westerner and non-Westerner relationships, and how cultural differences may potentially amplify the difficulties, which non-intercultural couples themselves are already likely to face. These factors include acculturation, language and communication, attitudes toward marriage, individual traits and behaviours, support of the family, societal views, gender roles, managing of the household finances and child rearing. Certain theories are also highlighted in an attempt to explain why these cultural differences have such a profound effect on the marital satisfaction of intercultural couples.*

**Key words:** *marital satisfaction; intercultural marriages; socio-cultural factors*

#### Introduction

The term "Intercultural marriage" can be defined as a marriage between partners from different racial, ethnic, national or religious backgrounds (Ho, 1990). In most discussions pertaining to intercultural marriages, the couple's race, ethnicity and religion appear to be the main focus. However, an individual's experience of culture is a considerably more complex issue. It is suggested that one tends to presume that their cultural values are representative of the global truth or the way things should be in the world. Thus, intercultural marriages are more likely to bring the cultural differences of two people into an intimate confrontation (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005).

This social phenomenon has been seen to be on the rise in many parts of the world (Milan, Maheux, & Chui, 2006; Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993; Qian & Lichter, 2007). In Canada for instance, intercultural couples represented 2.6% of all married couples in 1991, 3.1% in 2001 and up to about 4% between 2001 and 2006 (Milan et al., 2006). Similarly, the number of intercultural couples in the US has increased dramatically, from 310,000 in 1970 to 651,000 in 1980 and

further to 1,610,000 in 1990. This was a percentage increase from 0.7% in 1970 to 2.2% in 1992 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). This percentage further rose to 6% in 2000 (Qian & Lichter, 2007).

Similar findings can be seen in Asian context as well. Among the annual list of registered marriages in Taiwan, in 1998 7.8% of them contained a spouse that is a foreigner (this includes spouses from mainland China) and this number increased to 15.9% in 2003 (Yang, Huang, & Tsai, 2009). In 1970, the percentage of intercultural marriage in Singapore, from both the Women's Charter and Muslim Syariah Court, was approximately 4.4%. This percentage increased to 12% in 2000 and showed another 8% increase from 2000 to 2010, bringing the percentage of such marriages up to 20% in 2010 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010). Moreover, it is being predicted that, for the upcoming 50 years, intermarriages will continue to boost across cultures (Frame, 2004).

However, such relationships are found to have a higher risk for failure, stressful obstacles, more often end up in getting divorced, and show overall lower marital satisfaction rate, as compared to monocultural couples (Okitikpi, 2009; Donovan, 2004; Chan & Smith, 1995;

\* Psychological Studies, Temple University Japan Campus, Tokyo; tuf32951@tuj.temple.edu

\*\* School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore,

\*\*\* Department of Health Promotion and Psychotherapy, Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Solsberry, 1994; Nomura, 2007). It has been further evidenced that intercultural couples seem to have additional sources of difficulties, which includes macro level factors related to the family and society, and micro level cultural factors in the varying couple functioning and dynamics (Okitikpi, 2009; Bhugra & De Silva, 2000).

When analysing motivations for intercultural marriages, The United States Population Reference Bureau (2005 as cited in Tay et al., 2012), as well as other researchers (Nomura, 2007; Suzuki, 2007) state that one of the contributing reasons in increased numbers of intercultural marriages in recent years is due to higher and higher rate of immigration across the globe, which include military troops mobility, world trade, foreign exchange of students, tourism, as well as lower costs of travelling and availability of money.

Due to globalization, conventional social restrictions are being weakened (Romano, 2001, Suzuki, 2007), and in addition travelling for business or leisure is now easily accessible, affordable, more popular than any other time hence more firms are sending their employees overseas (Shepard, 1997). The same applies to rapidly growing numbers of students studying overseas (Institute of International Education, 2006), and the increase of tertiary education status in the population, which according to findings by The United States Population Reference Bureau (2005), also contributes to the surge in numbers of intercultural marriages. Some recent studies found that higher education is positively correlated with more open, tolerant and “liberal” thoughts towards assimilation across cultures, making tertiary students and highly educated people more accepting the idea of dating people from other countries and ethnic backgrounds (Farley et al., 1994; Kluegel & Eliot, 1986; Case et al., 1989 as cited in Tay et al., 2012).

Another factor established in research is the phenomenon of individuals being attracted to people from other cultures in general because they represent a different set of physical features and that their physical characteristics and skin colour are some of the factors that contribute to the perceptions of attractiveness (Nitta, 1988; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). For instance Kelsky (2001) discovered three factors leading Japanese women to desire Western men: physical features, positive behavioural and attitudinal traits and peripheral qualities like ability to speak English well. Such findings are in line with the idea of “akogare”, translated for a longing, desire or idealization, which has been one of the established motivations for Japanese women to marry White men (Kawamura, 2005 as cited in Tay et al., 2012). In contrast, all these traits are not very common in Japanese men.

The examples provided imply that international geo-social and perceptual boundaries have weakened, and social distance between ethnic groups has been reduced (Qian & Lichter, 2007). Since marital partners are, by definition, accepting of each other, it shows that barriers to social interaction and intimacy between people of different groups are being broken down (Qian & Lichter, 2007). Thus, intercultural marriage is seen as a positive change in

relations between races and a decline in racism (Besharow & Sullivan, 1996).

### **Theoretical explanations**

It is important to emphasize from the beginning that each couple, regardless being mono-cultural, or intercultural relationship, need to deal with the variety of factors, which potentially may be detrimental to the marital satisfaction. Marriages are constructed differently and uniquely across each and every couple. However, conflicts are highly likely to occur, and act as potential obstacles (Falicov, 1986), and just like any other regular couple, intercultural marriages are no doubt faced with various sources of marital conflict (Romano, 2001). Having said that, it is also crucial to signal, that intercultural couples are subjected to more complex dynamics, due to the additional factors affecting their satisfaction, which is linked to the very fact of coming from different cultural backgrounds. Research shows (Sprenkle et al., 2009; Herr, 2009), that the cultural differences in language and communication, stereotypes, child rearing, and financial issues, as well as social support, family, and religious beliefs are likely to affect the marital satisfaction of a couple. For instance a study conducted by Jabar (2006) on Filipino women who were married to a foreigner discovered that cultural differences played a pivotal role in marital conflict and dissatisfaction.

The eco-systems theory (also known as the ecological systems theory) by Bronfenbrenner gives an in-depth analysis of how background and contextual factors could affect the quality of marriage for interracial couples (Wong, 2009). It speaks of multiple environments or levels that affect the quality of interracially married couples. The micro level context (microsystem) explains factors that stem from within the couple itself. Some examples of factors that affect marital satisfaction in the micro level context are the couple’s style of interacting, commitment, tolerance and respect. The exosystem level explains how social settings, that partners do not experience first-hand, still have the ability to influence their own interactions. The macro level (macrosystem) context explains factors that stem from the environment around a couple, in other words, structural factors that put extra strain on marriages. Some examples are workplace demands and discrimination. The eco-systems theory shows how the internal processes within a couple, and the external factors in the environment surrounding them, interact to determine a couple’s marital satisfaction.

Bronfenbrenner’s eco-systems theory proposes that individuals exist within a variety of settings, beginning at the individual level and extending to outward levels such as family, workplace and society (Duerden & Witt, 2010). Bronfenbrenner portrays development as a process that involves interactions both within and across these different contexts. His theoretical position held that interpersonal relationships, inclusive of micro-processes in the parent–child relationship, either existed, nor functioned in a social vacuum, but were embedded in the larger

socio-cultural structures of community, such as society, economics, and politics. Bronfenbrenner maintained that a person's development is hence the product of the interplay of many forces— cultural, social, economic, political and psychological. This theory shows that the marital satisfaction can be affected by a broad spectrum of factors.

Marital goals (the goals people want to accomplish in their marriage) are one of the core elements in the dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction (Li & Fung, 2011). The theory argues that the achievement of marital goals, especially the prioritized ones, is the most essential determinant of marital satisfaction. To be more specific, the four key elements of the dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction are as follows. First, people have multiple goals that they want to achieve in their marriage. Second, the priority of different marital goals is bound to dynamic changes across adulthood. Third, the achievement of prioritized marital goals in a certain developmental stage determines marital satisfaction. Fourth, other factors can also affect marital satisfaction by either changing the priority of different marital goals or by facilitating the achievement of the prioritized marital goals.

Personal goals are the consciously accessible and personally meaningful objectives people pursue in their daily life (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996). Personal goals indicate what individuals desire to achieve in their current life situations and what they try to attain or avoid in different life domains. Both receiving and giving support for personal goals are systematically linked to spouses' marital satisfaction. In summary, the dynamic goal theory explains the marital satisfaction is determined by whether the marital goals, especially the prioritized ones during a certain developmental stage, are satisfied in marriage.

Another theory that may be useful to explain interracial marriage phenomenon would be the exchange theory. There are various forms of the exchange theory. First is the marrying of a man with power (wealth, status, intelligence) to a beautiful young woman (Rosenfeld, 2005). This is supposed to represent a man's success in life and to have earned a beautiful woman with his power. Second would be that men who are skilled at work will marry women who are good housekeepers (Rosenfeld, 2005). This form may not be very relevant today as in the past, because more women are going out to work. Third would be that people in ethnic groups of higher social standing and lower socioeconomic status would marry those in ethnic groups of lower social standing but having a high socioeconomic status (Rosenfeld, 2005). The suggestion is that the person of higher social position but lower socioeconomic status would stand to gain more rather than lose out from the marriage by marrying a wealthy person of a 'lower' ethnic group although their social status by being affected by associating with a person of that race.

The core of this theory is that people get married in order to benefit from the marriage, which is a kind of exchange. This exchange could explain why people marry those of a different race, in hopes of gaining something in return. This theory can be used to a certain extent to explain

intercultural pairings (for example, a European man may marry an Asian woman because he may be looking for a traditionally oriented wife).

Other ways to describe why people get married are because they want to increase their utility level to be higher than that of single people (Becker, 1974), and because there is a "market" for men and women to be married. These two views explain why most adults choose to be married and why the education levels, wealth and personalities tend to be similar between spouses (Becker, 1974). Using these theories to explain intercultural marriage, one possible reason that people would intermarry is because "they have no choice" (Becker, 1974). They want to get married, but the "market" does not offer enough of their preferred partners. As such, they are willing to compromise and marry out of their ethnic group.

### Selected Factors Contributing to Marital Satisfaction in Intercultural Couples

#### Acculturation

In any intercultural marriage, one partner is either an immigrant from another country or the child of an immigrant (it is possible also that both parties are from different countries of origin and decide to settle in another country). As such, to the non-native party, the country's culture, people, and customs, may first appear daunting and strange. The attempt to adopt these new cultural beliefs and behaviours of the majority group is referred to as "acculturation" (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). In this attempt, people commonly respond by using one of four basic acculturation strategies; separation, assimilation, marginalization or integration.

Amongst immigrants, those who are unwilling to interact with members of the majority culture and are unable to accept the host culture (and hence use marginalization and separation strategies) tend to place themselves at a higher risk of being isolated and lacking social support (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991, as cited in Schwartz, 2012). Since family support and positive societal attitudes play vital and important roles in marital satisfaction (Takano, 2002), therefore, it would not be helpful to the relationship of an intercultural couple if the immigrant party makes use of such acculturation strategies and detaches himself or herself from these sources of social support. In addition, the ability to adapt to a new culture itself poses a challenge for many and brings about its own stress (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008) which makes this social support all the more needed.

Negy and Snyder (2000) found that acculturation strategies were highly influential on marital distress for mixed couples. A similar finding discovered that a potential lack of successful acculturation from African-American communities could fuel attitudes of non-acceptance and resistance towards an intercultural marriage involving African-American and White American parties (Beigel, 1966).

Most cultures are either predominantly individualistic or collectivistic due to their backgrounds

and also the environment. A collectivistic culture (typically associated with Asian people) usually emphasises belonging and working as a group, and form a “we” identity. On the other hand, an individualistic culture (typically referred to Westerners) reinforces the “I” identity which values self-actualization, individual achievement, and personal qualities (Hofstede, 1980).

People in collective cultures are usually sensitive to pay more attention to others’ behaviour and social status characteristics, which involves communicating in an indirect way during interaction (Gudykunst, Goa, Nishida, et al., 1992 as cited in Tay et al., 2012). On the other hand, research shows (Frymier, Klopff, & Ishii, 1990), that people in individualistic cultures are prone to act on their feelings, including being vocal about their personal opinions and communicating directly during interactions.

Ting-Toomey(1994)has related individualism-collectivism to conflict style, which strongly supports research evidence that the role of the culture variability is critical in influencing the resolving of cross-cultural conflict. For instance, when a problem in the marriage arises, an individualistic partner might confront the problem directly in order to solve it. However, a collectivistic partner may engage in conflict avoidance, and promote peace within the relationship by using more indirect negotiation (Ma, 1992 as cited in Tay et al., 2012). Data shows that Koreans often feign their emotions around their White spouses in order to avoid conflict (Lee, 2005 as cited in Tay et al., 2012), which supports the motion that partners in Westerner and non-Westerner relationships may face certain problems while communicating.

### **Language and communication**

Apart from potential difficulties in the acculturation process, cultural gaps between partners also result in greater marital conflicts and especially ways how they are addressed between spouses.

Kittivipart (1987 as cited in Tay et al., 2012) and other researchers (Renalds, 2011) discussing the findings stressed out that good communication skills are a key factor in maintaining marital satisfaction in intercultural relationships, whereby a lack of effective communication patterns with spouses often yield less contentment and happiness in the process. Taweekuakulkit (n.d. as cited in Tay et al., 2012) noted that communication problems may easily occur if interculturally married couples find it difficult to come to an agreement on a shared common language to use. Moreover, even if there is no problem with a mutual language being used, still possible barriers are very likely to come in their way as subtle differences of communication patterns may lead to misinterpretation (Renalds, 2011), the culturally influenced perception of criticism, emotional expressions, changes in emotional state, and overall relationship satisfaction of mixed couples to a certain degree (Galloway, 2006).

Flores, Tschann, Marin, and Pantoja (2004) asserted the possibility that those who adopt traditional cultural expectations tend to prefer to act in a manner

that would allow their relationships to be respectful and characterised by few conflicts. As such, they do not favour the open expression of conflict. On the other hand, parties that have higher levels of successful acculturation tend to be more open and direct in their communication, and in turn allow conflict to be expressed more easily. Research on Asians and Whites involved in intercultural marriages found that the Asian parties undertook a more passive and avoidant communication style when discussing issues and problems, while White spouses assumed the style that was more direct and verbally explicit (Yamada, 2006).

Accepting and adopting the host culture’s values are done in various ways, with the most common and efficient one being interactive with its members and gaining proficiency in the culture’s language. A large number of well-educated Asian immigrants in the US were able to assimilate well and rapidly (Qian, 2001). Black immigrants who were able to speak English well, also found themselves hastening their assimilation process (Espenshade & Fu, 1997, as cited in Qian, 2001). Studies on the Korean-American marriages by Jeong and Schumm (1990) support the same motion, how communication with members of the host culture and language proficiency aid acculturation mastery, and in turn, increases marital satisfaction. The study found that a large number of Korean-American marriages were often peppered with issues such as poor communication, problems of acceptance by society, difficulties in acculturation to American society, and marital instability. Upon examination of the English proficiency which the Korean wife possesses and her level of education, they found that the two variables were strongly correlated with marital and overall family satisfaction. They attributed their findings to the possibility that if the Korean wife had a satisfactory level of English proficiency, communication with her husband is more likely to be more effective and this in turn should improve their marital relationship. In addition, it would also allow her to interact better with American society and acculturate in an easier manner. Regarding their level of education, it was believed that the higher the level of education she attained, the more accurate and congruent her beliefs about American culture would be (Jeong & Schumm, 1990). The accuracy and congruence would be further increased if she received education in America as this would allow more opportunities to communicate with Americans. As earlier mentioned, knowledge and understanding of the other party’s culture is pivotal and reduces any potential misunderstandings an intercultural couple might have.

From the various studies (Beigel, 1966; Espenshade & Fu, 1997, as cited in Qian, 2001; Flores et al., 2004; Jeong & Schumm, 1990; Matsumoto & Juang, 2008; Negy & Snyder, 2000; Rogler et al., 1991, as cited in Schwartz, 2012; Yamada, 2006) it is clear that the ease and strategies in which parties of intercultural marriages make use of in the acculturation process have a strong effect on marital satisfaction. Successful acculturation to the host culture (either by integration or assimilation) allows the immigrant party to obtain a more accurate understanding of the majority culture’s values, in turn aiding the couple’s communication and relationship quality. Furthermore, it

would allow the couple to receive the social support which is so vital in an intercultural marriage.

### Attitudes on Marriage

The modern concept of marriage of individualistic cultures in the West, as well as increasingly in the East, is mostly based and centred on love (Perel, 2000). Couples get married out of romantic attraction and believe that a lack of romance is basis for dissolution of the marriage (Li & Fung, 2011). Thus, it is a free and private choice made by the two persons involved, aiming to develop mutual joy, intimacy and self-fulfilment. This inevitable involves the separation or weakening of the connection between a person and a family of origin and its traditions (Perel, 2000).

This idea is opposed to that of marriage views in more traditional and family-orientated or collectivistic cultures. Traditional cultures see marriage not as a union between two people but as a social agreement in which two extended families are joined for an objective purpose like social status and wealth. This is especially apparent in arranged marriages. In this view, the need of the community is of much greater importance than the needs of the individual. As such, the marriage of two people from different cultures of origin might affect not just themselves, but spring problems within their families (Perel, 2000).

This is evident in an interview study of American men and Japanese women forming couples living in the US. When news of their wedding was delivered to the parents of the Japanese wives, 45% of their parents refused to accept it. 30% of the sample had to elope to the US. This is in contrast to the initial reaction of the family of the American husbands, where all of their parents were supportive and accepting of their son's marriage from the outset. This illustrates the difference in attitudes of marriage between two cultures – one side viewing it as a personal decision and the other, as a family decision (Nabeshima, 2005). So, it may be concluded that rejection and resistance from the families, extended families and in-laws do pose a problem for intercultural couples and will be further elaborated in this paper.

Because of the differences in their attitudes towards marital relationship, most intercultural couples have views on boundaries that diverge vastly. They have polar expectations on how involved their families should be in issues pertaining to their marriage, like child rearing and gender roles. This appears to be the underlying cause of conflict for most intercultural couples. As such, couples have to define terms and check assumptions that might or might not be shared between them. From the simplest word to the most fundamental concepts of marriage, nothing can be taken for granted. The sheer amount of facts to learn about each other, sometimes makes the marriage seem overwhelming (Perel, 2000).

Consistent with the ecosystems theory, the issue of child-rearing is within the microsystem of the couple, stemming from within them. The disagreements due to cultural differences are internal in nature, since these differences affect the way they interact with each other.

However, the couple's macro system, consisting of their family, extended family and in-laws, do play a part in the rearing of the child. As mentioned above, boundary differences relating to how involved the family is in the raising of the child are external in nature. All these factors, both internal and external, from both the micro and macro system surrounding the couple, interact to determine their overall quality of a marriage and marital satisfaction.

### Individual Traits

Generally speaking, there is a paucity of research about interactions between personality traits of people entering intercultural marriages in Westerner and non-Westerner relationships. However, based on research data, one is safe to say that the individual traits and behaviours of a person will affect how both spouses handle each other. As cited by Wong (2009), such characteristics and behaviours include "self-esteem, interpersonal skills and emotional health; and couple interactional processes, such as similarity in race, values and attitudes" (Wong, 2009). Certain traits will contribute to a healthy marriage while others will prove to be detrimental. The values of interracial couples play a part in marital satisfaction as differing values from other cultures can cause frustration (Frame, 2004). Although some values are bound to be different as a result of a cross-cultural union, some basic values must be shared in order to ensure a successful and stable marriage. These culturally driven characteristics may easily cause disharmony between the spouses, as the values are deeply rooted in each person, and they form individually developed common sense (Wong, 2009).

On the other hand, having personalities that are too similar may be a problem, as well. A study by Shiota and Levenson (2007), which measures how similar couples are with respect to the Big Five (Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness and Neuroticism), shows that having too many similarities will negatively affect marital satisfaction. The most obvious findings are that similarities in extraversion and conscientiousness will negatively affect marital satisfaction in middle-aged couples, however, they do not influence older couples. The reason for such finding may be linked with the developmental stage that the different age groups face different challenges in marriage (Shiota & Levenson, 2007). This may be a supporting point for marital satisfaction in intercultural marriages as there will be differing personality traits resulting from cultural and social messages in early childhood environments. This could be worth pursuing topic for further research as it is not evidenced yet how these findings relate to Westerner and non-Westerner romantic relationship context.

Some examples, which are drawn from research, include humour styles and neuroticism. Humour is one possible factor that contributes to marital satisfaction. Studies have shown that couples with a similar sense of humour are more likely to report higher levels of attraction towards one another and a stronger desire to get married to a partner (Cann, Zapata, & Davis, 2011). As humour is

usually associated closely with social and cultural context and one might argue, to what extent the personal sense of humour may strengthen or weaken marital satisfaction in an intercultural marriage. Aggressive styles of humour (humour used to demean others), more pronounced in Western culture, have also been shown to correlate to lower marital satisfaction (Cann et al., 2011).

Neuroticism is another trait that is commonly associated with lower marital satisfaction. Highly neurotic people have negative emotions most of the time and are “prone to have irrational ideas, be less able to control their impulses, and to cope more poorly than others with stress” (Fisher and McNulty, 2008). In addition, neurotic responses tend to be labelled, and it is the society, that defines what kind of reactions are beyond acceptance. It should not be a surprise to find that couples who score high in neuroticism levels, have more problems in marriage. A study conducted by Fisher and McNulty (2008) showed that neuroticism led to a decline and marital as well as sexual satisfaction. However, more research is needed in relevance to cross-cultural influences in neurotic responses leading to lowering marital satisfaction.

The other personal traits affecting marital satisfaction include attachment styles, especially avoidant and anxious attachment (Holmes, 1993; Cassidy, 2001; Feeney & Noller, 1990), as well as rejection sensitivity (Schoebi, Perrez, Bradbury, 2012), however, the available data is inconclusive in reference to intercultural couples in Westerner and non-Westerner relationships.

### **Family support**

Another aspect that affects marital satisfaction in intercultural couples would be family and social support in the initial stages of marriage (Inman, Altman, Kaduvetoor-Davidson, Carr, & Walker, 2011). Parents are concerned over the spouses’ social status and its impact on the family’s standing in the community. Cultural dilution is also a concern, in which the family would be worried about the affected person losing his or her cultural roots. According to Sung (1990), family objections were the greatest obstacles to scale for couples contemplating on intermarriage. These barriers often led to fierce conflict with the parents and sometimes even affected family ties. Some consequences of family objections are feelings of guilt, unfriendly relations and unpleasant social situations when family members get together for special occasions. Family objection is thus one of the major obstacles in intermarriage and puts a great strain upon the couple.

Furthermore, Nabeshima (2005) stated that parents who had an opposition towards their daughters marrying someone of a different race led to a variety of concerns. These concerns included worrying that the family line in a certain profession would be disrupted, and concerns about care in old age. Some women whose parents opposed their marriage experienced emotional scars that lingered, including feelings of guilt, homesickness and mild depression over parental rejection. Feelings like these could potentially spill into the marital satisfaction of interracial

couples. This also shows that lack of family support in the initial stages of marriage due to the difference in culture and family values is overall greater in females than males.

### **Societal attitudes**

Societal attitudes affect marital satisfaction, in which couples tend to be sensitive towards adverse reactions people in public have towards their interracial relationships (Reiter, Richmond, Stirlen, & Kompel, 2009). Gaines and Agnew (2003) said that interracially married couples tend to experience disapproval by people outside of the relationship. Given that individuals tend to feel affected by other people around them, and having friends, relatives or even acquaintances, who do not support the intercultural relationship, may cause a lower level of satisfaction and personal intimacy between spouses. Furthermore, Sung (1990) stated that incidents where people in society give disapproving vibes towards an intermarriage couple could cause discomfort and insecurity. It was also found that a mixed couple is usually classified and judged according to the minority group of a partner with the lower social status. Even though people do not usually take extreme measures to discriminate against mixed couples at present, the feelings associated with negative societal attitudes can develop to be strong enough to hinder marital satisfaction. As mentioned by Frame (2004), marrying outside of the community is often seen as reflecting a lack of pride in one’s own culture. Furthermore, findings revealed that regardless of racial or gendered identity, those involved in interracial relationships were sensitive to negative reactions in public spaces, creating feelings of doubt that could hinder marital satisfaction.

Inman et al. (2011) also implied that negative reactions based in the respective communities of interracial couples were primarily determined by location. For instance, it was found that there was a greater likelihood for disapproval towards a member of an interracial couple in small, homogenous and conservative communities.

Society’s negative views on an interracial union thus also posed as a contributing factor to marital satisfaction in interracial couples (O’Neal, Brown, & Abadie, 1997). Moreover, Merton (2000) claimed that “In no society is the selection of a marriage partner unregulated and indiscriminate” (p. 474). It is also evidenced by other researchers (Hibbler and Shinew, 2002), who described how interracial couples felt socially isolated in important areas of their life. Their close friends and first-degree relatives may follow society’s norm of homogamy, and this may result them dissuading the interracial couple to get married. In summary, an interracial couple that faces scorn from their families or friends would likely experience lower marriage satisfaction and lower perceived intimacy, as a result (Reiter et al., 2009).

Fu (2007) further elaborated on this point by stating that social and legal environment influence decisions and possibilities of marrying someone from another race (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Davis, 1982; Lee & Edmonston, 2005; Sickels, 1972; Tucker & Mitchell-Keman, 1990). For

instance, while the U.S. mainland states had experienced severe racial discrimination in the past (Merton, 2000), Hawaii never had such racial tensions and occurrences like these in the islands have been historically low (Nordyke, 1989). The different social and historic atmosphere in the islands as compared to that in the mainland may have helped encourage intergroup relations (Fu & Heaton, 1997). This second explanation possibly interacts with the first, because in Hawaii, White people are not a majority. Thus, the social and cultural influence of White population in Hawaii has long been challenged by other groups (Wittermans, 1981). Especially in the last few decades, many minority groups have gained social and economic parity with Whites (Fu & Heaton, 1997; Labov & Jacobs, 1986), which has alleviated the social boundaries between Whites and non-Whites (Fu & Heaton, 1997). Furthermore, Hawaii never had laws against interracial marriage, as opposed to the States. This goes to show that the historical occurrences and laws in one's social environment could affect an interracial couple's marital options.

### Money Management

Money is a necessary item in order to survive as it is required for living expenses. Therefore, economic standing is often an important factor contributing to marital satisfaction, and as without money, the couple will face more difficulties later in life. Data shows one of the main reasons that people decide to discontinue their relationships is due to monetary disputes (Pimentel, Robb, & Houser, 2009). Arguments over money can be about either how money is managed and used or about total family income, which can consist of who earns the money, and the amount of money being earned. Conflicts arise when couples have different ideas about how to handle their finances (Atwood, 2012). Holding back money from spouses, as well as spending too much of each other's funds, contribute to conflict. Couples of different backgrounds may also have different attitudes when it comes to money.

According a study by Pimentel et al. (2009), there are certain attitudes towards money that can either increase or decrease marital satisfaction. Several attitudes were measured, and results have shown that couples that differ in how trusting they are with money or decisions related to money report better marital satisfaction. Partners who differ in their likelihood to regret decisions made regarding money, also report better marital satisfaction. This may be because couples will support each other and balance out what their spouses lack when it comes to financial decisions making. Lack of money would be an immediate area of concern for anyone, including couples. Therefore, it is presumed that family income should play a role in marital satisfaction. Those who get intermarried in order to increase their socioeconomic status will be more satisfied when this area is met (Jeong & Schumm, 1990). However, from the results of the study conducted by Pimentel et al. (2009), it can be assumed that how money is managed is more important than how much money is being earned. Couples from different cultural backgrounds may also have a different idea on who

should be making the money. For example, some cultures may have a strong patriarchal view in which only males work and make all the important decisions at home (Frame, 2004). The mind-set that has been cultivated by a person's cultural background is not so easily changed. This is likely to be a source of conflict between spouses, as different beliefs will confront each other and may affect marital satisfaction.

### Gender Roles

Another main source of potential conflict in an intercultural marriage is in the differing perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes that each individual holds. More often than not, a person in an intercultural marriage is not familiar or is even clueless regarding gender role perceptions in the other party's culture. The lack of knowledge stems from the fact that various cultures differ in how they think males and females should behave both in a relationship and in social settings.

The interviews conducted together with a large number of other studies (Barnes, 2010; Cowan & Cowan, 1987; Hsiao & Hammons, 2007; Starrels, 1994) reflect the truth that unequal and unfair division of household chores and labour adversely affects the marital satisfaction. The reason for its influence on marital satisfaction is due to the differences in the desire for an egalitarian marriage.

Census data pointed out that 24 percent of Asian female immigrants in America engage in an intercultural marriage as compared to nine percent of their male counterparts. This kind of difference is because Asian female immigrants prefer to marry Whites or other minority males as they tend to be less patriarchal and allow the relationship to take a more egalitarian course as compared to Asian male immigrants (Min & Kim, 2009). A similar explanation can be drawn from the discussion about the index of patriarchy analysed by Simons (2001).

In examining traditional gender roles, a key and pivotal factor is the quantity of household labour expected of each party. These expectations stem not from particular dominant culture but from the way of life that people used to adopt based on evolutionary explanations in regards to female and male adaptation strategies (Buss, 1995), and the different roles which males and females played translated to the perceptions of what is appropriate of each sex in this day and age (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008; Oshio, Nozaki, & Kobayashi, 2011). Most western cultures adopt the viewpoint that since marriage ought to be an egalitarian relationship, household chores should likewise be equally divided between the husband and wife (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010). This view is incongruent with the cultural viewpoint of non-Western ethnic groups and explains the difficulties and problems that intercultural couples could face.

### Views on Child-Rearing

Another issue that most couples, both intercultural and endogamous, face is their differing view on the methods of child-rearing. Cowan & Cowan (1988) found that in the

early stages of parenthood, the general marital satisfaction of American couples decrease. It is a challenging period for many couples. Early parents have new child-rearing tasks to perform and responsibilities to fulfil, mostly while sleep deprived and fatigued. Some even have to give up their careers to become full-time caregivers to their child. Time that used to be spent on personal hobbies, leisure and recreation activities are now taken away in order to be physically and emotionally present for the child (Nabeshima, 2005).

The different cultures of parents in an intercultural marriage pose an added complexity to an already problematic issue. In raising children, parents tend to revert to models learnt from their own childhood in their culture of origin (Nabeshima, 2005). Hence, intercultural couples would find problems synthesizing two cultural backgrounds into one that their child can grow up in (Perel, 2000). Children need a consistent pattern of socialization, which incorporates their religion and culture, to develop a healthy sense of self-identity. As such, an equal split in the exposure to both parent's cultures will not be sufficient enough (Perel, 2000). Thus, one parent has to accommodate and allow a child to be raised in the culture of his or her spouse in various aspects of child raising such as parenting roles, parent-child relationship, feeding, sleeping, discipline, education, etc., (Romano, 2001).

However, there are different concerns and fears that go along with raising one's child in a culture that is not of his or her origin. These concerns develop into feelings of hesitation and reluctance when it comes to accommodation, in turn, leading to marital conflict. One such fear is that the child that is brought up in a different culture or religion, with different experiences growing up, might alienate his or her parent. The parent must then learn to transmit a culture or language, in some cases, that they themselves may not be completely familiar with to their child.

Additionally, many migrant parents have reported that they feel a sense of loneliness and homesickness during this period of intense emotion, where family support is particularly needed, in their lives (Ryan, 2008). New Japanese mothers also revealed that they missed their family and particularly, their own mothers during this period. Their mothers would be helpful in the caring of the child and would love to see their grandchild. Also, they stated that, through childrearing practises, they catch a glimpse into the past, reliving memories of their own childhood and re-evaluating their past experiences (Maehara, 2010).

### **Diversity**

According to Ely and Thomas (2001), diversity is usually defined as a characteristic that typically refers to demographic differences of some sort among group members. It may include numerous dimensions to classify demographic differences, for instance race (Pelled, 1996) and culture (Cox, 1993; Larkey, 1996) and other characteristics, which can be used to analyse the vast array of differing traits (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Diversity is also considered a very crucial and integral part of modern and

changing perspectives on family, relationships, marriages and broader societal issues (Saggers & Sims, 2005).

According to Inman et al. (2011), diversity enriches the marital relationship. It helps the members of interracial couples gain different perspectives on people and their backgrounds. Participants in the study of Asian-Indian and white couples in interracial relationships claimed to question their own cultural assumptions and traditions. Ultimately, it was found that realizing the agenda one grew up with is not the only agenda in the world proved to be a positive factor that increased marital satisfaction. Diversity in the relationship also encouraged participants not only to explore further their own cultures, but also to develop a sense of belonging in their partners' cultures. Thus, the diversity in an intercultural couple may support the greater marital satisfaction (Inman et al., 2011).

### **Conclusion**

This paper presents the selected factors contributing to the marital satisfaction and complex dynamics which intercultural couples in Westerner and non-Westerner relationships experience. It appears that the ability to integrate well into the culture of the host country improves the marital satisfaction of an intercultural couple in various ways; it opens up avenues of social support (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991, as cited in Schwartz, 2012), it allows the immigrant party to gain acceptance from the local community (Beigel, 1966), and it increases each party's understanding of the other's cultural values and beliefs, hence reducing the possibilities of any future understandings (Jeong & Schumm, 1990).

Individual traits also are likely to have a significant bearing on a couple's marital satisfaction. For an intercultural couple, the individual traits of each party produce an attraction to the other party despite the barriers between the two cultures. Each culture may promote different values that might not exist in, or, in fact, clash with another culture. This may cause disputes over their differing values, if they cannot accept each other's differences (Frame, 2004).

The marital satisfaction of an intercultural couple can be affected too, by the general societal attitudes toward their marriage (Reiter, Richmond, Stirlen, & Kompel, 2009).

The way both parties in an intercultural couple perceive gender roles in marriage seems to contribute to how high or low their marital satisfaction is. It is highly likely that both parties in such a marriage would have different cultural beliefs and attitudes about what is culturally expected and acceptable behaviour for each gender in the marital relationship, especially with regards to the division of household labour (Nemoto, 2008). This difference commonly translates into an incongruence (especially so in a marriage between a non-Westerner party and a Westerner party), with the Asian party having more traditional gender role expectations and the White party promoting more egalitarian gender roles (Min & Kim, 2009).

In addition, having sufficient funding for marriage also seems play a major role in the marital satisfaction of



intercultural couples. Having too little money would lead to a lower quality of living as well as increased stress levels due to the constant pressure of needing to make ends meet (Dakin & Whampler, 2008). Couples may also clash over differences in opinion over how money should be spent, although they do influence each other in their thinking after living together for a while (Dakin & Whampler, 2008).

In summary, based on literature findings one may state that intercultural Westerner and non-Westerner marriages overall face both similar and unique difficulties in their marital relationships as ethnically homogenous couples, albeit in a more pronounced way. Intercultural couples are subjected to more complex dynamics, due to additional factors affecting their marital satisfaction, which is linked to the very fact of coming from different cultural backgrounds, and, as a result, their discrepancies in beliefs, values, and attitudes have the potential to amplify such difficulties.

### Limitations of the intercultural studies

It is important to notice that there are many potential variables affecting marital satisfaction in intercultural marriages and the presented article took only some factors into account, predominantly utilising social aspect of selected factors, thus certain limitations exist.

First of all comparative studies may risk some simplification, as they tend to present findings in more black and white categories, which surely limits the whole scope of possible variable interactions and manifestations.

Second, there is evident the lack of one unified methodology in the cross-cultural field of research, which may result in using different categorisation, when analysing intercultural phenomena.

Third, one need to remember that intercultural marriages are influenced simultaneously by the combination of internal, as well as external forces, including individual, psychological, social, and cultural factors, and it is not justified to interpret all differences as the result of cultural influences exclusively.

Another limitation of this study is related to the fact, that the culture itself is a very complex and multidimensional concept, and it is not easily quantifiable. Thus, any generalisation resulting from comparative intercultural studies requires caution, when drawing conclusions.

Still, the team of authors believe, that this paper can be useful in aiding future research related to the topic of marital satisfaction in intercultural couples, in Westerner and non-Westerner context. It may be used to provide a foundation for individuals, be it academic writers, policy makers, marriage counsellors, students or others wishing to delve deeper into this topic. With the analysis of intercultural marriages provided in this paper, future research could yield more conclusive findings and lead to appropriate follow-up actions.

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