

INTERCULTURAL COUPLES:  
EXAMINING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

This study compared the relationship between social support and relational satisfaction in intercultural marriages and other intercultural marriage-like relationships as compared to their intracultural counterparts' relationships. Specifically, this investigation sought to determine the amount of social support received by intercultural couples in comparison to intracultural couples, and the relationship between this social support and relational satisfaction. Seventy-eight intercultural and 87 intracultural couples participated in the study by completing a questionnaire on relational satisfaction and social support. The research suggested that relational satisfaction would be lower for intercultural couples due to the perceived instability and the added stressors that can occur in such a union. The results of this study indicated that intercultural couples did not differ from intracultural couples in the amount of social support they received from friends. The social support received from family by intercultural couples was lower, however not significantly. The results also showed that there was a positive relationship between social support and relational satisfaction. No significant difference was indicated between the levels of relational satisfaction among intercultural and intracultural couples.

## **INTERCULTURAL COUPLES:**

### **EXAMINING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT**

The United States has witnessed an increase in intercultural marriages since 1967. In 1960, seven years before the case of *Loving v. Virginia*, the number of intercultural marriages in the United States was approximately 149,000. Only 10 years later the number had doubled to 300,000. In 1995, the number rose to 1.4 million intercultural marriages in the United States (Arnett & Pugh, 1997). Of the 1.4 million intercultural couples in 1995, 5% were black and other races besides white, 24% were white and black, and 71% were white and other races besides black (Arnett & Pugh, 1997). Statistics indicate that 65% of Japanese Americans and 70% of American Indians intermarry (Aunapa, Monroe, Sachs & Taylor, 1993).

Although the number of intercultural marriages continues to rise, many people object to intercultural marriages. Most people are willing to accept a work relationship with a person involved in an intercultural relationship, and even allow an intercultural child to visit their home (Davidson & Schneider, 1992). Yet, studies show people often have negative attitudes toward intercultural marriage in general, especially if it involves their own son or daughter (Davidson & Schneider, 1992; Mills, Daly, Longmore & Kilbride, 1995). Many families do not accept the marriage initially. As families become more acquainted with the spouse some families accept the spouse, especially after the birth of grandchildren (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993). Family objections can create such obstacles so great that some couples end

up severing their family ties (Sung, 1990).

Regardless of their lack of acceptance, intercultural couples do get married. The relative success of such unions is not clear. Some report it is much higher than the national average (Gaines & Ickes, 1997) whereas others claim the divorce rates do not differ from those of intracultural couples (Bizman, 1987). Research on relational satisfaction of married couples suggests marital satisfaction is higher among couples who are similar in important ways (Hansen, Fallon, & Novotny, 1991; Heaton & Pratt, 1990; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995). One important similarity is social network overlap, which is positively correlated to marital satisfaction (Hansen et al., 1991). Similarities in religious affiliation (Heaton & Pratt, 1990) and coping style (Ptacek & Dodge, 1995) are also correlated with relational satisfaction among intercultural partners. Such findings suggest the importance of differences as a source of dissatisfaction and relational distress.

Differences and disagreements that cause distress for some intercultural couples include food, religion, sex, and gender roles (Clamar, 1991; Clulow, 1993; Glenn, 1982; Heaton & Pratt, 1991; Ho, 1990; Petersen, 1986; Romano, 1988; Stringer, 1994; Woelz-Stirling, Manderson, Kelaher, & Gordon, 2000). Given that intercultural couples face so many potential differences, it follows that their ability to cope with challenges may mediate their relational success. Couples may be more able to cope with barriers because of the support they receive from each other, family, friends, coworkers, or even neighbors who do not have objections to the intercultural marriage. Social support is the verbal and nonverbal communication between seekers (i.e., individuals receiving social support) and supporters (i.e.,

individuals giving social support) that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship (Leatham & Duck, 1990). Supportive communication helps an individual when it functions to decrease the anxiety and stress caused by something unknown. It also helps the receiver in developing perceived control over stressful situations (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). The purpose of this study is to compare the relationship between social support and relational satisfaction in intercultural marriages and other intercultural marriage-like relationships as compared to their intracultural counterparts' relationships. Specifically, this investigation seeks to determine the amount of social support received by intercultural couples in comparison to intracultural couples, and the relationship between this social support and relational satisfaction.

### **Intercultural Couples**

Intercultural marriages have been described using a variety of terms, including bi-national, cross-community, cross-cultural, cross-frontier, cross-national, dual culture, interethnic, interfaith, intermarriage, international, interracial, and mixed. These terms have not been used consistently to refer to the same type of relationship (cf., Barnett, 1963; Clamar, 1991; Fujino, 1997; Kikumura & Kitano, 1973; Kouri & Lasswell, 1993; Petersen, 1986; Stringer, 1994). For purposes of this study intercultural marriage is a global term representing marriages between two people from different cultures, races, religions, or ethnicities. Intercultural marriages are the union of two people with different cultural and behavioral norms and backgrounds rooted in religious, racial, or ethnic differences (Hutter, 1990).

## **Reasons for Intercultural Marriages**

Although the number of intercultural marriages has been increasing in the U.S. since the Supreme Court's ruling against anti-miscegenation laws on the case of *Loving v Virginia* (Arnett & Pugh, 1997; Holmes, 1997; Sung, 1990), additional circumstances contribute to the rise in the number of intercultural marriages. A few of the circumstances leading to intercultural marriages include access, class homogamy, attraction, and rejection of one's own culture. Immigration trends increased people's access to other cultures (Cottrell, 1990; Nitta, 1988; Sung, 1990). As these immigrants entered the workplace, schools, and neighborhoods, interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds increased. These interactions provided the opportunity for "individuals from different societies and cultures to become intimately involved leading to possible intermarriage" (Nitta, 1988, p. 222). For example, this exposure, or propinquity, has been found to be the strongest predictor of interracial dating among Asian Americans (Fujino, 1997).

Class homogamy—marrying up or down as a form of resource exchange—is another reason individuals enter intercultural marriages (Davis, 1941; Lee & Yamanaka, 1990; Merton, 1941). Kalmijn (1993) found that in intercultural marriages between African Americans and Whites the African Americans tend to have a higher level of education than their White spouses do. Peres and Schrift (1978) found similar trends in the United States and Israel. Foeman and Nance (1999) argue resource exchange is an overly rational view; many may marry for love (Bizman, 1987; Sung, 1990) or common interests (Lewis, Yancey, & Blitzer, 1997).

In addition, people may be “attracted to individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds precisely because they are different” (Nitta, 1988, p. 222). People may view other cultures as exotic and pursue a relationship with a person from that culture. In contrast, sometimes people choose to intermarry because they are rejecting their own culture (Char, 1977; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Porterfield, 1973). Such individuals would view themselves, or be viewed by others, as rebels, outcasts, misfits, adventurers, escapists, or deviants, even if this is a motive of only a few of all intercultural marriages (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993).

### **Difficulties Facing Intercultural Relationships**

Whatever the reasons may be for entering an intercultural relationship, in the early stages of the relationship, as with most relationships, couples focus on their similarities. Differences are often disregarded as surface details, challenges, or aspects that make the relationship more interesting (Romano, 1988). As the relationship progresses, and the couple more interdependent, the differences may grow in seriousness. “It is then that they become fully aware of how many differences there are, how deeply embedded some of them are, and how these differences are going to affect their future together” (Romano, 1988, p. xiii).

Differences, especially those that emerge as unpleasant, are likely to play a significant role in relational distress. Differences that lead to problems are likely to serve as expectancy violations. Expectancy violations theory (Burgoon, 1995) proposes that such expectancy violations motivate behavior on the basis of the intensity of the arousal produced and its valence (i.e., positive or negative value). For example, a couple may agree that a marriage is a partnership, but discover that

what is meant by the term partnership differs (Imamura, 1990). She may expect shared household chores and discussing work; whereas he may expect shared chores based on gender and would not discuss anything related to his work.

Intercultural couples face the same differences others face, but find such differences are complicated by distinct cultural orientations and ways of framing such issues. Several examples that have been investigated are suggestive. Some couples of different faiths face the decisions of what faith to practice, in what faith to marry, and in what faith to raise the children (Clamar, 1991; Stringer, 1994). Others are surprised by difficulties managing finances. Woelz-Stirling et al. (2000) examined the conflict about money in intercultural couples in Australia. These couples were Filipina women married to Australian men. Filipinas in the Philippines have an economic independence and equal partnership in decision-making and finances. However, men in Australia are the decision makers and in some cases refuse to let the wife work. The distress can be so great that some Filipinas become depressed or develop other emotional problems.

Other intercultural relationships find themselves managing differences in gender roles. An American woman married to an Indian man describes one such dilemma, "he is suspicious of being forced to play the part of American husband as I am of playing Indian wife. At this point I don't trust many aspects of his culture, and he doesn't trust many in mine" (Merrill, 1995, pp. 3-4). Some partners of an intercultural relationship harbor xenophobic thoughts or feelings and need to avoid common prejudice or trivializing aspects of their partner's culture (Gaines & Liu, 2000). The lack of a shared culture could add to misunderstandings in the

relationship as well as adding to any instability or stress that may exist despite the differences in the cultural background (Clulow, 1993).

Of course, not all stresses faced by intercultural couples arise from their relational differences. Dainton's (1999) study of African-American, European-American, and intercultural couples revealed intercultural couples experienced more external stresses than internal stresses on the relationship. Another study examining intercultural couples of the same religion also found that most of the marital difficulties were due to external factors, or influences found outside of the relationship (Graham, Moeai & Shizuru, 1985). Two of the most important sources of external stress are family and society.

**Families.** In addition to the challenges within an intercultural relationship, couples may face problems that arise between themselves and their families. The couples' families are often opposed to the relationship. If the couple marries, it is not uncommon for some or all of the family members not to attend the wedding (Arnett & Pugh, 1997; Killian, 2001; Rosen, 1982). One couple found out two years into their marriage that an aunt and uncle of the bride walked out of the ceremony when they saw that the groom was Black (Killian, 2001). For some Intercultural couples there is "...tension or even open conflict with their in-laws based on ethnocentric attitudes on one side or the other" (Rosen, 1982, p. 90). This can lead to further problems for the couple. Sometimes parents abandon "their antipathy toward their daughters-in-law or sons-in-law when they realize that they might lose contact with their children and grandchildren" (Kouri & Lasswell, 19, p. 251), but others irreparably damage their relationship with their son or daughter.

Even when the families are accepting of the intercultural marriage, it is often difficult for one spouse to understand the other's family. This is especially apparent when one spouse moves to the other spouse's home country or cultural venue. In addition to adjusting to a new cultural milieu, the spouse must also adjust to the attitudes and behaviors of the other's family. These spouses, usually the wives, often face resentment from their husband's families because the husband chose to marry outside his culture. Foreign wives often face challenges coping with being marginalized by their husbands' families and society (Imamura, 1990).

Even the way each spouse views his or her family and the role that the family should play in the couple's lives often differs. For example, in the Korean culture, daughters are required to be faithful to their parents. In one study of marriages in which the Korean wives followed their European American husbands back to the United States. These wives often had difficulty adjusting to life in the United States partly because they were no longer able to help their parents (Ratliff, Moon & Bonacci, 1978). They often wished to bring their parents over to the United States or to help out their families financially by sending money. If the husband does not comprehend the cultural force of his wife's need to assist her parents "he is likely to have a miserable wife and an unhappy marriage" (Ratliff et al., 1978, p. 223).

**Society.** Most individuals who do not know an intercultural couple perceive these couples unfavorably (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001). They are perceived as less psychologically adjusted and less traditional. The qualitative interviews and observations on management of public harassment conducted by Datzman and Gardner (2000) revealed experiences that some intercultural couples had with

outsiders staring, spitting, or mumbling at them in public. Killian (2001) also interviewed intercultural couples and found these couples would sometimes alter their behavior in public so as to make a good impression. In some cases couples would try to appear as though they were not together in order to not call attention to themselves. The potential for public harassment is on the minds of intercultural couples wherever they go. One woman in Northern Ireland would use either her married name or maiden name depending upon what part of town she was in (Stringer, 1994). Violence and other life threatening incidents are not uncommon (e.g., Williams & Andersen, 1998). One Black man, while camping in the south with his White wife, heard a gun shot in the middle of the night and could not stop thinking of the possibility of a lynching if the two of them were seen together (Killian, 2001). Such accounts demonstrate how deeply rooted society's perceptions can be of intercultural couples.

Society, family, friends and even the partners themselves have attitudes and behaviors that can add stress on an intercultural couple's relationship. Relational outsiders, not to mention history and custom, can place pressure on intercultural couples to terminate the relationship; it is remarkable that many of these relationships survive over time.

### **Social Support**

Intercultural couples have the potential to encounter conflict in many areas inside and outside of the relationship, yet many intercultural relationships survive. Social support may help account for success in maintaining such relationships. The

research on social support began in the field of medicine, specifically in the area of epidemiology (Cassel, 1976; Cobb, 1976; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). The research from epidemiology and community psychology suggests that social support has positive effects on physical and mental health (Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1994; Burleson, Albrecht, Goldsmith, & Sarason, 1994; Gottlieb, 1983, 1985).

No consistent definition for social support exists in the literature. For some researchers, social support only takes place in times of stress, adverse circumstances, or times of crises (e.g., Cassel, 1976; Cobb, 1976). For others, it is a basic, ongoing requirement for well being (Gottlieb, 1978, 1983, 1985). Some researchers include tangible items as support (i.e., gifts, money, etc.); while others claim tangible items do not constitute support. Although these differences exist, all definitions are based on the assumption that people must rely on one another to meet certain basic needs (Cutrona, 1996).

Along with the discrepancies among the definitions of social support, the labeling of social support is also inconsistent. Some authors use social support synonymously with social networks or social integration (Cutrona, 1996). Social networks are made up of the people with whom an individual interacts on a regular basis (Allen, 2002; Cotton, Cunningham, & Antill, 1993; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000; Hansen, Fallon, & Novotny, 1991; Stopes-Roe & Cochrane, 1990; Wood, 1994). Social integration is the presence or absence of key social ties, most often marriage and membership in groups such as churches, clubs, and other voluntary organizations (Cutrona, 1996).

Several scholars (e.g., Albrecht & Adelman, 1984; 1987; Albrecht et al., 1994; Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Barnes & Duck, 1994; Bippus, 2001; Burleson et al., 1994; Clark, Pierce, Finn, Hsu, Toosley, & Williams, 1998; Jones & Guerrero, 2001; Riggio & Zimmerman, 1991; Xu & Burleson, 2001; Zimmermann & Applegate, 1994) conceptualize social support as a communication process between people. These scholars see social support as a dynamic, transactional, and symbolic process in which providers and recipients mutually influence one another's affective, cognitive, behavioral, and/or relational states (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). These routine transactions are important psychologically and emotionally because they provide individuals with feelings of availability of support and create and perpetuate individuals' sense of being in a relationship (Leatham & Duck, 1990).

Most research examines social support as a perceived process; that is, the amount and quality of support a person receives is likely to be perceived by that person (Cutrona, 1990; Procidano & Heller, 1983). The subjective belief of an individual that support is available and the perceived support received might have more of an impact on emotional adjustment, relationship satisfaction and health than the interactions that brought about those feelings (Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). For the purposes of this study social support will be defined as "the belief that others are available to provide emotional and practical support" (Cutrona, 1990, p. 30). It is closely related to the provision of comforting communication in stressful situations.

## **Functions of Social Support**

Social support functions to give a perception of control in one's life. This can include sharing tasks and feelings, exchanging information and affection, and expressing love, isolation, family ties, and friendship (Vaux, 1988). The perception of support or nonsupport can enhance or detract from the quality of a relationship (Leatham & Duck, 1990). Although a wide range of individuals may offer social support, measurements of the perception of social support tend to focus on family and friends (Procidano & Heller, 1983).

Individuals who are socially skilled experience less distress in relationships (Riggio & Zimmerman, 1991). They are able to provide the verbal and nonverbal comforting behaviors to someone seeking support as well as compensate for a provider who is not socially skilled. The comforting behaviors provided by an individual's social network can be broken down to five factors: other orientation, problem solving, relating, refraining from general negativity, and different perspective (Bippus, 2001). According to Jones and Guerrero (2001), positive behaviors that influence the perception of received support include highly person-centered messages (i.e., acknowledgement and elaboration of the feelings of the receiver), and nonverbal immediacy (i.e., psychological closeness).

## **Issues of Non-Support**

Non-support occurs in everyday conversations. Messages that go beyond simply not providing support to imply the disapproval are non-supportive. For example, parents' reactions to their sons' or daughters' intercultural relationship

have ranged from “She’s a nice girl, but...” to “She hardly looks Oriental at all” (Rosen, 1982, p. 90). One wife was introduced by her mother-in-law in this way: “This is my daughter-in-law. She’s Moroccan, but she is a college graduate” (Rosen, 1982, p. 90). Parents often provide initial acceptance or ambivalence, only later to be nonsupportive upon gradually realizing how committed their child was to the partner (Stringer, 1994). Some parents accept the relationship for fear of losing contact with their son or daughter (Kouri & Lasswell, 1993). Nonsupport from one’s social network is likely to pose a significant barrier to relational survival.

Considering what is known about the benefits of social support in stressful situations and the stress that may arise out of the cultural differences in an intercultural relationship as opposed to the similarities in an intracultural relationship, the following hypotheses are posed:

H<sub>1</sub>: Intercultural couples will report receiving more social support than will intracultural couples.

H<sub>1a</sub>: Intercultural couples will report receiving more social support from friends than will intracultural couples.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Intercultural couples will report receiving more social support from family than will intracultural couples.

### **Relational Satisfaction**

Relational satisfaction is the subjective impression that the various components of one’s relationships is more positive than negative (Durodoye, 1994). If the two individuals differ culturally they may have more adjusting to do than a

couple who is more similar. McGoldrick and Preto (1984) contend that “the greater the difference between the spouses, the less common the pairing and the greater the difficulty they will have adjusting” (p. 348).

One adjustment in an intercultural marriage may be in the way the couple deals with distress in the relationship. The more similarly couple members believe they cope, the more satisfied each member will be with the relationship (Ptacek & Dodge, 1995). Conversely, if couples cope dissimilarly, they will report lower levels of satisfaction. Hansen et al. (1991) found that marital satisfaction was positively correlated with network overlap, the “degree to which two or more individuals share the same social network” (p. 102). Couples who share more of the same interests will likely interact with many of the same people. Members of interpersonal relationships who are dissimilar not only report having lower levels of satisfaction but also have more of a separation between the two social networks.

Research on marital satisfaction as it relates to intercultural couples shows several inconsistencies in the findings (Durodoye, 1994). Studies of divorce statistics of intercultural couples revealed that the levels of divorce were at times equal, higher, or lower than those of intracultural couples. Durodoye (1991) examined differences in factors related to marital satisfaction between intercultural couples who were Nigerian male and African American female and intracultural couples who were both African American. The intercultural couples, consistently reported more dissatisfaction on scales of overall marital distress, time together, disagreement over finances, and conflict over childrearing. Negy and Snyder (2000) found intercultural relationships reported higher levels of distress in the relationship

than intracultural relationships. Research in Hawaii found that marital satisfaction was lower among intercultural couples than among intracultural couples (Fu, Tora & Kendall, 2001).

Based on what is known about the benefits of social support as well as the differences and difficulties involved in an intercultural relationship, coupled with what is known about relational satisfaction the following hypotheses and research question are posed:

H<sub>2</sub>: There will be a positive relationship between social support and relational satisfaction.

H<sub>2a</sub>: There will be a positive relationship between social support from friends and relational satisfaction.

H<sub>2b</sub>: There will be a positive relationship between social support from family and relational satisfaction.

RQ<sub>1</sub>: Will intercultural couples and intracultural couples report significantly different levels of relational satisfaction?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Participants were required to be in a long-term romantic relationship. Individuals could be either married or living with their partner. For a couple to be included in the research, both individuals in the relationship needed to participate. The recruitment of participants was completed in four ways. First, 56 individuals, comprising 28 couples, responded to announcements placed in four local

publications. Second, 68 individuals comprising 34 couples were recruited from a marriage group at a local church. Third, the researcher also approached participants as they waited in line to purchase admission at a movie theater. Questionnaires from 42 individuals, comprising 21 couples, were gathered in this manner. Finally, undergraduate students enrolled in a lower division communication course at a large west coast university were asked to find a couple to fill out the questionnaires. Students returned 182 questionnaires from 91 couples.

The total participant sample for this intercultural relationship study consisted of 174 couples from the Southern California area. The information gathered from nine individuals was incomplete resulting from 9 couples' data being removed from data analysis. Of the remaining 165 couples, 78 couples were coded as intercultural due to a difference in ethnicity or religion. Twenty of the intercultural couples differed by religion, 42 couples differed by ethnicity and 16 couples differed by both religion and ethnicity. The other 87 couples responded to the questions of religion and ethnicity the same as their partner, and were considered intracultural. Basic demographic data on the participants' gender, age, religion, and ethnicity were collected (see Table 1).

Analysis of variance was used to compare groups by the primary constructed variables. The only significant difference across groups occurred in the relational satisfaction variable. The results from the group of participants that answered advertisements in local periodicals were slightly inconsistent with the other three groups. The effects of this difference were small, accounting for 5% of the variance or less. Differences on all of the social support variables were non-significant. On

the basis of this evidence it was decided that the four samples could be aggregated for analysis in order to optimize statistical power for the remaining hypothesis tests.

### **Procedures**

Each individual was given a consent form that briefly explained the procedures of the study and asked to sign the form if he or she was willing to participate. He or she was then given a questionnaire. Participants who responded to an announcement in a publication were provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope and asked to mail their questionnaires to the researcher. The participants from the church group and from the movie theater were asked to fill out the questionnaire and return it to the researcher who was waiting nearby. The participants who were recruited by students were asked to place their questionnaires in a sealed envelope and return it to the students. The students then returned the envelopes to the researcher. Each pair of questionnaires had an identification number in order to match couples in the data.

### **Measurement**

The Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of Spanier's (1976) 10-item Dyadic Adjustment scale was used to measure the satisfaction of couples within their relationships (Appendix 1). The Dyadic Satisfaction Subscale has been widely used not only in determining the adjustment of couples in their relationships but also in comparing it to other comparable scales (Carey, Spector, Lantinga, & Krauss, 1993; Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994). The alpha reliability for the Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Satisfaction subscale has been reported to be from  $\alpha = .87$  (Care, et al.,

1993) to  $\alpha = .94$  (Spanier, 1976). In this study its reliability was .79.

Perceived social support was assessed by Maton, Gouze, and Keating's (1987; Maton et al., 1996) shortened version of Procidano and Heller's (1983) Perceived Social Support Scale (Appendix 2). This scale measures the amount and quality of social support from friends and family as perceived by the receiver. Exemplary items are as follows: "My friends give me the moral support I need," and "My family is sensitive to my personal needs." The 10 item scales as used by Maton et al. (1987, 1996) has ranged from .79 to .94. In this study, the alpha reliabilities for perceived support from friends ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and family ( $\alpha = .93$ ) were satisfactory.

## **Results**

Because the first hypothesis refers to differences among couple types, rather than among each individual member of a relationship, the couple was used as the unit of analysis for this hypothesis. Scores for individuals were calculated on each of the scales. These scores were then combined for each couple; the summed score for each couple was divided by two to create an average score on each scale.

Hypothesis one posited that intercultural couples would report higher levels than would intracultural couples on social support from both friends and family. This hypothesis was not supported. The power of the t-test with 174 couples at the .05 probability level is approximately .59 for an effect of .20, but .87 for a moderate effect of .30, suggesting that the rejection of this hypothesis may be due to lack of power to locate small effects. Results indicate there is a violation of the equality of variance assumption for family support variables. However neither social support

from family nor friends reveals statistically significant differences by couple type. Intercultural couples ( $M = 37.45$ ,  $sd = 5.88$ ) did not differ from intracultural couples ( $M = 37.56$ ,  $sd = 6.05$ ) for social support from friends ( $t = -.112$ ,  $df = 158$ ,  $p > .05$ ). For social support from family, intercultural couples ( $M = 39.24$ ,  $sd = 7.78$ ) were lower than intracultural couples ( $M = 41.13$ ,  $sd = 5.76$ ) but not significantly ( $t = -1.75$ ,  $df = 156$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Further analysis by recruitment type showed no significant difference either.

Hypothesis two, which proposed a positive relationship between social support and relational satisfaction, was supported. Social support, combined from both friends and family, is positively correlated with relational satisfaction ( $r = .31$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between social support solely from friends and relational satisfaction ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Social support solely from family is also positively related to relational satisfaction ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When analyzed at the individual level, women's social support from friends is not related to relational satisfaction ( $r = .09$ , ns), but is related to family support ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For men, both friend ( $r = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and family ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ) support were positively related to relational satisfaction. When analyzed by sample type, differences emerge that qualify the results of hypothesis 2, indicating there are different links between support and relational satisfaction based upon sample type and type of support.

Research Question One asked if intercultural couples and intracultural couples would report significantly different levels of relational satisfaction. Analysis

of the data reveals that there is no significant difference ( $t = -1.015$ ,  $df = 153$ ,  $p > .05$ ) between the amount of relational satisfaction reported by intercultural couples ( $M = 39.89$ ,  $sd = 5.90$ ) than intracultural couples ( $M = 40.06$ ,  $sd = 5.99$ ).

Post-hoc analyses would have been conducted to see to what extent these results were moderated by whether the couples were religiously or ethnically heterogeneous; however, there were only two religions with sample sizes large enough, so the sample size was too limited by ethnicity to analyze further. Post-hoc analysis on gender differences revealed that females perceive significantly higher levels of support from friends ( $t = 4.72$ ,  $df = 160$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $M_F = 39.26$ ,  $M_M = 35.80$ ) and family ( $t = 2.60$ ,  $df = 158$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $M_F = 41.09$ ,  $M_M = 39.35$ ) than males. There was no difference between males and females in relational satisfaction.

## **Discussion**

This study compared the relationship between social support and relational satisfaction in intercultural marriages and other intercultural marriage-like relationships as compared to their intracultural counterparts' relationships. Specifically, this investigation sought to determine the amount of social support received by intercultural couples in comparison to intracultural couples, and the relationship between this social support and relational satisfaction. The results suggest relational satisfaction would be lower for intercultural couples due to the perceived instability and the added stressors that can occur in such a union.

Hypothesis one posited intercultural couples would report higher levels of social support than intracultural couples. This hypothesis was not supported. The

social support received from family by intercultural couples was lower, however not significantly. Intercultural couples may have received more and less support than other couples canceling out any effect. Other factors may mediate the role of social support for intercultural relationships. For example, the type of culture an individual is from, collectivistic versus individualistic, can effect the value of supportive communication (Mortenson, 2002). Collectivism is positively associated with support messages. Another possibility is that the longer ethnic minorities have been in their new country may acclimate them to normal network processes. Younger generations of immigrants are less ethnocentric in choice of friends, while older generations report significantly larger networks (Stopes-Roe & Cochrane, 1990). The generation of individuals was not considered in the current study and could be a contributing factor as to the statistically insignificant findings for the first hypothesis.

The results of this study did reveal a positive relationship between social support and relational satisfaction. Therefore hypothesis 2 was supported; however the relationship was small. It could be that social support plays only a relatively minor role in relational satisfaction. Another possibility is that the role of social support in relational satisfaction is highly episodic. The general quantity and quality of social support may be far less important than the particular role of a particular set of support messages in a particular personal crisis. The impact of support may be highly discontinuous and nonlinear, which would suggest that future research might benefit from turning point and hazard types of analysis.

The results of the research question showed no significant difference

between the levels of relational satisfaction among intercultural and intracultural couples. Although intracultural couples reported slightly higher levels of satisfaction, this difference was not statistically significant. Previous literature suggests intercultural couples have the potential for more distress due to differences based on the partners entering the relationship from differing cultures, thus reporting lower levels of satisfaction in the relationship (Durodoye, 1991, 1994; Fu et al., 2001). Relatively few studies have examined actual distress experienced by intercultural couples (Negy & Snyder, 2000). The majority of previous research, including the present study, makes the assumption that intercultural couples experience more distress primarily because of the cultural differences between them rather than examining actual distress experienced. There is some research to suggest that even intercultural couples can have similarities that hold them together (Graham et al, 1985; Heaton & Pratt, 1990). Intergroup research has consistently shown that when groups perceive an external threat to the group, similar to the stresses that intercultural couples might experience, the group experiences increased cohesiveness (e.g., Fisher, 1990). An analogous process may be at work with the couples investigated in this sample.

Post-hoc analyses on gender differences revealed that females perceive significantly higher levels of support from friends and family than males. This finding supports previous research on social support and gender differences (Belle, 1982; Reevy & Maslach, 2001). After marriage, men often allow their support relationships to lapse, possibly because their wives become their main source of support (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Cutrona, 1996). Previous research on gender

differences has suggested that women offer empathy and men offer advice (Cutrona, 1996; Vaux, 1985), yet when Mickelson, Helgeson, and Weiner (1995) tested this theory they found men and women did not differ. More recent research has suggested that women provide more solace and men provide an escape or solution (Burleson & Gilstrap, 2002). The support messages provided by women are more emotional than men's support messages (MacGeorge, Clark, & Gillihan, 2002). These gender differences could be attributed to the different ways that men and women produce messages (Burleson, 2002). Further analysis showed that for the women in this study social support from friends was not positively related to relational satisfaction. Another finding indicates no difference between males and females in relational satisfaction. In fact, partners were equally satisfied with their relationship.

### **Limitations**

Despite previous literature suggesting that intercultural relationships are unstable and predisposed to encounter more distress than intracultural relationships, the present study showed no strong differences. Other researchers (Negy & Snyder, 2000) have had similar unexpected results. In the present samples it could be that *similarities* in religion (Heaton & Pratt, 1990) and coping style (Ptacek & Dodge, 1995), neither of which was explicitly operationalized in this study, facilitated relational satisfaction.

The overall findings of this study may be attributed to additional moderating variables that were not examined. Moderating variables that may have influenced

these results include, but are not limited to, geography and group identity.

Intercultural couples residing in geographical areas that have a diverse mix of cultures may have more similarities and encounter less distress than in areas that are not culturally diverse. The current study used a generalized group of intercultural and intracultural couples. Previous research has examined Black/White relationships (e.g., Dainton, 1999; Datzman & Gardner, 2000; Davidson & Schneider, 1992; Kalmijn, 1993; Kouri & Lasswell, 1993; Lewis, Yancey & Bletzer, 1997; Williams, 2002; Williams & Andersen, 1998), others have looked at Nigerian and African American couples (Durodoye, 1991), Japanese Americans (Kikumura & Kitano, 1973), Korean Americans (Ratliff et al., 1978), Mexican American/White couples (Negy & Snyder, 2000), as well as Protestant/Catholic couples in Northern Ireland (Stringer, 1994) and Filipina/Australian couples in Australia (Woelz-Stirling et al., 2000). It may be then that findings are highly sample specific, as cultural identities split along multiple facets of self and relationship (Collier, 1998). By grouping the participants in such a general way the current study may have missed some differences.

Related to the problem of group identity, the use of this sampling procedure and the large intercultural mix in the southwestern region of the United States, not necessarily characteristic of other locales in the United States, limit the generalizability of the findings of this study to other populations. Southern California is a culturally diverse and interculturally tolerant region where intercultural couples may not come up against some of the difficulties that other intercultural couples could in other less diverse, less tolerant populations of the United States.

## **Implications**

An abundance of research has been conducted in the area of interpersonal relationships, including marriages and other long-term romantic relationships as well as intercultural relationships. Intercultural marriages, in particular, are a unique focus for research for two reasons. These relationships set apart from other marriages because of the differing dynamics of the members based on the different culture. Secondly, there is no indication of a decrease in the amount of intercultural couples. Therefore, a greater understanding of the impact of social support on the relationship of intercultural couples is warranted.

Research on intercultural relationships, social support, and relational satisfaction is an important contribution to the current body of knowledge. Social support and relational satisfaction have been shown to have positive effects on individuals' well being (for reviews see Carey et al., 1993; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). Empirical investigations on social support in general are of value to anyone receiving or providing support. At some point in time that includes everyone. The links between social support and relational satisfaction (Hansen et al., 1991) and between social support and intercultural relationships (Stringer, 1994) as well as between intercultural relationships and relational satisfaction (Durodoye, 1991, 1994; Fu et al., 2001; Negy & Snyder 2000) adds to the necessity of such investigations. The current findings demonstrate the importance of further research on the communication dimensions of social support in intercultural relationships.

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**APPENDIX 1. DYADIC SATISFACTION SUBSCALE**

1. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?  

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
--------------	------------------	---------------------	--------------	--------	-------
2. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?  

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
--------------	------------------	---------------------	--------------	--------	-------
3. In general, how often do you think things between you and your partner are going well?  

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
--------------	------------------	---------------------	--------------	--------	-------
4. Do you confide in your mate?  

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
--------------	------------------	---------------------	--------------	--------	-------
5. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?  

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
--------------	------------------	---------------------	--------------	--------	-------
6. How often do you and your partner quarrel?  

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
--------------	------------------	---------------------	--------------	--------	-------
7. How often do you and your mate "get on each others nerves?"  

All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
--------------	------------------	---------------------	--------------	--------	-------
8. Do you kiss your mate?  

Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
-----------	------------------	--------------	--------	-------
9. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.  

.	.	.	.	.	.
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy
10. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?  
  

I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does.

I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *will do all I can* to see that it does.

I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does.

It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but *I cannot do much more than I am doing* now to help it succeed.

It would be nice if it succeeded, but I *refuse to do any more than I am doing* now to keep the relationship going.

My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more that I can do* to keep the relationship going.

**APPENDIX 2. PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT SCALE**

The statements that follow refer to feelings and experiences that occur to most people at one time or another in their relationships with friends (NOT including your relational partner). For each statement there are five possible answers: YES, yes, ?, no, NO. Please circle the answer you choose for each item.

- |     |     |   |    |    |     |  |
|-----|-----|---|----|----|-----|--|
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 1.  | My friends give me the moral support I need.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 2.  | My friends enjoy hearing about what I think.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 3.  | I rely on my friends for emotional support.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 4.  | There is a friend I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 5.  | My friends and I are very open about what we think about things.                                   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 6.  | My friends are sensitive to my personal needs.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 7.  | My friends are good at helping me solve problems.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 8.  | I have a deep sharing relationship with a number of friends.                                       |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 9.  | My friends seek me out for companionship.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 10. | I have recently gotten a good idea about how to do something from a friend.                        |

The statements that follow refer to feelings and experiences that occur to most people at one time or another in their relationships with their families (may include your relational partner). For each statement there are five possible answers: YES, yes, ?, no, NO. Please circle the answer you choose for each item.

- |     |     |   |    |    |     |   |
|-----|-----|---|----|----|-----|---|
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 1.  | My family gives me the moral support I need.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 2.  | I get good ideas about how to do things or make things from my family.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 3.  | My family enjoys hearing about what I think.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 4.  | Members of my family share many of my interests.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 5.  | I rely on my family for emotional support.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 6.  | There is a member of my family I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later. |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 7.  | My family and I are very open about what we think about things.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 8.  | My family is sensitive to my personal needs.  |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 9.  | Members of my family are good at helping me solve problems.   |
| YES | yes | ? | no | NO | 10. | I have a deep sharing relationship with a number of members of my family.                                       |

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<b>AGE</b>	20-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	>50	Not Specified
	195	35	27	29	15	36	11
<b>RELIGION</b>	Catholic	Jewish	Protes- tant	Muslim	Other	Other Christian	Not Specified
	129	2	67	3	81	40	8
<b>ETHNICITY</b>	White	African American	Asian American	Latino/ Hispanic	Native American	Non-U.S. American	Other
	211	19	3	42	7	3	25