cretion in their decisions to take account of special circumstances is wise. But beginning with a presumption of a fifty-fifty split of accumulated assets, unless there is a prenuptial agreement to the contrary, may be the best way to ensure that unpaid labor in the context of a long marriage is duly rewarded.

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CHAPTER 12

# Toward an Understanding of Asian American Interracial Marriage and Dating

Jeanne L. Tsai, Diane E. Przymus, and Jennifer L. Best

We want our children to marry Chinese, but it's because we're Chinese; we forget that *they're* American.

A Chinese father

One of the hottest issues confronting the Asian American community today is the increasing number of interracial dating and marital relationships, especially among younger generations of Asian Americans. Whatever the forum—anthologies of Asian American literature, conferences on Asian American studies, documentaries on local Asian American communities—interethnic dating and marriage are topics of considerable interest and heated debate. Within the Asian American community, some fear that by coupling outside their culture, Asian Americans will lose their Asian heritage. Others in the community argue that coupling across racial and cultural lines will end racial segregation.

Asian American interracial relationships are relevant to persons outside of the Asian American community as well. To individuals committed to combating racism and discrimination, the disapproval and outrage that such relationships evoke illustrate that racial prejudice and discrimination still thrive at the beginning of the twenty-first century. To persons interested in race and culture, children of interracial unions challenge existing conceptions of race and culture that do not account for mixing between groups. Finally, to those interested in racial, cultural,

and psychological influences on human behavior, interracial relationships demonstrate how human behavior is multiply determined. For instance, although interracial contact and exposure may influence whether individuals couple across racial lines, factors such as gender expectations, cultural identity, and personality may also play a role.

Despite the relevance of Asian American interracial relationships to these inquiries, our current knowledge base is quite limited. In this chapter we review the meager literature on Asian American interracial relationships and then propose ways in which feminist psychological methodology might advance our understanding of them. We present preliminary data that illustrate how such research might be conducted. Finally, we discuss issues that arise when one applies a feminist methodology to understand interpersonal processes in different racial and cultural groups. We begin by presenting a brief description of the Asian American community and its history regarding intermarriage and dating.

## WHO ARE ASIAN AMERICANS?

The group Asian Americans is comprised of individuals of East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean), South Asian (e.g., Indian), Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian), and Filipino descent. In 1990, there were approximately 7.3 million Asian Americans residing in the United States, incorporating 2.9 percent of the total U.S. population (a 107.8 percent increase from the Asian American population in 1980) (Uba 1994). Asian Americans are expected to make up 11 percent of the population by the year 2050 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). Most Asian Americans reside in California, New York, or Hawaii, where Asian immigrants first settled in the early nineteenth century (Lee and Yamanaka 1990). Census data from 1990 reveal that among Asian Americans, most are Chinese (22.6 percent), followed by Filipino (19.3 percent), Japanese (11.7 percent), Asian Indian (11.2 percent), and Korean (11 percent) groups (Uba 1994). The rest are Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders. Two-thirds of Asian Americans are foreign born, that is, immigrants or refugees who came to the United States for a variety of social, economic, political, and educational reasons (Min et al. 1995).

Although tremendous diversity exists among specific Asian American groups, Min and others (Espiritu 1992; Kibria 1997) argue that they are united by a "pan Asian American" ethnicity. The term "Asian American" grew out of the Civil Rights Movement as an attempt to recognize



cultural similarities and engender political and social unity among the various Asian American groups. Many Asian American groups share similar cultural values and beliefs, including collectivist orientation, filial piety, respect for authority and the elderly, emotional moderation and control, emphasis on educational achievement, the role of shame as a behavioral influence, and familialism. Asian Americans also share a similar political and social position in American culture. That is, they are grouped together in census and other statistical databases and are often treated as one group in American public policy (Min et al. 1995). In addition, because Asian Americans have similar racial features, members of one specific Asian American group are often mistaken for those of another. For example, acts of racism and discrimination intended against one specific Asian group are often acted out on members of another (Min et al. 1995). These common experiences have resulted in the emergence of a relatively unified Asian American culture (Kibria 1997; Min et al. 1995). As a result of these similarities, much research has grouped Asian Americans together. Thus, in this chapter, we discuss Asian American interracial coupling, differentiating among specific Asian American groups whenever possible.

## ASIAN AMERICAN INTERRACIAL COUPLING

As recently as 1901, marriages between Asians and European Americans were illegal. Antimiscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1967, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the removal of restrictive immigration quotas (Min et al. 1995). Thus, the small number of Asian Americans in the United States, combined with the illegitimacy of Asian American interracial marriage, may explain why relatively few studies of Asian American interracial coupling existed prior to the 1960s. Since the 1960s, the studies that have examined Asian American intermarriage and dating have revealed four major trends.

First, census data suggest that Asian American intermarriage increased steadily from the 1960s and 1970s to the 1980s. This trend was consistent with rates of intermarriage in other racial and ethnic groups (Lee and Yamanaka 1990; U.S. Census Bureau 1960, 1970b). However, from 1980 to 1990, Asian American intermarriages dropped from 25.4 percent to 15 percent of all Asian American marriages. Interestingly, this trend was not consistent with that of other racial and cultural groups for which intermarriages continued to increase (Lee and Fernandez

1998). Second, specific Asian American groups vary in their likelihood to intermarry. Since the 1960s, Japanese Americans have consistently intermarried more than Filipino Americans, who have intermarried more than Chinese Americans (Lee and Fernandez 1998). Third, when Asian Americans do intermarry, they are more likely to marry European Americans or individuals of the Caucasian race than any other racial/cultural group (e.g., African Americans, Latino Americans). Finally, among Asian Americans, females are more likely to intermarry and interdate than are males (Fujino 1997; Lee and Fernandez 1998).

## POPULAR THEORIES REGARDING ASIAN AMERICAN INTERRACIAL COUPLING

Researchers have proposed different theories to explain these patterns. These theories are (1) group size, (2) assimilation, (3) status exchange, and (4) sex-ratio imbalance. Group-size theory proposes that intermarriage is inversely related to group size (Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982). That is, the smaller the Asian American group, the greater contact its members have with other racial and cultural groups and the more likely they will intermarry. Conversely, the larger the Asian American group, the less contact its members have with members of other groups and the less likely they will intermarry. This theory may explain why from 1980 to 1990 there was an increase in the Asian American population and a decrease in Asian American intermarriage.

Assimilation theory makes the opposite prediction. Proponents argue that intermarriage is an index of group assimilation (Spickard 1989). Thus, the longer Asian groups are in the United States, the more assimilated to American culture they become and the more they couple across racial lines. This argument has been used most frequently to explain differences in rates of intermarriage among specific Asian ethnic groups. For example, Japanese immigrants, unlike Chinese immigrants, were encouraged by the Japanese government to assimilate to American culture (Takaki 1989). This was particularly true after World War II, when Japanese Americans were unjustifiably interned and their loyalty to the American government unfairly questioned (Nagata 1989). As a result, Japanese Americans may have intentionally increased their contact with, adopted the cultural traditions of, and encouraged intermarriage with European Americans more than other Asian American groups.

Status-exchange theory (Merton 1941) is perhaps the most controversial of theories used to explain interracial relationships. This theory



was originally proposed to explain the greater frequency of White female–Black male marriages compared to Black female–White male marriages in the 1940s. According to status-exchange theory, females of higher racial status marry males of lower racial status if in other ways the males have higher status than their female partners (e.g., socioeconomic class). In the case of White female and Black male marriages, Merton (1941) proposed that White females married Black men if the men were of higher socioeconomic status than they were. Since 1941, status-exchange theory has been adapted and applied to marriages between members of other ethnic and racial groups. For example, this theory has been used to describe marriages between American military men and Korean women they met during the Korean War: In this case, Asian American women exchanged their status as exotic symbols for the higher financial status of their European American husbands (Kim 1998). This theory, however, has received little direct empirical support. That is, no study has demonstrated that such status discrepancies exert any direct influence on one's decision to couple across racial lines.

Finally, sex-ratio imbalance theory has been used to explain gender differences in Asian American intermarriage. This theory suggests that since the 1940s there have been more Asian American females than males, and, therefore, Asian American females have had to look for non–Asian American partners. Findings from studies of Asian Indian intermarriage do not support this theory. That is, Asian Indian males outmarry more than do Asian Indian females (Hwang, Saez, and Aguirre 1997).

Despite the prevalence of these theories in the literature, they are limited in their empirical support and in what they tell us about Asian American interracial relationships. For instance, the assimilation and status-exchange theories make predictions about the psychological state of individuals involved in interracial relationships, but few studies have actually tested these hypotheses explicitly. Similarly, the group-size and sex-ratio imbalance theories propose that the sheer number of available partners influences Asian American intermarriage, but they tell us little about the cultural and psychological influences that may be at play.

## RETHINKING ASIAN AMERICAN INTERRACIAL COUPLING

Given the limitations in our current knowledge and understanding of Asian American interracial relationships, researchers have much to gain from assuming a feminist psychological research perspective. Feminist

psychological research methodology assumes a person-centered approach. Landrine and Klonoff (1992), in their article on cultural diversity and methodology in feminist psychology, define person-centered research as research that investigates the intentions and subjective meanings of the research participants, regards the research participant as the primary interpreter or his/her own experience, and combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Furthermore, feminist methodology acknowledges the importance of placing individuals in their surrounding sociocultural context and of viewing individuals holistically (Hare-Mustin 1978).

Most of the existing research on Asian American interracial relationships does not study the subjective experiences of individuals within these relationships but instead makes assumptions about the roles that race and culture play in their relationships. These studies also tend to overlook individual differences within cultural groups that may moderate the influence of cultural values, norms, and stereotypes. Finally, most theories and studies do not view these relationships holistically; that is, they do not consider the dynamic aspects of race, culture, and intimate relationships and how these may change over time. In the next section, we propose a different way of examining Asian American interracial relationships that stems from feminist research methodology. We present preliminary data on Asian American interdating and intermarriage to illustrate our points.

Our preliminary data come from one dating sample and one married sample. The dating sample comprised fifty-four heterosexual dating couples (twenty-two Chinese American female–Chinese American male; twenty European American female–European American male; twelve Chinese American female–European American male), of which at least one partner in each was a student at a large Bay Area university. Couples were involved in committed, monogamous dating relationships lasting, on the average, one and a half years. Couples were recruited from flyers for a larger study of culture and emotion in intimate relationships; only a subset of these findings are reported in this chapter.[1]

The married sample comprised ten interracially married couples, and, therefore, analyses of this sample were not comparative. All ten wives in this sample were Asian American; nine of the ten husbands were European American. The tenth husband was African American.[2] These couples had been married for an average of 13.56 years (SD = 2.31) at the time they participated in our exploratory study; three of the twenty spouses had been previously married. Couples were middle to upper-



middle class and well educated; all had attended college, and most had attended some form of graduate school. This sample was recruited from a small Midwestern community organization focusing on social and political issues. Couples completed questionnaires about their relationships, and a subsample was interviewed for approximately one hour about their relationships. For both samples, we attempted to recruit both Asian female–non-Asian male *and* Asian male–non-Asian female dyads, but we received only one response from a couple of the latter configuration. Therefore, we did not include Asian male–non-Asian female dyads in our analyses. Although our samples are small and lack adequate representation, they illustrate a new way of studying and understanding Asian American interracial relationships.

## THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF BEING "INTERRACIAL" AND/OR "INTERCULTURAL"

As argued by Jones and Thorne (1987), in order to understand the psychological and phenomenological aspects of interracial and intercultural relationships, we must "rediscover the subject" or examine the subjective experience of individuals within these relationships. Interracial couples may vary in the degree and salience of racial and cultural differences and in the influence they have on their relationships. In the existing literature, however, few researchers have asked couples how they view the roles of race and culture in their relationships. In fact, few studies have assessed whether individuals even see their relationships as "interracial." For example, a European American male in our married sample stated, "It never occurred to me, oddly enough, that we were an interracial couple . . . just that she was Chinese and I was Caucasian, and that was fine. But to be an interracial couple . . . it's very interesting *to be defined* that way."

It is possible that by labeling relationships as "interracial," researchers are presupposing differences that might not exist, and in effect, imposing their interpretations onto their research participants. As a result, these terms may obscure other sources of similarity or difference between partners that may have a greater influence on couples than race or culture. For example, Ahren et al. (1981) found that males and females in interracial marriages were more similar in their scores on personality tests than those who married within their racial groups. The impact of these personality similarities may be significantly greater than the influence of race on the daily workings of the relationship.

These sources of similarity or difference may be more salient to the couple than their racial or cultural affiliations. For example, when asked what the first thing was that they noticed about their partners, married couples listed a variety of characteristics, ranging from "his funky glasses" to "her personality"; *none* reported characteristics that were explicitly racial or cultural. It is possible that some of the characteristics reported by the couples are conflated with cultural stereotypes (e.g., "she was shy" may be related to cultural stereotypes of the submissive Asian female), but it is unclear from couples' responses whether this was in fact the case. Interestingly, when asked to describe their ideal mates, only three of the twenty respondents in the married sample mentioned characteristics related to culture. Of these responses, some were general (e.g., "comfortable in more than one cultural context"), whereas others were more specific (e.g., "not of European descent"). It is possible that the subjective experience of being "interracial" differs for couples for whom race and culture were salient constructs during the commencement of their relationships than for couples for whom they were not.

Other assumptions made by social scientists include the confounding of race and culture; "interracial" couples are often assumed to be "intercultural." Although cultural differences are often associated with racial differences, in certain domains of experience, they may not be. For example, interracial unions may occur between individuals of different racial groups that share particular cultural values and beliefs. Fong and Yung (1995/1996) propose that many Asian American women married Jewish American men because both Jewish American and Asian cultures possess high levels of familialism. In our dating sample, interracial Chinese American–European American couples did not differ from Chinese American couples or European American couples in their reported levels of disagreement in areas vulnerable to cultural conflict, that is, the amount of affection in their relationships, their philosophies of life, or their modes of communication. Similarly, couples in our interracial married sample reported little cultural conflict in their relationships (mean = 2.81 [SD = 1.61], on a scale from 1 = not at all, 4 = neutral, and 7 = extremely).

## INTERACTION BETWEEN CULTURE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

All individuals are influenced to some degree by aspects of their culture. How individuals respond to these aspects of culture, however, may vary. A feminist psychological perspective acknowledges that both cultural



factors and individual characteristics influence behavior. In this section, we suggest potential cultural influences and individual characteristics that may influence interracial relationships.

### *Sources of Cultural Influence*

*Values* Cultural contexts influence individuals and their intimate relationships in a number of ways (Berscheid 1999). Culture influences conceptions of romantic love. For example, Ting-Toomey (1994) argues that in collectivistic cultures such as China and Japan, less emphasis is placed on passionate and romantic love than in individualistic cultures. Culture may also influence conceptions of the ideal mate. For example, Buss (1989) found that when choosing mates, men and women in China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Taiwan, and Israel (Palestinian Arabs) placed a higher value on chastity than did men and women in Sweden, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, West Germany, or France, who placed little importance on prior sexual experience when selecting mates. Hatfield and Sprecher (1995) found that American college students valued expressiveness and openness more than Russians or Japanese college students when selecting mates.

*Gender Roles and Expectations* Culture may also influence the gender roles and expectations of individuals in intimate relationships. In many Asian cultures, Confucian tradition views women as subservient to men (especially to their husbands) and as the primary caretakers of their families (especially of their sons, fathers-in-law, and husbands) (Okazaki 1998; Park and Cho 1995). It must be noted that the extent to which cultural beliefs regarding the role of women translate into actual practices varies according to the specific group. For example, women in Hmong culture have less latitude in their behavior than Vietnamese women, who are allowed more dominant roles in the family (C. Ho 1990, as cited in Min et al. 1995). Traditional Confucian norms expect men to be the carrier of the family line and tradition, the "supreme authoritarian" of the household, and the primary breadwinner of the family (Uba 1994). These cultural conceptions of gender roles may influence what individuals seek in their mates as well as how they behave in intimate relationships. For example, cultural expectations that Asian American men will continue the family line may influence their selection of partners and explain why fewer Asian American men than women marry members of other racial groups. Lee and Fernandez (1998) pro-

pose that unlike other Asian American groups, rates of Asian Indian intermarriage are higher among males than females because Asian Indian culture expects women more than men to continue family traditions.

*Cultural stereotypes* Culture may also influence intimate relationships via cultural stereotypes. As stated above, although there is increasing tolerance for interracial coupling, many still view such relationships as abnormal (Kibria 1997). Stereotypes that intercultural couples are dissatisfied in their relationships, suffer from higher rates of divorce, and have children with low self-esteem and confused identities abound, even though recent empirical research debunks these stereotypes (Cauce et al. 1992; Mass 1992). For instance, in our dating sample, interracial Chinese American–European American couples did not differ from Chinese American couples or European American couples in how satisfied they were with their relationships (mean = 5.69 [SD = 1.11], on a scale from 1 = very unhappy, 4 = neutral, 7 = perfectly happy).

As reported by the married couples in our study, Asian American interracial couples are often stereotyped as military men with their war brides or as one respondent put it, "White guys with their Oriental pearl, exotic wife." These stereotypes may influence how individuals perceive interracial couples and may result in prejudice and discrimination. For example, an Asian American female respondent from our married sample said, "It's not usually anything overt. But it's the way that the maitre d' in a four-star restaurant will look at us and then look around and then decide where to seat us, which is not always the best place."

In addition to stereotypes about interracial couples, individuals may be influenced by stereotypes about Asian American men and women (Jackson et al. 1997; Walsh 1990). Asian American women are often depicted as sexual and domestic (Louie 1993; Chan 1988; Kitano and Chai 1982; Okazaki 1998; Ranard and Gilzow 1989; Ratliff, Moon, and Bonacci 1978). These stereotypes are commonly found in films and periodicals. Mayall and Russell (1993) examined the content of pornographic materials and found that the Asian women were depicted either as "sweet young lotus blossoms" or objects of bondage; Louie (1993) found that images of Asian American women as sexual and domestic pervade popular novels. The influence of stereotypes of Asian American women on interracial marriage has been most widely discussed in the context of marriages between Asian women and American military men. Kim (1997) suggests that during the Korean War, American military men may have been influenced by stereotypes of the exotic nature of Korean women. Similarly, many Korean women may have perceived American servicemen as "superior" and "powerful," which may have increased their attractiveness as potential husbands.



Unlike Asian women, Asian men have long been stereotyped as asexual and/or effeminate. These stereotypes can be traced to early twentieth-century literature (Teng 1997). Other stereotypes of Asian American men include the "wise kung fu master" and the cold-hearted and shrewd businessman/gangster (Okazaki 1998). These images were conceived during World War II and have been perpetuated through films and television. Although these images convey a more masculine Asian man, paradoxically, he still remains relatively asexual, untrustworthy, and undesirable. Findings from empirical studies suggest that European American college students endorse these stereotypes: Asian males are perceived as overly studious, socially inept, weak, cunning, hostile, and unemotional. Asian American males are also rated lowest in physical and social attractiveness and are seen as more feminine than males of other minority groups (Jackson et al. 1997). Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995) found that African American and Latina women excluded Asian American men as viable marriage partners. Significantly less research has examined stereotypes of European American men and women, who are often depicted as symbols of the dominant, privileged culture. More importantly, research has not determined whether stereotypes about specific cultural groups impede or promote interracial relationships.

### *Sources of Individual Variation*

Culture may influence individuals and their intimate relationships through conceptions of love, ideal partners, gender-role expectations, and stereotypes. How individuals respond to these cultural influences, however, may depend on various factors, including their cultural identity, awareness of gender issues, exposure and experience with members of different cultural groups, and their personalities.

*Cultural Identity* Individuals vary in the extent to which they identify with their cultural heritages, which may influence the roles culture and race play in their intimate relationships. For example, individuals who do not have strong cultural identities may not consider cultural heritage an important criterion for mate selection, whereas individuals with

strong cultural identities may. Cultural identity may influence the meaning of interracial coupling. For example, Tsai, Ying, and Lee (2000) found that overseas-born Chinese Americans had "unidimensional" cultural identities, whereas American-born Chinese Americans had "bidimensional" cultural identities. Individuals with unidimensional cultural identities perceive their cultural identities as being inversely related to each other (e.g., the more Chinese one is, the less American one is). Individuals with bidimensional cultural identities perceive them as being independent of each other (e.g., how Chinese one is does not relate to how American one is). Thus, overseas-born Asian Americans may equate intermarriage with the loss of their Asian heritage; as a result, they may rarely engage in intermarriage. American-born Asian Americans, however, may not equate intermarriage with the loss of their Asian heritage, and therefore, engage in intermarriage more frequently. This may explain why intermarriage is higher among American-born than overseas-born Asian Americans (Lee and Fernandez 1998).

The meaning of intercultural and interracial coupling may also depend on one's stage of cultural identity development. For example, for some groups, ethnic identity may comprise three sequential developmental stages: (1) foreclosure, (2) immersion-emersion, and (3) internalization (Phinney 1990). Asian Americans who have been raised in primarily European American communities (with little exposure to Asian culture) may be at the foreclosed stage of ethnic identity development. That is, they may identify with European American culture more than Asian American culture. This may influence how likely they are to date other Asian Americans. Consistent with this hypothesis, Fujino (1997) found that the more Asian American males and females endorsed mainstream European American standards of beauty and power, the more they refused to date Asian Americans. Individuals who are exploring their Asian American heritage (e.g., by taking courses on Asian American history, joining Asian American community groups) may be at the immersion-emersion stage of ethnic identity development and may reject individuals of different cultural backgrounds as potential mates. For example, in Walsh (1990), an interview respondent was quoted as saying, "I don't see how Asian women can take Asian-American Studies courses and learn about how American culture has 'feminized' Asian men [i.e., stereotyped Asian men as effeminate], and then continue to date white men" (Walsh 1990).

On the other hand, individuals who base their cultural identities less on external criteria (e.g., the cultural background of their friends and



partners) and more on their own internal standards (e.g., what *meaning* they attach to their cultural background) may be at the internalization stage of ethnic identity development. Therefore, they may not view interracial coupling as a threat to their cultural identity. So far, no studies have examined what role cultural identity has, if any, on non-Asians' decisions to date and marry individuals of Asian descent.

*Awareness of Gender Inequalities* Another source of variation is how aware individuals are of traditional gender roles, expectations, and inequalities, and how acceptable they find them. For example, awareness of traditional gender inequalities may vary by cultural orientation. Individuals who are more traditionally Asian may accept traditional gender inequalities, whereas more Americanized individuals may not. Asian American women who desire more egalitarian relationships may choose to date individuals from cultural groups that endorse less traditional gender roles (Fujino 1997). As one of the married sample participants remarked, "From the very beginning I was aware that as a girl, I had less rights and privileges than my brother, so when people ask when did I become a feminist, I say when I realized my brother had privileges I didn't. And so from the very beginning I determined for myself that I wanted to be in an equal relationship. I've always said 'I will be your partner . . . not your subservient wife.'"

Not surprisingly, Fong and Yung (1996) found that Chinese and Japanese American women who were feminists had the most difficult time accepting traditional Asian values that placed women in positions subordinate to men. These women also reported being the most drawn to non-Asian men who were likely to have nonsexist attitudes. Interestingly, Fujino (1997) found that Americanized college-age Asian American men also sought dating partners who did not possess traits characteristic of traditional Asian women. The more they believed that Asian American women were obedient, deferential, and polite, the more they dated European American women.

*Exposure to and Experiences with Members of Other Cultures* Although stereotypes about interracial couples and about members of particular cultural groups abound, individuals may vary in their responses to these stereotypes, depending on their exposure to and experience with members of the stereotyped group. Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans who have limited exposure to Asian Americans may be more susceptible to such stereotypes than those who have had extensive ex-

posure to Asian Americans. Furthermore, depending on the previous experience one has had with members of specific groups, particular stereotypes may be more salient than others, which may influence mating preferences. For example, an Asian American woman who is influenced by negative stereotypes about Asian American female–European American male relationships may be less likely to couple with a European American male than an Asian American woman who is less influenced by these stereotypes.

*Personality* Last, but not least, personality may be a source of variation in the roles that culture and race play in intimate relationships. Personality variables may influence the meanings and consequences of interracial and intercultural relationships. For example, Cottrell (1990) has proposed that individuals who date or marry across cultural lines are either marginal, rebellious, detached, emancipated, adventurous, or embracers of culture. Although no studies have examined whether these descriptors are accurate, they do suggest that the meaning of interracial and intercultural relationships might differ by personality type. Whereas "cultural embracers" may seek partners of different cultures in order to learn more about the world, "marginal" persons may be involved in intercultural relationships because no other partners are available.

## THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Feminist psychological perspectives also emphasize the importance of viewing individuals holistically (Hare-Mustin 1978). The bulk of the literature on interracial and intercultural dating examines relationships at a single moment in time. Few, if any, studies have examined how cultural differences that exist in the beginning of a relationship change over the course of the relationship. Research demonstrates that partners become more similar over time (Smith and Moen 1998; Gruber-Baldini, Schaie, and Willis 1995, as cited by Berscheid and Reis 1998). Thus, it is possible that initial cultural differences may become less pronounced, especially as the couple creates its own culture. Interestingly, Asian American wives and their European American husbands in our married sample reported no differences in how "American" or how "Asian" they felt. Although it is possible that these couples were similar in their cultural orientation when they began dating, it is also possible that over the course of their marriages, they have become more culturally similar than different. For example, one of the respondents from our married



sample wrote on her questionnaire, "People have assumed that I have assumed Caucasian ways, when in reality my spouse has assumed more Asian ways."

Thus, the couple's "culture" may be a synthesis of the cultural customs and traditions that each partner brings to the relationship as well as their joint experiences as a couple. A respondent from the married sample provided this example: "We were not compatible in child-rearing practices and we really had to make that mesh. . . . We had some major differences in how you handle babies, how you handle discipline, how you handle cleanliness, and how you handle eating and just everything! I wouldn't say we were incompatible but we had a lot of things to work out so that we were both satisfied with how we were raising our kids."

The roles of race and culture in intimate relationships may change at different stages of the relationship. In the context of short-term relationships, both females and males report physical attractiveness as being the most important traits in their mates (Buss 1998; Regan and Berscheid 1997). In the context of long-term relationships, both males and females seek partners that are kind, understanding, and intelligent and that have other qualities that relate to being a good mate. Thus, the physical characteristics of individuals of different racial and cultural groups may be important for women and men in the context of dating and short-term relationships, but they may be less important in the long run. Our married couples reported such changes in their conceptions of their ideal mates.

Similarly, social pressures exerted on the couple based on their racial and cultural differences may change as the relationship develops. For example, negative family reactions to interracial relationships have been cited as a considerable source of stress for Asian American intermarried couples (Sung 1990). However, our married couples reported that their families' acceptance of their relationships significantly increased from the time they began dating to when they were married to the time they participated in our study ($F[1,16] = 4.30$, $p = .05$).

Of course, conflicts due to cultural and racial differences may also arise at different stages of the relationship. For example, although couples may resolve their cultural differences at one stage of their relationship, these cultural differences may resurface at later stages, for instance, during milestones for which they may hold different cultural traditions and expectations (child rearing, care of aging parents). Mackey and O'Brien (1998) found that ethnicity influences how couples resolve conflict associated with these different milestones. They compared the

amount of conflict experienced by African American, Mexican American, and European American intraracial couples during the "early years," "child-rearing years," and "empty-nest years." Compared to the other two groups, African Americans reported more conflict in the early years. During the child-rearing years, however, African Americans reported no increases in conflict, whereas the other two groups did. Cultural differences in conflict associated with different milestones may cause even greater distress in interracial and intercultural relationships. Consistent with this hypothesis, our married couples reported cultural conflicts around child rearing and care of elder relatives.

Finally, cultural influences and cultural categories themselves may change over time. For example, American stereotypes of Asian women are becoming more masculine (Espiritu 1997). Taylor, Lee, and Stern (1995) and Taylor and Stern (1995) found that Asian American women are represented more in technical and business magazines than in women's and hobby magazines. Asian American female images occurred in work rather than in outdoor, social, or home settings. In these contexts, Asian American women are presented as individuals who are more focused on their careers than on their families, contradicting older stereotypes that portray Asian American women as domestic and submissive. How will these emerging stereotypes influence interracial intimate relationships? The emergence of a pan-Asian ethnicity also demonstrates the dynamic nature of culture. As described by Kibria (1997), the birth of a pan-Asian ethnicity may alter second-generation Asian Americans' conceptions of interracial and intercultural dating.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Feminist psychological methodology emphasizes the importance of understanding individual experience, allowing individuals to interpret their own experience, viewing people holistically, and integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. These recommendations are extremely relevant for research on interracial coupling. Future studies must explore how members of "interracial" and "intercultural" relationships define themselves. Studies that combine qualitative and quantitative research methods can explore the various meanings of involvement in interracial and intercultural relationships as well as the generalizability of such meanings. By including measures of both cultural variables (e.g., awareness of cultural stereotypes) and individual differences (e.g., cultural identity, gender-role expectations, personality), we can better understand how individuals respond to their cultures and how these interactions influence intimate relationships. With respect to gender, most studies of Asian American intermarriage focus primarily on Asian American female–European American male unions. More research that examines interracial unions formed by Asian American males is needed. In addition, most of the existing research focuses on heterosexual relationships. Asian American interracial unions also exist in gay and lesbian communities (Hoang 1991). Future studies should more explicitly examine the interaction of gender and culture in these relationships. Studies should also explore the extent to which the surrounding cultural milieu and acceptance of interracial coupling influences such relationships. Finally, longitudinal studies that follow couples over time can examine how culture and relationships mutually influence each other and how these influences change during various stages of intimate relationships.



## A FINAL CAVEAT

Thus far, we have argued in this chapter that using a feminist perspective will greatly advance our understanding of Asian American intermarriage and interdating. While this is true, we have one caveat. It is possible that in some cases, the feminist perspective may require some modification in order to be applicable to groups of non-Western cultural descent. Feminist ideals place great emphasis on equal rights of all groups; this emphasis is based on American values of individualism and justice. For women and men of non-Western descent, however, gender equality and inequality may be less important, may have different meanings, and may even assume different forms. Thus, we must carefully assess the extent to which we are imposing our cultural norms, standards, values, and ideals on individuals with cultural traditions different from our own.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have argued that existing research on Asian American interracial and intercultural dating and marriage is limited. We have suggested ways of studying Asian American interracial relationships by using feminist psychology research methodology and have illustrated these suggestions with findings from our preliminary work. Systematic empirical research will help us dispel inaccurate stereotypes about the individuals within these relationships and about the relationships themselves. Furthermore, such studies will advance our knowledge about an

issue that is of particular concern to the Asian American community. Most importantly, future research will inform us about the ways in which race and culture influence relationships—knowledge that is critical as our society grows ever more multicultural and as our interracial and intercultural interactions become ever more intimate.

## NOTES

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1. For more information about the Chinese American and European American intraethnic couples, see Tsai and Levenson (1997).

2. Our married sample comprised six native-born Japanese American women married to European American men; two Korean or Korean Chinese women married to European American men; one Korean American woman married to an African American male; and one Chinese American woman married to a European American male. When quoting individuals from this sample, we will refer to their ethnicity as "Asian American" in order to maintain confidentiality.

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CHAPTER 13

# Arranged Marriages

## *What's Love Got to Do with It?*

Monisha Pasupathi

In American culture, choice is related to happiness, independence, autonomy, and equality. We do what we choose longer, with more pleasure, and greater ambition (e.g., Cordova and Lepper 1996), and what we choose is to a great extent who we are. Or so it seems, looking both at the world in which we live and at the worlds of social and developmental psychology in which I work. What could be more self-evident, then, than the idea that arranged marriages, which deny the individual the power to make a very important life choice, are an anachronistic and oppressive practice?[1] Further, newspaper and magazine articles (e.g., Lamb 1999) attribute rising rates of female suicide in countries like China and Pakistan partly to arranged marriage practices in these cultures. But a quick count of my own relatives and friends suggests that those whose cultural backgrounds provide them with both alternatives—a marriage of choice and one that is parentally arranged—don't always take the route of choice. The fact that people who are well-acquainted with and open to Western marriage practices do not necessarily adopt those practices suggests that there may be more to arranged marriages than oppression, depression, and suicide.

### ON A PERSONAL NOTE: WHAT HAVE I GOT TO DO WITH ARRANGED MARRIAGES?

I am the product of a love marriage between two cultures, that of southern India and that of the southern United States. My father, the son of