

Marital Struggles Experienced by Interracial Couples: a Content Analysis of Japanese and
American Blogs

Aiko Kawano

Undergraduate, Saint Mary's College

akawan01@saintmarys.edu

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Faculty Advisor: Dr. Susan Alexander

Email Address: salexand@saintmarys.edu

Abstract

Interracial marriage is the marriage among two individuals who share different racial/ethnical backgrounds and cultures with each other. The number of interracial marriages has increased in both the United States and Japan, which leads to various struggles that interracial couples must face on a daily basis. This study examines the struggles of interracial couples between Japanese women and White American men described in four blogs written by Japanese women. Of these four blogs, two originate from Japan (one couple with children and one couple without children) and the other two are from the United States with the same condition. Findings reveal that social networking, the division of house chores, and extended family relationships are the most frequent areas of struggles among interracial couples regardless of whether or not they have children and their country of residence. However, interracial couples with children have more struggles over household chore than those who do not have children. Lastly, interracial couples in the United States report more social networking struggles compared to interracial couples in Japan. The findings suggest that having children and the country of residence are huge influences on the relationships of interracial couples. The paper argues that increased media's portrayals of interracial marriage may help interracial couples relate to each other.

In the United States of America, Census data shows that the number of interracial marriage has been increasing (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998). As interracial marriages increase, interracial couples may experience struggles due to their cultural differences, but how do they learn to address these struggles? In the U.S., media, such as television programs, influence the audience's understanding of interracial relationships. For example, in the television program *Modern Family*, Gloria and Jay are married, interracial couple living in the U.S.; Gloria is Colombian and Jay is American. Lloyd and Levitan (2009) discuss how this show depicts the couple's cultural struggle, such as the language barrier and other cultural differences. When Gloria speaks too fast, her husband, Jay does not understand what she says because of her accent. When the couple does not agree with each other, Gloria tends to bring her own culture as her excuse, which Jay does not fully understand.

Given the increase in interracial marriages and the stereotypical depictions of the struggles such couple face, the purpose of this study is to examine how interracial couples view the struggles in their marriage. This paper finds that interracial married couples comprised of Japanese women and White American men, struggle with similar marital struggles regardless of the presence of children or country of residence. An increase in images of interracial marriages in media may help these couples understand the struggles particular to interracial marriage.

Social Exchange Theory

Interracial marriage is one example when people experience and share their cultural differences. Social Exchange Theory is, according to Homans (1981), "the application of general psychological propositions to the explanation of social behavior" (p. 698). Homans explains that an individual's behavior affects others' behaviors, and this begins during childhood. From the moment a child is born, she is interacting with others, such as parents and siblings. As

children grow older, they begin interacting with people outside the family such as peers, in a school or church setting. Because people's beliefs and values differ, children begin to understand differences exist between their cultural values and beliefs and other cultures. Recognizing differences among cultural groups can affect an individual's behaviors. Social exchange theorist, DeLamater and Ward (2013) explain that "A's behavior reinforced B's behavior (in a two party relation between actors A and B)" (p. 62).

According to Social Exchange Theory, one's behavior is influenced in both positive and negative ways; however, when one's behavior is affected in a positive way, it makes it possible to minimize the costs and maximize the benefits of the interaction. For instance, when one person in a relationship always says "thank you," they expect the other person in the relationship to perform the same behavior. Thus, parents model such acts for their children to imitate. DeLamater and Ward (2013) state that "behavior is a function of payoffs, whether the payoffs are provided by the nonhuman environment or other humans" (p. 62). Engaging in positive behaviors not only changes the other's behavior for the better, it also can be thought of as a "payoff" (DeLamater and Ward, 2013, p. 62). Similarly, one's behaviors can affect others negatively. For instance, when one uses vulgar words in front of another, the other may start using such language thinking it is the norm. These two individuals are engaged in social exchange, but the exchange may be considered a negative one.

Although Social Exchange Theory reveals certain patterns, not everyone reacts the same way to the social exchange. Homans (1981) points out that "each single exchange alters the value to each person of the action the other takes toward him or her" (p. 698). Interacting with different individuals enables one to realize the differences and similarities among groups, and this essentially changes one's own behaviors. Because every exchange is different, it can be

difficult for people to realize the influence of social interactions overall. Additionally, different cultures hold different behaviors as the norm, thus the cultural environment impacts the interpretation of the behavior. In addition to cultural differences, Social Exchange Theory also views one's family background as important to how people are affected by social interactions. Even within the same race/ethnic groups, people may have different reactions to social exchanges based upon family background. Thus, when examining interracial relationships, both the cultural context and family background shape one's acceptance of such relationships.

Application of Social Exchange Theory to Interracial Relationships

Social Exchange Theory can be applied to interracial relationships in the United States and Japan. When two individuals are in an interracial relationship, for equal social exchange to occur they must understand each other's differences. For example, when a couple does not speak the same language, one of them must learn the language that the other speaks. Social Exchange Theory suggests that each must weigh the costs and benefits of learning this new language. If the couple is planning to reside in a nation in which only one of these languages is typically spoken, then this cultural context may be a determinant factor in selecting one language over another. Or, the couple may decide to take mutual advantage of the opportunity to learn a new language from one another. Couples from the same racial or ethnic group may not have this same social exchange opportunity since they already share culture and language.

Being different from another can help an individual better understand their ethnic identity. The process of social exchange in interracial relationships, whether in the U.S. or Japan, impacts one's behavior in the relationship. The question this research project sets out to examine, is how do social processes affect the people in the interracial relationship?

Literature Review

Lee and Yamanaka (1990) and Zhang and Van Hook (2009) report that interracial marriage has been increasing in the U.S., and Asian Americans make up a significant percentage of those interracial marriages. In 1990, the overall rate of Asian American interracial marriage across the U.S. was 25% (Zhang, Van Hook, 2009, p. 105). Of that 25%, 15.7% were Chinese Americans, 34.2% were Japanese Americans, and 31.8% were Korean Americans (Zhang and Van Hook, 2009, p. 105). For Asian Americans, forming an interracial marriage is highly influenced by their parents, especially those parents with traditional values. According to Zhang and Van Hook (2009), Asian women acculturate faster than Asian men, and they tend to marry more frequently (p. 105). Lee and Yamanaka (1990) find that Asian American women prefer to date white American men rather than Asian American men (p. 290). Lastly, Zhang and Van Hook (2009) find that Asian Americans who have more white friends tend to form interracial relationships (p. 107). Clearly, social interaction, including romantic interaction, is one factor in creating an interracial relationship.

Previous research has looked at the success of interracial marriages. Gudykunst and Mody (2002) note that Japanese romantic relationship culture is less intimate than the American romantic relationship culture (p. 242). In terms of forming an interracial relationship, Gudykunst and Mody (2002) also found that the chance of forming an interracial relationship was higher among more educated people (p. 244). When interracial couples communicate successfully, they are more likely to have a successful interracial marriage, which is defined by Gudykunst and Mody (2002) as sacrifice, patience, and commitment (p. 247). In other words, a successful interracial marriage exists because both the husband and wife accept each other's differences.

Although successful interracial couples understand each other's different cultures, integrating with others outside of their marriage is a different issue. Interracial married couples do report experiencing various challenges throughout their marriage in terms of fitting into the community. According to Hibbler (2002), these couples indicate that they did not feel like they fully belonged to either culture (p. 138). Sometimes, they do not get along with their own families due to interracial marriage. Qian and Licher (2001) argue that marital assimilation for couples of a white American and a minority is extremely important for a successful marriage (p. 291).

There are various factors that impact interracial couples' ability to assimilate into one another's culture, including religion. Perry (2013) found that white Protestants are less open to the idea of interracial marriage and some believe that interracial marriage is "sinful" (p. 427). Perry (2013) also found that whites who attend diverse congregations show more support of interracial marriage than those who do not (p. 427). People who are engaged in private religious activities, such as praying and reading sacred books, support interracial marriages (Perry, 2013, p. 426). Perry (2013) found that whites who believe the literalist view of the Bible are less supportive of interracial marriage (p. 427). Although one's religion does not always predict if one will support interracial marriage or not, certain religion practices do influence how individuals view interracial marriage.

Some interracial couples not only have different religions, but they also may have different values in other areas such as raising children. Want (2013) found that interracial couples struggle to name their biracial children (p. 2). Want (2013) discusses how the number of foreigners living in Japan increased, thus the number of interracial marriages started to increase (p. 3). However, interracial couples and their biracial children experience various prejudices or

discrimination. When interracial marriage first became common in post-World War II Japan, biracial children were labelled, such as Ainoko (mixed kid) or Ha-fu (half-Japanese) (Want, 2013, p. 4). Today, interracial couples carefully choose their children's names since the children have two different cultures. When children of interracial couples have a name representing only one part of their culture, they are likely to face bullying, isolation, and even abandonment.

Interracial couples tend to argue about their children's names only at birth, however. The more frequent conflict among interracial couples is about their children's education path. Cheng and Powell (2007) suggest that the first few years of raising biracial children are extremely important in terms of education, especially if the parents do not have a similar educational background (p. 1047). Cheng and Powell (2007) found differences between biracial families and monoracial families in terms of educational goals and family resources (p. 1050). Monoracial families have more educational resources than biracial families, but biracial families have more educational goals than monoracial families. Specifically, families with a white father and Asian mother tend to invest more on their children's education than other interracial couples. Although there are patterns in interracial couples' resources for their children's education, the essential factor on an education is family income.

A family's income is important, and in interracial relationships each culture holds a different view of its management. Woolley (2003) argues that in North American culture, people cherish egalitarian marriage, meaning that both the husband and wife work and take care of family duties equally (p. 108). In the United States, men and women unequally earn, spend, and share money in their marriage, thus managing money in the family gives power to the person who handles the money. In a study of traditional British and American working-class

households, Woolley (2003) found that the wife takes care of day-to-day money management, while the husband makes important decisions such as buying a house or car (p. 112). By contrast, in upper-class households, the husband tends to take care of both managing day-to-day money and important decisions, and the wife gets an allowance as she wishes (Woolley, 2003, p. 113). Overall, Woolley (2003) found that among Americans 56 % of men and 48% of women indicated that they handle the family finance together; however, in Asian households, the wives are mostly in charge of the family finances (p. 111).

Marital conflicts among interracial couples result from financial issues in the family. However, this happens more often in the early stage of a marriage when incomes are smaller. Papp, Cummings, and Coeke-Morey (2009) identify several sources of marital conflicts. The most frequent conflict between the husband and wife concerns child-rearing, followed by conflicts over household chores, communication, and leisure (p. 95). Family finance ranked in the 5th in terms of the most common conflicts; 18.3 -19.4% of couples agreed that money issues caused disagreements (Papp, Cummings, and Coeke-Morey, 2009, p. 96).

Previous research suggests that interracial relationships are increasing, but maintaining a successful interracial marriage can be challenging for a number of reasons. To build upon the existing research, this study focuses on how interracial couples, comprised of a Japanese woman and a white American man, view their interracial marriage and the struggles they may face.

Methodology

The data for this study was obtained through a content analysis of four blogs by four interracial couples consisting of Japanese women and White American men; two blogs are from the U.S. and the others are from Japan. These couples describe their marriage as an interracial

marriage. Blogs are websites that allow ordinary people to post their opinions on the Internet. In blogs, people express their opinions freely, and anyone can read their public posts.

The blogs were selected on September, 10, 2015, by using Yahoo Japan by using the following key words; interracial marriage, Americans, and living in the United States/Japan. A purpose sample was selected containing two blogs written by biracial couples from the U.S. *Him, Japanese, and Me*ⁱ and *My Ordinary Life in New York*ⁱⁱ and two blogs from Japan *Fun Days with My American Husband Ame-chan, a Western Japanese Whitebear, Our Baby Buddy and Our Lovely Dog Maui*ⁱⁱⁱ and *My Interracial Marriage with an American-My Diary with My 2 Half-Children*^{iv}. These blogs were selected because they are comparable in terms of the frequency of updates. Two blogs that are updated currently are *Him, Japanese, and Me* (from the U.S.) and *Every day with my American Husband Ame-chan and a Western Japanese Whitebear* (from Japan). The other two blogs that have stopped updating are *My Ordinary Life in New York* (from the U.S.) and *My Interracial Marriage with an American-My Diary with My 2 Half-Children* (from Japan). The current blogs started running in 2007 and 2009 respectively, and discontinued blogs started in 2009 and 2012 and stopped in 2013 and 2015. In all four blogs, most of the posts are written by the wives (Japanese women) with targeting other interracial couples.

The number of posts on the current blogs is approximately two hundred posts and fifty posts for each of the discontinued blogs. To obtain a random sample, every fourth post on each blog was coded starting on October 12, 2015 until October 29, 2015. This resulted in a total sample of one hundred thirty of blog posts. Of these one hundred thirty blogs, fifty one posts contained more than one category, and this resulted in obtaining a total sample of one hundred eighty one posts.

Each post was coded for the following themes: discrimination by strangers, family, and co-workers, isolation in family, community, and work, house chores, language of communication (English/Japanese), family finance (who handles money), raising biracial children (naming and education), religion (practicing, holidays, and children), extended family relationships, social networking within couples and outside of marriage, pets, free time, and other. For this study, discrimination indicates the situation when an interracial couple is treated differently than the same-race/ethnicity couples by strangers, family and co-workers. Isolation indicates the experience when the interracial couples are separated from others such as family, community, and at work. Language of communication suggests the language that interracial couples use such as English, Japanese, or both. Raising biracial children includes the names of biracial children and their education path. Religion indicates interracial couples' practice for their religion, what holidays they celebrate, and how their biracial children follow which religion. Extended family relationships include the relationships between the people in the interracial couples and their families such as children, parents, and siblings. Lastly, social networking indicates a connection between interracial couples and their neighbors in the larger community.

¹ The original blog title is 彼と日本語と私

¹ The original blog title is ニューヨークで普通に生活

¹ The original blog title is アメリカ人のアメちゃん、関西人の whitebear、ベビーの Buddy に愛犬マウイと過ごす楽しい毎日♪

¹ The original blog title is アメリカ人と国際結婚＊ハーフちゃん 2人子育て日記

Findings

The data from this study shows that, overall, interracial couples comprised of Japanese women and American men, regardless of children and residential country, experience frequent struggles in their marriage.

Table 1 Marital struggle regarding children in interracial couples in Japan and the U.S.			
Category	Children	No Children	TOTAL
Social Networking Within Couple	18 (10%)	15 (8.3%)	33 (18%)
House Chores	15 (8%)	7 (3.9%)	22 (12%)
Others	5 (2.8%)	10 (5.5%)	15 (8.5%)
Extended Family Relationships	5 (2.8%)	10 (5.5%)	15 (8.5%)
Language Communication (English/Japanese)	2 (1%)	11 (6%)	13 (8%)
Free Time	8 (4.5%)	4 (2.2%)	12 (6.5%)
Religion (Holidays)	2 (1%)	9 (5%)	11 (6%)
Raising Biracial Children (Education)	10 (6%)	0 (0%)	10 (5.5%)
Social Networking Outside of Marriage	3 (1.7%)	7 (3.9%)	10 (5.5%)
Isolation in Family	5 (2.8%)	4 (2.2%)	9 (5%)
Family Finance	5 (2.8%)	3 (1.7%)	8 (4.5%)
Isolation in Community	5 (2.8%)	2 (1%)	7 (4%)
Pets	6 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	6 (3%)
Discrimination by Strangers	3 (2%)	1 (.6%)	4 (2%)
Isolation at Work	2 (1%)	1 (.6%)	3 (1.5%)
Raising Biracial Children (Naming)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
Religion (Practicing)	0 (0%)	1 (.6%)	1 (.5%)
TOTAL	96 (53%)	85 (47%)	181 (100%)

Table 1 shows that, overall, Social Networking within Couple is the most frequent area of conflict regardless of presence of children or not (18%). Comparing the struggles between interracial couples with children and without children, interracial couples with children show a slightly higher percentage of struggles (10%) compared to interracial couple without children (8.3%). Examples of struggles about Social Networking within Couple include statements such as, “ever since we had our son, our relationship changed; more arguments and work, and no free time for the two of us,” which is made by a Japanese woman from the U.S. A Japanese woman

from the U.S. said, “American guys don’t apologize and make excuses to get away from a bad situation, and I feel so bad for all the Japanese women with American men.”

Conflict over House Chores is the second most frequent area of struggle for interracial couples with children (8%), followed by Raising Biracial Children (6%). Examples of conflict over House Chores struggles include a statement from a Japanese woman from the U.S. who said, “My husband never listens to what I told him about our daily chores...I sometimes get really upset.” Struggles of Raising Biracial Children (Education) include a statement, such as “it is so hard to teach our kids English because my husband is busy, and even when he teaches English, I feel like I’m forcing them to speak English” from a woman from Japan.

The third most frequent struggles overall is Extended Family Relationships (8.5%). In terms of Extended Family Relationships, interracial couples with no children had a higher percentage of struggles (5.5%) compared to the interracial couples with children (2.8%). Examples of Extended Family Relationships include comments, such as “it is so hard to live in Japan sometimes since we cannot see our American family, especially, when someone passes away.”

Language Communication (English/Japanese) is also a common struggle among interracial couples without children (6%). Examples of Language Communication (English/Japanese) include explanations, such as “I cannot follow what people are saying,” and “[when I corrected my husband’s Japanese,] he got really upset.” Another area in which interracial couples with no children struggle is in regard to Religion (Holidays) (5%), while only 1% of interracial couples with children report a struggle in this area. Examples of Religion (Holidays) struggles include comments such as, “I [wife] do not know anything about church on Christmas day.”

One area that both couples with and without children report as a struggle is Family Finance. Interracial couples with children indicate it as a struggle more (2.8%) than those who do not have children (1.7%). Family Finance examples include statements such as, “In our household, I’m definitely the one who handles the money. When my husband needs money, he just asks me, and I just give it to him.”

Overall, interracial couples in Japan and the United States show approximately the same frequencies of struggles regardless of their county of residence.

Categories	Japan	United States	TOTAL
Social Networking Within Couple	11 (6.1%)	22 (12%)	33 (18.1%)
House Chores	9 (5%)	13 (7.1%)	22 (12.1%)
Extended Family Relationships	9 (5%)	6 (3.3%)	15 (8.3%)
Raising Biracial Children (Education)	7 (3.9%)	8 (4.4%)	15 (8.3%)
Language Communication (English/Japanese)	11 (6.1%)	2 (1.1%)	13 (7.2%)
Others (Food)	7 (3.9%)	5 (2.7%)	12 (6.6%)
Religion (Holidays)	8 (4.4%)	3 (1.7%)	11 (6.1%)
Social Networking Outside of Marriage	8 (4.4%)	2 (1.1%)	10 (5.5%)
Isolation in Family	5 (2.8%)	4 (2.2%)	9 (5%)
Family Finance	2(1.1%)	6 (3.3%)	8 (4.4%)
Free Time	5 (2.8%)	2 (1.1%)	7 (3.9%)
Isolation in Community	2 (1.1%)	5 (2.7%)	7 (3.8%)
Pets	0 (0%)	6 (3.3%)	6 (3.3%)
Discrimination by Strangers	2 (1.1%)	2 (1.1%)	4 (2.2%)
Isolation at Work	0 (0%)	3 (1.7%)	3 (1.7%)
Others (Customs)	2 (1.1%)	1 (.6%)	3 (1.7%)
Raising Biracial Children (Naming)	1 (.6%)	1 (.6%)	2 (1.2%)
Religion (Practicing)	1 (.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (.6%)
TOTAL	90 (50%)	91 (50%)	181 (100%)

As Table 2 shows, Social Networking within Couple is the most frequently blogged about struggle (18.1%). However, this struggle varies significantly by nation; 12% of couples in the U.S. report this struggle versus 6.1% of couples in Japan. Examples of Social Networking with

Couple include statements, from a Japanese woman, “we argued because my husband did not care about his own country, and I pointed that out, which turned into an argument.”

Household chores is the second most frequent struggle (12.1%), and again couples in the U.S. are more likely (7.1%) to report this versus couples in Japan (5%). Examples of struggles from House Chores include statements from a Japanese woman in the U.S., “my husband never does dishes even though he says he would.” “My husband says something bad about me being a house wife, and he doesn’t even help me with the house chores,” said a Japanese woman from Japan.

Extended Family Relationships, Raising Biracial Children (Education), and Others rank in as the third most frequent struggles (8.3%). Extended Family Relationships examples include a statement from a Japanese woman in the U.S., such as, “I don’t like my mother-in-law. She makes fun of me a lot, and I just don’t want to be with her at all.”

In terms of Raising Biracial Children (Education), interracial couples in Japan and the U.S. show the close level of struggles (3.9% and 4.4%) respectively. Examples of Raising Biracial Children (Education) include comments from a Japanese woman in the U.S., such as “I got really upset because my husband thinks that it is bad to show a cellphone screen to babies, and I disagree with him,” and “[we argued because] I did not want my kids to watch American shows because they are bad influences” said a Japanese woman in Japan.

Interracial couples in Japan show a higher rate of struggles of Religion (Holidays) (6.1%) compared to couples in the U.S. (1.7%). Language Communication (Japanese/English) is also more often brought up among interracial couples in Japan (6.1%) and in the U.S. (1.1%).

One area of significant difference is Pets. The data suggests that interracial couples in the U.S. have this as a struggle (3.3%) while no interracial couples in Japan report this (0%). This is

a significant difference in terms of countries. An example of struggles with Pets includes claims, such as “even though I am sick, I had to take care of our dog, and this is such a torture,” reported by a Japanese woman in the U.S.

The overall data suggests that interracial couples with or without children and living in Japan or the United States have similar patterns of struggles. Regardless of children and residential country, interracial couples indicate that Social Network within Couple, House Chores, and Extended Family Relationships are among their top struggles.

Discussion

Creating diverse environments in the U.S. is important since people who have better understanding of different cultures are less likely to stereotype. As Lee and Yamanaka (1990) and Zhang and Van Hook (2009) report, the number of interracial marriages has been increasing in the United States. The 1960 U.S. Census reports that there were 29 thousands couples comprised White husband and Asian Pacific Islanders including Japanese. This rose to 63 thousands couples in 1970 and 129 thousands in 1980 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998). While the Census does not focus on specifically Japanese women and American men, it shows that the number of interracial marriages has been increasing every decade. As a result, there is a dramatic increase of interracial marriages in the United States. The Asian Nation.org (2010) reports that Japanese women who are raised outside of the United States are most likely to have White husbands (29.9%) compared to other Asian minority groups (Asian-Nation.org, 2010). Interracial marriages of Asian women and White Americans is increasing, but this brings with it new areas of potential marital conflict.

One potential area of marital conflict is religion. Perry (2013) finds that arguments about religion were more frequently brought up in Japan than in the U.S. Among married couples

living in Japan, this suggests that it is challenging for Americans to fit into the Japanese religious culture. One reason may be that the culture in Japan is not as religiously diverse as the United States, thus Americans living in Japan do not have as many religious opportunities as they do in the U.S. Religion may be one factor that could cause disagreements among interracial couples since both of them may or may not share the same religious beliefs.

Woolley (2003) finds that the social class of married couples defines who takes care of the family finance. Although Woolley's (2003) study does not specify racial/ethnical varieties, it suggests that married couples, from different backgrounds, bring different expectations of roles to the family. It is conceivable that interracial couples may have even more struggles because they have different class views due to different cultural perspectives. It is important to note that family finance is a struggle among interracial couples, thus one's social class may influence the relationship in both positive and negative way. Specifically, when interracial couples have children, social class may cause a struggle since biracial children must adopt one class identity.

Based on the previous studies and the current study, the portrayals of interracial marriages and the actual interracial marriages are viewed differently. As Hibbler (2002) finds, interracial couples sometimes do not feel as though they belong to either culture due to their marriages. The current study shows that interracial couples in the United States experience more isolation than those who are in Japan. This indicates that Americans are less open to diversity about other nation's cultural values, which causes interracial couples in the U.S. to experience greater isolation. People in other countries, such as Japan, tend to have better understandings of American culture because they are exposed to American cultural products like films and television programs. In the United States, media, such as television programs have a significant influence on cultural awareness, which can led to misconceptions or stereotypes. Interracial

couples, therefore, may relate to images of interracial marriage shown in the media. As interracial marriages increase, it is likely American media will begin to reflect this change.

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