

Perceived Marital Quality and Stability of Intermarried Couples: A Study of Asian-White, Black-White, and Mexican-White Couples*

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The purpose of this study is to compare intermarried and intramarried couples with respect to their marital happiness and perceived marital stability. White, black, Mexican, or Asian spouses in black-white, Mexican-white or Asian-white unions were compared to intramarried couples based on data from the 1988 National Survey of Families and Households. The final sample included 4,522 married couples. The results suggest that differences in marital happiness and perceived stability between intermarried and intramarried couples vary by race/ethnicity and gender. Our findings indicate that only interracially married white females reported significantly lower marital happiness and stability than their intramarried counterparts. Conversely, spouses in Mexican male-white female and white male-Asian female unions reported significantly higher marital quality and/or stability than their white counterparts.

Rates of intermarriage are an important indicator of race relations in the United States (Kalmijn 1993). The recent decision by the U.S. Census Bureau to allow citizens to select multiple racial categories for the 2000 Census indicates the growing awareness of the importance of interracial relationships

* This paper reports the results of research undertaken at the University of Utah. It has undergone a more limited review than official Census Bureau publications. The views expressed are attributable to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Census Bureau.

and children of such unions. From 1970 to 1990, the prevalence of interracial couples increased almost 5 times from 321,000 to 1.5 million, a rise from 0.7 percent to 2.9 percent of all intact marriages (U.S. Census Bureau 1998a, 1998b). Although the number of intermarriages is rising, those numbers are much smaller than one would expect if people married without regard to race/ethnic-based assortive mating. Presumably, there are still powerful forces in society that make intermarriage uncommon although these forces do not appear to have a uniform effect on all intermarriages. For example, in the early 1990s, only 7.3 percent of all marriages involving blacks were interracial while 30 percent of marriages involving Asian and Pacific Islander were interracial (U.S. Census Bureau 1998b). Among these interracial marriages, most (80-96 percent) of the other non-black or non-Asian spouses were white.

Empirical research on intermarriages has focused on the incidence and trends of these marriages, their causes, and the problems encountered by the marriage partners and their children (Anderson and Saenz 1994; Kitano, Fujino, and Sato 1998; Lee and Fernandez 1998; Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell 1995). Unfortunately, there has been little empirical work on the quality and stability of intermarriage in recent years. One major obstacle to research on interracial marriage is the difficulty of obtaining large, representative samples of such marriages. A common source of data is based on marriage license records. However, most states have removed racial information from their marriage license applications, making it difficult to obtain recent records. Moreover, these records tend to underestimate the prevalence of intermarriage (Kitano and Daniels 1994) and do not provide information on the marital quality of intermarriages.

Due to the low percentage of intermarriages among all marriages, surveys using systematic sampling to identify intermarriages are inefficient and expensive. Consequently, most empirical studies on the stability of intermarriages have used census data or local and/or non-representative samples (Cheng 1957; Heer 1974; Ho and Johnson 1990; Jeong and Schumm 1990; Shinagawa and Pang 1988). While census data are representative, they do not include measures of marital quality except for divorce rates. Studies based on local or non-representative samples often include measures of marital quality, but their results have limited generalizability.

The purpose of this study is to estimate differences in marital quality and perceived marital stability between intermarriages and intramarriages. This study offers several advantages over previous studies. First, it uses a national sample of intermarried and intramarried couples, which allows us to generalize

our findings to the U.S. population. Second, it compares the perceived marital quality and stability of three racial/ethnic minority groups. Third, numerous personal and family characteristics relevant to the marital quality and perceived stability of couples are controlled for in the analyses. Finally, marital quality and stability data are obtained directly from each spouse rather than by proxy. Studies of marital quality have seldom included responses from both spouses.

Literature Review

Marital Quality and Stability of Interracial Marriages

White (1990) demonstrated that it is important to consider family processes, especially marital quality, if we are to understand differential risks of divorce in the population. Marital quality has been shown to be a very reliable and powerful predictor of divorce (Johnson, Amoloza, and Booth 1992; White and Booth 1991). Examining the marital quality of intermarried couples provides important information about the marital well-being of such couples and their likelihood of divorce. To date, the major studies of intermarriage have focused on its stability, not its quality. Few empirical studies have examined marital satisfaction of intermarriages with most being exploratory studies based on military or small snowball samples (Bowen 1985; Jeong and Schumm 1990; Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell 1995; Sung 1990).

In intermarriage research, *marital stability* generally has been measured in terms of divorce rates (Cheng and Yamamura 1957; Heer 1974; Ho and Johnson 1990; Monahan 1966, 1970). Many earlier studies have demonstrated that intermarriages have higher divorce rates than intramarriages. Ho and Johnson (1990), however, reached a different conclusion. Their findings indicated that the estimates of marital stability in intermarriages vary depending on the race/ethnicity, gender of the non-white spouse, and the choice of comparison groups.

In sum, the divorce literature on intermarriages highlights the importance and necessity of examining distinct racial/ethnic combinations rather than treating all intermarried couples as a single group. Moreover, the paucity of recent empirical work on marital quality and the stability of intermarried couples suggest the need for further research in this area.

Personal Characteristics of Those Who Intermarry

Recent studies on intermarriage patterns using the U.S. Census data have consistently found that the personal characteristics of intermarried Asians, blacks, and Mexicans differ significantly from those of their intramarried counterparts. The average age of the intermarried is younger than same-race married individuals. This is partly because anti-miscegenation laws were not repealed until 1967. Hence, there were legal reasons that explain why there are fewer interracial couples that are older. Individuals in intermarriages are more likely to have been previously married, and, therefore, they tend to be older at the time of marriage. They are also more likely to have a larger age difference between spouses and have fewer children. The intermarried, on average, have significantly higher educational attainment, occupational status and income than their intramarried counterparts. They are also more likely to have moved away from their place of birth if they were U.S. born (Cazares 1986; Lee and Yamanaka 1990; Shinagawa and Pang 1988; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1990). Foreign-born Mexicans and Asians are less likely to intermarry than their U.S. born counterparts (Aguirre, Saenz, and Hwang 1995; Mittelbach and Moore 1968; Lee and Yamanaka 1990; Lee and Fernandez 1998). Interracially married blacks are more likely to have been born in foreign countries, the northern U.S., or the West Coast (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1990) and black Americans living in metro areas are more likely to intermarry than are their peers in non-metro areas (Cready and Saenz 1997). There is a gender gap in the prevalence of interracial marriages. Among blacks, males have higher rates of interracial marriage than females (Kalmijn 1993). Conversely, foreign-born Asian females have a much higher intermarriage rate than Asian males. The gender gap is considerably smaller among U.S. born Asian males and females (Lee and Fernandez 1998).

Research on religious homogamy suggests that marital partners of the same religion are more likely to have successful marriages than couples with different religions (Heaton and Pratt 1990; Dudley and Kosinski 1990). Although little is known about the religion of intermarried couples, religious homogamy may be less likely among these couples. Naturally, religious heterogamy may confound the effects of race/ethnicity on the marital quality and stability of intermarriages.

Existing research has focused on the personal characteristics of the minority spouses but not those of their white partners. Hence, little is known about the personal characteristics of white partners' in intermarriages.

Sociological Imagination

Characteristics of both spouses in intermarriages have not been examined in relation to their marital quality and stability. Further exploration of the personal characteristics of both spouses in intermarried unions in relation to their marital quality and stability is therefore needed.

Theoretical Perspectives

Much of the empirical research in this domain does not specifically test theories on the marital quality and stability of intermarriages. Three prominent perspectives: marginal man theory (Park 1928), assimilation theory (Gordon 1964), and status inconsistency theory (Vernon and Buffler 1988) will be tested in this study.

Marginal Man Theory

Seventy years ago, Park (1928) argued that individuals whose lives spanned two cultures were marginal to both; hence, they were prone to confusion, loss of identity, alienation, and distress. According to this theory, an intimate relationship with someone of another racial/ethnic group would increase marital distress, conflict, and instability.

Assimilation Theory

Gordon (1964) argued that intermarriage is a result of declining social barriers between different groups and an indication of minority group assimilation into the dominant culture. Presumably, intermarried minority individuals are likely to have embraced attitudes and values of the dominant culture. Specifically, they may have marital attitudes similar to those of the predominant majority culture, and are more willing to resolve an unsatisfactory marital relationship. Accordingly, this theory predicts intermarriages to be less stable when compared to minority intramarriages while marital stability of intermarriages should be similar to that of same-race white couples.

Status Inconsistency Theory

Status inconsistency theory also offers an explanation for the potential for higher negative outcomes of intermarried couples. Unlike perspectives that

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focus on intermarried couple's cultural differences, status inconsistency theory focuses on the structure of the society. Status inconsistency theory assumes that societies are divided into numerous social hierarchies. Originally, the theory stated that when an individual simultaneously occupied positions of unequal rank across multiple status hierarchies such as occupation, income, and ethnicity, harmful consequences would result (e.g., a poor physician) (Vernon and Buffler 1988). The U.S. may be seen as a racially and sexually stratified country, with (1) racial/ethnic minorities historically ranked lower in status than (non-Hispanic) whites and (2) females ranked lower than males, other things being equal. Applied to couples, status inconsistency theory would predict relatively more negative outcomes for intermarried couples because they encounter higher social disapproval due to their inconsistent racial/ethnic status.

One possible approach to expand on the status inconsistency perspective is to anticipate differences in perceived marital happiness and stability by race and sex. For instance, we might rank groups by race and sex. For males, combining socioeconomic status and stereotypes of what American males are expected to be, we might rank in descending order the following racial groups as status-consistent mates for white females: (1) Whites, (2) Mexicans, (3) Asians, and (4) Blacks. For females, where it might be argued that socioeconomic status matters less, we might rank in descending order the racial groups as potentially status-consistent mates for white males as follows: Whites and Asians (1.5), Mexicans (2.5) and blacks (3.5), where the 0.5 accounts for the possible lower status of females. The greater the difference between racial groups by sex, the greater the likelihood that perceptions of marital happiness and stability will differ from counterparts in same-race marriages. Thus, status inconsistency theory would predict that the likelihood of any negative outcomes for intermarried couples depends on the race and sex of the minority spouses. Given the above ranking, one would expect white men to be less happy when married to Mexican and black women, and they should not differ significantly when married to Asian women or white women. Similarly, one would predict white females to be less happy when married to black or Asian men while they should not differ significantly when married to white or Mexican men. For minority individuals, regardless of gender, one may expect them to be just as happy if not happier than their same race counterparts with same-race spouses while such may not be the case for their white spouses.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature and theoretical perspectives, four hypotheses are formulated. First, we expect intermarried couples to be younger at the time of the interview, with a larger age difference between spouses, to be more likely to have been previously married, more educated, tend to be older at the time of marriage and have fewer children than intramarried couples. Second, we expect that as a group, intermarried couples will have lower overall marital quality and stability. Third, the effect of intermarriages will persist after controlling for their various personal and family characteristics. Fourth, marital happiness and stability of the intermarried will differ from their same-race counterparts depending on the race and gender of their minority spouse.

Research Design**Data**

The sample for this study was obtained from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a national probability sample of non-institutionalized adults in the United States. The data were collected between March 1987 and May 1988 from 13,008 households. One adult from each household was randomly selected to be the primary respondent. The spouse of the married primary respondent was also given an extensive self-administered questionnaire.

For the purposes of this study, only married respondents age 75 and under of known race/ethnicity were selected from the total married sample (n=6882). The age criterion was used since all but one intermarried couple was 75 years of age or younger. Approximately 20 percent of all married couples did not answer the question on race/ethnicity. Although we assume that the majority of these couples are same-race couples, we acknowledge that our sample may potentially be biased for this reason. A final sample of 4,522 married couples forms the basis for this study. Due to the small number of intermarriages among some racial combination (particularly intermarriages between minority groups), we selected the three largest intermarried groups. The groups included were: 1) intermarried couples (black-white, N=34; Mexican-white, N=76; and Asian-white, N=25); 2) minority couples in intramarriages (black couples, N=448; Mexican couples, N=185; Asian American couples, N=35), and 3) white couples (N=3,722). The racially

homogamous minority and white couples served as baseline comparison groups.

Sampling weights were used for the final sample so that estimated statistics could be generalized to all couples in the United States in 1988. Each racial/ethnic group was weighted separately so that the number of couples in each racial/ethnic group was the same before and after weighting. In this way, the relative influence of cases within the group mirrors the national population of all couples of that group in the U.S. in 1988. The weighted percentage of interracial couples estimated from these data was between 1.4 to 1.7 percent, a percentage very close to the 1980 U.S. Census' estimation of 1.5 percent.

The primary independent variable in this study was the racial composition of the couples. Since we are interested in how a person's race, his or her spouse's race, and the gender of the person separately affects his/her marital quality, this is a classic case of a statistical identification problem. To address this problem, we combine racial/ethnic composition and gender of spouse and coded the combinations using the following abbreviations:

- 1) black male-white female couples (BW);
- 2) white male-black female couples (WB);
- 3) Mexican male-white female couples (MW);
- 4) white male-Mexican female couples (WM);
- 5) Asian male-white female couples (AW);
- 6) white male-Asian female couples (WA);
- 7) black couples (BB);
- 8) Mexican couples (MM);
- 9) Asian couples (AA); and
- 10) white couples (WW).

Control variables include the respondent's age at the time of the interview, age differences between spouses, age at marriage, number of marriages, educational level, number of children living with the couple, place of residence (North, South, North Central, and West), number of work hours, and religious homogamy. The responses on religious affiliation were first coded into religious categories following the denominational groupings of Roof and McKinney (1987). Each couple's religion was then coded as: 1) both husband and wife have no religion; 2) only one spouse has a religious affiliation; 3) husband and wife have different religions; and 4) the spouses have the same religion.

The dependent variables in this analysis were marital quality and stability. One dimension of marital quality—marital happiness—was examined. Marital happiness was measured by responses to the question, “Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage?” This overall marital happiness was scored on a 7-point scale ranged from 1 (not very happy) to 7 (very happy). Marital (in)stability was measured by responses to the question, “It is always difficult to predict what will happen in a marriage, but realistically, what do you think the chances are that you and your husband/wife will eventually separate or divorce?” Respondents’ perceived likelihood of ever divorcing or separating was scored on a 5-point scale ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

Analyses

T-tests were used to examine the first hypothesis of whether the personal and family characteristics of intermarried individuals differ significantly from their counterparts. The remaining hypotheses were tested using multiple ordinary least squares regressions. For these analyses, the responses to both dependent variables (marital happiness and marital instability) were technically ordinal but approximate interval level variables. PROC GLM (General Linear Model) in SAS allows one to test for differences in means for all possible paired comparisons for polychotomous independent variables such as those used to identify specific inter/intra-racial/ethnic marriage groups. To minimize the Type I error rate, multiple comparisons between marital quality and stability of each racial combination were performed only after the OLS models were found to be significant, and only results of relevant comparisons were used and reported. Multiple comparisons were performed on the dependent variables with all other covariates held at their mean values. Since perceived marital happiness and stability of husbands and wives are not independent, separate OLS regression models were estimated for husbands and wives. To avoid statistical identification problems due to the high correlation of personal characteristics between husbands and wives, the separate regressions only include personal characteristics of either husbands or wives but not both. Family characteristics such as religious homogamy/heterogamy, total number of children, and age differences of spouses were included in both husband’s and wife’s regression analyses.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the personal and family characteristics of husbands and wives in different racial combination are presented in Table 1. These are descriptive statistics without any statistical adjustments except weighting.

T-Test Results

Personal and family characteristics. The first hypothesis states that the personal and family characteristics of intermarried couples differ significantly from those of couples in intramarriages. In general, this hypothesis is supported. Table 2 shows the T-test results for the differences in means of personal and family characteristics between the intermarried and intramarried spouses. Overall, intermarried males and females are significantly younger at the time of the interview, have a larger absolute age difference between spouses, are older at the time of marriage, are more likely to be in a second or later marriage, have more children living at home, work more hours, and are less likely to be in religious homogamy.

Age is strongly associated with a person’s work status, probability of remarrying and having children. Given our sample of intermarried couples is significantly younger than the intramarried couples, we re-analyzed these characteristics adjusting for the age of the respondents. We found that the significant differences in the number of children and work hours across racial combinations are no longer observed.

Educational attainment. Intermarried females, when treated as a single group, have significantly lower levels of educational attainment than their same-race counterparts. We further examine educational attainment by each racial combination since educational attainment generally varied by race (results not shown). Our findings indicate that there are notable subgroup differences on the educational attainment among the intermarried depending on the race and gender of the minority spouse and the choice of comparison groups. There are four general patterns. First, the overall pattern noted earlier is based on the fact that white females married to blacks and Mexicans have a significantly lower educational attainment than white females in

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for All (Weighted Variables by Means / Percentage and Standard Deviations) Racial Combinations (Husband/Wife)

Wives' Personal Characteristics	Racial Combinations (Husband/Wife)						
	AW n=11	WA n=14	AA n=35	BW n=21	WB n=12	BB n=425	MW n=42
Education	12.67 (2.92) 8 to 19	14.63 (2.43) 12 to 18	14.21 (2.92) 6 to 20	11.86 (2.75) 8 to 20	14.32 (2.43) 10 to 19	12.28 (2.95) 2 to 20	11.90 (3.48) 0 to 20
Age	33.86 (14.36) 18 to 63	32.23 (5.92) 24 to 41	35.73 (9.36) 22 to 56	34.38 (9.57) 22 to 57	33.50 (11.67) 26 to 66	41.89 (14.06) 18 to 75	33.60 (8.40) 17 to 60
Age at Marriage	24.21 (5.78) 16.1 to 35.1	24.38 (5.04) 18.3 to 36.1	23.26 (3.73) 14.1 to 33.2	25.26 (7.47) 17.3 to 46.8	25.16 (3.93) 17.7 to 30.9	24.38 (7.96) 13 to 67.9	23.80 (7.01) 14.3 to 50
% in Remarriage	8.20 (30.05) 1 to 2 times	37.85 (50.33) 1 to 2	13.54 (11.57) 1 to 2	32.35 (48.79) 1 to 3	9.13 (30.09) 1 to 2	17.07 (37.80) 1 to 3	22.72 (42.20) 1 to 3
Work Hours	25.49 (21.56) 0 to 55	29.72 (14.84) 0 to 45	22.89 (19.50) 0 to 48	28.47 (21.02) 0 to 70	25.13 (20.76) 0 to 55	22.11 (20.61) 0 to 80	18.84 (19.56) 0 to 55
Marital Happiness (1=low, 7=high)	5.16 (2.17) 1 to 7	5.78 (1.66) 2 to 7	6.02 (1.51) 2 to 7	5.21 (1.89) 1 to 7	6.23 (0.90) 4 to 7	5.82 (1.34) 1 to 7	6.34 (0.88) 4 to 7
Perceived Marital Instability (1=low, 5=high)	1.79 (1.28) 1 to 4	1.35 (0.49) 1 to 2	1.31 (0.58) 1 to 3	1.94 (1.22) 1 to 5	1.43 (0.83) 1 to 4	1.57 (0.91) 1 to 5	1.22 (0.48) 1 to 3

Table 1 (cont'd)

Husbands' Personal Characteristics

Husbands' Personal Characteristics	Racial Combinations (Husband/Wife)						
	AW n=11	WA n=12	AA n=35	BW n=25	WB N=9	BB n=448	MW n=42
Education	13.26 (2.13) 11 to 20	15.21 (2.40) 12 to 19	14.84 (2.80) 9 to 20	13.43 (2.56) 8 to 20	13.48 (1.96) 12 to 20	11.44 (3.78) 0 to 20	12.49 (3.05) 0 to 17
Age	37.86 (16.40) 20 to 72	34.89 (6.99) 23 to 46	39.61 (10.88) 22 to 62	38.49 (9.76) 25 to 60	42.97 (14.61) 26 to 67	44.41 (13.98) 19 to 74	35.93 (9.33) 20 to 58
Age at Marriage	28.54 (6.07) 19.8 to 38.3	27.35 (3.95) 21.3 to 35.1	26.16 (4.02) 17.1 to 35.6	29.18 (6.58) 20.3 to 45.1	34.36 (10.83) 24.1 to 58	26.78 (8.49) 14.2 to 68.3	26.20 (7.53) 19 to 57
% Remarriage	34.45 (48.62) 1 to 2	17.20 (35.54) 1 to 3	0 0 1 to 1	31.05 (47.84) 1 to 3	47.52 (49.92) 1 to 4	22.26 (41.65) 1 to 4	24.96 (44.01) 1 to 4
Work Hours	39.91 (18.92) 0 to 70	44.28 (15.96) 0 to 65	33.27 (18.30) 0 to 72	37.46 (14.28) 0 to 58	(31.00) (23.56) 0 to 70	29.79 (21.02) 0 to 80	37.73 (12.99) 0 to 60
Marital Happiness (1=low, 7=high)	5.89 (1.19) 4 to 7	6.26 (0.80) 4 to 7	6.46 (0.83) 4 to 7	5.78 (1.47) 1 to 7	6.60 (0.59) 5 to 7	6.06 1.25 1 to 7	6.22 (1.02) 4 to 7
Perceived Marital Instability (1=low, 5=high)	1.78 (1.04) 1 to 4	1.14 (0.33) 1 to 2	1.17 (0.49) 1 to 3	1.62 (0.92) 1 to 4	1.59 (0.79) 1 to 3	1.49 (0.88) 1 to 3	1.34 (0.75) 1 to 4

Table 1 (cont'd)

Couples' Characteristics	Racial Combinations (Husband/Wife)					
	AW n=11	WA n=12	AA n=35	BW n=21	WB n=9	
					BB n=425	MW n=42
Absolute Age Difference	5.08 (3.00) 0 to 9	4.85 (3.47) 1 to 12	4.17 (3.18) 0 to 11	5.93 (4.58) 0 to 15	7.23 (9.19) 0 to 29	3.72 (4.12) 0 to 26
Total Number of Children	1.79 (1.58) 0 to 5	1.59 (1.21) 0 to 4	1.91 (1.59) 0 to 5	2.67 (2.32) 0 to 7	2.71 (1.97) 0 to 6	3.13 (2.37) 0 to 14
Number of Children living at home	1.53 (1.35) 0 to 4	1.17 (0.85) 0 to 3	1.73 (1.46) 0 to 5	1.28 (1.45) 0 to 4	1.28 (1.14) 0 to 3	1.63 (1.34) 0 to 7
Region						
North East	15.66	9.25	22.22	15.69	46.48	3.15
North Central	0	4.32	21.91	29.05	19.70	16.86
South	40.18	30.80	15.95	13.38	20.44	15.40
West	44.16	55.63	39.92	41.89	13.37	60.38
Religious homogamy						
No religion	11.43	19.29	16.04	1.21	32.92	3.42
One Spouse has Religion	26.24	30.69	9.22	8.41	51.62	11.07
Different Religion	20.54	11.57	4.85	36.35	15.46	28.90
Same Religion	41.78	38.46	69.89	54.02	0	64.72

Table 2. Difference in means (T-test and p-values) between Intermarried and Intramarried Individuals on Personal and Family Characteristics by Gender

Personal Characteristics	Husbands*		Wives	
	Mean differences t-value p-value	Mean differences (Age adjusted) t-value p-value	Mean differences t-value p-value	Mean differences (Age adjusted) t-value p-value
Age at the Time of the Interview	-7.25 t=-5.8 p<.0001		-7.75 t=-6.30 p<.0001	
Age at Marriage	2.08 t=3.01 p<.01	3.27 t=4.93 p<.0001	1.37 t=2.13 p<.05	2.28 t=3.64 p<.001
Number of Marriages	0.19 t=3.91 p<.0001	0.21 t=4.55 p<.0001	0.06 t=1.54 p=.12	0.08 t=1.97 p<.05
Work Hours	3.37 t=1.76 p=0.08	-1.98 t=1.19 p=0.24	4.36 t=2.47 p<.05	1.42 t=0.83 p=0.41
Educational Attainment	-0.07 t=-0.23 p=0.81	-0.43 t=-1.48 p=0.14	-0.56 t=-2.24 p<.05	-0.87 t=-3.48 p<.001
Family Characteristics				
Absolute Age Difference	1.06 t=3.14 p<.01	1.06 t=3.13 p<.01		
Total Number of children	-0.21 t=1.25 p=0.21	0.11 t=0.66 p=0.51		
Number of children living at home	0.25 t=2.14 p<.001	-0.01 t=-0.10 p=0.92		
Residence	$\chi^2=59.54$ p<.0001			
Religious Homogamy	$\chi^2=26.29$ p<.0001			

*omitted group = intramarriage

intramarriages. Such was not the case among intermarried minority females. Second, white males in intermarriages (WB and WM) have significantly higher education levels than intramarried blacks (BB) and Mexican husbands (MM) respectively. They do not differ significantly from white males in same-race marriages nor from minority females in intramarriages. Third, among black and Mexican males and females in intermarriages (BW, WB, MW, and WM), their educational levels are significantly higher than their counterparts in intramarriages (BB, MM). Finally, the educational attainment of Asian males and females in intermarriages (AW and WA) do not differ from their same-race counterparts in their educational attainment.

Regression Results

Key hypothesis. Our key hypothesis states that intermarried couples have lower overall marital quality and stability than intramarried couples, and that these differences persist after controlling for their personal and family characteristics. Results from baseline models that predict marital happiness and stability of husbands and wives with a single dummy variable for racial-ethnic homogamy were non-significant. This result remains after controlling for personal and family characteristics. Regression results of our fully adjusted models using all ten racial combinations as the independent variables follow.

Given our key independent variable is a multi-categorical variable and in order to present all planned multiple comparisons between racial groups, we presented matrices consisting of estimated regression coefficients and adjusted means of the dependent variables for husbands and wives of different racial/ethnic combinations in Tables 3 through 6. To read these tables, the reader should choose a racial combination from the heading "Comparison groups" in the first row and an appropriate comparison group from the first column. For example, the first entry in Table 3 reported a regression coefficient value of 0.40. This means that holding everything else constant, white husbands in WA unions reported an average of 0.40 point higher on their perceived marital happiness than Asians husbands in AW unions. The reported coefficients are similar to those reported for dummy variables in a regular OLS regression. In this case the coefficient indicates the adjusted mean difference between the two groups.

Table 3. Adjusted Means and Regression Coefficients^a for Husbands' Marital Happiness by Inter/Intramarriage Categories

Racial Combinations (Husbands-Wife)	Adjusted means ^b	Comparison Groups										
		AW (n=11)	WA (n=12)	AA (n=35)	BW (n=25)	WB (n=9)	BB (n=448)	MW (n=42)	WM (n=34)	MM (n=184)	WW (n=3722)	
AW	5.96											
WA	6.36	0.40										
AA	6.53	0.57	0.17									
BW	5.80											
WB	6.66			0.86@								
BB	6.05			0.25	-0.61							
MW	6.31											
WM	6.19									-0.14		
MM	6.26									-0.05	0.07	
WW	6.09	0.13	-0.27	-0.44*	0.29	-0.57	-0.22	-0.10	-0.17@			

@p<.1

*p<.05

**p<.01

***p<.001 (2-tail)

^a Regression coefficients is equal to the adjusted mean differences between intermarried and intramarried groups.

^b Marital Happiness: 1= very unhappy, 7= very happy

^c These are weighted least-squares means with all other control variables held at their mean values.

Table 4. Adjusted Means and Regression Coefficients^a for Wives' Marital Happiness¹ by Inter/Intramariage Categories.

Racial Combination (Husbands/Wives)	Adjusted Means ^a	Comparison Groups									
		AW (n=11)	WA (n=14)	AA (n=35)	BW (n=21)	WB (n=12)	BB (n=425)	MW (n=42)	WM (n=29)	MM (n=185)	WW (n=3692)
AW	5.18	-									
WA	5.85	0.67	-								
AA	6.02	0.84@	0.17	-							
BW	5.23				-						
WB	6.28				1.05*	-					
BB	5.79				0.56*	-0.49	-				
MW	6.36							-			
WM	6.10							-0.26	-		
MM	6.10							-0.26*	0.00	-	
WW	6.05	0.87*	-0.20	-0.03	0.82***	-0.23	0.26****	-0.31*	-0.05	-0.05	-

@p<1

*p<0.05

**p<0.01

***p<0.001 (2-tail)

^a Regression coefficients is equal to the adjusted mean differences between intermarried and intramarried groups.¹ Marital Happiness: 1= very unhappy, 7= very happy^a These are weighted least-squares means with all other control variables held at their mean values.Table 5. Adjusted Means and Regression Coefficients^a for Husbands' Perceived Marital Instability by Inter/Intramariage Categories.

Racial Combinations (Husband-Wife)	Adjusted mean ^a	Comparison Groups									
		AW (n=11)	WA (n=12)	AA (n=35)	BW (n=25)	WB (n=9)	BB (n=448)	MW (n=42)	WM (n=34)	MM (n=184)	WW (n=3722)
AW	1.70	-									
WA	1.05	-0.65*	-								
AA	1.19	-0.51*	0.14	-							
BW	1.59				-						
WB	1.54				-0.05	-					
BB	1.53				-0.06	-0.01	-				
MW	1.30							-			
WM	1.46							0.16	-		
MM	1.29							-0.01	-0.17	-	
WW	1.40	-0.30 ¹	0.35@ ²	0.21@	-0.19 ¹	-0.14	-0.13***	0.10	-0.06	1.13*	-

@p<1

*p<0.05

**p<0.01

***p<0.001 (2-tail)

^a Regression coefficients is equal to the adjusted mean differences between intermarried and intramarried groups¹ Perceived marital instability: 1= very low chance of separating/divorcing, 5= very high chance of separating/divorcing^a These are weighted least-squares means with all other control variables held at their mean values.¹ This coefficient was significant at baseline.² This coefficient was non-significant at baseline.

Table 6. Adjusted Means and Regression Coefficients* for Wives' Perceived Marital Instability^b by Inter/Intramariage Categories.

Racial Combinations (Husband-Wife)	Adjusted Means ^c	Comparison Groups									
		AW (n=11)	WA (n=14)	AA (n=35)	BW (n=21)	WB (n=12)	BB (n=425)	MW (n=42)	WM (n=29)	MM (n=185)	WW (n=3692)
AW	1.73										
WA	1.26	-0.47@									
AA	1.34	-0.39@	0.12								
BW	1.91										
WB	1.42	-0.49*									
BB	1.62	-0.29*	0.20								
MW	1.19										
WM	1.37						0.22				
MM	1.43						0.24* ¹	0.06			
WW	1.40	-0.33 ¹	0.14	0.06	-0.51***	-0.02	-0.22***	0.21* ¹	0.03	-0.03	

@p<.1
 *p<.05
 **p<.01
 ***p<.001 (2-tail)

* Regression coefficients is equal to the adjusted mean differences between intermarried and intramariage groups.
^b Perceived marital instability: 1= very low chance of separating/divorcing, 5= very high chance of separating/divorcing
^c These are weighted least-squares means with all other control variables held at their mean values
 1 This coefficient was significant at baseline.
 2 This coefficient was non-significant at baseline

With few exceptions, our baseline models without control variables show very similar patterns to our fully adjusted models. Significant findings in the baseline models are reported only when there are notable differences from the full models.

Marital Happiness. Overall, marital happiness of intermarried husbands did not differ significantly from those of husbands in intramariages (see Table 3). Such was not the case for intermarried wives. Overall, marital happiness of intermarried white females differed significantly from their counterparts in intramariages (see Table 4). Specifically, white wives married to Black (BW) or Asian (AW) men reported significantly lower marital happiness ($p < .05$) than white females in same-race unions (WW). White wives with Asian husbands (AW) also reported lower marital happiness than wives in AA unions ($p < .10$). Contrary to our key hypothesis, we found that white women married to Mexican men (MW) reported significantly higher marital happiness than their white counterparts ($p < .10$) in WW unions. It is notable that unlike white females in intermariages (AW, BW, and MW), the marital happiness of minority females in intermariages (WA, WB, and WM) did not differ from their counterparts in intramariages.

Marital Stability.

Husbands. Although there is no significant difference between husbands in intermariages and intramariages on their reported marital happiness, the perceived marital stability of some groups of intermarried husbands differ significantly from those of husbands in intramariages. Asian husbands in AW unions perceived a greater chance of divorcing or separating than their Asian counterparts ($p < .05$) in same-race unions (see Table 5). They also perceived a greater chance of divorcing or separating than white males with Asian wives ($p < .05$). When compared to intramariaged white males (WW), both Asian and black husbands with white wives (AW and BW) reported lower marital stability in the baseline model ($p < .05$) but such differences disappear after controlling for their personal and family characteristics. Yet, white males with Asian spouses (WA) reported significantly lower chances of divorce than intramariaged white males (WW) intramariages, but this effect was not significant in the baseline models.

Wives. All three groups of white wives in intermarriages perceived significantly different marital stability than those of wives in intramarriages. For white females in AW unions, their report is consistent with their overall lower marital happiness and that of their husbands' perceived marital instability (See Table 6). White wives in AW unions perceived a greater chance of separating ($p < .05$) than Asian wives in same-race Asian (AA) and interracial unions (WA). They also reported a higher chance of divorce or separation than white wives in WW unions. This effect disappeared in the final model. This suggests that the personal and family characteristics of intermarried AW couples account for some of the differences of their perceived marital stability. Similarly, white wives in BW unions perceived a greater chance of divorcing or separating than black wives ($p < .05$) and white wives ($p < .001$) in same-race unions. White wives in BW unions also perceived a greater chance of divorcing or separating than black wives in WB unions ($p < .05$). For white females in MW union, their report is also consistent with their higher perceived marital happiness. These wives perceived a lower chance of divorcing or separating than Mexican women ($p < .05$) and white women ($p < .05$) in intramarriages. However, this effect was not significant in the baseline model.

Summary and Discussion

Our comparison of intermarried and intramarried couples revealed differences with respect to their personal and family characteristics that are consistent with results from earlier research. Our findings suggest that several characteristics explain some of the differences in the marital happiness and perceived instability between these types of couples. By controlling for these factors, we either eliminated the negative effects of intermarriage or its effects on marital happiness and/or perceived marital stability became apparent among husbands and wives in AW, BW, WA, and MW unions. Our results indicate that future research on marital quality and stability of intermarried couples should consider these confounding personal and family characteristics.

The overall findings of this study did not fully support the hypothesis (hypothesis 2) that all intermarried couples have lower marital quality and stability than intramarried couples. These findings remain after controlling for numerous personal and family characteristics (hypothesis 3). Our results support hypothesis 4 that not all intermarried subgroups experience negative

marital outcomes although some subgroups did report lower marital quality and greater separation proneness than their intramarried counterparts.

This study statistically controlled for numerous personal and family characteristics. However, other factors not controlled for in this study may also influence the marital well-being of intermarried couples. Opposition from parents and in-laws may be more common among intermarriages. Findings from a recent study by Lewis and Yancey (1995) on family support of interracial couples (black-white and Mexican-white) may help to explain some of the differential findings in this study. Lewis and Yancey found that black family members were perceived to be the most supportive and accepting of intermarriages while white family members were perceived to be least supportive and accepting. The literature on marital quality has indicated that family support is an important factor affecting marital quality. Greater family support perceived by minority families may explain why intermarried minority spouses in our study do not report lower levels of marital quality and stability than their counterparts. Literature on social networks generally indicates that women are the kin keepers of our society. Hence, intermarried white females may be more likely to feel a lack of support from their own (white) family than intermarried white males. Family opposition to the union and the lack of family support may be a source of marital stress and strain. This, in turn, may explain the lower marital quality and perceived stability of white females in AW and BW unions. The lack of family support may reduce barriers to divorce among unhappy marriages. Thus, intermarried white females may in fact perceive their marriages to have a higher chance of separation or ending in divorce even though they may not necessarily be unhappy with their marriages. White males with minority wives may receive more support from their wives' family and kinship.

To consider the possible effects of parents on marital quality among intermarried and intramarried couples, we examined couples' perceived relationship quality with their parents and in-laws. This is a good proxy measure given that the NSFH does not have direct measures of family support. Couples with a poor relationship with parents and their in-laws will perceive lower family support that may in turn elevate marital stress. There were a total of eight reports from the two sets of parents (four reports from each spouse). Each relationship quality question was measured on a 7-point likert-scale where 1 equals "very poor" and 7 equals "excellent." A dummy variable was created where "1" refers to a couple where at least one out of eight possible measures had a score of 3 or lower thereby indicating that the relationship with

at least one parent was poor. Non-supportive families may create more stress for the couples and have a direct impact on a couple's perceived marital quality. Alternatively, perceived support from a couple's family may only provide a buffering effect for the couples in times of stress and not have a direct impact on their perceived marital quality. Bivariate analyses (not shown) indicate that intermarried couples are more likely to report lower relationship quality with their parents and/or parent-in-laws. When this variable was added to the final model, the main effect of this measure of perceived relationship with parents and in-laws has a significant negative effect on perceived marital happiness and stability. However, there was no interaction effect between relationship with parents and being in an intermarriage. The significant results reported previously for the final model remain after controlling for relationship with parents.

We did not directly measure whether intermarried couples are socially marginal or lack support from their families. Our findings are, however, consistent with the idea that intermarried couples are more "socially" marginal because of their higher likelihood of reporting lower relationship quality with their parents and in-laws. Nevertheless, as suggested by our findings, it appears that even if intermarried couples are more marginal than their counterparts in intramarriages, being marginal from one's family and/or culture does not necessarily lead to lower marital happiness and stability. Since feeling marginal does not necessarily imply structural marginality (social isolation), it is essential to study the social networks and supports received by intermarried couples in future investigations. Previous qualitative studies (Rosenblatt, Karin, and Power 1995, Sung 1990) suggest that intermarried couples seek out other non-familial support and eliminate non-supportive members in their network.

Assimilation theory helps to explain the findings for intermarried Asians and Mexicans since both groups include recent immigrants. Although such information was unavailable from this study, the personal characteristics of intermarried minority spouses in our study and the insignificant differences between their marital quality and stability from same-race white couples suggest that they are more assimilated than their intramarried minority counterparts. As predicted, we found that Asian males with white wives perceived their marriages to be less stable than Asian intramarriages but they did not differ from those of same-race white marriages. Though they may perceive a lower level of marital stability compared to intramarried minorities, they appear to have adopted the more western marital attitudes and values and

demonstrated similar attitudes towards their marital stability as intramarried white couples.

Finally, status inconsistency theory helps to explain many of the findings of this study. Consistent with predictions based on status inconsistency theory, the greater the differences between racial groups by sex, the greater the likelihood that the perception of marital happiness and marital stability will differ from counterparts in same race marriages. In general, we expect males to have higher status than females even though this has changed in recent years. It is not surprising that white wives with Asian or black husbands in this study reported significantly lower marital happiness and stability than their counterparts in intramarriages (AA, WW). Their greater differences in status ranking appear to have a negative impact on the marital quality of such unions (AW and BW) than other interracial unions (MW) where the racial distance between husbands' and wives' status was smaller. In fact, we found that white females in Mexican male-white female unions reported significantly higher marital quality and/or stability than their white counterparts.

Conversely, the status differences between white husbands and their minority wives (WA, WB, and WM) did not have significantly lower perceived marital quality when compared to their same-race counterparts (AA, BB, MM, and WW). This suggests that both white husbands and minority wives are benefiting from the higher status of the husbands, and, in turn, perceived their marriages as happy and as stable as intramarried couples. Alternatively, because of the inconsistent (gender X racial) status among minority male-white female unions, these couples may receive more social disapproval than white male-minority female marriages where the white husbands' status is consistent with the societal expectation of racial/socioeconomic status ranking. Hence, inconsistent status may create more stress for the minority male-white female couples.

In conclusion, future studies of intermarriage should specify the race/ethnicity and gender of minority spouses and comparison groups. There should be careful examination of the direct impact of family support (or the lack of support), the role of social stigma, and other non-familial supports on the marital quality of intermarriages. The role of assimilation on marital attitudes and values of intermarried minorities should also be further explored. In the near future, marital quality and stability of intermarried couples will become an increasingly important topic given the increasing numbers of such marriages. We will need to monitor the well-being of intermarriages as public

attitudes and acceptance changes as multi-racial children become more prevalent in society.

Our findings highlight the importance of comparison groups when examining the marital quality and stability of intermarried individuals. Our study shows that comparisons between intermarriages and minority intramarriages often yield very different results from comparisons between intermarriages and white intramarriages. Yet, as with all empirical investigations, this study was limited by several factors. First, our sample may suffer from potential sample selection bias. Since our sample includes only intact marriages, this may underestimate the negative effect that the racial differences have on marital success. Unfortunately, this is a common problem in marital stability studies since the least stable marriages generally dissolved before data collection (the so-called left truncation problem). In addition, 20 percent of married couples in the NSFH have missing values on race of at least one spouse. This is a potential source of bias for our sample. Second, the sample size of intermarried couples was relatively small. As a result, estimation of interaction effects among different racial combinations with independent variables was not practical. Third, among all same-race Asian and same-race white couples in this study, we assumed that they are in ethnically homogeneous marriages. For example, based on the racial classification of NSFH, Chinese and Indians from the East are treated as one racial group although their culture differs significantly.

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