An Inside Look at Hispanic-Asian Intermarriages

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Abstract

Despite increasing diversity and relaxation of anti-miscegenation laws in America, the rate of interracial/interethnic marriages is still relatively low (15% newly married couples in 2010). Additionally, only about 30% of intermarried couples do not involve a White partner. This qualitative study examined the lives of Hispanic/Asian married couples, a pairing that occurs at very low rates in America, to understand their experiences in forming and sustaining their union. The study found that these individuals bridged cultures as well as classes. Most participants met their spouse in an educational or professional setting and had relatively high levels of agency to choose their partner independent of third-party influences. Race/ethnicity did not play an explicitly significant role in respondents' attraction to their partner and they brought only small amounts of their ethnic heritage into their married lives. The findings suggest that despite their divergent origins, these individuals might be more homogamous than they otherwise seem by belonging to a "third culture" of assimilated minority in America characterized by similar educational/occupational paths and embrace of multiculturalism.

Introduction

For most of history, endogamous marriage, or marriage of members within the same social group, has been the norm. Worldwide, racial and ethnic endogamy has stemmed from beliefs of ethnocentrism and nationalism, which are reinforced over generations by promoting close ties to cultures and traditions and fostering in-group solidarity. This works well when physical boundaries between groups are clearly demarcated. However, with increasing globalization and immigration, countries are rapidly diversifying in their racial and ethnic makeup. For example, America's demographics have changed dramatically over the last century, with the latest Census data showing that Whites now make up around 60% of the U.S. population, compared with almost 90% in the beginning of the 1900s. Hispanics make up the next most populous demographic at 19%, followed by Blacks at 12% (Jensen et al, 2021). The trend for the percentage of Whites in the U.S. is projected to further decrease, due to immigration statistics showing that new arrivals are mostly non-European and are predominantly Asian or Hispanic, two groups that combined made up almost 70% of total immigrants in 2018 (Budiman, 2020). What will happen to marriage patterns as a result of this increasing diversity? Will endogamy persist or will marriage between members of different ethnic and racial groups become more common?

Previously in America, there were many structural barriers to interracial/interethnic marriages (in this paper, referred to as "intermarriage" or "mixed marriages"). Over the past few centuries, federal and state laws were enacted to prevent miscegenation, as well as to ban immigrants from certain countries from entering the country or from obtaining U.S. citizenships by classifying them as non-White (or mandated that Americans who married these non-Whites give up their U.S. citizenship). Additionally, redlining and zoning policies effectively segregated neighborhoods and limited opportunities for mixing (Moran, 2001). The combined result was a societal norm towards endogamy. However, changes to these laws, such as the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1967, or the Immigration Act of 1952 and the Hart-Cellar Act 1965, has redefined what is legally permissible and possible with regards to marriage today. In the period after the passage of these acts and judicial decisions, interracial marriage did not become immediately popular, as social norms and structural divisions were still entrenched. More recently, though, there has been a slowly increasing trend in intermarriage. According to a recent Pew Center analysis, 15% of all new marriages in the U.S. in 2010 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from one another, representing more than a two-fold increase from the

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rate in 1980, which stood at 6.7% (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Yet, this is still much lower than what would be expected if people from all races/ethnicities paired up randomly.

The rise of intermarriage has prompted a body of literature containing both theoretical and empirical analyses. Most historical studies in interracial marriages focused on intermarriages between Whites and Blacks, the most populous minority group in America in the mid-1900s (Aldridge, 1978). However, as other racial/ethnic minority groups began to grow as a result of expanded immigration and guest worker programs, the literature has been adapting to include them (Qian, 1997; Qian and Lichter, 2001, 2007, 2011; Lichter, Qian & Tumin 2015). Data from several studies has shown that the rise in the rate of intermarriage is largely driven by Hispanics and Asians, who “marry out” at high rates when compared with the sizes of their populations in America. However, their rates might fluctuate depending on the level of continued immigration of people from their region of origin, which theoretically could replenish endogamous mate options (Qian and Lichter, 2007, 2011). Still, the rates of intermarriage, which currently stand at 25.7% for Hispanics and 27.7% for Asians, are much higher than those for both Whites (9.4%) and Blacks (17.1%).

The clearest trend is that most racial/ethnic minorities who intermarry marry Whites. For example, the Pew report by Budiman showed that about 70% of new intermarriages involved a White spouse, and which helps explain why many of the studies on mixed marriages focus on pairwise comparisons of the intermarriage between a White spouse and a minority group spouse to endogamous White or to endogamous minority group marriages. Because of this trend, particular attention is given to one classical assimilation theory with respect to intermarriage: the “Anglo-conformity” ideology (as opposed to the “melting pot” or “cultural pluralism” ideologies). Under the “Anglo-conformity” ideology, intermarriage with whites is evidence of not just behavioral assimilation, the adoption of the cultures, customs and languages of the majority race of a society, but structural assimilation, the acceptance into social circles, activities and lives of the dominant race, as well (Gordon, 1965).

Others argue that trends in intermarriage could simply be a reflection of the blurring of other barriers to integration of these minority groups from the dominant group, for example, increased economic mobility, decreased residential segregation, and distance from culture of origin over subsequent generations for the members of the minority group (Qian and Lichter, 2001). Additionally, newer models of assimilation theory argue that assimilation is not necessarily always a uni-directional process. One view posits that mainstream society is now a “composite culture,” where different minority subgroups present in the mix will lend aspects of their culture to the dominant group. This in turn causes a decline in ethnic distinction, and decreases the relevance of cultural and social differences between people of different backgrounds in most spheres of their daily lives (Alba & Nee, 2005).

What is much less studied in the field is the 30% of couples from the Pew data who are in mixed marriages that do not involve a white partner. This must mean they marry outside their race/ethnicity to another minority racial/ethnic group. While there would be many combinations to investigate, this study will focus on Hispanic-Asian couples. To obtain an estimate of the rate of these types of marriages, I used data from demographic studies by Qian and Lichter, who have been investigating patterns of intermarriage among immigrants compared with natives for all broad ethno-racial categories (White, Black, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian) for the past few decades. Based on data from their 2001 study using 1995 Census data, about 0.11% of marriages were between a Hispanic spouse and an Asian spouse for individuals aged 20 – 34. The level stayed basically the same in a 2011 follow-up paper using 2008 Census data, which also showed that 0.11% newly formed marriages in 2008 were between an Asian spouse and a Hispanic spouse. A slight tick upward could be seen in their subsequent 2015 paper, which showed that 0.24% newly formed marriages from 2008 – 2012 were between an Asian spouse and a Hispanic spouse. It seems that very few researchers investigate this pairing because it occurs at very low frequency.

Many factors contribute to an individual's choice of marriage partner. Firstly, people are exposed to possible marriage partners in "marriage markets," which include the neighborhood, school, and workplace. There are variations within each with regards to level of diversity, and individuals might occupy different social locations within each one. Secondly, the concept of the logic of numbers, which states that endogamy is inversely proportional to group size, suggests that people who are in minority populations in particular marriage markets should marry out more frequently, but generally to the majority group. Additionally, third-party constraints, such as parental influence or religious group approval, have been cited as factors in whether or not to pursue marriage with a romantic partner. Marriages do not happen in isolation, and couples take cues about the suitability of their marriage from their surroundings. Lastly, the importance of cultural similarity has been shown to help form and sustain marriages. Cultural similarity has been deemed to play a large role in establishing commonalities in worldviews and activities, as well as higher levels of comfort between the partners as they navigate through life (Kalmijn, 1998).

While there are a lot of superficial differences between Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups as a whole, such as language and physical appearance, partnerships between members of the two groups may not be as exogamous as perceived just by looking at race/ethnicity alone. There are other dimensions on which they could actually be in an endogamous marriage. These include religion (especially Christianity or Catholicism), education and occupation, social characteristics on which there is actually a high level of endogamy (Rosenfeld, 2008). So, although marriage is often seen as a personal choice based on romantic love, it is possible that these mixed marriages are less a product of preference than one of exposure and opportunity, within the limits of social norms at the time. Some sociologists argue that selection of partner is actually quite predictable as a result of "formal and informal social rules and expectations that direct people to behave in a certain way" (Yodanis & Lauer, 2017).

The goal of this project was to record and analyze some of the experiences of individuals in Hispanic/Asian marriages. I wanted to answer a few broad questions, namely:

- How do people meet? What draws them together?
- What is the effect of third parties on their choice of partner?
- How similar or dissimilar are the spouses? How do they overcome differences?

Method

Participants are a convenience sample recruited either via author's personal network or contacting individuals in an online interracial dating advice forum. Participants were interviewed via phone or video chat for 30 mins to 1 hour. In two cases, answers were provided in written format. Questions covered background of individuals and their families of origins, how they met their spouse, dating and courtship, married life and interactions with in-laws.

Results & Discussion

Overview of Participants

Participants included both spouses of 2 married couples, as well as 3 individuals from interethnic/inter-racial marriages, for a total of 7 participants (names shown in bold in Table 1) representing 5 married couples. All participants were in a Hispanic/Asian relationship, and identified as either Hispanic or Asian, with the exception of one individual married to an Asian person, who identified as Mixed Caribbean, but speaks Spanish at home. All individuals had a least a college degree and were between the ages of 27 – 45 years old. The duration of marriage at time of interview ranged from 2 years to 8 years.

	Alias	Ethnicity	Education	Origin location
Couple 1	**Lucy**	Japanese/Chinese	M.A.	Hong Kong & Santa Barbara, CA
	Eric	Mexican	PhD	Santa Ana, CA
Couple 2	**Allie**	Chinese (Taiwan)	B.S.	East Bay, CA
	--	Mexican/Peruvian	M.A.	San Jose, CA
Couple 3	**Heather**	Ecuadorian	B.S.	Long Beach, CA
	Ben	Japanese	M.S.	Short Hills, NJ
Couple 4	**Kate**	Chinese	J.D.	New York City (Brooklyn)
	--	Colombian	M.B.A	New York City (Queens)
Couple 5	**Sarah**	Caribbean mixed	PhD	New York City (Queens)
	--	Chinese (HK)	B.S.	Hong Kong & Baltimore, MD

Table 1: Demographic data of participants

Getting together

Since demographic data shows that Hispanic/Asian couples are relatively rare (>1% all marriages in a given year), I wondered whether this could be due to the lack of opportunity to meet in inclusive situations, or if it was more of a lack of a shared “culture.” To shed light on how couples who successfully transitioned to marriage met and formed bonds, I asked about courtship, such as their dating timelines, cohabitation, and what they most liked about the other. I also asked how they felt about themselves culturally, to get a better picture of their identity.

Identity and previous exposure to diversity

With respect to identity, most participants expressed a degree of “mixed” identity bridging their ethnic roots and the culture of their upbringing (in most cases, America). All participants were highly proficient in English and well-assimilated into American culture but had bonds to their ethnicities through their parents, generally reinforced either by speaking a language other than English or routinely participating in cultural activities (holidays or food traditions) related to their ethnicity. Most were like Kate, who described feeling close to 50%/50% split between identifying as American and identifying as Chinese. Though she was born in the U.S., has never been to China, and has a diverse set of friends, her physical appearance and fluency in Chinese and role as lifelong translator for her parents created a strong tie to her heritage.

All respondents and their spouses were from the Northeast or California (with two spending a significant amount of time in Hong Kong). There was a wider range in terms of lifetime exposure to diversity. Some participants grew up in areas that were a bit more uniform in racial makeup, while others grew up in very multicultural environments. Two spoke of how the demographics of their schools or neighborhood changed as they grew up due to immigration into the area by particular ethnic groups. However, the majority reported having a diverse social circle, whether by virtue of their surroundings or their own personal initiative to cultivate relations to those with different backgrounds. Additionally, though prior dating partners was not explicitly asked during this interview, a few female respondents revealed that they had romantic relationships with partners of another ethnicity (though not the same ethnicity as their current spouse) prior to dating their spouse.

These findings seem to support research showing that previous exposure to diversity increases the likelihood of entering into an interracial relationship or marriage. For example, one study showed that individuals who had prior interracial contact in schools or neighborhood settings were more likely to continue to have diverse social networks as adults and also more likely to be interracially married (Emerson et al, 2007). Additionally, the

finding that several participants had previous interracial/interethnic relationships aligns with research showing that a woman having a different-race first partner is highly predictive of interracial marriage. This study also showed that women hailing from the West coast or the Northeast of America had the highest odds of interracial marriage, a trend seen in my data set as well (King & Bratter, 2007).

How do they meet?

The majority of couples interviewed met in a university or university-adjacent setting. For example, Allie met her spouse, who was attending the same school as her, during an on-campus activity. Ben and Heather also met while attending the same university, because they were both student employees at the school's gymnasium. Eric and Lucy attended separate universities in the same city, and met at an off-campus bar common for students and alumni of both schools. This venue for meeting is unsurprising as it has been empirically shown that as people spend more time in educational institutions and spend a shorter time between school and marriage, most people meet their spouses while at school (Rosenfeld). For those who do not meet at school, the workplace, where Kate met her spouse, is the next most "efficient" marriage market, and is becoming increasingly homogeneous for educational attainment as well (Kalmijn).

Almost all participants met their spouse in-person, except Sarah, who met her husband on the dating app Hinge. Two other individuals in Hispanic/Asian relationships who were interviewed but not included in this study because they were not married, stated they met online using a dating app. Both agreed it might be difficult to have had the opportunity to meet their partners "in real life." For one individual, the distance was geographic, and for the other, the distance was between their social circles due to socioeconomic status. Since studies have shown that online dating platform users are increasingly willing to date outside their race (Tsunokai et al, 2009), it will be interesting to see if this translates to more married couples meeting online/virtually in the future.

What drew them to each other?

In answering the question about what attracted them to their spouse, the majority of respondents spoke of qualities they desired or admired in a partner. Many of these qualities revolved around personalities and dispositions (for example, most respondents mentioned a form of "caring," "willing to help others" and "respectful" in their response), in addition to shared interests and common activities. Most respondents made no explicit mention of their spouse's ethnicity in describing what attracted them to their partner. The exception was Sarah, who listed her husband's "willingness to share his culture and traditions" as a reason. Aside from her, no one voiced particular interest in the other's culture or language as a reason for embarking on the relationship.

Ideologies outlined in a previous study by Yodanis, Lauer and Ota (2012) on "affiliative ethnic identity," a framework with which to understand interethnic relationships, had the potential to help me characterize the nature of my participants' attraction to their spouses. In this study, the authors interviewed subjects who were in relationships with people who spoke a different first language than them and used the results to establish three types of affiliations. One was "affiliating with a particular ethnicity," where individuals take on an "identity rooted in knowledge, regular consumption and deployment of an ethnic culture that is unconnected to an individual's ethnic ancestry." Language skills and engaging in the culture's cultural activities are important in this type of identity. In another, "multicultural identities," individuals are "open to moving freely within and between cultures." They have a clear interest in pursuing ethnic differences but are not limited to a particular type of ethnicity with which to affiliate. Lastly, "disconnection with one's own ethnicity" individuals are characterized by having a "more intense feeling of not belonging to parts of their own culture." These people desire to move away from their ancestral ethnicity.

However, the results of my study indicate that my respondents didn't fit neatly into these three identities. The "affiliating with a particular ethnicity" ideology was not very prominent, because almost no one mentioned an interest in the other's ethnicity; rather, they evaluated the partner as an equal in spite of their different

background. Additionally, “disconnection with one’s own ethnicity” was not very well-represented either, as most respondents were comfortable with their own self-reported identities that was a blend of their heritage and their upbringing in America. A few, mainly the mixed-race/ethnicity participants, might have exhibited a greater degree of “multicultural identities” than the others, but it was still not the norm. It is possible there are differences in the responses from the participants in my study and those interviewed by Yodanis et al, because the participants in my study are married while the participants in the paper were still in courtship phases (or had already dissolved the relationship).

A more suitable description for the participants’ attitudes towards their spouse’s differing ethnicity is “colorblindness,” or the minimization of race/ethnicity. While the term was coined with respect to Whites, it can be applied to ethnic/racial minorities who intermarry (Vazquez, 2014). Though they acknowledge the fact that there are racial/ethnic differences between them and their partner, it is not an obstacle to their personal relationship. Still, to add an alternative explanation, one that is not centered on ethnic differences but rather similarities despite ethnic differences, such as a shared “bridging culture” of being a mixed-identity individual or someone who “gets being a minority in America” (Chong, 2017), could be an avenue for future study.

Cohabitation

Fewer than half the couples in the study lived together for an extended period of time (< 1 year) prior to marriage. This was a surprising result as it differs from a demographic study showing a greater propensity for inter-racial/inter-ethnic couples involving a white partner to cohabitate prior to marriage (Choi et al, 2022). I had expected that, due to the potential for large difference in cultures, people in mixed marriages would have wanted to cohabitate first to ensure compatibility of lifestyle. It is possible that the personalities of individuals willing to pursue intermarriage makes cohabitation unnecessary.

Third-party influences

Though its influence has been declining, family is one pillar of third-party constraints that have an effect on individuals’ choice of marriage partner. Studies have shown that parental influence, whether in the form of parental control or other decisions like choice of neighborhood in which to raise children, have an effect on individuals’ likelihood of being in an interracial relationship in adolescence, though the effect varies based on gender and race (Zhang & Sassler, 2019). To investigate this, participants were asked about the level of interactions with parents and in-laws and the nature of the interactions, as well as any cultural and language barriers the faced.

Parental reactions to spouses

The initial reactions of parents to each participant’s significant other were mixed, and in some cases asymmetrical within one couple. For example, Allie recounted the strongly negative reaction of her parents the first time her future husband met her parents. Over an agonizing dinner, they exhibited passive-aggressive behavior and refused to speak with him, deferring all conversation to her brother, who mirrored their attitude. Her mother privately made other underhanded insults about their relationship. On the other hand, Allie’s initial experiences with her husband’s family was strongly positive. In a complete reversal of her parents’ attitude towards her husband, her husband’s parents exuded warmth and welcomed her with the “mi casa es tu casa” hospitality. Though her parents have accepted her husband over time, Allie felt her parents’ initial frosty reception was due to the difference in social class between her family and his.

Lucy had a similar experience. She actually did not reveal to her mother that she and Eric were dating until they got engaged, due to fear of disapproval. This was because of Lucy’s mother’s racism against a previous romantic partner of a darker-skinned ethnicity. When she did present Eric, her mother’s reaction was ambiguous, and Lucy couldn’t tell if her mother’s resigned acceptance of Eric was just due to relief that Lucy (34 years old at the time) was getting married at all. The reaction Lucy received from Eric’s mom, however,

was very positive. Her mother-in-law was not judgmental and only expressed that she wanted both children to be happy. Lucy was shocked at the ease with which she was able to obtain his mother's approval.

Heather responded that her parents were surprised that she brought home an Asian man. She said that in her parents' home country of Ecuador, the cultural preference for those who emigrate to America is that it is best to marry a white American, because then "the baby will have blond hair and blue eyes." Her family warned her there would be a big cultural difference if she pursued the relationship, believing that Asian families were more "formal" compared to their "warmth." She admitted there were differences, but less so than she expected, as she spent more time with Ben and his family. On the other hand, Ben was surprised how easily his parents took to Heather. Though she wasn't Japanese, the more they got to know her, the more they found how seamlessly she filled the void of the daughter they never had (Ben is one of 3 sons).

The other couples did not note any anecdotes about drastic first impressions that needed to be overcome, nor was there an instance where both sets of parents harbored strong feelings against the match. The data seems to suggest that as long as a couple has the support of at least one set of parents, they can pursue their relationship without too many insecurities overshadowing their choice of partner. Another factor could be the relative independence of the participants. For the most part, the participants were advanced in their education or career and had spent a significant amount of time away from home by the time they thought about getting engaged. For example, Eric stated that he believed that if he had been 10 years younger, he would have had a harder time convincing his family to allow him to marry exogamously. This demonstrates that parents could have opinions, but for the most part respected the maturity of their children as well as the choices they made.

Frequency of visitations with parents and in-laws

The frequency of visitations with parents and in-laws varied and seemed to be mostly at the couple's discretion. At one end, some participants were quite distant from their families, whether by choice or work-location constraints. Others who lived close to parents saw their families fairly frequently (1x/week). The rest had a medium (1-2x/month) level of visitations to or from family members, which could fluctuate depending on special occasions like birthdays or holidays. Three of the 5 couples saw one spouse's parents on a more regular basis than the other. One couple saw both sets of parents/family equally regularly together as a couple, and another couple saw their families individually (each spouse going to their respective family) at similar intervals. For the most part, it seems like the couples were able to maintain an appropriate balance of connection and distance from their families to lead independent lives. With few exceptions, parents respected their children's autonomy and were not too meddlesome.

Nature of interactions with in-laws and language barriers

The nature of the interaction with in-laws also varied. Here, the effect of a language barrier was asymmetric. All the Hispanic spouses in the relationship spoke Spanish with their families of origin. None of the Asian spouses besides Ben claimed any level of proficiency to comfortably engage in discourse in Spanish with their in-laws, but some of parents of the Hispanic spouse spoke English proficiently enough to their child's spouse to facilitate interactions and the Asian spouses found ways to manage. Kate mentioned the usefulness of Google Translate, and Lucy noted that "there are more ways than language to connect" and still felt she could make meaningful connections with her mother-in-law when they spent time together, for example, learning cooking or gardening techniques. On the other hand, 4 of 5 parents of the Asian spouse spoke English, so there was less difficulty with communication for most of the Hispanic spouses. In any case, where there was a language barrier, it was not seen as an impediment to the relationship, because deeper/frequent contact with in-laws was not required to sustain the marriage.

Interactions with other mixed-race couples

All participants and their spouses knew other interracial/interethnic couples, though in only one case was the couple also a Hispanic/Asian pair. A surprising amount of interracial/interethnic were within their own families. Siblings, especially younger siblings, of respondents were often in relationships (both married and unmarried)

to people of other ethnicities/races. This is interesting because research has shown that having an older sibling in a mixed relationship also increases the likelihood of an individual engaging in a mixed relationship. The trend of multiculturalism might run in families, like Sarah's, where even her grand-aunts were married to Asian men, so she felt she was continuing a pattern rather than breaking a trend. While intermarried couples are relatively rare, they might not be as rare in some smaller social circles or familial contexts, which helps dispel the norm of endogamy for their group members.

Cultural Distance

Are Hispanic/Asian spouses really very dissimilar? It seems that despite potentially different origins, there are a lot they might share with respect to their life paths, especially personal and career development achieved through higher education, which expose them to similar people, lifestyles and values, in addition to setting them up for jobs in similar fields and income levels.

Differences

One obvious difference between the partners of these couples is their ethnicity, though only one respondent mentioned it when asked (see prior section on attraction). Larger-magnitude initial differences expressed by the respondents concerned food, communication, and religion. All couples, though, were able to get over these diverging elements, usually by one spouse accommodating the other. Regarding food, for example, Eric admitting he had to get used to Lucy's eating preferences, such as sampling a lot of small dishes prevalent in Asian cuisines. With respect to communication, it was commonly expressed that the Asian household was not as open or warm. Kate related having to get used to physical forms of expression like hugging and kissing ("the touch aspect") in her husband's culture, which was initially foreign to her. Religious differences were also present but readily resolved. Heather was not religious when she met Ben, a practicing Christian, so she entered the faith upon entering into a relationship with him. For many of these couples, the relationship bond was strong enough that individuals found it worth making changes to accommodate the differences.

Similarities

Facilitating the couples' relationships and transitions to marriage was the fact that most couples did not bring many traditions from their upbringing into their new home. The bilingual spouses did not attempt to speak the non-English language in their new household. The participants did not enforce cultural traditions on their spouse and were comfortable letting traditional holiday celebrations to be spearheaded by their parents, with their participation being voluntary. For the most part, they established identities together as a married couple based around their similarities. Shared interests revolved around lifestyle activities like travel and fitness, food, and pet ownership. Shared goals centered on home ownership and career advancement. Shared values included having similar views on social issues and spirituality. In describing these similarities, all the couples were not unlike any other same-race/ethnicity couple who had a shared cultural background. The fact that these couples persevered goes against traditional warnings that "the greater the spouses' cultural differences, the more difficulties they can expect to encounter in adjusting to marriage" (Moran).

Class

While this study specifically recruited individuals in interracial/interethnic marriages, there were also differences between each pair's "class of origin". In 4 of 5 couples profiled in this study, one person grew up in a lower socioeconomic level than their future spouse, meaning there was an asymmetry between the two spouse's parents' level of educational attainment or occupation (metrics sometimes used as a proxy for socioeconomic level during participants' formative years). Here, asymmetry was defined as both of one spouse's parents completing college or higher degree, while the other spouse's parents did not achieve higher than high school diploma or worked "blue-collar" jobs. On the other hand, there was much more uniformity in the educational attainment and current occupations between the spouses themselves. For perspective, all of the participants interviewed had a college degree, and the majority (5 of 7) completed at least one post-graduate degree. All

were currently employed in white-collar jobs. In their current positions, all participants were solidly middle-class (if not upper-middle class).

Despite the asymmetry in “class of origin,” participants found their spouse to be a suitable marriage partner and have committed to long-term relationships. No participant highlighted educational attainment or occupation specifically as a factor that attracted them to their partner, but having similar levels of education or types of job likely enabled them to have more similarities than they might have had otherwise. The pattern found in my study align with research showing that people rarely marry outside of their current socioeconomic class (sometimes alluded to as educational or occupational endogamy). On the other hand, many people do marry outside of the socioeconomic class they grew up in, especially if they achieve inter- or intra-generational mobility, like many of my participants or their spouses. This can add an extra layer of complexity to understanding the forces that attract the spouses to each other, because the extent to which an individual’s “culture” (dispositions, tastes, worldviews and perceptions of experiences) are rigidly linked to class origin or are changeable with social mobility, has been debated by scholars.

Regardless of the origin of the similarities and differences, the idea of “cultural complementarity” from a study on cross-class marriages (Streib, 2015) was evident in several responses. The author of the study found that couples in relationships that are heterophilic for social class of origin expressed appreciation for their partner in terms of “cultural complements,” or the “obverse” of traits they dislike in themselves and attribute to their own upbringing. Several participants in my study saw differing dispositions in their future spouse as something positive and complementary that they wanted to incorporate into their lives. For example, Allie revealed that she admired the individualistic streak in the personality of her husband. It was very different than her personality at the time, and something she desired but felt she never had the chance to cultivate, being raised in an Asian household. Similarly, Lucy noted how, by default, she’s uncomfortable sharing true feelings with close ones due to her upbringing under traditional Asian parents who rarely revealed their emotions. She found an “anchor” in Eric for his openness in communication and willingness to talk over sensitive issues. Notably, she appreciated Eric’s mother for bringing him up in such a way to foster this disposition in Eric. Overall, the results show that in addition to bridging ethnicities, mixed marriages might be even more important in bridging socioeconomic classes.

Conclusion

This study provided details on the lived experiences of several Hispanic/Asian intermarried couples. The study found that these individuals bridged cultures as well as classes. Participants mostly met their spouse at school or work, and despite some challenges interacting with parents or in-laws, were able to operate relatively independently to choose their partner. Interestingly, race/ethnicity did not play an explicitly significant role in respondents’ attraction to their partner. Their fluid/mixed identities bridging their culture of origin and their culture of upbringing in America made them comfortable bringing only small amounts of their ethnic heritage into their married lives. Despite seemingly divergent origins, these individuals might be more homogamous than they otherwise seem by belonging to a “third culture” of assimilated minority in America, which is characterized by similar educational/occupational paths and embrace of multiculturalism.

There are several limitations with this study. First, I used multiple forms of data collection, including both verbal interviews (phone or video) and written questionnaires (text-based documents), depending on the preference of the respondent. While this enabled me to increase the amount of data I gathered, it decreased the uniformity of responses acquired. Additionally, each method had its pros and cons. With the verbal interviews, I was able to build rapport more easily, gauge the interviewee’s personality and eliminate redundant questions. However, sometimes I felt that the nature of a real-time connection increased the effect of social desirability bias when answering questions. With written questionnaires, I found that responses were clearer, less contradictory, and more well-thought out. Unfortunately, I could not ask follow-up questions to the interviewee to expand on particular themes. Secondly, there is the possibility of interviewer bias. While I tried to maintain neutrality

throughout my interviews, I did disclose to all participants my ethnicity as Asian and my marital status as being married to a Hispanic male. Therefore, it is possible that some responses were tailored to the assumptions of characteristics of someone in this position, such as skewing the majority of the answers, to having a positive tone.

Furthermore, this study is also not generalizable to the wider population of individuals in Asian/Hispanic marriages because the sample was a convenience sample consisting of either first- or second-degree contacts from my personal network or people previously unknown to me who volunteered in response to my request soliciting participation. This sample is likely overrepresented in highly educated individuals and residents of a small set of locations within America. To address the issue in sampling and to further the research, it would be informative to expand the sample set to individuals currently residing in different geographic areas of the country and at different socioeconomic levels. It would also be insightful to interview couples in Hispanic/Asian relationships who are not yet married, and those who have been in ones that have since fallen apart. Adding these perspectives will be useful for comparisons to those in long-term marriages. In the future, it would be wonderful to be able to extend this study longitudinally and follow-up with these participants over the next several years. Combined with my existing data, I hope to continue to contribute to the literature in this small but growing field of study.

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