Connecting Interracial Relationships to Polynesian Culture

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Abstract
Interracial relationships are becoming more acceptable in our evolving society. The majority of previous research consists of African American and white couples. However, to date there has not been research conducted that examines the ways that Polynesian and white couples overcome cultural barriers and create communication satisfaction. This study uses a content analysis methodology to analyze the communication and cultural differences within interracial relationships. The participants include three white women married to Polynesian men. They were interviewed using a semi-structured and informal interview format as well as a narrative analysis. The results indicated a common belief of compromise.

Introduction
The year 2012 marked the 45th anniversary of the monumental Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia*. This crucial court case altered the way society viewed interracial relationships. “On June 12, 1967, the nation's highest court voted unanimously to overturn the conviction of Richard and Mildred Loving, a young interracial couple from rural Caroline County, Virginia (“Loving Decision: 40 Years of Legal Interracial Unions,” 2007). The United States has undeniably progressed since 1958 when the Lovings, an African-American man and a white female, were charged with a crime for being married to one another. Individually, the couple was charged with marrying outside their own race. It has only been in the last century that interracial marriage has finally become legal in all 50 states. In the year 2000, Alabama was the final state to appeal the anti-miscegenation law, which made it illegal for whites to marry nonwhites (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 35). According to Taylor et al. (2012), “about 15% of all new marriages in the United States in 2010 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from one another” (p. 1). Interracial marriages are rapidly growing in this country and as members of a diverse society we should be more
informed on the context of these emerging relationships. In an ever-evolving world, it is essential that we look at interracial relationships because “four-in-ten Americans (43%) say that more people of different races marrying each other has been a change for the better in society” (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 2). In essence, societal attitudes are changing toward racial differences, which is imperative to interracial relationships (Harris & Trego, p. 230).

To date, previous research has been conducted on individuals of African American, Hispanic, Asian (including Pacific Islanders), and White descent within interracial relationships and marriages. However, very little research has been conducted regarding interracial relationships specifically between Pacific Islanders, also known as Polynesians, and the white culture. The Polynesian islands consist of many islands in the Pacific Ocean: Hawaii, Tonga, Samoa (Western and American), Tahiti, New Zealand, and Fiji. This study will fill in the gaps of interracial relationships specifically between a white and Polynesian heterosexual couple.

Recently I entered into an interracial relationship with a Polynesian man and have found that there are many cultural, racial, and ethnic barriers to overcome in order for us to have a successful and healthy relationship. My relationship with my boyfriend Scott is different from any other relationship I have ever been in. I know in my heart that he was put in my life at the right time because we have so many things in common, which is what initially drew me to him. Scott and I met at our mutual friend’s wedding in September 2011 and we immediately hit it off. Scott is highly educated: he has two Master’s degrees, one in Communication and the other in History. During one of our initial conversations at the wedding we spoke of his thesis topic and my area of study. We are both enthusiastic about learning and exploring new things. Scott and I also share a common religious background, which initially provided a strong foundation for our relationship. Scott and I are both members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, more commonly known as Mormons. Many of our first in-depth conversations were about our religion and the role it has played in our lives. In these conversations, we both disclosed personal thoughts and feelings that required us to view one another as trustworthy. Although we have many similarities, our differences have overshadowed these many times. We have experienced instances where the miscommunication, assumptions, and lack of understanding have caused tears and hurt feelings. There are many differences within Polynesian culture compared with the white culture, including cultural barriers within interpersonal and relational communication. This study addresses these relational and interpersonal barriers and how
couples like Scott and I achieve full communication satisfaction and harmony within a relationship.

The purpose of this study is to discover communication patterns of interpersonal and relational communication within interracial couples, particularly between a Polynesian and white couple. Through this study I want to find answers to questions such as: how do Polynesian and white couples create communication patterns in order to create a successful relationship? How do interracial relationships succeed in society where this type of relationship is steadily growing? What are the contributing patterns to communication with successful interracial relationships?

Literature Review
In this study, I use the three relational stages in identity management theory by Tadasu Imahori and William Cupach. Irving Goffman’s theory of face negotiation will also be referenced in accordance with identity management theory. This theory supports the argument that couples deal with identity management differently at different stages of the relationship (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 244). These theories will provide support when addressing specific relational problems and provide the audience with further research on interracial relationships. This study is organized into three sections addressing Imahori and Cupach’s different relational stages of identity management theory, including trial, the enmeshment and renegotiation phase, collectivistic and individualistic cultures, and black and white interracial relationships. This study will focus on the ways to overcome intercultural relationship struggles in order to create a harmonious environment, ultimately leading to having one cohesive voice as a couple.

Identity Management Theory
The first stage of Imahori and Cupach’s identity management theory is the trial phase. In this stage, the couple will explore their cultural differences, manage tensions and mistakes in each other’s cultural identities, and risk face threats in order to discover the balance necessary for a relationship (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 244). In the initial stages of an interracial relationship each person’s identity has an influence in their interactions and relational communication style. When people are in the beginning stages of the relationship, things can be said that may possibly be offensive to the other person.

According to Cupach and Metts (1994), “Even the most skillful and well-intended communicator sometimes finds him- or herself in the position of
having spoken an inappropriate comment or having felt diminished by receiving a criticism from someone else” (p. 4). This was true when Scott and I first began dating. I was telling a good friend of mine how interesting it was to date a Samoan man. My friend said that he heard that Samoans eat horse meat. I was really taken back, yet intrigued by this statement! I called Scott and asked him if it was true, and if so, what the meaning was behind that. Scott responded defensively, saying, “Never say that again!” I immediately saved face by fully explaining why I was so curious and the context of the conversation I had with my friend.

When people create interpersonal relationships, individuals have to be able to manage face in order to recover from unintended communications and have the ability to protect oneself. This is something that a person may initially find attractive about the other person, their ability to support our face as they get acquainted (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 36). Another aspect of the trial phase involves exploring one another’s “cultural difference and what cultural identities they want for their relationship” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 244). Scott and I fortunately moved past the horse meat conversation, although other issues certainly arrived.

According to Nance and Foeman (1999), in “the first of four stages of the new model of interracial relationship development, as two individuals become acquainted they must become familiar with the similarities and differences between them and develop a shared belief that a relationship is possible” (p. 549). In order for a couple to believe that their relationship will continue to grow, they need to be able to create happiness as independent individuals within their interracial relationship. Some interracial couples have said that they have an extra advantage over intraracial couples as they have learned about new cultural traditions, thus creating a shared culture between the couple. “When strangers move into a new and unfamiliar culture and interact in it, the process of resocialization, or acculturation, occurs. Gradually, strangers begin to detect similarities and differences with the new surroundings” (Gudykunst & Yun Kim, 1997, p. 337). This couple can create happiness together and develop a closer relationship with one another. If couples can manage challenges in a satisfactory manner, a couple can create and share a relational culture (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 53). Now that there is support for the trial phase, next we will address the enmeshment stage of identity management theory.

The second stage of Imahori and Cupach’s identity management theory is the enmeshment phase. “In this stage, the couple finds comfort in who they are
as a couple, share rules and symbols, create common understandings of another and the relationship and focus on the intracultural interaction” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 244). In this stage couples start to find their own particular relationship identity as well as unique benefits after they have agreed to move forward with their relationship. Rather than looking to outsiders for relationship guidance, they turn to each other to create their own ideal relationship (Foeman & Nance, 2002, p. 245). The ideal relationship is exclusive to each couple and will become known the more time the couple is together. Each person in the relationship will look to the other to create or sustain their own attitudes about their shared identity.

Scott and I have entered into the enmeshment stage recently. We have had a few instances where we weren’t happy with another for talking about our relationship outside of our relationship. Scott understands that I really want to learn about the Polynesian culture, although he has asked me to ask him questions and not other people. He has also been upset that I have disclosed our private relationship information to my mom. He feels as though my parents will look at him differently, whether it is good or bad.

According to Foeman & Nance (2002), “partners may actually find a more comfortable place with each other than they did with their own kind” (p. 245). Moreover, they state, “It is interesting to note that many couples are actually forced into this phase by an unaccepting society” (Foeman & Nance, 1999, p. 551). Certain situations may cause the couple to engage in communication that requires full disclosure in order to continue their progress in the relationship, such as a couple being faced with disapproval from family members and friends. “Multiple encounters with racial stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination across time may result in lower satisfaction and stability” (Goodwin & Cramer, 2002, p. 73). These types of struggles are specific to interracial couples only. Although there are many ways that couples can continue to be successful in the enmeshment phase, including surrounding themselves with other interracial couples who support a common perspective (Foeman & Nance, 1999, p. 552), this type of friendship creates relatedness to other interracial couples and a support system for all couples involved. There is a sense of security when couples are surrounded with people that are having similar experiences and are facing the same issues. Scott and I have at least three other interracial couples we get together with on a regular basis. It is ironic because within the relationships the females are white and the males are “brown,” we joke.

Also, during the enmeshment stage couples share common perspectives and shared visions of the relationship. According to Foeman and Nance (2002),
“Interracial couples may choose to see themselves as exceptional or different, but ultimately, as existing in their own right and on their own terms rather than as inadequate in terms of what is deemed desirable by others” (p. 246). This may include stories that are built on past experiences where the couple’s interracial status was threatened or drawn attention to.

The final stage of Imahori and Cupach’s identity management theory is the renegotiation phase. This stage suggests that cultural differences have already been defined as part of the relationship and are more manageable, the couple has a stronger relational identity, and cultural differences are easier to manage because there is already a common basis for doing so (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 244). In this stage, couples reinforce to another their unique cultural identities as an asset to the relationship, whereas in the previous stages differences were seen as an obstacle for the couple. For example, couples will be able to look at their wedding ceremony as a site for two distinct and different cultures to come together and be one. They will see this as a positive reflection of their relationship and their individuality as a couple. According to Nance and Foe (1999), “when couples emerge with effective strategies and perspectives, they may feel energized to share their views” (p. 554). Couples will offer younger couples advice regarding what would work for them, or how they adapted to each other. These types of couples will find happiness in being part of a team.

Renegotiation is constantly changing. Couples will cycle through this phase numerous times throughout the lifespan of their relationship. Events that bring out racial awareness such as having children, resolving conflict, and coping with each other’s individual issues causes the couple to revisit the previous two stages of relational management. “Over a lifetime together, the pair will have more or less need at any given time to focus on race or to evolve as an interracial couple” (Nance & Foe, 2010, p. 247). However, they continue, “inasmuch as every couple has its unique challenges such a statement implies that the interracial couple does not find a particular challenge to be insurmountable or a burden and may, in fact, enjoy many of the opportunities the relationship provides” (Nance & Foe, 2010, p. 247). Interracial couples face many obstacles and are presented with many uncomfortable moments. However, if the couple has the desire to stay together and work through what comes their way, “the happy couple will also learn to enjoy the ride” (Nance and Foe, 2010, p. 247).
Collectivism—Individualism
The islands within Polynesia are considered a collectivistic culture. This type of culture tends to focus on goals, needs, and views of the group as a whole, rather than the individuals’ own goals, needs, and views (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). These include “shared ingroup beliefs, rather than unique individual beliefs, cooperation within ingroup members, rather than maximizing individual outcomes” (Gudykunst & Yun Kim, 1997, p. 57). Collectivists are satisfied with few choices, silence is considered a virtue, and the family (birth or marriage) is the most important, although new relationships tend to be difficult (Holliday, 2011). Traditionally Polynesians have considered the needs of the family and village first. This idea begins to take shape early as a young child. In Margaret Mead’s (1973) research on the island of American Samoa, she stated that the most important relationship within a Samoan household is the relationship between the boy and girl who call each other “brother” and “sister,” whether they are related by blood, marriage, or adoption (p. 32). This childhood relationship shapes the child’s collectivistic communication style and implies the sense of being a part of a larger familial group.

When I first met Scott’s extended family, I noticed this immediately. His niece and nephew are referred to as each other’s brother and sister by the other family members, even though biologically they are first cousins. This is also true in adult relationships; Scott has many usos, which is the Samoan word for brother. He takes great pride in calling his friends his uso. As we have moved forward with our relationship, he has begun to create a friendship with my girlfriend Michelle’s boyfriend, Robbie. I have heard Scott say to Robbie, “You are my brother, and I just don’t say that to anyone.”

In the early years, children also form relationships with “any older relative, which has a right to demand personal services from younger relatives, a right to criticize their conduct and to interfere in their affairs” (Mead, p. 30). These significant initial relationships start to teach the child respect and honor, as well as respecting their elders. Children are taught very early on to listen and obey all older family members. This is the beginning stage of their collectivistic communication with others in the family unit. Children’s relationships with their biological parents are very effortless and painless (Mead, 1973, p. 190). As the child continues to grow, their family considers them a sense of pride. “Within many households the shadow of nobility falls upon the children, sometimes lightly, sometimes heavily” (Mead, 1973, p. 190). This is true, especially with the oldest child or with a child’s potential rank within the village when the child gets older. Samoan parents are very proud of their children and
see them as a reflection of who they are as parents. Children are a sense of pride for the family name and are treated as such. As young Samoans continue to grow and shape their lives, they begin to participate and contribute to the collectivist style of family life. This is also true for Samoan families living on the mainland United States, although for a first or second generation family, the island values and traditions remain something that holds the family culture together. Many Samoan families have chosen to assimilate within American society, yet still create that “island feel” in the home. Within Samoan homes many families have multiple generations, relatives and other various members of their family living in the same household, such as the villages in Samoa. They keep the feeling of togetherness and support as a collectivistic family culture that learns from their ancestors. For example, in Scott’s Mom’s home there are six adults and two children that live in the house full time. It consists of Scott’s three biological siblings (two females and one male) and their two children, as well as two biological cousins.

An individualistic culture such as the United States emphasizes individual identities, beliefs, needs, goals, and views rather than those of the group (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Within the individualistic culture the individual is independent and looks out for themself and their immediate family. Individuals are different and unique, self-reliant, and continually strive to improve themselves. Within individualistic cultures there are ingroups, “groups that are important to their members” (Gudykunst & Yun Kim, 1997, p. 57). These ingroups may consist of immediate family, their religion, their chosen profession, and social clubs that might influence behavior in any particular social situation (Gudykunst & Yun Kim, 1997, p. 57). These ingroups affect the individuals’ beliefs, which affect different areas of their life. Individualism is expected to affect communication mainly through its influence on group identities and differentiation between ingroup or outgroup communication (Gudykunst & Yun Kim, 1997, p. 57).

The white culture may relate more toward an individualistic culture, as it is difficult for most white people to describe exactly what cultural patterns are uniquely white (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 187). Frankenburg (1993) describes whiteness not only in terms of race or ethnicity but also as a set of linked dimensions (p. 190). “These dimensions include (1) normative race privilege; (2) standpoint from which white people look at themselves, others, and society; and (3) a set of cultural practices” (Frankenburg, 1993, p. 190). Therefore, it seems as though it is expected that members of an individualistic culture perform more facework than do members of the collectivistic culture.
Individuals use facework to build their own esteem and create their identity. As individuals form interpersonal relationships with other individuals they form a shared cultural identity. “Relational partners co-construct the interaction episodes that constitute their relationship” (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 96). Couples bring their identities together to “form what Goffman calls a ‘working consensus’ which encompass both partners and spans their interactions with another” (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 96). Couples continue to work to create a co-culture within the relationship.

The traditional cultural descriptions of individualism and collectivism create a label for the “other” within our growing society. “Despite the claim to neutrality, it seems clear that individualism represents imagined positive characteristics, and collectivism represents imagined negative characteristics” (Holliday, 2011, p. 9). These descriptions continue to allow us to put the “other” into a category. The attempt to categorize people is society’s way of trying to fully comprehend our differences. “These terms have a problematically unclear nature, hovering between geography and psychological concept, to the extent that it is impossible to use them in a logical, consistent manner, while at the same time using them is in unavoidable because they are on everyone’s lips” (Holliday, 2011, p. 11).

**Interracial Relationships**

Just as all romantic relationships begin, those who make up interracial couples have an initial attraction or draw to one another. According to Harris & Kalbfleisch (2000), “one partner finds the racially different other more appealing because of her or his race” (p. 50). This is an attraction based on skin tone and attractiveness that the couple initially sees in each other. As an interracial relationship continues to move forward, it is socially risky and subject to many struggles that intraracial couples do not face. According to a study by Harris & Kalbfleisch (2002), “According to some participants family and society as external factors have communicated that romantic relationships, between African Americans and European Americans remain socially ‘taboo,’ despite the anti-miscegenation laws of 1964” (p. 63). Research suggests that individuals that were raised in a diverse environment surrounded themselves with different races. The possibility of dating a person of another race is more likely to happen. They grow accustomed to the cultural differences, therefore interracial relationships are not as taboo. This is true for Scott, who was previously married to a Cuban woman. His previous dating experiences had only consisted of Latinas.
According to Foeman & Nance (1999), there are two myths that are associated with black and white couples. The first myth regarding blacks and whites in relationships is that black men are over-sexualized. This myth is rooted in slavery, where the white women believed that to be true (p. 543). The second myth is that blacks marry whites for status, and a white woman exchanges her race status for a higher socioeconomic status (p. 543). “Although it would be silly to argue that no black-white relationships are based on a social-economic trade-off, this aspect may be overplayed” (Foeman & Nance, 2000, p. 544). Even though interracial relationships are still the minority within society, it is less likely to see a black female with a white male. “When a white male dates or marries a black female, no fundamental change in power within the American social structure is perceived as taking place” (Goodwin & Cramer, 2002, p. 67).

As interracial relationships become more popular the power within society will begin to fluctuate, as Michele Foucault states in his theory of discourse formation. Discourse formation states that power shapes and conditions who we are as a society and shifts with time; it never stays in one place. We don’t have power—more correctly, according to Foucault, power “has us” as a society, and there are no guarantees as to where or how it will develop or congeal over time.

Current statistics show that, “8.4 percent of all current U.S. marriages are interracial, which is up from 3.2 percent in 1980” (Yen, 2012). This statistic shows that many more individuals are exploring and viewing change within relationships. The younger generations are breaking away from their parents’ views and are becoming educated. According to Lobe (2005), “the younger and better-educated people in the US are more likely to intermarry than older and less-educated citizens” (p. 32). If interracial relationships continue to evolve it is imperative that societies’ attitudes do as well. There are many struggles within interracial relationships, although there can also be many benefits. In order for the relationship to succeed it will require a balance between the two individuals. According to Martin & Nakayama (2010), “the benefits of such relationships include (1) acquiring knowledge about the world, (2) breaking stereotypes, and (3) acquiring new skills” (p. 383). Individuals in the relationship may not always see these benefits as positive and at some point may agree that the costs outweigh the rewards for the individual, such as the social exchange theory states. All things considered, the effort an individual will have to put into an interracial relationship is so much more than an intraracial relationship.
According to Troy, Lewis-Smith, and Laurenceau (2006), “the decreased benefits and increased costs of interracial romantic relationships, when combined with a large pool of attractive alternative partners, should result in more relationship difficulties and less satisfaction than for couples of intraracial relationships” (p. 68). With the divorce rate increasing at a rapid rate, marriage is a gamble and is proven to be more so interracially. Divorce rates in interracial marriages overall show a 41% chance of separation compared to 31% in couples who did not marry interracially (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 35). Although there are many risks, the benefits posed by Martin & Nakayama are also available. An intercultural relationship, whether it be a friendship or romantic, will teach each individual about a new culture and have the ability to broaden the other’s horizons. As interracial relationships increase, we will find that as a society we will have a better understanding of others and the struggles they have endured. It will help us to critically think about other’s thoughts, actions, and feelings toward issues that may be sensitive to the other.

With all the many differences discussed, how do interracial couples create a loving, respectful, and committed relationship? In the brief study that follows, I explore the meanings attached to interracial relationships between Polynesian and white couples. I undertake a critical analysis in order to draw attention to the outlook of the white women and their relationships with Polynesian men. Although the women’s relationships are not equal and have many differences, I focus on the commonalities to understand the struggle within interracial relationships.

**Methodology**
Studies such as this are important because there is a lack of research regarding the white and Polynesian culture within intercultural and interpersonal communication and relationships. The numbers of interracial relationships are growing within society; therefore, further research is needed to support either success or decline within relational satisfaction. This research contributes to an understanding of how members of Polynesian and white relationships maintain relational communication satisfaction.

**Participants**
The participants and their significant others are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The Mormon religion acts as the bridge to connect the women to this study. Overall, the church highly values the family unit and acts as a collective community for its members. Therefore, the number of Polynesians that belong to the church is growing. These women married
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another member of the church that come from the Polynesian culture. Therefore, I reached out to the women to participate in the study.

The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: first, they self-identified with the white culture; and second, they have a marital relationship with a Polynesian man. Another reason these women were chosen was because I have had previous individual interaction with each one, increasing their feelings of personal trust. I knew these women had experiences that were fundamental to my research; therefore, I contacted each one of them individually and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed and share their knowledge as well as personal narratives in order to contribute to the study. Kay, one of my participants, is significantly older than the other two. I chose her based on her history with the culture and overall knowledge of the Polynesians.

I conducted my initial interview in May of 2012 with my sister’s close childhood friend, Ashley, who had recently celebrated her third anniversary with her Samoan husband, Foki. Ashley and Foki live in a suburb of Phoenix, Arizona. In March 2013 I contacted Scott’s mom, Kay, who was with her Samoan husband, Aiulu over 20 years before he passed away 21 years ago. Kay and her family have lived in the Los Angeles area for over 20 years. Finally, in March 2013 I interviewed a family friend, Kasey, who married a Tongan man, Suli, six years ago. Kasey and Suli live in a small town in Northeastern Arizona. I began the interviews by questioning and addressing the four stages of identity management theory by Imahori and Cupach and how they related or did not relate to the stages. I then asked participants about their relational differences between the individualistic and collectivistic culture. Finally, I asked the participants about Foeman & Nance’s theory of Interracial Relationships.

**Research Design and Procedures**

In order to obtain qualitative research information on the Polynesian and white culture, I used semistructured interviews which contained open-ended questions as a guide for the participant conversation. I allowed for the participants to provide personal narratives that contribute to thick description. This provided an understanding of cultural values and contributed to an overall understanding of the cultural meaning. I also used the constant comparative method in order to determine the similarities and differences between the participants’ relational communication. I began by setting up categories within the data in order to interpret the ethnographic and narrative analysis, which helped me to understand how the participants see the world.
Limitations
There are many limitations to this study. First, there is a 40-year age gap between the participants. This age gap may have caused different cultural views as well as rose-colored glasses. Second, while interviewing I relied on the participants to self-disclose honestly and not save face. With interviews that require a large amount of self-disclosure there should be consideration of face saving. In order to minimize the impact these limitations had on this study, I also chose participants that know me. I disclosed my personal struggles with the Polynesian culture, which provided the participants a sense of comfort when disclosing such personal information.

Findings
Among the women that were interviewed there were four common categories or areas of analysis. The first commonality between the participants is how they initially viewed the Polynesian culture. These women had very similar views of what they believe the Polynesian culture consisted of. The following statements are representative of this:

They are very happy people. I felt as though I was always listened to.

Everyone pulls together, after the baby I received dinner for three weeks in a row. Everyone is family when it comes to supporting another. Everyone takes care of another.

Polynesians are so giving and welcoming to everyone. He would give his shirt off his back whether he needs it or not.

The women all shared a love for the collectivist aspect of the Polynesian culture. They liked that their partner was interesting and different than what they were culturally used to. They also appreciated that they were able to learn about a new culture and grow with a man with whom they were falling in love. As a whole, Polynesians are very family oriented and this provided an initial common ground on which to build a relationship.

On the other hand, the opposite perception was voiced regarding the participants’ view of the Polynesian cultural traditions, rituals, and acceptance. The following statements reflect these responses given by the participants:

Some Samoans will say, “Here it is. Get used to it.”

You are either “in” or “out.” There are a lot of “no no’s” in this culture.
In Tonga, the oldest sister has the most respect in the family. Usually, she can name the first child if she wants to. Parents can take the first grandchild to Tonga and raise them. Yeah, they have weird things.

The women individually struggled with hurt feelings and being accepted within the Polynesian culture. They became frustrated with the lack of communication with their partners and often relied on research and conversations with outsiders. Nevertheless, in order to continue to build their relationship they knew they had to be open about their feelings, whether good or bad. Ashley said, “He appreciated me more ‘cause she asked him more questions that rely on research.”

Another area of analysis is the level of the participants’ adaptation that took place within a more collectivistic culture. This was different than what the participants had previously encountered in the individualistic culture. Each participant had different experiences, depending on their significant other, regarding the level of culture shock. The women discussed their initial feelings thus:

I did all the learning, changing and adapting. I had to bite my tongue. I was expected to change. I’d come home crying, his family would ignore me, talk behind my back, there’s so much to learn and understand.

I didn’t feel interesting. Why would anyone like a white girl, we don’t have anything culturally cool.

Although this was true for the two younger participants, Kay’s comments reflected a different perspective regarding culture shock, which also reflects on the age gap between the participants. Kay has lived in the diverse community of Los Angeles area for over 50 years. She met her now-deceased husband in 1968, and the acceptable societal values, beliefs, and gender roles were very different than what society currently upholds. During that time, women generally had a tendency to lose themselves in their relationship with a significant other, even though the fight for women’s liberation had just begun. Kay, as well as her girlfriends, had a full time job after she finished high school. Therefore, she gained her independence and individuality through her employment and presumably didn’t need that sense of individuality in her relationship. This issue is significant because it seems that she had an easier time adjusting to the Polynesian culture shock than the other participants. As she stated,
I didn’t think that we were any different. I loved the culture and customs. I adapted to the Polynesian culture, I never felt like an outsider. I respected the culture and knew my role.

I was taught to take care of my family and your last name is all you have. You don’t do your last name wrong. You don’t embarrass your family.

The final category of analysis concerns when the interracial couple begins to identify as one complete unit. As couples progress in their relationship they take on one identity, essentially a third culture, and move forward together. All participants acknowledged that other people saw them as different, although Kasey noted a specific instance where she and her partner were confronted as a couple with their racial differences. Kasey overheard a heated conversation between her husband Suli and a few white men. She felt as though the white men were “talking to him like he was stupid.” She was “mad” and asked the man, “why are you talking to my husband like that, he is a college graduate!” Kasey assumed that they were speaking down to her husband because he was “brown.” She asserted herself and stood up for her husband and their relationship. Kasey and Suli were bluntly confronted with their racial differences in this instance. She continued, “People look at us funny, I don’t care.”

Although society as a whole is moving forward in accepting interracial relationships, many still view interracial couples as “others.” Interestingly, the participants in the interracial couples do not see themselves as any different than those in intraracial couples:

There are lots of interracial couples and they have cute babies. We’re not any different, we’re normal. Interracial relationships are the norm.

I didn’t care if people looked at me ‘cause I was in an interracial relationship. I didn’t pay attention to how people viewed us.

I didn’t think we were different than anyone else.

Amongst the younger participants, compromise was the key to maintaining a happy relationship. They initially knew that their relationship would be turbulent due to the racial and cultural differences. It was a sacrifice they were willing to make in order to be in a happy relationship with the man they fell in love with. Kasey said, “My way isn’t the only right way. He comes
from a different part of the world, they do things differently. It’s all about compromise.” Ashley spoke of her cultural struggles, stating, “I’m with my husband and that is all that matters, when I am next to him. Stupid crap is stupid crap.” Ashley and Kasey initially struggled letting go of their individualism to connect with their Polynesian husbands. They resisted conforming to the collectivistic way, yet came to believe in compromise. However, Kay never felt as though she had to adapt to a different culture. She eased into her husband’s culture and confirmed this by saying, “for us his way was right way.” For her there was no need to culturally compromise; she had previously been exposed to the Polynesian culture and had adapted. Kay easily accepted her role as her husband’s partner with little compromise.

**Conclusion**

Interracial relationships are growing at an astounding rate, and so is society’s positive view of them. Until now, struggles with the Polynesian culture have not been addressed. The data presented in this research suggests that interracial relationships are starting to become the norm. There are going to be many cultural struggles, such as the struggles that Scott and I have experienced. These relationships require a lot of hard work and mutual commitment to another. Such work and commitment will contribute to the couple’s identity as one cohesive unit as long as both individuals learn to compromise. Listening to these women’s responses has helped me understand their cultural struggles as well as provide me with a strong sense of relatedness.

This study is vital to the field of intercultural and interpersonal communication in order to fill the gap within Polynesian intercultural relationships. It has contributed to research on identity management theory and individualist and collectivistic culture, as well as beginning the research on Polynesian and white couples. The present research is based on many different races, although mainly African American and white relationships. This study has been expanded in order to incorporate Polynesians. It has addressed a gap in existing research with the voice of white women in marriages with Polynesian men. Understanding the responses of these participants adds an alternative perspective to the research on interracial relationships.

**References**


