WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING AN INTERCULTURAL-INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP?

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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- Intercultural Reality Check: Do-Ables

At twenty-two, I was a fiercely independent, nontraditional Jain Indian woman who lived in the United States with my parents. For a number of reasons, I decided to pursue an arranged marriage, shocking the closest of my friends. When I came back from India with my husband, my parents were the envy of all their friends. Not only was I the oldest daughter, but I acquiesced and chose a traditional arranged marriage. After one month together, imagine the realization that he was the biggest mistake of my life! My husband was not the man he claimed to be. But my parents were adamantly against the "D" word. "Grin and bear it," they advised me. They refused to become the outcast of the entire community, shamed and embarrassed. So I ignored it and put on a happy face.

After two long years of misery, depression, and suffering, I filed for a divorce. But what a cost . . . my parents no longer speak to me. It was and still is a devastating experience to me. I am now branded as a tainted woman. I recently moved out of the state and am slowly reclaiming my life back again.

Mona

To many East Asian Indians who have decided to pursue arranged marriages or are pressured to follow the traditional path, Mona's relational situation is not an exception to the rule. However, from the lens of our own cultural view, we may read the situation with shock and awe. Why would any independent woman choose to go to India and marry an individual whom she has never dated or barely even knows? What part did *love* play in this arranged marriage? What is the role of *passion* in this relationship pairing? Why should Mona "grin and bear" a miserable marriage? Didn't her parents care enough about her to support her "D"-word decision?

If we probe deeper into how different cultures handle intimate relationship issues, we may learn more about the challenges, decisions, and creative solutions that occur as they deal with different relationship problems. Their decisions may open our eyes to diverse ways of communicating in an intimate relationship. According to Guerrero et al. (2011), *intimacy* is "related to the degree to which people communicate affection, inclusion, trust, depth and involvement conveyed in a variety of ways" (p. 18). Intimate relationships can include deep friendships, romantic relationships, and close family relationships.

This chapter examines the challenges individuals face in forming voluntary intercultural-intimate relationships. The discussion first addresses the relationship challenges that individuals face when they come from diverse cultural value systems. Next, it identifies the facilitating factors that prompt relational partners to be attracted to each other. Third, the chapter addresses particular obstacles that some couples face when they desire to move the relationship to marital bonding stages. Fourth, it explores issues of raising secure, bicultural children. Finally, there are do-able guidelines for developing a healthy intercultural-intimate relationship. Understanding the challenges, facilitating factors, obstacles, and rewards of an intercultural-intimate relationship can help us to be more mindful and patient in dealing with our own diverse intimate relationships.

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL-INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS: INVISIBLE CHALLENGES

Before we discuss why individuals are attracted to one another across cultural or ethnic lines, we need to look deeper into the cultural "iceberg" (remember Chapter 3) and explore the semihidden values that come into play in any relationship. Let's first revisit some familiar terms, such as individualism and collectivism, and draw out their implications for culture-based relationship expectations. Then everyone can investigate some communication decoding issues that may cause relationship misunderstandings.

Cultural–Ethnic Membership Values

Our cultural values (*individualism* and *collectivism*) influence our behaviors and our needs when we are in a close relationship, such as the need for *autonomy* and *connection*. Recall the core building block of individualism–collectivism lies in its relative emphasis on the importance of the "I" identity and the "we" identity (see Chapter 3). "I" identity members (e.g., Australians and Norwegians) tend to emphasize personal and relationship privacy issues. In contrast, "we" identity cultural members (e.g., Guatemalans and Costa Ricans) tend to emphasize family and ingroup network connection issues (see Table 10.1). From the collectivistic frame, relationship development is closely intertwined with the fate of others within the ingroup (Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2006; Wang & Chen, 2010; Wang & Lui, 2010). For example, Mona opted for the traditional path of an arranged marriage early on. She wanted the approval and acceptance of her family and extended family network in the very beginning. Although she suffered in her miserable arranged marriage right after the first month, she did not want to cause her family or extended family network to *lose face* or to be embarrassed on her behalf within the Indian ingroup community. This explains why her first choice was to "grin and bear it."

TABLE 10.1 INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC RELATIONSHIP ORIENTATIONS

Individualistic orientation	Collectivistic orientation
I-identity relationship expectations	Ingroup relationship pressures
Couple's privacy and autonomy needs	Ingroup's connection and concerns
Voluntary personal commitment	Family and social reactions
Low-context emotional expressions	High-context emotional expressions
Unique relational culture	Conventional relational culture

Despite some individualistic and collectivistic cultural differences, it is also important to know that in nearly all of thirty-seven cultural samples studied (Buss et al., 1990), both females and males endorsed *mutual attraction-love, dependability, emotional stability, kindness-understanding,* and *intelligence* as top-ranked mate-selection criteria. Overall, the greatest cultural variation is found in the attitude toward *premarital chastity.* Respondents in China, India, Nigeria, Iran, and Zambia (i.e., reflective of collectivistic values) differ from those of the continental United States and Western Europe (i.e., reflective of individualistic values) in placing a premium value on premarital chastity.

Love Expectations and Expressions

How do we define love? The word *love* can have many different connotations and at times can be very confusing. The term love can be used seriously or casually—depending on what culture you're from. Researchers simply cannot offer a clear definition of love. However, perspectives on love have been developed to distinguish love from liking, for example, comparing different types of love and liking as a triangle (Sternberg, 1988) or researching the different ideologies of love such as diverse love styles (J. A. Lee, 1977; Levine, Aune, & Park, 2006). In fact, individuals in the United States have different beliefs about romantic relationships and these different ideas suggest how different stages of relational initiation, maintenance, and termination play a critical role in intimate-interpersonal relationships based on love styles.

Just as people vary on how they conceptualize love, expectations concerning love across cultures vary as well. Although passionate love (affection, sexual desire, and attraction) is valued where family ties are weak (e.g., as in the larger U.S. culture), passionate love is diluted where family ties are strong (e.g., in South Korea and Pakistan). Romantic passionate love has been found to be a critical component in the "falling in love" stage of many individualists (Gao, 1991), thus the emphasis in individualistic cultures is on this kind of love regardless of the partners' cultural backgrounds or social standing (Kline, Horton, & Zhang, 2008). This is one of the reasons why individualists believe that getting married without love appears to be a disastrous decision. For example, our interviewee, Cailee (a college student), comments:

> In my opinion you cannot have love without attraction. That is my bottom line. Both terms can have very diverse meanings but with the same root. They connote a behavior and a feeling that motivate and drive people to connect with one another. They can be used for or against you and you need to understand why you're attracted to another person and fall head-over-heels in love with no regrets.

Cailee's view really represents the ideal in individualistic cultures, which is that romantic love is the central part of many love relationships, and that attraction chemistry is common during the initial stages of any romantic love relationship. In individualistic cultures, people typically want to "fall in love" (which sometimes involves intense dating procedures) and then either get married or move on to another dating partner. Romantic love, however, often poses major relational paradoxes. Although intimate partners desire to "lose" themselves in a romantic love-fused relationship, many of them also struggle with their desires for independence and personal freedom. Intercultural love experts Karen and Kenneth Dion (1996) concluded that the high divorce rate that characterizes "U.S. society is due in good part to the culture's exaggerated sense of individualism" (p. 286). They observe that in the United States, subscribers to "expressive individualism" face the following dilemmas in romantic relationships:

> First, one can "lose" one's self and the feeling of personal autonomy in a love relationship, feeling used

and exploited as a result. Second, satisfying the autonomous needs of two "separate" individuals in a love relationship obviously becomes a difficult balancing act. Third, the spirit of American individualism makes it difficult for either partner in a relationship to justify sacrificing or giving to the other more than one is receiving. Finally, and inevitably, Americans confront a fundamental conflict trying to reconcile personal freedom and individuality, on the one hand, with obligations and role requirements of marital partner and parent, on the other. (p. 286)

However, research indicates that many collectivists value companionate love (strong friendship and commitment) more than passionate love in romantic relationships (Gao, 1991). For example, some traditional collectivists (e.g., India, Iran, South Korea, and northern Nigeria, in which arranged marriages are still the norm) prefer to get married and then take their time to fall in love. Essentially, love is more pragmatic. In collectivistic cultures, ingroup harmony and cohesiveness are emphasized over individual needs and desires. From this particular value framework, the value of love as caregiving, doing things for one another, carrying out your relational obligations and role responsibilities, and tending to the relationship from a long-term perspective takes precedence over romantic ideals (Kline, Horton, & Zhang, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2009). Thus, for some collectivists, the meaning of being *in love* takes long-term commitment, reciprocal loyalty, and time to cultivate. They can also continue to learn to fall in love after their marriages. Alternatively, as they learn to grin and bear it, they may also have a change of heart and learn to accept the flaws and virtues of their lifetime partners (see Jeopardy Box 10.1).

Expert researchers on love, Kline, Horton, and Zhang (2008), also examined cultural differences in communicating love by comparing young adults from the United States and East Asian countries of China, Japan, and South Korea. The U.S. American and East Asian international students answered questions about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to love and friendship and also expectations concerning marriage. The results showed that East Asian respondents were more likely to believe that marriage is about *trust*, *caring*, and *respect* and that it takes *hard work*; U.S.

JEOPARDY BOX 10.1 TOP FIVE WEDDING SONGS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2009

Song	Artist
1. "From This Moment On"	Shania Twain/Bryan White
2. "At Last"	Etta James
3. "Power of Love"	Celine Dion
4. "I Cross My Heart"	George Strait
5. "Unchained Melody"	Righteous Brothers

Source: http://www.weddingzone.net/p-top50t.htm (retrieved April 22, 2011).

American respondents were more likely to believe that love in marriage is *essential* and *unconditional*.

East Asian students also tended to express love and affection in close friendships predominantly through "talking" activities such as having dinner together and drinking together, whereas U.S. American students tended to express love and affection in close friendships during activities (e.g., sports and exercise, going to movies or concerts, and shopping) along with having dinner and drinking together. In expressing love and affection in marriage, both groups had the same notions about important vehicles for expressing love: talking, having dinner together, doing things together, and physical intimacy. Both groups also subscribed to the importance of having similar beliefs, faithfulness, and commitment in marital relationships, more so than in close friendship relationships (Kline et al., 2008).

Autonomy–Connection Issues

In developing a relationship between individuals from two contrastive cultures, friends or romantic partners often face the choice of how to handle autonomy and connection issues without going crazy (see Blog Pics 10.1.a and 10.1.b). *Autonomy* is the need for personal privacy and regulated space in a relationship. *Connection* is the need for the merging of personal and psychological space. Independent-minded partners often view autonomy–connection struggles as a delicate high-wire act, constantly balancing the "me–we" dialectical forces (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In contrast, interdependent-minded partners often see autonomy and connection as a quadrangular juggling act, a "me–we–they–they" dance performance in the

(a)

(b)

Blog Pic 10.1 (a) Looking for love. (b) Intercultural-intimate relationship takes hard work.

intimate relationship and among their respective family/friendship connective networks. As a result, the intimate partners believe the romantic relationship will never be truly free from the grip of their family obligations, duties, and extended family reactions.

Further, in terms of relational commitment issues, individualists would tend to expect voluntary personal commitment from their partners in approaching their intimate relationships. However, for collectivists, structural commitment in an intimate relationship may be more important than (or at least on an equal footing with) personal commitment in a long-term romantic relationship. Here **personal commitment**

means an individual's desire or intent to continue the relationship based on his or her subjective emotional feelings and experiences; **structural commitment**, on the other hand, means the individual takes into consideration various external social and family reactions in deciding to either continue or terminate a relationship (M. Johnson, 1991). As in the opening scenario, Mona has opted for the importance of structural commitment over personal feelings, and, therefore, stays in her miserable arranged marriage for another two long years before seeking the "D" word.

As a result of the struggle with the autonomy and connection pulls, one other outcome among the individualistic cultural mindset is the phenomenon known as the "hook up" culture. Hooking up carries a wide range of meanings, but is linked to consensual sexual activities with no pretense of starting a committed relationship between young, mostly college-age students (Bogle, 2008). Bogle (2008) interviewed seventy-six U.S. college students over a span of five years and offered us some insights into how contemporary young men and women are grappling with the sexual realities in U.S. culture. Check out the following hook-up interview dialog (Bogle, 2008, p. 177) in which one female interviewee was complaining about her "hook up partner" to KB:

> Shana: He's not ready to commit. He wants to keep playing and I just can't sit around here anymore because it hurts too much.
> KB: Other girls?
> Shana: Yeah.
> KB: So he wants to be involved with you, but wants it to be a nonexclusive thing?
> Shana: [Right so]…then it comes to the point where he says: "We have to talk." And I'm like: "Oh great [sarcastic tone] Here we go again"…We are famous for having talks.
> [He says] "I want to make sure we are on the same page, that you realize that I am still not ready to commit to you. I see us in the future together but not right now."

Although many U.S. college students recognize hooking up as the pathway to a potential romantic relationship, a hook-up encounter does not guarantee any deep commitment beyond the in-the-moment

interpersonal encounter. An intimate relationship is already a complicated affair between two attracted partners within the same cultural community; imagine the complexity of intercultural romantic attraction, especially in conjunction with communication decoding issues (Imahori & Cupach, 2005).

Communication Decoding Issues

Many interesting things can happen in an intercultural relationship development journey. For example, let us consider the following incident in Blog Post 10.1. Olivia and Jose are classmates in the basic intercultural communication class at the University of Hawaii. Olivia is an ethnic mix of Hawaiian and African American, and Jose is from Brazil .

To minimize initial interaction anxiety, two cultural strangers must be at least proficient in a shared language and the use of the everyday slang and idioms of a culture (Gudykunst, 2003, 2004). Moreover, it is critical for the native language speaker to develop cultural sensitivity for a relational partner who is not a native language speaker. That is, even if Jose had understood the idiomatic phrase "chill" (or the word *date,* as in "dating" and not a fruit on the tree), Olivia's dating request might still have hit a brick wall because of the masculine gender role expectations in Brazil. Thus, beyond a shared language and an open-minded attitude, in-depth knowledge of the other's cultural values, expectations, idioms, nonverbal moves, and dating rituals would have greatly helped Olivia to accomplish her "chill" goal.

Although individualists often use a low-context, direct verbal approach in initiating, maintaining, and ending a close relationship, collectivists often use a high-context, indirect approach in dealing with relationship formation and development issues. Take, for example, the South Korean blockbuster hit movie, *My Sassy Girl.* The main character, Kyeon-Woo, has deep emotional feelings for the Girl, a young woman he met accidently on a train and feels responsible for. Kyeon-Woo is never explicit about his deep emotional feelings for the Girl he continues to love for years—even after two separations. When they are finally reunited at the end, his emotional exchange with his relational partner is very subtle and nuanced. There is no public display of affection. There is only mutual silence and holding hands under the table, with warm tenderness. In the United States, we often scoff at such emotional understatement as shyness. In an individualistic culture, it is instead expected that relational partners would engage in active verbal self-disclosure with phrases such as "I love you" and "I miss you." *My Sassy Girl* was remade in the United States with a similar story line. In this version, the main character, Charlie, serves as the narrator to explain his entire background and situation. Charlie has no problem revealing his feelings to the girl, Jordan, and displaying affection for her. With a beautiful, passionate kiss at the end, Jordan reveals her true passion for him in an overt self-disclosure mode.

The contrasting elements are very reflective of the differences between the two cultures. The Korean

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BLOG POST 10.1

After three weeks of small talk and group work, Olivia was thinking of asking José out. After the intercultural class, Olivia got up the courage to talk with José. She stopped him and said, "José, what are your plans this weekend? Do you wanna chill?" José was dazed and confused.

As a newly arrived Brazilian international student on campus, José had pretty decent English proficiency. But he did not understand the word *chill* as meaning either "to relax and get together informally" or "to relax at a place to watch futbol." He was quite confused by the meaning of the word chill in this context. Had he even understood it, this request—from José's collectivistic,

masculine viewpoint—might well have come too early in their initial acquaintance.

José was a bit embarrassed and hesitated to answer. Meanwhile, Olivia felt like a fool and made an excuse to leave. Both José and Olivia experienced emotional embarrassment in this interaction episode. José, looking at the expression of Olivia, realized that he somehow had offended or insulted her. Olivia, on the other hand, did not realize that Jose was having verbal decoding problems with the word chill. Nor did she realize the different gender role expectations concerning initiating a dating request from the Brazilian viewpoint. She just felt awkward and embarrassed. Both parties experienced emotional anxiety and information uncertainty.

version speaks more for itself rather than through the characters' dialog. The audience generally must reach conclusions about the actors' emotions on their own based on the actors' reactions, responses, and the nuanced chemistry between Kyeon-Woo and the Girl. In the U.S. version, the growing chemistry between Charlie and Jordan was obvious and clear. From the collectivistic cultural lens, if you love someone, you reveal it through your attentiveness and sincere caring actions. For collectivists, love is in the details of paying attention to the other person's needs, desires, and wishes and the fact that you are also ready to sacrifice yourself on your relational partner's behalf. If both individuals are from the HCC zone, they will be able to understand each other's implicit caring gestures. However, in relationships where relational partners come from different communication styles, they may carry diametrically opposed expectations and experience major communication decoding problems.

To address such problems, relational partners must make a strong commitment to communicate in a culture-sensitive manner and to decode both the content and the relational meanings of the communication exchange process. This means learning to truly understand her or his relational partner's beliefs, values, needs, and interaction styles, as well as how she or he interprets core identity and relationship issues.

INTERCULTURAL-INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP ATTRACTION: FACILITATING FACTORS

Attraction is an unspoken energy that drives people together. The force of attraction can be sudden or developed slowly across time. There are clear cultural-based influences that affect the initial attraction between two individuals: perceived physical attractiveness, perceived similarity, self-disclosure, and intercultural–interracial intimate relationship development. Along with several other items, each of these will be discussed in this section.

Perceived Physical Attractiveness

Physical attraction happens when one is attracted to a person's appearance, such as the body, eyes, hair, or clothes. Ryan (2004) found the force of attraction in Western cultures has to do with our facial features:

men should have prominent cheek bones, a big smile, and strong jaw line; women need a small nose and chin, with high eyebrows and narrow cheeks. In addition, usually the extroverts, from the Western cultural perspective, are more likely to be perceived as attractive and are more likely to develop multiple romantic relationships.

Recent research evidence indicates that physical attractiveness is critical to initial attraction, but so are cultural differences regarding what is attractive behavior or what are attractive character traits. For example, attractive persons are perceived to be high in potency in the United States (i.e., high energy and enthusiasm); however, Koreans perceive attractive persons to be high in integrity and concern for others (Wheeler & Kim, 1997). In the initial stage of relationship development, individuals are often concerned with creating a favorable impression in the presence of others so that others can either be attracted to them or at least find them likable. Thus, an individual may interact in a way that seems to exude attractive qualities (from his or her own perspective) to create a favorable impression; unfortunately, this person may still not be perceived as very attractive to an individual from another culture.

Impression formation and *interpersonal attraction* are two intertwined concepts. Physical attraction is closely associated with overall perceived attractiveness. Overall perceived attractiveness, in turn, is related to desirable personality attributes, such as appearing sensitive, kind, sociable, pleasant, likable, and interesting. Attractive people are also evaluated as more competent and intelligent (Ross & Ferris, 1981).

In comparing U.S. and Japanese perceptions of facial attractiveness, U.S. college students have consistently rated smiling faces (both American and Japanese faces) as more attractive, intelligent, and sociable than neutral faces. The Japanese students, on the other hand, have rated smiling faces as more sociable but not necessarily more attractive or intelligent. They actually perceive neutral faces as more intelligent than smiling faces. They also do not perceive smiling faces as more attractive than the neutral faces (Matsumoto & Kudoh, 1993).

In terms of perceived credibility, facial composure and body posture appear to influence our judgments

of whether individuals appear to be credible (i.e., high social influence power) or not credible (i.e., low social influence power). In some Asian cultures (e.g., South Korea and Japan), for example, influential people tend to use restrained facial expressions and to practice postural rigidity. In U.S. culture, however, animated facial expressions and postural relaxation are associated with credibility and positive impression formation (Burgoon et al., 2010). Overall, it can be concluded that perceived attractiveness or credibility is in the eye of the beholder. The meaning of such concepts reflects social agreements that are created and sustained through cultural nonverbal practices (check out the bridegroom and the bride in Blog Pic 10.2).

Perceived Similarity

Perceived similarity refers to how much people think others are similar or dissimilar to themselves. It implies the perception of shared views in beliefs, values, attitudes, communication, interests, and/or hobbies. For example, Morry (2005) found that same-sex

Blog Pic 10.2   Celebrating a nontraditional wedding on the beach.

friends perceived themselves to be happier individuals the more they reported being similar to their friends. The similarity–attraction perspective (Byrne, 1971) has received intense attention in intergroup–interpersonal attraction research for the past three decades. The argument behind this perspective (with a distinct individualistic-based focus) claims that individuals are motivated to maintain or increase their positive self-evaluation by choosing to associate with others who reinforce dimensions relevant to the self (i.e., birds of a feather flock together).

The similarity–attraction hypothesis supports this assumption: a positive relationship exists between perceived similarity and interpersonal attraction (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). There are three possible explanations to account for this hypothesis: (1) we experience cognitive consistency if we hold the same attitude and outlook in our relationship; (2) cognitive consistency reinforces our ego and provides identity rewards and affirmation; and (3) with similar others, we tend to invest less time and energy in managing relational vulnerable feelings, which gives a boost to interpersonal attraction.

In the context of intergroup–interpersonal attraction, perceived similarity takes on a variety of aspects, such as perceived cultural–racial similarity. For low-prejudiced individuals, race is a nonissue, but perceived physical attractiveness is the decisive factor in intergroup attraction (Byrne, 1971). In contrast, for high-prejudiced individuals, racial dissimilarity is viewed as creating insurmountable barriers to intergroup attraction. Additionally, research studies indicated that the more the relational partners in initial interethnic encounters hold similar viewpoints concerning communication orientations (e.g., ways to support each other's self-concepts, ways to comfort each other), the more they are attracted to each other (Gudykunst, 2004; Lee & Gudykunst, 2001).

In addition, people may be attracted to dissimilar strangers if they have repeated chances to interact with them under favorable contact conditions and with a positive mindset. Proximity, together with perceived similarity, definitely influences initial intercultural attraction. Rachel, a college senior says, "During the first year of college, Jamal lived one floor down and I never met him. I never went to his co-ed floor. I only

hung out with those around me. By chance, I met him in the library last semester and realized he lived one floor right below me! We became fast friends and I regret I never met him until close to graduation." We can communicate only with people we meet via face-to-face situations or in cyberspace. Proxemic nearness to others creates more interaction opportunities. With repeated interaction opportunities, individuals may uncover important attitudinal and communication similarities (e.g., relationship philosophy, family outlook, similar communication styles, and common interests) and thus increase their confidence in relating to each other (see also, Shackelford, Schmidt, & Buss, 2005).

Cross-Cultural Self-Disclosure Comparisons

Self-disclosure involves the intentional process of revealing exclusive information about ourselves to others that the other individuals do not know. The study of self-disclosure is related to social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Chen & Nakazawa, 2010). Generally, social penetration theory says that interpersonal information progresses from superficial, nonintimate self-disclosure to more deep-layered, intimate self-disclosure. This developmental process also involves the **breadth** (i.e., number of topics we are comfortable and willing to disclose to reveal our dynamic self) and **depth** (i.e., intimate layers that reveal our emotionally vulnerable self) of self-disclosure. Deep-layered self-disclosure, as the pinnacle of intimacy, is defined as an individual's willingness to reveal exclusive private information and especially vulnerable identity information to a significant other.

In any relationship, verbal revelation and concealment act as critical gatekeepers in moving a relationship to greater or lesser intimacy. Both the willingness to reveal something about yourself and the willingness to pay attention to the other person's feedback about you are necessary to build a trusting intercultural friendship or romantic relationship (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011; Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011; Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Verbal self-disclosure often follows a *trust-risk dilemma*. To trust someone, you must be willing to take some risks to share some unique information about yourself. Through taking the risk, you may also

have established an initial trusting cycle in the interpersonal relationship. However, you may also have to worry about your friend betraying the exclusive information you have just shared. Before continuing with this section, fill out the my.blog 10.1 self-disclosure survey. The survey is designed to help you understand your degree of readiness for self-disclosure to strangers versus best friends.

The term **public self** refers to those facets of the person that are readily available and are easily shared with others; the term **private self**, on the other hand, refers to those facets of the person that are potentially communicable but are not usually shared with generalized others (Barnlund, 1975). We can disclose information concerning the different parts of the public self (e.g., tastes and interests, work and studies, attitudes and opinions, money) and the private self (e.g., family secret issues, personality traits, body image or self-image issues). Barnlund (1989) found that the Japanese tend to have a relatively small layer of public self and a relatively large layer of private self. In contrast, his research revealed that U.S. Americans have a larger layer of public self and a smaller layer of private self. Sharing information concerning either the public or the private self is conducted through relational openness. The Japanese have been found to be more guarded with regard to disclosing their inner attitudes and private feelings in initial relationship development stages and they self-disclose with a slower, polychronic time rhythm. In comparison, U.S. Americans are more responsive in disclosing and reciprocating information of a personal, private nature and tend to move faster from the acquaintance relationship to the intimate friendship level, with monochronic time rhythms.

In examining the self-disclosure patterns of East Asian international students from four different countries (China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), Y. W. Chen (2006) found that East Asian students self-disclosed slightly more in intracultural friendships than intercultural friendships. In addition, they perceived the disclosure of attitudes and opinions, tastes and interests, studies or work, and personality as "superficial topics," whereas they considered the sharing of information on money and financial matters and body and appearance "intimate topics." However, there was

my.blog 10.1 ASSESSING YOUR READINESS TO SELF-DISCLOSE TO STRANGERS VERSUS BEST FRIENDS

Instructions: Recall how you generally feel and communicate in various situations. Let your first inclination be your guide and circle the number in the scale that best reflects your overall impression of yourself. The following scale is used for each item:

4 = SA! = Strongly agree!
3 = MA = Moderately agree
2 = MD = Moderately disagree
1 = SD! = Strongly disagree!

Generally speaking, I readily disclose to *strangers* about the following topics:	SA	MA	MD	SD
1. My interests and hobbies.	4	3	2	1
2. My goals and dreams.	4	3	2	1
3. My work or study situations.	4	3	2	1
4. How much money I make.	4	3	2	1
5. My political opinions.	4	3	2	1
6. My racial beliefs and viewpoints.	4	3	2	1
7. My dream dates.	4	3	2	1
8. Conflicts with family members.	4	3	2	1
9. My feelings about my face.	4	3	2	1
10. My feelings about my body.	4	3	2	1
11. My positive qualities that I really like.	4	3	2	1
12. My own negative personality traits.	4	3	2	1

Generally speaking, I readily disclose to *my best friends* about the following topics:	SA	MA	MD	SD
1. My interests and hobbies.	4	3	2	1
2. My goals and dreams.	4	3	2	1
3. My work or study situations.	4	3	2	1
4. How much money I make.	4	3	2	1
5. My political opinions.	4	3	2	1
6. My racial beliefs and viewpoints.	4	3	2	1
7. My dream dates.	4	3	2	1
8. Conflicts with family member.	4	3	2	1
9. My feelings about my face.	4	3	2	1
10. My feelings about my body.	4	3	2	1
11. My positive qualities that I really like.	4	3	2	1
12. My own negative personality traits.	4	3	2	1

Continued

my.blog 10.1 CONTINUED

Scoring: Add up the scores on all the "strangers" disclosure items and you will find your strangers disclosure score. Strangers disclosure score: _____. Add up the scores on all the "best friends" items and you will find your best friends disclosure score. Best friends disclosure score: _____.

Interpretation: Scores on each self-disclosure dimension can range from 12 to 48; the higher the score, the more you are ready to self-disclose to strangers and/or best friends on a variety of topics. If the scores are similar on both item sets, you are equivalent in your readiness to self-disclose to both strangers and best friends.

Reflection probes: Check out your two scores with a classmate. Interview each other and ask each other the following questions: Where did you learn your self-disclosure habits? Do you come from a low self-disclosive family or a high self-disclosive family? How do you feel about people who self-disclose too much? How do you feel about people who self-disclose too little?

Source: Scale adapted from Barnlund (1989).

no clear distinction concerning the amount of self-disclosure and the revealing of positive–negative content of self-disclosure in those two friendship types: they generally self-disclosed the same type and amount of information to acquaintances as to intimate friends.

In a follow-up study, Chen and Nakazawa (2010) investigated the self-disclosure patterns of U.S. American students in intercultural and interracial friendship types. In the study, students reported on either their intercultural friendships (between a U.S. citizen and a non-U.S. citizen) or their interracial friendships. The research findings indicate that the level of relational intimacy plays a strong role in self-disclosure patterns: as relational intimacy level increases, friends have greater intent to disclose, they disclose in greater amount and depth, and they also engage in more honest/accurate self-disclosure. These findings were the same for both intercultural and interracial friendship situations; respondents report equivalent levels of reciprocal self-disclosure.

Furthermore, in comparing self-disclosure patterns in Japanese and U.S. American students, Kito (2005) discovered that both groups were drawn to their new-found friends because of perceived similarity. Japanese respondents cite togetherness, trust, and warmth as their top friendship priorities, whereas the U.S. Americans cite understanding, respect, and sincerity as top friendship indicators. It seems that whereas Asian collectivists emphasize an interpersonal "relationship atmosphere" of harmony and warmth, American individualists emphasize the intrinsic friendship qualities of "being oneself" and "self-transparency" or honesty.

Overall, individualists have been found to engage in more active self-disclosure than collectivists across topics and different "targets," or receivers (e.g., parents vs. friends). When comparing Japanese and U.S. groups, both agreed on their disclosure *target* preferences in the following order: same-sex friend, opposite-sex friend, mother, father, stranger, and distrusted acquaintance (Barnlund, 1989). U.S. college students consistently score themselves higher in their overall amount of self-disclosure than Japanese and Chinese college students. Female college students also report a significantly higher amount of self-disclosure than male college students, regardless of culture (Ting-Toomey, 1991).

Thus, self-disclosure is one of the key factors in developing a personal relationship in any culture or ethnic group. One other way to understand self-disclosure in more depth is to check out the Johari Window. The label "Johari" takes its name from Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham—the first names of the window's creators. The window can be conceived as having four panels: *open, hidden, blind,* and *unknown* (see Figure 10.1).

On a broad level, the *open panel* is defined as information known to self and also information known to generalized others or a specific person. The *hidden panel* is defined as information known to self but unknown to others. The *blind panel* is defined as information not known to self but known to others. Last,
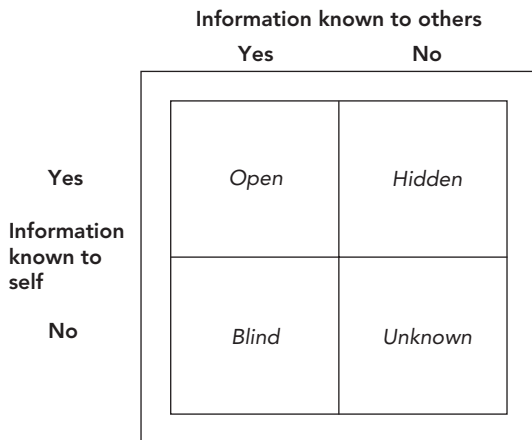
Information known to others

	Yes	No
Yes **Information known to self** **No**	*Open*	*Hidden*
	Blind	*Unknown*

FIGURE 10.1 THE JOHARI WINDOW

the *unknown panel* is defined as information not known to self or to others. One example of this is based on a true story. Two interethnic college friends shared a close friendship, including much sharing about their dating experiences. After graduation, they took a vacation together. While having dinner on the second day of their vacation, the conversation turned deep. One friend, processing all the information and the conversation, came out (admitted she was gay) to the other friend. This surprised them both. The gay friend had no idea until then that she was, in fact, gay. Because of the deep self-disclosure conversation and perceived acceptance, the one friend actually helped the other friend to sort out some of her core identity issues in a very spontaneous yet authentic manner.

Individuals who have big open panels and small hidden panels are more willing to disclose and share information about themselves compared with individuals with small open panels and big hidden panels. The blind panel can shrink in size by paying attention to feedback and comments from others. The blind area means we are unaware (or in denial) that such attitudes (e.g., sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes) or behaviors (e.g., gay bashing) exist in us, but our friends actually observe those attitudes or behaviors. Through obtaining feedback from others, information that we are previously unaware of becomes known to us. The mysterious panel, the unknown area, at first glance seems strange. However, we can deduce that the unknown panel exists in all of us because there is always something surprising

or new to discover about ourselves and others—through new learning, traveling, life experiences, or meditations about the unconscious self.

Self-disclosure and intimacy are interdependent: appropriate self-disclosure can increase intimacy, and increased intimacy prompts more self-disclosure. Self-disclosure develops interpersonal trust, emotional support, and mutual identity validation. However, self-disclosure can also open up the vulnerable self to hurt, disappointment, and information betrayal.

Online Disclosure of Affection

Although verbal and nonverbal self-disclosure during face-to-face communication has been discussed, social network sites are providing an alternative way to disclose feelings or attraction to another. The most popular social networking site is Facebook, with 500 million active users worldwide. According to Facebook (2011), 50 percent of active users log on in any given day and spend over 700 billion minutes per month logged on. A typical "Facebooker" has 130 friends. With so much time spent on Facebook, how people develop and maintain friendships and how they communicate together change the typical rules of interpersonal relationship engagement. According to Choi, Kim, Sung, and Song (2011), whereas U.S. college students held larger but looser online social networks, Korean college students maintained denser but smaller online social networks. Whereas U.S. students tend to emphasize "bridging" interaction strategies to accumulate large and more extended social networks, Korean students tend to stress "bonding" interaction strategies to solidify deeper social connections on Facebook. By the way, what do you think are the top five ways that U.S. college students express affection via Facebook? Take a guess and jot down your hit-or-miss answers in Hit-or-Miss 10.1.

Third-Party Matchmakers: Online and Mobile Dating

Online dating and matchmaking has evolved, transformed into a multibillion dollar concept and practice. Once marked with negative connotations, online dating services provide the easiest way to meet others without forming the need to move toward forming serious ties or commitment (Romm-Livermore, Somers,

HIT-OR-MISS 10.1 EXPRESSING AFFECTION ON FACE-BOOK

How do you express affection for your close friends on Facebook? Write down the first five things that come to mind and then see how closely your expressions of affection match respondents' in a recent study:

To express affection for my close friends through Facebook, I . . .

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Answers: 1. Send them a wink ;). 2. Post pictures with one another. 3. Add love comment on their wall. 4. Comment on their wall. 5. Comment on their pictures.

Source: Mansson and Myers (2011, p. 162).

JEOPARDY BOX 10.2 TOP FIVE INTERNET DATING SITES

Site	Number of subscribers
1. Match.com	29 million
2. Chemistry.com	14 million
3. Perfectmatch.com	11 million
4. Eharmony.com	9 million
5. Spark.com	1 million

Source: http://www.consumer-rankings.com/dating/ retrieved July 17, 2011

Setzekorn, & King, 2009). James John, a graduate student, recently joined and reflected, "A year ago, as a college senior, I would have laughed at the mere idea of it. I joined Match.com just to see what it was about and I was blown away. It's like a secret society. I ran across so many people I know that would never have told me they were on it, let alone I would have never guessed. There are all kinds of people and very attractive (which I never expected!). I'm only five days in. I told my buddies about it and they all laughed. They were blown away. I jumped in, now everyone seems to be jumping in. A week later I got text messages from two buddies who have also signed up!"

Online dating has become a widespread, explosive global phenomenon. Mobile dating or "mobile romance" appears to be equally popular. Using the same online dating services, subscribers can register, text their location, and find profiles of people in the same zip code range. Technology aids in the heavy reliance on cell phone/text culture, which appeals mainly to younger users (Coleman & Bahnan, 2009). More than half a billion users around the world subscribe to online services (Kale & Spence, 2009). Do you know the top five online dating sites for 2011? Check out Jeopardy Box. 10.2.

Aside from the traditional dating sites, there are also specialized dating and social sites among like-minded people in terms of religion (Christian and Jewish), vegans, "Goths," and spiritual seekers.

The curiosity of online versus offline courtship development is intriguing for some researchers. How does online dating work? According to Whitty (2009), there are five phases of courtship. In phase one, the *attention phase*, an individual selects an attractive photograph to post, chooses a screen name to represent himself or herself, and crafts a skillful profile. If these three methods connect with another individual and attract attention, phase two occurs. In this second phase, the *recognition phase*, virtual flirting occurs, which is sending a wink, a kiss, or some icon to represent an interest to the other party. Phase three is the *interaction phase*, the shortest phase, which may take place via e-mail, instant messaging, or texting. With the absence of traditional cues of flirting, many emoticons are used (see Chapter 7) to express interest. These first three phases reflect the strategic self-presentation used by individuals to communicate who they are in cyberspace. In the virtual world, individuals can be ambiguous and creative and can play without the fear of face-to-face outright rejection. It is interesting to note that with the global reach and the safety of the Internet, online dating has moved to countries with historic patterns of arranged dating. The fourth phase, the *face-to-face meeting phase*, refers to the "screening out process" in which partners check each other out for physical chemistry or sexual arousal attraction. They are also checking to see whether the actual person matches the online profile. The meeting is usually scheduled in a

safe public space and with a limited time restriction. Last, the fifth phase, the *resolution phase*, refers to the decision-making phase to decide whether to see each other offline again and/or to also continue using the online dating site to check out other potential dating partners. Conflict arises when one partner takes herself off the site and the other partner is discovered still using the dating site actively.

Take for example Ignighter.com, a U.S. dating Web site created by three founders in their mid-twenties. The site focuses on group dates in which "one member, serving as a point person, could arrange a date—a movie, say, or a picnic in Central Park—with a group of other people and thereby take the awkward edge off typical dates" (Seligson, 2011, p. BU1). Although the dating site was not very successful in the United States, it attracted hundreds of users per day in India—making it India's fastest growing dating Web site. The average age of users is 23.5, and the service connects individuals into groups who chat through messaging; the service also arranges group dates—to movie viewings, restaurant meals, and going to clubs together (Seligson, 2011). This lucrative business of searching for love online is booming in China as well. In a country with relationship worries and the pressure to be married by the age of thirty, millions of Chinese are using online dating services as the answer. C. C. Jiang (2011) reports that online dating sites in China attracted approximately 3 million subscribers in 2010 and is predicted to increase even more in the upcoming five years for busy Chinese professionals (Seth & Patnayakuni, 2009).

Intercultural–Interracial Romantic Relationship Development

Research on intercultural romantic relationships examines both its challenges and its benefits (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). In discussing interracial intimate relationship development, Foeman and Nance (1999) concluded that interracial couples move through the following stages of "racial" awareness and awakening in their intimate relationship process: racial awareness, coping, identity emergence, and relationship maintenance. The first stage, *racial awareness*, refers to the gradual awakening stage when the partners in the

interracial relationship become conscious of each other's views and societal views on intimate racial relationship matters. The second stage, *coping*, refers to the struggles the couple must face in gaining approval from their families and friends and the strategies they come up with in dealing with such external pressures. In the third stage, *identity emergence*, both partners gain a new sense of security and bravely announce their intimate relationship to their families and ingroups. The fourth stage, *relationship maintenance*, refers to the continuous hard work the couple must face in dealing with new challenges such as having children, moving to new neighborhoods, and meeting new social circles.

Despite the many pressure points in an intercultural–interracial relationship, many intimate couples often mention the following relationship rewards in their intercultural/interracial relationships (Karis & Killian, 2009; Romano, 2003; Rutsogi, 2009; Ting-Toomey, 2009; Visson, 2009): (a) experiencing personal enrichment and growth resulting from the day-to-day opportunity to continuously clarify their own beliefs, values, and prejudices; (b) developing multiple cultural frames of reference resulting from the opportunity of integrating multiple value systems such as "doing" *and* "being," "controlling" *and* "yielding"; (c) experiencing greater diversity and emotional vitality in their lifestyles because of participating in different customs, ceremonies, languages, celebrations, foods, and cultural network circles; (d) developing a stronger and deeper relationship with their partner because they have weathered intercultural prejudice and racist opposition and arrived at a forgiving, healing place; and (e) raising open-minded, resourceful children who see the world from a multicultural lens and have the ability to be "at home" wherever they find themselves.

These stages of challenge and benefit provide an overall picture of intercultural romantic relationships. With the increase in cultural and ethnic diversification in the United States, the likelihood of being attracted to members of other cultures and races will also increase (Karis, 2009; Llerena-Quinn & Bacigalupe, 2009; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Age, generation, ethnic identity, and racial–intergroup attitude appear to be four important predictors of interethnic dating and marriage. For example, Firmin and Firebaugh (2008)

uncovered that one's age and generation appear to be two key predictors for intimate relationship formation: younger people and succeeding generations are more open to interracial dating than older and preceding ones. The later the generation in the United States, the more likely the individuals in that generation tend to date outgroup members. Additionally, the less prejudice they perceive in intergroup relations, the more likely they are to be open to date members from that group. For example, third-generation Asian Americans are five times more likely to marry outside their ethnic group than first-generation Asian Americans (Kitano, Fujino, & Sato, 1998).

Chung and Ting-Toomey (1999), in examining interethnic dating attraction in Asian Americans, found that the strength of individuals' ethnic identities was related to intergroup attraction and dating. Individuals with assimilated, bicultural, or marginal identities have a greater tendency to date outside of their own groups than those who view their ethnic identities and traditions as very important aspects of their self-concept. There were also times during which individuals were attracted to culturally dissimilar others because they perceived their partners as typical, or atypical, of their own culture. This means that people do activate their stereotyping process in initial intercultural attraction stages—be they positive or negative stereotypes. In addition, there may also be a **"Romeo and Juliet" effect** at work in an intercultural-intimate relationship: the more the respective families are against this intimate relationship, the more the couple wants to rebel against their parents and "do their own thing" and, therefore, they find each other even more attractive (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005).

Martin, Bradford, Drzewiecka, and Chitgopekar (2003) surveyed European American young adults regarding their openness to and experience with interracial dating. The results indicate that respondents who were raised in more diverse neighborhoods and who had diverse acquaintances were significantly more likely to date outside their race. Reasons given for encouraging interracial dating included compatibility, physical and sexual attraction, and curiosity. Reasons offered for discouraging interracial dating included lack of desire, lack of proximity, and personal, familial, or societal pressure. Levin, Taylor, and Caudle (2007),

in a longitudinal study examining interracial dating patterns from over two thousand college students (from diverse racial–ethnic backgrounds), uncovered that students who exhibited lower levels of ingroup favoritism bias, intergroup anxiety, and ingroup identification were more likely to date members of other racial and ethnic groups during college. In addition, students who dated outside their group more during college showed less ingroup favoritism bias and intergroup anxiety at the end of their college experience (see also, Shelton, Richeson, & Bergsiekar, 2009).

In contrast to this general finding, Asian American students who dated outside their group more during college also felt more pressure *not* to socialize with or date members of other groups at the end of their college experience. Latinos/as whose families had been in the United States for more generations were also more likely to date intercultural–interracial partners. Latinos/as also reported experiencing less bias directed against them as intergroup dating partners than other minority groups because of both historical factors and physical characteristics. Interestingly, intergroup dating in college was less prevalent among those who had a greater proportion of precollege ingroup friendships. The influence of such close friendships and particular ingroup attitudes (e.g., intergroup anxiety and prejudice) may outweigh opportunities to branch outward and seek interracial–intergroup dating opportunities.

In June 2010, the Pew Institute reported a study on interracial marriages in the United States. Among their findings for 2008 are the following:

- 14.6 percent (one in seven) of new marriages in the United States were between spouses of different ethnicities.
- 22 percent of marriages in the West were interracial or interethnic, compared with 13 percent in both the South and the Northeast and 11 percent in the Midwest.
- 22 percent of all black male newlyweds married outside their race, compared with just 9 percent of black female newlyweds.
- 40 percent of Asian female newlyweds married outside, compared with 20 percent of Asian males.
- Intermarriage rates doubled between 1980 (6.7%) and 2008 (14.6%).

- More than one-third of adults (35%) say they have a family member who is married to someone of a different race.

For the most recent percentage breakdown of interracial and interethnic marriages in the United States, see Table 10.2. The label "whites" in Table 10.2 refers to the dominant white group in comparison to members of co-culture or minority group status (Pew Research Center, April 2011).

INTERCULTURAL-INTIMATE CONFLICT: OBSTACLES AND STUMBLING BLOCKS

Intercultural and interracial dating or marriage is fertile ground for culture clash and obstacles (Note: *intercultural* will be used in conjunction with *interracial* for ease). There are many sources of intercultural-intimate conflict. **Intercultural-intimate conflict** is defined as any antagonistic friction or disagreement between two romantic partners caused, in part, by cultural or ethnic group membership differences. Some of the prominent conflict sources are cultural–ethnic value clashes (see the first section), prejudice and racism issues, and raising bicultural and biracial children (Karis & Killian, 2009; Visson, 2009). This section examines prejudice and racism reactions in the everyday environment of the romantic couple. It also explores the different coping strategies that couples use to counter racist attitudes and includes a discussion of identity issues in raising a bicultural child.

The Encounter: Prejudice and Racism

When it comes to encountering prejudice and racism, the experiences of interracial or intercultural couples may be different. Some of these couples may appear to outsiders to be an ingroup or intracultural relationship because of their physical similarities (e.g., a couple made up of a Mexican American and a Guatemalan may have similar skin color and other physical features, yet they derive from different cultures). These couples can choose to reveal their differences to outsiders. But, for interracial and some other intercultural couples, the visible differences are inescapable to all (e.g., an Asian American married to an African American or a European American dating a Latina). These couples must find different ways to cope with various family and social group reactions as well as with each other's reactions toward the role their ethnic group plays in their relationship.

Although the emotional reactions from outgroup members range from complete acceptance to utter ostracism, the couple's reactions in considering ethnicity as a factor in their relationship can also range from deep understanding to total dismissal. Conflict often arises when intercultural couples have to deal with the dilemma of whether to talk about matters of race or racism in their surrounding environment and within their own relationship context.

Prejudice is about biased, inflexible prejudgments and antagonistic feelings about outgroup members. However, racism is about a personal/institutional belief in the cultural superiority of one race and the perceived inferiority of other races (Jones, 1997).

TABLE 10.2 RACIAL AND ETHNIC INTERMARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

Group	Total Number	Bride	Groom
Whites Marrying Hispanics	118,000	White 53%	White 47%
Whites Marrying Asians	43,100	White 21%	White 74%
Whites Marrying Blacks	32,300	White 75%	White 25%
Whites Marrying Native Americans	14,600	White 48%	White 52%
Hispanics Marrying Blacks	12,600	Hispanic 73%	Hispanic 27%
Hispanics Marrying Asians	6,700	Hispanic 42%	Hispanic 58%
Blacks Marrying Asians	3,700	Black 20%	Black 80%

Source: Pew Research Center (cited in *National Geographic*, April 2011, p. 20). Population: *Marrying Out* (April 2011). *National Geographic*, p. 20.

Racism also refers to the practice of power dominance of a "superior" racial group over other "inferior" races. Couples often encounter initial conflict when marriage plans are discussed with their respective parents. Reactions can range from responses of support, acceptance, rejection, or fear to outright hostility. For example, let's look at Gina's family's response from the following interview excerpt (Gina is a European American woman planning to marry an African American man):

Well, when I told my parents, they both looked kind of shocked, and then my father sort of blew up. He was yelling and screaming and told me that I had just thrown my life away and was I happy about that. But the whole time, I didn't hear my mother say anything against us. Later, after my father went to bed, she came up to me and told me that while she couldn't go against my father's wishes, she just wanted to make sure that I was happy. (McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999, p. 76)

Or consider the family response to James (an African American), when he announced his plans to marry a Euro-American woman:

My father was absolutely against my marrying a white woman. He said I was a traitor to my race and that I was not giving black women a chance at a wonderful life. He would not talk to Donna, would not see her under any circumstances, and we did not talk to each other for over five years. (McNamara et al., 1999, p. 84)

For many ethnically homogeneous families, fear is the basic reason for opposition to an intercultural marriage. Their reasons can include societal or community disapproval, fear for the general physical and emotional well-being of the couple, fear of ostracism, and self-esteem issues concerning their biracial grandchildren (Frankenberg, 1993). As one European American woman commented,

I am sitting in a small restaurant with my daughter, my husband, my grandson, and my son-in-law. I look at my two-year-old grandson. I have a warm feeling and think to myself, "This is my first grandchild." Then my pleasure dissolves into anxiety as I realize that everyone in the restaurant is looking at us. My grandson is brown. My son-in-law is black. And my daughter is no longer mine. (Crohn, 1995, p. 90)

In terms of societal reactions, one of the most common problems experienced by intercultural couples is the blatant, open stares from strangers. In addition to the stares, prejudicial treatment by some restaurant servers and real estate agents and racism within their own workplace may deeply disturb the couple's relationship. For example, read Russell's (an African American husband) comments:

We go into a restaurant, together, with our children. We will order the meal and when we are done, the waitress hands us separate checks. Like she is saying "There is no way you two could be together." And here we are sitting with our children, who are obviously fair-skinned: whom does she think they belong to? (McNamara et al., 1999, p. 96)

Finally, simply because the partners are in an intimate relationship, there is no guarantee that they are free of racism or matters of race in their own evolving relationship. In times of anger and conflict, couples may have expressed racial epithets or racial attitudes to vent their frustrated feelings, and these expressions can seriously hurt each other. Although some of the words may have been exchanged in a joking/teasing or sarcastic way during an intimate conflict, those words or phrases can be taken as hurtful, racist comments.

Sometimes a nonminority partner's indifference to or ignorance of a racial issue may actually perpetuate a racist worldview. Gloria (an African American woman married to a European American man) said in an interview,

I told him someone yelled, "nigger." I was on the corner down there; I was with the baby, just driving by. And his first reaction is, "Well, what did you do to provoke that?" ... And I thought, "That's the difference between being black and white. Why would I have to do anything to provoke it?" (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995, p. 240)

This nonminority partner's insulated stance toward racism issues reflects his lifelong privilege of being a white male in a predominantly white society (see McIntosh, 1995). The concept of white privilege refers to the invisible entitlement that confers dominance or power resources for whites. Thus, white males can walk down the street at night without the need for awareness of potential racist remarks directed at them

without cause or drive their cars routinely without the need to be particularly concerned with racial profiling issues by the police on the highways.

Fortunately, not all European Americans have such a chilling, indifferent reaction to racism issues faced by their intimate partners. As Adam (a European American male married to an African American female) commented,

> It takes being open to your own racism. It's all well and good to be sensitive to others in how they react to you, but you ought to be a little bit sensitive when you can and recognize your own mistakes, try to learn why what you've just said or done offended your partner…for example, there's an experience where Wanda would say, "Yeah, I understand that," and I say, "I don't understand it. What was happening? Help me out here." (Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 243)

When two intimate partners bring to their relationship strong identities as members of two different minority groups, they may be hypersensitive to identity conflict issues. The following heated debate between Alan (with a strong sense of African American identity) and Sara (with a strong sense of Jewish identity) illustrates this point:

ALAN: How can you know what it means to be discriminated against? You grew up in a comfortable, safe neighborhood. You got to choose whether or not you revealed to others that you were Jewish. My ancestors were brought here as slaves.

SARA: I can't believe you're saying this stuff. You know that I lost great-aunts and great-uncles in the Holocaust. You don't have any monopoly on suffering. What right does the past give you to say how we lead our lives? (Crohn, 1995, p. 171)

Alan and Sara's identity conflict issues—cultural, racial, and religious identities—obviously tapped into very intense, core emotions in their own identity construction. They will need time to really get to know the identity of each other and to find meaningful ways to connect to each other's cultures as well as their own.

Countering Racism and Prejudice: Coping Strategies

In dealing with prejudice and racism outside their relationship, some couples may talk about racism issues as a lifetime project, whereas others dismiss them as inconsequential. Some reinforce the idea that to deal with prejudice issues, they must learn to be honest about prejudices that they carry within themselves. Other couples try to keep matters of race a small part of their relationship and focus their attention more on love, grocery shopping, raising children, doing the laundry, washing the dishes, planning vacations, and handling all the details of a shared life (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). In addition to race issues, emotional issues (e.g., work stress, money, sex, housework, and a new baby) are the most common topics of marital squabbles (Gottman & Silver, 1999). These are the frequent "emotional tasks" that couples have to deal with in their everyday lives and that often reveal their very different cultural and personal perspectives on how to approach such issues.

Most interracial couples, however, have developed specific coping strategies to deal with recurring prejudice and race situations. These coping strategies include *ignoring/dismissing* (especially for minor offenses, such as staring or nasty comments), *normalizing* (thinking of themselves and appealing to others to treat them as "normal" couples with marital ups and downs), and *withdrawing* (avoiding places and groups of people who are hostile to interracial couples). In addition, they use *educating* (outreach efforts to help others to accept interracial couples), *confrontation* (addressing directly the people who insult or embarrass them), *prayer* (relying on faith to solve problems), and *humor* (adding levity in distressing situations) to ease or ward off the pains of racism (McNamara et al., 1999). Partners usually use ignoring/dismissal coping strategies to deal with minor threats but use more direct strategies—such as educating and confronting—when countering major racist comments or slurs.

Because the discussion of any racial or religious identity issue is so complex and emotionally charged, most couples actually avoid the topic altogether in their own relating process. However, refraining from dealing with identity issues (especially from the beholder's viewpoint) is like "buying peace for your relationship on a credit card. You may enjoy the temporary freedom from anxiety you 'purchased' by avoiding the difficult topics, but when the bill finally comes due, the 'interest' that's accumulated in the form of resentment and

regret may be devastating" (Crohn, 1995, pp. 183–184). Partners in an intercultural-intimate relationship often wonder whether their conflicts are a result of genuine differences of opinion, personality clashes, cultural value differences, or the prejudiced attitude of one of the partners. To achieve a genuine understanding of these intertwined issues, couples must learn to listen, to probe for accuracy, and to listen some more. As a final example, let's listen to the following comments by an African American male who is married to a white female:

> If I had to pick the perfect wife that I could have, she is very close to it.... She knows me better than anyone else...[and] she helps me a lot too. I like to talk to her and trust her and the fact that we both trust each other was there from the start. I know that she is really sensitive to issues of race and that is because we have experienced so much together. But I also know how difficult that has been for her. So I always try to keep her feelings in the front of my mind. I can't do anything about my race, but I can do something about how it affects her, at least sometimes I can. She does the same for me, which means that we are always thinking of each other. That's one of the reasons why I think we have lasted for so long—we are a lot stronger because we are really sensitive to the problem. (McNamara et al., 1999, p. 150)

A fundamental acceptance of the cultural–racial and religious aspects of a partner's identity and a mutual willingness to explore cultural codes, as well as a mutual openness in discussing racism issues, can facilitate greater relational satisfaction. Whether we are in an intimate intracultural or an intercultural relationship, we will do well to regard each interpersonal relationship as if it is an intercultural one.

Relational Transgressions and Terminations

Individuals involved in intimate romantic relationships of any kind may experience unfortunate relational transgressions (e.g., affairs, flirting with others). Zhang, Ting-Toomey, Dorjee, and Lee (2012) explored how U.S. American college students and Chinese college students might differ when they respond to their dating partners'

Internet relational transgressions. Overall, they found that U.S. respondents tend to prefer leaving the relationship ("exit" response) and/or to communicate anger ("anger voice response") more so than Chinese respondents in reacting to an episode of online emotional infidelity. Comparatively, Chinese respondents tend to prefer loyalty, passive neglect, and third-party help responses. It seems that for the Chinese respondents, loyalty is a passive-active strategy: a patient, self-disciplined reaction helps to tone down upfront confrontation and it would not aggravate the conflict situation further. Furthermore, whereas seeking help from family and close friends might seem to be passive in the U.S. American mindset, it is actually an active strategy for Chinese participants because it shows that the individual is caring and committed to the intimate relationship and that he/she is actually doing something to salvage the relationship by seeking third-party advice. Both culture groups, however, also preferred the use of a high degree of integrative, "win–win" problem-solving as a response to their partner's online infidelity.

Furthermore, the researchers (Zhang et al., 2012) also uncovered that participants with different levels of self-construal differed when they responded to their dating partners' relational transgressions. High independent self-construal participants tend to prefer exit and anger voice responses, whereas high interdependent self-construal participants prefer the use of integrative voice and third-party help-seeking responses. Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, and Yee-Jung (2001) also found that biconstrual individuals (those who are high on both independent and interdependent traits) tend to have the most diverse conflict repertoires to deal with a conflict situation in comparison to independent, interdependent, and ambivalent (low on both independent and interdependent traits) personality types. However, the degree of intimacy between the conflict partners, the nature of the conflict, and the conflict context greatly influence individuals' expectancies concerning appropriate and effective conflict behaviors and outcomes in different intercultural/interracial conflict situations.

Moving beyond interracial/interethnic communication styles and response to transgressions, Bratter and

King (2008) used data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth to examine divorce rates for interracial couples in comparison to same-racial couples. The study revealed that overall, interracial couples have higher rates of divorce, particularly for those marrying during the late 1980s. Compared with same-race white/white couples, they found that black male/white female marriages and Asian male/white female marriages were more prone to divorce. Interestingly, those involving white male/non-white female marriages and Hispanic/non-Hispanic marriages tended toward lower risks of divorce.

Researchers continue to focus on understanding these more fragile interracial marriages. Although they cannot conclude that race is the cause per se of divorce, it does seem to be associated with higher risk of divorce or separation (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). One notable finding is that there is a consistent elevated divorce rate for white females in interracial marriages. This distinctive couple type may experience added stress caused by negative reactions from strangers and diminished support from family and friends. In addition, it may be that white mothers may be perceived as "unqualified to raise and nurture non-white offspring because of their lack of experience in navigating American culture as a minority" (Bratter & King, 2008, p. 170). Yancey (2007) notes that white females reported encountering more racial incidents with their black husbands (e.g., inferior restaurant service, racial profiling, and racism against their children) and more hostilities from families and friends compared with other interracial pairings. Such unwelcoming reactions and the distancing environment from both racial ingroups may add additional strain and social isolation to this type of interracial marriage.

Finally, not all is perfect in the online community. Eighty-one percent of the top divorce U.S. attorneys say that during the past five years they have seen an increase in the number of U.S. divorce cases using Facebook evidence (American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, 2010). Facebook is now viewed as the unrivaled leader for online divorce evidence with 66 percent of attorneys surveyed citing it as the primary source.

RAISING SECURE BICULTURAL CHILDREN

The common refrain from many intercultural marital couples is, "We were doing fine until the kids came along." Most intercultural parents easily slip back into their own childhood memories and use their own family models to discipline, to guide, and to raise their children. In the context of bicultural family socialization, some of these parents may hold conflicting values and attitudes in teaching their children "good" from "bad" behaviors or "proper" from "improper" ways of communicating with their grandparents, parents, siblings, or extended family members. There are two themes in this section: raising bicultural–biracial children and helping children to develop a secure identity.

Bicultural Identity Struggles

In any intimate relationship, the topic of raising children is a major stress point. But add intercultural factors to this mix and both parents and children have multiple options to choose from and to follow. Do you remember our story from Chapter 2, when the Muslim father and the Jewish mother struggled with interfaith issues in raising their bicultural children? His story, along with other interfaith and intercultural couples' stories, can be expressed through the following reflective questions: Does one parent have a greater intensity when identifying with her or his cultural or ethnic group (or religious faith) than the other? What degree of involvement do members of the immediate and extended families play in the child's life? What is the cultural and religious composition of the environment, neighborhoods, and schools? Do parents reach a mutually satisfactory outcome regarding an identity path for the family and in raising the child? Take a minute and read the poem "What Is the Color of Love?" in Blog Post 10.2. Discuss your reactions and feelings with your classmates.

Bicultural children and transadopted children often face more identity issues and complexity during various stages of their life cycle development. Decisions about which group to identify with, which label they prefer, and the context that triggers an identity are part of the bicultural identity struggles among children and adolescents. In addition, there are four identity forms many bicultural children claim for themselves: (1) **majority-group identifiers**—these children identify with the parent from the dominant culture or religion, and they may or may not publicly

BLOG POST 10.2   WHAT IS THE COLOR OF LOVE?

he came to me
he saw through me
and he gave me his heart
we found harmony
so much in common
though we were from worlds apart
when I saw him
I loved him and he loved me
what could be simpler to see
but clouds of fear hovering near
coloring the truth
afraid to let it be . . . let it be
we had a son
and being half black
he asked some hard questions
at six, while building sand
castles at the beach
he said, "mommy I wonder
what people think
seeing a Black kid with a
Japanese lady?"
at seven, he watched a white

neighbor scream at me
"you should be ashamed for
having a Black child!"
and my son said
"mommy is there something
wrong with that lady?"
at eight years old he came home
from school one day and said
"why do some people hate
Black folks so much?"
I didn't know how to answer
But I hope he never runs out of questions
love so strong
like a simple song
it made two worlds into one
but I'm still left with a child's question
what is the color of love?
what is the color of love?

Source: Miyamoto, N. "What Is the Color of Love?" In A. Ling (Ed.), *Yellow Light: The Flowering of Asian American Arts* (pp. 330–331).

acknowledge the identity of their other parent (in this case, from a minority-group background); (2) **minority-group identifiers**—these children identify with the parent who is a minority, and they may either acknowledge that their other parent is from a different background or deny (or minimize) their dual heritage background; (3) **synthesizers**—children who acknowledge the influence of both aspects of their parents' cultural backgrounds and synchronize and synthesize the diverse aspects of their parents' values into a coherent identity; and (4) **disaffiliates** (i.e., "none of the above" identifiers)—children who distance themselves or claim not to be influenced by their parents' cultural backgrounds, and they often create their own identity labels and rebel against any existing label that is imposed on them as part of a particular racial or cultural group (Crohn, 1995).

Children or teenagers at different developmental stages may experience the emotional highs and lows related to their sense of self. They may opt for different identity forms—depending on their peer group's attitudes, their parents' socialization efforts, their own self-identity explorations, and the larger society's support or rejection of such an identity search process (see Blog Post 10.3).

Cultivating a Secure, Multifaceted Identity

Developing a secure identity is a lifelong commitment that requires resilience and skill development. In essence, it means maintaining flexibility. This is not an easy task. To achieve bicultural competence with living in two or more cultures, LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) outline dimensions we believe may help bicultural individuals:

- Have knowledge of the cultural values and beliefs of each group;
- Have a positive attitude toward both minority and majority groups;
- Have the confidence that one can live effectively within the bicultural groups without compromising one's individual identity; and
- Be grounded.

To facilitate a stronger dialog between parents and children regarding cultural and religious identity

BLOG POST 10.3   **"I WANT TO BE PINK!"**

When I was three years old, I wondered why my skin color was so different from my newborn baby sister. My mother tells me that I asked, "Why am I blue? Why can't I be pink like my sister?" as I pointed to the brown skin on my arm. I must have been concerned that I was irregular or odd because I didn't have the same skin tone as my sister. I never met my biological father, who did have a dark complexion, so I unknowingly used my mother and baby sister as the models for what I should have looked like. For me, as a child, I think I was mostly concerned with looking like my sister because I wanted to be reassured that I was part of the family. I thought to myself, "Wait, why do I look different? I want to be part of this family very much, so I should change my skin tone!" Given my experience, I think to myself how troubling (mental strain, anxious, confusion) it can be for some children who grow up not knowing or having a blueprint to compare themselves to.

I didn't know any better as a child; my identity was shaped by my surroundings and of course by those closest to me. I was very young, but I made an age-old observation that as human beings, we want to find similarities between others and ourselves. As an adult, I look back at my childhood inquiry as a reminder to embrace diversity, because in the end, we all want to belong.

—J. Acosta-Licea, *college student*

issues, here are some practical guidelines. First, take time and make a commitment to work out a family identity process as early in your relationship as possible; understand the important aspects of your own and your partner's cultural–ethnic and religious identity. Second, make time to listen to your children's identity stories and experiences; their ambivalence is oftentimes part of a normal, developmental process. Learn not to judge or be hurt by their truthful revelations. Third, try to provide your children with plenty of cultural enrichment opportunities that celebrate the diversity of both of your cultures; offer them positive experiences to appreciate and synthesize the differences (Crohn, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 2009).

Fourth, be truthful in dealing with prejudice and racism issues; nurture a secure sense of personal self-esteem and self-worth in your children regardless of how they wish to identify themselves. Parents should model constructive, assertive behaviors in confronting prejudice and racism issues. Finally, recognize that your children will grow up and choose their own path; keep the dialog open and let your young children or teenagers know that you will always be there for them. A secure home environment, listening to their stories with patience and interest, giving them room or space to grow, and finding meaningful ways to relate to who they are and are becoming are some very basic means that parents can use to signal their heartfelt caring and mindful presence in their children's lives.

To conclude this chapter, we should recognize that in any intercultural-intimate conflict, it is difficult to pursue all "my needs" or all "your needs" and come up with a neat conflict resolution package. In most intimate conflicts, couples who engage in constructive conflict tend to cultivate multiple paths in arriving at a mutually satisfying destination (see Blog Post 10.4).

These couples learn to listen to their partners' viewpoint with patience, and they are open to reconsidering their own position. They are committed to understanding their partners' cultural beliefs, values, intimacy lenses, and relational expectations. They are also willing to actively share and self-disclose their vulnerabilities, dreams, and hopes. Finally, they are able to inject humor and to laugh with each other in times of stress. They are also able to be mindfully there for their small children and adolescents—in their quest for cultural and personal identity meanings.

INTERCULTURAL REALITY CHECK: DO-ABLES

This chapter focused on the challenges in developing intercultural-intimate relationships. We explored different culture-based relationship expectations concerning love, autonomy and connection, and communication issues. We discussed the facilitating factors—perceived physical attractiveness, perceived similarity, self-disclosure, offline and online dating, and some intercultural–interracial romantic relationship research findings—that shape the ebbs and flows of an intercultural-intimate relationship. The pressures that an intercultural couple face in dealing with various racism issues and also the increasingly important topic of raising bicultural–biracial

BLOG POST 10.4 AN INTERFAITH MARRIAGE: DEVELOPING A THIRD CULTURE OUTLOOK

I was with my boyfriend for three and a half years before he proposed to me. Our religious differences were known, but overlooked by us . . . until we got engaged and had to plan our wedding. Both of us were born and raised in India and had moved to USA for further education. My father is a Muslim by birth, my mother a staunch Protestant Christian. My fiancé and his parents are Hindu. I grew up Christian. Both my fiancé and I are not extremely religious, or at least consider ourselves not to be.

How do you put these contrasting religions together? How should we plan our interfaith wedding? There were four ways to resolve this issue: we could choose to display one identity and ignore the other; display no identity at all and have a legal ceremony that forgoes all ritual elements; figure out a way to combine both religious and cultural traditions into a single ceremony; or display different identities in separate events.

After countless hours of discussion with my fiancé and parents, we agreed that each of our religious rituals was important to each of our identities, and it was also important for us to consider our parents' desires. But there was no way we could fit it all into one ceremony. The thought of trying to combine the bridal attire would be a recipe for disaster—Hindus wear white to a funeral, and red for their wedding; imagine me wearing a white bridal gown on my wedding day?

The last option is what seems to be working for us—separate the two. The result is planning for a four-day wedding, one for each side of the family, four different wedding ensembles, and plan for multiple, yet distinct ceremonies. However, even this is easier said than done. It took us several months to help each other understand the different rituals in each faith; it also took time to convince each of our parents to understand the other side. I could not understand why the Hindu wedding had to take place on an auspicious day at a particular time that was decided by a priest and he could not understand why I wanted to get married in the church I was raised in.

My identity was questioned, and I could not understand or explain why I am at a "culture-pluralistic" stage, where I assume that as an interfaith couple we have a "tapestry marriage;" we will have to constantly work on our differently colored threads, to combine a complex fabric for the future.

—Noorie, *college student*

children were presented. These and other obstacles are best handled by culture-sensitive dialog, genuine relational commitment, and extra attention to cultural, ethnic, and relational identity development issues.

The following do-able guidelines are drawn from the preceding discussion of various challenges and stumbling blocks that face an intercultural-intimate couple. They may help you in managing diverse intimate relationship issues:

- Pay close attention to culture-based challenges in developing an intercultural-intimate relationship.
- Be mindful that individualists and collectivists hold different expectations concerning communication issues, such as dating requests or self-disclosure.
- Be sensitive to your relational partner's family reaction issues. Learn to deal with the individualistic and collectivistic value gaps adaptively.
- Be committed to developing a deep friendship with your intimate partner as a cushion to deal with both internal and external stressors down the road.

- Be unconditionally accepting of your partner's core personality. You must make your partner feel that you try hard to understand the cultural and religious (or nonreligious) contexts that she or he is coming from.
- Be flexible in learning the communication styles of your intimate partner and learn to code-switch from direct to indirect styles or from verbal to nonverbal attending behaviors.
- Be responsive to the "emotional tasks" awaiting you in your intimate relationship and learn to share them responsibly and with enjoyment.
- Be diligent in depositing emotionally supportive messages into your relationship. Research (Gottman & Silver, 1999) confirms the validity of the "5-to-1 ratio"—you must deposit five positive messages in your intimate relationship to counteract one negative message.
- Be positive in your relationship memories. Research indicates that the more you engage in positive relationship memory reflections, the more you will think positively about the current state of your intimate relationship.