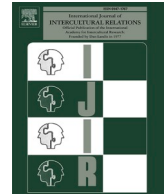




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Overcoming barriers to intercultural communication in romantic love relationships across WIERD and non-WEIRD cultural regions

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ABSTRACT

Overcoming barriers to Intercultural Communication was explored in new analyses of 5432 participants with partners in a cross-cultural study of romantic love relationships. Intercultural differences were measured by low similarity on race, nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background. Potential barriers were measured by low similarity on attitudes and values, religious beliefs, interests and hobbies, or language. Communication was measured by scales of four topics revealed to and by the partner and trusting the partner not to lie. As predicted, intercultural differences were correlated with potential barriers, barriers were correlated with less communication, and communication was correlated with relationship satisfaction, commitment, and five measures of well-being. Yet measures of intercultural differences were only trivially correlated with communication, with factors that best predict relationship satisfaction, and with relationship satisfaction, commitment, and five measures of well-being. In other words, couples with intercultural dissimilarity are almost as likely to overcome barriers to communication and other challenges to relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment, and are just as likely to achieve well-being, as other couples. These findings were consistent across nine cultural regions around the world, including both WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultural regions. They were also consistent across eight types of romantic love relationship defined by women or men in opposite-sex or same-sex relationships unmarried or married.

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Introduction

Previous publications on intercultural communication have emphasized cultural differences between families rather than within families (Baldwin, 2017). They have also emphasized potential barriers to communication due to differences in race, nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background (Jandt, 1998, 2020). Less is known about how well these barriers are overcome in communication in intercultural relationships for satisfying, long-lasting relationships, and for individual well-being. This is important to investigate, since the prevalence of interracial and interethnic marriages has been increasing since the 1950s (Rosenfeld & Roseler, 2023).

Recent reviews of research on intercultural relationships by Brooks (2022) and by Ulrich et al. (2022) have explored whether they differ in relationship satisfaction, without being able to address questions about the potential impact of intercultural barriers to communication on relationship satisfaction. Brooks (2022) did a meta-analysis that statistically combined findings of 28 studies of relationship satisfaction that compared interracial and same-race couples. While there were some inconsistencies in the findings, the combined effect revealed no difference. Brooks suggested that the assumptions in the literature that interracial couples are less satisfied may be a reflection of publication bias in which statistically significant differences are published.

Brooks also explored the assumption that opposition to interracial dating would result in less relationship satisfaction, but found no evidence of that being true. For example, historically there has been more opposition in the South, yet national studies found more satisfaction among interracial couples in the South and Northeast than in the West and Midwest.

Ulrich et al. (2022) also did a meta-analysis of relationship satisfaction, combining 20 studies of interracial, interethnic, and intercultural relationships. They found some studies revealed less satisfaction, while other studies revealed more satisfaction, but the differences were small and the majority of studies indicated no difference, which was true of the combined effect.

In these recent extensive reviews, Brooks only studied interracial and opposite-sex relationships, and all of the studies were in the USA. Ulrich et al. (2022) studied interracial, interethnic, and intercultural relationships, but these relationship types were all combined, not compared, and most were in the USA as well.

New analyses of data from a cross-cultural study of romantic love relationships (Hill, 2019) made it possible to explore the following questions, while making comparisons across both WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultural regions:

1. Are intercultural relationships more likely to have potential barriers to communication?
2. How important is communication for relationship outcomes and well-being?
3. To what extent do potential barriers impact communication?
4. Do intercultural differences impact communication in romantic love relationships?
5. Are There Intercultural Differences in the Factors that Best Predict Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment?
6. To what extent do intercultural differences influence relationship outcomes and well-being?

Method

These new analyses are based on the 5432 participants who described a current married or dating partner, among the 8839 participants with or without partners, in the study that was online in twenty languages. The participants were recruited by forty collaborators from nine cultural regions and included eight relationship types. The nine cultural regions were grouped into North America, Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Central West & South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Hence the new analyses extend the findings across both WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultures around the world, whereas most previous studies have been conducted in the United States (Brooks, 2022; Ulrich et al., 2022).

The eight types of romantic love relationships were defined by women or men in opposite-sex or same-sex relationships unmarried or married. Their numbers in these new analyses were women opposite-sex unmarried 2649, men opposite-sex unmarried 1027, women opposite-sex married 599, men opposite-sex married 220, women same-sex unmarried 435, men same-sex unmarried 101, women same-sex married 136, men same-sex married 223. Hence the new analyses extend the findings across various relationship types, whereas most previous studies have been on opposite-sex marriages (Brooks, 2022; Ulrich et al., 2022).

The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 84, with 54.2% age 18–22, reflecting the fact that 70.2% were college students of various ages. An additional 15.4% were college graduates, while 14.4% had not graduated from college.

Jandt (1998, 2020) described potential barriers to communication in terms of dissimilar language and values, due to differences in race, nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background. In the cross-cultural study, participants were asked the extent to which they were similar to their current partner on race, nationality, ethnicity, and cultural background. Responses were from 0 = NOT AT ALL to 8 = COMPLETELY. Hence low ratings indicate dissimilarity between partners across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types. The percentages of participants saying completely similar are 61.6% for race, 68.9% for nationality, 55.5% for ethnicity, and 37.5% for cultural background. However, the full range of responses 0–8 are used in the analyses described below.

Note that partners were least likely to be described as having completely similar cultural backgrounds. Hence partners may be perceived as having somewhat dissimilar cultural backgrounds even if they are similar in race, nationality, and ethnicity. There are subcultures within racial, national, and ethnic groups, as well as in regions, neighborhoods, and families.

To measure potential barriers to communication, participants were asked the extent to which they were similar to their current partner on attitudes and values, religious beliefs, interests and hobbies, and primary language. Responses were from 0 = NOT AT ALL to 8 = COMPLETELY. Again, low responses indicate dissimilarity between partners across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types. The percentages saying completely similar are 28.4% for attitudes and values, 35.4% for religious beliefs, 12.6% for interests

and hobbies, and 79.2% for primary language. However, the full range of responses 0–8 are used in the analyses described below.

Note that partners in these analyses are least similar on interests and hobbies, and most similar on primary language. Conversely, they are most dissimilar on interests and hobbies, and least dissimilar on language. Hence language might be less of a potential behavior to communication between partners than has been assumed in the literature, if they have been able to communicate enough to become partners.

The scales used in the new analyses were previously described in Hill (2019). Communication between partners was measured using a four-item scale of the extent to which the participant had revealed four topics to the partner, and a four-item scale of the extent to which the partner had revealed the same four topics to the participant. The four topics were cultural and social background, attitudes and values, goals in life, and feelings about the partner. Responses were from 0 =NOT AT ALL to 8 =COMPLETELY. Questions about the four topics were averaged to create scales called "I reveal" and "P reveals." Confirmatory Factor Analysis using Structural Equation Modeling had revealed that these scales had consistent factor loadings across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types.

Participants were also asked the extent to which they trust the partner not to lie to them, with responses from 0 =NOT AT ALL to 8 =COMPLETELY, since trust is important for communication in any relationship.

Relationship satisfaction was measured by a three-item scale, which was the average of ratings on the following statements, in which CP means Current Partner, which appeared in different parts of the questionnaire: "All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your relationship with CP?" "CP and I have a good relationship" "Currently, how satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your life? – Your relationship with your spouse or partner." Responses were from 0 =NOT AT ALL to 8 =COMPLETELY. Confirmatory Factor Analysis using Structural Equation Modeling had revealed that these scales had consistent factor loadings across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types.

Relationship commitment was measured by a four-item scale, which was the average of ratings on the following statements: "To what extent do you consider yourself to be in a committed relationship with CP?" "I cannot imagine ending my relationship with CP?" "I view my relationship with CP as permanent." "To what extent do you feel committed to remain in a relationship with CP?" Responses were from 0 =NOT AT ALL to 8 =COMPLETELY. Confirmatory Factor Analysis using Structural Equation Modeling had revealed that these scales had consistent factor loadings across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types.

In defining well-being, Diener et al. (2002) view happiness as an emotional response, while life satisfaction is viewed as a cognitive evaluation. Depression and anxiety are additional emotional responses important in well-being, and self-esteem is a cognitive evaluation of self-worth important in well-being. Hence well-being was measured by a widely-used single item for happiness, plus four scales for life satisfaction, depression, anxiety, and self-esteem, which have consistent factors loadings across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types.

Happiness was measured by the following single item (Greve, 2010): "Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?"

Life satisfaction was measured by the average of fourteen items from Hill and Peplau (2001), under the question "Currently, how satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your life?" with responses from 0 =NOT AT ALL to 8 =COMPLETELY. The items were the following: your life as a whole, your educational level, your employment status (full time or part-time or unemployed), your job, your interests and hobbies, your commitment status (single, married or other committed relationship), your relationship with your spouse or partner, your relationships with other family members, your sex life, your relationships with friends, your household income, your health and fitness, your appearance, your weight.

Depression was measured by an item from Beck et al. (1961) plus four items from Campbell et al. (1976) under the question "How would you describe your present life?" A minus indicates that the item is reversed in averaging with the others: + I feel discouraged about the future, + Enjoyable vs. Miserable, + Full vs. Empty, + Brings out the best in me vs. Doesn't give me a chance, - Discouraging vs. Hopeful.

Anxiety was measured by a new item plus four items from Campbell et al. (1976): - I generally feel at ease, - Worried vs. Confident, - Nervous vs. Calm, - Tense vs. Relaxed, + Easy vs. Hard. Self-esteem was measured by three items from Rosenberg (1965): + On the whole, I am satisfied with myself, - All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure, + I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Associations between variables across all cultural regions and relationship types are measured using Pearson correlations. With such large sample sizes, even small correlations can be statistically significant. Squaring the correlation indicates how well either variable predicts the other. Since correlations less than .10 when squared predict less than .01 or 1%, they are considered *trivial correlations* in new and prior analyses of this study (Hill, 2019). Non-trivial correlations are highlighted in bold. Consistency in associations across cultural regions and across relationship types are assessed using Structural Equation Modeling.

Results

1. Are intercultural relationships more likely to have potential barriers to communication? Correlations between the four intercultural relationship measures and the four potential barriers are shown in Table 1, across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types.

Partners who were more similar to themselves on race, nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background were also more similar on attitudes and values, religious beliefs, and especially language. Conversely, those less similar on the former were less similar on the latter. But similarity on race, nationality, and ethnicity was trivially correlated with similarity on interests and hobbies, and there was only a slight correlation between similarity on cultural background and interests and hobbies. It is interesting that these intercultural measures have the least association with interests and hobbies, which is the potential barrier that has the least complete similarity

Table 1
Intercultural similarity and potential barriers.

	Attitudes & Values	Religious Beliefs	Interests & Hobbies	Language
Race	.14**	.26**	.03*	.37**
Ethnicity	.16**	.30**	.04**	.44**
Nationality	.12**	.25**	.04**	.57**
Cultural background	.22**	.36**	.10**	.46**

Table 2
Communication measures and relationship outcomes plus well-being.

	I reveal	P reveals	Trusting P
Relationship Satisfaction	.54**	.54**	.58**
Relationship Commitment	.59**	.54**	.52**
Happiness	.36**	.36**	.34**
Life Satisfaction	.34**	.35**	.31**
Depression	-.26**	-.26**	-.22**
Anxiety	-.13**	-.14**	-.13**
Self-Esteem	.24**	.23**	.17**

Table 3
Potential barriers and communication measures.

	I reveal	P reveals	Trusting P
Attitudes & Values	.38**	.40**	.36**
Religion	.14**	.14**	.13**
Interests & Hobbies	.21**	.23**	.18**
Language	.12**	.10**	.06**

between partners, 12.6 % noted above.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to explore whether the four intercultural measures are associated with each of the potential barriers consistently across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by CFI > .950 and RMSEA < .05.

Hence similarities in race, ethnicity, nationality, or cultural background can lead to similarities in attitudes and values, religious beliefs, and language. Conversely, dissimilarities in race, ethnicity, nationality, or cultural background can lead to dissimilarities in attitudes and values, religious beliefs, and language. This is true across the nine cultural regions and across the eight relationship types.

But since correlations do not indicate causality, it could be that differences in attitudes and values may lead people to feel that they differ in cultural background, even if they are the same race, religion, and nationality.

The strongest correlation in Table 1 is .57, which when squared equals .3249, which indicates that only 32.49 % of the variation in that potential barrier is explained by variation in that intercultural measure. Hence other factors may influence potential barriers to communication beside intercultural differences.

2. How important is communication for relationship outcomes and well-being? Correlations of the three communication measures with the relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment scales, and with the well-being measures, are shown in Table 2. The double asterisks indicate that the probability that the correlation was greater than zero due to chance is $p < .01$.

The communication measures were consistently positively correlated with the positive indicators (relationship and life satisfaction, commitment, happiness, and self-esteem) and inversely correlated with the negative indicators (depression and anxiety). Hence these analyses confirm the importance of communication between partners for couple outcomes and individual well-being assessed in multiple ways.

SEM was used to explore whether the communication measures are associated with relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, and each of the five measures of well-being, consistently across the nine cultural regions and eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by CFI > .950 and RMSEA < .05.

But while disclosure and trust can lead to these outcomes, it is also possible that causality may occur in the other direction. Relationship satisfaction and self-esteem can lead to being comfortable disclosing to and trusting a partner.

3. To what extent do potential barriers impact communication? Correlations between potential barriers and the extent of communication between partners are shown in Table 3. Positive correlations mean that similarities in potential barriers are associated with greater communication. Conversely, dissimilarities in potential barriers are associated with less communication.

Similarities in attitudes and values have stronger correlations with communication than do similarities in religion, interests and hobbies, with similarity in language having slight or trivial correlations. Hence attitudes and values matter more for communication, while language similarity matters much less than has been assumed. And the sizes of these correlations indicate that other factors may influence communication beside these four potential barriers.

Table 4
Intercultural similarity and communication measures.

	I disclose	P disclose	Trusting P
Race	.09**	.09**	.07**
Ethnicity	.08**	.07**	.05**
Nationality	.09**	.08**	.03*
Cultural background	.10*	.10**	.07**

Table 5
Intercultural similarity and partner suitability factors.

	Race	Nationality	Ethnicity	Cult. Backg.
Personality similarity scale	.08**	.03*	.08**	.15**
Rating partner desirable	.06**	.07**	.06**	.09**
Parents & others approve	.11*	.10**	.12**	.13**

SEM was used to explore whether the communication measures are associated with each of the four measures of barriers, consistently across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by CFI > .950 and RMSEA < .05.

4. Do intercultural differences impact communication in romantic love relationships? In spite of the correlations between intercultural similarity and potential barriers shown in Table 1, and the correlations between potential barriers and communication measures shown in Table 3, the correlations between intercultural similarity and communication measures are trivial or slight, as shown in Table 4.

Partners who differ in intercultural similarity differ very little in communication between partners. In other words, intercultural partners are largely able to overcome increased barriers to communication with their partners, to communicate about the same degree as partners who are not intercultural who overcome their challenges to communication.

SEM was used to explore whether the four measures of intercultural similarity are consistently associated with each of the three measures of communication, across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by CFI > .950 and RMSEA < .05. Hence communication between partners varies trivially with dissimilarities in race, ethnicity, or nationality, and only slightly with dissimilar cultural background, consistently across cultural regions and relationship types.

In other words, couples with intercultural differences are largely able to overcome barriers to communication as well as other couples, consistently across cultural regions and relationship types.

5. Are there intercultural differences in the factors that best predict relationship satisfaction and commitment? When factors that are inter-correlated are jointly used to predict something, one factor often captures the effects of the other factors, which is reflected in lower regression coefficients measuring the additional prediction contributions of the other factors. This is known as the problem of multicollinearity. But rather than being a problem, it is a phenomenon of interest in this cross-cultural study. For example, there were several measures of sexual attitudes and behaviors that were correlated with relationship satisfaction, but sexual satisfaction captures the effects of all of them, so adding the other measures didn't improve the prediction of relationship satisfaction.

Previous analyses of the data in the cross-cultural study identified factors that capture the effects of other factors to best predict relationship satisfaction and commitment. These factors were grouped into four categories called partner suitability, intimacy dimensions, exchange processes, and conflict resolution. Together these factors explain 76 % of the variation in relationship satisfaction, and 77 % of the variation in relationship commitment. These percentages are very high for social science research. In addition, 77 % is greater than the typical 61 % explained by Rusbult's Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult et al., 2011), which is "widely considered the leading theoretical perspective on commitment" (Forward by Daniel Perlman in Hill, 2019).

Each of these categories of best predictors will be correlated with the four intercultural similarity measures to see if they vary. Correlations between intercultural similarity and the partner suitability factors are shown in Table 5.

While the personality similarity scale is slightly correlated with similarity in cultural background, it is trivially correlated with similarity in race, nationality and ethnicity. Rating the partner desirable is trivially correlated with all four measures of intercultural similarity. However, parents and others approve of the partner is slightly correlated with all four. Intercultural differences between partners may result in disapproval by parents and others, but that disapproval is slight across the many participants in this study.

SEM was used to explore whether the four measures of intercultural are consistently associated with each of the three factors of partner suitability, across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by CFI > .950 and RMSEA < .05. Hence the trivial or slight associations between partner suitability factors and intercultural measures are consistent across cultural regions and relationship types, with the slight ones relating to parents and others approval.

These findings generalize a previous study by Shenhav et al. (2017) of Asian, Latino, and European background college students in the USA. They found that students in intercultural dating relationships reported a little more disapproval of their relationship by their parents than those in same culture relationships (2.46 vs. 2.22 on a scale from 1 to 5). However, those in interracial relationships did not report statistically significantly more disapproval by their parents than same race couples (2.36 vs. 2.33).

These findings are also related to a study by Machette and Cionoa (2023) of intercultural marriages in the USA. It revealed that

Table 6
Intercultural similarity and intimacy dimension factors.

	Race	Nationality	Ethnicity	Cult. Backg.
Emotional closeness	.10**	.09**	.11**	.12**
Saying both are in love	.09**	.07**	.10**	.12**
Four Component Love Scale	.08**	.06**	.08**	.11**
Eros (Made for each other)	.06**	.05**	.07**	.11**
Trusting partner not to lie	.07**	.07**	.05**	.07**
Sexual satisfaction	.00	.00	.03*	.04**
Anxious Attachment	-.03*	-.04**	-.02	-.03*

Table 7
Intercultural similarity and exchange process factors.

	Race	Nationality	Ethnicity	Cult. Backg.
Benefits from relationship	.04**	.03*	.00	.01
Equal involvement in relnp.	.03*	.03*	.02	.02
Equal power in relationship	.04**	.01	.04**	.04**
Invested in relationship	.01	-.01	-.04**	-.04**

Table 8
Intercultural similarity and conflict resolution factors.

	Race	Nationality	Ethnicity	Cult. Backg.
Positive Responses Scale	-.04**	.03*	.03*	.04*
Voice (would discuss & fix)	.06**	.03	.03*	.05**
Highest sources of conflict	.03	.03*	.03	-.00
Exit (would break up if diss.)	-.07**	-.04**	-.07**	-.06**

most intercultural couples developed effective ways to manage their challenges without reducing their marital satisfaction, except when challenges involved their in-laws, who were either too involved in their lives or disapproving of their marriage. In the current cross-cultural study, the parents who disapprove could be either one's own parents or the partner's parents who are in-laws.

Correlations between intercultural similarity and the intimacy dimension factors are shown in [Table 6](#).

Emotional closeness is slightly correlated with similarity in race, ethnicity, and cultural background. Saying both are in love is slightly correlated with similarity in ethnicity and cultural background. But the Four Component Love Scale (with caring and attachment items from [Rubin, 1970](#), and passion and intimacy items from [Sternberg, 1986](#)), and feeling we were made for each other, are only slightly correlated with similarity in cultural background. Trusting the partner not to lie, sexual satisfaction, and anxious attachment are trivially correlated with all four intercultural similarity items.

SEM was used to explore whether the four measures of intercultural similarity are similarly associated with each of the intimacy dimension factors, consistently across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by $CFI > .950$ and $RMSEA < .05$. Hence the trivial or only slight associations between intimacy dimensions and intercultural similarity measures are consistent across cultural regions and relationship types.

Correlations between Exchange Process factors and intercultural similarity are shown in [Table 7](#), and are all trivial.

SEM was used to explore whether the four measures of intercultural similarity are associated with each of the four measures of Exchange Process factors, consistently across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by $CFI > .950$ and $RMSEA < .05$. Hence the trivial associations between Exchange Process factors and dissimilarity in intercultural measure are consistent across cultural regions and relationship types.

Correlations between Conflict Resolution factors and all four intercultural similarity measures are shown in [Table 8](#), and are all trivial as well.

The Positive Responses factor includes the following three items: "I try to find a mutual solution with CP for any problem" "When CP reacts strongly to something, I try to find out what is stressing CP" "When I react strongly to something, CP tries to find out what is stressing me."

SEM was used to explore whether the four measures of Intercultural Similarity are associated with each of the four measures of Conflict Resolution factors, consistently across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by $CFI > .950$ and $RMSEA < .05$. Hence the trivial associations between the Exchange Process factors and the intercultural similarity measures are consistent across cultural regions and relationship types.

Together [Tables 5–8](#) reveal that the factors that best predict relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment are trivially or only slightly associated with intercultural dissimilarity, consistently across cultural regions and relationship types. In other words, the four categories of factors that best predict relationship satisfaction and relationship, are largely the same for couples similar or dissimilar on the four intercultural measures. An important factor that differs slightly is approval of parents and others.

Table 9
Intercultural similarity and relationship outcomes and well-being.

	Race	Ethnicity	Nationality	Cult. Backgd.
Relationship Satisfaction	.07**	.08**	.08**	.10**
Relationship Commitment	.09**	.09**	.10**	.10**
Happy	.03	.04*	.04*	.04**
Life Satisfaction	.06**	.05**	.04**	.07**
Depression	.01	.01	.00	.00
Anxiety	-.01	-.01	.01	-.02
Self-Esteem	-.01	-.03*	-.02	-.01

6. To what extent do intercultural differences influence relationship outcomes and well-being? New analyses of the cross-cultural study explored correlations between four kinds of intercultural similarity and relationship satisfaction plus relationship commitment and five measures of well-being, which are shown in [Table 9](#).

There is only a slight correlation between differences in cultural background and less relationship satisfaction and commitment, and only a slight correlation between differences in nationality and relationship commitment. Correlations between the intercultural measures and the five measures of well-being are all trivial. This is consistent with the trivial correlations between intercultural similarity and communication measures in [Table 3](#), and the trivial or slight correlations with the four categories of factors that best predict relationship satisfaction and commitment in [Tables 4–8](#).

SEM was used to explore whether the four measures of intercultural similarity are associated with each measure of relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, and the five measures of well-being, consistently across the nine cultural regions and the eight relationship types. Consistency in all these associations was indicated by CFI > .950 and RMSEA < .05. Hence the slight associations for relationship satisfaction and commitment with intercultural similarity, and the trivial associations for measures of well-being and intercultural similarity, are consistent across cultural regions and relationship type.

In other words, couples with intercultural dissimilarity are almost as likely as other couples, to overcome challenges to relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment, and are just as likely to achieve well-being.

Discussion

[Table 1](#) reveals that intercultural differences can lead to potential barriers to communication. [Table 2](#) reveals that communication between partners is important for relationship outcomes and individual well-being. [Table 3](#) reveals that potential barriers can impact communication, especially attitudes and values. In all three tables, the size of the correlations indicate that other unspecified factors are important as well, which is confirmed in [Table 4](#) revealing that measures of intercultural differences are only trivially or slightly correlated with communication between partners. In other words, on-going intercultural relationships are largely able to overcome these barriers to communication. This is true across both WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultural regions and across eight relationship types defined by women or men in opposite-sex or same-sex relationships unmarried or married.

[Tables 5–8](#) reveal that the factors that best predict relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment are only trivially or slightly correlated with measures of intercultural differences. This is consistent with [Table 9](#) which reveals that relationship outcomes and individual well-being are only trivially or slightly correlated with intercultural differences.

Several previous studies, which are often small, provide insights into ways that barriers to communication might be overcome to achieve relationship satisfaction. They include strategies for overcoming differences, such as learning the other's culture and language ([Donovan, 2004](#); [Reiter & Gee, 2008](#); [Yodanis & Lauer, 2017](#)), accepting differences ([Kim et al., 2021](#)), focusing on the partner's needs ([Han, 2022](#); [Mock, 2023](#)), and making efforts to manage conflict ([Lan, 2019](#)). They also include benefits of being in an intercultural relationship, including personal growth in intercultural competence, self-awareness, open-mindedness, and language fluency ([Renalds, 2011](#)), creativity ([Lu et al., 2016](#)), and self-understanding by wrestling with differences ([Yun, 2015](#)). Still other studies identified alternative patterns of adjustment to intercultural differences, such as adopting one partner's culture, alternating cultural practices, embracing both cultures, or creating their own culture ([Jayantini et al., 2022](#); [Tseng et al., 1977](#)).

These strategies and benefits include learning the same language and culture as the partner, which directly overcomes potential barriers to communication, and personal growth more generally. These are examples of expansion of the self to include the partner described by [Aron and Aron \(1996\)](#) and updated by [Aron et al. \(2022\)](#).

Studies have also explored who are more likely or less likely to engage in intercultural relationships. [Keels & Harris \(2014\)](#) conducted a study of 2804 undergraduates from 24 colleges and universities, and found that White students were least likely to date interculturally, while Latino/a students were most likely to, and that Black men were more likely to than Black women. [Martin et al. \(2003\)](#) surveyed 316 young White people in the US about intercultural dating. They found that participants who grew up in diverse neighborhoods, had diverse acquaintance and friendship networks, and whose family members also dated interculturally were more likely to engage in intercultural dating.

Hence intercultural differences can be overcome (1) due to similarity on other factors that best predict relationship satisfaction, (2) through strategies for overcoming differences, (3) by benefits of being in an intercultural relationship, (4) through alternative patterns of adjustment, and (5) by being more willing to engage in intercultural relationships.

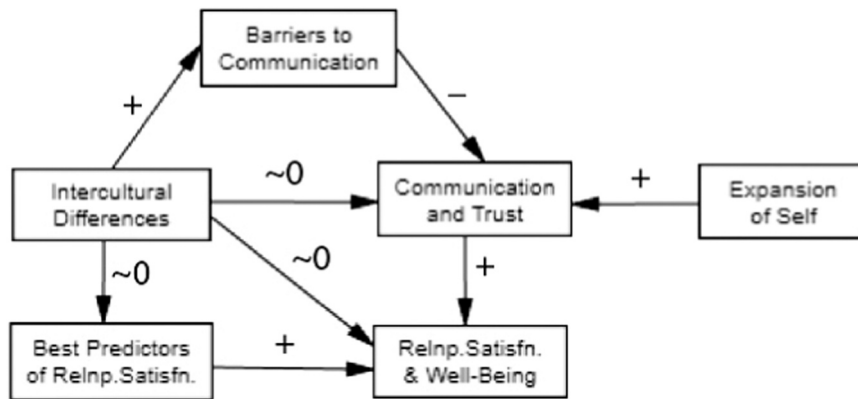


Fig. 1. Overcoming intercultural differences.

Conclusions

Previous publications and new analyses of data from a cross-cultural study of intimate relationships, reveal the complex findings summarized in Fig. 1.

Intercultural differences can create potential barriers to communication, as shown by the positive arrow, which can reduce communication, as shown by the negative arrow. Communication and trust are important to achieve satisfaction and well-being, as shown by the positive arrow. But intercultural couples can largely overcome barriers to communication as well as other couples, as shown by the near zero arrow, in order to achieve relationship satisfaction and well-being, as shown by that near zero arrow. The factors that best predict relationship satisfaction are largely the same for couples with intercultural similarities or differences, as shown by that near zero arrow, and are very important for relationship satisfaction, as shown by that positive arrow. These findings are consistent across nine cultural regions around the world, including both WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultural regions. They are also consistent across eight types of romantic love relationships defined by women or men in opposite-sex or same-sex relationships unmarried or married.

Previous studies suggest that self-expansion, including learning the same language and culture as the partner, can overcome barriers to increase communication between partners, as indicated by that positive arrow, leading to relationship satisfaction and well-being, as indicated by that positive arrow.

All couples face challenges. Some couples face more challenges than others, and some couples are more successful in coping with their challenges than others. But couples with intercultural differences largely do this about as well as other couples. And intercultural differences can be attractions as well as barriers in intimate relationships. The challenge that is slightly harder to overcome is parental disapproval and dealing with in-laws.

Limitations and future research needed

Participants in this study were college students and older non-students who were often college graduates. Those in WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultural regions who have similar levels of education may be more similar in their patterns of communication and romantic love relationships. Couple members with less education may face greater challenges to their relationships and well-being, which may or may not be similar across WEIRD and non-WEIRD cultural regions.

Participants answered questionnaires that were in multiple languages online, except in Pakistan where those in arranged marriages and those in free-choice marriages completed printed questionnaires (Hill, 2019). Those who do not have access to the internet may differ in ways that impact their romantic love relationships, such as economic status.

All of the participants analyzed in this paper were currently in a relationship. Not studied were persons who had been separated or divorced from an intercultural relationship. Future research should compare breakups and divorces among couples who have intercultural differences or similarities. In addition, studies should measure barriers and communication as well as relationship satisfaction, and in relationships not only in the USA.

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