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INVITED REVIEW

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Processes in international relationships: A critical review

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Abstract

In the present review, the author draws upon Bell's (1987) critical race theory – especially as reflected in Crenshaw's (1989) construct of intersectionality – en route to examining the results of four studies of international relationship processes that have been published since 2002 (i.e., Holzapfel et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2019; Kuramoto, 2018 and van Mol & de Valk, 2016). One common theme that emerged from the four studies was the importance of satisfaction-related processes in international relationships – a theme that Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory would anticipate within intranational and international relationships alike. Although persons from African, Central American, and South American nations are conspicuously missing from the studies in question, the author does *not* attribute such omissions to structural racism. Implications for future research on inclusivity and the dynamics of international relationships are discussed.

Statement of Relevance: Processes within international relationships (involving persons from different countries of origin) seldom receive attention within relationship science. The present critical review highlights four studies since 2002 in which international relationship processes have been investigated. Overall, the basic processes (all of which involved satisfaction) were consistent with the notion of "universal" dynamics that would be expected, regardless of participants' nationality. However, as the present review indicates, the need for greater diversity in such research (especially beyond "Eastern" and "Western" nations) cannot be overstated.

KEYWORDS

diversity, ethnicity, inclusion, interdependence, structural racism

1 | PROCESSES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

In their introductory article for an edition of the *Journal of Social Issues* (*JSI*) that focused on interethnic marriage in the United States (edited by Stanley Gaines, Eddie Clark, and Stephanie Afful), Gaines et al. (2015) stated that *interethnic* relationships involve partners who differ in their presumed biological and/or cultural heritage. By the same token, in a concluding article, Clark et al. (2015) noted that the conceptual and empirical articles for that edition (i.e., Afful et al., 2015; Bell & Hastings, 2015; Campbell & Herman, 2015; Craig-Henderson & Lewis Jr., 2015; Dainton, 2015; Leslie & Young, 2015; Schueths, 2015; Ware et al., 2015; and Wu et al., 2015) generally emphasized *interracial* relationships that involve partners who differ in their presumed biological heritage. A recurrent theme in the *JSI* edition was the fact that – until the U.S. Supreme Court declared that anti-"race-mixing" laws were unconstitutional, in Loving v. Virginia (1967) – U.S. citizens could be punished via fines and imprisonment for marrying partners who were classified as belonging to racial outgroups, depending upon where they lived. Such laws had covered three-fourths of the U.S. at one time or another (Spickard, 1989).

Within the aforementioned *JSI* edition on interethnic marriage in the U.S., Schueths (2015) examined the fragility of relationships that were *international* (i.e., involving partners who differ in presumed "state-based" cultural heritage) as well as primarily interracial in composition, generally consisting of U.S.-born White women who had married immigrant Latino men. Schueths pointed out that, despite the fact that nearly fifty years had elapsed since the U.S. Supreme Court handed down their ruling in *Loving v. Virginia*, these "mixed-[citizenship] status" marriages remained vulnerable to disruption by the U.S. government. In particular, Schueths identified the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, 1996 (IIRIRA) as effectively nullifying the freedom-to-marry provisions of *Loving v. Virginia* for "mixed-status" couples, given that legal immigrants and undocumented immigrants alike may be deported from the U.S. on the basis of conviction for misdemeanors such as minor traffic violations. Furthermore, Schueths observed that the IIRIRA has been dubbed the "Mexican Exclusion Act" – an obvious allusion to the post-Reconstruction Era/pre-Civil Rights Era Chinese Exclusion Act of, 1882, due to its disproportionate effect on immigrants from a specific ethnic group.

Schueths's (2015) study of "mixed-status" couples was informed partly by *critical race theory* (*CRT*), which was popularized by Crenshaw et al. (1995), among others. According to critical race theory (which originated with post-Civil Rights Era legal scholars, most notably Derrick Bell; e.g., Bell, 1987), institutional racism is endemic within the U.S. legal system and throughout American society. Although critical race theory initially dealt with anti-Black racism in particular, Schueths observed that offshoots such as *Latina/o critical race theory* (*LatCrit*; e.g., Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano et al., 2005) have adapted the basic principles of CRT in order to address distinct forms of institutional racism that Latinas/os often face, such as selective passage and implementation of anti-immigrant legislation. As Schueths's analysis indicates, even in the 21st-century United States, the institution of marriage is not spared from the adverse effects of racism where the relationships between racial-minority immigrants and

their significant others are concerned. In fact, Schueths detailed numerous ways in which the social networks of entire families – both immediate and extended – may be damaged by modern-day institutional racism.

2 | RATIONALE/OBJECTIVES

Schueths's (2015) article on the plight of "mixed-status" couples referred to an "intersection" (p. 805) between individuals' racial and national group memberships as important to consider regarding the effects of systemic racism upon the lives of undocumented Latina/o immigrants and their loved ones (within and outside the context of international relationships). As it turns out, Schueths did not specifically mention *intersectionality* as a construct that was derived from critical race theory. However, Delagado and Stefancic (2017) explicitly connected critical race theory with intersectionality:

> As politics has a personal dimension, it should come as no surprise that critical race theorists have turned critique inward, examining the interplay of power and authority within minority communities, movements, and even selves....
>
> "Intersectionality" means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation[;] and how their combination plays out in various settings. These categories – and still others – can be separate disadvantaging factors.... (p. 58).

Crenshaw (2017) arguably is the most influential proponent of intersectionality as a construct arising from critical race theory (Carbado & Harris, 2019). On the one hand, Crenshaw and colleagues (e.g., Cho et al., 2013) would agree with the expansive list of socially defined groups that Delagado and Stefancic (2017) had listed as part of the proper subject matter for studies of intersectionality. On the other hand, Crenshaw consistently has emphasized the interplay between race and *gender* (rather than race and nationality), as illustrated by the following quote from her highly influential 1989 article:

> As ideological and descriptive definitions of patriarchy are usually premised upon white female experiences, feminists and others informed by feminist literature may make the mistake of assuming that the role of Black women in the family and in other Black institutions does not always resemble the familiar manifestations of patriarchy in the white community, Black women are somehow exempt from patriarchal norms. For example, Black women have traditionally worked outside the home in numbers far exceeding the labor participation rate of white women. An analysis of patriarchy that highlights the history of white women's exclusion from the workplace might permit the inference that Black women have not been burdened by this particular gender-based expectation. Yet the very fact that Black women must work conflicts with norms that women should not, often creating personal, emotional and relationship problems in Black women's lives. Thus, Black women are burdened not only because they often have to take on responsibilities that are not traditionally feminine but, moreover, their assumption of these roles is sometimes interpreted within the Black community as either Black women's failure to live up to such norms or as another manifestation of racism's scourge upon the

> Black community. This is one of the many aspects of intersectionality that cannot be understood through an analysis of patriarchy rooted in white experience. (pp. 156–157).

In a chapter from the *APA Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology* (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015, Editors-in-Chief) regarding interactions between individuals from different racial groups, Shelton and Richeson (2015) recommended that research on intergroup relations address intersectionality across participants' race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. However, Shelton and Richeson's recommendations did not mention individuals' nationality, *or* intersectionality concerning intergroup relations (whether international or interracial) beyond acquaintanceships and friendships. In the present paper, inspired by the "2 in 2023" special editions of *JSPR* and *PR* (edited respectively by Randall, 2023; and Curran, 2023), I consider the extent to which research on interpersonal relations has addressed three questions regarding critical race theory, intersectionality, and international relationship processes since 2002: (1) From whose vantage point has the research been conducted? (2) What types of questions are valued? (3)(a) Who is included in, versus who is left out of, the research; (b) whose voices are missing; and (c) what topics should be studied by the next generation (and why)? Afterward, I offer suggestions regarding inclusivity in future research concerning international relationships.

3 | POSITIONALITY STATEMENT[1]

In terms of *ascribed* status (Allport, 1979), I am a heterosexual male of African descent who was born in the United States (although I have lived in the United Kingdom for more than twenty years). I remember the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement (which included my father as an activist) and the Black Power Movement (which included my father's brother as an activist) within the US. Although I also remember the Women's Rights Movement within the US, I obtained considerably more knowledge about that particular social movement outside the home (especially in school) than I obtained within the home, where my mother was a "housewife" (that situation would change after I left home; my mother eventually divorced my father and pursued a career as a schoolteacher, adopting the title "Ms." but retaining my father's surname). My working-class background, combined with my experience as a person of African descent in the US (and, later, the UK), consistently fueled my desire to strive toward social equality within the part of the world that I inhabit, even as I acknowledge that I am advantaged by virtue of my gender and sexuality. Mindful of the origins of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) within Black feminist scholarship (see also Crenshaw, 1991), I hope that I do justice to the construct within the present paper.

In terms of *achieved* status, I am a social/personality psychologist who has conducted research within (and, sometimes, outside) the fields of ethnic psychology and relationship science for more than thirty years. As an undergraduate student in psychology, I conducted an honors thesis on stereotyping and evaluation of music by European-descent individuals; I assumed that I would specialize in intergroup relations (following Allport, 1979) once I obtained my Bachelor of Science degree. However, as a postgraduate student in psychology, I ended up conducting a doctoral dissertation on interpersonal traits, gender-role compliance, and interpersonal resource exchange between women and men within two relationship contexts (i.e., heterosexual relationships and friendships); as such, I was trained as a specialist in

interpersonal relations (inspired by H. S. Sullivan, 1953). Throughout my post-PhD career, I have sought to combine my interests in intergroup relations and interpersonal relations. Indeed, I have studied interethnic as well as intraethnic romantic relationships; and same-gender as well as heterosexual romantic relationships (not to mention friendships across and within genders). Thus, my academic record attests to my affinity toward (if not *bona fides* for) scholarship on intersectionality.

4 | METHOD[2]

4.1 | Identification

In order to identify peer-reviewed empirical articles concerning the dynamics of international relationships, I began by searching the APA PsycInfo database (January 8, 2022), entering the text terms "international," "intercultural," and "relationships." The PsycInfo search yielded 1053 "hits," comprising a mix of Ph.D. dissertations, books, book chapters, peer-reviewed conceptual and empirical articles, conference proceedings, and non-peer-reviewed articles (whether conceptual or empirical). During the identification stage, I did not remove any records.

4.2 | Screening

Next, I scanned all 1053 PsycInfo records manually; I excluded 1037 "hits" that were not peer-reviewed empirical articles on international relationships. Afterward, I retrieved all 16 remaining "hits" and assessed their eligibility. Subsequently, I excluded (a) 10 papers on international friendships that did not include details regarding the cognitive, affective, or behavioral dynamics within those relationships; (b) one paper on international marriages that included details concerning relationship dynamics but was derived from the same data set as another paper (with the same set of main authors); and (c) one paper that purportedly dealt with individuals' international dating relationships but actually was limited to parental attitudes toward those relationships (rather than the lived experiences of the relationship partners), resulting in a final tally of four peer-reviewed articles.

4.3 | Inclusion

Accordingly, the present review focuses on four studies of the cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral dynamics of international relationships (Holzapfel et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2019; Kuramoto, 2018 and van Mol & de Valk, 2016). The study by Kuramoto was qualitative; whereas the studies by Holzapfel et al., Kaya et al., and van Mol and de Valk were quantitative. Even without specifying "marriage" as a text term, all of the studies were based on data largely or exclusively from married individuals. Moreover, even without specifying any aspects of relationship dynamics, all four studies addressed relationship satisfaction. Lastly, although I did not impose a time limit, all four studies were published since 2002. It is worth noting that the aforementioned paper by Schueths (2015) did not constitute one of the 1035 initial "hits," presumably because the title and main text used the term *interracial* (rather than international) to describe the relationships; even if the paper by Schueths had survived that initial cull, the fact

that it included a single quote from one participant concerning interactions between that individual and society (not interactions between the individual and her husband) would have rendered it ineligible for inclusion in the final set of studies.

5 | REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE

What theoretical perspective(s) within relationship science might help us appreciate the importance of satisfaction (whether intra-national or international)? In a review of the literature on relationship maintenance, Dindia and Canary (1993) highlighted two relevant theories that address the functionality of keeping relationships in satisfactory condition: (1) *Relational dialectics theory* (Baxter, 1988), a communication-studies perspective that emphasizes the ways in which a handful of logically opposite forces (e.g., *autonomy* versus *connectedness*, *novelty* versus *predictability*, and *closedness* versus *openness*) may combine to influence satisfaction, whether directly or indirectly; and (2) *interdependence theory* (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), a social-psychology perspective that focuses on the ways that two reinforcement-related precursors (i.e., *rewards and costs*) combine to directly influence satisfaction. Both relational dialectics theory and interdependence theory embrace behaviorist principles, although Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) major revision of interdependence theory charted an increasingly cognitive direction for that theory over time (e.g., Kelley et al., 1983/2002; Kelley et al., 2003).

I shall draw upon interdependence theory (rather than relational dialectics theory) in the present review, because (1) Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) initial version of interdependence theory assigns a clear role to satisfaction (a) as a consequence of rewards and costs, (b) as an antecedent of dependence (defined in opposition to power), and (c) as an antecedent of commitment, in close relationships (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993); and (2) Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) major revision acknowledges that the dyad or relationship pair (rather than the individual) ideally should constitute the unit of analysis, in quantitative as well as qualitative studies (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). These features of interdependent theory *should* assist researchers in understanding relationship maintenance among intranational and international couples alike (Gaines et al., 2015). Nevertheless, Clark et al. (2015) applied an interdependence analysis in attempting to understand the process by which precursors of satisfaction (i.e., rewards and costs), among other "investment model" variables (Rusbult, 1980, 1983), influence relationship maintenance specifically among international and other interethnic couples. In fact, the entire *JSI* edition on interethnic marriage in the US (cited at the start of the present paper) was informed by interdependence theory (Gaines, 2018).

By emphasizing interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) in the present review, I do not mean to imply that interdependence theory should be accepted uncritically as a conceptual framework. In fact, some "cross-cultural" psychologists who examine similarities and differences between average scores on variables of interest have contended that interdependence theory and other perspectives that owe an intellectual debt to Skinner's (1938) operant reinforcement theory do not generalize beyond the United States, not to mention nations that exist outside the West (Goodwin, 1999). Nevertheless, even "cross-cultural" psychologists would be hard-pressed to specify evidence that would challenge the generalizability of significance versus non-significance covariance among interdependence constructs (Hill, 2019). For example, results of a meta-analysis by Tran et al. (2019) indicate that the magnitude of correlations among investment model variables may differ significantly across national groups; yet the basic premises of Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model remain intact (e.g., relationship

satisfaction and investment size covary positively with commitment; whereas perception of alternatives to the relationships covaries negatively with commitment; see also Le & Agnew, 2003, for a previous meta-analysis).

From whose vantage point has the research been conducted? All four studies in the present review were conducted from the vantage point of the researchers in their roles as relationship "outsiders," interpreting data from their participants, rather than commenting upon their own experiences within international relationships (Gaines et al., 2015). Judging strictly on the basis of the four articles in question, one would not characterize the researchers as lacking impartiality in their analyses of participants' qualitative or quantitative data (Craig-Henderson & Lewis 2015). By the same token, the four sets of researchers differed in terms of the extent to which they cast their studies as dispassionate investigations into the dynamics of international relationships. The author of the qualitative study (Kuramoto, 2018) was unique in pursuing a "strengths-based approach" to examining the transition to parenthood among married couples in Japan, involving wives from Japan and their husbands from "non-Asian" (all of which were "Western") nations, as a means toward challenging negative societal stereotypes regarding conflict as endemic within intercultural marriages. Conversely, the authors of the quantitative studies (Holzapfel et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2019 and van Mol & de Valk, 2016) were relatively neutral in stating their respective aims.

Although the article by Kuramoto (2018) in the present review did not contain a positionality statement, a separate article by Kuramoto (2019) based on the same data set identified the author as a Japanese wife and mother who was married to a "European" husband. Of course, such additional knowledge should not automatically lead us to question Kuramoto's objectivity as a researcher (Gaines & Ickes, 2000). After all, Kuramoto was *not* a "participant-observer" and did not claim that her participants' relationship experiences mirrored her own relationship experiences. Nevertheless, Kuramoto's self-reported positionality offers insight into the author's access to participants (considering that she began by approaching her own acquaintances for the study, obtaining additional participants via snowball sampling). Additionally, Kuramoto's positionality helps explain why she cast her research in terms of advocacy as well as empiricism. One issue for which we *might* revisit Kuramoto's positionality is that of husband/wife power differentials, which Kuramoto did not address in detail, although the lack of comparable information regarding the positionality of the authors of quantitative studies in the present review requires that we tread carefully when commenting upon the implications of Kuramoto's positionality.

Unlike the paper by Kuramoto (2018), the paper by Holzapfel et al. (2018) focuses squarely on empiricism and does not advocate an overtly "strengths-based" approach concerning the management of stress among partners in international relationships. In their study of 73 heterosexual cohabiting couples within the United States (all of whom included one partner from the U.S. and one partner from a different nation), Holzapfel and colleagues struck a balance between (a) acknowledging potentially elevated levels of stress among international married couples in general (though not necessarily occurring among their sample of international cohabiting couples in particular) and (b) noting that dyadic coping in response to internal stress among partners in international romantic couples has not historically been the subject of empirical research (with their study serving as an exception to the rule). Despite their emphasis on empiricism, Holzapfel et al. contended that the results of their study yielded important implications for clinical and counseling practice involving international cohabiting couples – a contention that is fully consistent with Kuramoto's argument regarding her results as applicable to clinical and counseling work with international married couples.

Like the paper by Holzapfel et al. (2018), the paper by Kaya et al. (2019) is thoroughly empiricist and is not framed in terms of a "strengths-based" approach. Specifically, Kaya et al. examined aspects of ethnic identity and relationship satisfaction among 123 heterosexual "committed" couples (including "Western"/Chinese, "Western"/"Western," and Chinese/Chinese couples who were either married or cohabiting) who lived in Australia. However, unlike the paper by Holzapfel and colleagues (or the paper by Kuramoto, 2018), the paper by Kaya and colleagues does not address implications for clinical or counseling practice. In fact, although Kaya et al.'s inclusion of relationship satisfaction was not simply an afterthought, the authors prioritized cross-couple comparisons with regard to "Western" and Chinese cultural identities. Thus, Kaya et al. placed themselves primarily within cultural psychology, in contrast to Holzapfel et al. (who placed themselves mostly within relationship science) or Kuramoto (who did not place herself firmly within cultural psychology *or* relationship science, possibly fitting best within educational psychology; e.g., Kuramoto, 2019). Therefore, Kaya et al. presented their study exclusively as basic science; whereas Holzapfel et al. and Kuramoto combined basic and applied science in their studies.

Finally, although the paper by van Mol and de Valk (2016) technically is empiricist and does not engage in overt advocacy, the authors repeatedly described the symbolism of international relationships within the European Union in general – and the Netherlands in particular – in positive terms. The paper by van Mol and de Valk examined social support and relationship satisfaction among 898 individuals who were in cohabiting or marital relationships (including 674 individuals in binational relationships and 224 individuals in uninational relationships). Unlike the other studies that we have reviewed thus far, the study by van Mol and de Valk was based on data from one partner per couple. Given the authors' pro-EU comments regarding the incidence of binational relationships within the Netherlands, one could argue that van Mol and de Valk have placed themselves firmly within *political* psychology, rather than cultural psychology or relationship science. Lastly, van Mol and de Valk lean more heavily into sociology than do Kuramoto (2018), Holzapfel et al. (2018), or Kaya et al. (2019), all of whom place themselves within psychology (although relationship science bears the influence of sociology as well as psychology; Gaines et al., 2015).

Taking a step back from the vantage points of the respective authors, one is struck by the degree to which Holzapfel et al. (2018) delved into the processes by which individuals within international relationships end up experiencing varying levels of satisfaction (e.g., individuals' frequency of communicating stress as positively related to individuals' satisfaction *when partners reported low internal stress*). More than any other set of authors whose studies are highlighted in the present review, Holzapfel and colleagues embedded their research within relationship science, invoking Bodenmann's (1995, 2005) *systemic transactional model* of partners' interdependence with regard to stress and coping. In turn, Bodenmann (1995) briefly alluded to Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory when identifying individuals' perception of alternatives to their relationships as an "extrinsic motive" for dyadic coping (Bodenmann also mentioned individuals' relationship satisfaction as an "intrinsic motive" for dyadic coping, though not overtly from the perspective of interdependence theory). Therefore, it stands to reason that the target audience for Holzapfel et al.'s paper consists of relationship scientists, first and foremost. In contrast, the other authors did not appear to be targeting relationship scientists.

What types of questions are valued? One can detect a fundamental difference between (1) the retrospective, "strengths-based" questions that Kuramoto (2018) directly posed *to* participants who were satisfied with their international relationships and had made the transition to

parenthood several years before the study took place; and (2) the contemporaneous, non-evaluative questions that Holzapfel et al. (2018), Kaya et al. (2019), and van Mol and de Valk (2016) directly or indirectly posed *about* participants who may or may not have been satisfied with their international relationships and may or may not have been parents at the time of the respective studies. Also, it is not clear how Kuramoto ascertained participants' levels of satisfaction with their marriages; whereas the other researchers cited particular scales with Likert-type items to measure satisfaction (Holzapfel et al. and Kaya et al. used multiple-item scales; van Mol and de Valk used a single-item scale). Finally, the four sets of researchers differed in the extent to which they posed questions to or about participants concerning relationship constructs other than satisfaction: Kuramoto posed additional questions *to* participants; Holzapfel et al. and van Mol and de Valk posed additional questions *about* participants; and Kaya et al. did not pose additional questions.[3]

In general terms, Kuramoto (2018) asked participants to indicate what they say and do in order to maintain satisfaction in their international relationships. Kuramoto's participants indicated that, before becoming parents, they had acquired key "resources" such as *rich communication* (part of *strengths shared by two*). Kuramoto's participants also indicated that, after becoming parents, they had acquired "resources" such as *sharing partner joy/pain* (part of *enhanced partnership*). Before as well as after becoming parents, Kuramoto's participants additionally indicated that they had learned "lessons" such as *respectful communication approach* (part of *couple communication*) and *various views/methods* (part of *adjusting and respecting*), with the caveat that these lessons became especially important after parenthood (when conflict between spouses generally became most prevalent). Interestingly, Kuramoto's results contradict the common assumptions that married couples' satisfaction in general – and wives' satisfaction in particular – (a) will decline over time and (b) will drop even more dramatically if/when couples become parents (see also Huston, 2009, for a review with regard to comparable results from the longitudinal PAIR Project of intra-national couples within the U.S.).

Applying Bodenmann's (1995, 2005) systemic transactional model to their study of relationship satisfaction among heterosexual international couples who lived in the U.S., Holzapfel et al. (2018) broadly asked to what extent does (1) individuals' (and their partners') perceptions of internal stress covary with individuals' satisfaction, (2) stress communication moderate covariance between perceptions of internal stress and satisfaction, and (3) positive and negative aspects of dyadic coping moderate covariance between internal stress and satisfaction. Consistent with hypotheses that were derived from those questions, Holzapfel et al. found that (1) individuals' and their partners' internal stress were significantly and negatively correlated with individuals' satisfaction; (2) the link between internal stress and satisfaction was moderated by stress communication, with the correlation significantly lower among individuals who reported high (compared to low) stress communication; and (3) contrary with hypotheses, the link between internal stress and satisfaction was unrelated to positive or negative aspects of dyadic coping. If internal stress represents individuals' subjective experience of high costs and low rewards, then Holzapfel et al.'s results are consistent with Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory (see Bodenmann, 1995).

Unlike Kuramoto (2018) or Holzapfel et al. (2018), Kaya et al. (2019) did not pose direct, overarching questions concerning relationship satisfaction in their study of Chinese-Chinese, "Western"/"Western," and "Western/Chinese" couples who lived in Australia. Nonetheless, alongside three hypotheses that were unrelated to satisfaction (influenced by the social identity theory of Tajfel, 1979; and the acculturation model of Berry, 1997), Kaya et al. did propose the hypothesis that similarity between psychological identification with Chinese and "Western"

cultures would be a significant positive predictor of satisfaction (which was supported for similarity between partners' identification with "Western" culture, which was a significant positive predictor of satisfaction; but was not supported for similarity between partners' identification with Chinese culture, which was unrelated to satisfaction). Kaya et al. pointed out that similarity between partners' identification with the majority culture (given that the couples lived in the "Western" nation of Australia) emerged as the type of similarity that was relevant to satisfaction. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether the covariance between partners' identification with "Western" culture and satisfaction was equal or unequal across Chinese-Chinese, "Western"/"Western," and "Western"/Chinese couples.

Lastly, drawing upon Kalmijn's (1998) homogamy theory, van Mol and de Valk (2016) asked whether individuals within binational and uninational relationships in the Netherlands differed in relationship satisfaction. Although Kalmijn's homogamy theory would predict that individuals are more satisfied within uninational (compared to binational) relationships, van Mol and de Valk stopped short of endorsing that hypothesis. Indeed, van Mol and de Valk found that (a) Dutch individuals in uninational relationships did not differ significantly from Dutch individuals in binational relationships; whereas (b) Dutch individuals in uninational relationships scored significantly *lower* in satisfaction than did non-Dutch EU individuals in binational relationships. Therefore, not only was the hypothesis from Kalmijn's homogamy theory unsupported; but van Mol and de Valk's results concerning satisfaction scores for non-Dutch individuals in binational relationships ran directly counter to Kalmijn's predictions. Such findings are consistent with Luo's (2017) conclusion that social homogamy generally is a poor predictor of relationship satisfaction, especially when compared to the importance of individual-difference predictors (at least when it comes to relationships in "Western" nations).

Stepping back from the types of questions that are valued, the *answers* to general questions (whether explicit or implicit) from the four sets of studies in the present review are connected to Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory only in an indirect manner, if at all. We observed that Kuramoto's (2018) conclusion about satisfaction as maintained among Japanese wife-"European" husband couples following parenthood in Japan was compatible with Huston's (2009) conclusion of satisfaction as not invariably declining among intranational American couples; as it happens, Huston's PAIR Project was built upon the conceptual foundation of Kelley's (1979) refinement concerning Thibaut and Kelley's (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) interdependence theory, especially the premise that partners retain the capacity to provide rewards as well as costs for each other throughout their relational lives. Also, I noted that Holzapfel et al.'s (2018) finding about internal stress as inhibiting satisfaction among international couples in the U.S. was consistent with Bodenmann's (1995) interpretation of interdependence theory. Conversely, the studies by Kaya et al. (2019) and van Mol and de Valk (2016) do not bear upon interdependence theory (unless one counts Kaya et al.'s use of the actor-partner interdependence model; Kenny, 2018).

Who is included in the research, versus *who is left out of the research*; *whose voices are missing*; and *what topics should be studied by the next generation (and why)*? Among all four studies, individuals from "Western" nations were included. In the study by van Mol and de Valk (2016), individuals from nations outside the EU (and, consequently, individuals from nations outside the "West") were excluded; in the studies by Kuramoto (2018) and Kaya et al. (2019), individuals from nations outside Japan and the "West" (and, as a result, individuals from nations outside the "East–West" dichotomy) were excluded; and in the study by Holzapfel et al. (2018), no individuals were excluded on the basis of nationality. Although heterosexuality was not an explicit prerequisite, voices from members of sexual minority groups were missing from all of

the studies; whereas the lack of reported statistics concerning individuals' racial classification (except for Holzapfel et al., who collected data from members of various racial groups) prevents us from determining whether voices from members of ethnic minority groups also were missing. Lastly, in order to build upon the results that we have reviewed, future researchers should add socioemotional rewards and costs, given their presumed but undocumented influence on satisfaction (Rusbult, 1983).

Kuramoto (2018) cast her study as complementing previously published studies of international relationships involving individuals from Japan, noting that (a) most of the previous studies tended to focus on relationships between husbands from Japan and wives from Asian nations other than Japan, concluding that communication difficulties (e.g., linguistic barriers, cultural clashes) between spouses were common; and (b) the few studies that examined relationships between wives from Japan and husbands from "Western" nations likewise tended to emphasize communication difficulties between spouses. In contrast, Kuramoto contended that her study had given voice to Japanese wives and "Western" husbands in a manner that had not occurred in past studies, providing a forum to participants for discussing constructive aspects of communication and other patterns of behavior between the spouses. Notwithstanding these positive features of Kuramoto's study, the frequency with which "Western" husbands cited their Japanese wives' "expertise" as first-time parents – combined with Japanese wives' acceptance of such apparent deference – could be construed as evidence that many of the husbands and wives were perpetuating gender stereotypes that maintained male-oriented power differentials (see Holmes, 2000).

As noted above, among the studies in the present review, Holzapfel et al.'s (2018) study was the most inclusive in terms of participants' nationalities. Moreover, neither gender nor nation of origin moderated the significant negative impact of internal stress on individuals' relationship satisfaction in Holzapfel et al.'s study. Thus, Holzapfel et al.'s results – which replicated Bodenmann's (2005) previous results concerning internal stress and satisfaction among individuals within *intra*national relationships – generalized across a variety of pairings among individuals within international relationships. Holzapfel et al. acknowledged that the modal pairing within couples was between an individual from the U.S. and an individual from Germany, although they also pointed out that fewer than 20% of couples were characterized by that particular pairing. At any rate, due to the quantitative nature of their study, Holzapfel et al. were not in a position to provide a platform for participants to express themselves in a direct manner. Unlike Kuramoto's (2018) study, one is left to infer that – regardless of nationality – Holzapfel et al.'s participants in effect are speaking with the same "voice" via their responses to survey items concerning internal stress and satisfaction.

Unlike Kuramoto (2018) or Holzapfel et al. (2018), Kaya et al. (2019) included "comparison" subsamples of *intra*national couples (i.e., "Western" male/"Western" female and Chinese male/Chinese female) in addition to subsamples of international couples (i.e., "Western" male/Chinese female and Chinese male/"Western" female). However, Kaya et al. did not state whether they tested for moderation effects concerning the significant positive covariance between partners' similarity in psychological identification with "Western" culture and individuals' relationship satisfaction. Therefore, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, one is left with the conclusion that the effect of similarity in identification with "Western" culture on satisfaction generalized across all gender × nationality pairings. As was the case for Kuramoto's study, Kaya et al.'s study did not yield any evidence for "East"-"West" differences in relationship processes; yet the lack of qualitative data in Kaya et al.'s study prevents us from determining the extent to which the direct voices of participants are reflected in the results. At any rate,

one is left to conclude that all participants speak indirectly with the same "voice" by way of responses to survey items on ethnic identification and satisfaction in Kaya et al.'s study.

Finally, unlike the studies by Holzapfel et al. (2018) or Kaya et al. (2019), moderation was a non-issue in the study by van Mol and de Valk (2016) concerning within-EU nationality pairing as a predictor of relationship satisfaction in international relationships. One problematic aspect of the results in van Mol and de Valk's study is that, in the text on pages 50 (Abstract) and 55 (Results section), the authors imply that comparisons were made between (a) individuals from non-Dutch EU nations in binational relationships and (b) everyone else (i.e., Dutch individuals in uninational relationships as well as Dutch individuals in binational relationships); yet in the corresponding Table 2 on p. 55, significance tests clearly compared (a) Dutch individuals in uninational relationships and (b) everyone else (i.e., Dutch individuals in binational relationships as well as non-Dutch EU individuals in binational relationships). Therefore, the statistical basis for van Mol and de Valk's claim about a difference between Dutch individuals in binational relationships and non-Dutch EU individuals in binational relationships on satisfaction does not exist. As for participants' direct "voice," the study by van Mol and de Valk resembles the studies by Holzapfel et al. (2018) and Kaya et al. (2019) in lacking such direct qualitative data.

Taking a step back from who is included in the research, versus who is left out of the research; whose voices are missing; and what topics should be studied by the next generation (and why), one is struck by the fact that individuals from African, Central American, and South American nations are nearly invisible in the studies within the present review (although Holzapfel et al., 2018, did collect data from some individuals from those nations). Exactly *why* individuals from African, Central American, and South American nations are so vastly underrepresented in studies of international relationships is unclear. Although two of the studies (i.e., Kaya et al., 2019 and Kuramoto, 2018) implicitly raised the prospect of "East"-"West" differences in relationship processes (a prospect that also surfaces briefly in some 21st-century writings by interdependence theorists; e.g., Kelley et al., 2003), perhaps the more relevant comparison is between individuals from overrepresented nations in the "Global North" (predominantly populated by racially White persons) and individuals from underrepresented nations in the "Global South" (predominantly populated by persons of color; White et al., 2012). Research on individuals from African, Central American, and South American nations in international relationships is sorely needed.

6 | REVIEW SUMMARY

If intersectionality encompasses considerations of power differentials alongside the combined effects of individuals' socially defined group memberships upon individuals' social and psychological experiences in everyday life (e.g., Crenshaw, 2012), then it does not appear that any of the studies in the present review was designed to address intersectionality. Regarding the study by Kuramoto (2018), one might ask whether Japanese wives' and "Western" husbands' consensus on the wives as child-rearing "experts" (possibly a tacit acceptance of patriarchy) would have been so commonplace within a "comparison" sample in which the wives were "Western" and the husbands were Japanese. As for the studies by Holzapfel et al. (2018), Kaya et al. (2019), and van Mol and de Valk (2016), in the absence of data that could be interpreted as evidence supporting versus refuting the notion of power differentials, one might ask whether adding measures of relationship satisfaction would have enabled researchers to uncover a *lack*

of covariance between satisfaction and commitment among female non-"Western" immigrants to "Western" nations (who may be especially likely to believe that they are trapped in their international relationships, thus remaining highly committed despite experiencing low satisfaction; see Rusbult & Arriaga, 2000).

In turn, if critical race theory is the conceptual framework within which the construct of intersectionality ultimately is embedded (e.g., Crenshaw, 2011), then it does not seem that any of the studies in the present review was designed to address critical race theory. With regard to the study by Holzapfel et al. (2018), given that nearly 90% of U.S. individuals within international relationships classified themselves as White, one might ask whether the significant negative covariance between internal stress and relationship commitment would have been magnified among a larger subsample of Black participants (comprising fewer than 5% of U.S.-born *and* non-U.S.-born participants, and generally lower in number than all other racial groups in that study) in light of systemic racism that disproportionately affects Black persons within the U.S. As for the studies by Kuramoto (2018), Kaya et al. (2019), and van Mol and de Valk (2016), in the absence of data on participants' racial group memberships, one might ask whether collecting such information – and, ideally, seeking racially diverse samples wherever possible – would have uncovered any evidence suggesting that systemic racism affects satisfaction-related processes within international relationships *outside* the U.S.

Having critiqued the studies in the present review regarding a lack of explicit attention toward intersectionality and critical race theory, I would *not* characterize those studies as emblematic of systemic racism (in contrast to some pre-21st-century studies of interracial relationships, which explicitly invoked racist stereotypes; Gaines & Leaver, 2002). Both modern-day cultural psychology (including "cross-cultural" psychology across nations and "ethnic" psychology within nations) and relationship science rose to prominence during the early 1980s (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). However, the two fields have developed largely along parallel tracks, with lack of agreement regarding basic terms such as *interdependence* (defined as internal representation of self with others as a property of persons within cultural psychology; versus mutual influence in thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds as a property of pairs or dyads within relationship science; see also Gaines & Hardin, 2013). I believe that the authors of the four papers in the present review deserve credit for collecting data from ethnically diverse samples (in terms of racial and national, if not religious, demographics); such diversity among participants can be difficult for researchers to attain, especially outside the context of intraethnic relationships (Gaines & Ferenczi, 2020).

7 | IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The four studies that we highlighted in the present review collectively offer a solid descriptive base upon which relationship scientists might build increasingly theory-driven programs of research on the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction within international relationships, with a primary goal of expanding the inclusivity of such research – for example, by drawing upon currently under-studied constructs from Baxter's (1988) relational dialectics theory or Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory (see Dindia & Canary, 1993). Unfortunately, I am unaware of any ongoing attempts to use relational dialectics theory as a framework that would allow researchers to build conceptual and empirical bridges between cultural psychology and relationship science. Conversely, throughout the time interval that the studies in the present review have been conducted (i.e., since 2002), Gaines and colleagues (e.g., Gaines &

Agnew, 2003; Gaines et al., 2015; Gaines & Hardin, 2013; Gaines & Hardin, 2020) have consistently proposed ways that interdependence theory might serve as a unifying bridge. Rather than repeat the suggestions that Gaines and colleagues have made over the years, I shall attempt to make novel suggestions on the basis of interdependence constructs that arguably have not received sufficient empirical attention.

Probably the most obvious under-studied construct within Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory that could be examined in tandem with satisfaction within international relationships is *power* – a construct that is not identified within Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model and is not measured via Rusbult's Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult et al., 1998). For example, Kuramoto's (2018) study of the transition to parenthood among Japanese wife/"non-Asian" husband relationships hinted at power differentials favoring the husbands. Even if gender were the only socially defined group dimension along which spouses differed, I would expect wives to experience disadvantage relative to husbands regarding power (and, as a result, comparatively lower satisfaction; see Kelley et al., 2002). In terms of intersectionality, I would not be surprised to find a heightened male-oriented power differential when the wives come from "Eastern" nations and the husbands come from "Western" nations (perhaps involving high percentages of wives with "interdependent" self-construals and husbands with "independent" self-construals; see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). By measuring power alongside investment model variables, researchers could test hypothesized power-satisfaction links (see Kelley et al., 2003).

Another understudied construct within Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory that could be studied together with commitment (if not satisfaction) in research on international relationships is *love* – like power, unidentified in the investment model (Rusbult, 1980, 1983) and unmeasured in the IMS (Rusbult et al., 1998). None of the studies in the present review was concerned directly with love, although Holzapfel et al. (2018) used a measure of satisfaction (i.e., the Relationship Assessment Scale, or RAS; S. Hendrick, Dicke, & C. Hendrick, 1998) that included an item asking how much individuals loved their partners. From an interdependence theory perspective, one should measure love separately from satisfaction and commitment (see Kelley et al., 2002). Nevertheless, the study by Holzapfel et al. – which also was the only U.S.-based study in the present review – offers food for thought regarding intersectionality: The role of love in individuals' experience of satisfaction might be influential among international married couples (who comprised most of the couples in Holzapfel et al.'s sample) primarily within one nation (i.e., the U.S.), as the interdependence-informed *suffocation model of marriage* by Finkel and colleagues (Finkel, Hui, et al., 2014; Finkel, Larson, et al., 2014) would predict.

One construct that merits inclusion within the present review is *conflict resolution*, which is well-researched among interdependence theorists (in the tradition of Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) but could use more attention within the literature on international relationships (see Gaines & Ramkissoon, 2008). Among the studies that I reviewed, Kuramoto's (2018) study is most relevant; international married couples in that sample tended to comment upon conflict as emerging as a major issue after their offspring were born, with agreement on shared goals within marriage proving to be essential for resolving conflict. Although the IMS (Rusbult et al., 1998) does not include a measure of conflict resolution behaviors, Rusbult and colleagues developed stand-alone surveys to measure individuals' responses to (1) their own and/or partners' dissatisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1982); (2) partners' anger or criticism (Rusbult et al., 1991); and (3) partners' betrayal (Finkel et al., 2002). Regarding (lack of) intersectionality, any of those constructs would allow researchers to test the oft-unstated assumption that commitment as a mediator

between satisfaction and conflict resolution will be more influential among international couples in general, compared to intranational couples (Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

All told, the construct of power may be the most promising construct for promoting research on international relationships that not only embraces Bell's (1987) critical race theory (including the construct of intersectionality from Crenshaw, 1989) but also embraces Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory (including the investment model from Rusbult, 1980, 1983) as guides for inclusivity in relationship science. For instance, if the so-called "East"-versus-"West" dichotomy ends up magnifying male-oriented power differentials when international relationships involve Asian-descent women who are paired with European-descent men, then one might ask whether male-oriented power differentials are *mitigated* when international relationships involve European-descent women who are paired with Asian-descent men (see Gaines et al., 1997). Also, venturing beyond the "East"-versus-"West" dichotomy, one could ask whether African-descent women in international relationships are more versus less likely to experience male-skewed power differentials than are Asian-descent or European-descent women; or whether African-descent men in such relationships are more versus less likely to experience male-skewed power differentials than are Asian-descent or European-descent men (Gaines, 2018).

Notwithstanding Delagado and Stefancic's (2017) definition of intersectionality (as quoted near the beginning of the present paper), I am not aware of any studies of processes in international relationships that have focused on partners' sexual orientation or socioeconomic status (the latter of which Delagado and Stefancic designated as *class*). As relationship scientists increasingly examine dynamics in same-sex romantic relationships, the emerging portrait of satisfaction-related processes appears to be quite similar across same-sex and heterosexual relationships, although it is not clear that same-sex and heterosexual international relationships necessarily are similar in this regard (see Diamond, 2015). Furthermore, socioeconomic status – whether intersecting with individuals' nationality or not – rarely is examined in studies on relationship processes (see Karney, 2015). Thus, my lack of commentary in the present review concerning sexual orientation and socioeconomic status reflects a genuine lack of relevant research within the context of international relationship processes, rather than an oversight on my part; I strongly encourage relationship scientists to consider such potentially important contributors to intersectionality in future research (perhaps via greater integration with cultural psychology; e.g., Cohen, 2009, 2010).

8 | CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In the introductory article for a *JSI* edition on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call for action to behavioral scientists at the 1967 convention of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (edited by Andrew Stewart and Joseph Sweetman; and featuring King's address, published as King, 2018), Stewart and Sweetman (2018) observed that intersectionality and critical race theory have been embraced by many social scientists outside psychology; yet such critical perspectives have *not* received much recognition by psychologists (for an exception, see J. M. Jones's, 1998 proposal for a *psychological critical race theory*). Considering the extent to which relationship science historically has been informed by social psychology (Berscheid & Reis, 1998), perhaps the lack of influence regarding intersectionality and critical race theory within studies of international relationships should not come as a surprise. Ironically, none of the articles in the 2018 *JSI* edition (which also included Adams et al., 2018; Allen &

Leach, 2018; Anderson & Bushman, 2018; Bell et al., 2018; Brannon, 2018; Pettigrew, 2018; Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Stewart & Tran, 2018; Sweetman, 2018; and Yogeeswaran et al., 2018) covered relationship processes.

More recently, in the introductory article for a *JSI* edition on applications of intersectionality to critical social issues (edited by Kim Case, Nicole Overstreet, and Lisa Rosenthal), Overstreet et al. (2020) noted that the intersectionality *construct* has given rise to an intersectionality *theory*; yet psychologists generally remain disengaged with intersectionality or critical race theory, let alone Black feminism (which has influenced scholarship on intersectionality in the wake of Crenshaw, 1989). To their credit, Overstreet et al. recommended that psychologists draw upon intersectionality theory in linking intergroup relations with intra-group relations. However, none of the articles in the 2020 *JSI* edition (which also included Bullock et al., 2020; Case et al., 2020; Cole, 2020; Ellison & Langhout, 2020; Hagai et al., 2020; Heberle et al., 2020; Nair & Vollhardt, 2020; Richter et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2020; Settles et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020; and Young, 2020) covered relationship processes (other than receipt of social support as reported by Williams et al.).

At the start of the present paper, I referred to the *JSI* edition on interethnic marriage in the U.S., which tended to emphasize interracial relationships over international relationships. As it happens, neither the present paper nor the *JSI* edition alluded to specific studies on *interreligious* relationships (i.e., involving partners who differ in presumed "faith-based" cultural heritage). However, such studies are virtually nonexistent (Gaines, 2018). For now, I would argue that most of the available evidence regarding processes in intercultural relationships is limited to international relationships (though it is worth noting that race is socially constructed, leading some authors to use the terms "race," "culture," and "ethnicity" interchangeably; Hill, 2019). Given the difficulty that many relationship scientists are likely to have encountered in attempting to obtain financial and other resources that are required to conduct most research on international relationships, those authors who have succeeded in that quest (e.g., Holzapfel et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2019; Kuramoto, 2018 and van Mol & de Valk, 2016) deserve credit for their empirical contributions to the field. In closing, I hope that the present review will encourage relationship scientists to progress beyond the traditional boundaries of "East" and "West" in future studies of processes within international relationships.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study. (Stanley O. Gaines Jr: Stanley.Gaines@brunel.ac.uk)

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ENDNOTES

[1] The distinction between ascribed and achieved status in the present positionality statement was influenced by Gordon Allport's classic work on intergroup relations, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954/1979). Allport's treatise was forward-thinking in many respects, not the least of which was Allport's conviction that individuals should

be free to marry across racial and other ethnic boundaries without facing the threat of legal or other societal repercussions (Gaines, 2018).

[2] The process of identifying, screening, and including relevant studies is consistent with the recommendations that are contained within the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) *2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases and registers only*, which is available via https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.prisma-statement.org%2Fdocuments%2FPRISMA_2020_flow_diagram_new_SRs_v1.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

[3] As it turns out, the paper by Kaya et al. (2019) reported results from a data set that also was the source for three earlier papers on satisfaction and international (versus intra-national) relationships, for which Halford, Hiew, and van de Vijver served as authors (i.e., Halford et al., 2018; Hiew et al., 2015, 2016). Those earlier papers – which tended to repeat the same descriptive statistics regarding nationality, gender, and satisfaction that Kaya et al. reported – did not emerge as "hits" in the aforementioned PsycInfo search. Inclusion of those papers would have yielded several additional survey questions concerning relationship constructs but did not offer substantial insight beyond the satisfaction-related processes that Kaya et al. covered.

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