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Religious Homogamy and Marital Quality: Historical and Generational Patterns, 1980 – 1997

Despite significant social changes in the past 50 years, research continues to find a strong and enduring link between religious homogamy and marital quality. Yet, research has not explicitly examined whether this link has changed over time or over generations. To address historical and generational trends, I use national, longitudinal data collected between 1980 and 1997 that represents 3,211 respondents in the parental and offspring generations and 2 measures each of marital quality and religious homogamy. The findings show that the relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality weakened significantly between 1980 and 1997 from intragenerational change and generational replacement. The homogamy–marital quality link was weaker in both generations partly because of the increasing relative influence of gender, work, and family issues. Additionally, a decline in perceptions of religious authority has altered the religion–marital quality connection, though mostly among the younger generation. Even so, religiously homogamous couples still report higher marital quality.

Research in the past 50 years routinely finds a positive association between a couple's religious beliefs and behaviors and the quality of their marriage. Religious homogamy—the extent to which husbands and wives hold similar religious beliefs and participate jointly in religious practices—appears to be one of the stronger religious predictor of marital quality (e.g., Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Heaton & Pratt, 1990). The explanation for this long-term and contemporary phenomenon partly lies in the intergenerational transmission of religion and marital behaviors and the fluid reciprocity between the religious and family institutions (Christiano, 2000). This suggests that children inherit their parents' levels of religion and marital quality and then replicate the positive link between religion and marital quality.

Arguably, though, the current generation of young adults who grew up and married in the past several decades experienced some of the most rapid structural and secular changes in work, family, gendered roles, and, perhaps, religion throughout their life course. Gerson (2001) labels these adults the "children of the gender revolution." How is it, then, that these changes have left untouched the historical relationship between religion and marital quality among younger generations? This invariant relationship is even more notable given that these societal changes have already altered the many marriage-related work, gender, and family bargains among recent generations (Kalmijn, 1998). Furthermore, given the rapid tempo of these social structural changes, would we not also expect some modification over time in the religion–marital quality relationship for older generations as well?

To address these questions and to improve on prior studies, this research uses intergenerational data from a national longitudinal study of marriage where the older parental generation

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was interviewed from 1980 to 1997 and the younger offspring generation was interviewed in 1997. These data allow the assessment of issues not previously researched—whether the link between religious homogamy and marital quality is invariant across historical and generational time. Theoretically, I suggest that possible mechanisms behind any transformation between religion and marital quality result from generational and social structural (i.e., historical) changes. Methodologically, I pool the parental (1980 – 1997) and adult offspring data (1997) to estimate whether the link between religious homogamy and marital quality was invariant between 1980 and 1997. Then, I examine the source of any transformation by partitioning the change into generational and social structural components.

BACKGROUND

The Longstanding Association Between Religion and Marital Quality

Research 50 years ago (Burchinal, 1957) and today (Curtis & Ellison, 2002) reach the same conclusion: A strong and positive association exists between religion and marital quality. This relationship remains after adjusting for the overestimation of marital quality among more religious couples (Filsinger & Wilson, 1984). Longitudinally, Stacey (1990) finds that marital quality increases as couples become more religious. Recent research suggests that religious homogamy (i.e., religious similarity) is more important to marital quality than the absolute levels of religion of any one spouse or the couple (Call & Heaton, 1997). Dudley and Kosinski (1990) find that the strongest links between religion and marital quality are among couples with high congruence on religious beliefs and church attendance. Using the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH-1), Heaton and Pratt (1990) also find that joint church attendance is important for marital quality. Similarly, Curtis and Ellison find higher levels of marital conflict among couples with different levels of church attendance and theological disparities. Generally, a greater disparity or distance in religious beliefs between a husband and wife is associated with a greater likelihood of an unhappy marriage (Ortega, Whitt, & Williams, 1988).

The empirical evidence on the importance of religious homogamy lends credence to conceptual arguments that religious homogamy is a complementary and integrative trait in marriage. Becker (1991) argues that religious similarity is marital-specific capital that is associated with marital quality. Waite and Lehrer (2003) contend that shared religious experiences increase family cohesion just as religion is an integrative social force. Religious homogamy is a couple-based trait that optimizes marital companionship by reducing the need for a spouse to search for similar views outside the marriage. Couples with similar religious views and behaviors are united by their common belief in the values of their religion, which influences marital quality, commitment, dependency, and interaction, and provides a unified approach to marital and family issues (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993).

Theoretical Approaches Explaining a Transformation in the Association Between Religion and Marital Quality

The longstanding and positive link between religion and marital quality occurs, partly, because of the intergenerational transmission of marital and religious beliefs and behaviors (Amato & Booth, 2001; Myers, 1996). These same intergenerational processes, however, also introduce two causal mechanisms that may transform the religion–marital quality link: generational replacement and social structural changes.

Generational replacement. Generational change theory argues that behavioral and attitudinal changes are a product of the ongoing replacement of older generations by younger generations (Ryder, 1965). The younger and older generations differ systematically in their childhood and socialization experiences, and these differences are carried into adulthood producing dissimilar life course patterns. For the present study, the offspring generation was socialized within a society that was much less traditional in terms of gender, work, family, and religious issues and roles, compared to their parents' generation. Thus, as the offspring generation reached adulthood, entered the married population by 1997, and joined and replaced the older parental generation who were married by 1980, they brought with them their less traditional upbringing. These generational differences have the potential to transform the historical link between religious homogamy and marital quality between 1980 and 1997.

Social structural changes. Two sociohistorical changes may be possible mechanisms behind the transformation in the effect of religious homogamy on marital quality. First, over time changes have occurred in the meaning, role, and influence of religion (broadly called religious authority). This alteration is not a decline in the quantities of religion (e.g., church attendance, biblical literalism) but a decrease in the extent to which individual beliefs and behaviors are influence by religion (Chaves, 1994). Sherkat and Ellison (1999) find that traditional measures of religion over the past several decades have remained relatively stable, for example, religious participation and belief in God. Yet, as religion becomes a more private and individual pursuit, numerous studies find that religious adults increasingly emphasize personal fulfillment, self-enhancement, and gender equality; increasingly interpret religion in individualistic terms; and look to religion less for life-guiding authority (Greer & Roof, 1992; Hammond, 1992; Hout & Fischer, 2002). These trends appear mostly among younger individuals and those aligned with mainline religions, though research documents that these trends increasingly characterize the youngest adults affiliated with conservative religious organizations (Gallagher & Smith, 1999). Denton (2004) finds that even though conservative Protestants hold more traditional gender ideologies, their actual marital decision making practices are not different from those of liberal Protestants who hold more egalitarian ideologies.

For this study, the implication is that younger married offspring who entered the married population by 1997 may be equally religious across traditional measures, but the import of religious authority on marital quality is weaker for them than among their older parents who married by 1980. These subjective differences have the potential to transform the link between religious homogamy and marital quality between 1980 and 1997.

A second mechanism transforming the link between religious homogamy and marital quality is temporal changes in gender, work, and family. The younger generation in this study was raised and married in a society distinct from the society in which their parents were raised and married. The distinction is marked by a societal shift toward less traditional work, family, and gendered roles that alter the landscape of marriage.

Research consistently shows that younger couples encounter new complexities and conflicts stemming from these changes in work, family, and gendered roles that were and are not encountered as extensively by older couples. Compared to the older parental generation, a majority of wives in the offspring generation is employed in the labor market. In 1997, over 60% of all married women were in the labor force, which is nearly double the 32% in the labor force in 1970 (U.S. Census, 1998). Casper and Bianchi (2002) argue that the truly amazing trend since 1970 is the dramatic rise in the combination of paid work and mothering among younger married women. Another significant change is a trend toward less traditional gender beliefs, especially among younger generations (Myers & Booth, 2002). Additional temporal changes that increase marital complexity and may transform the link between homogamy and marital quality are increases in the percentage of families that are stepfamilies, reside in urban areas, are preceded by premarital cohabitation, have spouses with college degrees, and form at later ages.

Research finds both positive and negative consequences for marital quality from the new gender-work-family configurations. The significant issue for this research is not whether these configurations benefit or harm marital quality but that they now dominate marital relations and may overshadow the traditional influence of religious homogamy. Even though younger marriages may reap certain benefits, they also face different obstacles in their marriage than do (and did) older marriages. Research does find that today's younger married adults have higher levels of marital conflict and problems (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). These marital difficulties generally stem from disagreements over children, division of labor, and general household decisions that are a result of the changing family-gender-work bargain (Hochschild, 1997).

For this study, the marital quality of the younger offspring married by 1997 will be more a function of how well they negotiate complex and structural work and domestic demands in a more egalitarian society compared to their parents married by 1980. These contemporary gender-work-family dynamics have the potential to transform the link between religious homogamy and marital quality between 1980 and 1997.

METHOD

Sample and Data Structure

The data for this research come from a 17-year, five-wave longitudinal panel study titled Marital Instability Over the Life Course. The purpose of the study was to develop measures and identify the causes of marital quality and stability throughout the life course. The study drew heavily on a life course perspective to understand how changes in a range of independent variables such as economic resources, wife's employment, presence of children, religion, and general family life were linked to marital quality and stability. In 1980, sample households were chosen through a simple random-digit-dialing procedure and the husband or wife was selected for an interview using a second random process. Only married individuals under age 55 in households in the contiguous United States were included in the sample. Of those individuals contacted, 78% gave complete interviews. The final sample consisted of 2,033 married persons (not couples). When compared with U.S. census data, the sample was representative of married individuals with respect to age, race, household size, housing tenure, presence of children, and region of the country. In 1983, 1988, 1992, and 1997, reinterviews were completed with 78%, 66%, 58%, and 53%, respectively, of the original sample.

A sample of offspring (children of the main respondents) was included as part of the 1992 and 1997 waves of data collection. To be eligible, offspring had to have resided in the household in 1980 and be 19 years of age or older at the time of the interview. When parents had more than one eligible child, a random procedure was used to select the child for inclusion in the study. In 1992, 496 (86%) parents with eligible offspring provided names and telephone numbers of children and interviews were conducted with 471 (95%) of these offspring for an overall completion rate of 82%. In 1997, interviews were conducted with 426 of these offspring for a reinterview rate of 90%. An additional 275 offspring reached eligibility in 1997. Parents offered the names of 250 (91%) of these offspring, and interviews were conducted with 220 (88%) offspring for an overall completion rate of 80%. The analysis pools data from three groups of offspring: 426 offspring first interviewed in 1992 and retained in 1997, 45 offspring interviewed in 1992 but not in 1997, and 220 offspring first interviewed in 1997. The pooled sample is independent as there are no sibling pairs. I limited the age range of the offspring to 19 – 33 so as to not overlap with the 1997 parental sample (34 – 72).

The sample of offspring may be biased because of parental attrition patterns and willingness to provide information on their offspring. Parental attrition between 1980 and 1997 occurred in predictable categories: African Americans, renters, fathers, relatively young and old parents, parents with less education, and those living in the South. Also, interviews were obtained with about half (50.4%) of eligible offspring. I reestimated all the models presented in this article with a lambda variable predicting attrition (Heckman, 1979). The results from these models were not significantly different from the ones reported in this article. I also analyzed whether parental religion and marital quality were significant predictors of attrition and willingness to provide offspring information. They were not in either situation, which suggests that the offspring sample is not biased because of selection or attrition factors.

Measures

Two measures of marital quality are used in the analysis. *Marital happiness* assesses whether respondents are *very happy* (3), *pretty happy* (2), or *not too happy* (1) with 10 aspects of their marital relationship. Topics of evaluation include global feelings of the marriage (overall happiness, strength of love) as well as the spouse's satisfaction with specific aspects of the relationship (amount of understanding received, amount of love and affection, and the spouse as a companion). Higher scores indicate greater happiness ($\alpha = .87$). *Marital stability* is the propensity to divorce and includes both a cognitive component (thinking the marriage is in trouble, considering divorce) and an active component (talking to friends or spouse about the possibility of divorce, consulting an attorney, separating from the spouse). The scale is derived from 12 items, and higher scores indicate greater marital stability ($\alpha = .91$). The measure is logged because the scale is positively skewed.

The analyses use two measures of religious homogamy. *Religious authority homogamy* is the extent to which the husband and wife

perceive each other to be equally influenced by religion. The 1980 and 1997 survey addressed this measure with different questions. In 1980, the respondent was asked, "In general, how much would you say your religious beliefs influence your daily life? Very much. Quite a bit. Some. A little. None?" The follow-up question asked, "And how about your husband/wife? Very much. Quite a bit. Some. A little. None?" In 1997, the respondent was asked, "How religious are you compared to your (husband/wife)? Would you say you are much more religious, more religious, about the same, less religious, or much less religious?" From these responses, three dummy variables (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) were created that capture the extent to which spouses share equal levels of religious authority. Couples are coded as *same* if the 1980 responses were equivalent (e.g., both *very much* or *a little*) and the 1997 response was *about the same*. Couples are coded as *different* if the 1980 responses were one-to-two levels different; for example, *very much* and *some* or *a little* and *none*, and the 1997 response was either *more religious* or *less religious*. Couples are coded as *much different* if the 1980 responses were three-to-four levels different, for example, *very much* and *a little* or *quite a bit* and *none*, and the 1997 responses were either *much more religious* or *much less religious*. Even though religious authority homogamy is measured slightly different in 1980 and 1997, both wordings produce similar results as shown in Table 1. This variable measures perception of religious authority homogamy; it may or may not estimate actual congruence. Research, though, strongly suggests that marital quality is more sensitive to perceptions than to behaviors (Lye & Biblarz, 1993).

Joint attendance measures the extent to which the husband and wife attend religious services together and was estimated by identical questions in 1980 and 1997: "How often do you and your (husband/wife) attend church together? Would you say *weekly* (4), *once a month* (3), *less than monthly* (2), or *never* (1)?" Higher values indicate greater joint attendance. This measure of homogamy does have a potential limitation. Specifically, consider two couples: Couple A attends church together once a month, but the respondent attends alone weekly. Couple B attends church together less than monthly, but always go together. In this example, Couple A would be rated more homogamous than Couple B, even though the reverse is true. To test the extent of this limitation, I ran cross-tabulations and correlations between the church attendance of the couple and of the respondent alone (attendance for the spouse was not reported). The correlation was high at .85 ($p < .001$). Further, rates of joint and respondent attendance were identical 81% of the time. In only 6% of the cases did the respondent report attending church alone weekly or once a month but jointly less than monthly or never. This suggests strongly that there are very few Couple A's in the data and that the current measure of joint attendance is a valid measure.

Denominational homogamy is not one of the variables used because the religious affiliation of the spouses was collected only in the 1980 parental interview. This exclusion is not a fatal flaw for two reasons. First, prior research generally finds little to no effect of denominational homogamy on marital quality (e.g., Curtis & Ellison, 2002; see Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993, for contrary findings.). Second, the correlation between joint attendance and denomination homogamy was .89 ($p < .001$) in 1980. Although not perfectly correlated, the results suggest that denominational homogamy and joint attendance go nearly hand in hand. In lieu of denominational homogamy, I use the respondent's *religious affiliation* to tap into the different and changing family and marriage ideologies that are espoused by different denominations (Brooks, 2002; Hout & Fischer, 2002). Membership in religious organizations was assessed by two questions where the respondent named the specific denomination, church, or sect with which they were affiliated. Using this information, I created seven categories of religious affiliation following the classification strategy developed by Steensland et al. (2000): Black Protestant, Conservative Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other, and Unaffiliated. I could not create a separate Black Protestant group because only 3.5% of the sample is Black, and their cell sizes would have been too small in the regression analyses. Therefore, I placed conservative Black Protestants into the Conservative Protestant category and mainline Black Protestants into the Mainline Protestant group. As shown in Table 1, the self-reported religious affiliation of the sample is quite similar to those found in Steensland et al. (2000).

I assessed gender ideology with a 7-item scale. Sample items included "A woman's most

Table 1. *Descriptive Information of Variables*

Variable	Parents, 1980		Parents, 1997		Offspring, 1997		Range
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Marital quality							
Marital happiness	28.49	3.95	28.09	4.13	28.93	3.63	11 – 34
Marital stability	1.08	.95	1.17	1.02	1.06	1.01	0 – 1.4
Religious homogamy							
Religious authority							
Same	.71	.88	.68	.92	.64	.91	0 – 1
Different	.23	.41	.25	.44	.27	.47	0 – 1
Much different	.06	.16	.07	.25	.09	.38	0 – 1
Joint church attendance	2.52	1.27	2.57	1.26	2.59	1.21	1 – 4
Gender, work, and family							
Husband works full time	.90	.30	.74	.44	.84	.44	0 – 1
Wife works full time	.42	.49	.51	.50	.73	.49	0 – 1
Gender egalitarianism	18.73	3.23	19.64	3.16	20.50	2.82	7 – 28
Conflict over division of labor	.25	.43	.17	.37	.42	.49	0 – 1
Conflict over children	.11	.31	.07	.26	.17	.37	0 – 1
Conflict over household decisions	.09	.20	.04	.21	.11	.18	0 – 1
Religious affiliation							
Mainline Protestant	.29	.49	.27	.47	.26	.49	0 – 1
Conservative Protestant	.25	.30	.30	.38	.28	.33	0 – 1
Catholic	.27	.44	.25	.40	.26	.44	0 – 1
Jewish	.03	.14	.02	.15	.02	.15	0 – 1
Other	.06	.20	.05	.22	.08	.22	0 – 1
Unaffiliated	.09	.29	.11	.32	.12	.31	0 – 1
Control							
Age	35.46	9.25	52.35	8.79	30.48	4.95	18 – 72
Female	.60	.49	.61	.48	.51	.49	0 – 1
White	.88	.30	.93	.25	.92	.31	0 – 1
Age at marriage	22.90	5.38	23.73	7.14	23.88	3.67	16 – 42
Prior cohabitation	.25	.41	.29	.38	.38	.53	0 – 1
Presence of children	.76	.43	.50	.50	.63	.48	0 – 1
Presence of stepchildren	.07	.26	.04	.20	.04	.19	0 – 1
Urban residence	.77	.42	.81	.43	.88	.32	0 – 1
Years of education	13.42	2.63	13.93	2.47	14.92	2.38	8 – 22
Remarriage	.15	.36	.23	.42	.09	.28	0 – 1
Years married	12.56	9.19	28.59	10.55	6.54	4.97	0 – 55

important task in life should be taking care of her children," and "It should not bother the husband if a wife's job sometimes requires her to be away from home overnight" (1 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *strongly disagree*). Items were coded so that higher scores represent less traditional gender ideologies, and the mean response served as the scale score ($\alpha = .72$). I use information on labor force participation to get at competing work-family demands and negotiations that are common in marriages. The analyses included whether the husband and wife worked full time (1 = *full time*). I understand that this variable does not capture the dynamic interplay between work and family roles, such as timing of work and role overload. I was limited by the data in the 1997 surveys, however, and was only able to measure whether the spouse worked full time. To capture the extent to which these demands may be troublesome and require complex role negotiation, I measured the amount of conflict in three different

domains with a series of dummy variables (1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*). Respondents were asked whether they and their spouse have arguments or disagreements about doing their fair share of (a) the housework and (b) looking after the children. The third domain assessed negotiation resolutions between husband and wife by the following question: "Overall, are you satisfied with the amount of influence you have in family decision making?"

The link between religion and marital quality is embedded in a context of sociodemographic and life course variables. All models control for variables that are routinely associated with marital quality and religion as summarized in Table 1. These variables include age, place of residence, age at marriage, gender, education, race, prior cohabitation, years married, marriage order, and the presence of children and stepchildren.

Missing values for the dependent and primary independent variables were trivial. None of the variables had more than 2% missing values, and most were between 0% and 0.5%. I tested a variety of missing value strategies (e.g., casewise deletion, multiple imputation) and settled on using the mean or median substitution strategy. Overall, the results were nearly exact regardless of which strategy I adopted.

Analytic Strategy

A series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models were estimated to test the research questions. Several of these models pooled data from both waves of the parental interviews as well as data from the offspring interview. This strategy creates correlated observations either because of repeated measures on the same respondents or measures from parent–adult child pairs. Therefore, standard OLS regression techniques are not appropriate because of the violation of a number of assumptions, including independence of observations and correlated error structures. To overcome these problems, I used models that compute regression coefficients by generalized least squares estimation techniques where the variance-covariance matrix uses Taylor series linearization variance estimators. These models include a variable that links and then makes adjustments for clustered, correlated observations—either because of repeated measures or parent–adult child pairs. This technique is favorable to other techniques that are often employed to overcome the independence-of-observations problem.

RESULTS

Some of the descriptive statistics in Table 1 suggest what may *not* be causing a change in the religious homogamy–marital quality link over historical or generational time. Specifically, the means for marital quality and religious homogamy do not differ significantly from 1980 to 1997 or between the parental and offspring generations. Levels of marital happiness and stability, religious authority homogamy, and joint church attendance are all statistically similar for parents in 1980 and 1997 and between parents and offspring in 1997. These trends imply that any change in the relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality is not being driven by historical or generational changes in the *values* of these variables.

Overall Change

The first step is to determine whether the link between religious homogamy and marital quality has changed over time and generations. The regression models for change are in Table 2 and include all variables—religious homogamy, gender, work, family, and controls. The results for historical change in the first panel show two consistent trends. First, in the main models, religious homogamy is consistently and statistically linked with marital happiness and stability. Couples who report different or much different levels of religious authority homogamy also report lower levels of marital happiness and stability compared to couples who report same levels of religious authority homogamy. Further, levels of marital happiness and stability are greater among couples who attend church together more frequently. Second, the interaction models show that all effects of religious homogamy changed significantly between 1980 and 1997, and the pattern is identical for both measures of marital quality. Specifically, the negative effects of spouses having different and much different levels of religious authority homogamy declined between 1980 and 1997 for both marital happiness and stability. The positive effects of joint church attendance on marital stability also declined between 1980 and 1997.

The analysis of generational change is in the second panel and produced several interesting results. First, in the main models, marital happiness is no longer associated with couples holding different levels of religious homogamy, as suggested by the previous interaction model.

Table 2. *Unstandardized Generalized Least Squares Coefficients for Regression of Marital Quality on Religious Homogamy Across Survey Year and Generation Membership: U.S. Adults*

	Historical Change: Pooled Parental and Offspring Generations, 1980 – 1997 (n = 3,211)				Generational Change: Pooled Parental and Offspring Generations, 1997 (n = 1,185)			
	Marital Happiness		Marital Stability		Marital Happiness		Marital Stability	
Variables	Main	Interaction	Main	Interaction	Main	Interaction	Main	Interaction
Religious authority homogamy								
Same (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Different	−1.04*** (−.13)	−1.38*** (−.15)	−.09*** (−.11)	−.11*** (−.13)	−.41 (−.03)	−.49 (−.03)	−.05* (−.07)	−.05* (−.07)
Much different	−1.46*** (−.13)	−1.40*** (−.13)	−.15*** (−.12)	−.15*** (−.11)	−1.41*** (−.11)	−1.62*** (−.12)	−.09* (−.07)	−.09* (−.08)
Joint church attendance	.65*** (.22)	.70*** (.23)	.09*** (.20)	.10*** (.22)	.57** (.17)	.58** (.17)	.06** (.16)	.06** (.17)
Interaction with survey/generation								
Religious authority homogamy								
Different	—	.97*** (.13)	—	.06* (.05)	—	.14 (.01)	—	−.05* (−.05)
Much different	—	.55* (.06)	—	.04* (.04)	—	.75** (.08)	—	.10* (.07)
Joint church attendance	—	−.15* (−.08)	—	−.05** (−.13)	—	−.17* (−.08)	—	−.01 (−.00)
Survey (1 = *1997*)	—	−.01 (−.00)	—	.00 (.00)	—	—	—	—
Generation (1 = *offspring*)	—	—	—	—	—	.27 (.03)	—	−.11 (−.07)
Mainline Protestant	.34 (.04)	.31 (.02)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.24 (.02)	.23 (.02)	.03 (.04)	.02 (.03)
Conservative Protestant	.33 (.03)	.37 (.04)	−.05 (−.04)	−.04 (−.02)	−.12 (−.07)	−.10 (−.08)	−.05 (−.05)	−.02 (−.01)
Catholic	.63** (.07)	.68** (.08)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.25 (.05)	.24 (.05)	.05 (.07)	.01 (.00)
Jewish	.28 (.01)	.31 (.03)	−.00 (−.00)	−.01 (−.00)	.30 (.01)	.25 (.00)	.06 (.02)	.08 (.03)
Other	.15 (.00)	.15 (.00)	.01 (.00)	.02 (.01)	−.02 (−.00)	−.02 (−.00)	−.07 (−.06)	−.09 (−.03)
R^2	.111	.132	.129	.141	.126	.155	.150	.171

Note: All models contain the gender, work, family, and control variables, but the coefficients are omitted for parsimony. Numbers in parentheses are standardized coefficients.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. (Two tailed.)

Yet, when couples hold much different levels, they report lower marital happiness and stability. Second, church attendance continues to be a significant predictor of marital happiness and stability, but at lower levels compared to the models that included the 1980 data. Third, most, but not all, of the effects of religious homogamy are smaller among the offspring than among the parents: (a) holding different beliefs about religious authority on marital stability, (b) holding much different beliefs about religious authority on marital happiness and stability, and (c) joint church attendance on marital happiness.

Overall, Table 2 shows evidence of both an historical and a generational shift in the relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality. The models, though, provide limited evidence that marital quality varies as a function of religious affiliation after controlling for the behavioral and altitudinal aspects of religious homogamy, similar to that shown by Curtis and Ellison (2002). As is typical, the historical and generational effects in Table 2 may be confounded by each other as well as age effects. To sort out the patterns of these shifts, the next set of regression models are estimated (a) separately by historical time and generations and (b) with reduced (religious homogamy and control variables) and full (religious homogamy, control, and gender, work, and family variables) specifications. To test and discuss whether coefficients change significantly between models, the strategy suggested by Clogg, Petkova, and Haritou (1995) is used.

Historical and Generational Differences

The reduced models (Model 1) estimate the relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality without any gender, work, and family variables. By looking at the findings across the three populations in Table 3, we can determine if the effects of religious homogamy change and whether general religious authority changes as well. The results partly support the argument that the role, meaning, and authority of religion have decreased between 1980 and 1997 and are weaker among the younger generation, thus accounting for some of the general decline found in the previous table.

When spouses hold different and much different levels of religious authority, it negatively affects both marital happiness and stability. These negative effects, though, are generally larger for the parents in 1980 than for the parents in 1997 or the offspring in 1997. Indeed, the effects of spouses holding different levels of religious authority declined significantly by 29% – 62% between 1980 and 1997 among the parents and are statistically nonsignificant among the offspring in 1997. The effect of spouses holding much different levels of religious authority does not differ between 1980 and 1997 among the parents but again is statistically nonsignificant for the offspring in 1997. The results for joint church attendance reveal a different pattern across time and generations. Without adjusting for gender, work, and family issues, the effect of joint church attendance remains statistically stable from 1980 to 1997 among the married parents and in 1997 between the parental and offspring generations.

In the full models (Model 2), the equation includes variables capturing gender, work, and family issues. These models test the second structural argument that contemporary gender-work-family dynamics transform the link between religious homogamy and marital quality between 1980 and 1997. The results partly support this argument and account for some of the remaining general decline found in the previous table.

Among the parental generation in 1980, none of the effects of religious homogamy change significantly between Models 1 and 2. This suggests that the link between religious homogamy and marital quality remains stable even in the face of gender, work, and family complexities. For the other two populations, though, the stability of the religion–marital quality link is more tenuous. For the parents in 1997, the effect of spouses holding different religious authority levels on marital happiness becomes statistically nonsignificant and on marital stability decreases appreciably but is still significant. The effect of much different levels on marital happiness and stability remains statistically significant although at substantially lower levels. The most consistent relationship involves the behavioral measure of joint church attendance. Indeed, even after controlling for gender, work, and family dynamics, the link between joint church attendance and both measures of marital quality remains significant and positive.

For the offspring generation in 1997, there were no significant links between religious authority homogamy and marital quality in the reduced model and these patterns remain in the reduced model. The one religious variable that continues to influence marital quality is joint

Table 3. *Unstandardized Ordinary Least Squares Coefficients for Regression of Marital Quality on Religious Homogamy and Selected Independent Variables, by Year and Generation: U.S. Adults, 1980 – 1997*

	Parental Generation, 1980 (n = 2,031)				Parental Generation, 1997 (n = 895)				Offspring Generation, 1997 (n = 297)			
	Marital Happiness		Marital Stability		Marital Happiness		Marital Stability		Marital Happiness		Marital Stability	
Variables	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2
Religious authority homogamy												
Same (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Different	−1.57*** (−.17)	−1.35*** (−.14)	−.14*** (−.14)	−.12*** (−.12)	−.60* (−.08)	−.52 (−.03)	−.10** (−.09)	−.04* (−.05)	−.41 (−.04)	−.37 (−.02)	−.04 (−.02)	−.01 (−.00)
Much different	−1.60*** (−.15)	−1.41*** (−.14)	−.16*** (−.12)	−.14*** (−.11)	−1.63*** (−.12)	−1.15** (−.08)	−.15*** (−.14)	−.09* (−.08)	−.95 (−.06)	−.64 (−.03)	−.01 (−.01)	−.00 (−.01)
Joint church attendance	.76*** (.23)	.69*** (.22)	.13*** (.23)	.11*** (.22)	.72*** (.19)	.56** (.17)	.08** (.19)	.06** (.17)	.65*** (.18)	.42* (.10)	.08** (.20)	.05** (.16)
Mainline Protestant	.92* (.08)	.87* (.08)	.09* (.10)	.04 (.06)	.31 (.03)	.26 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.01)	.47 (.07)	.52 (.06)	.12 (.04)	.14 (.04)
Conservative Protestant	.34 (.04)	.42 (.03)	.02 (.00)	.04 (.02)	.23 (.02)	.31 (.04)	−.05 (−.05)	−.04 (−.02)	−.04 (−.00)	−.08 (−.02)	−.03 (−.03)	−.06 (−.04)
Catholic	.44* (.07)	.49* (.08)	.06* (.08)	.06* (.09)	.15 (.01)	.22 (.03)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.24 (.04)	.18 (.02)	.02 (.01)	.04 (.02)
Jewish	.30 (.02)	.29 (.01)	.03 (.01)	.01 (.00)	.27 (.01)	.26 (.01)	−.03 (−.02)	−.01 (−.00)	.70 (.05)	.68 (.05)	−.01 (.00)	−.02 (−.01)
Other	−.12 (−.00)	−.20 (−.03)	−.09 (−.04)	−.01 (−.03)	−.15 (−.02)	−.18 (−.02)	−.10* (−.06)	−.13* (−.08)	−.04 (−0.01)	−.05 (−.02)	−.07 (−.05)	−.11 (−.06)
Gender, work, and family issues												
Conflict over division of labor	—	−1.85*** (−.20)	—	−.20*** (−.23)	—	−2.41*** (−.22)	—	−.15** (−.19)	—	−1.33*** (−.18)	—	−.17** (−.21)
Conflict over children	—	−1.67*** (−.13)	—	−.15*** (−.13)	—	−.82 (−.05)	—	−.19*** (−.16)	—	−1.78*** (−.19)	—	−.26*** (−.23)
Conflict over household issues	—	−.83*** (−.09)	—	−.05*** (−.06)	—	−5.04*** (−.24)	—	−.34*** (−.21)	—	−4.30*** (−.27)	—	−.27*** (−.13)
Nontraditional gender ideology	—	−.03 (−.02)	—	.01** (.07)	—	−.04 (−.02)	—	.00 (.00)	—	−.07* (−.05)	—	.02** (.15)
Husband working	—	.61** (.09)	—	.05* (.04)	—	.00 (.00)	—	.02 (.02)	—	−.33 (−.04)	—	.02 (.02)
Wife working	—	−.20* (−.07)	—	−.03* (−.06)	—	.47 (.05)	—	.01 (.01)	—	−.77* (−.08)	—	.00 (.00)
Age	−.03* (−.08)	−.06** (−.13)	.01* (.12)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.00)	−.00 (−.01)	.01* (.11)	.00 (.05)	−.07 (−.03)	−.05 (−.02)	.00 (.00)	−.00 (−.01)
Gender (1 = *female*)	−.73*** (−.10)	−.92*** (−.11)	−.03* (−.05)	−.03* (−.06)	−.24 (−.03)	−.09 (−.01)	−.04* (−.06)	−.02 (−.03)	−.26* (−.04)	−.15 (−.02)	−.03 (−.04)	−.02 (−.03)
Race (1 = *White*)	1.00*** (.08)	.86** (.07)	.09*** (.08)	.07** (.06)	.92* (.06)	.45 (.02)	.09** (.07)	.05 (.03)	.49 (.03)	.73 (.05)	.13* (.09)	.17* (.10)
Education	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	−.01** (−.09)	−.01** (−.08)	.02 (.01)	−.00 (−.00)	−.00 (−.01)	−.00 (−.00)	.02 (.02)	.00 (.00)	.02** (.13)	.03** (.15)
Cohabitation (1 = *yes*)	−1.34*** (−.31)	−.99** (−.25)	−.24** (−.33)	−.18* (−.20)	−.97** (−.20)	−.62 (−.08)	−.19** (−.28)	−.13* (−.17)	−.88* (−.15)	−.62 (−.08)	−.14* (−.20)	−.09 (−.09)
Years married	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)	−.03 (−.04)	−.02 (−.02)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.02)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.01)	.00 (.04)	.00 (.04)
Remarriage (1 = *yes*)	−.78** (−.11)	−.33 (−.03)	−.06* (−.06)	−.04* (−.05)	−.55* (−.07)	−.45 (−.05)	−.02 (−.03)	−.01 (−.01)	−.24 (−.04)	−.14 (−.02)	−.02 (−.02)	.00 (.01)
Children present (1 = *yes*)	−1.03*** (−.11)	−.78** (−.08)	−.08*** (−.10)	−.06*** (−.08)	−1.09*** (−.13)	−.83** (−.10)	−.08*** (−.13)	−.06** (−.09)	−1.14** (−.15)	−.67* (−.09)	−.09** (−.11)	−.02 (−.04)
Stepchildren present (1 = *yes*)	−2.02*** (−.28)	−1.55*** (−.18)	−.23*** (−.26)	−.17* (−.19)	−1.63*** (−.20)	−1.12*** (−.14)	−.17** (−.20)	−.13* (−.15)	−1.98*** (−.28)	−1.01* (−.15)	−.15** (−.23)	−.10* (−.16)
Urban (1 = *yes*)	−.05 (−.01)	.01 (.00)	−.01 (−.03)	−.00 (−.00)	.00 (.00)	.04 (.02)	.02 (.03)	−.00 (−.00)	−.01 (−.00)	.00 (.00)	−.00 (−.01)	.01 (.00)
R^2	.10	.18	.14	.23	.11	.22	.12	.25	.09	.24	.11	.26

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standardized coefficients.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. (Two tailed.)

church attendance, although this influence on marital happiness wanes in the presence of competing gender, work, and family dynamics. For marital stability, the coefficient for joint church attendance does not decline significantly in the full model and is not different from the coefficient for the parents.

For all three populations, the variables tapping gender, work, and family dynamics are robust predictors of marital quality in both statistical and practical significance. The standardized coefficients show that the effect sizes of the three areas of conflicts are slightly larger for the offspring than for the parents in both 1980 and 1997. The main substantive difference across time and generation is the role played by husband-wife employment patterns. Compared to the effects of gender, work, and family dynamics, the net effect size of religious homogamy is slightly smaller, though not trivial. The behavioral measure of religious homogamy—joint church attendance—has the largest practical effect on marital quality, ranging from .10 to .22 in the full models. Taken all together, the variables in the full models consistently capture about 25% of the variance in marital quality across time and generations.

Additional Issues and Model Specifications

Research finds that religion increases with age and specific life course events, though the effects of these life course events on religion generally do not begin until one's mid-20s (Myers, 1996; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995). Perhaps, the offspring are not yet of the ages where religion influences marital quality, as seen with their parents. To test this, I reestimated the models in Table 3 for parents aged 19 – 33 in 1980, which represents the same ages as their offspring in 1997. The results indicate that all measures of religious homogamy are associated with marital happiness and stability, even after controlling for gender, work, and family variables. It appears that my generational findings are not an artifact of age or life course effects.

Other potential confounding factors arise because many of the societal changes discussed in this article have (a) more strongly affected women and the youngest adults (Spain & Bianchi, 1996), (b) led to an individualized or "his and her" marital style (Bernard, 1972; Cherlin, 2004), and (c) created a widening in traditional family values between conservative Protestants and most other religions (Woodberry & Smith, 1998). Also, by using panel data from married individuals in both 1980 and 1997, I include first marriages as well as remarriages and those married in 1980 but not in 1997. I examined all four of these issues with interaction models that crossed religion by gender, age, and denomination, by using individual measures of religion (instead of homogamy), by coding whether the husband or wife had the higher/lower values on religion, and by dropping and analyzing remarriages separately. Hardly any of the interaction terms reached statistical significance, and all other results did not change substantively the historical and generational patterns reported in this paper.

DISCUSSION

Despite significant social changes in the last 50 years, research continues to find a robust relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality. Expanding on this research, the present analysis uses longitudinal and intergenerational data from 1980 to 1997 to evaluate three research questions. From these analyses emerge four main conclusions. First, the traditionally invariant relationship between religious homogamy and marital quality did weaken between 1980 and 1997. Second, this weakening occurred through generational change, whereby the link between religious homogamy and marital quality was significantly smaller in 1997 among the younger offspring generation than among their parents. This weakening also occurred through intragenerational historical change, whereby the religious homogamy–marital quality link was significantly smaller in 1997 than in 1980 among the older parental generation. Third, two structural changes from 1980 to 1997 are at the heart of the historical and generational weakening in the homogamy–marital quality link: a decline in religious authority and a rise in the relative influence of contemporary family and work lives. Fourth, even in the face of this weakening relationship, religious homogamy continues to be associated with marital quality, though to a lesser extent among younger married adults. The behavioral measure of joint church attendance emerged as more important to marital quality than the attitudinal dimension of religious authority homogamy.

This study supports and extends several existing lines of work. First, the changing role of religious homogamy provides further evidence that the marital bargain has changed significantly in contemporary U.S. marriage (Kalmijn,

1998). Second, Rogers and Amato (2000) show that greater work-family conflicts and changing gender relations have altered marital quality in younger marriage generations. The results here broaden these findings and show that work, family, and gender issues also alter the traditional predictors of marital quality among both younger and older generations. Third, Denton (2004) finds that differences in religious ideologies can no longer unequivocally predict marriages and marital decision making. Today's couples often base their marriages on the wider cultural ideologies of gender equality more than on their religious ideologies. Denton's findings may help to explain the finding here that just holding *different* views of religious authority—compared with *much different* views—does not appear to be as detrimental to marital quality as in the past.

Future research in this area may profit by the limitations and the issues not analyzed in this article. Specifically, an analysis of well-specified birth cohorts (e.g., 1940 – 1949) may reveal critical variations across characteristics such as gender, marital and parental status, and race. Further, even though my analysis failed to find any significant trends across the six broad denominational classifications, recent work argues that significant differences do exist between various religious denominations that are often grouped together in research (Woodberry & Smith, 1998). Finally, my measures of religious homogamy were standard but also simple. More nuanced measures of religious homogamy are needed to develop a more comprehensive picture. Additional research could further extend this study by using traditional measures of religion as this article speaks only to the link between religious homogamy and marital quality.

Perhaps most importantly, future research could advance the prior and these current findings by examining specifically how, when, and why religious homogamy (and religion in general) influences marriage. For example, higher levels of domestic violence are found among couples with dissimilar theological views, and the gender segregation of household tasks differs between homogamous and mixed-faith couples (Ellison & Bartkowski, 2002; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999). Both domestic violence and the division of household labor have serious consequences for marital quality. Further, a close examination of marital issues such as domestic violence and housework is important as the role of religion in contemporary marriages, especially those of younger adults, is perhaps narrower and more complex and issue specific. Indeed, Cherlin (2004) argues that today's marriage, much like religion, is one of an individualized marriage.

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