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References

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Section:

RESEARCH

HOW RELIGIOSITY AND ETHNICITY AFFECT MARITAL SATISFACTION FOR JEWISH-CHRISTIAN COUPLES

This study examined the relationship between religiosity, ethnic identity, and other-group orientation on marital satisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples. The participants completed a measure of religiosity, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), and a demographic questionnaire. Significant relationships were found between husbands' and wives' religiosity, ethnic identity, and DAS scores. Additionally, parental involvement in daily life and other family members' interfaith marriages were correlated with husbands' but not wives' marital satisfaction. Results from multiple regression equations showed that there were no significant predictive relationships between any of the predictor variables and marital satisfaction for wives and husbands in this study. Implications for mental health practice are presented.

Given the rise in interfaith marriages today specifically between Jews and Christians, counselors need to be aware of how husbands and wives experience issues of ethnicity and religiosity in their relationship. Intermarriage between Jews and Christians has increased significantly with each succeeding generation and reflects the overall trend of rising religious and ethnic intermarriage among all non-Hispanic Whites of European ancestry. Alba (1991) wrote that nearly 50% of marriages between non-Hispanic Whites born in the United States are between people with no common ethnic ancestry. Given the trend of rising intermarriage across each succeeding generation, Alba (1991) also concluded that "marriage between people having different ethnic ancestries could be described as the rule rather than [sic] the exception" (p. 4). McGoldrick and Preto (1984) found that there is a lack of research on ethnic intermarriage; however, findings from several studies and clinical impressions indicate that ethnic intermarriages are more likely to have problems and to end in divorce than endogamous marriages (Ho & Johnson, 1990; McGoldrick & Preto, 1984; McGoldrick & Rohrbaugh, 1987).

In a review of the literature, Ho and Johnson (1990) found that interethnic divorce rates were higher than intraethnic divorce rates in Hawaiian couples and that some ethnic combinations were more likely to end in divorce than others. Jewish religious leaders tend to take the position that intermarriage will lead to a loss in ethnic identity. Sprott (1994) reported the following: "According to

the straight-line theory of assimilation, two conditions contribute to the demise of a distinctive culture group: intermarriage with outsiders and loss of mother tongue" (p. 311). Alba (1991) offered two strategies that interethnic couples may employ to maintain their ethnicity and marital harmony. One is that interethnic couples may focus on the element of shared ethnic overlap and place less importance on their differences, and further, they will socialize their children to have an ethnic identity.

Occurring hand in hand with the rise in ethnic intermarriage is the rise in religious intermarriage. In a study analyzing data collected from the 1972 to 1982 General Social Survey, McCutcheon (1988) found that religious intermarriage increased in all but one of the seven denominations surveyed (i.e., Conservative Christians showed a decrease). Of the remaining six, McCutcheon (1988) found that Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterian-Episcopalians showed the highest rate of intermarriage (70.5%, 77.8%, and 81.0%, respectively) as compared to Catholics (42.8%) and Jews (40.7%).

Fishman, Rimor, Tobin, and Medding (1990) wrote that in the 1960s, 9 out of 10 Jews married another Jew. Twenty years later the rate has increased substantially from approximately 25% to 50%, depending on the population surveyed. Today it is estimated that approximately one million Jews are in interfaith marriages.

Along with the rise of intermarriage, there is also support for a higher divorce rate in interfaith as compared to same-faith marriages (see Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985, for a review). The divorce rate for religiously intermarried couples varied depending on the religious mix under study. Studies showed that the divorce rate in Catholic-Protestant marriages ranged anywhere from two to five times higher than for same-faith marriages for either of these two groups. For Jewish-Christian intermarriages, the divorce rate was almost twice as high as it was for Jewish-Jewish marriages. Kosmin, Lerer, and Mayer (1989) found that the rate of divorce for Jews married to non-Jews is 32% as compared to 17% for Jews married to Jews.

A couple of factors affecting the intermarriage rate between Jews and Christians are:

The secularization of religion allows "religious identification to be viewed as irrelevant to the choice of one's mate in modern society," and "Love tends to be the driving force behind most marriages" (Gleckman & Streicher, 1990, p. 484)

The impact of propinquity suggests that Jews will marry Jews only if there are sufficient numbers of eligible persons available (Johnson, 1980)

Given the increased frequency of intermarriage between Jews and Christians, the increased likelihood that more of these marriages will end in divorce as compared to Jewish-Jewish marriages, and the distinct differences between these two cultural and ethnic groups; it is surprising that there are not more empirical studies that examined the role that culture and ethnicity played in predicting marital satisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples. Spickard (1989) wrote that "Although ethnicity is important, and although it is importantly related to intermarriage (without ethnicity there would be no ethnic intermarriage), the precise nature of that relationship is not yet clear" (p. 11). The importance then of studying ethnicity as well as religiosity is based on the following: (a) there is little research that examined the relationship of ethnic identity to factors related to psychological adjustment (Phinney, 1990); (b) both have an influence on the way a person thinks, feels, and acts; and (c) Judaism is both a religion and ethnic identification and is sometimes referred to in the literature as a religioethnic group (Kivisto & Nefzger, 1993; Mayer, 1991).

The primary purpose of this study, then, was to fill in the gap that currently exists in the literature and to examine how culture (religious) and ethnicity affect functioning in a major life role. Specifically, the need to study the relationship between husbands' and wives' ethnic identity and marital satisfaction was supported in part by the clinical impression that "The greater the difference between the

spouses, the less common the pairing and the greater difficulty they will have adjusting" (McGoldrick & Preto, 1984, p. 348).

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 85 Jewish-Christian couples in their first marriage. They were recruited from several sources including family and acquaintance networks (36%), the Internet (12%), Jewish-affiliated interfaith support groups (16%), Christian-affiliated interfaith support groups (8%), Dovetail, a newsletter for Jewish-Christian families (15%), and nonaffiliated interfaith support groups (13%). Of these 78 males and 80 females indicated that their race was White, non-Hispanic.

The majority of males (50) and females (52) reported a yearly family income of \$75,000 or above, and 39 females and 33 males reported attaining a graduate degree. In terms of occupation, 41 males reported being employed as a business professional. For females, the occupational spread was more evenly distributed, with homemaker (16) and business professional (14) being the two largest categories. The mean age for females was 36.36 years (with a range of 24 to 65) and 37.64 for males (with a range of 24 to 67). Couples reported being married for a mean of 9 years ($M = 9.37$ for females and 9.31 for males), with two thirds of the sample having one or more children. Thirty-five males and 37 females identified their religion as Jewish followed by Catholic, including Roman Catholic, (males, 26 and females, 28). Additionally, 33 Jewish females and 28 Jewish males reported being affiliated with Reform Judaism followed by 4 females and 6 males affiliated with Conservative Judaism. In terms of the religious affiliation of the Christian spouse, the largest group represented was Catholicism (Roman Catholic and Catholic); it received the highest endorsements for husbands--12 and 14, respectively--and wives--12 and 14, respectively. A number of participants indicated no religion and yet identified their ethnic group as Jewish American (wives 2 and husbands 5) or belonging to a Christian ethnic group like White Anglo Saxon Protestant (wives 4 and husbands 6).

Measures

The following instruments were used in the study: a measure of religiosity developed specifically for this study, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976), and a demographic data sheet.

Ethnicity was ascertained utilizing two different response formats. On the demographic survey, participants were given a list of 16 responses including "Other, please describe" and were asked to circle the one that best described them. The list did not include "Multiethnic" or "American." A second method of identifying a participant's ethnic group was through the use of an open-ended format question that was included in the MEIM (Phinney, 1992). Although the demographic survey did not include the option multiethnic, it should be noted that several respondents circled more than one ethnicity and their response was coded as multiethnic (males 10 and females 9). A comparison of the two formats indicated that slightly fewer respondents indicated that they were Jewish American on the MEIM (females 36 and males 31) compared to the demographic survey (females 40 and males 37).

Family and lifestyle information was also obtained from the demographic survey that addressed factors such as the degree to which parents were supportive of the participants' relationship while they were dating their spouse and toward their decision to marry their spouse. In addition, information was obtained on the degree of contact they had with their parents on an everyday basis. Of particular note, 41 of the females compared to 33 of the males had immediate family that were also involved in an interfaith marriage. Females viewed their parents/in-laws as more involved in the couple's everyday lives as compared to males.

Measure of Religiosity. Single-item scales to measure religiosity were used for this study (e.g., Gorsuch & McFarland, 1972). "This is not unlike the single-item scales of religiosity used in a study conducted by Hansen (1987). Given that single-item scales have been shown to be a valid measure of religiosity, the following three items were included in this study as a measure of religiosity: (1) In the past year, how often have you attended religious worship services? (2) How important is religion to you in your life? and (3) To what degree does "religious" describe you? In one study that examined the impact of religiosity on marital adjustment, Hansen (1987) measured religiosity by including items 1 through 3. He found that the coefficient alpha for the scale was .83. Participants rated the three items on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated least religiosity and a 5 indicated greatest religiosity. Specifically, for the first item, a 1 indicated less than several times a year and a 5 indicated more than once a week. For item 2, a 1 represented not at all important and 5 on the scale represented extremely important. For item 3, a 1 was indicative of not at all and a 5 represented very much so. The three subscales were combined to obtain a total religiosity score.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. The MEIM (Phinney, 1992) is a 24-item, self-report scale designed to measure "those aspects of ethnic identity that are applicable to all groups" (p. 158). From 20 of these items, it is possible to obtain an index of ethnic identity (EI) as well as an index of other-group orientation (OGO). Phinney (1992) reports Cronbach's alpha for the 14-item EI Scale as .90 and .74 for the OGO 6-item scale with a college-based sample. Phinney (1992) examined the construct validity of ethnic identity by analyzing its relationship to self-esteem according to ethnic identity theory and found that for minority college students, there was a positive, significant correlation. See Phinney (1992) for a more detailed discussion of the MEIM.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The DAS (Spanier, 1976) is a 37-item self-report measure designed to assess the quality of marriage. Responses to the items ranged from a zero (for least marital satisfaction) to a 5 (for greatest marital satisfaction). High scores indicate good adjustment and satisfaction with the relationship, while low scores indicate poor adjustment, dissatisfaction, and are usually indicative of marital distress. For this study, the scores on the four subscales (Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Satisfaction, Affectional Expression, and Dyadic Cohesion) were added together to obtain an overall index of marital adjustment. A composite score somewhere around 115 is typical for a nondistressed partner (Spanier & Filsinger, 1983). Spanier (1976) found that the Cronbach alpha for the overall DAS was .96. Construct validity was determined by comparing the DAS to the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke & Wallace, 1957). The correlations between these two scales was .86 for married participants and .88 for divorced participants ($p < .001$).

DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

The 168 survey packets--each containing one survey each for husband and wife--were sent out and 90 couples mailed back surveys for a response rate of approximately 54%. This is higher than expected for mail-survey research (Borg & Gall, 1989). From the original 90 couples who participated in the study, 5 were eliminated because 1 partner did not meet the criteria for inclusion or failed to complete the second page of the MEIM (Phinney, 1992).

Interested participants received a survey packet that included two identical sets of materials--one for each spouse. Given the nature of the study, the investigator followed the example of Nelson (1991) and included a statement in the participant instructions that couples may find it useful or helpful to discuss their responses on their own or with a mental health care provider once the surveys were returned. Attached to the participant instructions were four questionnaires: (1) demographic data sheet, (2) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), (3) religiosity scale, and (4) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). The investigator randomly varied the order in which the measures were presented. Also included in the survey packet were two self-addressed, stamped return envelopes to be used by husband and wife to mail their responses separately.

Prior to conducting the study, a power analysis was conducted to determine approximately how many participants would be needed for the multiple regression analyses employed in this study. Assuming a moderate effect size, the power level was set to .80, with an alpha level of .05 (Cohen, 1988). The power analyses indicated that 75 couples, were needed to reach statistical significance.

RESULTS

Reliabilities of Main Measures

Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients (Borg & Gall, 1989) were obtained for the four central measures of the study: (1) Religiosity, (2) Ethnic Identity and (3) Other-Group Orientation subscales of MEIM (Phinney, 1992), and (4) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). Cronbach alpha of .86 for Religiosity, .90 for Ethnic Identity, and .92 for Marital Satisfaction were obtained. The reliability coefficient for Other-group Orientation was somewhat weaker at (Cronbach alpha = .64).

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were obtained between the religiosity scores, ethnic identity scores, and other-group orientation scores for wives and husbands. Results show that, of the correlations between religiosity scores and ethnic identity, scores for husbands were significant at the $p < .01$ level, such that the greater the husbands' religiosity, the greater their own strength of ethnic identification. Results also showed a significant negative correlation, $p < .05$ level, between religiosity scores and other-group orientation scores for wives only. Specifically, the greater the wives' levels of religiosity, the weaker their other-group orientation (see Table 1). Further, two significant positive correlations were obtained for husbands' marital satisfaction and the amount of parental involvement in their daily life and the presence of another family member in an interfaith marriage at the .01 and .05 levels respectively.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were also obtained to examine the relationship of the four main variables by gender (see Table 2). There were several significant correlations between husbands' and wives' scores. For instance, female religiosity scores were correlated significantly to male religiosity scores, such that the greater the wives' level of religiosity, the greater their husbands' level of religiosity. There was a significantly negative correlation between the wives' level of ethnic identity and their husbands' such that the greater the wives' level of ethnic identity, the lower the husbands' level of ethnic identity. There was a negative correlation between wives' level of other-group orientation and husbands' religiosity scores, such that the higher the wives' other-group orientation score the lower their husbands' score on religiosity. And finally, there was a significant correlation between the wives' marital satisfaction score and their husbands', such that the higher the wives' score on the DAS, the higher their husbands' score on the DAS.

The Predictive Relationship

This study examined whether or not marital satisfaction, in general, increased with (a) religiosity, (b) strength of ethnic identity, and (c) other-group orientation. Two separate regression analysis were employed for husbands only and wives only to predict marital satisfaction. However, religiosity, ethnic identity, and other-group orientation failed to predict the marital satisfaction of wives and husbands in an interfaith marriage (see Table 3).

DISCUSSION

Limitations of the study

Given that random sampling procedures were not used, the results of this study are limited to the demographic characteristics of the volunteers who chose to participate in this study. In addition there is no way of knowing whether the couples in this study reflect other Jewish-Christian couples. Additionally, it is possible that variables other than the ones being studied may have an impact on marital satisfaction and create a spurious relationship given that marital satisfaction is a complex issue. Finally, this study was designed to explore the relationship between religiosity and ethnicity on

marital satisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples. No attempt was made to compare marital satisfaction in same faith marriages.

Despite consistent findings in other studies that interfaith marriages are relatively unstable as compared to same-faith marriages, it remains unclear as to what factors actually affect marital satisfaction. However, in this study it was found that husbands religiosity was significantly correlated with their ethnic identity, yet it was significantly negatively correlated with wives' Other-Group Orientation.

The predictive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction was not supported in this investigation for wives or husbands. This finding was not consistent with research that supports a positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Albrecht, 1979; Filsinger & Wilson, 1984; Glenn & Weaver, 1977; Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 1982; Wilkinson & Tanner, 1980). However, it is important to keep in mind that many of these studies included same-faith Christian couples, while others may have included interfaith marriages but did not describe the religious mix of the couples included in the investigation.

The following factors may explain the lack of a significant predictive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction in the present investigation: (a) the religiosity measure used in this study may not have been sensitive enough to capture aspects of religiosity that are perhaps more salient to an interfaith population, (b) the participants in this study may lack a strong religious commitment in the traditional sense, (c) given that interfaith marriages are a subset of all marriages in general, there may be variables other than the ones measured in the present study (e.g., communication styles) that would better predict marital satisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples, (d) people who intermarry may refrain from religious expression in an effort to maintain marital harmony and prevent family discord, and (e) Jewish-Christian spouses may have more in common than one might expect given their religious differences.

Other possible reasons for the lack of a significant predictive relationship between ethnic identity and marital satisfaction may have to do with the notion that ethnicity may not be a factor for Christian or Jewish Americans given that "For most Americans of European background, ethnicity is not a salient or important part of their identity, and they can choose what role, if any, it will have for them" (Phinney, 1996, p. 922). This is in contrast to American-ethnic groups of color. Additionally, Jews and Christians who intermarry identify with their respective ethnic groups in a symbolic fashion versus an active expression of their ethnicity (Alba, 1991).

In general, it appears that Jewish-Christian couples included in this study are relatively open to other groups. One could assume that a person involved in an interfaith marriage is at least open to his or her spouse's ethnic group. However, openness to one's spouse's ethnic group does not necessarily imply openness to all other ethnic groups. Although the variables "parental involvement in daily life" and "other family member in interfaith marriage" correlated significantly with marital satisfaction for husbands, none correlated significantly for wives. Husbands in this study reported that the more their parents were involved in their day-to-day life the more satisfied they were in their marriage. This discrepancy is consistent with the marital satisfaction literature that reported that marriage has a differential impact on men and women (Fowers, 1991). She further reports that "Men seem to obtain greater mental health benefits from marriage than do women" (p. 209). In addition, Fowers (1991) wrote that "Husbands generally report greater marital satisfaction than do wives" (p. 219).

Implications for Mental Health Professionals

The primary reason for conducting this study was to contribute to what is known about Jewish-Christian marriages so that mental health professionals who work with these couples can make more informed and guided treatment interventions. To begin with, the results of this investigation suggest that religious differences, in and of themselves, may not be solely responsible for the higher rate of

marital dissatisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples as compared to same-faith couples. The same thing could be said for ethnic differences and their impact on marital satisfaction in interfaith couples. Apparently, there are factors other than the ones included in this study that may be more related to marital satisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples. Perhaps it is the way Jewish-Christian couples attempt to resolve or discuss their differences that accounts for the higher rate of marital discord as compared to same-faith couples. It is possible that Jewish-Christian couples have more frequent and regular conflicts than same-faith couples, given that religion and ethnicity influence the way one sees the world. It may be particularly important for counselors who work with Jewish-Christian couples to help husbands and wives identify differences in communication and negotiation styles with the goal of developing more effective means of communicating and resolving conflicts.

The results of this research also suggest that one should be careful about assuming that Christian-Jewish couples are less committed to their respective religions. This cautionary note is based on the findings from this study that Jewish-Christian couples who participated in this study expressed the full range of religiosity, from least religiosity to greatest religiosity.

Mental health professionals who work with interfaith couples also need to be aware of the tendency for husbands and wives to experience marriage differently. There were several instances in this investigation where findings occurred for one gender but not the other. In addition, results from the current investigation point to the need for mental health professionals who work with Jewish-Christian couples to take both spouses' perspectives into consideration when trying to discern the impact that differences in religiosity have on the marital satisfaction of the couple.

And last, the results point to the role that extended family members can have on influencing marital satisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples. Jewish-Christian couples may lack the kinds of support that are available to same-faith couples (Eaton, 1994). Given this, Jewish-Christian couples who lack supportive familial relationships may be at an increased risk for marital discord. However, mental health professionals who work with Jewish-Christian couples should be cautioned against assuming that their clients' parents are unsupportive of their marriage. In this study, both husbands and wives reported that their respective parents were very supportive of their decision to marry their spouse. This indicated a rise in parental support from the time they were dating their spouse. In general, mental health professionals who work with interfaith couples may want to suggest and encourage interfaith couples that they see in treatment to seek additional sources of support. These may include interfaith outreach programs sponsored by Jewish or Christian organizations, nondenominational interfaith support groups, and interfaith chat groups on the Internet. In addition, interfaith programs or books can be particularly helpful for couples who are looking for role models to help guide their efforts in creating a lifestyle that is acceptable to both spouses.

Given the findings in this study, future research should focus on the development and implementation of a multidimensional measurement of religion that could be used across religious groups.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between the Religiosity Scale and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity

Legend for Chart:

- B – M
- C – SD
- D – Religiosity
- E – EI
- F – OGO

A B C D E F

Religiosity

Wives	2.41	1.03	--	--	--
Husbands	2.09	.92	--	--	--

Ethnic Identity

Wives	2.82	.58	.12	--	--
Husbands	2.79	.62	.33[**]	--	--

Other-Group Orientation

Wives	3.72	.37	-.22[*]	.08	--
Husbands	3.58	.39	.04	.13	--

Notes: EI = Ethnic Identity Level, OGO = Other-Group Orientation.

[*] $p < .05$. [**] $p < .01$.

Table 2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Wives' Scores and Husbands' Scores on the Religiosity Scale, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Legend for Chart:

B - Religiosity (Wives)
 C - EI (Wives)
 D - OGO (Wives)
 E - DAS (Wives)

A

	B	C	D	E
Religiosity (Husbands)	.35[**]	.17	-.34[*]	.10
Ethnic Identity (Husbands)	.01	-.34[*]	.01	.00
Other-Group Orientation (Husbands)	.10	.18	.09	.05
DAS (Husbands)	.08	.11	-.13	.60[**]

Notes: EI = Ethnic Identity Level, OGO = Other-Group Orientation, DAS = Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

[*] $p < .05$. [**] $p < .01$.

Table 3. Standardized Regression Coefficients of Complete Model Multiple Regressions with Religiosity, Ethnic Identity, and Other-Group Orientation Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Legend for Chart:

B - Wives Only[*] (n = 85) Beta

C - Wives Only[*] (n = 85) P

D - Husbands Only[**] (n = 85) Beta

E - Husbands Only[**] (n = 85) P

A	B	C	D	E
Religiosity	.11	.30	-.12	.31
Ethnic Identity	-.10	.37	.04	.72
Other-Group Orientation	.06	.61	.04	.75

Notes. [*] Model $R^2 = .02$, [**] Model $R^2 = .01$.

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