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Interfaith Marriage and Marital Outcome*

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THE SOCIOLOGICAL literature contains many studies which compare interfaith and intrafaith marriages on postmarital variables,¹ and most of these investigations indicate that the results of the intermarriages are inferior in terms of traditional criteria. In most instances the authors attribute the poor showing of the interfaith unions to the religious difference or something closely related to it.

Other research has shown that persons who intermarry differ from the intramarried on a variety of premarital characteristics,² and this suggests the possibility that the postmarital differences are merely a reflection of the selection process that is operating. For example, a finding that intermarriages result in fewer children may be interpreted in several ways. As others have suggested, it may be that intermarried people limit their families in an attempt to avoid conflict over religious training. But on the other hand, the result may be due to the fact that those who are likely to intermarry are also likely to be "small family oriented." The data now available do not permit one to choose between these interpretations.

In order to determine whether marriage type (inter- or intramarriage) affects outcome it is necessary to compare groups which are the same on all premarital characteristics which are relevant. Though a complete equivalence is not possible we shall try to approach such a situation by matching on a series of premarital variables. If comparisons of the matched groups do not

produce differences the indication is that marriage type is not relevant. If differences are obtained they are clearly not due to the matched factors. They may, however, be due either to unmatched premarital factors or to marriage type. A definite conclusion will not be possible, but since the number of factors matched will be large any differences between the groups will be tentatively attributed to the effect of marriage type.

The first hypothesis is contrary to most opinion on this subject, and the reasoning behind it should be specified. The hypothesis should not be taken to mean that it is believed that marriages which unite persons with markedly different attitudes, values, and practices have the same results as marriages which are homogamous in these respects. On the contrary, it is assumed that truly heterogamous marriages may very well lead to lessened satisfaction, fewer and less well-adjusted children, and lessened religiosity. The basis for the prediction is the assumption that interfaith marriages are as likely to be homogamous in relevant respects as are intrafaith marriages. It is assumed further that a marriage which is homogamous does not carry an extra burden because the parties to it were brought up in different religions.

The assumption that most interfaith marriages are homogamous in regard to attitudes, etc., has several bases. Without at all denying the existence of important differences among the religious groups in regard to family matters, it does seem that there is a strong core of agreement. One might expect, further, that most couples would reach agreement prior to marriage on those issues in regard to which the religions disagree since they are so well publicized as sources of difficulty. Even if there is a lack of agreement at first, it might be that in the typical case there is adequate agreement by time of marriage.

In addition, it seems possible that in most cases there is similarity of attitudes from the beginning. The attitudes and practices of the religious groups differ in some respects, but many of those who intermarry do not subscribe to the position of their group even before they meet their future spouses. It must be remembered that only certain people intermarry, and

* Condensed version of a part of the author's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Interfaith Marriage in an Urban Area," Indiana University, 1958. The writer would like to express his gratitude to Leo Srole and Thomas S. Langner of the Midtown Mental Health Project for their kindness in making available to him the data upon which this study is based. The Midtown study was conducted by the Department of Psychiatry of the New York Hospital and Cornell University Medical College. The study was created and developed by the late Thomas A. C. Rennie, and it is currently directed by Alexander H. Leighton as part of the Cornell Program in Social Psychiatry. Thanks are also due Clifford Kirkpatrick and Sheldon Stryker of Indiana University for their many helpful suggestions.

¹ A bibliography of these studies will be found in *Ibid.*, pp.215-19.

² Data on this point and a bibliography of relevant materials will be found in Jerold S. Heiss, "Premarital Characteristics of the Religiously Intermarried in an Urban Area," *American Sociological Review*, 25 (February, 1960), pp. 47-55.

these people are probably emancipated from the traditions of their group. They may have more in common with another emancipated person who is nominally of a different religion than they do with most people of their own religion.

In summary, the predictions do not deny the idea that truly heterogamous marriages differ in their results from marriages which are homogamous. It is assumed, however, that most interfaith marriages are homogamous in regard to attitudes, values, and practices because agreement is likely to be reached prior to marriage on those matters which divide the major religious groups if the couple disagreed on these issues at the outset. It is further assumed that intermarriages do not carry an extra burden if the marriage is homogamous in these respects.

In regard to the fourth area, interpersonal relationships outside the family of procreation, this line of reasoning is less relevant. Intermarriages, whether or not they are homogamous, are less likely to be well received by family and friends than are intrafaith marriages. One would expect, therefore, that on these variables the results of intermarriages would be different from the results of intramarriages.³

THE SAMPLES

The data to test the hypotheses were obtained from the Midtown Mental Health Survey. The sample used in that research was an area-probability sample of 1660 persons age 20 to 59 living in the "Midtown" section of Manhattan. This sample contains 87 per cent of the persons originally chosen, and the nonrespondents do not appear to differ from those who cooperated. Comparisons between the sample and census data indicate that the sample is representative of the Midtown area. The population of Midtown is probably representative of the white, non-Puerto Rican population of Manhattan.⁴

For the purposes of this study 493 of the respondents were excluded because they reported that they had never been married, and

fifty-five were removed because it was not possible to classify them as intermarried or intramarried.⁵ This left 1167 respondents—304 intermarried and 863 intramarried.

It is from this group that the matched samples were drawn. For each intermarried respondent an intramarried person was sought as a match on a case to case basis.⁶ Eleven premarital variables were used: respondent's religion when growing up, socio-economic status of the respondent's father, respondent's education, number of previous marriages, age at first marriage, family of orientation integration score, early family dissatisfaction score, family conflict score, religiosity of parents, sex, and present age. If it had been possible to match all the intermarried respondents the sample would have contained 304 matched pairs. However, it was possible to match the subjects on all variables in only 37 per cent of the cases.⁷ A considerable reduction in the number of cases did occur, but the sample used seems to be of sufficient size for the present purposes.⁸

For this study no attempt will be made to distinguish among the various combinations possible in the interfaith marriages. We will leave to future investigations a consideration of the differential results of, for example, Protestant-Catholic marriages as compared with Protestant-Jewish marriages. In this sample the large majority of the intermarried Protestant

³ Respondents were classified on the basis of the religions in which they and their spouses were raised.

⁴ The data for the dependent variables were gathered from only one spouse, and, therefore, the present sample contains only one partner from each marriage. Since the original choice of the husband or wife as the respondent was done by a random procedure, this does not seem to bias the results. There is reason to expect that if in each case the other spouse had been chosen the results would have been the same.

⁵ On some of the variables an exact correspondence of the cases was not required for an acceptable match. For example, the various scores were dichotomized, and a match was considered adequate on the present age variable if the respondents were in the same or adjacent five year groups.

⁶ The final sample contains fifty-eight "completely matched" Catholic pairs and forty-five completely matched Protestant pairs. The Jewish sample contains twenty-nine pairs, but only seven of these are completely matched. Incomplete matches had to be used in order to get a sufficiently large N. In this Jewish sample twenty of the pairs matched on at least ten of the eleven factors, and all are matched on at least eight variables.

The author's dissertation contains further information on the matching procedure, data from comparisons of unmatched samples, and comparisons of the best possible matches. In general, though not always, the comparisons of the unmatched samples produced the most significant differences and the comparisons of the complete matches produced the least significant differences. See Heiss, "Interfaith Marriage in an Urban Area," chaps. 6 and 7.

⁷ It should be noted that results in this area may have an effect upon the results in the other areas. For example, poor relationships with parents may have an indirect effect on marital satisfaction. It is believed, however, that the effect will not be great enough to produce noteworthy differences.

⁸ Further information on the samplings procedure will be found in Leo Srole, Thomas S. Langner, Stanley T. Michael, Marvin K. Opler and Thomas A. C. Rennie, *Midtown Manhattan: The Mental Health Story*, Volume I, "The Thomas A. C. Rennie Series in Social Psychiatry," (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.)

TABLE 1. MEAN AND PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MATCHED INTERMARRIED AND INTRAMARRIED RESPONDENTS CONTROLLED BY RESPONDENT'S EARLY RELIGION

Variable	Cath.	Prot.	Jew.	Total
A. Adjustment and Satisfaction				
1. Mean Present Dissatisfaction Score	+.57**a	-.47*	+.14	+.14
2. Never Worry About Marriage	+12.3%	+12.2%	+3.4%	+9.5%
3. Agree—Unmarried Can Be As Content	+1.9%	+2.4%	+26.0%*	+2.9%
4. Mean Mental Health Rating	+.26*	+.04	-.28	+.14
B. Children				
1. Mean Number of Children	+.34*	+.19	+.25	+.25
2. Mean Problems with Offspring Score	+.31	-.10		+.13
C. Religiosity				
1. Religion Not At All Important	+6.9%	+2.2%	+17.3%	+7.2%
2. Never Attend Church	+6.4%	-4.0%	+33.3%	+5.3%
D. Interpersonal Relationships ^b				
1. Mean Number of Related Families Seen	+.06	-.58	+2.58***	-.03
2. Agree—Better To Stay Away From Relatives	+7.3%	-2.4%	+10.3%	+2.9%
3. Mean Number of Close Friends	+.22	+2.00**	+1.30	+.96*
4. Want More Friends	+5.1%	-4.5%	+13.8%	0.0%
5. Mean Suspiciousness Score	+.24	+.09	+.45	+.21

* Significant at .10 level; ** Significant at .05 level; *** Significant at .01 level. For the first three sets of variables a two-tailed test was used.

^a A plus sign indicates that the direction of the difference favored the intramarried group according to conventional criteria. That is, a plus sign indicates that the intramarried showed better adjustment and satisfaction, had more children, had fewer problems with children, were more religious, etc.

^b On these variables a one-tailed test was used since the direction of the difference was predicted.

respondents are married to Catholics, and most of the intermarried Catholics are married to Protestants. In the sample of intermarried Jews about half the respondents have Catholic spouses, and about half are married to Protestants.

HYPOTHESES AND FINDINGS

The first variables to be considered are concerned with the reported adjustment and satisfaction of the respondents. The first comparison involves a score of present dissatisfaction, the PD Score.⁹ It is predicted that the scores of matched samples of intermarried and intramarried respondents will not be significantly different.¹⁰

⁹ Since the concerns of this research were not foreseen when the original study was designed, the available materials were insufficient to permit the construction of true scales. In several cases, however, a group of questions seemed to have a common referent and these were combined into crude indices which may be called simple scores. These scores indicate the number of related questions that were answered in a given direction. The deficiencies of these scores are, of course, numerous, and they should be taken as first approximations. For the PD Score seven items were used. An item analysis revealed that each item correlates significantly (point biserial) with the total score. Among the items are: "In general, would you say that most of the time you are in high spirits, good spirits, low spirits, or very low spirits?" "Do you feel that you have had your share of good luck in life?" A complete list of the questions will be found in *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.

¹⁰ Though not specified, the predictions are meant to refer to each religious group taken separately as well as for the Total group.

The data to test this prediction are summarized in Table 1.¹¹ Contrary to expectations, there are fairly large differences in both the Catholic and Protestant groups. In the Catholic group the intermarried have significantly higher dissatisfaction scores, and in the Protestant group the intermarried have significantly lower dissatisfaction scores. The difference in the Jewish group is in the same direction as the Catholic difference, but it is small in size.

The groups were then compared on their responses to the question, "Do you worry about marriage often, sometimes, or never?" Despite the obviousness of the question, it is thought

¹¹ For the first three sets of variables the P's are based upon two-tailed t and z tests corrected for the correlation introduced by matching. It should be noted that the data do not meet the assumptions of the tests very well. For example, the sample is not a simple random sample, and several of the distributions are markedly skewed. The P's are, therefore, only approximations. These deviations from assumptions, if they lead to an important effect, will usually cause the null hypothesis to be rejected more frequently than it should be. If the null hypothesis cannot be rejected on the basis of calculations from the usual formulas, it is very probable that if more appropriate formulas could be used the null hypothesis would still be accepted. If the present calculations produce a significant P, the possibility still remains that the difference is not significant. Thus, "the cards are stacked" against the theoretical assumptions of this research. See Allen L. Edwards, *Experimental Design in Psychological Research*, (New York: Rinehart, 1950), pp. 165-67. And, Leslie Kish, "Confidence Intervals for Clustered Samples," *American Sociological Review*, 22 (April, 1957), pp. 154-65.

that the answers reflect marital satisfaction. In both the Protestant and Catholic groups there are fairly large differences favoring the intramarried. They are, however, not statistically significant. The difference in the Jewish sample is very small, but it is in the same direction as the others.

The next question used, "Do you agree or disagree with this statement: The unmarried person can be just as content as the married one?" is thought to have a projective element which permits an indirect measure of marital satisfaction. It is assumed that happily married persons would be unlikely to agree. In the Catholic, Protestant, and Total groups the differences are small, but in the Jewish group a significantly larger proportion of the intermarried agreed.

The final variable in this group is the mental health rating of the Midtown Study. This rating was made by three psychiatrists on the basis of a consideration of the questionnaire materials on attitudes, psychosomatic symptoms, etc. It is an evaluation of the respondent's general mental health; particularly the efficiency of his functioning in everyday life.¹²

In the Catholic group there is evidence that the mental health of the intermarried is poorer than that of comparable intramarried persons. The average difference, .26 on a 4 point scale, is large enough to permit rejection of the null hypothesis at the .10 level of confidence. In the other groups the differences could have occurred by chance, though it is noteworthy that the difference in the Jewish group is fairly large and "favors" the intermarried.

In general, these data are not completely consistent, but there appears to be reason to doubt the null hypothesis in regard to the Catholic sample. If the matching ruled out selective factors, and if the indices are valid, it seems that intermarriage has a deleterious effect upon Catholics. In the other groups the data do not provide a strong basis for rejection of the null hypothesis.

The next concern is the relationship between interfaith marriage and children. In general, the fertility of the intermarried respondents is somewhat less than that of the intramarried, but the difference is significant only in the Catholic group. In the other groups the differences could have been due to chance.¹³

It would follow from commonly held no-

¹² An extensive analysis of this rating will be found in Srole, *et al.*, *op. cit.* It seems to have acceptable validity and inter-rater reliability. The raters did not know if the respondents were intermarried or intramarried.

¹³ Both completed and non-completed families are in-

cluded. The comparisons are limited to respondents who have never been married before.

tions that children increase dissatisfaction for the intermarried while they lessen it for the intramarried. The assumptions of this study would lead to the expectation that the relationship between the satisfaction of those with children and those without children would be the same regardless of marriage type. This prediction will be tested by use of the present dissatisfaction score.

In all religious groups the intermarried who had children received higher dissatisfaction scores than the intermarried without children, but the same relationship was found within the matched intramarried groups.¹⁴ Furthermore, the levels of significance tend to be the same. When the difference between the "have" and "have not" groups is significant in the intermarried group it is significant in the intramarried group. The only exception to this is noted in the comparison without religion controlled. In this case the difference is significant in the intermarried group but not in the intramarried. In general, it appears that children have about the same effect on the dissatisfaction of intermarried and intramarried respondents.

The next consideration is the relative adjustment of the children of intermarried and intramarried respondents. A problems with offspring (PO) score was constructed to reflect the degree to which the parents reported that they had problems with their children.¹⁵ The difference in the Protestant group differs in direction from that found in the Catholic group. Neither is significant, but the Catholic difference is fairly large and favors the intramarried. No comparison could be made for Jews because there were not enough cases.

Finally, a comparison was made between the groups in regard to the nature of the problems they had with their children. In the Protestant groups the lists are similar, but some noteworthy differences appear in the Catholic group. These include: Intermarried Catholics report a greater frequency of trouble with bad companions, school difficulties, sibling conflict, and habit disturbance. The average number of prob-

cluded. The comparisons are limited to respondents who have never been married before.

¹⁴ For these comparisons all the matched cases had to be used in order to get a sufficiently large number.

¹⁵ The PO Score is based upon four items. Two examples are: "Here are some ideas that people have expressed. Would you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each one? 'Children give their parents more trouble than pleasure.' 'Have you ever gone (did you ever go) to anyone outside the household for help or advice on this (i.e. a problem with children?'" Responses to each item are clearly correlated with the total score. For further information on this score see Heiss, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-62.

lems reported per respondent is also higher for the intermarried Catholics.

It seems, then, that in the Catholic group there are grounds for rejecting the null hypothesis. Intermarried Catholics appear to have fewer children, and they may have more difficulty with those they have. In the other two groups, the comparisons of fertility produced small difference in the same direction as the Catholic difference. The other comparisons showed little.

The effect of intermarriage upon the religiosity of intermarried persons is a question of some debate, and this will be the next area to be considered. Two indices of the respondent's religiosity were used: his response to the question, "Quite aside from church (synagogue) going how important would you say religion is to you?" and his response to a question concerning frequency of church attendance. On both these questions there are clear differences which seem to show that intermarried Catholics and Jews are less religious than comparable persons of those religions, but in neither case is the difference large enough for chance to be ruled out. In the Protestant group the differences are smaller, and the direction of the difference is not the same on both questions.

In regard to interpersonal relationships outside the family of procreation, the final area to be considered, the prediction is that there will be differences which favor the intramarried.¹⁶ This hypothesis is supported in the Jewish group in regard to number of relatives seen. The intermarried Jews see significantly fewer relatives. The differences in the other two religions are small, and in the Protestant group the difference is in the opposite direction.

It is also expected that the intermarried will show greater hostility to their relatives as indicated by greater agreement with the statement, "A person does better for himself by staying away from his family (close relatives)." In the Catholic and Jewish groups the differences are in this direction, but they are not statistically significant. The small difference in the Protestant group is in the opposite direction.

Three other variables were considered: number of close friends, responses to the item, "Do you have as many friends as you would wish or would you like more?" and suspiciousness (S) score.¹⁷ These comparisons produce small,

but consistent, differences in the Catholic group, and one significant difference in the Protestant group. Intermarried Protestant respondents report significantly fewer friends than do the intramarried. It should be noted, however, that the intermarried Protestants have many friends. Their lack of friends is only relative. Their responses to the question which follows indicate, in addition, that they are not overly disturbed by this relative lack of friends. Largely due to the big difference in the Protestant group, the comparison without religion controlled also produces a significant difference on the number of friends variable. The comparisons of the Jewish groups do not produce any differences large enough to be significant, though substantial differences are found on each variable. In fact, with religion controlled, all but one of the comparisons involving these three variables yielded differences consistent with the notion that interfaith marriage leads to worsened interpersonal relationships.

For the interpersonal relationships variables all of the differences in the Catholic and Jewish groups are in a direction consistent with the hypothesis, though only one of them is statistically significant. In the Protestant group this consistency is not found.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate the impossibility of making a single statement concerning the relevance of interfaith marriage for marital outcome. The effect varies depending upon the religion of the respondent.¹⁸

In the Catholic group the null hypothesis does not seem to hold, for all of the differences are in the same direction. Even when the groups are matched, the outcomes of the Catholic intermarriages are consistently poorer. The basic assumptions underlying the working hypothesis are clearly put in doubt. However, without at all denying that there is an effect, it seems appropriate to note that the size of this effect does not appear to be very great. Many of the differences are small in size; few of them are statistically significant.

The conclusion for the Jewish group is about the same, for here all but one of the differences parallel those found in the Catholic group. In regard to the Protestants the null hypothesis must be accepted. The differences in one direc-

¹⁶ Since the direction of the difference was predicted, all comparisons on the interpersonal relationships variables are evaluated by a one-tailed test.

¹⁷ The S Score contains seven items. Included are: "Do you sometimes feel that people are against you without any good reason?" "Here are some ideas that people have ex-

pressed. Would you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each one?" "Behind your back people say all kinds of things about you." Each item correlates with the total score. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

¹⁸ All that follows assumes, of course, that the matching cancelled out all relevant premarital differences.

tion are about equal in number to the differences in the opposite direction. Among the Protestant respondents marriage type seems irrelevant for outcome.

We are now faced with the problem of explaining why the predictions were not borne out. It is clear that one or both of the original assumptions do not hold for the Catholic and Jewish groups. It may be that we overestimated the degree to which interfaith marriages are homogamous, and/or we may have underestimated the degree to which partners in an homogamous intermarriage carry an additional burden.

To decide adequately between these alternatives would require additional research, since the data available to us do not permit a clear answer. We would speculate that such research would probably show that the second assumption is incorrect. It now seems clear that it is more than possible that an intermarried Catholic or Jew carries something of an additional burden even if he and his spouse are in essential agreement. Our original assumptions probably underestimated the importance for these groups of pressures from church and family. That these pressures would be less intense and less effective in the case of the intermarried Protestants also seems logical.¹⁹ A datum from the present

¹⁹ The only data available from a non-college sample indicate that Protestants are more opposed to interfaith marriage than are Catholics. The parents of the Catholic respondents in our sample, however, are predominantly foreign-born, and very religious. We assume their opposition to intermarriage

study supports this notion in regard to dissatisfaction. Intermarried Catholics who see their relatives have higher present dissatisfaction scores than intermarried Catholics who never see their relatives. In the Protestant group the relationship is reversed. A comparison in the Jewish group was not possible because of the small number of cases.

Is the assumption of equal homogamy in the two marriage types also incorrect? In this case the situation is unclear. The fact that the results varied by religion creates a problem, and several explanations are possible. On the basis of the data one might argue that the original assumption holds for the Protestant group but not for the others. This may be so, but if it is, the reason for it is not clear. A second possibility is that the assumption holds for none of the groups, but the Protestant who is intermarried is not affected by his lack of consensus with his spouse, while intermarried people in the other groups are. This might be the case, particularly on the satisfaction variables, if the Protestant respondents were less committed to their point of view. A final possibility is that the original assumption applies to all groups, and the findings can be attributed entirely to differences in outside pressure. A choice among these alternatives is not possible without additional data. A study to provide such data could easily be designed.

was very strong. See, "Mixed Marriage Opposition Strongest Among Protestants," *Hartford Courant*, 122 (March 22, 1959), p. 31A.

BACK ISSUES NEEDED

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