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Interracial, yet Intrafaith: Does a Common Religion Predict Higher Relationship Quality in Interracial Romantic Relationships?

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Interracial, yet Intrafaith: Does a Common Religion

Predict Higher Relationship Quality in Interracial

Romantic Relationships?

Danielle Fenn

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Interracial, yet Intrafaith: Does a Common Religion Predict Higher Relationship Quality in Interracial Romantic Relationships?

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The purpose of this study was to analyze the association between relationship quality and religious discrepancy of interracial couples who are either married or cohabiting. Two variables of religious discrepancy (religious affiliation discrepancy and religiosity discrepancy) were studied. The sample included three groups of interracial couples: Hispanic-white, Asian-white, and Black-white. The data were analyzed using a structural equation model and regression estimates of the three groups were compared. Results showed a significant relationship in only three of the 12 relationships between the two variables of religious discrepancy and relationship quality. Significant negative relationships were found between religious denomination discrepancy and relationship quality for the Hispanic-white and Black-white group. In addition, a significant negative relationship was found between religiosity discrepancy and relationship quality in the Asian-white group. Clinical implications are discussed.

Keywords: interracial couples, interracial marriages, interracial, married, cohabiting, religion, religiosity, religious homogamy, religious heterogamy, Black, white, Hispanic, Asian, relationship quality, marital quality.

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Introduction

Interracial marriages have increased dramatically since anti-miscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional in 1967 (Pascoe, 1991; Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010; Lee & Edmonston, 2005). In fact, during 2008, the percentage of new U.S. marriages that were interethnic was six times higher than the 1960's rate (approximately 2.4% compared to 14.6%; Passel et al., 2010). In terms of total marriages in 2008, 8% were either interracial or interethnic (Passel et al., 2010). Research on why an increased number of individuals are entering these marriages is diverse and extensive. However, many believe that the increase in interracial marriages is due, in part, to a greater acceptance level by society of such unions (Lee & Edmonston, 2005; Kalmijn, 1998). While numerous studies have looked at the trends of interracial marriages and the reasons for intermarrying, few have focused on the quality of such marriages.

Many interracial couples report that their marriages are the same as ethnically endogamous marriages (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995); however, it is possible that interracial couples inherently face challenges that endogamous couples do not (see Karis, 2003). These challenges can be presented from factors outside of the marriage, such as society's judgment and the support or disapproval of the individuals' families, and from factors internal to the marriage, such as differences in parenting, communication styles, and religious beliefs and practices (Bughra & DeSilva, 2000; Alba, 2005). All of these challenges can affect the quality of marriage. In fact, Hohmann-Marriot and Amato (2008) found that multiple challenges, including greater heterogamy, fewer shared values, weaker social support, and more complex relationship histories, all contributed to lower relationship quality among interracial couples. Studying the marital quality of interracial couples is important because low marital quality is a significant risk

factor for divorce in these and other unions (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Previti & Amato, 2003; Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish, & Kim, 2002).

Although differences in any viewpoint can cause marital discord, a marriage in which the couple does not share the same religion (e.g. Catholic, Jewish, etc.) and/or level of religiosity (e.g. regular church attendance, daily reading of the Bible) can lead to substantial conflict and even dissolution of the marriage (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Call & Heaton, 1997; Kalmijn, Graaf, & Janssen, 2005). Conversely, sharing a common religion and level of religiosity has been found to be related to greater happiness, adjustment, and satisfaction in marriage (Hunt & King, 1978). In fact, Lambert and Dollahite (2006) found that shared religious beliefs and practices helped couples to avoid problems in their marriage, resolve conflicts, and facilitate reconciliation when conflicts did arise. However, researchers have yet to examine the effect of religious homogeneity among interracial families. Specifically, Kalmijn (1998) stated, “no studies have simultaneously analyzed ethnic and religious characteristics of husbands and wives” (p. 416). The purpose of this study was to address the gap in the research literature by examining the effect of religious homogeneity on marital quality among interracial couples.

Review of Literature

The History of Intermarriages in the U.S.

The U.S. is often viewed as a “melting pot” of individuals of varying ethnicities and races. However, the degree of assimilation of U.S. immigrants into the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (WASP) majority is different for each race and ethnicity. Racialization is the process of using physiological or biological markers to separate groups of people and sets them up for discrimination (Cornell, & Hartmann, 2007). Surprisingly, some European immigrant groups,

such as Italians, Jews, and Irish, were not viewed as “white” by the WASP majority when they first came to the U.S. (Morgan, 2007). However, through political opportunities and entering the labor market, they were able to fill niches in American society (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 1991), transition from a racial to an ethnic group (Morgan, 2007), and assimilate into the majority (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995). Furthermore, when these immigrants intermarried, their assimilation into mainstream American society was such that they were finally considered “Americans” (Morgan, 2007). Similarly, it is through intermarriage that many scholars believe assimilation between groups is acquired and is an indication of the rigidity or flexibility of the racial boundaries between the ethnicities or races (Morgan, 2007).

Black-white racial boundary. Black-white intermarriages are the least common of all interracial unions in the U.S., which may be an indication that the racial boundary between Blacks and whites is more rigid than between others races or ethnicities. As such, the challenges that Black-white couples face may be more severe than other interracial couples. Starting in the colonial period and continuing into the mid-twentieth century, laws were passed by state legislators that prohibited the mixture of races (anti-miscegenation laws) (Pascoe, 1991). In many states these laws were gender- and race-specific (Pascoe, 1991; Kalmijn, 1993), presumably to target the mixture of races that was most unaccepted by the dominant group. Not surprisingly, it wasn’t until anti-miscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967 that intermarriages between whites and Blacks became more common (Passel et al, 2010; Lee & Edmonston, 2005).

It is important to note that Blacks were not the only group that underwent racialization by dominant American society. For example, anti-miscegenation laws also prohibited the marriage between whites and other races (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Native Americans, Hawaiians,

Hindus, and Hispanics) (Pascoe, 1991). As our sample also includes data from Hispanic-white and Asian American-white intermarriages, a brief history of these ethnicities in the U.S. is included here.

Hispanic intermarriages. The major Hispanic or Latino immigration to the U.S. did not occur until 1970, following the 1965 Immigration Act. In 1900, Latino/Hispanic/Spanish groups made up only 0.5% of the U.S. population, jumping substantially to 4.6% in 1970 (Hirschman, 2005), and to 12.5% in 2000 (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001). Today, Latinos are the largest minority group in the U.S., making up 16.3% of the population at the time of the 2010 Census (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Some researchers suggest that Latino immigrants will marry within their own or between other Latino groups (termed panethnicity) based on similar interests, experiences, and external pressures (Espiritu, 1992; Kibria, 1998). In fact, studies have shown that there is a trend of panethnicity in the U.S. between Latino groups, especially for the immigrant generation (Rosenfeld, 2001) and for non-white Latinos (Qian & Cobas, 2004). Fu (2007) found that Cubans and Puerto Ricans had a stronger affinity for panethnicity, whereas assimilation (intermarriage to whites) was greatest for Mexicans and "other Latinos." The same study found that Whites were the favored intermarriage partner for Latinos and that 36% of Latinas and Latinos intermarry, while only 3.5% marry Latinos of other Latino groups (Fu, 2007). In addition, Fu (2007) found that there was an affinity between Latinos and Filipinos, possibly due to similar histories of Spanish colonization.

Asian intermarriages. The Chinese were the first Asian immigrants to come to the U.S., starting in 1850, and were followed by Japanese immigrants in 1890. The major Korean

immigration is still ongoing (Hyun, K. J., 2001). The Chinese and Japanese immigration was stilted by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the “Gentleman’s Agreement” of 1907 (Kitano et al., 1984). Korean immigration was halted mostly due to Japan’s occupation of Korea (Kitano et al., 1984). In 1965 the bans on immigration were lifted; however, a preference was given to highly-educated professionals, relatives of U.S. immigrants, and refugees from natural calamities and Communist-dominated countries (Kitano et al., 1984). One study found that exogamy (or out-marriage), was most likely for (ranked): Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Indian Asian, and Southeast Asian (Qian, Blair, & Ruf, 2001). Qian et al. (2001) hypothesized that Japanese assimilation was due to their adoption of the cultural values and norms of America and seeking education as a way to move up the socioeconomic status ladder.

Intermarriage Trends

In 2010, the Pew Research Center reported the results of the 2008 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), in addition to the results obtained from the telephone interviews of almost 3,000 adults. They found that 14.6% (or one in seven) new marriages in the U.S. are interracial or interethnic, which is double what it was in 1980 and six times that of 1960 (Passel et al., 2010). In addition, 8% of all current marriages in 2008 were intermarriages (different race or ethnicity), as compared to 3.2% in 1980. The increase in intermarriages in 2008 was due to a doubling of intermarriage rates for whites and a tripling for Blacks, while the rates for Hispanics and Asians stayed the same. Of those that intermarried in 2008, 9% were white, 16% were Black, 26% were Hispanic, and 31% were Asian (Passel et al., 2010). Passel and associates (2010) state that the lack of growth in intermarriage rates for Asians and Hispanics may be due to the steady increase of Hispanic and Asian immigrants to the U.S., which increased group size for those races and the opportunity for same-race marriage.

Gender differences in intermarriage rates are found among Blacks and Asians, but not among whites and Hispanics (Passel et al., 2010). More specifically, Black women are less likely to intermarry (racially or ethnically) than black men (i.e. 9% as opposed to 22% of new marriages in 2008). The genders are reversed for Asians, as 40% of new intermarriages in 2008 were with Asian females and a non-Asian male and 20% with Asian males and a non-Asian female. In addition to gender, higher intermarriage rates are also positively correlated to age, region, education, and nativity.

Passel and associates (2010) conclude that the increase in intermarriages is due to the weakening of cultural taboos against racial and ethnic intermarriages and the flow of immigrants from Asian and Latin American countries. In support of this hypothesis, a Gallup poll conducted in 2003 showed that 86% of Blacks, 79% of Hispanics, and 66% of whites would accept a grandchild or child marrying someone of a different race than their own (Lee & Edmunston, 2005). In addition, as for the evidence of this shift in U.S. values, in the 2000's only 10% of whites favored laws against Blacks marrying whites (anti-miscegenation laws) as opposed to 35% in the 70s (Lee & Edmunston, 2005).

Although it appears that the acceptance of intermarriages has increased, discrimination still exists based on the racial composition of the marriage. For example, in their study, Passel and associates (2010) asked respondents if they would be “fine” with a family member marrying someone of a different race (Black, white, Hispanic, and Asian). The results indicated that 81% would be “fine” with a family member marrying a white person, while only 66% said they would be “fine” with it if the person was Black. In relation to age, 93% of adults aged 18 to 32 approved of whites dating Blacks, while only 68% of adults 65 and older approved of the same.

The percentage of respondents that reported they would be “fine” with a family member marrying a Hispanic or Asian person was 73% and 75%, respectively.

Dynamics of Intermarriages

A significant amount of literature concludes that interracial marriages are less “successful” (e.g. in terms of lower marital happiness and higher divorce rates) than intraracial marriages (Porterfield, 1978; Gaines, 1997; Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Fu, Tora, & Kendall, 2001; Goodman, 1991). In addition, the historical literature (e.g. DeVos, 1973; Glenn, 1986; Hunt & Coller, 1956) described interracial marriages as dysfunctional and resulting in isolation and violence (particularly of Asian-American war bride couples). In fact, regardless of the increased acceptance of intermarriages, some still view these unions as “dangerous and doomed to tragedy” (Root, 2001). Gaines and associates (1999a) concluded, “The negative societal stereotypes concerning interracial couples are so pervasive and so intricately woven into historical and contemporary American race relations that empirical evidence of functionality among interracial couples rarely enters popular or academic discourse” (p. 462).

Despite these broad generalizations, the empirical evidence of the dynamics of intermarriages is mixed. For example, Fu and associates (2001) found that the interracial couples in their study reported lower marital happiness than same-race couples. Likewise, Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) reported that partners in interracial unions generally had lower relationship quality than same-ethnic unions and they reported more conflict. The finding was supported for both men and women in the research samples and in both cohabiting and married unions.

With respect to the psychological distress of individuals in intermarriages, Bratter and Eschbach (2006) found that in a sample of intermarried couples, the distress for intermarried

white women was significantly higher (12.5%) than that of white women married to white men (8.0%). However, there was an exception to this pattern for intermarried women married to Asian husbands. In addition, the study found that the rate of psychological distress for intermarried white men, as compared white men married to white women, was 6.7% and 5.7%, respectively. The exceptions to this pattern for intermarried men was a higher distress rate (13.5%) for men married to Native American women and a lower distress rate for men married to Hispanic women, as compared to white men married to white women.

Conversely, Gaines (1997) found that the interracial couples in his study followed a communalism model of resource exchange. Communalism is characterized by active, rather than passive, resource exchange, which may help promote the resource exchange of affection and respect and increase marital satisfaction and stability. With respect to his findings, Gaines (1997) concluded that, "Perhaps enterprising researchers will accept this conceptual challenge to represent interracial couples as no less normal or functional than any other couples" (p. 361).

In a later study, Gaines et al. (1999b) found that a sample of interracial couples had high levels of affection, respect, romanticism ideology, and a lack of evidence of dysfunctionality with regards to interpersonal behavior. In another study by the same author, in a sample of approximately 100 males and females in interracial relationships, the majority (66% and 62%, respectively) were securely attached (Gaines et al., 1999a), indicating a high level of healthy functioning.

A study comparing the relationship dynamics of a sample of interracial couples to same-race couples found: 1) no significant difference between the two samples in the frequency with which they used coping strategies and the frequencies of dysfunctional or positive conflict interactions; 2) the interracial couples were no more securely or insecurely attached when

compared to the same-race couples; and 3) the null hypothesis that the interracial couples would have lower marital satisfaction than the same-race couples was not confirmed (Troy, 2006). As such, Troy (2006) concluded that “because these predictions were not confirmed, it suggests that new frameworks need to be developed to understand exactly how partners in interracial relationships manage both common and unique obstacles” (Troy, 2006, p. 12).

Lastly, Bratter & King (2008) found that although interracial marriages, overall, are more prone to divorce, this is not the experience of all intermarried couples. For example, they found that white men married to non-white women showed little to no difference in divorce rates from those of white-white couples. Some researchers have cited the higher divorce rate of interethnic couples as compared to the whole U.S. population (i.e. 66% vs. 50%) as “proof” that these unions are less satisfying. However, Gaines (1997) stated that this conjecture was “dubious at best” (p.358) as the divorce rate of Black-Black couples is similar to that of interethnic pairs.

Similarities and differences of interracial to intraracial relationships. Karis (2000) found that many interracial couples claimed their relationships weren’t any different from same-race relationships, based on the perception that, within the home, race is not important. For example, one woman stated: “You are not thinking of everybody’s color when you’re looking for your socks...race disappears in the house.” (Karis, 2010, p. 28). However, Karis determined that when the couple ventures out into society, they are reminded of their racial diversity and that they are not, in fact, like same-race couples. As such, a claim that race doesn’t matter may be “backtalk” to those that claim that the two races are too different and shouldn’t be together. While many interracial couples in Karis’ study (2010) denied that stereotypes have an impact on their relationships, several noted that they had an impact on their sense of self. For example, women would alter their behaviors based on the views of others on their interracial marriage,

find ways to protect themselves from stereotyping, and create “public strategies” such as avoiding any action that might lead to people stereotyping them or their relationship.

In terms of interpersonal similarities and dissimilarities, the motives of marrying someone of a different race are similar to those entering same-race marriages (e.g. love and compatibility) (Porterfield, 1978). In addition, Porterfield (1978) found that “most of them [the interracial couples in his study] reported that their initial relationships were based on shared interests, ideas, and values” (p. 65). As evidence of the similarity between interracial and intraracial couples, Karis (2010) stated that race is socially constructed and does not constitute an “essential difference” (p. 28). In addition, the majority of these couples stated that their fights do not have racial overtones and that they are similar to those of any married couple.

One dissimilarity, as noted by couples in two different studies, was a unique awareness of their spouse relative to their dual existence as an individual and as a member of a racial group, as well as their emotions due to their different racial backgrounds (Porterfield, 1978; Karis, 2010). Another dissimilarity was noted by Bhugra and De Silva (2000), who stated that intercultural couples face difficulties from society’s outlook on them and from their own differences in habits, customs, values, and beliefs. Interracial couples may also differ in the way that they communicate, verbally and/or non-verbally (Bhugra et al., 2000). In addition, due to unique cultural/racial backgrounds, interracial couples may have different parenting methods, ideas of social norms, and expectations of the marriage and the roles and responsibilities that each is expected to take on (Bhugra et al., 2000).

With respect to intrapersonal aspects of interracial unions, Karis (2010) states that white women married to black men may feel like “outsiders within” (Luke, 1994, p.51), as they are treated differently if they are alone (as opposed to being with their spouse or biracial children),

they are more aware of white privilege than most whites, and they feel different from other whites but don't have the physical markers to set them apart.

Marital Quality

Studying marital quality is important due to its effects on society (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998) and personal well-being (e.g. Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Ren, 1997). In addition, improved therapeutic interventions, obtained from the study of marital quality, can lead to the prevention of divorce and marital distress (Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998) or the alleviation of its effects (Baucom, Shoham, Mueser, Daiuto, & Stickle, 1998). Marital quality is an indicator of the dynamics of marriage (Bulanda & Brown, 2007) and is associated with the overall happiness of both partners (Aldous & Ganey, 1999). While marital quality can be defined in various ways, for the purpose of this study it is defined by marital satisfaction, marital stability, and frequency of marital problems.

Religion and Religiosity

Religious groups are generally exclusivist, ecumenical, or fall somewhere between the two. Mormonism, for example, is an exclusivist religion (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993) in that membership is limited to only those persons who meet clearly defined criteria, and eligibility for certain religious practices, such as temple attendance, is strictly enforced. In contrast, ecumenical religious groups, such as Lutheran and Methodist, have few membership criteria and those that do exist are weakly enforced (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993).

In 2008, nearly eight in ten (78.4%) U.S. adults surveyed belonged to a Christian religion, 5% belonged to another faith, and nearly 1 in 6 (16.1%) didn't have any religious affiliation (Pew Forum, 2008). In the same year, Protestantism constituted only a slim majority (51.3%) over other religions, Catholicism accounted for approximately a quarter (23.9%) of the

adult population, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day-Saints (Mormons) made up 1.7%. In addition, nearly four in ten (37%) married couples were religiously heterogamous, with Hindus and Mormons being the most likely to marry within their own faith (90% and 83%, respectively; Pew Forum, 2008).

Religiosity is composed of personal spiritual beliefs, religious practices, and involvement in a faith community (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). A study conducted by Pond and Smith (2009), researchers for the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, found that among a sample of approximately 35,000 adults, 56% felt that religion was very important, 39% attended religious services weekly, 71% were absolutely certain of a belief in God, 59% prayed daily, and 21% shared their faith or view on God daily.

Religion, Religiosity, and Marital Quality

Religion and religiosity have significant impacts on marriages. Religious teachings can influence education, parenting, where you live, social and professional networks, and how one's time and money is used (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). Because religion dictates, or at least influences, so many aspects of one's personal, as well as marital interactions, when the religions are different, a loss of efficiency and possibly more conflict can be the result (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993).

The utility of religion and religiosity in marriage. Religiosity has been found to have high utility in marriages. In particular, studies have shown that couples may utilize religion or religious beliefs in helping them to solve problems (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995). One study found that common religious beliefs and practices helped couples to: “a) prevent problems in the relationship, b) resolve conflict, and c) work toward relational reconciliation” (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006, p. 442). Problems were prevented by

having a “shared sacred vision and purpose” (p. 442) and “fostering relational virtues” (p. 443). When problems did arise, they could be resolved by turning to religious practices or doctrines (e.g. reading scriptures on how to better relate to their spouse or attending religious services to change their focus). Reconciliation was facilitated by the couples increased commitment to the marriage, as dictated by their religious beliefs, and their willingness to forgive.

Religion, religiosity, and marital stability. Marriages in which the spouses are of different faiths have higher dissolution rates than marriage characterized by religious homogamy. Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) found that religiously heterogamous marriages are generally less stable than homogenous marriages when looking at the fifth year dissolution probabilities. Specifically, they found that they were lowest for homogamous Mormon marriages, which they attributed to the religion’s focus on the family and because “this is a small group whose religious beliefs and practices differ substantially from the majority culture” (p.395) (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). In addition, they found that the effect of religious out-marriage on dissolution was large compared to other factors, such as age at marriage, education, and loss of parent.

Additionally, several studies have shown an impact on marital stability when couples share the same level of religiosity, in addition to the same religion. For example, one study found that higher church attendance for the husband and wife decreases dissolution, while a discrepancy in attendance increases it (Call & Heaton, 1997). In addition, Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) found that the importance each individual places on the religion will have an effect on stability. Similarly, Hunt and King (1978) found that similarities in religiosity between the husband and wife were positively correlated to marriage success; and that their commitment to maintaining their religious beliefs and putting effort into the religion resulted in increased commitment to the marriage.

Religion, religiosity, and marital quality. Studies have generally shown a positive correlation between religious homogamy and marital quality. A cross-sectional study of interreligious and same-religion married couples found that interreligious couples were less happy than same-religion couples (Glenn, 1982). In addition, the study found that marriages in which one or both individuals had no religion were less happy than both same-religion and interreligious couples. In terms of religiosity, one study determined that “greater happiness, adjustment, and satisfaction in marriage is related to positive beliefs about religion, greater effort, more religious participation, more agreement about religion, greater tolerance, and higher extrinsic motivation toward religion” (Hunt & King, 1978, p. 404).

Religiosity, Marital Quality, and Intermarriages

Low marital quality in marriage is often due to differing beliefs and values that each individual has developed separate of one another and that are reflective of the environment in which they were raised (i.e. cultural/ethnic background, family values, etc.). Assumedly, the more these values differ, the frequency and/or intensity of conflict, problem areas, and divorce proneness within the marriage would increase and marital satisfaction and positive interaction would decrease (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Call & Heaton, 1997; Durodoye, 1997). It is likely that the values of intermarried couples differ more than those of intra-married couples, resulting in lower marital quality than that of same-race or same-ethnicity couples. However, research on the subject has been inconclusive, largely due to the variability of findings (e.g. Durodoye, 1997; Bratter & King, 2008; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008).

The association between religiosity and the marital quality of intermarriages has never been studied; however, some studies have hypothesized about this effect. Heller and Wood (2000) concluded that common religious backgrounds may provide a common "language" from

which to communicate and negotiate differences with decreased conflict. They also stated that when a partner is either ambivalent or feels negatively about the other partner's religious customs, the intimacy in the marriage may decrease. Also, Ho (1990) stated that difference in religion can be devastating to intermarriages because the religious beliefs and doctrine are ingrained into the individual's psyche. In addition, even if one or both individuals forfeit or compromise their religious beliefs for the good of the marriage, this altering of self-identity may result in compromising the integrity of the marriage.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to help bridge the gap in literature on the dynamics of interracial marriages by determining the effect of religious heterogamy on the marital quality of interracial couples. As such, the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1: Interracial couples that share the same religion will have higher marital quality than those that do not.

Hypothesis 2: Interracial couples that have lower discrepancy scores for religiosity will have greater marital quality than those with higher discrepancy scores.

Methods

Data Collection Procedures

The cross-sectional data for this study was acquired through the administration of the RELATIONSHIP Evaluation (RELATE) questionnaire to couples in romantic relationships. The questionnaire is based on a model that delineates premarital predictors of marital quality and

stability (Busby, Holman, & Taniguchi, 2001). It is composed of 274 questions that target the characteristics of both partners and the dynamics existent between them (Busby et al., 2001).

The participants either filled out a paper version of the questionnaire that was mailed to them or an electronic copy online at <http://www.relate-institute.org>. The questionnaire included a confidentiality notice both in paper and electronic format. Once returned by mail, the completed paper versions were scanned, processed into a SPSS dataset, and combined with the online version dataset.

Participants

The participants of this study were 483 interracial heterosexual couples that were either married (first marriage or remarriage) or cohabiting. Although the sample includes couples who are cohabiting and married, the term “married” was used throughout the study for the sake of simplicity. The racial combinations of these couples were Black-white, Hispanic-white, and Asian-white. The largest interracial combination was Hispanic-white (N=229 or 47%), followed by Asian-white (N=203 or 42%), and, lastly, Black-white (N=51 or 11%) couples. Table 1 shows a cross-tabulation of the frequencies of interracial couples for each racial combination. Gender pairing was not possible for this study due to the small Black-white couples dataset.

Table 1

Cross-tabulation of Couples

	Black Female	Asian Female	White Female	Hispanic Female	Totals
Black Male	0	0	33	0	33
Asian Male	0	0	69	0	69
White Male	18	134	0	103	255
Hispanic Male	0	0	126	0	126
Totals	18	134	228	103	483

A slight majority of couples were married. This including 45.5% of the males who were in their first marriage and 7.7% who were in their second or higher marriage. Forty-seven percent of the males were cohabiting. Among the females in the sample, 45.8% were in their first marriage, 7.2% were in their second or higher marriage, and 47.0% were cohabiting. The most common response to the question among males and females about religious denomination was “none” (26.7% and 24.0%, respectively). The next largest group for both males and females was Protestant (19.9% and 23.4% respectively), followed by Catholics and Latter-Day Saints (LDS) for males (19.0% for both religions) and LDS for females (19.9%). These four religious denomination responses (i.e. “None”, Protestant, Catholic, and LDS) made up the majority of the sample for both men and women. Table 2 reports the frequencies of the religious denominations of male and female participants.

Table 2

Religious Denomination of Participants

Denomination	Males	Females
Catholic	19.0%	15.7%
Protestant	19.9%	23.4%
Jewish	2.9%	1.4%
Islamic	0.6%	0.6%
Latter-Day Saint (Mormon)	19.0%	19.9%
Buddhist	1.2%	3.1%
Hindu	1.4%	1.0%
Sikh	0.0%	0.2%
Other	8.9%	10.6%
None	26.7%	24.0%

The most common combination of religious denominations for the couples was LDS-LDS followed by “None-None”. Overall, 50.4% of the couples shared the same religion. Table 3 shows the cross-tabulation of the religious denominations of the paired couples. Male participants are listed in rows and females in columns.

Table 3

Cross-tabulation of Religious Denominations of Couples

	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Islamic	LDS	Buddhist	Hindu	Sikh	Other	None
Catholic	27	29	0	0	2	3	1	0	14	16
Protestant	16	46	1	0	0	2	2	1	11	17
Jewish	7	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Islamic	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
LDS	0	1	0	0	91	0	0	0	0	0
Buddhist	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Hindu	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Other	4	14	0	0	1	2	1	0	11	10
None	20	19	6	0	2	6	1	0	11	64

Overall, the sample was well educated. Table 4 shows that approximately a third of the couples had received a bachelor’s degree, while almost one fourth had received a graduate or

professional degree. The average age was 32.8 years for men (SD = 8.185) and 31.0 years (SD = 8.078) for women.

Table 4

Educational Attainment of Couples as Percent of Total (N=483)

Education	Males	Females
Less than high school	0.8%	0.4%
High school equivalency (GED)	1.0%	0.4%
High school diploma	4.3%	2.1%
Some college, not currently enrolled	11.8%	8.9%
Some college, currently enrolled	11.8%	14.9%
Associate's degree	5.8%	6.4%
Bachelor's degree	29.8%	31.3%
Graduate or professional degree, not completed	9.1%	8.7%
Graduate or professional degree, completed	25.5%	26.9%

Measures

The measures of this study were derived from subscales within RELATE, which have been shown to be valid and reliable measures. In an evaluation of the RELATE model, Busby and associates (2001) found that the RELATE subscales had reliability scores between .70 and .90 for both internal consistency and test-retest measurements. Scales that were utilized in this study have reliability scores ranging from .79 to .99.

Marital quality. Marital quality was measured by combining the scales of marital satisfaction, problem areas, and marital stability. The Relationship Satisfaction Scale ($\alpha=.88$) was used to assess marital satisfaction and is composed of seven items. The general question for this scale is: "In your relationship, how satisfied are you with the following?" An example of an item

on this scale is “The quality of your communication.” The Relationship Stability Scale ($\alpha=.81$) is a three-item scale and was used to assess marital stability. An example of one of the questions of this scale is “How often have you thought your relationship (or marriage) might be in trouble.” The Problem Areas Scale ($\alpha=.84$) was used to assess frequency of marital problems and is composed of seven items that addresses the frequency of problems in areas such as roles, communication, and rearing children. The question associated with this scale is “How often have the following areas been a problem in your relationship?”

Religion and religiosity. The religiosity of each spouse was determined by the Religious Orientation Scale ($\alpha=.79$), and a discrepancy score was created to determine whether the couple had the same level of religiosity. The Religious Orientation Scale was composed of four items, and an example question is “How often do you pray (commune with a higher power)?” (Busby et al., 2001). There were five response options for the scale, ranging from “Never” to “Very Often.” The religion of each spouse was determined by the question: “Your religious affiliation is...” A variable was created to determine whether the couple had the same or different religion. In addition, the response of “other” for religious affiliation was analyzed to determine if the couple had the same or different religion.

Control variables. Although the effect of education on the marital quality of interracial couples is unclear (see Bulanda, 2007) some studies have shown an interactional effect between them (Conger et al., 1990; White & Rogers, 2000). In addition, age has been shown to have an effect on marital quality (Umberson, et al., 2005). As such, these variables were included as control variables. Education was measured by the question, “How much education have you completed?” with nine response options ranging from “Less than high school” to “Graduate or professional degree, completed”. Age was measured by a standard demographic question.

Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the path model, and the statistical program Analysis of Moments Structure software (AMOS; Arbuckle, 2008) was used to conduct the analysis. In addition, the availability of both partners' information made it possible to use the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) strategy (Kenny & Cook, 1999). The primary advantage of SEM is that it controls for measurement error, which reduces the bias in the regression coefficients (Kline, 1998). The chi-square fit statistic, Tucker and Lewis Index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error (RMSEA) were used in testing the goodness-of-fit of the model.

The model that was tested is represented in Figure 1. The main independent variables were the discrepancy of their religiosity, and whether their religious denomination was the same or different from each other. The dependent variables were the marital quality of the male and female, individually. In addition, six control variables, male religiosity, female religiosity, male age, female age, male education and female education were also included. Three datasets were created from the three interracial couple combinations (i.e. Black-white, Hispanic-white, and Asian-white), and the model was run separately for each of these groups.

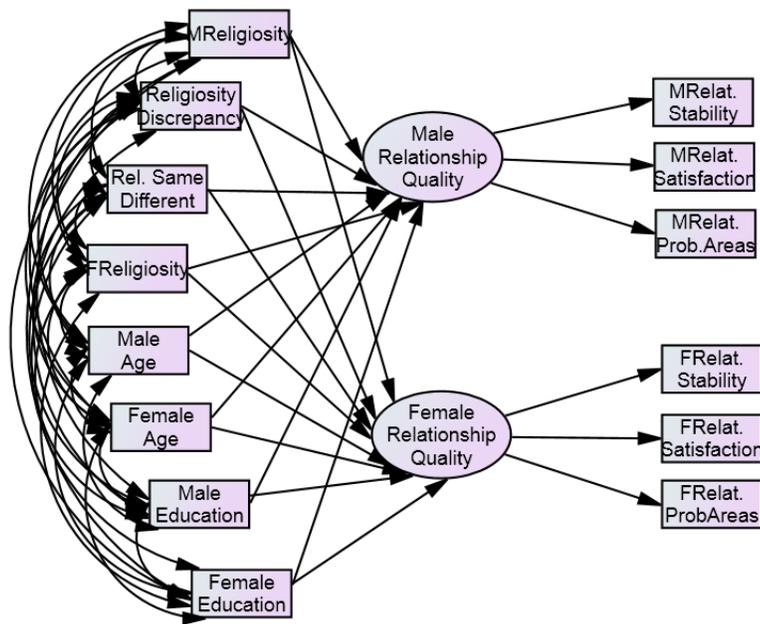


Figure 1. SEM model utilized for the analysis of the three groups.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Hispanic-white correlations. As indicated in Table 5, there was a significant correlation between the religiosity discrepancy score and male relationship quality (-.142). Significant correlations were also found between whether the male and female religions were same or different (“Rel. Diff.”) and male relationship quality (-.148), as well as female relationship quality (-.182). The correlation between difference in religious denomination and female relationship quality was not statistically significant.

Table 5

Correlation Matrix for Hispanic-white Couples

	MRQ	FRQ	MRel.	FRel.	Rel.Discr.	Rel.Diff	MEduc.	FEduc.	MAge	FAge
MRQ ^a	1.00									
FRQ ^b	.731**	1.00								
MRel. ^c	.138*	.132*	1.00							
FRel. ^d	.051	.057	.643**	1.00						
Rel.Discr. ^e	-.142*	-.079	-.359**	-.172**	1.00					
Rel.Diff ^f	-.148*	-.182*	-.369**	-.352**	.378**	1.00				
MEduc.	.006	.043	-.045	-.181**	-.032	.027	1.00			
FEduc.	.131*	-.030	-.125	-.177**	.114	.116	.293**	1.00		
MAge	-.130	-.138*	-.099	-.120	-.063	.100	.072	.092	1.00	
FAge	-.145*	.146*	-.039	-.052	-.094	.056	.083	.177**	.856**	1.00

*p<.05, **p<.01

^aMale relationship quality. ^bFemale relationship quality. ^cMale religiosity. ^dFemale religiosity. ^eReligiosity discrepancy. ^fReligious denomination discrepancy.

Asian-white correlations. As indicated in Table 6, there were significant correlations between religious discrepancy and female relationship quality (-.227), but not with male relationship quality among the Asian-white couples. The couple's religion being the same or different was not significantly correlated with male relationship quality or female relationship quality.

Table 6

Correlation Matrix for Asian-white Couples

	MRQ	FRQ	MRel.	FRel.	Rel.Discr.	Rel.Diff	MEduc.	FEduc.	MAge	FAge
MRQ	1.00									
FRQ	.693**	1.00								
MRel.	-.029	-.017	1.00							
FRel.	-.059	-.063	.588**	1.00						
Rel.Discr.	-.107	-.227**	-.316**	.128	1.00					
RelDiff	.017	.009	-.325**	-.243**	.236**	1.00				
MEduc.	-.053	-.015	-.109	-.181**	.062	.091	1.00			
FEduc.	.067	.107	-.284**	-.298**	.145*	.232**	.503**	1.00		
MAge	-.185**	-.207**	.016	.010	0.57	-.128	.328**	.189**	1.00	
FAge	.261**	-.259**	-.010	.042	.126	-.114	.270**	.222**	.847**	1.00

*p<.05, **p<.01

Black-white correlations. As indicated in Table 7, religious discrepancy was significantly correlated to female relationship quality (-.286), but the correlation wasn't significant for male relationship quality. The couple's religion being the same or different was not significantly correlated with either male or female relationship quality.

Table 7

Correlation matrix for Black-white Couples

	M RQ	F RQ	M Rel.	F Rel.	Rel. Discr.	Rel. Diff	M Educ.	F Educ.	M Age	F Age
M RQ	1.00									
F RQ	.708**	1.00								
M Rel.	-.026	-.178	1.00							
F Rel.	-.126	-.272	.382**	1.00						
Rel. Discr.	-.196	-.286*	-.001	.125	1.00					
Rel Diff	-.275	.009	-.079	-.270	.248	1.00				
M Educ.	-.157	-.156	-.123	.138	.127	-.002	1.00			
F Educ.	.035	.084	-.131	-.184	.113	.111	.302*	1.00		
M Age	-.171	-.334*	.022	.124	.305*	-.104	.101	.225	1.00	
F Age	-.158	-.306*	-.057	.120	.323*	-.090	.055	.354*	.799**	1.00

*p<.05, **p<.01

Structural Equation Modeling Results

Goodness-of-fit. The χ^2 statistic, AGFI, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA were computed to determine adequate fit for the model. The model fit the Asian-white and Hispanic-white dataset satisfactorily. The indicators for the model fit with the Asian-white group were as follows: $\chi^2 = 53.501$ ($p=.04$), $df = 37$, TLI = .958, CFI = .985, and RMSEA = .047. The indicators associated with the Hispanic-white group were: $\chi^2 = 64.977$ ($p=.003$), $df = 37$, TLI = .945, CFI = .980, and RMSEA = .058. Although the RMSEA of the Hispanic-white dataset was slightly above .05, the reported lower and upper limits were .033 and .080. The fit indicators for the model applied to the Black-white group were: $\chi^2 = 46.789$ ($p=.13$), $df = 37$, TLI = .881, CFI = .958, and RMSEA = .073. As such, the fit for this group was mixed, possibly due to the small sample size.

SEM results. As indicated in Table 8, SEM model analysis showed a significant direct relationship between having the same or different religions and female relationship quality ($\beta = -.161$, $p < .05$) among the Hispanic-white couples. However, it didn't have a significant relationship with male relationship quality. There was no significant relationship between religiosity discrepancy and either male or female relationship quality. Male religiosity and female religiosity had significant relationships with male relationship quality ($\beta = .241$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .278$, $p < .05$, respectively).

Table 8

Regression Estimates for the Three Groups.

Pathways	<u>Hispanic-white Estimates</u>			<u>Asian-white Estimates</u>			<u>Black-white Estimates</u>		
	Unstandard- ized	Standard- ized	<i>p</i>	Unstandard- ized	Standard -ized	<i>p</i>	Unstandard- ized	Standard- ized	<i>p</i>
RelDiscr →MRQ	-.095	-.101	.193	-.052	-.072	.397	-.029	-.043	.780
RelDiscr →FRQ	.007	.008	.921	-.192	-.260	.004**	-.168	-.210	.166
Rel.Diff.→MRQ	-.136	-.127	.105	-.036	-.043	.585	-.283	-.341	.039*
Rel.Diff. →FRQ	-.180	-.161	.040*	-.023	-.027	.736	.019	.019	.894
MRel. →MRQ	.125	.241	.012*	-.106	-.039	.705	-.004	-.009	.951
MRel. →FRQ	.061	.113	.230	-.046	-.109	.295	-.099	-.191	.200
FRel. →MRQ	-.147	-.278	.003**	.006	.014	.886	-.068	-.157	.351
FRel. →FRQ	-.042	-.076	.410	.042	.094	.357	-.403	-.082	.607
MAge→MRQ	.003	.042	.753	.009	.165	.237	-.006	-.122	.644
MAge→FRQ	-.002	-.027	.843	.003	.051	.719	-.009	-.145	.523
FAge→MRQ	-.017	-.266	.052	-.026	-.479	***	-.006	-.116	.644
FAge→FRQ	-.011	-.167	.218	-.022	-.394	.007**	-.012	-.196	.414
MEduc→MRQ	-.022	-.082	.259	-.020	-.080	.354	-.030	-.135	.384
MEduc→FRQ	.013	.046	.521	-.007	-.028	.753	-.039	-.143	.334
FEduc→MRQ	.068	.228	.002**	.052	.230	.024*	.032	.130	.431
FEduc→FRQ	.003	.008	.910	.070	.267	.004**	.054	.179	.257

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Among the Asian-white couples, results indicated that there was a significant relationship between religiosity discrepancy and female relationship quality ($\beta = -.260, p < .05$). No other significant relationships were found between the other dependent and independent variables.

Among the Black-white couples, results indicated that there was a significant relationship between religions being same or different and male relationship quality ($\beta = -.341, p < .05$). No other significant relationships were found between the other dependent and independent variables.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test the hypotheses that interracial couples who share the same religion and similar levels of religiosity would have higher relationship quality than those that do not. Overall, the two hypotheses were only partially supported; three of the twelve hypothesized relationships were found to be significant. Among the Hispanic-white couples, a significant relationship was found between having the same or different religions and female relationship quality. The relationship was negative, indicating that if the couple shared a common religion, the female relationship quality increased. Likewise, there was a significant direct relationship found in the Black-white couples between having the same or different religions and male relationship quality. Again, the relationship was negative indicating that if the couple shared a common religion, the male relationship quality increased. These two findings support Hypothesis 1. The relationship between sharing a common religion and female relationship quality was not significant in the Asian-white and Black-white couples. In addition, sharing a common religion was not significantly associated with male relationship quality among the Hispanic-white and Asian-white couples. Thus, in regards to the first hypothesis, that

religious denomination discrepancy would have a negative association with relationship quality, only two of the hypothesized six relationships were found to be significant.

The second hypothesis, that discrepancies in levels of religiosity would have a negative association with relationship quality, was largely unsupported by the results in the study. Only one of the six hypothesized relationships was found to be statistically significant. A significant negative relationship was found among Asian-white couples between religiosity discrepancy and female relationship quality, but that was the only significant association.

Overall, then, the results of the study provided only limited support for the hypothesis that religious homogamy would have a positive association with relationship quality among interracial couples. These results are inconsistent with much of the research among same-race couples. For instance, Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) found that, when a couple's religions are different, a loss of efficiency and possibly more conflict is the result. In addition, low religiosity discrepancy has been found to help couples to prevent problems, resolve conflict, aid in reconciliation, and provide a "shared sacred vision and purpose" (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006, p. 422). Another study found that marriage in which the couples had no religious preferences or of different faiths had the highest dissolution rates (Call & Heaton, 1997; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). However, the results are generally consistent with a study of 25 intermarried couples found that, compared to religiously-homogamous, same-race couples, they did not differ in terms of level of intimacy, mutual understanding, and similarity of intimate experience (Heller & Wood, 2000).

Scholars of interracial marriages have argued that religious homogamy would be especially important among interracial couples. Although the results of their study suggested

otherwise, Heller & Wood (2000), hypothesized that religion would provide a common “language” for the interracial couple. In addition, Ho (1990) speculated that a difference in religion or religiosity would be devastating for interracial marriages, as they are so ingrained in an individual’s psyche. The non-significance of this relationship may be explained by the idea that intermarried couples may find that their relationship quality increases in the very process of navigating their religious differences (Heller & Wood, 2000).

In addition, many interracial couples who have already accepted racial and, oftentimes, cultural differences to the extent that they have entered into interracial relationships, may also readily accept other differences in their relationship, such as religion. In other words, the couple may forfeit having the homogeneity in terms of race, religion, and/or culture for the reasons that many couples get married for, such as compatibility, love, attraction, and common interests. In the long run, some interracial couples may feel that their religious differences are not any more of a “deal breaker”, or hindrance, than their racial differences.

Limitations

The data used for this study was cross-sectional, which can decrease the utility of the results in determining the effects of religiosity and common religion on relationship quality. Future research should be conducted to obtain longitudinal data on interracial couples to more accurately determine direct or indirect effects between the variables. Also, the results did not discriminate between the gender combinations within the three interracial combinations. Future research that utilizes larger sample sizes should make these gender distinctions so as to conduct more precise analyses.

Another limitation was that the sample was not normally distributed, as the sample size did not allow it. As such, there were a disproportionate number of LDS-LDS couples, and the size of the datasets of interracial couples did not reflect demographic percentages found throughout the U.S. Future research should include obtaining a dataset large enough so as to obtain a normally distributed sample size that would yield more accurate results. In addition, the Black-white couples dataset was small (N=51), which may have biased the results. Future research should include obtaining a larger Black-white dataset so as to provide more accurate results.

Clinical Implications

Interracial couples are becoming more common throughout the U.S., and numbers are expected to increase in the coming years. As such, clinicians need to be prepared to treat these couples in therapy. Research has concluded that interracial couples often face more struggles in their day-to-day lives and in their relationships than do same-race couples (Karis, 2010; Bhugra & DeSilva, 2000). While this research lends some support to the hypothesis that having similar religiosity and/or the same religion may result in increased relationship quality, this study has indicated that this relationship may be more complex than previously speculated. As such, clinicians need to carefully assess the role that religion and religiosity play in the relationships of interracial couples and to ensure that they do not presume to know the nature of its impact. If religion and/or religiosity is determined to have a significant impact on the relationship, it is advisable that clinicians provide appropriate focus in therapy on how the religious element of their relationship can be utilized as a commonality and strength amidst the racism, discrimination, and struggle to blend different cultures that many of these couples face (see Bhugra & DeSilva, 2000 and Karis, 2010). Conversely, clinicians need to be aware that when

couples do not share the same religion or similar religiosity, it may exacerbate the struggles they are already dealing with and result in lower relationship quality. It may be advisable to help the couple to find other commonalities, or shared beliefs, that will substitute for that which is lacking and assist in creating a “common culture” for the couple.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the hypothesis that religious homogamy has a significant positive relationship to the relationship quality of interracial couples was only partially supported. These findings indicate that much is still unknown about the dynamics of interracial couples. As such, future research should be conducted to further delineate this relationship, as well as others, that may be pivotal for the proper treatment of interracial couples in therapy.

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