

Factors Influencing Changing Religions for Marriage and The Impact Of Such a Change.

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This article highlights the notion that religiosity is based on marital relationships and also examines factors influencing changing religions for marriage and the impact of such a change. Findings based on previous submitted research premise this argument on religion and its affects on factors such as family, marital partners, and children. It is believed that religion has a major impact on many factors of family life and delves into the idea that religion is changed along with marital partners or with the affects of family life. It is also believed that many social problems could be attributed to choice of religion and or religious affiliation of marital partner. This paper also details the adverse affect on children's perception of religion.

The purpose of this paper examined the factors that influence switching religions for marital reasons and the impact of such a change. In particular I examined birth cohort, religious practice, the economic concepts of household production and human capital, religious diversity within families, children born into interfaith marriages, and whether or not it is necessary to change religions for marital happiness. ¹Through this study it is expected that issues of religion and

culture contribute to critical issues of our time; one is increasingly likely to find young people marrying across the old religious line which entailed people of the same faith entering into marriage; children are being educated along with others from different religious backgrounds; and we live in a society where people are willing to harmonize their marriages by changing religions.

Americans switch religions to harmonize their marriage according to Musick and Wilson (1995). In a study conducted by the aforementioned authors, respondents were asked whether or not they switched religion in connection to their marriage. The respondents were asked to describe the processes of religious mobility that occur in general and were then asked to compare those reasons with their own

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religious mobility.

Switching religion for marital purposes is a distinct kind of religious mobility that has been hidden by previous studies (Musick and Wilson 1995). This study was significant because there had been no research of its kind. This particular study found that switching for marital reasons increases the impact of religious variables. Thus, conversion between religious groups is much greater than similar religious groups (Iannaccone 1990). Iannaccone defined the groups as two or more people interacting with each other who share common goals that stem from common problems with a desire to resolve them; agree upon a set of norms they hope will help them achieve their common goals; combine certain norms into roles that expect persons within the group to fill and carry out in the interests of the group.

Through Musik and Wilson's (1995) research we find that switching religions occurs when people are married to partners of other religious denominations. The analysis of religious mobility, which is defined as the movement out of a religious affiliation and movement into another religion, is only one way to analyze the overall impact of switching religions due to marital relationships where partners are affiliated with different religions. It is important to married individuals to do their best to harmonize their marriages by changing religions especially if one was not religious upon marrying the other religious individual. In harmonizing one's marriage, the obvious assumption would be that one partner would want to make their marriage stronger by toying with the idea of switching to their partner's religion.

Sherkat (2004) states spousal influences are significant factors that motivate religious switching. Religious intermarriage has also been shown to influence a host of other outcomes: spousal conflict, domestic violence, divorce, and fertility. The reciprocal connection between religion and family life makes the topic of religious intermarriage of particular importance in the sociology of religion. In Sherkat's article, cohort differences were measured in pattern of interfaith marriages; the author found that by determining the impact of birth cohorts, educational attainment, educational factors, geographic mobility, and religion of origin on the probability of religious intermarriage and the distance of intermarriage: the data would lead to answer why specific patterns of interfaith marriages are followed.

The birth cohorts were found to be too broad in showing patterns of interfaith marriage for people born before 1933. These figures are compared to individuals born in 1933 and later. Using the data to compare educational attainment, the comparison category was equal educational attainment.

For this study, a set of regional and residential classifications were used to analyze migration. The key in this classification system is the understanding that in the United States the religious market is quite distinctive in the South, and that opportunities for religious intermarriage are limited both in the homogeneous South and in rural communities. Stable residents of rural areas are hypothesized to be the least likely to intermarry and any intermarriage would likely be between members of similar religious groups.

Religious diversity within families has been shown to create a number

of difficulties for marriages such as leading to decreased rate of marital satisfaction, increased spousal conflict, higher rates of divorce, and increases in domestic violence. This research is important because it found that there are many different reasons for wanting or accepting religious switching in marriage (Sherkat 2004).

A study regarding religious practice, the economic concepts of household production, and human capital was used to develop a new model of religious participation. In this study, the model explains observed patterns in denominational mobility, religious intermarriage, conversion ages, the relationship between church attendance and contributions, and the influence interfaith marriage has within the levels of religious participation.

Iannaccone (1990) suggested that empirical studies have found patterns in religious intermarriage very similar to those of intergenerational religious mobility. One of the patterns examined in this study was the tendency to marry within one's denomination where predispositions were high. Intermarriage rates are higher in denominations with farfetched substitutes, and finally the intermarriage that does occur is usually between people from similar religions.

Researchers concluded from these studies that the economic concepts of household production and human capital generate a powerful model of religious participation. In each case of the model, the predictions received strong empirical support. Conversions are concentrated in the early stages of the life cycle, as people search for the best match between their religious skills and the context in which they produce commodities of religion, therefore, religious upbringing is looked upon as

being the most prevalent source of religious human capital, and is a major determinant of religious belief and behavior; people tend to seek out partners whose religious human capital complements their own, and the productive efficiency inherent in shared faith marriages leads to higher levels of church attendance.

It is important to include a study concerning children of interfaith marriages. When children are born into an interfaith family, religious differences can become even more overwhelming. Couples must now decide whose religion is going to be best for the child. Will the child have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah? Will she have a Christian Confirmation? Will he be baptized? *How* will he be baptized? If adults feel torn by religion, it is easy to imagine how much more children can feel between two religions dividing them.

There are three studies that provide valuable insight into religious identification on the part of offspring of interfaith marriages, but for the sake of this paper we will only examine one of these studies. Salisbury (1990:129) notes that "children tend to follow the religion of the mother if she is Catholic, but not if she is a Protestant." Thus, as suggested by the data, the mother's influence was greater if she was a Catholic.

It was shown that all in all, from Salisbury's (1990) study, there exists considerable continuity across generations relative to religious identification. Switching religion occurs, but it is part of the familial processes, therefore children born into an interfaith marriage tend to follow the religious practices of their mother if she is Catholic, and when children are old enough to decide what religion they are

more open to, it will be a familial process that helps these children decide what is best for them at that particular point in their lives.

For society as a whole, the importance of the familial process can be noted by helping children of interfaith marriage decide, as they age, what is best for them. It is a difficult process, as the child may worry about offending one or both parents when choosing the faith they will represent. How does marriage survival play out among interfaith marriage? A report was presented to discuss the results of carefully refined tests of the religious homogamy and marital stability generalization.

Burchinal and Chancellor (2004) studied comparisons first of marital survival rates among homogamous Catholic, homogamous Protestant, and Catholic-Protestant marriages. Second, refinements in classifications were made among the Protestant marriages to permit comparisons of marital survival rates among selected types of denominationally homogamous Protestant and mixed marriages. Third, comparisons were presented for marital survival rates between homogamous Catholic marriages and selected types of denominationally homogamous Protestant marriages. Fourth, marital survival rate differences were determined for selected types of marriages involving Catholics and persons who claim affiliation with certain Protestant denominations.

This study displayed that marital survival rates were considerably greater among the mixed unspecified Protestant marriages than among the homogamous unspecified Protestant marriages. Throughout comparisons in variations of marriage the clash of religious values and beliefs less frequently led to divorce in the interreligious marriages than did

circumstances associated with the lack of affiliation with a church.

Relatively few studies focus on the process of relationships among married interfaith couples; although the number is increasing. The trend in interfaith marriages may likely continue, as a nationwide study reported: less than half of the young adults surveyed "believed that it is not important to find a spouse who shares their own religion" (Whitehead and Popenoe 2001: 6).

Drawing on the research that interfaith marriages may be at a higher than average risk for divorce than same-faith couples, we may draw the inference that conflict is present in these marriages and that couples' communication processes may also be strained. Religious orientation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) may influence the extent to which interfaith partners form social networks and, report satisfaction with support provided from these networks.

Extrinsics, who need to practice their faith in public or as part of a group may have a greater need for a religious social network as well as be more dependent on the communication from this particular network. In contrast, intrinsics prefer to practice their faith individually and may not be strongly dependent on a religious social network or social support from a religious social network.

According to Hughes and Dickson (2005), extrinsic religious orientation is inversely related to reported marital satisfaction while intrinsic religious orientation is directly related to marital satisfaction. Therefore, interfaith marriage partners need not share the same religious denomination; they may only need common religious orientation to be happy. Moreover, spouses communicate with each other

during times of relational conflict, and in other intervals of the marriage, which is likely the cause for marital happiness opposed to religious orientation.

Having the same religious and spiritual beliefs are criteria for many people when they are seeking a marriage partner. Many people feel strongly that the person they are going to marry should be of the same religion, have the same traditions and customs, and intensity of belief as they do. For these people, this is an integral part of their idea of marriage. On the other hand there are those who marry someone who is "outside" their religion. Many times they must overcome family opposition to be with the one they love. Sometimes if one partner feels so deeply about his or her religion, their future spouse will convert. This converting only works if the partner is not coerced into changing their religion or is not strongly held by the tenets of his or her own faith.

Changing religion for a partner, against one's will, especially if one's religion has always been a very important factor in life, never works. There are many aspects to a marriage. Religion is only one of them, but a very important one at that. A person's re-ligious or spiritual beliefs make one part of your lover's persona.

Does religion matter in today's marriages? Is it necessary for one to convert for the viability of one's marriage? Researchers Booth, Johnson, Branaman, and Sica (1995) studied changes in religiosity and marital quality. An assessment from a national sample of married persons studied the extent to which changes in religious involvement influence marital quality and the extent to which changes in marital quality affect religiosity.

Research on this topic has assumed that a change in religious involvement alters marital quality rather than the reverse. Marital difficulties or other difficulties are believed to lead couples to increase their religious involvement. Many religions emphasize to families that regardless of distress, they must remain intact and individuals whose marriages are troubled may view increased involvement as a way to strengthen the relationship. In Booth et al. (1995) study, five features of religious life are examined: (a) learning about the divine other through reading religious materials such as the Bible, (b) interacting with a divine other through prayer, (c) attending services, (d) participating in religious social events, and (e) existential certainty (religious influence). These 5 marital scales were assumed to be indicators of marital quality.

The research found strong evidence that an increase in religiosity has very little effect on marital quality. Second, evidence was found that marital qualities sometimes alter religious activities. Third, gender has little role in explaining the relation between changes in re-ligiosity and marital quality. In other words, little support is found for the idea that an increase in religious activity improves marital relations. Increase in religiosity slightly decreased the probability of considering divorce, they neither enhance marital happiness or interaction nor decrease conflict and problems that are commonly thought to cause divorce (Booth et al. 1995).

In conclusion, for many Americans, tolerance toward individuals marrying across religious lines has increased. More and more couples from every religion are taking the plunge into interfaith marriage and the raising of

interfaith children. One crucial issue of our time is how are we to live together in a world which is becoming increasingly aware of its religious diversity, notably more so since 9/11? In many of these situations, issues of religion and culture are contributing factors. We also live in a world where one is increasingly likely to find young people marrying across the old religious line. Children are being educated alongside others who come from quite different religious backgrounds and we live in a society where people are willing to harmonize their marriages by changing religions.

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