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Religiosity and Gender Role Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to investigate possible sex, age, and religious differences involving the information placed in Internet dating ads on Match.Com. The researcher focused on views of men and women both in the age range of 30-45 and their views of whether or not they would like to have children in a future relationship. The research used a post hoc design with chi-square analyses and a one-way ANOVA. Women opted more to not have children in the future with a partner. Men seemed more eager to have children in a future relationship. Moreover, without considering age, differences existed between religiosity and wanting children, religiosity and the number of desired children, and religiosity and age. Results of this study supported the predictions of these findings. Women listed more attributes about career and education than wanting to have children.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research project was to study sex, age, and religious affiliation as factors influencing individuals' intentions to have children in a future relationship. A portion of this study focused on both genders in the age range of 30-45 years old to determine any differences in their view about having children. Another portion of the study focused on the relationship between religious affiliation and the desire to have children. Due to a shift in the dynamics of roles of both genders, women today are choosing to focus more on their education and careers. This role shift seems to be having

an effect on women's choice to bear children, either they are waiting significantly later in life or opting to not have children.

Gender Role Attitudes

In the recent decades, people have witnessed a significant shift in the attitudes of men and women and their perspective of whether or not to have children. The collective experiences of individual women, such as acquiring more education, have contributed to the aggregate liberalization of gender-role attitudes (Thornton & Freedman, 1979). The idea of the disruption of the family due to the significant divorce rate could be a contributing factor to the shift of gender-role attitudes. During the 1960s and 1970s the divorce rate doubled (Cherlin, 1981). In the 1990s and 2000s we may be witnessing the results of the attitudes of the children from divorced parents. These "children" are now adults and experimenting with the world of Internet dating. There is little evidence to prove or disprove this possible theory for gender-role attitude shifts. To what extent are adult gender-role attitudes influenced by family structure during adolescence (Thornton & Freedman, 1988)? Nevertheless, life-course researchers have found that some characteristics of pre-adult environments (e.g., size of place) exert continuing and even overriding influences on adult attitudes (e.g., Miller & Sears, 1986; Stephan & McMullin, 1982).

Religion and Fertility

A relatively large amount of research has existed on the relationship between religion and fertility; however, much of the research has examined historical census data, not current data, and the research has explored two or more religious denominations. The current research differs from past research by focusing not on existing children of couples, but on whether or not individuals desire to have children in the future and their decisiveness about having children. The tradition in many religions is to have children and large families. This appears to be especially true among the Catholic and Mormon religion (Heek, 1956; Lehrer, 1996; Marshall, 1950; Pitcher, Peterson, & Kunz, 1974; Thornton, 1979). The Catholic religion has differed from the Mormon religion in its beliefs about the use of contraceptives (McQuillan, 2004); therefore, even though individuals who are Catholic may have large families, they may not desire large families. On the contrary, individuals who are Mormon may desire large families. Also relating to religion and fertility, Hacker (1999) noted liberal religions, such as the Congregationalist religion, have fewer children than conservative religions, such as the Lutheran religion. In addition, cohabiting couples in Flanders and the Netherlands who showed religious commitment were more likely to postpone childbearing than cohabiting couples who did not show religious commitment (Corijn, Liefbroer, & Gierveld, 1996).

One potential explanation for the relationship between religious denominations may have involved family life. Many studies have shown family life as an important focus in many religions. For example, Marks (2004) presented the notion religious practices positively influence family functioning and noted the benefits, such as fostering family unity and closeness, outweigh the costs, such as the amount of effort and time to gain compliance in participating in religious practices. These findings occurred cross-

culturally among various religious affiliations. Religion has positively influenced families in many ways. Religious families have handled conflicts within the family in healthier ways than nonreligious families. Moreover, Abbott and Berry (1990), noted religious families were more likely to seek guidance and assistance from God and exhibit family satisfaction than nonreligious families. Religious families also have had closer familial ties and higher quality mother-child (Pearce & Axinn, 1998) and father-child relationships (King, 2003; Roggman, Benson, & Boyce, 1999). In addition, religious fathers were more familiar with the development of their infants (Roggman et al., 1999). Besides finding more involvement in religious fathers than nonreligious fathers King (2003) found religious fathers considered marriage and having children to be more important than nonreligious fathers and were more egalitarian in their views about household chores and childcare than religious fathers. Despite this finding, King (2003) noted gender stereotypes would be more prominent in religious families since biblically the father is the breadwinner and the mother is the nurturer.

Some potential reasons for the higher fertility rate among some religious denominations, such as the Catholic and Mormon religions, have been beliefs about abortion and the use of contraception, the amount of power religion has over the people and society, and the degree of beliefs about the traditional roles of men and women in society (McQuillan, 2004). Woodsong, Shedlin, and Koo (2004) found individuals who believed in God, but were not necessarily religious, had mixed feelings about the use of contraceptives. Even though all participants in their study used contraception, many discontinued usage. The discontinuation resulted from a belief in natural order and God's will. More specifically, participants tended to distrust pharmaceutical companies and the health care system because they believed pharmaceutical companies and the health care system were more concerned with profit than with the well being of consumers. Participants in the study believed synthetic drugs were harmful and interfered with the natural bodily cycle of a woman. The study found similar results for men and women. Due to these beliefs, those who used contraceptives had a high likelihood of discontinuing usage and having an unplanned pregnancy. These findings are significant for the current study because they seem to suggest individuals who believe in God are more likely to want children and to want more children than individuals who do not believe in God. They may believe bearing children fulfills their role as parents and follows God's will and the natural order.

Religion and Gender

Erik Erikson's theory as it pertains to religiosity is significant to the current study. According to Zock (1997), Erikson believed gender differences have existed in religious behavior. Erikson believed individuals are bisexual; therefore, both feminine and masculine modes have existed in men and women. He noted the masculine mode related to the outer space, such as eternity, transcendence, and omnipotence, and the feminine mode related to the inner space, such as one's relationship with God and inner, spiritual experiences. Erikson also believed the feminine mode must exist for the masculine mode to exist. Past research has supported Erikson's theory as it pertains to religiosity by finding a relationship between gender and religiosity. More specifically, Adbel-Khalek (2006) found women were more religious than men in the Muslim culture.

Men were also less intrinsically religious than women (Ghorpade, Lackritz, & Singh, 2006), and men with feminine characteristics were more intrinsically religious than men without feminine characteristics (Thompson & Remmes, 2002).

Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to explore internet dating advertisements to investigate the possible relationships between gender-role attitudes of the family structure and to also look at the possibility of a relationship between religious views and whether or not that could be a contributing factor to wanting children in a future relationship. Sex, age group (men and women 30-45), and religious choice served as the three primary organizing variables. All three variables are meaningfully related to how gender differences and religious backgrounds may influence different attitudes about whether or not to have children in a future relationship. The current study hypothesized women would be more likely than men to want to have children. The study also hypothesized individuals of any age who believed in a higher power would be more decisive in their decision about whether or not to have children and to want more children than individuals who did not believe in a higher power.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants. Thirty men and 30 women who listed their profiles on Match.com during June, 2007 served as participants. Their ages ranged from 30 to 45, and they were all from the United States.

Design. The primary participant stratification variables in this 2 x 3 independent-groups, archival study were gender and age group (30 to 35, 36 to 40, and 41 to 45). The primary dependent (response) variable was a “yes” or “no” question of whether they wanted to have children. The researchers recorded data for these variables from the response items from the ads on Match.com.

Elements of an Internet dating profile on Match.com. Each profile consists of two types of information: information about the individual placing the ad, and information about a desired “date”. Types of information in the profile may include: screen name and possible descriptive of that individual. The profile can also consist of a photo. There are many questions that are answered in the profile, one being “whether or not they would like to have children in the future.”

Operational definitions for responses. The measure of selectivity was a simple counting of the number of “yes” and “no” answers to the question of whether or not the participant wanted to have children in a future relationship.

Procedure. In using Match.com, the researcher specified gender and age of the participant. From the profiles retrieved, 30 profiles for each gender were selected for each appropriate age range for this particular study. The researcher recorded this data from these selected profiles.

Results

Gender comparisons. The question was whether women versus men would mostly likely consider having children in a future relationship. A chi-square analysis revealed significant differences between gender differences and the desire to bear children, $p < .001$. The majority of men desired to have children in a future relationship (57%), and the majority of women did not desire to have children in a future relationship (10%).

STUDY 2

Method

Participants. The current study consisted of 90 men and 90 women who posted their profiles on Match.com and stated they were living in the United States. The chronological ages of the participants were 19 to 59 with a mean age of 38.20 and a standard deviation of 10.62. The participants described their ethnicities as Caucasian (69%), Asian American (13%), multiple ethnicities (10%), Latino and Hispanic (3%), Pacific Islander (3%), African American (2%), Native American (1%), and other (1%). Fifty-nine percent of the participants described themselves as currently having at least one child, and 41% of the participants described themselves as currently having no children.

Materials. Match.com is a national Internet dating website. Participants sign in with a user name and password. After signing in, participants may search the site or enter personal information they choose to advertise about themselves. The site prohibits advertisements by individuals under the age of 18. The public may search the site to view photographs and personal information of men and women who are dating on the Internet. The website asks for factual (e.g. age, marital status, ethnicity, faith) and subjective information, such as descriptions of oneself or one's desired partner.

Design. The current study was an archival study with an ex post facto design. One aspect of the study included primarily categorical variables, which were gender, religious affiliation (spiritual, but not religious; Christian; atheist), the desire to bear children (no, unsure, definitely), the desired number of children (zero, one, two), and decisiveness about having children (unsure; sure, definitely or no). Another aspect of the study included a categorical (independent) variable and a numerical (dependent) variable. The independent variable was religious affiliation. The dependent variable consisted of three levels, which were spiritual (but not religious), Christian, and atheist. The independent variable was the chronological age of the participants.

Procedure. We began by signing in on Match.com to view various profiles of participants of the website. We utilized the "Search" engine, followed by the "Custom search" engine. We controlled for faith and the desire to bear children. The options for "faith" the website offered were "Christian/Protestant," "Christian/Catholic," "Christian/LDS," "Christian/other," "Hindu," "Buddhist/Taoist," "Jewish," "Atheist," "Agnostic," and "Spiritual (but not religious)." One at a time, we selected "Christian," "Atheist," and "Spiritual (but not religious)" for the study and collected data from 30 men

and 30 women for each group. The options for “Want children” were “Do not want to have children,” “Probably not,” “Unsure,” “Someday,” and “Definitely.” We selected “Do not want to have children,” “Unsure,” and “Definitely.” By selecting the options, the website generated profiles only for participants with the selected characteristics. Each web page generated 16 photographed profiles with a total of 32 web pages. Using a random number table, we randomly selected three profiles from each web page and collected demographic information and information relating to the hypotheses of the current study. The relevant information for the current study included age, gender, ethnicity, desire to bear children, desired number of children, and religious affiliation.

Results

Religion and the desire to bear children. A chi-square analysis revealed significant differences between religious affiliation and the desire to bear children, $\chi^2(1, N = 180) = 22.68, p < .001, \phi = .36$. The majority of Christians described themselves as wanting to bear children (55%), and the majority of atheists described themselves as unsure if they wanted to bear children (48%). Among individuals who wanted children ($n = 66$), 50% identified themselves as Christian, followed by atheist (29%) and spiritual (but not religious) (21%). Among individuals who did not want to bear children ($n = 44$), 57% identified themselves as spiritual (but not religious), followed by atheist (27%) and Christian (16%). Among individuals who were unsure if they wanted to bear children ($n = 70$), 48% identified themselves as atheist, followed by spiritual (but not religious, 30%), and Christian (29%).

Religion and the desired number of children. A chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference between religious affiliation and the desired number of children, $\chi^2(1, N = 101) = 15.74, p < .01, \phi = .40$. Among individuals who described themselves as not wanting any children ($n = 46$), 57% identified themselves as spiritual (but not religious), followed by atheist (26%) and Christian (17%). Among individuals who described themselves as wanting to bear one child ($n = 22$), 55% identified themselves as Christian, followed by atheist (27%) and spiritual (but not religious, 18%). Among individuals who described themselves as wanting to bear two children ($n = 33$), 42% identified themselves as Christian, followed by atheist (33%) and spiritual (but not religious, 24%). The current study did not consider the desire to bear three or more children because the expected cell count was less than five.

Religion and age. A one-way ANOVA with three groups (Christian; atheist; spiritual, but not religious) revealed significant differences in mean ages, $F(2,177) = 17.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. To assess the pair-wise differences, the current study used the Tukey post hoc analysis, and the results between groups were significant. The group of individuals who described themselves as spiritual (but not religious) had a significantly higher mean age ($M = 43.58, SD = 10.23$) than the groups of individuals who described themselves as atheist ($M = 33.07, SD = 9.17$) and Christian ($M = 37.95, SD = 9.85$), $p < .001$ and $p < .01$ respectively. The group of individuals who described themselves as Christian had a significantly higher mean age than the group of individuals who described themselves as atheist, $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

The results were surprising. Men overwhelmingly desired to have children in a future relationship. This research project was to study gender, age, and religious considerations about whether or not to have children in a future relationship. Women overwhelmingly did not desire to have children in a future relationship. Women, today, are more focused on achieving success in life without bearing children. There is a significant shift in the attitudes of men and women and their perspective of having children in future relationships. The collective experiences of individual women, such as acquiring more education, have contributed to the aggregate liberalization of gender-role attitudes (Thornton & Freedman, 1979).

As expected, individuals who believed in a higher power were more likely to be decisive about wanting children by desiring to bear children; however, unexpectedly, the support for the hypothesis occurred only in individuals who identified themselves as Christian. Individuals who identified themselves as being spiritual, but not religious, were more likely to not want children than individuals who identified themselves as Christian or atheist. A potential explanation for this unexpected finding may be age because individuals who stated they were spiritual, but not religious, were significantly older than individuals who stated they were Christian or atheist. Further research on young adults or by controlling for age may help clarify if the current results pertaining to spiritual, but not religious, individuals not wanting to have children may be generalized to the population. The current results seem to imply people identify more with spirituality as they age and are less likely to want to bear children.

In addition, as expected, the results showed individuals who did not believe in a higher power were more indecisive about whether or not they wanted children and were more likely than Christian, but less likely than those saying they were spiritual but not religious to state they did not want children. These results suggest religion may offer decision-making suggestions, such as surrendering to God's will and practicing discernment. Also, many religions emphasize the importance of family life (Abbott & Berry, 1990; King, 2003; Mark, 2004; Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Roggman et al., 1999) implying the purpose of adulthood is to marry and raise children. The current study seems to support this notion. Family life seems to be so influential in people's lives that simply identifying oneself as Christian significantly influences one's desire to have children. Previous research on religiosity and family life also showed individuals who belonged to the Catholic or the Mormon religion were more likely to have children and to have larger families (Heek, 1956; Lehrer, 1996; Marshall, 1950; McQuillan, 2004; Pitcher et al. 1974; Thornton, 1979). The current study showed that not only being Catholic or Mormon, but simply identifying oneself as Christian related to one's desire to bear children.

The results of the current study imply Christianity has provided a strong cultural and societal influence on family life and the core beliefs about the role of the family in society. McQuillan (2004) provided support for this implication in their historical

overview of various religions, such as the Catholic, Mormon, and Islamic religion, and the tremendous influence they had on society and the government.

A limitation of the current study was the reliance on a descriptive identification with religious affiliation. Consequently, one cannot generalize beyond the identification. For instance, one cannot say that people who are religious are more likely to desire children than people who are not religious. Despite the limitation, the current study provided insight into the influence religion has on people even when they are not truly religious, which means believing in God has related to wanting to bear children. Another limitation was the reliance on Internet dating advertisements, which implies that honesty about one's religious affiliation and desire to bear children may be a factor. Despite the limitation, the current study provided insight into the role of God in the family.

Future research on the differences between internal religiousness and identification with a religion and the desire to bear children may be beneficial in further understanding the influences religion and God have on society and the family. Moreover, future research on the influences of religion and spirituality on decision-making may shed some insight into differences, such as surrendering to God's will (Woodson et al., 2004) in decision-making strategies among individuals who describe themselves as religious and/or spiritual and individuals who do not describe themselves as religious or spiritual.

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