

## **Priming of religious words and its effects on partner preferences**

### **Introduction**

Braithwaite et al. (2015) conducted an investigation to study the influence of religion on strategies associated with mate selection. The result of this study shows that religious affiliation was the strongest predictor of many people's partner preferences. However, he suggested researchers to look further into the behavior of partner selection. This paper will focus on the effects of religion on the phenomenon of mate selection. First, I will discuss how this topic is relevant in today's society. Afterward, I will describe relevant literature about religious priming and mate selection processes, and how it may relate with one another. Finally, I will describe a testable hypothesis, along with methods and research techniques to study how religious priming affects partner preferences.

### **Relation to Present Day**

Dating has become extremely common in our society today. From a young age, teenagers and young adults engage in these intimate relationships to understand and discover their desires for future relationships. This leads to the societal emphasis of the value of marriage and the importance of finding a partner that will provide to support the family. Hence, this is the reason why people have been focusing more on their partner's personality traits because it is such a big predictor of marital and sexual satisfaction (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford 1997). In addition, other factors such as religion, has also played an imperative role in influencing marriage choices (Perry 2015). Religion can sometimes lead people to choose certain partners because of the desire to marry within the same religion rather than the emotional attraction they experience. However, there are certain personality traits that are correlated with basic religious beliefs that may also influence people's partner preferences. This could be an alternate explanation to

people's choice of a religion-affiliated partner. In addition, it is possible that people are more attracted to the traits associated with religion as opposed to the religion label.

### **Literature**

Religious priming is a technique that has been used in various studies. Researchers, Pichon, Boccato, & Saroglou (2015), studied the impact of subliminally priming participants of religious context with prosocial behaviors. Many similar studies have already researched this relationship, but these researchers primed participants with religious words and studied how it will affect their decision to engage in prosocial behaviors through the number of charity pamphlets they will take. The results of this study showed that participants that were primed with religious words, obtained more pamphlets than those who were not primed with religious words (Pichon, Boccato, & Saroglou 2015).

People tend to be morally hypocritical when it comes to comparing themselves to others. A study conducted by Carpenter and Marshall (2009) used religious priming to decrease this hypocrisy, to show that religious priming is in congruence with behaviors that are associated with religious beliefs. In this study, participants, primed and non primed, were given task assignment sheets and were told that they were responsible for assigning a consequence through a marked quarter (Carpenter & Marshall 2009). The independent variable of this study was the participant's obtained trait, which is measured through the random assignment of religious or nonreligious primed. On the other hand, the dependent was the consequence they decide to assign after reading the task worksheets. To measure this variable, a quarter was marked with "SELF to POS" labeled on a red sticker and on the other side "OTHER to POS" labeled on a green sticker. The study concluded that religiously primed participants, who had high intrinsic

motivation, were more consistent with their intrinsic behaviors than those with low intrinsic motivation (Carpenter & Marshall, 2009)

In a study conducted by Khoynezhad, Rajaei, & Sarvarazemy (2012), these researchers examined the relationship between basic religion beliefs and the five personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The participants in this study were told to rate their religious beliefs and to test their five factor personality traits. In order to measure this independent variable, they were told to take two questionnaires, the basic religious beliefs questionnaire, which rated participants' religious beliefs and the NEO questionnaire, which measured the participants' big five personality traits. The dependent variable in this study was the participants' ratings of their religious beliefs and their answers to the NEO questionnaire. To measure this variable, the researchers used correlation coefficient and regression analysis. As a result of this study, the personality trait conscientiousness had the most positive relationship with the basic religious beliefs (Khoynezhad, Rajaei, & Sarvarazemy 2012). This concludes that those who were religious primed, had a stronger connection with traits such as reliability, hardworking, and organized, which can explain the preferred traits some people have.

Many studies have shown that there is a distinct relationship between religion and personality traits. However, the following study examines the ideal five factor personality traits people prefer in a mate. Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford (1997), researched about the specific personality traits dating and married couples look for when finding a partner. In this study, researchers obtained two groups of participants: dating couples and newlywed couples. They were asked to take self-reports and partner report for trait ratings, as well as ratings for mate personality preference and a marital satisfaction questionnaire. As a result, Botwin, Buss, &

Shackelford (1997) concluded that although there were in fact sex differences when it came to preferred mate traits, there were still some commonly preferred traits amongst the two sexes.

These researchers have discovered that the most valued qualities in a mate are intellect-openness, agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness.

### **Hypothesis:**

The main hypothesis for this paper is that participants, who are primed with words and values associated with religion, will be more likely to prefer a partner that is affiliated with a religion.

Based on Khoynezhad, Rajaei & Sarvarazemy's (2012) study, it has already been discovered that basic religious beliefs has a positive correlation of the conscientiousness trait. In addition, Pichon, Boccato, & Saroglou (2007) showed the effectiveness of religious priming in behaviors. Through these studies, it is reasonable to conclude that there could be a relationship between religion and desired personality traits. As mentioned before, religion has had a huge impact on marriage decisions. There are cases where marrying a person of the same religion is essential to their partner ideals. However, I propose that some people are attracted to the traits associated with religion, which influences their decision to marry someone of a religion. With this said, I hypothesize that religion priming will and can affect a person's preferred mate.

### **Methodology**

To test this hypothesis, the following experimental design will be used to conduct the experiment. A prior analysis of the participants' religious beliefs will be taken, to ensure that their affiliations will not sway their decisions.

To begin this experiment, a sample of participants will be gathered and through cluster sampling, the participants of the group will be chosen. To operationalize the independent

variable, the group will first be primed religiously through a series of religion-affiliated words. In addition, they will also be asked to recite certain passages from the bible pertaining to the importance of marriage and love.

After this step, the participants will each be given a folder with six potential partners' self-written biography, consisting of their personal ideal partner traits as well as traits they would describe themselves. However, in these folders three of the partners are religious while three others are non-religious or of another spiritual belief, all in random order. Each participant will read through the descriptions of each partner and pick the partner they will most likely date and/or marry. The partner and the partner's traits will correlate with religious based traits, such as conscientiousness. These results will allow researchers to conclude the positive relationship between religion and preferred partner traits.

## **Conclusion**

Besides known factors such as wanting a partner that can be financially stable and can love and support a family, another factor such as religion, can encourage partner selection choices. This experiment reveals that religion can also be an important factor but is often overlooked because of the common thought that it is simply an identity. With this experiment, it can show that religion is much more than the beliefs and values one holds; it can also represent a person's personality. The traits associated with it can hold just as much power as the religious principles.

Religion is usually a controversial topic because of the various and dissimilar beliefs for each religion. However, other studies have shown that religion affiliated traits are similar to those of people without any religious affiliation. With this commonality, it can reveal the actual influencer of mate selection. If this phenomenon of mate selection can be further studied,

psychologists may better understand why religion is held up on such a big pedestal.

Furthermore, the quality and functionality of marriages may even improve due to the findings from these future researches.

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