THE RIGHT TO LOVE
IN SPITE OF THE TRIBE

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN CULTURE, RELIGION AND SOCIAL PRESSURE, ON INTERFAITH AND CROSS-CULTURAL DATING AND MARRIAGE

SIHAM YAHYA

B.A. (Behavioral Sciences)
M.A. (Educational and Clinical Psychology)

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DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY, SYDNEY

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To Itay Dagan

تزوّجتني

She married me

~ ~

...رغمَ أنفَ القبيلة

In spite of the tribe

.. وسافرتْ معي

And she traveled with me

.. رغم أنف القبيلة

In spite of the tribe

..وأعطتني زينبَ وعُمَرْ

And she gave me Zeynab and Omar

.. رغم أنف القبيلة

In spite of the tribe

وعندما كنتُ أسألُها : لماذا؟

And when I used to ask her: Why

كانت تأخُذني كالطِفل إلى صدرها

She would take me, like a child, against her chest

وتُتَمتِمَ:((لأنكَ أنت قبيلتي))

"Because you are my tribe."

Nizar Qabbani

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THESIS ABSTRACT

With increasing globalization, the possibility of interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds and faiths is greater than ever. Additionally, the possibility of these interactions developing into more serious relationships (e.g., dating and marriage) is also increasing. Nevertheless, interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriages have and remain taboo in certain societies and religions (e.g., anti-miscegenation laws). Individuals engaging in interfaith and cross-cultural relationships sometimes also face ostracism (by family and friends) and even death penalties in more extreme cases. Despite this, the numbers of interfaith and cross-cultural couples are increasing gradually, despite the obstacles that some of them face. Questions arise then concerning both the inhibiting as well as facilitating factors of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships.

The current thesis investigated the relation between religious affiliation and social/cultural pressure towards interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriages. Four studies were carried out to explore the subject addressed. The first study explored the relationship between the three monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and individuals' attitudes towards interfaith dating and marriages. The second study examined the perceived influence of parental and social pressure on individuals' perceptions regarding cross-cultural and interfaith dating and marriage. Further, the third study examined attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships between Jewish, Christian and Muslim individuals living in Israel, a conflict-ridden area. Finally, the fourth study looked at factors associated with short and long-term interfaith and cross-cultural married couples.

The general findings suggest that interfaith and cross-cultural relationships are both difficult to initiate and maintain if the social network surrounding the couple is not approving of the relationship. Moreover, the more religiously affiliated an individual is, the less likely it is that they will engage in an interfaith or

cross-cultural relationship. Additionally, for an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship to work, it requires one of the individuals in the relationship to compromise more than the other for the relationship to work. Lastly, there appears to be a generational attitude shift towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, with individuals generally more open to the possibility of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships compared to earlier generations.

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this thesis represents my original research, except where otherwise acknowledged in the text. This manuscript has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institute.

The ethical aspects of the following studies have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee and are in accordance with the American Psychological Association guidelines for research with human participants.

Siham Yahya

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DECLARATION OF THESIS

Name	Nature of Contribution to Thesis	Contribution
Siham Yahya	Decision concerning the researched topic	89%
	Review of the literature	
	Principal author and editor	
Dr. Simon Boag	Advice towards researched topic and approach	10%
	Assistance with editing	
	Suggestions for refinement	
Dr. Tal Litvak-Hirsch	Read data (in Hebrew) of 2nd study	1%
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SUBMITTED AND PUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

The Higher Degree Research programs of Macquarie University encourage Ph.D. candidates to complete their thesis in a thesis-by-publication format. This means that a substantial part is either in the form of published papers or papers prepared for publication and organised into a single work. Therefore, a degree of repetition is to be expected throughout the manuscript.

Yahya, S. & Boag, S. (2014). "My Family Would Crucify Me!": The Perceived Influence of Social Pressure on Cross-Cultural and Interfaith Dating and Marriage. *Sexuality & Culture*, 1-14.

Yahya, S., & Boag, S. (2014). Till Faith Do Us Part…: Relation Between Religious Affiliation and Attitudes Toward Cross-Cultural and Interfaith Dating and Marriage. *Marriage & Family Review*, *50* (6), 480-504.

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CHAPTER I:

Introduction

In an evolving globalized multicultural world such as today's, individuals are exposed to various options of fast and easy communication channels such as the rapidly developing social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Further, individuals have access to cost-effective and wide-ranging transportation facilities, which make it easier for them to commute across nations. And finally, interest in travelling, studying or working overseas, motivates individuals to leave their personal environments and venture into other societies. Hence, the likelihood of an individual meeting another from a different cultural background and/or faith is higher than ever. Therefore, it is also likely that individuals, who share the same interests, have a mutual attraction, and who enjoy the company of each other, may seek an intimate long-term relationship with one another, irrespective of their background or faith (Lanzieri, 2011).

Across studies, interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships (i.e., dating, marriage and cohabitation) have been broadly defined and usually include individuals from various races, ethnicities and religion (see Biever, Bobele & North, 1998; Falicov, 1995; Reiter & Gee, 2008). However, the present thesis defines *interfaith* relationships as one between two people that do not share the same faith (Alston, McIntosh & Wright, 1976), such as a Jewish man and a Christian woman, or a Christian woman and a Muslim man. On the other hand, the term *culture* is slightly more challenging in terms of definition. According to Fiske (2002) there is an array of components that constitute a culture, and these include but not limited to: practices, ideas, values and norms. Cohen (2009) supports Fiske's definition and adds that defining culture also depends

on the researcher's interest and their area of study, as well as whether the researcher is focused on *information* or *meaning* when studying culture (see Cohen, 2009). However, while culture is a complex term, in the context of this thesis, a *cross-cultural* relationship can be defined as one between people of different cultural background or traditional group; for example, an English man and a Pakistani woman, or a French woman and a German man.

Across the globe, there are several countries that report relatively high rates of interfaith and cross-cultural marriages. In Canada, for instance, it is estimated that 19% of all married or common-law couples are of interfaith and cross-cultural couples (Clark, 2006). Similarly in the United States, according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau's survey, 15.1% of all marriages were cross-cultural (Pew Research Center Report, 2010). Additionally, inter-racial marriages in the U.S. have increased from 321,000 in 1970 to 1.5 million in 2000 (Lara & Onedera, 2007). In India, where there is also *inter-caste* marriage, the highest rate of mixed marriages reported was in the Punjab, with a 12.2% rate of all marriages, followed by West Bengal with a 9.3% rate and Gujarat with an 8.2% rate of mixed marriages. Overall, the national rate in India stands at 5.1% (Goli, Singh, & Sekher, 2013). Finally in Australia, according to a report using data from the 2006 census (Khoo, Birrell, & Heard, 2009), 17% of all married couples are Australian-born citizens married to immigrants.

The rate of interfaith marriage in Australia differs with respect to religious groups and even gender; for example, among Muslims, 8% males and 6% females are married to non-Muslims. This is relatively low compared to Christians, where between 20-61% depending on denomination of males and 19-60% of females are in interfaith marriages. Jewish interfaith marriages are somewhere in-between, with approximately 21% of males and 19% of females in

these relations (Khoo, Birrell, & Heard, 2009).

Review of the Literature

While there is a relatively high number of intermarried and/or common-law couples worldwide, the notion of cross-cultural and interfaith marriages contradicts the conventional principle of endogamy, which has been observed for centuries across numerous cultures, and is still practiced today (see Hollingshead, 1950; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Joyner & Koa, 2005). Endogamy is the custom of marrying within one's cultural, religious, ethnic and socio-economic group. Cross-cultural and interfaith relationships fall under the category of *heterogamous* relationships, which is when couples differ from each other in terms of a certain criteria, e.g., culture, ethnicity, or religion. This is in contradistinction to *homogamous* relationships, which is when couples are similar to each other in terms of those, as well as other criteria (e.g., social economic status, sex and age) (Hollingshead, 1950).

One of the first significant studies on interfaith and cross-cultural marriages was conducted by Hollingshead (1950). Despite the study being focused on a specific population, the research covered many aspects of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, which included race, age, religion, ethnic origin and class on the selection of romantic partners. The findings suggested that participants were more inclined to engage in homogamous relationships, i.e., a relationship with a partner of the same faith and ethnic background. Moreover, further studies on homogamy have indicated that most partner selection is based on a high number of resembling traits between the two partners. For example, positive correlations have been found between partners' race, socio-economic status, age, intellectual ability, education, personality variables, physical attractiveness,

vocational interest and anthropometric measures (Ahern, Cole, Johnson & Vandenberg, 1985; Jaffe & Chacon-Puignau, 1995; Keller, Thiessen & Young, 1996). One way of explaining why individuals are more inclined to engage in homogamous relationships may be due to evolutionary theory.

Evolutionary Context of Intermarriage

One of the pioneering evolutionary studies on homogamy suggests that it is an extension of *kin selection* theory (Eberhard, 1975). Kin selection theory states that people (or vertebrates) tend to favour their blood relatives as a strategy for reproductive success because it increases the likelihood of genetic transmission. Kin selection is also a representation of *inclusive fitness* (Hamilton, 1964), which displays an organism's genetic influence on the next generation via the number of offspring carrying the same genetic information as that organism–the more offspring with similar genetic information, the "fitter" the organism. Thiessen and Gregg (1980) further suggest that rather than simply protecting their offspring from genetic information from non-relatives, humans have a tendency to detect other genetically similar organisms who are not relatives through common descent. Further, they propose that homogamous couples who select their partners according to gene similarity are likely to yield reproductive benefits. For instance, couples that succeed in producing a child are genetically more similar to each other in blood antigens than couples that cannot succeed in producing a child (Rushton, 1989). Another area of research has shown greater genetic similarity between married couples than randomly matched individuals (Tesser, 1993; Rushton, 1989). Furthermore, a study by Bereczkei, Gyuris, Koves and Bernath (2002) discusses homogamy by imprinting–like mechanisms in human mate choice. The

findings of the study suggest that a high degree of similarity can be ascribed to husbands'

mothers in comparison with their wives, with respect to physical appearance. This can be

explained from an evolutionary perspective–organisms mate with others that appear similar to

their caregiver and to themselves (see Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011; DeBruine, 2005).

Social Pressures Preventing Interfaith and Cross-cultural Intimate Relationships

There are a variety of possible causes for the preference towards homogamous and endogamous

partner selection. As previously stated, endogamy shapes individual and cultural desire for in-

group partner selection. It has also been discussed above that there are possible evolutionary

influences on homogamy. Alternative perspectives to evolutionary theory on homogamy and

endogamy may relate to: cultural traditions, religious affiliation, social pressures, and

discrepancies between universals rights and religious law.

    i.   *Cultural Traditions*

On an individual and cultural level, one line of research suggests that the reason for fearing and

objecting to interfaith and cross-cultural relationships stems from concern regarding the

destabilization of one's cultural identity. Cultural identity relates to a complex structure that

complies with personal beliefs, values and perception that impact behaviour and lifestyle

(Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). The concern of losing one's identity as a result of

entering into an inter-relationship arises with the expectation that one might have to change

because the partner has a different lifestyle and has different values that are according to their

own religious teachings and traditional practices (Roer-Strier & Ben-Ezra, 2006; Root, 2001;

Falicov, 1995; Cohen, 1988; Gordon, 1964). A study by Khan (1998), for instance, studied interfaith and cross-cultural marriages among Muslim Pakistani men, and found that mixed marriages were less likely to succeed than same-faith marriages. Previous studies also suggest that individuals would be more inclined to adhere to the dominant and mainstream endogamy notion of dating and marriage, to avoid cultural identity challenges (Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Leeman, 2009; Cila & Lalonde, 2013).

ii.   Religious Affiliation

Religious affiliation is the degree that an individual relates and/or adheres to religious teachings, traditions and customs (Hill & Paragament, 2008). Despite the increasing likelihood of interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships occurring as a result of globalization and multiculturalism—barriers still remain that prevent these relationships from occurring more often. Previous studies suggest that religious teachings and cultural tradition play a role in educating and dictating to individuals whom they shall and shall not marry (Leeman, 2009; Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995; Heaton, 1990). In terms of religion, for instance, the three primary monotheistic religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism all forbid interfaith and cross-cultural marriages to some varying extent (Leeman, 2009; Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995).

However, existing research is limited and mainly focuses on investigating intermarriage between different streams of the same faith (e.g., Catholicism vs. Protestantism) or concentrating on one faith only (Haji, Lalonde, Durbin, & Naveh-Benjimin, 2011; Leeman, 2009; Davidson &

Widman, 2002; Locke, Sabagh & Thomes, 1957), rather than studying how different faiths

perceive interfaith marriages (e.g., Islam vs. Judaism) and comparing individuals affiliated to

those religions to one another. Additionally, previous research has also focused on inter-racial

marriages (Wright, Houston, Ellis, Holloway & Hudson; 2003; Qian, 1997; Aldridge, 1978) and

cross-cultural marriages between immigrants and citizens of the same religion (Roer-Strier &

Ben Ezra, 2006; Khan, 1998). By focusing only on limited aspects that relate to intermarriage,

past research neglects and eliminates other potentially essential aspects relating to intermarriage,

such as cultural and religious repercussions.

Having said that, in recent years, there have been some studies examining relations between

religiosity, interfaith dating and partner selection. One example is a study is by Haji, Lalonde,

Durbin and Naveh-Benjamin (2011). Using an online questionnaire, the researchers examined the

relation between Jewish identity (religious and cultural) with respect to openness to interfaith

relationships and socio-political attitudes, in Israel. Their data suggest that the more religious

Jewish participants were, the less open they were to interfaith relationships. Their findings were

similar to previous research by Marshal and Markstrom-Adams (1995) who examined attitudes

towards interfaith dating among Jewish adults living in Canada. This study found that as

individuals adhered more to religious practice and orthodoxy, there was more restriction towards

interfaith dating. Further, the findings show that a majority of Jewish adolescents had a

preference for same-faith dating. These two studies demonstrate that religious and cultural

affiliation appears to play a major role in selecting a long-term partner. Further, Cila and Lalonde

(2013) examined Muslim young adults living in Canada. The aim of the study was to investigate

different psychological variables, such as religious affiliation, mainstream culture identification,

family connectedness, and gender, in relation to openness to interfaith romantic relationships.

Some of their findings suggested that the stronger the religious affiliation the less open the

Muslim Canadian participants were to engaging in an interfaith marriage. They also found that

Muslim Canadians were more inclined to date rather than marry non-Muslims, and that males

were perceived to be more inclined than females to marry non-Muslim women. Lastly, they

found that family connectedness and identification to mainstream Canadian culture both

influenced the participants' openness to engage in interfaith relationships. Family connectedness

was indirectly transmitted through religious affiliation, and stronger identification with

mainstream Canadian culture predicted more openness to interfaith relationships. All three

studies are in line with Hollinghead's (1950) findings, which supports homogamy. Moreover, the

findings in the three studies propose that religion is a factor moderating partner preference. More

specifically the more religious the participants were, the less open they were to interfaith intimate

relationships.

iii.   Social Circle

However, religion is not the only factor that interacts with partner selection preference and

maintaining a relationship. Another factor that has been raised by researchers is social pressure

(including family and friends) (Spencer & Felmlee, 1992; Parks, 2007; Sinclair & Wright, 2009;

Sinclair, Hood, & Wright, 2014). Several theoretical concepts explain how social networks

influence couples in maintaining their relationship (or not): (i) Heider (1958) introduced the

balance theory—people that are in a close relationship (e.g., family members) tend to have

similar attitudes towards others. This means that relationships between two people that is

supported by a significant other (e.g., friend or family) are more likely to be successful. Recently

Felmlee (2003), found that if a person in a dyad liked a third person, the other person would also like him or her; otherwise, the situation would be relatively unstable. This suggests that an individual might be more motivated to be in a relationship with a significant other, if for example, his or her family members also liked that person. (ii) According to Lewis (1973) *couple identity* is formed by the reaction that significant others, such as family and friends, have to that relationship. In order for the relationship between the couple to survive, they must be treated as a couple—forming the couple-identity—otherwise, the couple's relationship will struggle to survive. Moreover, according to the *uncertainty reduction theory* (Berger, 1987) positive feedback from the social network will reinforce the relationship of the couple. (iii) Communicating with family members and friends will provide third-party observational data about the partner, which reduces uncertainty about that person.

Moreover, Jin and Oh (2010) found that individuals' perceptions were in line with the proposition that the amount of network support for romantic relationships (i.e., support from friends and family) is closely associated with better quality relationships. Further, the results suggest that participants from the United States are more likely, than those from South Korea, to get involved in their social networks and to obtain more positive reactions from them about their romantic relationships. The perceived importance of social networks on romantic relationships was also significantly higher for Americans than for Koreans. This was mainly because the Korean participants did not involve their social circle (family and friends) in their romantic relationship as much as the American participants did. Finally, these results show that while cultural pressures are important for understanding why individuals engage in intimate relationships, a gap remains concerning the social and cultural pressures impacting upon interfaith and intercultural relationships. Moreover, it further appears that there are interpersonal

cultural differences (e.g., level of parental involvement in romantic relationships) relating to intimate relationships across cultures.

Discrepancies between Universal Rights and Cultural and Religious Laws

While there may be several causes that explain why individuals prefer homogamous and endogamous partner selection, a discrepancy exists between religious law, which supports homogamous relationships, and universal human rights. Although some religious laws dictate that individuals cannot marry outside of their own faith, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16, states that individuals have the right to engage in marital relationships irrespective of race, nationality or religion.

"(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

Ironically, despite the Human Rights article, anti-miscegenation laws are practiced in various parts of the world to this day (Novkov, 2008). Additionally, in some countries that are enduring a state of conflict, such as Israel, marrying a person from a hostile country is a federal offence which has serious consequences, such as losing one's citizenship rights, and even imprisonment. Furthermore, it should also be noted that some places in the world, such as Jordon, Iran, Pakistan, India, Palestine (Gaza), Israel (among the Muslim, Arab and Bedouin communities) and Saudi

Arabia, may punish those who attempt to engage in relationships that are unorthodox and this may be as serious as death penalties in very extreme cases (Ruggi, 1998; Madek, 2005; *The Signal*, 2013).

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties and obstacles faced by interfaith and cross-cultural couples, an attitude shift may be observed within the general population. For example, in accordance to the diminishing of anti-miscegenation laws in most countries (Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1, 1967; Novkov, 2008), interfaith and cross-cultural marriages continue to exist (Goli, Singh, Sekher, 2013; Heard, Khoo & Birrell, 2009; Lara & Onedera, 2007; Clark, 2006).

While interfaith and cross-cultural marriages continue to rise, heterogamous couples still face discrimination as a result of their relationship (e.g., ostracism, rejection from family). Thus, a significant amount of change is needed in order for heterogamous couples to be treated as equally as homogamous couples. Unlike other relationships, interfaith and cross-cultural relationships are not only affected by the authorities overruling their right to choose their life partner, but most cultures generally tend to disdain the notion of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships (Hollingshead, 1950; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Leeman, 2009; Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995; Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Joyner & Koa, 2005). Due to the social and religious barriers that heterogamous couples may face, they may consequently be more prone to emotional and psychological distress. For example, a study by Gaines and Brennan (2001) found that heterogamous couples are more likely to break up as compared to homogamous couples. As a result of the increased amount of social pressures that heterogamous couples face, a systematic shift towards a more tolerant society and approach towards interfaith and cross-cultural married couples is needed.

Immigration, Assimilation, Acculturation and Cross-cultural and Interfaith Relationships

One other substantial factor relating to interfaith and cross-cultural long-term intimate

relationships is immigration. The higher influx of immigration due to globalization has led to

more cross-cultural and interfaith marriages (see Vasquez, 2014; Chiswick & Houseworth, 2011;

Qian & Lichter, 2001; Lee & Bean, 2004; Waters, 2000; Coleman, 1994). Accordingly, there are

primarily two possible consequences of these interfaith and cross-cultural marriages: *assimilation*

and *acculturation*. *Assimilation* refers to the merging of cultural traits between two or more

distinct backgrounds (Hamermesh & Trejo, 2013). Additionally, according to Berry (2005)

assimilation is defined as acquiring a new culture and giving up the old. *Acculturation* is the

process of members from one group adopting beliefs and behaviours of others from another

group (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Bossard (1939) states that mixed

marriages are an index of the assimilation process of the migrants and of the social distance

between groups living in the area. Similarly, according to Gordon (1964), cross-cultural marriage

notably leads to assimilation, where members of a minority group lose their distinctiveness, such

as their ethnic and religious identities, and assimilate into the majority culture by intermarrying

within the dominant group. Finally, Root (2001) suggests that in cases where intermarriage

occurs between immigrants and in-born citizens, both partners are affected by the interfaith and

cross-cultural relationship–the one belonging to the minority group as well as the one belonging

to the dominant group. Falicov (1995) termed this phenomenon 'mutual acculturation'. In some

cases, assimilations and acculturation may negatively influence individuals on an emotional and

psychological level. A study by Khan (1998) found that a partner who leaves his or her own

culture and environment will feel that his or her identity is challenged and threatened in the new

environment. This will cause distress to both the individual and the interfaith and cross-cultural relationship.

It should be noted that the majority of studies on intermarriage have been conducted in higher influx immigration countries such as the United States (see Lieberson & Waters, 1988; Pagnini & Morgan, 1990; Qian & Lichter, 2001; Rosenfeld, 2002), Australia (see Jones & Luijkx, 1996; Meng & Gregory, 2005) and Canada (see Kalbach, 2002; Tzeng, 2000; Haji, Lalonde, Durbin, & Naveh-Benjimin, 2011; Cila & Lalonde, 2013). Subsequently, limited research has been conducted in countries with lower immigration and/or with non-Western political and historical state of affairs, such as Israel. Thus, the impact of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships in many countries is unknown.

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

The aim of this thesis is to study the perceived interrelation between religious teachings, cultural tradition and social pressure and attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships, and choice of long-term partner. Further, the thesis investigates the attitudes towards the complex notion of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships among the three main monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The thesis also studies interfaith and cross-cultural marriages in a conflict-ridden area—Israel, discussing the relation of a volatile environmental status and historical context on attitudes towards such intimate relationships. Finally, the study examines intermarried couples and investigates the factors that relate to the maintenance of their relationship in terms of inhibiting and facilitating factors that relate to their ongoing relationship.

Four studies were carried out to explore the subject addressed. The first study was conducted to examine the relationship between religious affiliation and attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith marriages. The study was conducted among university students who were to some degree affiliated to one of the following faiths: Islam, Christianity and Judaism. This thesis aims to identify a relation between religious affiliation and the likelihood of an individual engaging in a cross-cultural or interfaith relationship. This was investigated through interviewing the participants about their demographic background, followed by their choice of partners, and the way they approach the matter of choosing a life partner (or a person to date). There is a lack of knowledge in the area of religion and interfaith relationships on how individuals perceive the three monotheistic religions, and how religious teaching affects their lifestyle, if at all. This study will add an important dimension to the understanding of faith and interpersonal relationships.

The second paper was an extension of the first one and used the same data collected; however, it examined the relation between social network (both parental and peer) pressure regarding interfaith and cross-cultural relationships on the perception of their children regarding such relationships. Although research has been done in the area of the relations between social pressure and interpersonal relationships, religion was not considered as a factor. In this study, religion, culture and social pressure are taken into consideration; this will address the limitations of previous research.

The third study involved examining attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships in a conflict-ridden area—Israel. The study examined the relation between the historical events that have occurred in Palestine/Israel, that is, before and after 1948, and the current political state of affairs on attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith marriages among Jewish Israelis, Christian Palestinians and Muslim Palestinians living in Israel. In this study, another factor was

added, which is the political context of the individual. Interfaith and cross-cultural relationships are most difficult to initiate and maintain between individuals who are in a state of conflict with one another. However, there are individuals who choose to engage in a cross-cultural and interfaith relationship with someone with whom their nation or religion is in conflict. This study will add to the knowledge of how this may transpire and what factors may be involved in such a relationship.

Lastly, the fourth paper examines married interfaith and cross-cultural couples at different timelines of their marriage. The participants interviewed were all in an interfaith and cross-cultural marriage. The importance of this study is to understand what underlies these relationships and how they are maintained. It will also raise questions as to the sorts of difficulties that interfaith and cross-cultural couples may encounter and how they can or cannot be dealt with.

Three of the four studies were conducted in Australia and one in Israel. The aim of the study held in Israel was to investigate the relation of an ongoing volatile state and major historical conflict and attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural selection of a long-term partner. It was anticipated that the findings in Israel would be more polarized than the ones collected in Australia because of this conflict-status.

Finally, in the light of the above research, which suggests that religious affiliation and cultural expectations inhibit interfaith marriages, it is expected that attitudes towards such relationships would be restrictive. Thus, this thesis will add essential knowledge to the study of cross-cultural and interfaith, interpersonal relationships—an aspect that has been relatively neglected by researchers. It is crucial to understand the potential barriers and sources of conflict that arise from

such relationships, as well as study factors that may inhibit or facilitate interfaith and cross-

cultural relationships and social cohesion.

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METHODOLOGY – RESEARCH DESIGN

The current thesis uses qualitative research methods as a tool to collect and analyze the data. More specifically, semi-structured interviews were used to access perceptions and attitudes of the participants. By using semi-interviews, the participants are able to authentically disclose and uncover information that might otherwise be lost. Additionally, interviewing provides insight into the participant's subjective experience, since the interviewer is guided by the subjective perception of the interviewee. This can uncover how certain factors and experiences such as relationships, family and lifestyle may interact with the participant's attitudes, thoughts and emotions (Seidman, 2012; Weiss, 1994). Further, a semi-structured interview allowed the participant to clarify and elaborate their responses (using follow up questions). Finally, using a more manipulating tool to collect the data may restrict the participant to a set of answers to choose from, hence providing them with less space for authentic expression (Seidman, 2012; Weiss, 1994).

Three studies were conducted throughout the thesis (producing four reports). The first study recruited participants from a university participation pool. The students enrolled to the study were first year psychology students that participated for course credit. In the second study, an advertisement with a brief description of the study and requirements of the participant (e.g., participation is voluntary and not paid, and that the interview may take up to an hour) was posted at a university campus in Israel, and invited participants to join in the study. And finally, for the third study recruitment of participants was achieved by uploading a Facebook post with brief information on the study as well as an invitation open to couples who are in an interfaith or cross-cultural marriage to contact the researcher.

In order to provide the participants with the most comfortable conditions to enable them to easily

disclose information about themselves, their perceptions, and their attitudes, the following factors

were considered. Firstly, the interviews were conducted in the mother tongue language of the

interviewees[1] (languages used were: Hebrew, English and Arabic), this was provided in order to

enable the participants to express themselves as best as possible. Secondly, the participants were

asked to sign an information and consent form. This provided them with a brief description of the

study, as well as a statement, which reassured the participants that although some of the

information disclosed by them may be used in published manuscripts, any information used will

be anonymous and de-identified. Further, the participants were reassured that the participation in

the study was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time without having to give a

reason and without consequence.

The interviews used semi-structured interviews that were developed from a study conducted on

the subject of parental attitudes towards bi-lingual, peace-promoting schools in a conflict-ridden

area (Yahya, Bekerman, Sagy, & Boag, 2012). Sample questions will be provided throughout the

thesis accordingly to the studies involved. For data collecting purposes, all the interviews were

recorded with the permission of the participant.

The collected data were transcribed and analyzed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke,

2006; Boyatzis, 1998). Further the data were divided into reoccurring main themes using

Typological Analysis in order to be easily compared (Merriam, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Subsequently, and in order to prevent discrepancies, both authors examined the data separately

and a final analysis was created after reaching full consensus on the themes, categories and

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[1] N.B. Even though there was a variety of participants from different cultural backgrounds their mother tongue

typologies found. Finally, example responses were provided to the reader as evidence to support

the author's analysis.

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CHAPTER II:

Till Faith Do Us Part…: The Relation between Religious Affiliation & Attitudes towards Cross-Cultural & Interfaith Dating & Marriage

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the relationship between religious and/or cultural affiliation and attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith relationships, among university students in Australia. The questions of interest were: (a) what is the relationship between the three monotheistic religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam and attitudes towards interfaith dating and marriages, and; (b) how do the participants perceive their religious backgrounds to impact upon their decisions to enter or avoid cross-cultural and interfaith relationships? Using semi-structured interviews, qualitative data were gathered from fifty-seven students (42 females, 15 males, age $M = 21.9$, SD $= 8.8$). The findings suggest that university students in Australia (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) are generally disinclined to engage in a cross-cultural or interfaith relationship. Only a minority of the participants in the present study were open to engaging in a cross-cultural and interfaith relationship, provided that the partner was neither too religious nor demanded for the participants to change in any way. However, none of these participants were actively searching for a partner of a different culture or faith. Lastly, there was a clear reluctance by non-Muslim participants to be with a Muslim partner.

Patterns of cross-cultural and interfaith relationships (i.e., couples of different cultural backgrounds and religious faiths) have become more common in recent years (Hollingshead, 1950; Thomas, 1951; Locke, Sabagh & Thomes, 1957; Joyner and Kao, 2005; Clark, 2006; Lara & Onedera 2007; Khoo, Birrell & Heard 2009; Research Center Report, 2010; Lanzieri, 2011; Goli, Singh & Sekher, 2013). Nevertheless, even though cross-cultural and interfaith relationships have existed for centuries and have increased in number, they still characterize only a very small percentage of marriages (Reiter, Krause, Stirlen, 2005; Bradford, Drzewiecka, & Chitgopekar, 2003). Furthermore, given our increasingly multicultural world it is surprising that only a small number of people engage in such relationships, thus raising important questions about people's attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith relationships, and how these perceptions may modulate engagement in cross-cultural and/or interfaith relationships.

However, both culture and religion can be difficult to define. As Cohen (2009) notes, cultures are complex and one can identify "multiple constituents of culture, such as material culture (methods by which people share goods, services, technology), subjective culture (ideas and knowledge shared in a group), and social culture (shared rules of social behaviour, institutions)" (p. 195). In the present study, culture is defined in terms of people practicing the same traditions (rather than sharing the same nationality or living in the same country) that have been practiced by generations before them and their society around them. Religion, on the other hand, is sometimes categorised as a subset of culture (Cohen, 2009; Geertz, 1973). However, the defining feature of religion involves a spiritual element: "Religions are concerned with scriptural traditions and rituals, with which all members of a community engage, in order to give themselves a sense of identity, history, moral values and spirituality" (Dixon, 2005, p. 456). The present study was interested in the three monotheistic faiths; Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriage are actively discouraged by certain cultures and religions (Leeman, 2009; Pettys & Balgopal, 1998; Rosenthal, Ranieri & Klimidis, 1996) and hence may decrease the likelihood of such relationships occurring with people that are highly affiliated with their culture and/or religion. For instance, Catholic Christianity and Judaism are examples of faiths that strictly forbid interfaith marriage. On the other hand, in Islam, *men* are permitted to marry a non-Muslim, provided she is a chaste Christian or Jewish (also a *magi* [fire worshipers] according to Shi'ahs[2]) woman (Nasir, 2009). Consequently, one would expect to find that a stronger affiliation to a religion and/or culture that forbids interfaith and cross-cultural marriages will result in a reluctance to engage in such relationships. Accordingly, understanding these attitudes and perceptions towards cross-cultural and interfaith relationships adds an essential dimension to the study of interpersonal relationships, an aspect that has been relatively neglected by researchers. With increasing globalization and trends towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships there is greater need for understanding potential barriers and sources of conflict as well as factors that may facilitate such relationships and social cohesion.

Factors Involved in Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Relationships

Earlier research has shown that interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriages involve a marginal section of relationships that occur in diverse social settings. While it is assumed that in-group and similarity preference generally prevails (Brown, McNatt, & Cooper, 2003; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Osbeck & Moghaddam, 1997) interfaith and cross-cultural relationships do occur and some studies have been devoted to answering the questions as to *how* and *why* this may transpire. For example, the *racial motivation theory* (Richard, Yankee & Bletzer, 1997) proposes

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[2] *Shi'ah* is one of the two main branches of Islam, the other is *Sunni*.

that people are attracted by mysteriousness and strangeness in others of a different race (who are also usually of a different cultural background). However, an early approach by Hollingshead (1950) proposes that there are in fact two theories that postulate the choice of a partner; *homogamy*, which refers to "like attract like" (p. 619) and *heterogamy*, which suggests "opposites attract each other" (p. 619). Hollingshead (1950) found support for the theory of homogamy as opposed to heterogamy when race, age, religion, ethnic origin, and class were examined, suggesting that racial motivation theory is not generally supported.

Extant literature further suggests that both attending a multicultural school and the presence of diversity within parental circle of friends are predictors of cross-cultural and/or interfaith relationships (Bradford, Drzewiecka & Chitgopekar, 2003; Bekerman & Maoz, 2005). However, this is true only in certain western multicultural countries (e.g., U.S. and Australia) but less so in non-western and relatively homogenous cultural places in the world (e.g., Middle East) (Reich, Ramos & Jaipal, 2000; Leeman, 2009). Furthermore, according to the *contact hypothesis* (Bekerman, 2009), contact conditions between people of different cultural backgrounds will elicit empathic acceptance and mutual respect toward one another. Using this hypothesis as a theoretical foundation, a study by Martin et al. (2003) investigated whether attitudes and tendency towards cross-cultural dating have changed in recent years. Participants (mostly students) took part in a survey that studied the relationships between individual variables (gender, age), contextual factors (diversity of neighbourhood, diversity of friendship and acquaintance networks, and family experience with intercultural dating) and intercultural dating. The results suggested that respondents who (i) grew up in multicultural neighbourhoods, (ii) had diverse acquaintance and friendship connections, and (iii) whose family members also engage in cross-cultural dating patterns, were most likely to engage in intercultural dating. Such findings indicate

that intercultural relationships may either be facilitated or inhibited by contemporary as well as historical societal structures. Another important finding was that while some people may not be attracted to each other for various personal reasons, it is no coincidence that the group that Caucasian people have the least experience with (African Americans) is the group that has been most negatively portrayed in the media and in popular culture (Dixon, 2005; Matabane & Merritt, 1996). Similarly, Clark and Marisol (1999) studied cross-cultural relationships amongst university students from California and found a strong correlation between friendship and 'romance' relationship patterns; participants who had more culturally diverse friendships were more likely to engage in cross-cultural and interfaith relationships, more than once in a lifetime. In both studies the environmental diversity and closeness to people from other cultural backgrounds (and faiths) elicited interfaith and cross-cultural dating patterns. Lastly, people with a network of diverse ethnic backgrounds are more likely to meet a potential cross-cultural partner whereas those who have networks from the same cultural background may have fewer opportunities and encounter barriers to meeting possible cross-cultural partners (for instance, only being invited to events where everyone shares the same cultural background).

On the other hand, Martin et al. (2003), studied interfaith and cross-cultural relationships in the United States and compared their findings with a study by Philip Lampe (1981) from about twenty years earlier. They found that despite research suggesting that attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural marriages have improved and that there is an increase in the number of such dating and marriage patterns, such relationships are especially low in comparison to former years. According to Blackwell and Litcher (2004), people become more concerned regarding the race of their partners (amongst other things) when it comes to *serious* relationships (i.e., cohabitation and marriage). Moreover, they are less likely to choose to engage in a cross-cultural relationship if a

serious relationship is intended, which may involve starting a family and sharing each other's families, circle of friends, culture etc. This indicates that being in a cross-cultural relationship may create difficulties that would not exist otherwise in the couple's relationship (Blackwell & Litcher, 2000; Blackwell & Litcher, 2004). Brown et al. (2003) reported that stronger cultural identity, collectivism and social network approval were all positively correlated with same-group partner preference among Jewish students (as opposed to cross-cultural/interfaith relationships). His research consisted of two studies; the first study, involved Jewish students answering questions concerning in-group identity and their tendencies towards engaging in a relationship with a Jewish or a non-Jewish partner. The results showed that the Jewish students had a strong tendency to date Jewish rather than non-Jewish partners. The second study included both White Jewish and White non-Jewish students. Social network approval and collectivism positively predicted preferences among Jewish students (such that Jewish students exposed to higher collectivism and social network approval had a greater preference for other Jewish partners), while social network approval and similarity positively predicted preferences among non-Jewish students (such that non-Jewish participants demonstrated preference to partners that were similar to them and experienced social network approval for that relationship).

Religion and Interfaith Marriage

Another major factor that may hinder intercultural and interfaith relationships is the individual's religious affiliation (or lack thereof). Several studies have found that religious differences seem to significantly affect whether a person engages in a cross-cultural or interfaith relationship (Leeman, 2009; Naser, 2009; Hayes, 2002; Thomas, 1951). It is however difficult to disentangle religion from cultural background as they usually come 'hand in hand'. Nevertheless, two aspects

of religiosity relevant to understand factors influencing interfaith relationships can be discerned: *religious teachings* and *cultural tradition*. The religious teachings consist of written law that can be found in the holy books (Old Testament [*Tanach*], Bible, Qur'an) and other spoken/written religious law [e.g., in Islam, *hadith* and in Judaism *khazal*]. Alternatively, cultural tradition concerns more with cultural identity, traditions, and beliefs about "correct" or acceptable actions, customs etc. that were created by the people of that culture. Some cultures have evolved with time and yet others remain to follow the same traditions as they did decades or even centuries ago. While there are of course many religious traditions, this study focuses upon Judaism, Christianity and Islam. To date, no previous studies have compared the three monotheistic religions to one another or studied the relationship between those religious and cultural teachings, and attitudes towards interfaith marriages.

Judaism

Judaism does not officially and legally approve of interfaith marriage, but it is very common nevertheless mostly amongst secular Jews. The Old Testament states:

> *You shall not intermarry with them (the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites), giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly…"* (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

Moreover, from a more cultural perspective, within the traditional Yiddish[3] day-to-day language, one may find negative connotations and disapproving attitudes towards interfaith marriage. An example showing how strongly Jews are opposed to the idea of interfaith marriage is the term *Shiksa* (derived from the Hebrew roots *Shin-Qof-Tzadei*, meaning loathsome or abomination), which is most commonly used to refer to a non-Jewish *woman* who is dating a Jewish man (the masculine term is *Shkutz* which usually refers to an *anti-Semitic* man). It should be noted that unlike other religions (e.g., Islam or Christianity), the child's religious belief in Judaism is carried maternally, in contradistinction to Islam where the child's religious belief is carried paternally and in Christianity where it is communed according to baptism. Moreover, online information written by individuals from the Jewish community illustrates condemnation of interfaith marriage amongst the Jewish communities. Reading through Jewish forums on intermarriage, one may come across the following extreme opinions that vividly demonstrate how serious many Jews perceive the matter of interfaith marriage: "Intermarriage is accomplishing what Hitler could not: the destruction of the Jewish people…" and referring to intermarriage as, "the second silent holocaust." (JewFAQ website, 2013). Thus, in Judaism there are both official teachings and cultural attitudes acting to inhibit interfaith relationships, even if such relationships are occurring nevertheless.

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[3] A High German language of Ashkenazi Jewish origin, spoken throughout the world.

Christianity

Christianity is made up of many branches; some Christian branches forbid interfaith marriage and others endorse it. The Roman Catholic Church does not approve of intermarriage between Catholics and non-Christians but may consider marriage of a Christian to a baptized non-Catholic (Ata, 2005; Mol, 1970). This belief is supported by the following passage:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Corinthians 6: 14-16)[4].

However, other branches of Christianity such as the progressive or liberal Christians believe that each individual has the right to marry anyone he or she chooses as long as the Christian keeps believing in his/her way (Ata, 2005; Mol, 1970). This particular belief is supported by this passage:

To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made

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[4] Also see Deuteronomy 7:3-4 mentioned in the Judaism section.

holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they

are holy (1 Corinthians 7: 12-14).

Thus, in Christianity there are both official teachings and traditional attitudes acting to inhibit interfaith relationships, but also alternative interpretations which may be more tolerant of such relationships.

Islam

In Islam the religious rules towards men and women differ. Under the *Shari'ah*[5] and all modern Islamic laws, both for *Sunni*[6] and *Shi'ah*, a marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man is totally null and void—it is not recognized as a marriage at all, despite whatever valid solemnization may have taken place regarding it within a non-Muslim country. The man would have had to convert to Islam at the time of the contract if it were to be valid under Islamic Law (Nasir, 2009; Rahman, 1980):

> *And give not (your daughters) in marriage to Al-Mushrikoon till they believe (in Allah*
>
> *Alone) and verily, a believing slave is better than a (free) Mushrik (idolater), even though*
>
> *he pleases you. Those (Al-Mushrikoon) invite you to the Fire, but Allah invites (you) to*
>
> *Paradise and forgiveness by His Leave, and makes His Ayaat (proofs, evidences, verses,*
>
> *lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) clear to mankind that they may remember* (al-Baqarah, 2:
>
> 221).

[5] Shari'ah is the religious law of Islam.
[6] *Sunni* is one of the two main branches of Islam, the other is *Shi'ah*.

For a man however, the rules are different. He may enter into a marriage with a non-Muslim woman, provided she is a Christian or a Jew, or, according to the Shi'ahs, a *Magi* (fire-worshiper) (Nasir, 2009):

Do not marry unbelieving women until they believe. A slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though if she attracts you. And do not marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe. A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though if he attracts you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the fire but Allah beckons by His grace to the garden (of bliss) and forgiveness, and makes His signs clear to mankind; that they may receive admonition (al-Baqarah, 221).

However, it should be noted that some modern Islamic scholars and commentators dispute these rules, and believe that such actions are not precluded by Islamic law. Muslim women, they contend, should have marital choice similar to that of their male counterparts (Leeman, 2009).

Under Islamic law a Muslim man who married a Christian or Jewish woman has a religious obligation to honour and respect both Christianity and Judaism. Thus the woman's religious beliefs and rights are not in jeopardy through the marriage, because she would be free to maintain and practice her religion as a Christian or Jew. Conversely, a Christian or Jewish man who marries a Muslim woman is not under such an obligation within his own faith. Accordingly, allowing a Muslim woman to marry a Christian or Jewish man may expose her religious beliefs

and rights to jeopardy. Furthermore, nationality is most decidedly not the issue here; it is purely

and simply that of religion (Nasir, 2009). The justification for this view is the following: a)

Preservation of the Muslim community. If Muslim women marry outside the Muslim community

this would hinder the growth of the Muslim community as a whole; b) *The father establishes*

religion for his children. In most customs women marry into a family. Therefore, the father's

faiths and beliefs are passed on over the children; c) *Loss of rights that Muslim women are given*

after marriage. These rights include, practicing her faith, a *Mahr*[7], keeping her name after

marriage, retaining her earning and more; d) *Implications for family law*. This is of particular

significance in regards to interfaith marriages as it includes matters of divorce, child custody, and

inheritance (Goatmilk website, 2013). Thus, in Islam there are both official teachings and cultural

attitudes acting to inhibit interfaith relationships especially towards women and to a certain

extend towards men.

AIM OF THE STUDY

As the above demonstrates, there are both religious and cultural factors associated with the three

major monotheistic religions that may act to inhibit the possibility of cross-cultural and interfaith

relationships, although they differ in their degree of tolerance. The broad aim of this study was to

explore and examine the relationship between religion and culture associated with Judaism,

Christianity and Islam and attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith relationships. The

specific questions of interest were: (a) what is the relationship between the affiliation (or lack

thereof) to one of the three monotheistic religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam and attitudes

towards interfaith dating and marriages? (b) how do the participants perceive their religious

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[7] An amount of money paid by the groom to the bride, at the time of marriage, which she can spend as she wishes.

backgrounds to impact upon their decisions to enter or avoid cross-cultural and interfaith relationships. In light of the above research that finds that religious teachings and cultural expectations inhibit interfaith marriages, it is expected that attitudes towards such relationships would be restrictive.

METHOD

Participants

The interviewees were first year psychology students studying at a university in Sydney, Australia participating for course credit. Fifty-seven students participated in the current study (42 females, 15 males) with the age range of 18-62 ($M = 21.9$, $SD = 8.8$). Participants of the following cultural backgrounds partook in the study: Middle Eastern (15), Indian (2), American (7), South African (7), Asian (3) and white Australian (23). Their faiths included Christians (32), Muslims (13), Jews (12).

Procedure

The present study used a qualitative method in order to collect and analyse data. However, while qualitative research is typically used for theory-building, there is no *a priori* argument for preventing qualitative findings being used for both comparison with previous findings and studying perceived meaning. Interviewing was used to access the observations and perception of others and uncover themes and issues that might otherwise be difficult to assess (Weiss, 1994). Interviewing can also provide insight into the individual's subjective life since the interviewer is guided by the subjective perception of the interviewee. Listening to the interviewee's perspective

can reveal the effect that certain experiences have had on an individual's thoughts and feelings and the interview may also reveal the significance that the interviewee attributes to relationships, family and work.

Given that quantitative research methods can manipulate the participants' answers through allocating pre-conceived responses, such responses may not encompass all the reactions the participant might have towards the phenomenon and hence the researcher would be neglecting and losing essential information that could have been provided (Weiss, 1994). To avoid this, the current study allowed participants to choose which information to provide via a semi-structured interview to investigate participants' perceptions and attitudes, employing both open-ended questions and probing to enhance and clarify the participants' responses.

The interview questions were developed following a study conducted on the subject of parental attitudes towards bi-lingual, peace-promoting schools in a conflict-ridden area (Yahya, Bekerman, Sagy & Boag, 2012). The questions were taken from a larger study and related to biographic and demographic information of the participant as well as examining issues relating to experience with, and attitudes towards, cross-cultural and interfaith relationships (both friendly and romantic). The interview studied the following topics about the students: (i) biographic and demographic information (example question: *Could you please tell me a bit about yourself, where you were born, what school you went to, how were you raised? …And how about today, could you tell me a bit more about yourself?*); (ii) Religious affiliation (Example question: *Could you please describe yourself in terms of belief and cultural background? What type of traditions do you practice that might relate you to a specific group, culture or belief*); (iii) the degree of affiliation (Example questions: *"How do you practice your religion if at all? "What kind of things might you have done or do that you think may be seen as not in line with the religion that*

you belong to?"; (iv) Attitudes towards cross–cultural and interfaith friendships and dating (Example questions: *"Throughout your life have you had any friends/interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds and/or religions? If so, please elaborate.", "Have you ever thought about being in a cross-cultural or interfaith relationship, i.e., with someone from a different culture or different faith?", "Is it something you would consider before choosing somebody to date?",* and; (v) The relation between culture vs. religion and attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith dating and marriages (Example questions, *Could you try to point out why you would rather not engage in an interfaith and/or cross-cultural relationship? How do you think your religious belief and cultural background affect your attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith relationships, if at all?*). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded for the purpose of analysis (all of the interviews were conducted in English). The transcribed interviews were then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). Typological analysis was also employed (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984; Merriam, 2009) by dividing the main recurring themes into a number of categories that were easily comparable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The collected data were then compared according to the four axes presented in the findings section. To ensure reliability and validity, issues such as accurate reporting, transparency of the research process, and low-inference descriptors (insertion of multiple examples of the primary data in the report) were addressed (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984; Merriam, 2009). Both authors repeatedly scanned the interviews and identified major themes that they both agreed on in order to achieve greater validity of the results, and the two authors reached full consensus on the themes, categories, and typologies.

FINDINGS

The findings are described in terms of four axes: (i) Religious and cultural affiliation; (ii) attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith friendships; (iii) culture versus religion, and; (iv) attitudes towards Muslim partners (an unexpected finding).

(i) **Religious and Cultural Affiliation**

There was a wide spectrum of how affiliated the participants perceived themselves with regard to their religion and culture. Thirty-six participants described themselves as religious:

> "*Being Roman Catholic is pretty important and generally most Italian households I know, the grandparents are a lot more religious and it kind of slides down from there… so yeah my grandparents were, all four of them were pretty religious and it's pretty strong in the Italian culture, even when you go over there a lot of the old uncles and aunties and that kind of thing, we still have their pictures up on the wall and you go to church as much as you can and all that kind of thing. But my parents are really open minded, I still really appreciate the religion and I still really admire it and I still like to go to church if ever we have time, because it gets busy but on the main holidays we go and it's really a main part of my life.*" [F17]

Fifteen participants, however, were more traditional rather than religious, i.e., they lived in a secular manner (little to no religious practice) but engaged in several traditional practices:

"We're a traditional family rather than religious, you go to Shul (synagogue) and the high holidays and 'Chagim' (Hebrew word for religious holidays) and things like that and you have Friday night dinners and keep some of fasts like Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and things like that but don't really keep Shabbat, or kosher things like that." [F22]

Alternatively, eight other participants consider themselves spiritual by believing in a God but not religion:

"No I probably consider myself as new age, whatever belief people have is what they have. I don't believe that being Muslim or being catholic is right. I just believe there is a higher power and that I can contact or be with him whether I am sitting in a church, on the toilet, it doesn't matter. I don't believe I have to go to a house of worship." [F43]

(ii) **Attitudes towards Cross-Cultural and Interfaith Friendships**

In general, all the participants seem to be open to 'friendly' relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds and faiths, i.e., they would make contact with people from different cultural backgrounds at school, work, university or any other public, social place where they had the opportunity to interact with a person of a different cultural background or faith. They were mainly intrigued by the differences between their cultural background and religion and those of others. A European participant said:

Yes, it's interesting and there are so many cultures…I feel so lucky. I have friends in Spain that say, 'well I was born in Spain, I'll live in Spain and I'll die in Spain. I was born a Catholic, I'll live a Catholic, I'll die a Catholic.' I find that boring and not interesting, you have get to know different things, you have to get to know different cultures to understand if yours is better or worse. [F26]

Similarly, an Australian participant said:

I really value them (friends of different cultures) *because it's refreshing. Sometimes on the coast is probably not as multi-cultural as say in Sydney in certain areas. You can sort of get stuck in an almost Australian kind of cultural. It's really refreshing coming down and having people with different ideas and understandings of how they sort of get on with things.* [F16]

Another Australian participant added:

Well, in [a regional part of Australia]… *it's not very cultural (culturally diverse) at all, it's lot of regional families that have lived there for a long time but they didn't discriminate against anyone…they would accept students from any background there but there wasn't like any representation of Islamic religions or Judaism, it was just kind of different branches of Christianity. There was a handful of Hindu students...That's about it.* [F28]

The findings however show that not all of the participants were brought up in a multicultural society or had interacted with people from different background throughout their lifetime until entering university. Thirty-three participants went to a school or worked at a place with multicultural individuals, whereas twenty-four were raised in a very homogenous environment. These individuals who were raised in a homogenous environment did not have any relations with people from other backgrounds; e.g., Australians that were brought up at a primarily White, Christian society or Arabs that were brought up in an Arab community.

Being brought up in a homogenous group was especially true amongst the Jewish and Arab participants. A Jewish female stated:

I went to a Jewish school, so there was little interaction with non-Jews and non-Australian…when I finished school I felt like at school I was very sheltered, like going to a Jewish school and having activities with Jewish friends…I didn't feel I was that exposed to other things and like coming across different people…we all come from kind of similar backgrounds. It's interesting for me now that my eyes have been opened a little bit more. It's interesting to have discussions with people at work about their background. [F15]

Another Jewish female shared:

Our community is very much together…just the Jews. You know people outside but you don't really socialize with them very often…I am a nanny which is good, also for an Israeli

lady, from the Jewish community…I think it's an interesting experience, I find that I'm personally very cautious and very wary especially [at the university], *because it has a lot of…Pro-Palestine* [supporters] *so it's a bit of an issue…Last semester there was this Muslim girl, religious, in one of my tutorials and we spoke about things, there was also tension, there was always, 'did you hear what happen in the news? Israel did this'…. It's like things like that which is a bit uncomfortable but other than that it's fine.'* [F22]

Similarly, 9 of the 15 Arab (both Christian and Muslim Arabs) participants conveyed similar attributes as the Jewish background. A female Christian from an Arabic background said:

…we didn't really associate much with other people (from different cultural backgrounds and religions) because the family is so big that we didn't really need to…and you kind of find that even with friends, it's just easier if it's a similar culture. You see your friends and what they do through different cultures and you're kind of like 'oh, that's very different!' and it's okay if they're your friends, but then you think if that's your partner it could cause problems. [F7]

However, the rest of the Arab participants varied in their level of contact and closeness to people from different cultures and faiths; some merely worked or studied with people from different cultural background and faiths while others had close relationships with them.

There was another group of participants who were raised in a homogenous society, yet, did not separate themselves from other cultures as a matter of choice (as the previous group did) but rather as a result of the population of their residential area, which primarily consisted of white Christian people. An Australian participant said:

I grew up in a very strong Christian environment, church every Sunday, went to the catholic school so that was church, hymns all the time, so maybe I was oblivious to the other religions, but there was definitely no Muslims. I really hadn't heard of that until like, for years even after the 2001 bombings, even then it wasn't very known to me. [F29]

An interesting finding is that the participants who were *both* traditional and religious stated that they would not engage in a cross-cultural relationship or interfaith dating or marriage. For example, a Christian female participant from an Arabic background stated in response to the question *"Would you consider marrying somebody from a different culture or faith?"*, *"Probably not, I'm kind of growing up in a culture, that you kind of want something that is the same anyway."* [F5]. Similarly, a Muslim female from a non-Western background shared:

"First it kind of isn't accepted in our culture that you get married to someone that is outside the community. It does play a role in how a person is raised, their cultural background and their religion. If they are more cultural (traditional) they know the traditions and what's going on so that is who my kids are going to be… if they are not the

same, highly likely that relation is not going to work. Because I am a cultural (traditional)

person so I expect my partner to be the same. [F20]

There were however, exceptions. For instance, a Muslim participant stated:

It wouldn't be easy to marry someone from a different culture especially if their culture is

very different than mine, for example if they spoke a different language, then our families

won't be able to communicate…But traditionally and religiously there shouldn't be a

problem (to marry someone from a different culture but from the same religion); it would

only be about overcoming communication obstacles…But I guess if we were in love that

means we have already overcome them, isn't it? Also, if we were both Arab but of different

culture, for example a (Muslim) Egyptian marrying a (Muslim) Lebanese, there shouldn't

be a problem at all. [M48],

This example is more representative of the Muslim (as well as the Jewish) participants' attitudes

towards cross-cultural marriages of the same religion. Moreover, even participants who

considered themselves traditional but not religious (see example [F22] above) conveyed similar

attitudes towards interfaith marriages. A Catholic Australian from a Western-Oriental

background stated:

Yeah, I never thought about it, my family would probably prefer if I was with someone who

was at least Christian or whatever because I think at the end of the day you bring up your

children in the future in the same way… I've had really close friends and even guy friends that have gotten close to, one was Muslim and it was fine. I couldn't really see myself in a long term relationship with him, but I'm 19 I'm not really thinking about that right now but at the end of the day I would prefer to be someone obviously who has a similar background as me but I wouldn't really say it's a do or die situation. [F17],

Lastly, an international student from a Western background added:

I'd rather her be Christian, most likely someone that goes to the same Church as me just because it works out better… I've gone out with girls who weren't Christians before and it's just … It doesn't work, it's like different values and stuff... [M2]

On the other hand, the group who was non-religious as well as those who followed traditional behaviour were more open to the idea of interfaith marriage, 24 participants out of the 57 stated that they do not really consider cultural background as a factor when they engaged in a relationship. *(Q: Would you consider dating someone from a different culture of faith?)* A Christian Australian female participant shared:

My church wouldn't be very accepting of it because they always said that you should always marry someone of the same faith just so you can stay strong in your faith. I think I'm a pretty strong and determined person, so I don't think it would really affect me too much because I know I am not going to change that. [F13]

Another Christian Australian, dating a Hindu male participant said:

I am not exactly sure because, I didn't know that much about Hindu so I didn't really know what it involved and how that would change me as a Christian, but I know I'd like to think that I'll still remain true to my beliefs and everything and he can stay with his beliefs and it will still work [F13]

Nevertheless, these participants who were open to experiences with interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriage also added that if their partner would be extremely religious that they then would not be interested in the relationship:

The only thing that would stop me is if they were strongly religious and their parents would hate me or if it would be a continual problem…people end up falling in love with someone who is Jewish and they don't mind, but their parents don't like you…it's something you deal with I suppose. I probably wouldn't seek it out if it's something that was going to be a problem. [F23]

Similarly, a Christian Australian female participant said:

If their religion or faith played a big part in their life… that would change the person obviously… say if there were strict catholic… their values and things make them different, their practices too like my Jehovah's witnesses friends always have to go to church I think on Tuesday nights or whatever. , [F25]

To summarize, it appears that in general, within all of the religions, there was little issue with cross-cultural relationships if the partner was of the same faith (unless they were highly religious and traditional and even then it depended on how strict the individual's family and/or society was). However, what was striking about the findings was that for both Muslim and Jewish participants, the degree of affiliation to a religious tradition appeared to have no relationship with attitudes towards interfaith relationships. The Jewish and Muslim participants were generally not open to relationships with people from differing faiths and backgrounds. On the other hand, this finding was not observed with Christian participants, where instead, greater affiliation to Christianity appeared to be associated with less favorable attitudes towards interfaith relationships. Lastly, none of the participants wanted to engage in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship if the partner was extremely religious or traditional because they were not willing to change their belief system or way of life for their partner.

(iii) **Culture vs. Religion**

An interesting finding emerged regarding how the participants perceived their dating preferences and whether they gave more weight to religion or cultural background. The findings indicate that the participants were mainly worried about not having to change their ways of living or act in a way that was contradicting to their belief system (i.e., religion played a bigger role). It also

appears that the participants found it easier to be of the same culture because no change was required, since they usually shared the same language and traditions. An Australian female participant from a Lebanese background stated*(Q: Did you ever consider having a cross-cultural relationship?)*:

Not really, if anything it would have to be pretty similar to my culture just because it makes it easier with the family, like it's too difficult, too different, so like a previous relationship I had was with a Lebanese boy, but like Italian or even Greek, that would be okay. But my family is kind of like, 'find a nice Lebanese boy.' [F7]

Nevertheless, it is quite obvious from the interviews that engaging in a relationship with a person from a different religion was considered more difficult, especially if the partner was extremely religious. Moreover, none of the participants were willing to convert or in any way change their religious (nor non-religious) views for their partner. The participants were either wary of their personal environment's reaction or were anxious of the other's circle of friends and family's response.

(iv) **Attitudes towards Muslim Partners**

One striking finding that emerged involved attitudes towards relationships with Muslim individuals. Some of the non-Muslim participants (both males and females) that were generally open to being in cross-cultural and/or interfaith relationships were reluctant to engage in a

relationship with a Muslim individual specifically. Muslim individuals were perceived as too different and strict with their religious views and also condescending towards women.

A Christian American male participant shared:

I think it would be pretty weird if they were Christians going out with Muslims or something… just because they kind of don't mix too well… they do have similar backgrounds but they probably just don't mix too well, I just find it odd… I've studied a little bit of religion… Usually Muslims are pretty solid about going out with Muslims, Christians are usually... Yeah… Some are pretty solid about going out with Christians and they have their differences in history and what not... [M2]

However, this attitude towards Muslim partners was not restricted to individuals with White or Western backgrounds. For instance, two Christian Australian participants (one male and one female) from different Arabic backgrounds stated similar opinions, The female participant (from a Lebanese background) said:

I think again it depends on the religion, like I think especially Muslim, it would be very hard for me to go out with a Muslim…(Q: Relationships you wouldn't feel comfortable with your future children having) I think the same as for me, I probably wouldn't want them to go out with a Muslim, and religion again would be a big thing…(Q: Is there a reason for that?) I think more or less just their religion practices, especially because we are not

very religious… It's kind of like they are too into it… I guess if they (future children) came across someone nice, you're not going to say no. [F7]

A male participant (from an Egyptian background) said:

I probably wouldn't ever be allowed because catholic Christians and Muslims have had warfare and it's still since my uncle was assassinated he was a priest so it probably would get me kicked out of every family and extended family that I've got here. But then again if she's purely religious then I wouldn't be able to get along with her anyway. [M36]

There is also evidence that participants are concerned with the possibility of criticism and prejudice that they might have to deal with from friends and family if they chose to engage in a relationship with a Muslim partner. A Catholic Australian female participant said:

Without being racist, my grandmother said to me if I ever brought home someone Islamic faith that she would throw me out of the family and my mom was obviously like don't listen to her, ignore that kind of racists views because she is very catholic and very racists towards people from Islamic culture. She (grandmother) has views that Muslim people are terrorists I don't know why, I think it's the fear thing, it's just in the way she was brought up, but it's ridiculous and our family we like had Iranian dates on table and didn't tell her (that they were Iranian) and then she ate them and enjoyed them and then we told her they were Iranian she got upset! [F37]

A main female voice that was dominant in the finding was the fear of suppressive behaviour from Muslim male partners. One female participant shared:

The main one that would come to mind would be fundamentalist maybe Islam, just I don't know enough about the religion just from what I've seen. They sometimes expect women to wear full 'burqas' and things and not allowed to sort of have the same liberties in society as say if they did in Australia that's the only thing I can think of. [F16]

Another responded to the question *How do your parents feel about dating a boy from a different culture?*:

I think if I was to bring home someone who was Middle Eastern or Muslim they would be a bit cautious only from things that they have heard…(Q: Such as?) Like about the men being suppressive of women, we know families where a woman was married to a Muslim family and she was expected to change her religion and start dressing in that way, my parents wouldn't really want that for me, I suppose. [F30]

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relation between the affiliation towards one of the three major monotheistic religions and attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. Of primary note was the finding that only 38% of the participants are open to engaging in interfaith

and/or cross-cultural relationships. Nevertheless, they were not willing to date or marry a person from a different religion or cultural background if that person was extremely religious and/or different from them, i.e., practiced unfamiliar traditions or would ask them to change in any way. The other 62% of the participants were reluctant to engage in any type of serious relationship (that may lead to dating or marriage), other than common acquaintances, with people from different religious faiths. However, some of these participants were open to date partners from different cultural background as long as the chosen partners kept the same faith and practiced the same religious traditions. The findings also demonstrate that both participants that were either reluctant or eager to engage in interfaith marriages were both primarily focused on keeping their way of living and not changing themselves in terms of cultural behaviour. This finding is in line with former research by Hollingshead (1950) that supports the theory of homogamy, where people prefer to engage in serious relationships with others that are similar to them in demographic details. Furthermore, it should be noted that while some of the participants were not opposed to interfaith or cross-cultural relationships most of them were not actively searching for such a relationship, but merely would not reject it if an offer was presented. This finding is not in line with the *racial motivation theory* which states that people are attracted to one another's differences. In our findings the participants were not actively searching for partners of different cultural background or faith, but were merely open to these relationships should the opportunity arise.

However, when the religious affiliation factor is included, the findings show that the Christian participants were the only ones who were open to interfaith dating and marriages while the Jewish and Muslim participants were mostly reluctant. The main reason that both Jewish and Muslim participants would not engage in interfaith dating and marriages was for religious and

cultural reasons. The social and religious pressure and guilt were perceived to be too difficult to endure by the couple engaging in an interfaith relationship. It should further be noted that a Muslim woman who chooses to date or marry a non-Muslim man may face difficult decisions. Aside from the obviously distressing prospect of disobeying a tenet of her faith, she may be disowned by her family and ostracized by the community (Haddad, Smith & Moore, 2006). For a Muslim man on the other hand, interfaith marriage is less complicated, as long as the non-Muslim partner is a chaste Jewish or Christian woman. This situation may create a problem for Muslim women, living in primarily non-Muslim community, where the pool of prospective husbands is small as it is; with Muslim men marrying non-Muslim women the problem is augmented, leaving ever fewer potential partners for the remaining Muslim women (Haddad, Smith & Moore, 2006). From the Jewish point of view, there are two different factors involved in engaging in a cross-cultural and/or interfaith relationship. The first is the religious component, as mothers hold the child's religious identity, therefore women are less likely to engage in a relationship with a non-Jewish man. Secondly, there is a social component whereby Muslims are connected to terrorism directed towards Israel, which is known to be 'home to the Jews' and therefore are also less likely to be chosen as partners.

The finding that the strength of affiliation to religion appeared unrelated to Jewish and Muslim participants' attitudes but did so for the Christian participants deserves comment. More specifically, the Christian participants were more open to cross-cultural and interfaith relationships the less affiliated they were to Christianity. This finding might contradict some past findings that associate religious attitudes with constraint against short-term gain for longer-term benefits (see Luntz, 2009; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). For instance, a study by Luntz (2009), reported that a majority (66%) of non-religious Americans were more inclined towards

immediate gratification, whereas a majority (71%) of religious Americans conveyed a preference towards delayed gratification. In the current case, interfaith dating and marriage might be seen to satisfy immediate gratification, whereas the pressures from family and society may encourage delaying this gratification. Roy, Schumm and Britt (2014) explain this using the "Integrating Time Preference and Social Exchange Theories" (TPEX) Model (pp. 40) whereby personal decisions consider both short- and long-term costs and benefits. In this case, in the case of the Muslim and Jewish participants, individuals may be inclined to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural romantic relationships, however, the longer-term cost of family and societal pressure may outweigh any short-term benefits. In the case of the Christian participants, one possible explanation here is that they were from a university sample from Australia, a relatively secular country whereas the findings from Luntz are from the United States. A similar pattern of findings to those found in the United States are reported from the authors from a similar study within Israel where general religious affiliation is generally much stronger. What this then demonstrates is that environmental factors, and particularly, culture and society, are important influences and need careful consideration. Nevertheless, the relatively young age in the present sample is also a possible factor contributing here (for instance, reflecting a generation shift) and so further research into religion and interfaith relationships should explore this issue further.

Factors Associated With Unwillingness to Engage in Interfaith or Cross-Cultural Relationships

All the Jewish and all the Muslim participants, together with the eighteen Christian participants (56% of the Christian participants altogether) were disinclined to engaging in interfaith dating and marriage. The remaining 34% of the Christian participants were more open to the idea of

interfaith dating, however were not actively searching for a partner of a different faith or cultural background. The main differences between the two groups of participants are the way they were raised and the nature of their social life, and also their affiliation (or lack thereof) to religion. Both the Jewish and Muslim participants, as well as the Christian participants that were averse to interfaith relationships, were brought up in a homogenous environment and were either religious or highly affiliated with their cultural background. This finding is in line with Brown et al.'s study (2003), whereby a strong cultural identity was positively correlated with the preference of a partner of the same cultural identity among Jewish participants. Additionally, some of the participants in the current study had never met a person other than of their own faith or culture until they started studying at university. Accordingly, one of the factors influencing interfaith and cross-cultural relationships appears to be exposure to people from different cultural backgrounds. This is in line with the *contact hypothesis* that when people come into contact with people from different cultural backgrounds under favourable settings (neighbourhood playgrounds, integrated classrooms, intercultural friends of the family), negative attitudes are reduced, positive attitudes are enhanced, and cross-cultural and interfaith friendships and more serious relationships are likely to develop (Sigelman &Welch,1993). Theoretically, this also implicates the significance of contextual variables in investigations of cross-cultural and interfaith dating and may forecast that as a country becomes more diverse and as people have more opportunities for positive cross-cultural and interfaith relationships, cross-cultural and interfaith dating experiences may increase. However, this may be true unless a greater force acts upon it such as religion.

Attitudes toward Muslim Partners

One of the main finding in the study was that 38% of the non-Muslim participants individually (without being asked about it specifically) explicitly declared that they would not engage in any relationship with a Muslim person. Non-Muslims appear to perceive Muslims in a negative light, and in particular, Muslim men are perceived as domineering and would make a woman change her faith and way of behaviour. For instance, women being forced to wear a veil or '*burqa*' were mentioned as examples. This is in line with previous literature (Dixon, 2001; Matabane & Merrit, 1996) that states that people interacted least with those who are negatively portrayed in the media and popular culture. Moreover, as Nasir (2009) notes, there are many "age-old misconceptions" (p. 3) still widely held amongst non-Muslims regarding the place of women in Muslim society and that the relation between men and women in Islamic society is much more complex than usually understood. Nevertheless, the current findings demonstrate that greater education on the matter is required.

Limitations and Further Work

The findings above need to be considered in light of several important issues. The study only examined expressed attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, but cannot predict what these students may actually do should the opportunity for cross-cultural and interfaith relationships arise and parental and social pressure bear upon them. Therefore, further studies should be conducted on actual partners of interfaith and cross-cultural marriages, to see how such relationships transpired and what difficulties (if any) were encountered. Moreover, the issue of causal inference also requires careful scrutiny. While these findings suggest that certain

factors facilitate or inhibit interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, it is not possible to make firm conclusions about issues of directionality and actual causes since the situations that people live in, and the variety of influences, are complex. Furthermore, caution needs to be applied when generalizing since the findings need to be considered in the context of the sample of interviewees included in this study. For instance, there was a relatively small sample of participants representing Christians, Jews and Muslims and not all religious viewpoints within these faiths were assessed. Furthermore, the Australian historical and social background that forms the backdrop of this study is very different from places such as Israel and so future research in an Israeli campus could be a useful comparison point.

Further questions can also be asked about the role of Western media on the perception of Muslim individuals in the western world and beyond, by non-Muslim people. As the findings indicate, knowledge of Muslim individuals by non-Muslims is generally indirect rather than from actual personal encounters with Muslim people. Lastly, there was a larger representation of females than males in this study, although former research in this area shows that there is no consistent difference between sex and attitudes towards interfaith Catholic-Protestant marriages. Nevertheless, whether there are differences between males and females for Jewish and Muslim participants remains to be seen. For instance, since in Judaism the mother carries the religious identity, whereas in Islam the father carries the religious identity, males and females may hold different attitudes based on that religious law.

CONCLUSION

This paper portrays the importance of understanding the relationship between religious and cultural affiliation and cross-cultural and interfaith dating and marriage patterns. Existing

literature has few references on the impact of religion, culture and other factors that may impede or facilitate cross-cultural and interfaith marriages. At least half of the participants were open to considering cross-cultural relationships, but were only open to do so if their partner was neither too religious nor wishing to change them in any way. On the other hand, individuals reluctant to engage in interfaith relationships may still however be open to cross-cultural relationships if their partner practices the same religion (depending on the level of religiosity and affiliation to their cultural background). However, a lack of contact of people from different backgrounds appears to inhibit any engagement with interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. One unexpected finding was that there was widespread prejudice against considering relationships with Muslim people. The evidence suggests that this prejudice may be a result of ignorance, even amongst individuals undertaking tertiary education, regarding other people's religious faiths, cultural traditions and social behaviours. The three monotheistic religions (amongst others) teach love, forgiveness and respect for one another but sadly individuals have forgotten these teachings and are fixed on the differences that the religions propose. This problem could be addressed by teaching cross-cultural and interfaith awareness within all educational institutions and encouraging greater interaction between people of various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

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CHAPTER IV:

"Sadly, Not All Love Affairs Are Meant To Be…" Attitudes towards Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Dating and Marriages in a Conflict Ridden Area

ABSTRACT

This study examined attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships between individuals living in Israel. Jewish Israeli, Christian Palestinian and Muslim Palestinian students were interviewed. Attitudes were consistent with the social networks' prohibitions. Most participants were reluctant to engage in cross-cultural and interfaith relationships and were further disinclined for future generations to engage in such relationships. A main concern was adhering to religious teaching and societal norms, as well as conserving religious and cultural identity.

Previous research has found that the subject of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships is complex and both related to and affected by a variety of factors including religion, culture, tradition, race, sex and the social networks (Hollingshead, 1950; Eggert & Malcolm 1987; Harris & Kalbfleisch; 2000; Moore, 2000; Reich, Ramos & Jaipal 2000; Sprecher, & Felmlee, 2000; Harris& Kalbfleisch, 2000; Moore, 2000; Reich &, Ramos& Jaipal 2000; Le Espiritu, 2001; Felmlee 2006; Leeman, 2009; Etcheverry, Benjamin Le & Hoffman 2012; Yahya & Boag, 2014). *Interfaith* relationships involve couples of different faiths (e.g., a Muslim woman engaging in a relationship with a Christian man) and *cross-cultural* relationships involve couples from different cultural background (e.g., an American man marrying a Chinese woman).

The initiation and/or maintaining of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships is related to the degree of support from the social network and in particular from family and friends (Sprecher & Felmlee, 2000; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Moore, 2000; Reich, Ramos & Jaipal; 2000; Le Espiritu, 2001; Felmlee, 2006; Sprecher, 2011; Etcheverry, Benjamin Le, & Hoffman, 2012; Yahya & Boag, 2014). The findings generally indicate that both support of the relationship and positive feedback from significant others—such as family and friends—is required in order for such relationships to survive. Indeed, the influence of the social network's reaction to the couple provides *couple identity* (Lewis, 1973; Sprecher, 2011; Wright & Sinclair, 2012) and if significant others do not treat the couple as a viable pair, then the couple will struggle maintaining their relationship (Sprecher, & Felmlee, 2000).

To date, however, there is little research examining cross-cultural and interfaith relationships in general and in particular very little research on interfaith and cross-cultural relationships between people *on different sides of a conflict*. Generally, cross-cultural and interfaith relationships face many challenges, especially with respect to social norms and social influence (both of which are

also related to religion). Interfaith and cross-cultural relationships present a norm violation that challenges the predominant societal norm of *endogamy* (to marry or date within one's specific group as required by custom or law). With respect to conflict, Donnan (1990) who compared attitudes toward interfaith marriages in Northern Ireland and Pakistan, found that interfaith marriages are regarded with hostility since they represent threats to the cultural and religious groups standing within the conflict. In fact, some communities are markedly against interfaith relationships to the extent that they may even ostracize or cast out members of their community who engage in such relationships, and in extreme cases even resulting in death (Madek, 2005).

Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Marriages and Antimiscegenation Laws

Many countries across the world have had and/or still maintain prohibitions against interfaith and cross-cultural marriages, sometimes erecting laws of anti-miscegenation to prevent such unities. In Germany in 1935, the National Socialist government enacted anti-miscegenation (opposing marriage or cohabitation between a man and woman of different races) laws. The *Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre* (*Protection of German Blood and German Honor Act*) prohibited marriages and sexual relations between Jewish people and non-Jewish German people. Such relations between the two people were regarded as *Rassenschande* ('race-defilement') and people who violated that law faced serious charges, such as imprisonment or even execution (Gubar, 2006). Similarly, in South Africa interracial marriages were forbidden under the "Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act" that was passed in 1949. Later, in 1950, the "Immortality Act" was passed making any sexual relations with a person of a different race a criminal offence. While these two Acts were repealed in 1985, interracial marriages nevertheless

remain very low in South Africa compared to Europe and the United States (Moodley, 2000).

Elsewhere, in the *United States* anti-miscegenation laws banned marriages across ethnic and racial

backgrounds up until 1967 (Loving v. Virginia, 1967; Pascoe, 1996; Sealing, 2000), and in South

Carolina and Alabama it was not until 1998 and 2000 respectively that these states' constitutions

were officially amended to terminate anti-miscegenation laws (Sealing, 2000; Novkov, 2009).

Such examples are not isolated instances. Other countries that have either previously practiced or

currently have miscegenation laws include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, China, Malaysia and France

(Fredrickson, 2005; Moran, 2003).

Israel is also among countries with anti-miscegenation laws given that Jewish individuals cannot

marry *gentiles* (non-Jewish individuals). The Orthodox Rabbinate is the authority over marital

matters and civil unions and marriages performed by non-Orthodox Jewish Rabbis are forbidden

(which includes both Progressive and Reform Jewish Rabbis who may wed couples but the

couple's status remains unwed according to the Israeli law). Israel's Family law is under both

religious and secular jurisdiction, with two parallel legal systems working in tandem. For non-

Jewish individuals living in Israel (such as Muslims, Christians and Druze), marriage is

performed by their own religious authorities (e.g., an Imam, Priest, etc.) and they too must marry

within their religion (Smooha, 2011; Yahya & Boag, 2014).

Nevertheless, cross-cultural and interfaith relationships though less common in the past (see

Hollingshead, 1950; Thomas, 1951; Locke, Sabagh & Thomes, 1957) have generally increased in

frequency in recent years (Joyner & Kao, 2005) although barriers amongst different religions and

societies persist (Yahya & Boag, 2014; Smooha, 2010; Reiter, Krause, Stirlen, 2005; Bradford,

Drzewiecka, & Chitgopekar, 2003). In India and the United States today, for example, interfaith

and cross-cultural relationships are relatively common compared to half a century ago (*Ha'aretz*,

2013); however, relatively few people engage and/or maintain these relationships (Bradford, Drzewiecka, & Chitgopekar, 2003; Reiter, Krause, Stirlen, 2005). Despite this, there are individuals choosing to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriages despite significant restrictions imposed by authorities, religion and tradition (Leeman, 2009; Pettys & Balgopal, 1998; Rosenthal, Ranieri & Klimidis, 1996, Yahya & Boag, 2014).

The present study explored the context of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships between individuals of opposing sides of the conflict in conflict-ridden areas. More specifically, the aim of the current study was to examine the relationship and perceived influence of living in a conflict-ridden area (i.e., the perceived pressure by the social network) on an individual's decision to engage and/or maintain a cross-cultural or interfaith marriage. The conflict area under consideration is Israel and the relation studied is between Arab Palestinians (Muslim and Christian) and Jewish Israelis. In order to understand the significance of this study, some background information is needed about Israel's population, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the relationship between the peoples living in that country as a result of political and historical context.

Demography

While Israel is undeniably defined as a Jewish state, nevertheless, not all of its citizens are Jewish. Although over six million citizens (75.3%) of the entire population are Jewish, just over a million and a half (20.7%) of the citizens are Palestinian-Arabs. Of this Palestinian-Arab population 7.9% are Christian and 83.8% are Muslim and just over three-hundred thousand (4%) are non-Palestinian-Arab Christians, believers of minority religions (e.g., Druze) or unaffiliated

with any religion (Bureau of Statistics, Israel, 2013). The Palestinian-Arab's language is Arabic, not Hebrew (which is spoken by the majority of the population in Israel), and the two languages do not share mutual intelligibility. According to Smooha (2010), despite Palestinian-Arab modernization, their culture is still semi-traditional and notably less modern and secular than the dominant Hebrew (Jewish) culture in Israel. Arabs are also readily identifiable by the combination of their physiognomy, name, accent, and address.

All three monotheistic religions are observed in Israel and you may easily find mosques, churches and synagogues located in the same street (in certain cities, at least, such as Jaffa, Haifa, Beer-Sheva and Nazareth). Despite this perceived multicultural environment, there are many areas in Israel that are extremely homogenous (e.g., Muslim villages such as Um El-Fahem and Orthodox Jewish areas such as Bnei Brak). Concerning intermarriage, Smooha (2010) notes that within Israel, Arabs do not intermarry with Jews because both sides want to keep their existence separate. Moreover, he adds that this separation stems from and is facilitated by the fact that Arabs and Jews live generally in separate residential communities and study at different schools, affecting approximately 90 percent of the Arabs who live in fully Arab villages and towns.

Despite the perceived harmony in certain mixed areas in Israel, the differences between the peoples have been a source to numerous conflicts, both interpersonal and social—the main and predominant one being the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in depth, it is nevertheless necessary to briefly outline the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in order for the reader to get a grasp of the matter and how it relates to the subject at hand.

A Brief Account of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

In 1945, World War II ended after the systematic extermination of six million Jews as well as millions of other peoples of different religions and cultural backgrounds. The remaining Jewish survivors of Nazi Germany (also referred to as *'Sh'erit ha-Pletah'*: 'the surviving remnant') that were rescued from the concentration camps were about two-hundred-and-fifty thousand in number by 1950. Some of them found refuge in the United States, Canada and Europe but the majority—about one-hundred-and-thirty-six-thousand Jewish survivors—immigrated to Israel (Laqueur, 2009).

Prior to the end of the World War II, the population of Palestine was very different and was in a state of flux as a consequence of the ongoing *Aliah*[9] of Jewish people into the land. In 1880, less than 25,000 Jewish people resided in Palestine, which was just before the first Zionist *Aliyah* that occurred in 1881 as a result of the *Pogroms*[10] (Laqueur, 2009). By 1914, the number of Jewish people in Israel increased to 65,000. In the 1920s and 30s there were 425,000 Jewish people there and by 1940 there were over 600,000 Jewish people living there, which was the night of the "War of independence" which established the state of a Jewish country—Israel (Laqueur, 2009).

The Palestinians referred to their defeat at the hands of the Israelis as the *Nakba*[11] (see Litvak-Hirsch, Chaitin & Zaher, E. 2010). Palestinians are generally Arabs (but also comprise other different ethnic groups) that have lived in and/or are descendants of those who lived Palestine—

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[9] *Aliyah* is the immigration of Jewish people from the diaspora back to the land of Israel. It is one of the most basic tenets of the Zionist ideology.

[10] *Pogrom* is an organized violent mob attack on a particular ethnic group (generally against Jewish people), and often condoned by the forces of law, characterized by killings and/or destruction of homes and properties, businesses, and religious centers.

[11] The meaning of the word *Nakba* in Arabic is 'day of the catastrophe'. It is an annual day of commemoration for the Palestinian people of the anniversary of the creation of Israel. It is held every May 15, the day after Israelis celebrate their independence day. For Palestinians, the day marks the expulsions and flight of Palestinians from their towns and villages in the face of Jewish and later Israeli troop advances, their defeat in the 1948 Palestine War and 1948 Arab-Israeli War, their displacement from Palestine, and the loss of their property, which was seized by Israel.

the geographic area of the current state of Israel—that resided there during the Ottoman Empire

and the British Mandate (Bright, 2000). Before the 'war of independence' there was an estimated

number of over one million and three hundred thousand Palestinians living in Palestine (in

comparison to 600,000 Jewish people) (Bright, 2000). As a result of the establishment of the state

of Israel in 1948, an estimated 700,000[12] Palestinians were expelled from or had fled the area as a

result of the depopulation and destruction of their own and neighboring villages. These

Palestinians settled in refugee camps in one of the neighboring Arab countries (such as Syria,

Lebanon and mainly Jordan) where they waited for the "war of independence" to be over in the

hope of returning back to their home after the Arab countries were to overcome the new Israeli

forces (Bright, 2000). Today Palestinians are scattered throughout the world in both Arab and

non-Arab countries, such as the United States, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and

a relatively large number of almost five hundred thousand Palestinians live in Chile. However, a

majority of just over a million and a half of the Palestinians nevertheless resides in Israel

(Farsoun, & Zacharia, 1997).

The Palestinians living in Israel are a homeland minority, one that has populated Palestine for

centuries, whereas most Jews are first-to-third-generation immigrants. According to Smooha

(2010), "[t]he Arabs have firm ties to the land, consider themselves the true owners of the

territory, and claim the special rights accorded to indigenous peoples. Yet, on the basis of their

historical, religious, national, and emotional connections, the Jews feel the same way" (p. 5).

Furthermore, Smooha (2010) describes Israel as an ethnocracy[13] with a strong Judaizing drive

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[12] The exact number of Palestinian refugees is debatable, Palestinian references have quantified about a million refugees whereas Israeli references found no more than 520,000. The exact number was never confirmed.
[13] Ethnocracy is nondemocratic regime that oppresses ethnic minorities but otherwise has a semblance of democracy (Smooha, 2010).

and several commentators believe that the state discriminates against Palestinians living in Israel, in means of allocation of budgets, lands, appointments, and other resources (Abu-Nimer 1999; Smooha, 2010). Smooha (2010) additionally describes several demeaning as well as violent acts against Palestinians by Israel, which include the killing of thirteen protesters in October 2000, the building of a separating barrier between Israel and the West Bank, expanded Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and the launching of the Second Lebanon War and Gaza War. These events and more have largely alienated the Palestinians in Israel.

Furthermore, several scholars believe that the Palestinians living in Israel are characterized as an enemy-affiliated minority and are considered potentially hostile by the Jewish majority and the Jewish state. This results from the Palestinians being part of the Arab world and the Palestinian people who remain inimical to Israel—therefore it is inevitable that the Palestinians and the Jews are bound to have a basic mutual distrust (Smooha, 2010; Bar-On 2005b, Bekerman, 2005; Maoz, 2000b; Shenhav, 2003). As Smooha (2010) writes:

"The Arabs are a dissident minority. They reject Zionism, the de facto state ideology of Israel. They see Zionism, the Jewish movement of national liberation, as colonialist and racist, and they denigrate the Jews' fundamental Zionist collective identity. The Jews, meanwhile, do not see themselves as colonial settlers but rather as the genuine proprietors of the Land of Israel, from which they were historically exiled and to which they rightfully returned to find alien Arabs in possession. At the same time, many Jews regard Palestinian nationalism and identity not only as hostile but also as irrational, hateful, and detestable. Both sides reject the most cherished values of the other. For many Jews, it is difficult to accept enemy-affiliated and dissident Arabs as loyal citizens of the Jewish state."

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict began as a result of two opposing claims of the parties at hand; the Jewish claim is that Israel is the Jewish home that the Jewish forefathers were promised and the only place in the world where the Jewish people can be free. On the other hand, the Palestinian claim is that they are the indigenous people of that land and this is the land of their ancestors who were expelled from it by the Jewish Israelis before, during and after the declaration of Israel as a Jewish state. Moreover, the Palestinians believe that they deserve to return to their homes in Palestine, although they cannot under Israeli law that was granted legislation by the *Knesset* [14] in 2001 of *khok shiriun shlilat zkhut hashivah*—"Reinforcing the elimination of the Palestinian right of return" (Kent, 2012).

A solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is yet to be found. This endemic state of tension, as a result of Palestinian-Israeli conflict creates immense social pressure on both sectors involved in this ongoing conflict. Therefore, it is expected that views on the matter of interfaith and cross-cultural romantic relations (such as dating and marriage) will reflect this ongoing conflict.

The study of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships is significant because understanding attitudes and perceptions towards such relationships contributes to appreciating factors that either inhibit or facilitate such relationships, an aspect that has been relatively neglected by past research. Furthermore, today in an increasingly globalized world, there is a greater need for understanding potential barriers and sources of conflict as well as factors that may facilitate cross-cultural and interfaith relationships and social cohesion generally. Additionally, studying factors associated with cross-cultural and interfaith in a conflict area may shed light on potential victimization and even persecution of individuals that stray outside of social norms.

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[14] The *Knesset* is the unicameral legislature of Israel.

The present study is an extension of a study conducted in Australia examining (a) the relation between religious affiliation (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriages and (b) the relation between social pressure and interfaith and cross-cultural marriages. This previous study found that young people in Australia were generally open to *cross-cultural* relationships (people of different cultures; e.g., a culturally French individual marrying a culturally Indian individual), but generally against engaging in *interfaith* dating and marriages (i.e., people of different religions, e.g., a Muslim marrying a Christian). Furthermore, the Australian Jewish and Muslim participants were generally reluctant towards engaging in interfaith dating and marriages, whereas the Christian participants' attitudes varied from acceptance to dismissal in relation to the degree of affiliation to Christianity. More specifically, the more religious a Christian person considered him or herself to be, the less likely they were going to be open to *interfaith* dating and marriage.

While Australia is a relatively multicultural country (there is a rate of 6%-21% of intermarriage varying according to gender and religious and cultural affiliation (Khoo, Birrell, & Heard, 2009)), that is presently not experiencing a major conflict. On the other hand, the current study sought to further examine attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith relationships in a conflict-ridden area—Israel. Specifically, the study examined the relation between perceived social pressure (i.e., from parents and friends), on the development and/or dismissal of interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriage. Furthermore, this study examined the relation of the historical and political context in a conflict-ridden area, on attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriage.

METHOD

Participants

Eighteen participants (14 female, 4 male) with the age range of 18 - 69 years of age (*M* =28.38, *SD* =13.40) partook in the current study. The participants were one of three different religious backgrounds: Jewish (7), Christian (6) and Muslim (5). Fifteen were undergraduate students studying in a University and the remaining were three graduates. They were all citizens of Israel, seven Jewish and twelve Palestinian[15]. It should be noted that pseudonyms were used when referring to the participants throughout this paper.

Procedure

Qualitative data were gathered using Semi-structured interviews. By using semi-structured interviews, the participant was introduced a topic but was allowed to be authentic with his/her reply and not restricted to a set of answers to choose from (Seidman, 2012). The questions were drawn from a larger study examining cross-cultural and interfaith relationships (Yahya, Bekerman, Sagy & Boag, 2012). In addition to collecting biographic and demographic information, the participants were asked questions examining issues relating to experience with, and attitudes towards, cross-cultural and interfaith relationships (both friendly and romantic). Moreover, the questions investigated the influence of the participant's social network on their attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith dating and marriages. A sample of the interview questions include[16]: *"Have you ever thought about being in a cross-cultural or interfaith*

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[15] To avoid confusion, please note that by Palestinians, the authors are referring to *Arab* Palestinians living within Israel (as opposed to the Palestinian Territories).

[16] It should be noted that dating is generally not acceptable in the Arab and Muslim community (among others) unless the couple's intention is to date exclusively (however, certain restrictions may apply, e.g., sexual activities) and with the aim to get married. Moreover, in some cases, the approval of the female's father (or other significant

relationship, i.e., with someone from a different culture or different faith?", "Have you ever experienced any fears or doubts regarding your decision to be in a relationship with your partner?", "When you decided to be in this relationship, what were the reactions that you received from other people/family members/friends?". The questions also targeted matters of cross-cultural and interfaith dating and marriage with respect to past experiences, present attitudes, and future expectation.

All of the interviews were conducted in Hebrew and the interviews were recorded, coded, and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. The collected data were divided into six main recurring themes that were compared by the authors using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure reliability and validity, accurate reporting, transparency of the research process, peer examination of the collected data and its analysis were addressed. The three authors reached full consensus on the themes.

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male figure) is needed to allow this relationship to transpire. This matter was addressed during the collection of the data in order to respect participants' cultural traditions and religious observing.

FINDINGS

Four main themes emerged from the findings: (i) *Attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural marriages* describes the attitudes that the Jewish, Christian and Muslim participants have towards interfaith and cross-cultural marriages; (ii) The theme *family approval* describes the concerns and fears of some of the participants regarding parental reaction. Concerns included the effect of engaging in a cross-cultural or interfaith marriage on their relationship with their parents and the outcomes they expect from being with a person from a different faith or culture; (iii) The theme of *Social pressure and segregation*; emerged suggesting that interfaith and cross-cultural marriages would not survive in Israel as a result of the political state of affairs and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—and the pressure it inflicts on individuals living there. Moreover, interfaith marriages are not permitted in Israel by law and civil marriages cannot be performed there[17]. The only perceived place for maintaining such relationships would be over-seas; (iv) Lastly, the final theme that emerged was *future generation*; here it appears that there is no generational shift of attitudes across generations looking into the future.

Attitudes towards Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Marriages

Fourteen out of eighteen participants were reluctant to engage in cross-cultural and interfaith marriages. Ramzi[18], a Christian Palestinian male participant similarly states, *"The religion says*

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[17] The state of Israel abides by the Orthodox Jewish law, which does not allow interfaith marriages; Jewish people must marry other Jewish people only. Moreover, civil marriages are not authorized in Israel; however, they are recognized. If an *Israeli* couple decides to have a civil marriage over-seas it will be recognized in Israel, but the wedding ceremony cannot be performed there, because there are no authorized celebrants in Israel. Lastly, non-Muslims (e.g., Muslims and Christians) living in Israel perform their wedding ceremonies according to their own religion (by an Imam or Priest respectively), which also does not allow interfaith marriages.
[18] Pseudonyms were used to conceal the identities of the participants.

that you cannot marry someone that is not from your own religion, either she converts, otherwise it's unethical … I just don't even think about it." Eveline, a Christian female Palestinian participant states that it is extremely important for her that her partner will be Christian, while being also Arab is an advantage but less critical: *"I don't know why but it's really important for me that each person marries from their own faith, it really upsets me when someone takes another from a different faith … it's just engraved in me."* Similarly, two religious Muslim participants [Laila and Rania] mentioned that being religious affects their way of living and that Islam does not allow interfaith marriage for women, therefore they would not engage in such relationships to begin with.

The remaining four participants who were more inclined to intermarry were Jewish Israelis. Drorit says, *"Traditionally, it isn't acceptable to marry a non-Jewish person but my parents are very open minded—if I'm happy then it's all good…I would marry a non-Jewish man, I would also live with him without getting married, the connection between us is what matters most"*. None of the Palestinian participants were inclined to engage in an interfaith relationship, however they were open to cross-cultural relationships as long as they shared the same religion. However, two Palestinian participants (one Muslim [Niveen] and one Christian [Hamed]) and one Jewish participant [Noa] found it more difficult to marry someone from a different cultural background than faith. In their opinion, the cultural differences would raise too many difficulties for the intermarried couple. Three of the participants (two Palestinian Muslim females [Laila and Niveen] and one Jewish female [Shlomit]) were so disinclined to engage in interfaith marriages that they could not even imagine themselves being in such a relationship. Rania, a Muslim Palestinian female says, *"Maybe it's because I'm affected by my education, my faith, I never thought about it (interfaith marriage), I never imagined that one day I will fall in love with*

someone, that is I never gave myself the opportunity to fall in love or think of someone not from my faith or culture. I am all for sacrificing for love, but if I was ever in that situation, I would go to the high religious people and inquire, maybe in earlier stages, but sadly, not all love affairs are meant to be."

Interestingly, four Muslim Palestinian participants [Laila, Niveen, Rania and Ibrahim], four Christian Palestinian participants [Laura, Eveline, Christine and Ramzi] and two Israeli Jewish participants [Shlomit and Topaz] also indicated that they control whom to fall in love with. Namely, they choose whom to fall or not fall in love with according to that person's religion and cultural background. Even though Topaz, a Jewish female Israeli participant, thinks that if she lived abroad she may be more likely to fall in love with a non-Jewish person, she says, *"Initially it is possible to block yourself from a certain population, if for example I say I don't want to marry a Muslim no matter what, I can block my feelings and when I meet a Muslim man I will say to myself – no way, and simply step away."*

Ibrahim, a Muslim male Palestinian participant, thinks differently, however. For him being Jewish is not the issue; rather the ideological framework of the counterpart and her attitudes towards Palestinians. In his opinion, if he fell in love with a Jewish woman he may see himself overcoming the obstacles in the way of an interfaith and cross-cultural (Muslim Palestinian and Jewish Israeli) married couple living in Israel. However the Jewish woman must share the same pro-Palestinian mentality that he has, and not have any Zionist values that contradict his own values. However, Ibrahim also states, *"I have no problem with dating a woman that is from a different faith, it's having fun, but, when it comes to marriage then you have to think very carefully about what is about to happen… tomorrow when the child gets to the age of 18 then the mother wants him to join the army, it's a very sensitive situation and maybe in my subconscious I*

know that when I date Jewish women I block myself from falling in love with them." Ramzi, a Christian male Palestinian participant added, *"It's planted in your subconscious, if you look at a man that is from a different religion you won't look at him in a way that you want him or want to fall in love with him, because he's not of your own faith."*

Family Approval

Family approval and reaction to interfaith and cross-cultural marriages was very significant to a majority of the participants. All of the Palestinian participants, both Muslim and Christian, stated that their parents would not be accepting of an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship (and to a lesser extent a cross-cultural relationship of the same faith, if the couple were to remain living in Israel). Moreover, the participants were very mindful of their parents' attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural marriages and were mainly afraid of their parents' reactions as well as losing contact with their family. Mahmoud, a Muslim male participant said, *"I don't know exactly what would happen but it would be very difficult... Especially for my father, my father is a bit strict with his way of thinking, I don't want to say fixated, but he's very, very conservative about many things so it'll be very difficult for him to accept this..."* However, two Palestinian female (one Christian—Lubna and one Muslim—Rania) participants presented a different approach to this matter, in their opinion it would very difficult for their parents to accept the fact that they may choose to intermarry; yet, their parents will eventually come to terms with it.

Among the Jewish participants only three females participants [Noa, Topaz and Dafna] indicated that their parents would not be accepting of an interfaith marriage. Noa states, *"I think that so long as you meet someone that is from a different faith or culture, someone that is different from*

you and you come to your parents and say, 'listen I met someone…' like this or another, no matter if he's Christian or Muslim or Hindu or American, I really don't think it matters where they are from, as long as they are different from you it's problematic, no matter what the difference." Topaz went further: *"My father would commit suicide if I did so[19]."* Similarly, Dafna shares, *"My dad would find it very difficult, I think my mum may be accepting of it, she would never tell me not to do something, never… My dad belongs to the old generation, it's also really important for him because his parents are World War II survivors, so it's a very significant matter, not to marry a Goy[20] and marry a Jewish man."*

Another interesting finding is that eleven participants [Laura, Mahmoud, Laila, Eveline, Drorit, Niveen, Shlomit, Dafna, Rania, Lubna, and Ramzi] (both Palestinian and Jewish Israelis) indicated that since childhood they were taught not to engage in interfaith marriages. Lubna, a Christian female Palestinian participant suggested, *"I never thought about interfaith or cross-cultural marriage, from a very young age they teach you that this isn't an option, so you don't really think about it at all, personally, I didn't think about this option so I never got into it, I just didn't think about it."*

However, there appears to be some indications towards an attitude shift regarding interfaith and cross-cultural marriages. Niveen, a Muslim female participant says, *"Personally, I don't think negatively of the (people who intermarry), I actually value these people that go against the mainstream and despite of everything were able to do something and prove to the family and the world that maybe this suits me better than the guy from the family or same society."* Topaz, a female Jewish participant says, *"I think that it depends on the values that you're raised on, my*

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[19] It should be noted that this is a figure of speech, to convey the extreme devastation that the father will encounter.
[20] Gentile; non-Jewish person.

Christian friend for example, will only marry a Christian man no matter what, and I think that that's a bit primitive, but she was raised on these values and she truly believes in them. I on the other hand was raised according to clear values but I went the total opposite way, and rebelled. So I don't really believe in them and I think that you can certainly raise children according to two faiths and light both Chanukah candles and have a Christmas tree, you can make it happen, it really depends on who you are and values you abide to."

Social Pressure and Segregation

The participants indicated that there was social pressure to marry within their faith and culture and that this social pressure was directly related to the situation in Israel[21]. Drorit, a Jewish female participant says, *"Socially speaking, people would get upset to hear about a (Jewish) woman marrying an Arab."* Yeara, also adds, *"In Israel it is unacceptable, it is frowned upon because there's the matter of Judaism and that you're Jewish and if you marry someone…Just like the fact that you can't marry a non-Jew in Israel, you're not even allowed to do it here, you don't have the permit, so it's frowned upon. There is no acceptance of it in the state of Israel."* Shlomit another Jewish participant says, *"They are difficult to maintain and society forbids them… Society will judge those who intermarry."* Rania a Muslim female participant adds, *"Interfaith marriages create conflicts among couples in Israel because there's a political matter too, but also between Christians and Muslims… interfaith marriage (in Israel) is a big deal, there*

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[21] It should be noted that there was a difference between the two sexes with regard to intermarriage and breaking societal norms in general. It is perceived that it is easier for males than females to do so in the Palestinian culture (being a patriarchal society) and easier for females than males in the Jewish Israeli culture because of religious reasons (Islamically the father carries the religious identity of the child and in Judaism the mother carries the religious identity).

was one couple that did it in [her city] and there was a big fuss about it they even were spoken

about in the newspaper."

The participants also indicated that Israel has too much political tension as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which makes it more difficult for individuals to both engage and maintain an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship (if the cross-cultural relationship was between a Palestinian with a Jewish Israeli).

Related to the themes of social pressure in Israel was a theme of segregation that arose between Jewish and Palestinian individuals, both in terms of actual contact with the other (physical segregation) and in terms of social expectations (cultural segregation). This segregation begins from the period of school and continues throughout the individual's life. Four Jewish Israeli female participants (Topaz, Shlomit, Yeara and Drorit) could not see themselves marrying a non-Jewish man because they have little contact with people outside of their religious and cultural circles. Yeara explains, *"If you're living in a foreign country maybe you're more likely to think about it (interfaith marriage) but when you're living in Israel…I never thought about it because I always met only Israel Jewish people or Jewish people that made Aliah[22], but I never met anyone from a different cultural background so I never even thought about it."* There was some indications that this segregation was developed and maintained due to perceived differences between the various groups in Israel. Ibrahim, a Muslim male Palestinian participant stressed, *"Today I feel that the Jewish public is a lot more extreme, a lot more racist explicitly and denounces the phenomena of interfaith marriages, even among us Muslims today, Muslims are becoming more and more religious, so there is a type of segregation between the two groups and*

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[22] Aliyah is a Hebrew word, which means, "ascend" and is used to describe the immigration of the Jewish people from the diaspora to the land of Israel.

each one wants to keep its national identity and does not tolerate the phenomenon of an interfaith couple. Moreover, this segregation was also fed by the perception of being at war with the other. Laura a Christian participant stated that, "*Fellow Palestinian Arabs (no matter what religion they are affiliated to) marrying Jewish Israelis will be considered as traitors among the Palestinian community.*"

One possible effect of this segregation is the opportunity for stereotyped rather than factual knowledge. The findings suggest that Muslims are perceived as "primitive" and "extreme" in their behavior by four of the Jewish participants (Dafna, Topaz, Shlomit, Drorit). Some of these participants indicated that this is what is widely believed but they were not certain as to how much of this is true. While noting that there are orthodox Jewish men that are primitive too, not only Muslims, Dafna states, "*A Muslim Arab automatically brings up images of an Arab from Gaza, it makes me think of primitiveness, covering up a woman that has to do everything at home [...] There is a big difference between Christian Arabs and Muslim Arabs, Christian Arabs are more like me, they are less primitive and more Western, they are more accepting and more sophisticated. It's different. Again, not that I know any, but that's what I think.*"

Seven of the participants [Laura, Vicky, Yeara, Eveline, Topaz and Ibrahim] suggested that living abroad would make it easier for interfaith and cross-cultural relationships to occur and be maintained. Topaz, a Jewish female participant says, "*living abroad opens up opportunities to fall in love with people from different cultures.*" The conflict within Israeli society is perceived to put too much pressure on interfaith and cross-cultural (between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis) couples. Ibrahim adds, "*I don't know if you can create love in a place that is so full of hatred and politics and opinions and extreme ideologies, it's hard for me to think of a healthy interfaith*

relationship in a place like this, if I was in France then okay, I don't mind marrying a Jewish woman."

An outstanding finding was from a Muslim Palestinian female [Laila]. In her opinion Israeli society is promoting individuation in recent years, *"In Israel, I think that there is more acceptance towards interfaith marriages in recent years, because I see a process of individuation […] the cities strive to the direction of each individual is on his/her own, and makes his/her own decisions, the societal consolidation does not exist anymore so when someone decides to do something today, there might be a bit of contradiction from society if the decision is opposing to the society's values and norms but it's a matter of weeks, maybe less, and then everyone goes back to their natural state and that person is accepted by the society…Today, society doesn't have a significant effect."* This finding does not represent the vast majority of the participants but suggests a cultural shift in Israeli society.

It should be noted that it appears within Israel are certain areas that are different in their behavior to other areas where both have Arabs residing there, Eveline states, *"It's not a matter of the Arabic society, if you go to Haifa it's different, or to Lod or Ramleh it's also different. But on the other hand it's not a family thing either, it has to do with [Eveline's location] specifically, where we live, each area has it's own set of rules…"* Eveline is trying to describe the complexity of the Arabic culture living within Israel. She states that Arabs in Israel vary in their level of conservativeness according to the city that they live in; nevertheless, she also adds that families have different sets of rules for their children to abide by and that also influences the behaviors of individuals.

Summary

The findings suggest that individuals living in Israel experience pressure from a variety of aspects that are inseparable from their daily being. The four main aspects of influence are: (i) family, (ii) culture, (iii) religion and (iv) society/politics. Furthermore, all these—as well the individual—are affected by their interaction with others from different cultural backgrounds or faiths. This constant and relentless pressure is conveyed in Figure 1, the "Pressure Cooker Model" below:
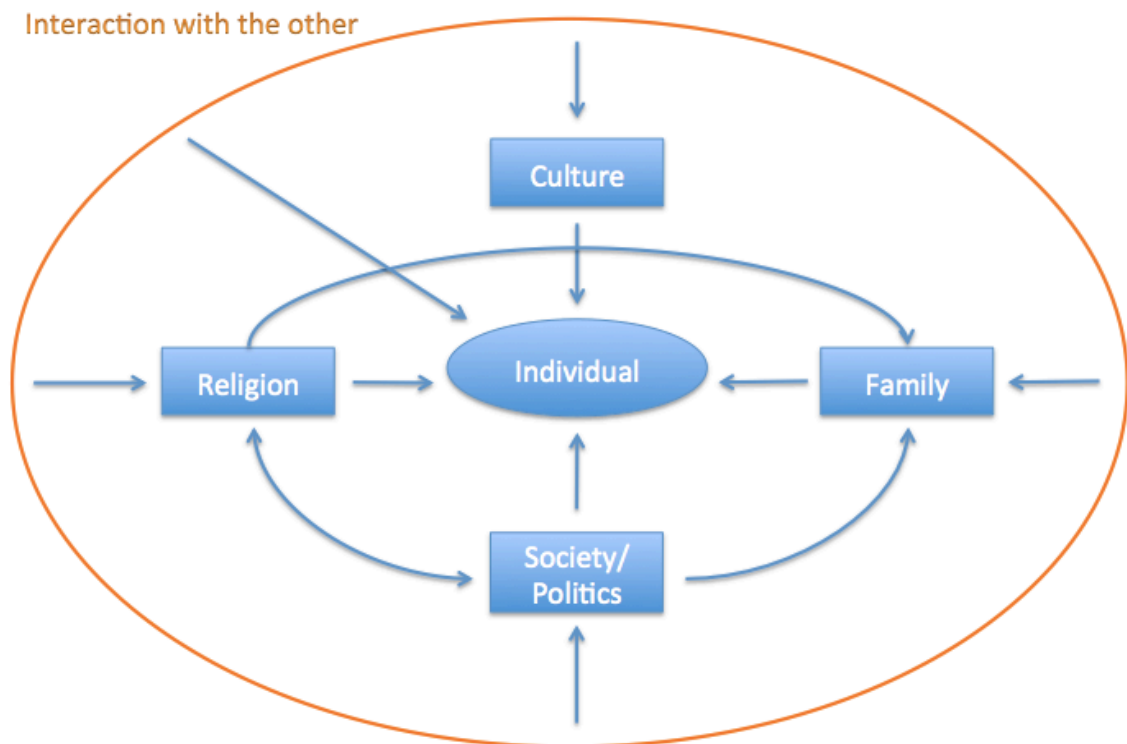
Figure 1

The arrows in the "Pressure Cooker Model" represent the *primary* direction of influence;

however, this does not rule out influence in other directions (potentially, the individual may

change politics, policy, family dynamics etc.).

Future Generation and Identity

Eight participants out of eleven were reluctant towards their children marrying a person from a

different religion (four of the participants had children at the time of the interviewing [Laila,

Niveen, Noa and Hamed]). In their opinion it would be too difficult especially in Israel, a

conflict-ridden area but also because the traditions and values are too different to cope with.

Laila, a female Palestinian Muslim participant said that religion is a way of life and the three

religions have different practices and traditions (some which contradict) and it would be very

difficult to maintain a religious lifestyle with a bi-religious family: *"It will be difficult for me not*

because of racist reasons, but because it's not acceptable that she will be with a man from a

different religion… We have to pray every day, wear a head scarf, and he has his own religion,

his own text to follow, I don't think that they will have a healthy relationship or life regulation…

it will be very difficult, of course I won't decide for her on this matter but I will be steadfast."

On the other hand, seven participants (four Jewish [Drorit, Dafna, Topaz and Noa], one Muslim

[Ibrahim] and two Christian participants [Lubna and Christine]) conveyed that they would be

accepting of their children intermarrying, mainly for the reason that their children will be adults

and should make their own decisions. Some of these participants, however, had a few terms in

order for this intermarriage to transpire; two Jewish female participants, Topaz and Dafna,

mentioned that they would be okay with it as long as the Jewish high holidays are celebrated and

the Jewish values are kept, even if two religions within the relationship were observed.

Moreover, another Jewish participant, Noa, mentioned that she would be accepting of her daughter intermarrying but she would be very upset if her daughter chose to marry an Orthodox Jewish man, because she feel would feel extremely different in her way of life.. Lastly, only one Muslim participant mentioned that he would be open only for his sons to intermarry and not for his daughters, *"A Muslim man with a Jewish lady, that's fine, but not the other way around."*

Furthermore, another noteworthy finding that appeared was regarding the issue preserving one's identity. Six participants (one Jewish [Shlomit], two Christian [Eveline and Christine] and three Muslim [Mahmoud, Ibrahim and Laila]) conveyed the importance of preserving their cultural as well as religious identity. Moreover, the participants stressed their worry towards the sense of belonging that interfaith or cross-cultural couple's children will have (i.e., to which culture/faith will the children feel they belong). In the participants' opinion the intermarriage will create identity conflicts within the children that the intermarried couple will bear. Shlomit a Jewish female participant says, *"Straight away I think about where will the children study? And what kind of education will they receive? And it seems too contradicting and complicated from this perspective, I don't know, it just seems weird to me."* Ibrahim a Muslim participant adds, *"When you have a family and kids, how do you deal with it? What's the child's identity? Because I see plenty of intermarried couples and eventually the child turns out to be either super-Jewish or super-Palestinian, it's as if the child lacks that inner peace of living with his/her identity in peace, it's always extreme, it goes to an extreme place and very little people are able to raise a child that can be many things simultaneously with a clear and sharp identity."* Similarly, Laila a Muslim female Palestinian participant stated, *"It will be difficult, both religiously and also when I think about it, after they get married and have children, you'll find that their children will have*

a confusion with regard to their identity, am I Muslim? Am I Jewish? Am I Christian? Where do I belong? There were people that have done this but at the end there was a conflict, especially when the children grew up and had to choose to where they belong, each parent would pull to their direction and the child is the one that gets hurt in all this situation."

DISCUSSION

This paper addresses the matter of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships in a conflict-ridden area—Israel. The main interest was to examine how the current political state of affairs (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) relates to attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural romantic relationships (such as dating and marriage). The findings clearly support previous findings that demonstrate that engaging in a relationship is affected by and related to one's social network (Felmlee & Sprecher, 2000; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Moore 2000, Reich, Ramos & Jaipal, 2000; Espiritu 2001; Felmlee, 2003; Etcheverry, Le, & Hoffman, 2012; Yahya & Boag, 2014). Furthermore, in the case of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships in a conflict-ridden area, as expected, the findings were even more extreme.

One of the most striking findings that emerged concerned the tremendous perceived social pressure that individuals felt under to conform to social norms and expectations. The reluctance stemmed mainly from the following reasons: (i) it appears that interfaith and cross-cultural relationships are forbidden both culturally (traditionally) as well as religiously (by Islam, Christianity and Judaism). (ii) Engaging in a romantic relationship with a person from the conflicting side is seen as treason by the Arab sector. This is consistent with Donnan's (1990) study on interfaith and cross-cultural marriages in conflict-ridden areas.; (iii) There is both a

physical cultural segregation between the Palestinians and the Jewish people living in Israel; they generally attend different schools and mostly live among each other and only during tertiary education are the two sectors merged more frequently. Therefore they are also less likely to engage in social activities together and may only encounter one another in public institutions or the workplace. The mixture of both the segregation and mind-set to avoid interfaith and cross-cultural relationships appears to act as a powerful influence that inhibits such relationships (combination of pressures) (Smooha, 2011). Moreover; (iv) endogamy is a social norm and all the participants were aware of this and the majority (fourteen out of eighteen) abided by that norm and altered their lifestyle to be in line with what society expects of them. Furthermore, the notion of endogamy raised another notion of controlling whom you fall in love with. Participants raised the issue of "blocking their feelings" if they were presented with an opportunity that "had a dead end" in order to avoid dealing with emotions towards a person from a different cultural background or faith. Lastly; (v) participants brought up the question of any future children's both religious and cultural identity. This appeared to be a very significant matter to both Jewish and Palestinian (Christian and Muslim) participants and the feeling of uncertainty about a child's religion and culture created hesitancy towards thinking that an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship was a realistic possibility. A minority of four individuals were open to interfaith or cross-cultural relationships; these individuals defined themselves as more "open-minded" and less affiliated to any culture or faith.

Another factor that seemed to be closely related to the matter of engaging or not in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship was family approval. The current findings support previous research, which states that social support is a vital factor when it comes to choosing a life partner and if the couple's social network (family and friends) are not approving, the relationship will

endure difficulties to carry on (Reich, et al, 2000; Felmlee, 2003; Etcheverry, et al, 2012; Yahya & Boag, 2014). This finding also conveys the importance of having a "couple identity" for a relationship to survive (Lewis, 1973; Sinclair & Wright, 2009; Sprecher, 2011), namely, it is crucial for couple to be regarded as a viable pair by significant others, otherwise, the relationship will struggle to survive. Moreover, five participants stated that since they were young they were taught values against interfaith and cross-cultural marriage and endogamy was rooted within them in the very early stages of life. Consequently, this value shaped their attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationship as well as their life-style. It appears the social environment exerts such pressure that an individual would generally never even consider the possibility of interfaith marriage. Accordingly, the findings suggest that social influence is so pervasive and engrained that it is not even a decision to be made by the individual. This notion appears across the three religions. Furthermore, some participants indicated that it would be easier for individuals to engage in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship living outside of Israel. There is too much tension to endure in Israel as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will make it very difficult for an interfaith or Jewish-Palestinian couple's relationship to survive or initiate.

Religious affiliation is also related to the choice of life partner; two female Muslim participants stated that being religious women affects their life-style, and choosing to marry a man from a different culture or faith will contradict this life-style for three main reasons: firstly, the partner might not approve or be tolerant towards the religious lifestyle that they choose to engage in. Secondly, the partner's lifestyle may be contradicting to their own as a result of the values and traditions he might possess. And lastly, Islam does not approve of interfaith marriages.

A striking finding was that the Jewish participants perceived Muslims in general as "primitive" and "extreme", especially with regard to the way women are treated in the Muslim and Arab sector. This perception was also detected in the previous study held in Australia (Yahya & Boag, 2014); it appears that there is a widespread misconception of the Muslim people and the way Islam treats women, conveyed by misinterpreted and intolerant statements given by the participants both in Australia and in Israel by non-Muslims. Nasir (2009) has addressed this issue and has tried to replace this "old-age misconception" and ignorance with knowledge about Islam and specifically on how it treats women. Additionally, this finding of perceiving Arabs in a negative light can also be related to the fact that Israelis generally perceive Muslims as their enemy, because they associate them with Palestinians whom they are in conflict with (Smooha, 2010). Moreover, it should be noted that in the current study the participants had little actual experience and knowledge of Muslim people; the findings indicate that segregation is a breeding ground for ignorance.

Lastly, when the participants were asked about their attitudes towards their children engaging in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship, just over half of the participants (eleven out of eighteen) said they were against it. The two major themes that came up were: (i) how will the couple's children be raised; (i.e., according to which religion and which culture), when Palestinians and Jewish Israelis have contradicting beliefs, lifestyles and values (which was also mentioned above regarding attitudes towards cross-cultural and interfaith relationships in general). In the participants' opinion this may create a conflict of identity, which may lead to an identity crisis for both the child and the family unit. From the findings it appeared that every decision—even choosing a school for a child to study at—was fundamental and created a lot of pressure for the parents. Moreover, adherence to a certain lifestyle was also an issue because

different religions and cultures may observe contradicting customs. And; (ii) the participants raised an important issue that what they were concerned about was preserving their religious and cultural identity. This finding is also consistent with the former findings in the study conducted in Australia (Yahya & Boag, 2014).

The remaining seven participants stated that their children will be old enough and wise enough to make their own decision regarding whom they choose to marry, whether it is from their own faith or culture or a different one.

Limitation and Further Work

It should be kept in mind that this study examined attitudes and participants' perceptions of factors influencing their decision-making. Nevertheless, it is not possibly to infer actual causal influences upon decision-making and behaviour from this cross-sectional study. It should also be noted that this population is not necessarily representative of the Israeli society as a whole. The participants were undergraduate and graduate academics from the department of Human Sciences and Arts and so may be expected to be leaning more towards a liberal rather than conservative state of mind and approach towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. Moreover, no Jewish men partook in this study. Nevertheless, with this in mind, the findings are even more striking as even more extreme positions might possibly be found within other demographics of Israeli society. Moreover, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study and follow the participants to see if their attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships change after they have had children and when their children were at an age to marry. Furthermore, it would be beneficial also to find out if a generational shift of attitudes occurs. Lastly, Israel is not the only

country that suffers from an endemic conflict. It would be interesting to study attitudes towards

interfaith and cross-cultural marriages in other countries (Pakistan and India, for instance) or

within cultures (e.g., Sunni and Shia Muslims) that are enduring a state of conflict. Additionally,

future research could examine the changes that had to occur in countries that have had conflict in

the past but are at peace today and do not prohibit or disdain interfaith and cross-cultural couples.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that this paper does not aim to prescribe interfaith and cross-cultural

relationships nor does it come to value such relationships over any other type of relationship. It

aims to provide knowledge for readers who are unaware of the obstacles and difficulties that

individuals may encounter when choosing to engage in such relationships. Furthermore, it

appears that segregation between people of different cultures increases the tendency to rely on

stereotypes instead of actual facts from experience. Until individuals break the trend of

segregation and start to communicate with others different from them (culturally, religiously and

traditionally) and *question* what is "fed" to them via potentially biased media and archaic ways of

thinking—it will be difficult to move towards a more tolerant and less prejudice society.

Lastly, presently the UN has no provision towards a human right for individuals to fall in love

and engage in a relationship with whomever they choose—if falling in love is a human right, then

as a start—antimiscegenation laws *must* be banned.

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Chapter V:

When Love Meets Faith and Culture: Factors Involved in Cross-Cultural and Interfaith Marriages

ABSTRACT

The present paper studied eight participants that are in different stages of an interfaith and cross-cultural marriage (several months to over twenty years). The aim of the study was to examine these unique relationships by looking at its interfaith and cross-cultural component, followed by the social, religious and personal outcomes intertwined within it, as a result of the interfaith and cross-cultural component of the relationship. This was done by analyzing in-depth interviews with the participants. The questions of interest were: a) What factors were related to the initiation and maintenance of their interfaith and cross-cultural relationship and marriage, b) what obstacles were they and/or are they still challenged by? And lastly, c) what advice might they have for interfaith and cross-cultural couples that intend to engage in a long term-commitment. Consistent with previous research examining expected challenges, the findings suggest that the social network (culture, friends and family) were perceived to have a great impact (both negatively and positively) on their interfaith relationship. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that interfaith and cross-cultural relationships are very complex and are related to numerous factors, such as: religious affiliation, cultural tradition, the environment the couple lives in, and closeness to one's family. Lastly, successful interfaith and cross-cultural relationships appear to require couples

who were open-minded to other faiths and cultures, a willingness of at least one half of a couple

to compromise, and for couples to be able to accept some uncertainty.

With the increasing frequency of immigration; access to Social Media, international education and employment; and transportation making it easier than ever for individuals to commute worldwide; the available opportunities for people from different cultural backgrounds and faiths interacting is higher than ever. Further, it is inevitable that some of these relationships may result in interfaith and cross-cultural short-term and even long-term intimate relationships. Interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriages are relationships between couples of different faiths (e.g., a Muslim man married to a Christian woman) and cultural backgrounds (e.g., a Chinese woman married to an English man) (Breger & Hill, 1998). These relationships are referred to as *heterogamous* relationships (where opposites attract), and they are less common than *homogamous* relationships (where likes attract) (see Hollingshead, 1950; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Joyner & Koa, 2005).

Past findings strongly indicate that interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships are difficult to engage in, and challenging to maintain. There are several factors relating to the initiation and maintenance of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. Among those are: (i) *religious affiliation* (Yahya & Boag, 2014; Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995), (ii) *cultural tradition* (or nationality/country of origin) (Roer-Strier & Ben Ezra, 2006; Haji, Lalonde, Durbin & Naveh-Benjamin, 2011) and (iii) *social network approval* (Yahya & Boag, 2014a; Yahya & Boag 2014b; Parks, 2007; Sinclair & Write, 2009). In fact, given these potential barriers, it is somewhat surprising that interfaith and cross-cultural relationships occur at all. Consequently, there are questions concerning how individuals within interfaith and cross-cultural relationships perceive these barriers and what factors conspire to make these relationships successful or not.

Potential obstacles to Cross-cultural and Interfaith relationships

Religious affiliation appears to be related to and possibly influence interfaith and cross-cultural marriages in a variety of ways (Yahya & Boag, 2014a; Yahya & Boag, 2014b; Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995). In a study by Cila and Lalonde (2013), Muslim Canadian university students completed an online questionnaire on attitudes towards interfaith romantic relationships; the findings suggested that the stronger the affiliation to Islam the less open was the participant to interfaith romantic relationships. Similarly, a study by Yahya & Boag (2014), where Australian students were interviewed on the matter or interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, found that the majority of the participants indicated that they were not inclined to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural relationships because of several reasons, one of them being religiosity. A common factor across both studies was that participants indicated that interfaith intimate relationships were against their religious belief (Yahya & Boag, 2014; Cila & Lalonde, 2013).

Cultural tradition is also related to and potentially affects individuals' attitudes on interfaith and cross-cultural relationships (Yahya & Boag 2014; Roer-Strier et al, 2006; Haji, et al, 2011). A study by Haji et al (2011), examined Jewish Canadian participants by their completing a questionnaire on both cultural and religious dimensions of Jewish identity, and attitudes towards interfaith relationships. The findings suggest that the Jewish participants that were culturally affiliated were less open to interfaith intimate relationships. Similarly, in in interviews of eighteen participants living in Israel (Muslim Palestinian, Christian Palestinian and Jewish Israeli), fourteen out of eighteen participants were reluctant to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural marriages because it appeared to be a deviation of the social norm.

Finally, studies indicate that an important factor that determines the success or not of any relationship is family and friends' approval of the relationship (whether interfaith, cross-cultural or otherwise) (Parks & Adelman, 1983; Eggert & Parks, 1987; Felmlee & Sprecher, 2000; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Moore 2000, Reich, Ramos & Jaipal, 2000; Espiritu 2001; Felmlee, 2003; Sprecher, 2011; Etcheverry, Le, & Hoffman, 2012; Yahya & Boag, 2014; Yahya). Past evidence indicates that if couples receive positive social reactions, it will strengthen their sense of identity as a couple and increase the couple's capability to endure threats to relationship viability (Lewis, 1973; Felmlee & Sprecher, 2000; Felmlee, 2001; Sinclair & Wright, 2009; Jin & Oh, 2010; Sprecher, 2011; Yahya & Boag, 2014). On the other hand, the studies above also indicate that negative social reactions will lead to difficulties maintaining the relationship making it struggle to survive. Furthermore, if a couple chooses to go against their family's wishes then they may suffer from sanctions varying from being ostracized from the family or community, to even being killed in extreme cases (Kalmijn, 2013).

A possible common factor between religiosity, culture and social sanctions is that deviation from the norm is seen as a threat to the internal coherency of a social group: Individuals who choose to engage in intimate interfaith or cross-cultural relationships may threaten the internal cohesion and homogeneity of the social group (e.g., culture and religion) (Kalmijn, 2013). In fact, on the matter of social cohesion, studies have found that intermarriage challenges norms about the uniformity of the social group and endogamy; this creates problems for both families and society as a whole (Roer-Strier et al, 2006; Ata, 2000; Root 2001; Breger & Hill, 1998).

What Happens to Individuals within Cross-cultural and Interfaith Relationships?

In terms of social integration into a foreign society or culture, there are several different theories that describe the way interfaith and cross-cultural couples deal with adaptation. According to Gordon's (1964) *Assimilation in American Life*, cross-cultural marriage notably leads to *assimilation*, where members of a minority group lose their distinctiveness, such as their ethnic and religious identities, and assimilate into the majority culture by intermarrying within the dominant group. On the other hand, Cohen (1988), states that cross-cultural marriage is a sign of *acculturation* into the dominant host culture; an inevitable consequence of pluralism and social tolerance, which does not necessarily lead to assimilation and to the loss of identity. Further, studies have shown that interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships affect both partners; the one who belongs to the minority group as well as the one who belongs to the dominant group (Root, 2001; Falicov, 1995). Falicov (1995) termed this phenomenon as *mutual acculturation*.

Consequently, according to Fujino (1997) cross-cultural and interfaith short-term-*dating* is a lot more common than inter*marriage*; the reason being that there is less pressure on the couple to plan a future together and think of the obstacles that lay ahead. Further, Fujino (1997) states that couples dating others from different cultures or faiths (rather than planning to get married) do not have to worry about changing or modifying their identity or traditions and therefore also "not let down" their social circle.

Why do Cross-cultural and Interfaith Relationships Occur and Persist?
Given the findings above, it appears that there are factors that conspire to make interfaith and cross-cultural relationships difficult to both initiate and maintain. However, despite all these

potential challenges, some couples still choose to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships, and some even get to the stage of marriage and starting a family. Consequently, it appears natural to ask: How do individuals initiate and engage in interfaith and/or cross-cultural intimate relationships? And, what factors are related to maintaining interfaith and cross-cultural relationships?

Previous literature on interfaith and cross-cultural married couples is fairly small and does not directly address the above questions, although it may address relevant facets. A lot of emphasis in previous research is placed on how intermarriage affects the individual's social identity as well as how the social circle affects the couple's relationship in terms of social structure. A study by Khan (1998), for instance, looked at the social implication and consequences of marriages between non-Muslim women and Muslim men in Pakistan, in terms of personal and cultural identity. Khan (1998) highlights the importance of wife/in-law relationships and its contribution to the success of a marriage. Khan (1998) found that the family's response plays a significant role in the relationship; for example, a welcoming family will result in a harmonious relationship; it also provided them with much needed support. On the other hand, a non-welcoming family will result in a difficult and often unpleasant relationship. Finally, Khan (1998) studies the effect of conversion on non-Muslim women to Islam, and its psychological and social outcomes. The results show that refusal to convert to Islam can empower a woman because she rejects the norms and values imposed on her allowing her to retain freedom of behavior. On the other hand, conversion might also lead to empowerment too, because by converting, the foreign wife will create a stronger bond with the family, showing her intention to assimilate.

Another study by Roer-Strier et al (2006) studied Western women married to Palestinian men (who have been living in Western countries) and at the time of the study were living in the West

Bank. Their research focused on the patterns of cultural adaptation of these couples and their

interaction with power relations in Palestinian society, such as patriarchy, East-West relations,

and the Israeli occupation. According to the study, the Palestinian men no longer felt complete

belonging and identification with their hometown, because of their experience living abroad for

so many years. Further, the Western women were foreigners to begin with and did not feel they

belonged to their new home either, making both individuals feel "out of place". Similarly to

Khan (1998), the religious and cultural dynamics in the West-Bank considerably affect women; it

is rooted with cultural symbolic boundaries that keep the foreign wife outside the cultural group.

Further, the in-laws feel responsible to familiarize the foreigner-in-law with the new environment

and the local traditions and expectations of her as both a foreigner and a woman in a patriarchal

society. For example, the wife, as both a woman and a foreigner, is not entitled to make any

family decision independently from her in-laws and her husband in particular.

Aim and Research Questions

The present study examined interfaith and cross-cultural intermarried couples of diverse cultural

backgrounds and religions. The aim of the present study was to reveal and understand what

individuals engaging in an interfaith and cross-cultural long-term commitment experience during

different stages of their marriage in order for their relationship to survive. Further, the

interviewees chosen were at different stages in their marriage and were interviewed using an in-

depth, semi-structured interview, in order to encompass a variety of aspects that different couples

experience throughout different stages in their marriage. The questions of interest were: i) What

factors were related to the initiation and maintaining of their interfaith and cross-cultural

relationship and marriage, ii) what obstacles were they and/or are they still challenged by? And lastly, iii) what advice might they have for interfaith and cross-cultural couples that are intending to engage in a long term-commitment? To address this intermarried couples, of different stages in their marriage (five months to twenty- four years), were individually interviewed in relation to their relationship preceding the marriage and afterwards. This was done using an idiographic approach in order to examine very specific experiences and to provide an indication of the variety of issues that a range of cultures and faiths might contribute. Studying interfaith and cross-cultural marriages in this way enables us to understand the perception of the couple's encounter and their relation to any obstacles that they meet. This is important because understanding cross-cultural and interfaith married couples adds a fundamental dimension to the study of interpersonal relationships as well as "modern families"—a dimension that has been neglected by researchers and practitioners alike.

The current study is a continuation of three previous studies (Yahya & Boag, 2014) which examined attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships and the expectations and fears associated with initiating and maintaining these. For instance, a common fear was to get disowned or ostracized by the family and community. A further aim of this study then was to assess whether the previous participants' expectations were predictive or not of what individuals in these relationships actually experience, and if so, (i) how did the participants in the current research overcome the difficulties that stood in their way? And (ii) how are they preserving and maintaining their interfaith and cross-cultural relationship?

METHOD

Participants

Eight participants partook in the study (four males and four females) with ages varying between 25 to 50. The interviewees were all Australian citizens (three participants were born and raised overseas and arrived in Australia at an older age to study or work. After getting married they were given an Australian citizenship) of different cultural backgrounds (Middle Eastern, European, Asian, and white Australian) and different religious affiliation (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). All the participants were in a cross-cultural and interfaith marital relationship at the time of the interviews (varying from five months to twenty-four years).

Procedure

The data were collected using an in depth, semi-structured interview (in English), that lasted between 60 – 120 minutes. The interviews were recorded (with the consent of the participants) and then transcribed for analysis purposes. By using semi-structured interviews, the participant was allowed to authentically respond without being restricted to a set of answers (Seidman, 2012). The questions were drawn from a larger study examining cross-cultural and interfaith relationships.

The main questions of interest were as follows: a) What factors were related to the initiation and maintaining of their interfaith and cross-cultural relationship and marriage, b) what obstacles were they and/or are they still challenged by? And lastly, c) what advice might they have for interfaith and cross-cultural couples that were intending to engage in a long term-commitment.

Example questions are: *"Could you tell me about how you decided to be in a cross-cultural and interfaith intimate relationship"*; *"What sort of reactions did you get from your family and friends after they found out about your interfaith and cross-cultural relationship?"*; *"In your opinion, what would you say made it easier for your relationship to work out?"*

Data Analysis

The data were read and reviewed by both authors several times and major themes were identified. Further, using typological analysis (Merriam, 2009; Goetz & Le Compte, 1984) main recurring themes were divided into a number of categories that were easily comparable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The collected data were then compared according to six main axes (see finding section below). Peer examination of the data and findings was conducted in order to ensure reliability and examples of the answers were included in the manuscript. Finally, the two readers reached full consensus on the themes found and data analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings were analyzed and six themes were derived from the analysis: (i) *Why interfaith and cross-cultural marriage?*; None of the participants were actively searching for a partner from a different faith or cross-cultural background. Furthermore, the participants believed that shared values are more important that faith or culture. (ii) *Experience in consequence to their interfaith and cross-cultural marriage*; the participants reported that having the family's approval is significant for the relationship to survive and also impacted upon the participants, (iii) *So how do*

interfaith and cross-cultural marriages actually work?; the participants noted that compromise is a main component in the preservation of their relationship (iv) *Choosing an environment to avoid conflict*; a minority of the participants mentioned that living in Australia made it a lot easier for their relationship to survive, because of its accommodating attributes towards interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships. (v) *Concerns about the children's religious and cultural identity*; the participants raised the issue of their children adhering to a certain religion or culture, in order for the participants to preserve their religion and cultural identity. And finally, (vi) *Advice to couples considering interfaith and cross-cultural marriage*; the majority of the participants were cautious to promote interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, because of challenges that they experienced.

The Couples

Tanaz and Shawn

Tanaz is a Muslim woman from a Middle Eastern background, and *Shawn* is a Christian man of a North American background. They are both in their late twenties and have been married for less than a year. Formerly they were flatmates and had been living together on "non-romantic" terms for about a year. The question of marriage came to Tanaz by surprise and initially she was very against the whole idea, *"At the beginning I said 'no, don't even talk about these things', because I had a bad image of non-Muslim guys, I just thought that all he wanted was to be with me (intercourse) or he just wants something else, it is not love."* After long discussions and a lot of convincing from her husband's side, they decided it was the right thing for them and got married soon afterwards.

Saed and Mei Ling

Saed is a Muslim man of a Middle Eastern background and *Mei Ling* is a Catholic woman of an Asian background. They are both in their late twenties and have been married for almost a year. They met in South east Asia—Mei Ling's home country. Saed was there for a job opportunity and Mei Ling worked with Saed at the same office. Their relationship started off on friendly terms; however, slowly yet gradually the two felt that there was more to their relationship than merely friendship and decided to explore a more serious side of it. Mei Ling and Saed dated for almost two years; throughout this time Mei Ling started studying Islam and eventually decided to take on the Muslim values and beliefs, *"I always told her that we can actually get married, with her being Christian…she was intrigued by Islam herself, so she would go out and start doing her own reading, she started reading the Quran for several months and she was quite amazed by the similarities as well as by how easy it was, and how much more logical sense it made to her, even how she interpreted Christianity was more in line with Islam and so she didn't feel like she had to negate Christianity.*

Tali and Matthew

Tali is a Jewish Middle Eastern woman in her late thirties, and *Matthew* is a Christian Australian man. They have been married for approximately five years. They dated for a few months before getting engaged. This was a second marriage for both of them, and while *Matthew* had children from his previous marriage (who lived with their biological mother) *Tali* came into the relationship with no children. After they got married they had two children of their own. Neither of them formerly thought of being in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship; on the contrary,

Matthew was raised with the notion that Jewish people had negative connotations related to them, [*Matthew*] *"My impression growing up was Jews were not like us, it was a negative connotation, if you were Jewish then, they'd say I thought something is wrong with Jews"*, [*Tali*] *"It was in Israel that it was more a big deal and I guess with my goals, there was something wrong with being a Gentile, because it was a second marriage for both of us, part of the dilemma, about part of my considerations was, I'll be divorced which is a bad thing, I'll marry a Gentile, I'm doing the wrong thing by my culture."*

Deniz and Yoel

Deniz (39) is a Muslim Turkish Australian woman and *Yoel* (40) is a Jewish Israeli man. They have been married for approximately ten years. *Deniz* and *Yoel* met in Japan while *Deniz* was travelling and *Yoel* worked there at the time. They dated for about a year and decided to get married for reasons that were not disclosed during the interview; however, it was mentioned that neither was positive about getting married but were hoping that matters would get better after marriage, [*Yoel*] *"We met in Japan… and we kind of decided to get married but I am not sure … it was kind of both of us weren't really 100% into it…"*

Joshua and Leah

Joshua (49) is a Jewish Australian man from an Anglo-Saxon background and *Leah* (49) is a Catholic Australian woman from an Italian background. They have been married for approximately twenty-five years. They met at a mutual friend's party and started dating. Initially they were not aware of each other's

religious backgrounds, thinking that there was no difference. [*Leah*] *"I found out when, we were at the park up at north Bondi, I don't know what we were talking about but it came out that Dave was Jewish and my jaw just dropped because I couldn't believe it, and the reason I couldn't believe it is because I had dated at least two Jewish boys prior to that and it just seemed to be the way it went, either nothing, like, no religion or they identified as Jewish. I was brought up in Bondi and surrounded by Jewish people…so I just got it, and my name is Leah and I look European and I think people just assumed I was Jewish when in fact I wasn't. So…That's when I found out and I was shocked, only from the point of view of, how could this happen, because, you're taught one way and encouraged one way (to be with a Catholic man) and time after time I'm landing somewhere else (with non-Catholic men, primarily Jewish), and then I think at that point is when it just became irrelevant."*

Why Interfaith and Cross-Cultural?

None of the participants were actively searching for a partner from a different faith or cross-cultural background. It appeared they all met under different circumstances and their relationship escalated to a more serious and intimate one. Further, all of the participants stressed the importance of marrying their partner because they shared common values, and because they were "good people", rather than being affiliated to the same religion as them (or not). [*Tanaz*] *"He's actually a Christian but I really don't know which branch of Christianity he believes in, because it's really not important to me, religion has never been that important in order to take onto consideration very much, so yes as long as a person is a good friend or person, it's okay with me."* Similarly *Leah* states, *"…the thing that is really important I think was Dave and I shared*

very similar values […] the fundamental values were quite similar." Further, *Saed* as well as *Tali*

mentioned that they have formerly been in relationships with individuals of the same faith and it

did not work out for them. In their opinion, being with someone from the same faith or culture

does not mean that there will be a perfect match, but rather, it has more to do with attitude

towards religion. For example, *Saed* states, *"I did date a Muslim girl for probably three months*

and she was Muslim by name but I actually couldn't marry her because of her Islamic beliefs,

because she was so close-minded, never really felt anything with her beliefs, it was very much an

identity and so I just couldn't deal with someone like that, whereas with her (his wife Mei Ling), it

wasn't the fact that she was Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or any of them, it was more

because of how she approached her religion, she had a passion for learning, a passion to be

close to God and she didn't care about the identity of such, she just wanted to make sure she was

practicing based on what God wanted her for.

Experience in Consequence to their Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Marriage

One of the aims of this study was to obtain the different types of reactions experienced and

received by the couples who chose to engage in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship. This

was in relation to previous research on attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural

relationships, where participants feared reactions from their social circle (e.g., being ostracized)

(Madek, 2005).

The participants stated that they were not concerned with reactions from people, other than their

immediate family (such as extended family and friends). However, most of the participant's

friends and extended family turned out to be supportive of the interfaith and cross-cultural

relationship (with an initial negative reaction that had to be dealt with, among some of the couples). Further the participants suggested that the support of the immediate family is extremely important in order for the relationship to survive.

Saed's parents were initially disapproving of his relationship with a North-east Asian woman, even though she converted to Islam and had started to practice the religion; however, his brother was accepting of the relationship and eventually *Saed's* parents accepted their daughter in law, [*Saed*] *"From my brother, it was pretty positive, because he knew the girl and he had a similar mind-frame to me. My parents and my sister, they were definitely trying to advise me against it and lead me away. […] After marriage we lived with my parents for a while, and they see her definitely as a daughter now, they're very close to her and love her and they couldn't be happier with her."*

Similarly, *Tanaz's* family were also not accepting of the interfaith and cross-cultural relationship initially; however, she did not emphasize the negative reactions that she indeed received from some friends as she was more concerned about her being content with her relationship, [*Tanaz*] *"About my friends, I probably thought they had bad thoughts or they still probably have, but I don't care, this is my life I have to make my own life, at the end of the day it's me and my husband who are going to live with each other, not friends, not people, not parents, sisters or brothers, I'm that type of person who doesn't really care about what people say."* However, she later suggests that being in a cross-cultural and interfaith relationship with a disapproving immediate family is very difficult, and that she worked extensively with her family until she received their approval of this relationship. [*Tanaz*] *"I think that if a girl gets married without her parents approval, the same thing is true about a boy, I think in future he or she will regret that, because parents never want bad for their daughter or son, so I think the responsibility of that girl or boy who wants to*

get married is try hard to get the approval by patience, sympathizing with the parents and
clarifying every trivial point and yes. […] because at the end of the day you need the support of
both families, life is not really easy so you'll definitely face problems and want the support of the
grownups or older people, so their support is very important."

Tali and *Matthew* also were less concerned about what others thought about their choice of
marriage. They mentioned that even though in the past they would have been more concerned
about people's reactions, and especially their immediate family, today, after they have been
married and divorced, and much more mature and older in age, they no longer put emphasis on
their parent's opinions or others.

Leah and *Joshua* describe a different story, they mentioned that it was a bit of a surprise to some
family members that *Leah* was not Jewish (mainly because of her name, European looks, and the
area that she lived in, that was primarily Jewish), but no one ever stood in their way. However,
there was a bit of a concern from *Leah's* mother about the children becoming Orthodox Jewish
and being very religious in that sense. Another issue that came up was the fact that Leah's mother
felt that perhaps she had "failed" raising *Leah* as a Catholic or Christian because she chose to
marry a Jewish man and raise her children as Jewish individuals.

Finally, it appears that not all the parents were approving of their children's choice of interfaith
and cross-cultural marriage; and Yoel and Deniz's relationship was not as "smooth sailing" as the
rest of the couples, *Yoel* says *"I told them (his parents) I am marrying…I basically called my*
father and he said don't tell it to your mom she will be very sad. Because she (his wife Deniz) is
not…it's not so much about being Muslim it's about being non-Jewish, and he said that, and he
himself doesn't want to talk to me until I tell him that the situation changed, and since then we

didn't even talk. Even when I visited Israel I just came by myself and my father left the home, and my mom, she doesn't know anything she doesn't know about my kids." As this last quote indicates, individuals in cross-cultural and interfaith relationships can feel so much pressure that their own children are kept secret from the rest of the family.

So how do Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Marriages Actually Work?

It should be noted that interfaith and cross-cultural couples obviously experience difficulties that every other couple experiences—they are not different of any other couple in that sense. Further, all the participants raised the matter of compromise as a key factor in the success of their interfaith and cross-cultural relationship. More specifically, the findings suggest that one partner had to compromise more than the other, by being willing to give up more for the sake of the relationship. Further, it appears that preserving primarily one's religious identity but also cultural identity (language, choice of name, cuisine, etc.), required for the counterpart partner to compromise in the sense that they had to adapt to a different lifestyle, in order to adhere to a certain religious or cultural regime. *Leah* states, *"I remember going away one of those conversations reflecting on…I'm insisting on our children being Catholic…I really need to back up my argument, I was in the car park having this conversation in my head and it was very much around how do I make my argument better for the children to grow up Catholic that it is for them to be Jewish, I'm right and you're wrong, all those sorts of arguments, to be honest, I couldn't come up with an argument, that really would trump a kid kept growing up in a faith. I think I got to a point where when I spoke to the priest who married us about that, I remembered talking to him one time, I had trepidation around telling him we've decided to have Jewish children because*

I've gone through that argument in my head. He said that it doesn't matter, as long as there's a belief in God, that kind of settled it for me and then I thought of the arrogance of I'm right and you on the other hand." Joshua suggests that during his adult-life he turned away from Judaism and this was partly because of his fear of anti-Semitism. However, it was still very important for him that he preserve his Jewish identity by passing it on to his children, especially because he is a descendant of a family that survived the holocaust. In order for his children to gain the Jewish knowledge, he too studied Judaism and reconnected with it. [*Joshua*] *"How will my children be Jewish when I'm afraid to be called Jewish because of people's reaction?"* As this last quote indicates, cultural and religious identity can become consolidated as a result of entering cross-cultural and interfaith relationships.

On the other hand, *Mei Ling* studied a new religion when she came into the interfaith and cross-cultural relationship, even though she was not required to by her partner. According to *Saed*, *Mei Ling* was interested in the religion and became connected to it while reading more about it, [*Saed*] *"I always told her that we can actually get married, with her being Christian or whatever she was, as long as she had God in her life […] From her perspective she was still Christian, but she also believed there's another prophet and she accepts the fact that being a Muslim is someone who submits themselves to God. She believes that all religions are Muslims in a way, as people try to submit themselves to God […] She stated that she believed that the prophet Mohammad is the prophet of God and so she became a Muslim from there."*

Nevertheless, not all the couples discussed religion before marriage, or placed much emphasis on the matter, for example, [*Tanaz*] *"[…] we haven't talked thoroughly about this but what we discussed is very simple, the conclusion was that, just give freedom to the children to choose whatever religion or culture they want to choose, they're free to that."*

Moreover, *Saed* discussed another aspect of compromise that came up in social situations. *Mei Ling* and *Saed* come from different cultural backgrounds, and also speak different languages and this sometimes affects them especially when they are in certain social contexts, *"A lot of my family's friends are obviously Arabic, so when we come into family environments, they talk in Arabic, so she's going to feel excluded at times, you try and avoid that. […] there's definitely challenge, even now when we go out socially with friends, whether it be with her side or my side of friends, there's always that sense of I'm different, at the same time both sides see it that we're very much in love and connected, and hence everyone is being very open and try and accept the other person into the group"*

Unlike the others, *Deniz* and *Yoel* state that they did not discuss fundamental matters related to their interfaith and cross-cultural marriage, in which today they regret not being clearer about. They were not prepared for the outcomes of the relationship, especially with regard to the interfaith and cross-cultural component of it. [*Deniz*] *"We were stupid…We didn't think about anything and that's the thing I didn't know. I didn't know for example that I miss having a culture. I feel like our children don't have any culture […]"*

Additionally, by choosing to be in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship, *Deniz* and *Yoel* had to compromise with negative reactions from their in-laws (from *Yoel's* side mainly). This may have been avoided had they chosen to be in a homogamous relationship or with their parents' consent to this relationship. *Deniz* described not being welcomed or even acknowledged by her in-laws, a matter that the entire family (couple and children) suffers from, *"When you have kids and they start asking about their other grandpa and grandma, I don't want to have to tell him one day that, because you are not Jewish they (the father's family) don't want to know you. […] (Addressing Yoel) But you want to go back, like even for a holiday, how can we walk*

down the street in the [father's home-country] with the kids?! If someone might see you? […]

Also if you think about if something happened to Yoel, I have always wondered what would I do?

Let his family know what happened to him and if he was in hospital…I guess what I'm trying to

say is that our stress is so much bigger than what you think."

Further, *Deniz* and *Yoel* describe a significant cultural clash that wedges between them. They

both feel that the other counterpart's culture is different and sometimes certain behaviors (that are

outcomes of the culture, or unintentional lack of sensitivity to the other hosting culture) might be

considered as inappropriate in certain contexts. [*Deniz*] *"I can pick any guy from my culture, they*

would kind of know instinctively how parents would want them to behave, for example, like

people would come over, like a relative, to my mom's house and he would just keep sitting, I

know in [Yoel's home-country] maybe that's okay but it's so not acceptable in my tradition, it's

so disrespectful and I cringe inside, like I think oh God! And like, it would just be easier to be

with someone that would know by instinct how to behave."

Choosing an Environment to Avoid Conflict

Two of the eight participants mentioned that living in Australia, a multicultural open-minded

society, made it a lot easier for them to engage in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship.

Yoel says, *"It's part of the reason I am staying here, because for me that (in his home-country)*

was good I am enjoying my life. Japan was also good and stuff. Here (current location, which is

not Japan) is not my first choice, not really happy here, but I really cannot go to my home-

country with a family, that's the situation." Similarly, Tanaz adds that the environment that you

live in very much affects the relationship, and living in Australia had made her interfaith and

cross-cultural relationship with Shawn a lot easier. *"The good point about our relationship was that, always in an open minded society as well, in a society that believes in all types of thoughts and religions are appreciated, even like gays or lesbians don't have a problem, so in this society, I wasn't really careful or I didn't really take care of the society."*

Concerns about the Children's Religious and Cultural Identity

Even though it appears that the participants were not concerned about their partner's religious affiliation and cultural background; three of the participants (*Saed*, *Dave* and *Leah*) found it important that their children have a faith that was not out of their children's choice (as stated by the rest of the participants). *Dave* wanted their children to be Jewish, not because he was religious but because of the importance of continuing his Jewish heritage.

For *Leah* it did not matter what their children's religion would be (after consulting with the Priest at the church she belongs to) as long as religion and its values were taught rather than it being an identity. *Leah* states, *"Dave and I had this conversation before we got married, as to what religion our children would be, quite a lengthy conversation around that, and for me it made sense that given that I was observant that they'd be Catholic, but then I said what does it matter? We agreed to bring them up Jewish and we got married in the Catholic church, because with the idea that, because there are seven sacraments in the Catholic faith, and marriage is one of those and so it seemed okay to married in a Catholic church… And it had to more than tokenism, I*

remember feeling very strongly around that, I'll agree to bring them up Jewish, but it had to be more than tokenism, and in fact they've all been Bar-Mitzva'd[23]…"

Similarly *Saed* wanted his children to be Muslim, religiously *Mei Ling* did not have to convert in order for the children to be Muslim; however, she chose to do so regardless. Further, it appears that both couples appear to be willing to compromise and discussed issues relating to religion before marriage and before making any significant decisions.

Tali and *Matthew* discussed children related issues too, some of them related to how much the Jewish religion and culture would take part in their home, for example, it was important for *Tali* to have family *Shabbat* [24] dinners as well as celebrate the high holidays. However, other issues came up too, [*Tali*] *"I think we did talk about it but it was not a major part, we had much bigger fish to fry, Matthew had kids from a first marriage that I needed to know if it came to a point of choosing between us, then what that was a bigger issue, than religion, what else did you discuss."* Further, it was also important for *Tali* that the children have Hebrew names, in her opinion, living in a foreign country will provide a foreign culture to her children and therefore she wanted to keep some of her children's identity related to the Jewish culture.

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[23] A Jewish ceremony that takes place at a Synagogue or Temple when a boy reaches the age of 13 and a girl the age of 12. This religious ceremony signifies reaching the age of becoming a full-fledged member of the Jewish community with the responsibilities that come with it. These include moral responsibility for own actions, eligibility to be called to read from the Torah and lead or participate in a *minyan* (quorum of ten Jewish male adults required for certain religious obligations), may possess personal property, may be legally married according to Jewish law, must follow the 613 laws of the Torah, keep the *halakha* (collective body of Jewish religious laws derived from the Written and Oral Torah), and may testify as a witness in a *Beth Din* (Rabbinical court) case.

[24] *Shabbat* is the Jewish day of rest and seventh day of the week, on which religious Jews remember the Biblical creation of the heavens and the earth in six days and the Exodus of the Hebrews, and look forward to a future Messianic Age. It is custom to have a festive dinner on this day and this offers an opportunity to contemplate the spiritual aspects of life and to spend time with family.

One significant finding was that three of the participants raised a concern of potential difficulties with their children engaging in a long-term commitment with a person from a certain cultural background or faith, that might be either less open to an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship, [*Leah*] *Could you see a Jewish and a Muslim, couple? There are question marks, there are stereotypes and it might work out like us but then, you're playing the numbers as to who you find and what they…I don't think that exists.*" Further, *Tali* stated that certain faiths and cultural backgrounds would be less respectful towards women, "[*Tali*] *I'd be worried about any culture that has less respect for women, so even Jewish Orthodox, somebody who came from that background, I'd be concerned if it was a strict Muslim, and Maltese…*" Further, one participant indicated that they would not want their children to be with anyone that was anti-Jewish in any way or extremely affiliated with Islam, [*Yoel*] *"as long as they don't join the Hizballah or something like that I actually thought about it what would make me really angry with my kid that I would…if they go and join something that is completely anti-Israel something that willing to fight it will make me I will not be happy."*

Advice to Couples Considering Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Marriage

The participants were further asked to give advice to partners that are currently in an interfaith or cultural relationship and are thinking of getting married (or to be in a serious long term relationship). All the participants raised the issue of being open minded and have the ability to compromise for the relationship to succeed. [*Joshua*] *"Understanding communications and tolerance and give support."* [*Leah*] *"I think there has to be clarity from the get go, if the couple decides they want religion to be part of their family life, personally I think there has to be an agreement and choose one. I don't think you can have a Christmas tree at the front of the house*

and a Chanukiah[25] at the back of the house and have it all happening in the same place, I don't think that's fair on our children, there's confusion there and for me I don't think that all goes well."

Saed mentioned the importance of being able to cope with times when it will not be comfortable because of cultural differences. *"I guess the biggest challenge is probably trying to get used to that being taken out of your comfort zone, you have to answer a lot more, so she represents the entire Asian community (laughing) as well as I represent everything to do with the Middle East and Islam so you have to be really into it."*

Tali mentions the importance of family approval of the interfaith and cross-cultural relationship, [*Tali*] *"I think it's very hard to sustain a relationship, when the family is against it, just from what I've seen, it's very hard on the marriage as well and relationship. It's always best if you can gradually befriend the family and make them like the idea and make them curious about it or proud of it, even if it's hard. I think people find it very hard to accept, especially from opposing cultures, in our case it's not opposing but Muslim and Jewish, the families would really struggle and go through denial and mourning. I'd say be compassionate about their struggle, but it doesn't mean give in just because it's hard for you, but definitely be compassionate for their hardship, it's really hard, maybe taking years and people have to go through a process. […] If it was multicultural relationship I would definitely warn my daughters that you're not choosing the easy path, if it's multicultural, like a cross-cultural relationship, or cross-faith, you're not choosing an easy path but the easy path is not necessarily better, I would definitely prepare them that there will be certain challenges that's not to say that these challenges are worse than others."*

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[25] A Chanukiah is the nine-branched candelabrum that is used on Chanukkah – a Jewish festival.

Further, the participants also stated that being in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship is not easy and that it adds to existing relationship issues and difficulties that normally arise between couples, making the relationship that much more difficult to maintain. Furthermore, one couple stated that it was too hard and they would not advise anyone to engage in such a relationship. *[Deniz] "I don't think now I would go into this if I knew what…It's too hard, too hard…" [Yoel]* continues, *"She didn't realize, I told her this was going happen, like don't expect my family to accept you, because they are a completely different world, but I don't think it registered. She didn't really understand it."*

Moreover, the participants all agree that the parental and social consent of significant others (mainly the immediate family) surrounding the couple is important for the relationship to survive; otherwise, it is highly likely that the couple's relationship will struggle to survive. Lastly, only one participant warmly encouraged others to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural relationship because in her opinion, it is an enriching experience that she enjoyed immensely [*Tanaz*] *"Finally, I want to say that it's really good, I never thought that life would be very interesting when you combine or mix two cultures and two different beliefs, sometimes it's really problematic in life, life is not really easy, sometimes his beliefs mismatch mine and some problems will arise and this one I think will be despite of our interfaith relationship, so it's really cool, I encourage more people of different nationalities to get married."*

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated interfaith and cross-cultural marital relationships. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, eight participants living in Australia, of diverse cultural-backgrounds and religions were interviewed. An idiographic method of research was used in order to try and capture the uniqueness of each individual's experience within that interfaith and cross-cultural relationship. The questions related to positive and negative consequences that the participants experienced leading to their choice of engaging in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship, as well as during their engagement in long-term interfaith and cross-cultural commitment. Further, the participants were also asked about their concerns about the future, and finally they were requested to give their advice (from experience) for couples that are considering engaging in a long-term commitment with their partner of a different cultural background or faith.

As expected, the participants interviewed for the current study were somewhat diverse in terms of how they met their partner, and how their interfaith and cross-cultural relationship evolved. Further, it appears that the couples share some similarities but also many differences, with regards to the reactions that they received from the people around them, and other experiences that they had to deal with in consequence to being in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship.

Potentially Promoting Factors

All the participants report that sharing the same values towards life is a lot more significant to them than sharing the same faith; therefore, the participants were open to heterogamous relationships. Moreover, it appears that sharing the same faith does not necessarily mean that the individuals will get along on a more personal and spiritual level. Two participants out of the eight

stated that they dated a person of the same religion and it did not work out because it was not

satisfying on a personal level. This is not in line with former research that endorses homogamy

which proposes that individuals are more inclined to choose a partner from a similar background

as theirs (Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). However, it should be

noted that people who choose to engage in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship are a

smaller percentage of the general community, and are thus examples of the exception to that

theory. The majority of individuals choose to engage in homogamous relationships and for a

variety of reasons including religious affiliation, adhering to traditional teachings, family

pressure and personal attraction (Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000).

Further, it appears from the findings that having the family's approval is an important factor in

sustaining the interfaith and cross-cultural relationship. This finding is in line with several former

studies that state that family and the individual's social network's approval are essential for a

relationship to survive (Parks & Adelman, 1983; Eggert & Parks, 1987; Khan, 1998; Felmlee &

Sprecher, 2000; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Moore 2000, Reich, Ramos & Jaipal, 2000; Espiritu

2001; Felmlee, 2003; Sprecher, 2011; Etcheverry, Le, & Hoffman, 2012). Family approval was

not a matter that came in the way for most of the couples in the present study; however, it

affected all of them in one way or another. Further, two out of eight participants mentioned that it

certainly did play a significant role in their relationship, and without their parents' acceptance of

the relationship it would have been really difficult, if even possible, to maintain the relationship.

Lastly, with reference to Khan's (1998) research, whereby, foreign wives sometimes

compromised in order to be part of the hosting community, only one participant converted her

faith and she did so for reasons other than to be part of the new host-family. It should be

mentioned, that initially, even with the conversion, her in-laws were not totally accepting of the

relationship; however, with time and after getting to know her, their attitudes towards her changed. The rest of the participants were not concerned about their partner's religious identity.

Another component that is significant in maintaining a cross-cultural and interfaith relationship is compromise. Compromise involved changing ones religious affiliation, cultural traditions and living environment. The findings suggest that some couples compromised more than others and that depended on the level of religious and cultural affiliation that each individual in the marital relationship had. However, there are different aspects of compromise that appeared in the findings; from the choice of religious identity and practicing certain traditions, and to choosing names that were culturally affiliated, and finally moving to a new country in order for the relationship to transpire. For example, some of the couples shared a respect for religion generally and it did not matter what the religion was as long as there was an affiliation to a religion that shared the same qualities (for instance, Islam and Christianity shared the same God). The fact that both partners found a middle ground of believing in a God (rather than a religion) was enough of a compromise for the relationship to work. Accordingly, focusing on a more general commonality of views rather than specific differences may be one strategy that interfaith and cross-cultural couples can employ to avoid conflict. Nevertheless, according to Fujino (1997), most interfaith and cross-cultural relationships do not end with marriage because not all couples are able to sacrifice their own identity for the sake of their relationship. Further, some people may not be able to make that sacrifice because they are religiously affiliated and their religion prevents interfaith and cross-cultural relationships (Yahya, Boag & Litvak-Hirsch, 2014, Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995) or their cultural background may not encourage such marriages (Root, 2001; Ata, 2000).

Significant Changes Made by the Counterparts

While compromise appears to be important, three out of eight participants chose to change at least one major component of their life in order for their relationship to be maintained. Four of these participants left their home country to live in Australia with their partner, and one of them also changed her faith (however, that was not a requirement of her husband, according to Islam). For example, *Mei Ling* changed her religious identity after she met *Saed*. It was not required of her to change her identity but she did nevertheless (a question that will remain unanswered is, would *Mei Ling* have converted to Islam had she not met *Saed*?). Similarly, *Yoel* left his home country in order to be married to *Deniz* and now cannot return there for the sake of the marriage and children (otherwise, the parents will be living in separate continents). Lastly, *Leah* gave up raising her children as Catholics because it was important for her husband to raise them as Jewish (Reform) individuals. *Joshua* wanted to preserve his Jewish identity through his children, in order to respect his ancestors that were taken by the holocaust. However, the couple got married at a Catholic church (and not a Synagogue or Jewish Temple) because it was important for Leah—as it is one of the seven sacraments in the Catholic faith; and Leah kept her Catholic faith. Therefore, it appears from the findings that sometimes significant changes have to be made by individuals in order for an interfaith and/or cross-cultural long term-commitment to succeed.

Adaptation to Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Marriage

However, evidently, all the participants had to adapt to a new lifestyle—even if it did not require a major change in their own lifestyle. This is because they had to merge two separate and different lifestyles that are according to two distinguished cultures and/or faiths—as part of their new lifestyle together, as an interfaith or cross-cultural married couple. The differences in lifestyle were not all major, for example, a simple difference is the choice of ethnic cuisine served at home. This adaptation is in line with the findings of Roer-Strier et al. (2006) who suggested that in the case of interfaith and cross-cultural marriages, both parties had to adapt to a new situation where they no longer felt completely part of their original social group; however, they were also not completely foreign. In Roer-Strier et al's study the adaptation was a lot more significant because the foreign wife had to adapt to a new culture that practiced very different traditions and social behavior; in this case a patriarchal society that does not allow a woman to make decisions on her own. This phenomenon of when both parties in an interfaith and/or cross-cultural relationship have to adapt to a new situation is termed as *mutual acculturation* by Falicov (1995). Further, two out of the eight participants have agreed to "lose" their distinctiveness, in order to be part of the dominant group that they have joined. This is in line with Gordon's (1964) theory of *assimilation*. However, the majority (six out of eight) participants did not have to change their identity in order to maintain the interfaith and cross-cultural marriage. Instead, they continued to be affiliated to their own faith as well as culture (however, this does not include their attitudes towards their future generation). This is in line with the phenomenon of *acculturation,* whereby the individuals become part of the dominant host culture without losing their own identity (Cohen, 1988).

Potentially Inhibiting Factors

The primary inhibiting factor that came up from the participants is the family disapproval of the relationship. As mentioned above, this is in line with previous research that found that family and friends' approval is an essential factor in allowing the relationship to continue (Parks & Adelman, 1983; Eggert & Parks, 1987; Felmlee & Sprecher, 2000; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Moore 2000, Reich, Ramos & Jaipal, 2000; Espiritu 2001; Felmlee, 2003; Sprecher, 2011; Etcheverry, Le, & Hoffman, 2012). In the present paper, two participants raised concerns to do with one side of the relationships' family disapproving of the interfaith marriage. The family was willing to disengage in any connection with the participant and therefore his wife and children had to be kept a secret from several members of his family. Further, the participant and his family were not able to go back and visit his home-country of fear that their relationship might be revealed even to his own mother. According to Kalmijn (1998) this is an example of high *group identification* that affects the disapproving family's attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships and moves them towards endorsing homogamy and endogamy.

Another factor that was briefly mentioned was the fact that the participants were living in a country that endorsed interfaith and cross-cultural marriages. It is presumably likely that if they had to live in a country that prohibited such relationships then their marriage would not have transpired. It should further be noted that choosing a certain environment was a means to avoid conflict—such was the case with *Tanaz* and *Yoel*; they would not be able to engage in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship in their home-country because of societal and familial reasons; therefore, they remained in Australia. Lastly, most of the participants met in Australia— a multicultural country that creates more opportunity for individuals of different faiths and backgrounds to meet and potentially fall in love.

Future Implications

With regard to future implications of interfaith and cross-cultural marriages, the future generation of intermarried couples raises some questions with regard to their own choice of marriage, which is inevitably going to be interfaith and cross-cultural because their parents are both from different faiths and cultures. Namely, the child might choose a partner of similar culture or faith as the mother or father, or someone different altogether. Having raised this issue, some of the participants primarily emphasized their concern about their children being with a partner that treated them well, rather than having a certain cultural background or faith.

However, three participants mentioned that certain cultural-backgrounds and faiths raise more concern to them than others, with regard to being a suitable partner for a long-term commitment. One out of eight participants was concerned about a partner from a Muslim or Mediterranean background who, to her, appeared to be less respectful towards women and sometimes more aggressive. Another participant stated that she was not sure if a relationship between a Muslim individual and a Jewish individual would work because of the current political state of affairs in Israel, as well as the Muslims being perceived to be very affiliated with their religion and less open to interfaith and cross-cultural marriages. Finally, a third participant stated that he was concerned his children might end up with an anti-Israel individual. These statements are in line with previous research suggesting that individuals are generally less inclined to marrying a Muslim individual because they are perceived negatively (Nasir, 2009; Yahya & Boag, 2014).

It appears that the participants in the current study, as well as previous ones (Yahya & Boag, 2014), perceive Muslims to be a source of concern as partners in an interfaith and cross-cultural

relationship. This is because Muslim individuals are commonly perceived in a negative light by non-Muslims. This phenomenon is likely to be the result of a wide misconception that stems from the intertwined relationship between religion and culture. Because of certain patriarchal cultures that are dominantly Muslim too (Roer-Strier et al, 2006, Leeman, 2009), Islam is misconceived by non-Muslims as a religion that treats women and girls with disrespect and dishonour. This misconception is a result of a common fault that non-Muslims do not differentiate between religion and culture (Nasir, 2009).

Finally, an unexpected finding was the advice that was given by the participants to couples that were currently in a cross-cultural or interfaith dating-relationship, and were planning on getting married (or engaging in any serious and long term relationship). All the participants apart from one mentioned the difficulties of being in a cross-cultural and interfaith relationship. The advice that was given was to be empathic towards the families and talk to them to help them understand the situation until they change their mind if there were issues. Furthermore, there has to be a lot of compromise and mutual understanding of one another, and the ability to be open-minded and to be taken out of your comfort zone (e.g., feeling excluded as a result of being in a social context where you do not relate to or understand the language or the shared social cues). Finally, one couple advised against interfaith and cross-cultural marriages, emphasizing the difficulties that come with such relationships, especially if the families (or even one of the families) were against the relationship.

Limitation and Further Work

It is important to note that the current study was conducted in Australia, which is perceived to be very multicultural. It is potentially very likely that in other places in the world, that are more homogamous or that a lot stricter with interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, such relationships would struggle a lot more to survive, if at all. Further, the couples chosen for this study were individuals that are currently married. Divorced couples may provide a different picture to the one presented in these findings. Further research could study divorced couples that were in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship, to examine whether the interfaith and cross-cultural component of the relationship caused the conflict.

Moreover, the study of interfaith and cross-cultural relationships is a crucial one. In an increasingly globalizing multicultural world, it is evident that such relationships are more likely to occur, and therefore it is important to understand the social implications that these relationships may produce. Further, it is significant to relate to the environmental impacts on individuals who choose to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural relationships, and how these impacts may affect the interfaith and cross-cultural couple's wellbeing and preservation of their relationship (and the potential impact upon future generations). Further, it is also important to study the future ramifications and products of these relationships—both personal and related to future generations.

In summary, it appears that findings from former studies that predict difficulties which interfaith and cross-cultural married couples will endure (Yahya & Boag, 2014) have some basis but are not necessarily problematic (Yahya & Boag, 2014). The challenges that are set in the way have to do with familial acceptance both of the situation as well as the new in-law. Further, there has to

be a willingness of the couple to compromise and adapt to a new lifestyle and finally, challenges appear even after marriage. However, some individuals are willing to endure all of the mentioned setbacks in order to be with the person that they fell in love with.

CONCLUSION

This paper studied interfaith and cross-cultural married couples from diverse cultural backgrounds and faiths. The findings convey a complex observation of interfaith and cross-cultural marriages, which is related to and affected by numerous factors including: religious and cultural affiliation, the willingness to compromise on important matters such as a personal identity; cultural and religious norms and traditions, and the family's reaction to the relationship (approving or disapproving). Further, some of the main components of a successful interfaith and cross-cultural relationship are: open-mindedness and patience. Interfaith and cross-cultural married couples endure further aspects of difficulty that other homogamous couples do not. Lastly, family acceptance and support of the couple is an essential factor towards the preservation of the relationship, in which without it the interfaith and cross-cultural couple's relationship will struggle to survive.

Finally, this study does not prescribe interfaith and cross-cultural relationships; however, it does raise the awareness of difficulties that are sometimes created by the environment and significant others (e.g., family and friends) surrounding the couple. These difficulties result in unexpected sources of stress for the couple in an interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationship. Furthermore, the couples in hand have to endure obstacles, simply because of their choice of partner. If it is a human right to fall in love with another person – no matter who they are and

what their cultural background or faith is – it should be a human right to choose to have a long-

term commitment with them.

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

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CHAPTER V:

General Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to study the interaction between perceived social pressure, religion and culture on interfaith and cross-cultural long-term intimate relationships (e.g., dating, cohabitation and marriage). While some past research has examined particular aspects of cross-cultural and interfaith relationships, there is minimal research examining differences in attitudes towards such intimate relationships across religions (as opposed to different streams of the same religion, e.g., Catholicism and Protestantism) and cultural background. There is also limited research on how different faiths perceive interfaith marriages (e.g., Islam vs. Judaism) and the relation of religious affiliation on attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural selection of long-term partners.

The current thesis has examined attitudes across the three main monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Moreover, most research has been conducted in the United States, Canada and Europe with less focus on exploring attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships in other parts of the world. This thesis further investigated attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships in Australia and Israel (examining both Palestinian and Israelis). These locations were chosen due to a lack of information in the current literature in this field. Furthermore, by conducting a study in Israel, another factor was added which was the influence of living in a volatile environment that is suffering from an endemic conflict. Finally, the current thesis has also addressed the limited research carried out on interfaith and cross-cultural married couples.

Overview of Studies

Four studies were conducted throughout this research and each study addressed a different area of interest within interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships. Further, the studies were designed in accordance to preceding findings from previous reports.

Study I

The first study that was conducted interviewed fifty-seven students at a university campus in Australia. The present study sought to examine the attitudes of Muslim, Christian and Jewish individuals towards intimate relationships.

The findings were in line with previous literature, which suggests that the three monotheistic religions prohibit interfaith and cross-cultural marriages (Leeman, 2009; Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Marshall & Markstorm-Adams, 1995; Heaton, 1990). A majority of 62% of participants reported being against interfaith and cross-cultural relationships due to religious reasons as well as cultural barriers. Namely, it appears that engaging in an intimate interfaith or cross-cultural relationship was a deviation from the cultural and societal norm and could lead to ostracizing from the family and/or community. However, some of the participants who were not open to interfaith intimate relationships were open to cross-cultural relationships—as long as they were able to keep their religious and cultural practices. The remaining 38% were open to interfaith and cultural relationships; yet, these participants were not actively seeking a partner of a different faith or culture. The majority who were against interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships were mainly of a Jewish and Muslim background, and almost all the remaining 38% who were open to

interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships were Christian. Finally, none of the participants were inclined to change their religious or cultural identity in order to engage in an intimate relationship. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that if a change in their religious or cultural identity or personal values was required, participants were less likely to engage in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship. Further, the participants were concerned about preserving their religious and cultural identity.

Study II

Data from the primary study were further analysed in order to address the question of the relation between family pressure on attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriage. The aim of the study was to examine parental and social pressure on attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriage. The findings suggest that the matter of interfaith and cross-cultural relationship is an area of concern that has been discussed in the past by most of the participants. Further, all the participants agree that heterogamous relationships are not treated like homogamous ones. One of the reasons for this is that the participants value the notion of preserving their cultural and religious identity and this was greatly influenced by both their immediate and remote social circle. Moreover, the findings reveal that the stronger the perceived pressure exerted on the participant the less likely the participant was going to engage in an interfaith or cross-cultural intimate relationship. Additionally, a minority of the participants mentioned that they were willing to endure the pressure from their social circle in order to keep the interfaith and cross-cultural relationship that they choose to engage in.

One particularly prominent finding was that participants perceived their parents and grandparents to be holding "racist" attitudes towards others of different faiths and cultural backgrounds. However, there also seems to be an attitude shift with regards to others different from them in faith or culture; namely, the participants did not appear to hold "racist" attitudes towards others from different faiths or cultural-background and were even open to the idea of their future generation engaging in such relationships. However, a minority of the participants did not want their children to engage in interfaith or cross-cultural relationships and they were confident that they would raise their children in such a way that their children would not want to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships. Lastly, the main concern overall (among all the participants) was that their child would choose a partner that would be good to them and not harm them in any way. Overall, the findings of this study indicate the importance that religious affiliation holds over cultural identity. More specifically, participants were more inclined to engage in a cross-cultural relationship than an interfaith relationship. However, it is interesting to note that while some participants were adamant over their disinterest in interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships, a possible generation shift may be observed when it came to their more lenient attitudes towards their imagined future offspring.

Study III

The third study that was conducted interviewed eighteen participants living in Israel (Arab Muslim, Arab Christian and Jewish Israeli). Following these findings and in accordance with the general aims of the thesis, the objective of the current study was to explore similar research

questions of the primary study in a different context in order to achieve a broader perspective. Thus, the present sample was chosen as a comparison point to earlier findings.

The demography of the state of Israel, as well as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, serve as an interesting comparison point to Australia, which does not endure any political disputes where ethnic groups are in conflict with one another (or at least not to the same level as in Israel). Consequently, this sets the stage to explore attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships among individuals living in a conflict-ridden area.

The findings suggest that the majority of the participants were affected by the negative social inclination towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. Further, the participants were mainly concerned about following religious teachings and societal norms and preserving their religious and cultural identity. Moreover, it appears that there were three main reasons that emerged from the findings that affected the participant's negative attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships: family approval, social pressure and segregation. Knowing that the family will disapprove of an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship made the participants less likely to engage in such relationships.

The findings also highlighted the volatile environment in the state of Israel, which appears to create a wedge between the Jewish and Palestinian individuals living there. Consequently, the Israeli-Palestinian tension is reported as affecting their decision to engage in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship. Additionally, there exists a clear segregation between Palestinian and Jews, which also adds to the separation of the two cultures. Furthermore, although there is no conflict among the Christian and Muslim Palestinians living within Israel, the findings still

suggest an ever present resentment among the two peoples—one that causes the participants to be less inclined towards engaging in an intimate relationship with the other group.

More strikingly, both Christian Palestinians and Muslim Palestinians would rather engage in an intimate relationship with a Jewish individual than with each other. The findings suggest that this may be due to their views of Jewish individuals as closer to the cultural traditions or lifestyles of both groups. Lastly, both Jewish and Christian participants perceived Muslim individuals in a negative light (i.e., as aggressive and disrespectful towards women). In summary, the Israeli-Palestinian sample was in line with the Australian sample in terms of hesitancy to engage in interfaith intimate relationships. However, the Israeli-Palestinian sample was far more polarized in their views towards such relationships with the other group.

Study IV

Recognising that both individuals and couples are very complex, the aim of this fourth and final study was to capture some of the unique experiences of couples at different stages of their relationships. The present study interviewed eight participants who are in interfaith and cross-cultural marriage. The aim of the study was to examine the idiographic factors involved in the initiation and longevity of such marriages. Further, the study aimed to discover some of the difficulties that the couples involved endure. The findings suggest that the participants perceive values as being significantly more important than sharing the same religion. That is, these participants reported feeling that a similar outlook and stance on life was more important than religious affiliation. Additionally, family support was notably more important in order for the relationship to survive. This means that for participants in such relationships, without family

support as a buffer to societal barriers, the marriage would struggle to survive. Further, considerable accommodation appears to be needed in order for the relationship to occur. However, it was reported that sometimes one individual would compromise more than the other. Finally, it appears that the couples are well aware of the difficulties in an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship. Consequently, they do not believe that simply anyone is able to engage in such relationships and finally, that individuals who are interested in interfaith or cross-cultural relationships should be aware of the difficulties that the journey holds.

Comparing Present Findings to Past Literature

The existing literature describes partner choice preference in terms of two main streams: *heterogamous* or *homogamous*. *Homogamy* is when likes attract like; namely, two individuals of the same kind – whether it be race, culture, religion, origin – are attracted to one another. On the other hand, *heterogamy* is when opposites attract (Hollingshead, 1950; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000; Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003). The findings from the present study are in line with previous research that support homogamy (Brown, McNatt & Cooper, 2003; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000). The majority of the individuals convey that they prefer similar partners in terms of religion and culture. The findings also suggest certain existing cultural factors that go against sustaining heterogamous relationships. To begin, the participants were primarily concerned that their religious teachings restrict interfaith relationships (Leeman, 2009; Cila and Lalonde, 2013; Haji, Lalonde, Durbin & Naveh-Benjamin, 2011; Marshal & Markstrom-Adams, 1995).

Firstly, the three main monotheistic religions to a certain extent prohibit interfaith and cross-cultural marriages (with the exception of Muslim males, who may marry any chaste woman of the book—Muslim, Christian or Jewish). Secondly, the participants perceived interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships as a diversion from the norm, which may result in negative reactions from their surrounding social circle (Parks, 2007; Sinclair & Write, 2009; Leeman, 2009). These negative reactions may range from being ostracized by the community, disowned by their family or being badly hurt in extreme cases (Leeman, 2009; Madek, 2005). Thirdly, the participants were also concerned about preserving their religious as well as cultural identity (Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Haji, Lalonde, Durbin, & Naveh-Benjamin, 2011; Leeman, 2009). Here the participants mentioned cultural clashes, where certain traditions or the lifestyle in their religion or culture (e.g., consumption of alcohol in Christianity) may be forbidden in their partner's (e.g., in Islam) (Roer-Strier & Ben-Ezra, 2006; Khan, 1998). Further, among the Jewish community the issue of being respectful towards survivors of the Holocaust played a big role against interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships. In their opinion, if interfaith marriages occur between Jewish individuals and gentiles, the Jewish people would have died in vain during World War II. Lastly, family pressure also played a role in choosing a homogamous relationship over a heterogamous one. It appears that the greater the pressure against interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships, the more reluctant the individuals were to engage in that relationship (Parks, 2007; Sinclair & Write, 2009). Only a small minority of individuals reported being able to endure the consequences of going against their family. Although the explored population involved current interfaith and cross-cultural married couples, these individuals still felt that without family approval their interfaith and cross-cultural relationships would have struggled to survive (Lewis, 1973; Hallinan & Felmlee, 1975; Berger, 1979; Felmlee, 2003).

It should be further noted that none of the Muslim or Jewish participants were open to engaging in interfaith or cross-cultural relationships (Cila & Lalonde, 2013; Haji, Lalonde, Durbin, & Naveh-Benjamin, 2011). Additionally, among the Christian participants who were open to the notion of interfaith and cross-cultural dating, the ones who regarded themselves as more religious were more reluctant to enter into such relationships. Lastly, those who were open to interfaith relationships were not actively seeking an interfaith or cross-cultural partner and thus, would not date someone that was extremely religious or that had asked them to change in any way.

Social Influence

One of the primary factors to emerge from this thesis related to interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriage is the widespread perception of family and social pressure. The findings suggest that the perceived pressure exerted by family and friends has a great impact on individuals (Parks, 2007; Sinclair & Write, 2009). Further, it appears that most participants that are affected by their family and friends come from non-Western backgrounds. This finding suggests that in collectivistic cultures the absence of a psychosocial separation may affect the individual's choice. During the normal course of development, individuals in Western societies undergo an important psychosocial separation from their parents (i.e., form an individual identity distinct from their family). Inherent in this separation is the formulation of a unique, autonomous identity (Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Dwairy, 1996; Erikson, 1950; Erikson, 1963; Mahler, 1968; Mahler, 1975). However, no parallel individual development seems to occur in traditional societies in Africa, Asia, South America, or the Middle East (Sue & Sue, 1990). In these societies, the collective identity of the family seems to remain central (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede,

1986), and the individual remains embedded within his or her collective identity. A family member who attempts to assert his or her individualism is viewed as deviant and faces condemnation. This stands in stark contrast with some Western conceptualizations, which value the unique, autonomous individual.

Additionally, individuals who choose to engage in an interfaith and/or cross-cultural relationship may endure severe sanctions enforced by their social circle. They may be ostracized from their community, disowned by their family and also killed in very extreme cases (Madek, 2005). It is not easy to be in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship not only because of interpersonal issues that result from this type of relationship, but also because of the reactions that the couples may suffer from.

Lastly, an interesting finding that was present in all the studies suggested that non-Muslim individuals perceived Muslims as disrespectful and aggressive towards women. This is interesting due to the results demonstrating that while the participants were open to interfaith and cross-cultural marriages, they were less likely to engage in an intimate relationship with a Muslim individual. Even Arabs that were not Muslim preferred to engage in an interfaith relationship with a non-Muslim individual. In the study conducted in Israel, for example, Christian participants stated that they would rather date Jewish individuals than Muslim individuals. Additionally the Jewish participants also stated that they would rather date Christian individuals than Muslim individuals. This suggests that while Christian and Jewish participants felt there was a cultural gap between their lifestyles, the cultural divergence between them was less substantial and less significant than between their ideals and values, and those of Muslim individuals. Accordingly, this may be due to their views of each other's religious and cultural traditions being closer to their own lifestyles.

Future Implications

In every-day life, the implications of religious affiliation and social/cultural pressures on attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural dating and marriages are not clear, as implied by the empirical investigation included in this thesis. For example, a minority of the older generation was perceived as "racist" according to the participants. This may impact on the younger generations' propensity to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. One way this might occur is that parents may be less likely to be supportive of their offspring's interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. Implicit racism may subsequently impede their offspring's desire to engage in such relationships. One of the former studies in this thesis found that parents believed "If it's not white then it's not right!" which may lead to increased racial tension, prejudicial thinking and in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this may further increase hostile tensions.

The current thesis has been important in investigating perceived and actual familial and societal pressures on attitudes towards interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. While older generations do not support heterogamous relationships, within Australia there seems to be a generational shift. It appears that the current generation is reluctant to interfere in the following generation's partner choice, even if it was an interfaith or cross-cultural relationship. However, this is not to say that this generation shift is evident across all cultures. In Israel, a generational shift was not found, due to participants believing that their future children will have similar attitudes, which are also in line with current societal ideals. Thus, rates of acceptance may vary dramatically around the world and so, a likely issue may be the impact it has on the rate of future interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. Due to Israel's polarised ethnic division, an increased prejudice towards people of different faiths may further divide their country by increasing hostility towards

one another. This has significant implications at a macro national level and a micro every-day community level. Presently, Israel endures several crises of national ethnic divergences, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Consequently, victims of increased prejudice may be ostracized from the community or even disowned by their family.

Additionally, the negative association between Muslims and the poor treatment of women implies a strong connection between religious fanaticism and the backward movement of women's rights. Although this is consistent with commentaries that suggest that Islam restricts women's voices (Roer-Strier & Ben-Ezra, 2006; Madek, 2005; Khan, 1998), further investigation is required before this relationship can be established. These negative associations on the relation between men and women in Islamic society are much more complex than usually understood. This problem could be addressed by teaching cross-cultural and interfaith awareness within all educational institutions and encouraging greater interaction between people of various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Finally, the findings of this thesis also extend to the future relationships that children of interfaith and cross-cultural married couples engage in. Namely, as children are the product of such relationships, their own future relationships will inevitably be interfaith and cross-cultural, respectively. Hence, the impact of a cross-cultural and interfaith identity may pose challenges that these children may find difficult to negotiate. Therefore, children may experience repercussions in adjusting to the norms and expectations of their parents' faith and culture, and they may be more susceptible to a host of emotional stress and social ramifications.

Thesis Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that the existing data are a collection of attitudes reported

by the participants, which reflect perceptions rather than necessarily facts. It is highly likely that

participants may change their minds with regard to how they may respond to certain situations.

For example, it is difficult to foresee how the participants may respond if they were actually in a

situation where they engaged in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship and were

experiencing pressure that was inflicted on them by their social circle. Subsequently, the data are

limited with respect to predicting what will actually occur in the future. To address this

limitation, married couples were interviewed. However, this limitation would be better addressed

by conducting a longitudinal study, examining interfaith and/or cross-cultural dating couples at

different stages of their relationship to see if there is a change in their attitudes and experiences

with time.

Secondly, causal inference requires careful scrutiny. Moreover, while some critical findings were

achieved from the data, firm conclusions about issues of directionality and actual causes cannot

be inferred. This is primarily because of the situations that individuals live in, and the variety of

influences affecting them. This limitation can be addressed by increasing research on interfaith

and cross-cultural relationships, as well as using different methods of research, for example

quantitative methods.

Thirdly, it is important to be careful before generalising these findings. While a diversity of

participants was present in the samples used in the studies, in terms of ethnicity, culture and faith,

it is difficult to relate the findings to other places in the world that are different (e.g., collectivistic

vs. individualistic societies). Thus, in order to address this limitation, once again, future direction should include more cross-cultural research in order to gain a more substantial perspective.

Finally, there was a larger representation of females than males in the studies conducted. Differences between males and females for Jewish and Muslim participants remains to be seen. Sex and gender differences should be addressed because religious law has different implications towards the different sexes. For examples, in Judaism the mother carries the religious identity of the child, whereas in Islam the father carries the religious identity. Moreover, while participants reported perceived differences in the treatment between males and females with regard to engaging in interfaith and cross-cultural relationships – clear conclusions may not be inferred because of the imbalanced number of male and female participants.

CONCLUSION

The study of interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships should be further investigated in modern scholarship. Namely, the complexities, challenges, and consequences of religiously and culturally-mixed family ties. This is particularly important since both social scientists and historians have come to appreciate the family as a locus of social commitments, encapsulating broader social realities and concerns.

The findings suggest that individuals are generally less prone to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural intimate relationships, especially if they are long-term commitments. There are several factors that appear to be related to this notion, and they are primarily: religious and cultural affiliation and family (as well as societal) pressure applied on individuals. More specifically, since the three monotheistic religions generally prohibit interfaith marriages, consequently, the more affiliated individuals are to their religion and culture, the less inclined they will be to engage in an interfaith and cross-cultural relationship. Further, if the parties' families disapprove of the interfaith and/or cross-cultural relationship, then the relationship will struggle to survive. Regardless of these perceived pressures, with increased globalization, these interfaith and cross-cultural relationships may still continue to increase. Furthermore, this indicates a growing need to examine the implications that these societal and generational tensions create and thus, a need exists to examine these issues.

Moreover, it appears that there are misconceptions about Muslims that have been systematically rising in the findings. Further research is needed in order to prevent exacerbating existing negative perceptions towards Muslims. Presently, as the tensions towards Muslims in Western-

countries – primarily the United States – get worse, there is a growing need to develop diplomatic, peace-promoting solutions.

Finally, this thesis provides fundamental knowledge associated with the study of interfaith and multicultural interpersonal relationships—an area that has been neglected by researchers and practitioners alike. This paper does not promote or prescribe interfaith or cross-cultural intimate relationships, nor does it discourage them; it brings to light the difficulties that certain individuals may endure merely for the sake of making a rightful and meaningful choice in their lives—falling in love—with a person of a different cultural background or faith.

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview for Study I/II

<u>Greeting the participant and describing the study:</u>

Again, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview today. It's very kind of you that you are giving up your time to do this.

Would it be okay if I taped this interview? I mean, if it was recorded?

Thank you very much.

I'm a psychologist and I'm doing my PhD here at Macquarie. My research concerns relationships in general and why people choose to be in certain relationships, and if it's a matter of choice at all. So thanks again for taking the time to help me. Please feel free to stop me at any point if you feel that my questions are too personal for you or are too revealing! If at any point you feel that you would like to stop the interview for any reason, please feel free to do so! It is important for me to know that you don't feel violated in any way. Your privacy is very important to me.

I want to emphasize, my work is done in accordance to the Australian code of ethics. The interview will be used only for research purposes ONLY and will be kept anonymous. No one will have access to the interviews outside of the research team who are myself, my supervisor.

If it's alright with you, we will start the interview with some questions about you and your background.

<u>The Interviewee</u>

1)	To begin with, it would be nice if you could tell us a little bit about yourself; about how/where you grew up, what kind of child were you? Did you have any hobbies? What were you like socially (many friends, one or two close friends), things like that...

- Where were you born? What was it like to grow up there and then?

- Could you tell me a little bit more about the way you were raised?

- What about school? What were your main subjects? What kind of school did you go to, what was it like there?

- Do you work anywhere part time or are you perhaps into volunteering? What do you like to do in your free time?

2)	How about your religious and cultural background? How would you describe it?

- Was religion important in your family when you were a child?

- And today, is it important to you today?

- Do you think of yourself as a member of a certain religious or cultural group or community?

- How about your relationship with other communities in Australia? Do you know any people that aren't from your cultural background?

3) How would you describe yourself in a few words?

<u>Relationships with People from Different Cultural Backgrounds</u>

4) Throughout your life have you had any friends/interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds and/or religions? If so, please elaborate.

- How do you feel about these relationships (friendly relationships in this case)?

- Have you ever thought about being in a cross-cultural relationship, i.e., with someone from a different culture?

- Is it even a question to you? Is it something you would consider before choosing somebody to date? Could you please elaborate?

- Is a cross-cultural relationship something you might consider? Could you tell me some more please (Why not/why so)?

<u>Parental Involvement in Choice of Life Partner</u>

5) Some parents are very much involved in their children's choice of friends and sometimes partners, some are much less. How would you describe your personal experience with this issue? To what extend are your parents involved with whom you choose to be friends with and with whom you'll share your life with?

- Which side initiates the involvement, do you ask for their opinion or do they get involved either way?

- How much about your relationship with your partner would you say your parents know about and/or are involved in?

- Could you describe your relationship with your parents?

The following sections (until section 11) are for students IN a relationship

The Decision Making Process Regarding the Relationship

6) Do you mind if I ask you a few questions about your partner (spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend)? Could you tell me about how you first met?

7) Could you tell me a little bit more about how you decided to be in a relationship with your partner? How would you describe the way you reached this decision?

- Was anybody involved in making this decision (parents, friends, advisor etc.)

- Was your decision to be in a relationship with your partner based on a certain belief or way of living political/cultural/religious? If so, please elaborate.

- Have you ever experienced any fears or doubts regarding your decision to be in a relationship with your partner?

- When you decided to be in this relationship, what were the reactions that you received from other people/family members/friends?

8) Have you had previous partners in your life? Could you tell me about them please? Only if you feel comfortable sharing this info with me!

The Partner as Perceived by the Interviewee

9) Could you describe your relationship with your partner in a few words?

- What kind of things do you like to do together?

- How many hours a day do you spend with each other?

- How has your relationship changed over the time and since you got married?

The Relationship with the partner

10) If you think about your relationship today, how would you say you see it now?

- Can you explain in what way/s your expectations of the relationship have been met, or haven't? Have these expectations changed over time?

- Can you describe how you perceive relationships in general? Why do you think people become partners? (note: sexual drives, start a family, expectation of surrounding environment, peer/community pressure).

Questions for ALL students

<u>Children</u>

11)   (If married or in a de-facto relationship) Do you have any children?

- (*For those without children* - "Hypothetically speaking,") Do you think that you'll be involved in your children's choice of partner in their relationships? If so, in what way?
- Are there any relationships that you might feel less comfortable with (different religion, different culture, same sex relationships etc.)

How would you feel if your child chose a relationship that doesn't fit with your beliefs/perspectives/expectations?

…. Thank you very, very much for sharing all this information. Is there anything you would like to add? Some issue you feel I have forgotten to ask you about, please tell me now?

In any case, here is my phone number if there is anything you would like to add to our conversation.

Semi-Structured Interview for Study III

<u>Greeting the participant and describing the study:</u>

Again, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview today. It's very kind of you that you are giving up your time to do this.

Would it be okay if I taped this interview? I mean, if it was recorded?

Thank you very much.

I'm a psychologist and I'm doing my PhD here at Macquarie. My research concerns relationships in general and why people choose to be in certain relationships, and if it's a matter of choice at all. So thanks again for taking the time to help me. Please feel free to stop me at any point if you feel that my questions are too personal for you or are too revealing! If at any point you feel that you would like to stop the interview for any reason, please feel free to do so! It is important for me to know that you don't feel violated in any way. Your privacy is very important to me.

I want to emphasize, my work is done in accordance to the Australian code of ethics. The interview will be used only for research purposes ONLY and will be kept confidential. No one will have access to the interviews outside of the research team who are my supervisor and myself.

If it's alright with you, we will start the interview with some questions about you and your background.

<u>The Interviewee</u>

12)   To begin with, it would be nice if you could tell us a little bit about yourself; about how/where you grew up, what kind of child were you? Did you have any hobbies? What were you like socially (many friends, one or two close friends), things like that...

- Where were you born? What was it like to grow up there and then?

- Could you tell me a little bit more about the way you were raised?

- What about school? What were your main subjects? What kind of school did you go to, what was it like there?

- Do you work anywhere part time or are you perhaps into volunteering? What do you like to do in your free time?

13)   How about your religious and cultural background? How would you describe it?

- Was religion important in your family when you were a child?

- And today, is it important to you today?

- Do you think of yourself as a member of a certain religious or cultural group or community?

- How about your relationship with other communities in Australia? Do you know any people that aren't from your cultural background?

14) How would you describe yourself in a few words?

Relationships with People from Different Cultural Backgrounds

15) Throughout your life have you had any friends/interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds and/or religions? If so, please elaborate.

- How do you feel about these relationships (friendly relationships in this case)?

- Have you ever thought about being in a cross-cultural relationship, i.e., with someone from a different culture?

- Is it even a question to you? Is it something you would consider before choosing somebody to date? Could you please elaborate?

- Is a cross-cultural relationship something you might consider? Could you tell me some more please (Why not/why so)?

Parental Involvement in Choice of Life Partner

16) Some parents are very much involved in their children's choice of friends and sometimes partners, some are much less. How would you describe your personal experience with this issue? To what extend are your parents involved with whom you choose to be friends with and with whom you'll share your life with?

- Which side initiates the involvement, do you ask for their opinion or do they get involved either way?

- How much about your relationship with your partner would you say your parents know about and/or are involved in?

- Could you describe your relationship with your parents?

The Decision Making Process Regarding the Relationship

17) Do you mind if I ask you a few questions about your partner (spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend)? Could you tell me about how you first met?

18) Could you tell me a little bit more about how you decided to be in a relationship with your partner? How would you describe the way you reached this decision?

- Was anybody involved in making this decision (parents, friends, advisor etc.)

- Was your decision to be in a relationship with your partner based on a certain belief or way of living political/cultural/religious? If so, please elaborate.

- Did you *actively* look for a partner from a different faith or background?

- Have you ever experienced any fears or doubts regarding your decision to be in a relationship with your partner?

- When you decided to be in this relationship, what were the reactions that you received from other people/family members/friends?

19)   Have you had previous partners that were form a different faith or culture?

<u>Children</u>

20)   (If married or in a de-facto relationship) Do you have any children?

- (*For those without children* - "Hypothetically speaking,") Do you think that you'll be involved in your children's choice of partner in their relationships? If so, in what way?

- Are there any relationships that you might feel less comfortable with (different religion, different culture, same sex relationships etc.)

- How would you feel if your child chose a relationship that doesn't fit with your beliefs/perspectives/expectations?

…. Thank you very, very much for sharing all this information. Is there anything you would like to add? Some issue you feel I have forgotten to ask you about, please tell me now?

In any case, here is my phone number if there is anything you would like to add to our conversation.