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Gender Role Beliefs and Intercultural Relationships

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ABSTRACT: The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between gender role beliefs and intercultural relationship quality for individuals in committed relationships, and between gender role beliefs and willingness to date outside one's respective culture for individuals not in committed relationships. We also measured individual participants' willingness to cross cultural boundaries when dating. The survey was available in both English and Spanish to increase sample size and accessibility. We ran separate regressions for singles and couples to estimate the relationship between gender role beliefs and the quality of close relationships. The findings revealed no significant correlation between gender role beliefs and couples' relationship quality or between gender role beliefs and singles' willingness. Therefore, this study contributes to research on cross-cultural relationships, showing that differences do not seem to define the quality of the relationship.

KEYWORDS: intercultural relationships, gender roles, relationship quality

Introduction

With the degree of convergence of national, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions in today's society (Rotaru 2023, 62-79), our once clear delineations of "us and them" are being blurred. Globalization has brought differing cultures, nationalities, races, religions, and linguistic communities closer than ever before (Silva et al. 2012). This brings about many changes in society and in the way we live our lives compared to those of generations past. "Changing and evolving global demographic patterns, where different cultures are continuously exposed to each other beyond the continental divide, often propel intercultural relationships" (McFadden and Moore 2002, 264). Note that intercultural couples are a different conceptual category than interracial couples, because different racial backgrounds do not equal different cultural backgrounds. An intercultural couple is characterized by "greater differences between the partners in a wide variety of areas, with race, religion, ethnicity, and national origin being [some of] the primary factors" (Silva et al. 2012, 857). The extent to which intercultural marriage and intimacy are accepted in our global society is a function of the cultural parameters within which these dynamics occur, and these parameters are rapidly changing (McFadden and Moore, 2002). It is no surprise, then, that as the rate of globalization (Rotaru 2014, 532-541) has been steadily increasing, the result has been an increase in intercultural marriages—especially within the last three decades (Silva et al. 2012). The year 1967 is considered as year zero in terms of interracial (and intercultural) relationships since that was when interracial marriage was legalized in the United States, and since then, we have seen an increase from 3% of interracial couples in 1967 to 17% in 2015. However, many studies have shown that interracial and intercultural couples are more vulnerable to dissolution of marriage than couples of the

same background (Crippen and Brew 2007; Forry, Leslie, Letiecq 2007; Gaines and Leaver 2002; Kalmijn, de Graaf, and Janssen 2005).

Culture

The increasing frequency of intercultural marriages/relationships poses the question of what external forces are at play in the quality of these relationships, including the values and norms within each culture, family, community, and individual's worldview. These variables can be "social, cultural, ethnic, religious, political, anthropological, geographical, and/or economic" (McFadden and Moore 2002). These worldviews are shaped by many different cultural sources, whether directly or indirectly. Vontress and colleagues (Vontress et al. 1999; also discussed in McFadden and Moore 2002) identified five different overlapping cultures, which seem to shape a person:

- A universal culture (all humans have the same basic needs)
- An ecological culture (the seasonal and climatic conditions have forced people to act in specific ways different than those of other climates)
- A national culture (these conditions being the language, government, and economics of a place that impacts a person's attitudes or lifestyle)
- A regional culture (subtle forces such as dialects or traditions that differentiate people from different parts of their own country)
- A racio-ethnic culture (variables that separate minority groups from the dominant groups in their society).

While Vontress and colleagues have identified these five cultures, there are perhaps other cultural sources that may affect one's worldview. One component of culture that may have an influence on one's worldview is an individual's gender role beliefs.

Gender Role Beliefs

Gender roles can be defined as "beliefs regarding the appropriate roles for men and women" (Constantin 2015, 738). It is clear from studies done on both males and females that both genders participate in the definition and perpetuation of gender roles (Blee and Tickamyer 1995). But are gender role beliefs the same across cultures? Gender relations and gender roles are socially constructed, embedded in social context and different from one society to another, which would suggest that they vary from culture to culture (Constantin 2015; Blee and Tickamyer 1995).

One reason for cultural differences is the many factors that influence gender role beliefs. Role theory (Weitzman 1979) argues that children will model their behavior and attitudes around their mothers, as they are the primary caretakers of the children, suggesting that mothers exert a significant amount of influence on their children's later attitudes in life (Blee and Tickamyer 1995). Even so, education, socioeconomic status, or getting married young seem to have even more substantial effects on gender role beliefs than maternal influences (Blee and Tickamyer 1995). This suggests that gender role attitudes are a result of life course experiences, which are directed by overlapping cultures. In a study done by Henley and Pincus (1978), they found that sexism scores are related to the parents' education where the more education the less bias there is, however racism is not related to parental education. When examining the means for the three different religious identifications claimed they found higher racism, sexism, and homophobia scores for members of the major U.S. religions.

It is important to keep in mind that attitudes, defined as "different social realities in different cultural contexts", are a product of the time and space in which they occur (Constantin 2015, 734). However, attitudes towards gender roles are hard to measure simply because gender role beliefs are multidimensional, intersecting with at least two

dimensions. Namely, the dimension of the social context in which these beliefs are manifested (private versus public) while the second one refers to gender power balance (equality versus inequality). The first dimension deals with women's public involvement in roles outside of the home (education, politics, business roles) compared to the private with activities such as housework or caring for children. The second dimension has to do with the power balance between males and females, where women are assumed to be inferior to men and complementarity discusses gender specialization in performing different roles (Constantin 2015). As complex as gender role beliefs are in and of themselves, one can only imagine the other cultural dimensions that simultaneously interact with and affect gender roles and gender role expectations in society. However, many different cultures seem to be mingling at an increasing rate, and the rate of change has not been as drastic as one might assume. This perhaps can be explained by the social psychology principle known as the homophily principle.

Homophily

Homophily can be explained in layman's terms as "birds of a feather flock together" or more specifically as "contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (McPherson et al. 2001, 416). Initial homophily studies showed substantial similarity between people by demographic characteristics such as age, sex, race/ethnicity, and education but also by psychological characteristics such as intelligence, attitudes, and aspirations (McPherson et al. 2001). We tend to socially distance ourselves not just by age, but also by religion, and education, where the biggest divide is between those with/without college experience and between white-collar/blue - -collar individuals. In general, what the findings on homophily suggest is that, in whatever demographic category we look at, if you are in the minority category for race or sex or whatever it is, you tend to have more heterophilious relationships than if you are the majority. So, if you are in an environment that is relatively diverse, you will tend to gravitate towards people who are more like you, given you have the option to. However, the less diverse an environment is, if you are the minority within that group, you will engage in relationships with individuals different than yourself on any demographic simply because of necessity.

Current Study

This study examines romantic relationships using the homophily principle from social psychology, which states that we are more attracted to people who are more similar to ourselves—this may play a role in the prevalence of intercultural romantic relationships. This project analyzes two relationships, namely (1) between gender role beliefs and intercultural relationship quality—within intercultural romantic couples and (2) between gender role beliefs and willingness to engage in intercultural relationships among single individuals.

Methodology

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited through the Andrews University Behavioral Science Research Pool, as well as through the researcher's social media using snowball sampling. Participants included individuals over the age of 18, fluent in either English or Spanish. A link to the survey hosted on the departmental LimeSurvey 3. 21.5+ installation was provided through the research pool, as well as on the researcher's Instagram and Facebook. In addition to the demographics used to characterize the sample, I also asked

participants to report their relationship status, religious identification as well as background, and political orientation. Total number of participants was 216, with a large majority (92.40%) identifying as part of the Seventh-day Adventist religion, 42% were in a relationship, 58% were single, 59% were female, 40% were male (with .90% other), and a great part of our sample was within the college age population with 84% of participants being within the ages of 18-22. Although the majority fell within that age category, I had good range from ages 18 to 51. There was a good distribution of race with 46% being white, 24% being African American, 24% Asian, 15% other, and 7% mixed.

Measures

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale

The ECR-12 contains 12 items that assess anxiety concerning rejection or abandonment and avoidance of intimacy and interdependence (relationship quality or habits for couples). For the ECR, a meta-analysis showed that women report having higher anxiety yet lower avoidance than men do (Del Guidice 2011, as cited in LaFontaine et al. 2015). The anxiety subscale was composed of three aspects: fear of interpersonal rejection, disproportionate need for approval from others, and distress when one's partner is unavailable. The avoidance subscale encompassed excessive need for self-reliance and reluctance to self-disclose (LaFontaine et al. 2015). Items such as "I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners" and "I worry about being abandoned" are answered using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). I reverse scored the items so that higher values will indicate greater relationship quality. I modified item 1 from "I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners" to "I feel comfortable when I have to depend on romantic partners" to avoid the ambiguous interpretation this item may pose. Lafontaine and colleagues (2015) claim the Cronbach's alpha coefficients (for both avoidance and anxiety subscales) remained above .74 or higher for the ECR-12 demonstrating a strong reliability.

Gender Role Beliefs Scale (GRBS)

The Gender Role Beliefs Scale (GRBS) by Brown and Gladstone (2012) contains 10 items that assess gender role stereotypes. Items such as "It is disrespectful to swear in the presence of a lady" and "Women should have as much sexual freedom as men" are answered using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Higher scores indicate higher levels of feminist gender role beliefs and lower scores indicating more traditional gender role beliefs. According to Brown and Gladstone (2012), alpha coefficients were .81 for the 10-item GRBS, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Three items from this scale were modified: for item 2, "courtship" was changed to "dating", for item 8, "to run a train" was removed and replaced with "to work construction", and for item 9, the phrase "child-bearing" was replaced with "having and raising children" and "taking care of their homes".

Differences in Romantic Relationships

The last two sections varied depending on whether or not participants completed the questionnaire as in a romantic relationship (dating exclusively, engaged, or married), or as a single individual (including dating non-exclusively). This section consisted of a self-report measure on the similarities and differences perceived by the individual between them and their significant other's backgrounds in 7 aspects: culture, native language, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, political orientation, and religious background. The participants were asked to rate their degree of similarity or difference on a 5-point scale ranging from completely different to exactly the same. Individuals who were single or dating non-exclusively were asked to what extent they consider similarities and differences in a

romantic partner's background when considering whether or not to date them, using those same 7 cultural aspects as the couples saw. That was answered on a 4-point scale ranging from definitely willing to definitely unwilling.

Procedure

This study was a non-experimental, exploratory survey design. After obtaining IRB approval (IRB #19-135), the link for the survey was activated on LimeSurvey and sent out. Once the study was selected, participants were given an informed consent form. This form notified subjects about the nature of the study, the number of sections to be completed, the time required to complete them, any known risks involved; that responses would be kept confidential; that all participants included in this study must be 18 years or older, and that all participants must be either native English or Spanish speakers. After reading the informed consent form, participants gave their informed consent through an electronic signature. Participants then completed the demographic questionnaire as well as the two common sections through Limesurvey (the ECR-12 and GRBS scales), and the follow-up sections based on whether they completed the survey as couples or singles. The study took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Couples were asked to create a code phrase for the purpose of pairing their responses. That code phrase would not be matched to their identities, as they would create it independent of the researchers. A Spanish version of the survey was created from the English version through translation and back translation.

Based on previous literature, we have formulated the following hypotheses in regards to gender role beliefs and their relation to quality in intercultural couples, as well as their relation to individuals' willingness to engage in intercultural relationships:

1) Individuals with stronger, traditional gender role beliefs and/or higher perceived differences in background compared to their significant other will have lower relationship quality, and the opposite will be true of those who have more progressive gender role beliefs and/or more similar backgrounds. 2) The second hypothesis is that singles who have progressive gender role beliefs will be more open to intercultural relationships.

Results

Separate regressions were conducted for singles and couples to estimate the relationship between gender role beliefs and close relationships quality. Within the sample of singles, an additional examination was made regarding the relationship between gender role beliefs and willingness to engage in intercultural relationships. Within the sample of couples, were examined the similarity of responses within couples, as well as the relationship between gender role beliefs and the reported cultural similarities within relationships. From the descriptive analysis of the data, no significant correlation was found between gender role beliefs and couples' relationship quality ($r = -.047$, $p = .659$) or between gender role beliefs and singles' willingness ($r = -.034$, $p = .711$). The correlation between Gender Role Beliefs and Relationship Quality was also not significant ($r = -.046$, $p = .611$). Four violin plots were generated to compare singles and couples in both categories of relationship quality and gender role beliefs. As can be seen below in Figure 1, there is good variance as there is a decent spread of the data in both gender role beliefs and relationship quality for both singles and couples. This indicates that there are some people with more traditional and more progressive gender role beliefs. There are others who have low relationship quality and those who have high relationship quality. However, there is very little shared variance between them. This is problematic because knowing one thing about gender role beliefs essentially tells us nothing about relationship quality as predicted. If the population at this university has a lot of diversity, yet this study does not find the same pattern of diverse relationships, what is the explanation for that?

Although none of the correlations found were significant, there was another pattern within the couples and singles group that could still be explored. From here the study became exploratory as other variables were examined in depth to see what could be found. In looking at the couples and singles groups, there was a great difference in the way they were answering the cultural similarity/willingness portions of the survey. It seemed that people are much more willing to date cross-culturally than the relationships they actually end up in. Looking at Figure 2, we can see graphs comparing how both the single and the couple participants answer the cultural willingness or cultural similarity questions. The singles graphs are labeled as A, while the couples graphs are labeled as B and we can see across all 7 of the factors how the singles and couples groups differed in the answers they gave. Single participants in this sample claimed to be either most definitely or probably willing to date someone who differs from them on the 7 different cultural factors listed above. Comparing that to the couples' data, we see that the majority of couples are either somewhat similar or exactly the same on those same 7 cultural factors. This descriptive analysis shows us that although many individuals report a willingness to cross cultural boundaries in romantic relationships, they actually end up in relationships with very similar cultural backgrounds.

Looking further at the couples' data, we noticed a split distribution, where even though the majority were either somewhat the same or exactly the same as their significant other, the rest were on the exact opposite side of somewhat or completely different. We decided to create a new transformed variable that split the couples into those two categories, thus allowing me to run a t-test on Gender Role Beliefs and Relationship Quality. Using Null Hypothesis Statistical Testing, the obtained statistic only indicated how unexpected the findings are, given our null hypothesis. Though the findings did not point in the initially predicted direction, they also did not tell us how likely it is that we could have found something given we had more subjects. Consequently, Bayesian Statistics were employed to determine whether the available data shows more evidence in favor of or against our null hypothesis. A Welch's t-test and a Bayesian t-test (using the default Cauchy prior; Wagenmakers et al. 2018) were conducteg to compare the two split couples group (different versus similar) with Relationship Quality and Gender Role Beliefs as the dependent variable.

As listed in Tables 1 and 2 below, the Bayes factors for all 7 cultural factors show that our data provide mild to moderate evidence in favor of our null hypothesis. In Bayesian statistics, one compares two models; a null hypothesis, which states the absence of the effect, and an alternative hypothesis, which states the presence of the effect. Though the findings did not point in the initially predicted direction, Bayes Theorem allows us to update our prior beliefs about the effect before we looked at the data to our posterior beliefs once we analyze it. It helps us assess the probability in favor of either the null or the alternative hypothesis. So what this means is that by analyzing the data as we already have, we did not know for certain whether the null hypothesis is accepted or if we simply did not have enough data. However, it allows us to see how strong the evidence is in favor of either the null or the alternative hypothesis.

The way you interpret a Bayes Factor can be seen in Table 3 down below. Based on those numbers, we see that for relationship quality, almost all of variables except religion had a Bayes Factor of less than. 33 meaning that it would put us in the mild side of moderate evidence in favor of null hypothesis. Unfortunately, we did not have a big enough sample size to get stronger evidence. This tells us that the evidence we do have points in the direction that there is no relationship or no effect of any of these cultural factors on relationship quality. Another thing to look at is at the means for both the similar and different groups are at about a 5. On the relationship quality scale a 5 is pretty high (with 7 being max) indicating a decently high level of relationship quality. Therefore, although we

might not have as much evidence as we want right now, what the data does indicate is that having a relationship that varies on these multiple cultural factors does not seem to lead to a better or a worse relationship quality than if you do not have those differences. Looking at Table 2, we see the same patterns for Gender Role Beliefs. This had even fewer factors that had moderate evidence in favor of our null hypothesis, the other factors were simply too small and were anecdotal. Looking at the means for this table, we can see that there is a small difference between couples who have more similar or different cultural backgrounds. The ones with more similar backgrounds seem to have slightly more progressive gender role beliefs than do those who come from different cultural backgrounds.

Discussion

There are quite a few conclusions we can draw from the results that were found. If we go back to the difference between couples and singles groups, we can see how attitudes did not reflect behavior too well (Horne and Johnson 2018). We can clearly see here that people's attitudes towards intercultural relationships seem to be positive and very open, however their behavior shows something very different.

Another conclusion we can draw from this is that relationships don't seem to be better or worse off if there are more similarities or more differences. What seems to be important are grasping onto the things you share with your partner rather than focusing on the differences. As I mentioned before, Seventh-day Adventism was the large majority religion for our sample, and it was also one of the factors that couples report being most similar on. Based on that descriptive observation we can speculate that perhaps all these people are very similar in religion and perhaps that is why their intercultural differences (gender role beliefs) may not play as big of a role in relationship quality as I at first had assumed. This is not totally unexpected, as social psychology has studied this exact effect and how it seems that it is only necessary for one strong, unifying bond or commonality between people to override what may seem as irreconcilable differences. Therefore, it would not be surprising if a factor such as religion could be strong enough to bring different cultures and people together, especially due to how strict of a religion Seventh-day Adventism is, which influences an individual's lifestyle pretty heavily.

One of the biggest limitations of this study was that our sample was not quite as diverse as we would have hoped. In general, there did not seem to be many couples that reported being in an intercultural relationship. In total, there were about 17 couples with whom we could match their data together and compare their answers, and across the board (except for one couple), their answers were all within one or two numbers away from each other. This means that they all agreed that they were more similar to each other on the 7 cultural factors. This is good because that allows us to trust that people will generally do a good job of self-reporting, however it is unfortunate as it seems as if the couples filling out the survey were actually not in intercultural relationships, as they reported being more alike than dissimilar. This aforementioned reason was one of the biggest limitations for this study, as we did not have enough individuals with differing religions and couples in actual intercultural relationships with which to make a comparison and draw stronger conclusions.

Future research could focus on examining the factors involved in motivating people to enter into intercultural relationships, as well as exploring the factors involved in intercultural relationship quality and satisfaction. It would also be interesting to see how strong of a factor the homophily principle is on influencing the kinds of relationships people engage in. Because of its limitations, this study would be interesting to replicate outside of the Adventist community and with a greater range of age categories to see if this effect remains the same or if there is some evidence for the original hypotheses. This asks us to consider more the kinds of social networks young adults create, as perhaps the opportunity

for diverse relationships is there (and people seem to be willing). However, individuals may still gravitate towards similarity rather than difference based on the diversity of their environments and the opportunities they have in engaging in intercultural relationships. By conducting Bayesian statistics, this project contributes to the evidence that people should not be afraid to enter relationships that are different, as differences do not appear to define the quality of the relationship.

Conclusions

To summarize, this study analyzes the effects that gender role beliefs play in the quality of intercultural relationships, as well as in single individuals' willingness to cross cultural boundaries when dating. Although this study's biggest limitation being that the couples in the sample were not as diverse culturally as we had hoped, findings still indicate that the differences do not play as big of a role in predictors of quality of the relationship as we might have hypothesized. These results provide a basis for further examination of what those predictors may be, and what could be the motivating factors for entering into intercultural relationships. With more and more intercultural diversity and interconnectedness, this topic of predictors of success in intercultural relationships is of increasing importance for all of us as we engage in and navigate relationships with individuals that may be very different than ourselves.

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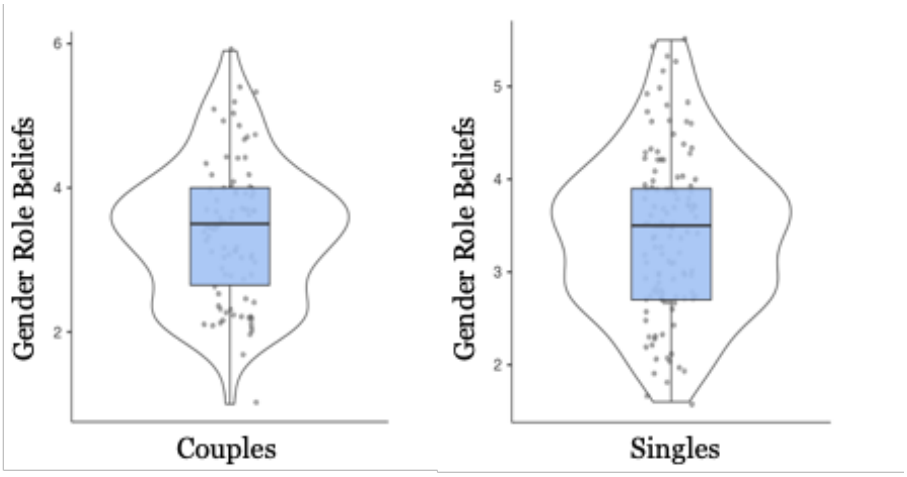
Figure 1. Variance for couples and singles on gender role beliefs and relationship quality



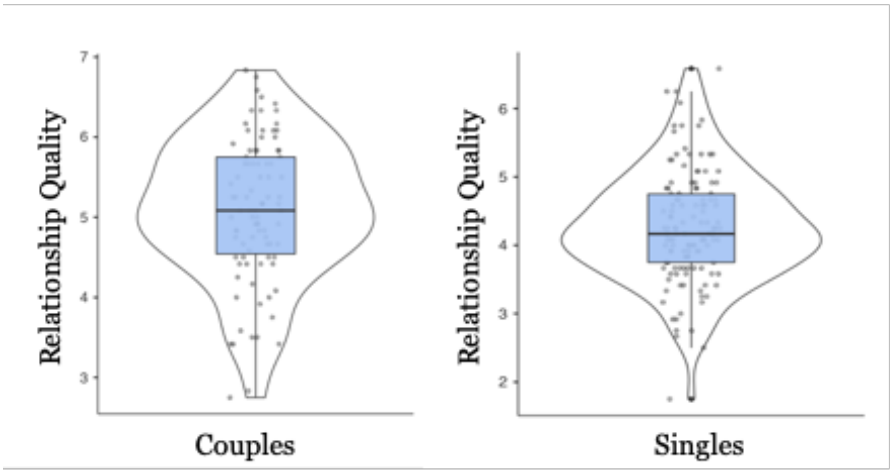


Figure 2. Comparison between singles and couples on Cultural Willingness/Cultural Similarity

Note. Compares the single and couple participants on their responses to the cultural willingness (for singles) or perceived cultural similarity to significant other's background (for couples). Singles graphs are labeled as 1, and couples graphs are labeled as 2 in comparing the 7 different cultural factors.

Table 1. The relationships between the 7 cultural factors and Relationship Quality

Cultural Factors	N (Similar)	N (Different)	Mean (Similar)	Mean (Different)	Welch's t	*p*	BF_{10}
Culture	55	34	5.10	5.08	.0853	.932	.228*
Language	67	23	5.06	5.23	-.806	.425	.326*
Ethnicity	52	36	5.15	5.04	.569	.571	.259*
Race	62	27	5.10	5.06	.245	.808	.244*
Socioecon	45	36	5.11	5.05	.317	.752	.242*
Political	53	18	5.12	5.22	-.415	.681	.296*
Religious	68	22	5.02	5.30	-1.40	.170	.501

Note. Bayes factors marked with an asterisk (*) indicate factors that are in the mild-moderate category for evidence in favor of our null hypothesis.

Table 2. The relationships between the 7 cultural factors and Gender Role Beliefs

Cultural Factors	N (Similar)	N (Different)	Mean (Similar)	Mean (Different)	Welch's t	*p*	BF_{10}
Culture	55	34	3.41	3.29	.563	.576	.262*
Language	67	23	3.43	3.26	.732	.468	.311*
Ethnicity	52	36	3.46	3.23	1.20	.234	.412
Race	62	27	3.48	3.20	1.25	.218	.470
Socioecon	45	36	3.48	3.33	.743	.460	.297*
Political	53	18	3.26	3.57	-1.18	.249	.508
Religious	68	22	3.42	3.19	1.01	.317	.393

Note. Bayes factors marked with an asterisk (*) indicate those that reached at least a mild-moderate level of evidence in favor of the null hypothesis.

Table 3. How to interpret Bayes Factors

Bayes Factor	Evidence Category
> 100	Extreme evidence for alternative hypothesis
30 – 100	Very strong evidence for alternative hypothesis
10 – 30	Strong evidence for alternative hypothesis
6 – 10	Moderate evidence for alternative hypothesis
3 – 6	Mild to moderate evidence for alternative hypothesis
1 – 3	Anecdotal evidence for alternative hypothesis
1	No evidence
1/3 – 1	Anecdotal evidence for null hypothesis
1/6 – 1/3	Mild to moderate evidence for null hypothesis
1/10 – 1/6	Moderate evidence for null hypothesis
1/30 – 1/10	Strong evidence for null hypothesis
1/100 – 1/30	Very strong evidence for null hypothesis
< 1/100	Extreme evidence for null hypothesis