

**Examining marriage: A comparison of perceptions based on  
religious affiliation and religiosity**

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### **Abstract**

Relationships are oftentimes formed based on the similarities two individuals have in dating relationships; for example, individuals may look for similarities in religion and religious values as a way to choose a partner or to determine the dynamics of their relationships. Furthermore, research has indicated that there is a positive correlation between the similarity of partners' religious influences and the quality of their relationship. Many religious individuals may often be misunderstood, however, due to existing religious stereotypes. Participants ( $N = 256$ ) in this study were recruited to take an online survey through Prolific. Using six different beliefs/behaviors, this study examined participants' self-reports of beliefs and behaviors, whether participants' reported beliefs aligned with their behaviors, and if participants accurately perceived the beliefs of other religions/worldview's beliefs. Results indicated that individuals of certain religions/worldviews shared similarities and differences in their beliefs and behaviors. Additionally, two thirds of the behaviors examined aligned with participants' beliefs and, typically, participants did not accurately perceive the beliefs of others overall.

*Keywords:* religion, marriage, perceptions, religiosity, Abrahamic

### **Examining marriage: A comparison of perceptions based on religious affiliation and religiosity**

Throughout history, marriage has been an important component of society all over the world. While the core significance of marriage has remained constant, the values within a marriage and individuals' perceptions of marriage have evolved with time. Religion has played a pivotal role in this evolution of the concept of marriage; thus, a further look was taken at the current role religion has in marriage-related beliefs and behaviors and how individuals' perceptions of marriage-related beliefs and behaviors differ based on their religious affiliation.

#### **Religion in Relationships and Dating**

According to research, many of the factors that contribute to the beginnings of a new relationship are influenced, and perhaps even restricted, due to the pre-existing physical and social circumstances (Vangelisti, 2012). In considering the potential physical circumstances, it is important to note that individuals are more likely to engage in a new relationship with someone who is located physically closer to them than with someone who is much further away in distance (Vangelisti, 2012). Additionally, individuals' potential partners are often limited to those who already run in the same social circles as them, whether that be in person or online (Vangelisti, 2012). The increased use of dating websites and apps may alter this trend, although dating apps with geolocative technologies are becoming more and more popular, which may continue to limit who people meet based on physical proximity (Yeo & Fung, 2016). Individuals also tend to enjoy interacting with those who are similar to themselves, and this often translates to whom individuals choose to marry (Vangelisti, 2012).

There are a variety of additional factors that an individual considers as they take steps towards entering a romantic relationship and dating. Research supports that specific factors such

as an individual's age, level of education, race, socioeconomic status, and personal abilities play a major role in the success or nature of a dating couple's relationship (Henderson et al., 2018; Vangelisti, 2012). Another factor that may determine the course of the relationship or individuals' expectations of a dating partner or romantic interaction is religion. An individual's religious values may very well affect what an individual wants as he or she enters into a relationship and may affect the type of partner an individual looks for, an individual's decision on what is and what is not considered acceptable behavior within their dating relationship, and a couple's lifestyle. Specific decisions that partners within a couple may make based on their religious views include, but are not limited to: the incorporation of religion into both partners' personal lives and their expectations of marriage (Henderson et al., 2018).

The more religious partners within a dating relationship are, the more likely it is that religion affects multiple aspects of that relationship (Henderson et al., 2018). This is especially true when partners share a similar level of religiosity and similar religious values and beliefs (Henderson et al., 2018). Specifically, there appears to be a positive correlation between the similarity of two partners' religious influence and the quality of their relationship (Henderson et al., 2018). In large part, this positive correlation may be attributed to a greater desire to put one's partner first and to express positivity throughout the relationship (Henderson et al., 2018). The presence of these selfless and positive qualities in a relationship as a part of an individual's religion may be somewhat dependent on the teachings of the partners' specific religions, however. Henderson and colleagues (2018) note that partners who identify as being a part of certain religions may be more likely to naturally possess kind and helpful qualities which would certainly benefit their relationship. These qualities could bring out positive behaviors in the relationship, such as being tolerant of a partner's need for time or space, being willing to forgive

a partner's mistakes, and being more open to different ways of showing affection for one's partner (Henderson et al., 2018). In fact, the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) General Social Survey reported that these kind and helpful qualities in a relationship are most affected by a partner's involvement in their religion, defined more specifically as church attendance and how religious the partner believes himself or herself to be (Henderson et al., 2018). Research also supports that the stronger the impact of religion and God in an individual's life, the less likely he or she is to respond to a relational conflict with aggression (Henderson et al., 2018).

### **Religion's Role in Marriage Decisions and Outcomes**

As prior research supports that religion often influences individuals' dating relationships, it is fair to assume that a similar relationship can be seen between religion and individuals' marriages. This is especially plausible as similar trends have been found in which dating relationships of partners with similar religious beliefs have led to not only greater levels of satisfaction, but also greater expectations of marrying one's partner (Henderson et al., 2018). In considering individuals' perspectives of and behaviors based on marriage from a religious standpoint, it is important to understand the root of these individuals' beliefs and actions. Researchers Goodman and Dollahite (2006) conducted a study in which they interviewed couples of various religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam - the three Abrahamic religions. After interviewing these diverse individuals, it was interesting to see that many of the participants' specific religious beliefs coincided with others' religious beliefs, as well (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Goodman and Dollahite (2006) found that one of the main reasons religious couples are so devoted to their marriages is because they believe their commitments to their marriages are important to God. Religious couples in this study reported that they believe that

God intended them to marry, as marriage was God's own creation (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006).

These religious individuals believed that God created marriage based on either a personal, relational, or spiritual aspect (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Marriage based on a personal aspect involves personal well-being, including personal growth, improvement, pleasure, or contentment (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Participants in Goodman and Dollahite's study (2006) also considered the relational aspects of a God-intended marriage, consisting of feelings of wholeness, understanding, and trust between couples. Finally, couples also looked at religious marriage in a more spiritual sense as a way of creating a stronger relationship with and becoming closer to God (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Individuals of either the Christian, Jewish, or Islamic faiths also tended to view God as a helper and turn to God in times of need, especially when it came to their sacred marriages (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Additionally, religious couples noted ways in which they believed God was indirectly working in their marriages, including through reading and acting on their respective religious texts and in their experiences with other people (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Individuals also indicated that they felt God's presence in their marriages in the forms of being and doing (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). God's involvement through simply being and existing was described as individuals being a good example of how people should be and live, by being someone who will hold them accountable, and by being their support system (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). God's involvement through doing was expressed as answering individuals' prayers, working through the Holy Spirit, and forgiving individuals of their sins (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). This finding did, of course, depend on a couple's belief that God values marriage and created it for humans (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006).

Regardless of whether a married couple identifies as being part of an Abrahamic faith, religiosity has multiple positive effects on long-lasting marriages (Sullivan, 2001). It may be that these positive effects of religiosity may not apply to married couples until they have reached at least their fifth year of marriage and will become more evident as the marriage ages (Sullivan, 2001). In general, Sullivan (2001) reports that married couples who have a higher level of religiosity tend to be happy and feel that their marriages are secure. Research also suggests that married couples who consider themselves religious tend to have an easier time dealing with changes in their relationship, a greater sense of commitment to their spouses, less conflict, and increased fertility (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Brown and colleagues (2008) report that greater participation in religious activities is correlated with an increase in the functionality of a family, as well as an increase in satisfaction with the marriage. Greater church attendance among married couples also contributes to greater marital satisfaction and commitment, in addition to decreasing the chances for reports of violence within the family (Sullivan, 2001; Mahoney et al., 2001). Sullivan (2001) also argues that the combination of religiosity and strong marital satisfaction can make up for any sexual dissatisfaction in a marriage. As various religious aspects increase marital satisfaction, as mentioned above, it is logical that religious married couples would have lower rates of divorce than nonreligious married couples. Such an association is supported by the literature, such that spouses who regularly attend church services together are less likely to get a divorce, according to Sullivan (2001). A negative correlation is also seen between married couples' participation in religious endeavors and their likelihood of divorcing across time (Brown et al., 2008). As mentioned above, religious discrepancies within a marriage can result in conflict, but this does not mean that individuals who are a part of the same religion always escape having to address their differences.

Even among individuals and married couples who consider themselves part of the same general religion, there is always a range of more specific ideals and opinions. This can be demonstrated through individuals' actions based on the level of personal autonomy they believe they have (Wilson & Musick, 1995). Clear distinctions between individuals' views on personal autonomy are more easily seen in religions that share similar viewpoints or among various denominations of one specific religion (Wilson & Musick, 1995). Comparing the viewpoints of people among various denominations and various religions is the approach that Wilson and Musick (1995) took as they considered religious married couples' responses from previously conducted interviews. The first item the researchers examined was whether couples agreed or disagreed with the idea that marriage is a lifelong commitment that can only be broken in the utmost severe situations (Wilson & Musick, 1995). While most of the couples who were interviewed agreed with this idea, as many religions place a great amount of value in marriage, couples' responses still produced a spectrum of beliefs (Wilson & Musick, 1995). For example, while the Pentecostal and Baptist Christians strongly agreed with the idea that marriage should be greatly valued and not be broken, individuals of Jewish faith and those with no or weak ties to a specific religion were the most likely to disagree with this idea (Wilson & Musick, 1995). The second item that Wilson & Musick (1995) examined was the idea that individuals within a marital relationship should have the freedom to do what they choose without input from their spouses. Once again, Jews and those unaffiliated with a specific religion tended to be more in favor of personal autonomy within marriage than those with more conservative religious affiliations, such as the Baptists and the Pentecostals, as they agreed more strongly with the statement (Wilson & Musick, 1995). After analyzing the data, Wilson and Musick (1995) also discovered that certain factors contribute to individuals being more likely to stick to traditional

religious views rather than personal autonomy in marriage. Individuals are more likely to support the idea of marriage being a lifelong promise if they have a homogamous marriage, attend church services often, are an older adult, are in their first marriage, and have less educational experience (Wilson & Musick, 1995). Additionally, individuals are more likely to be in favor of having individual freedoms within marriage if they have had a higher education, are younger males with few or no children, do not consistently attend church services, do not have a homogamous marriage, or if they are already beyond their first marriage (Wilson & Musick, 1995).

Another area in which individuals commonly feel they should be able to express personal autonomy in their marriages has to do with their sexual relations outside of marriage (Mahoney et al., 2001). According to prior studies, Mahoney and colleagues (2001) noted that most Christian individuals who were serious about basing their lives and choices off of their religious teachings were more likely to be against the idea of having sex outside of marriage than Christians who were not serious about these ideals and individuals of other, non-Christian religions. A difference was also visible in the degree of sexual activity individuals took part in with their spouses based on their religious beliefs (Mahoney et al., 2001). Individuals of Christian faiths who put greater emphasis on believing that God created sex for humans to enjoy within the constructs of marriage had and enjoyed sex more often than individuals who identified as having a greater sense of religiosity in general (Mahoney et al., 2001).

Much of the research that has been conducted on the effects of religion in marriage has been based on married couples who share the same religious beliefs and values (Ortega et al., 1988). While these findings are important, it is also necessary to consider the effects of marriages between individuals of two different religious backgrounds. Religious homogamy is

more commonly found within marriages as individuals with more similarities are more likely to be successful in marriage, and society has historically encouraged these types of relationships for this reason (Ortega et al., 1988). Of course, certain religious differences within a marriage do not have any significant effects on the couple's marital satisfaction (Ortega et al., 1988). A good example of this is a relationship between a Protestant and a Catholic, as both are members of Christian denominations that have certain values in common (Ortega et al., 1988). Some individuals have either personal or religious values that drive their desire for religious homogamy, resulting in one spouse converting to a different religion after marriage (Ortega et al., 1988). Married couples with a spouse who converted from one religion to another tend not to show any statistically significant differences than couples who were religiously homogamous in the first place, making conversion even more desirable (Ortega et al., 1988). For individuals whose marriage decisions are influenced by religiosity, religious heterogamy is much more likely to result in negative effects on marriage (Perry, 2015). In fact, Ortega and colleagues (1988) argue that as a married couple's religious differences increase, so do their chances of becoming dissatisfied with their marriage. In addition, Mahoney and colleagues (2001) claim that even as a married couple's attendance at religious services differs, their marriage is more likely to come to an end. It is also important to note that if a couple's decision to get married was not influenced by religiosity, then it is unlikely for religiosity to affect the quality of their relationship once they are married (Perry, 2015). To further look into the ways in which religion influences marriage, the resulting benefits of the incorporation of religion in marriage is addressed.

### **Benefits of Religion in Marriage**

In the many studies that have been conducted to examine the association between marriage and religion, researchers and participants have focused on different aspects of religion, including religiosity, religious participation, and prayer life, as well as even more specific examples of which facets of religion impact married couples the most. Overall, three elements of religion have been identified – “faith community, religious practices, and spiritual beliefs” (p. 85) – and there have been significant and recurrent religious themes that have been found to benefit marriage in both a general sense and in relation to specific marital situations (Marks, 2008). Themes that fall under the faith community element of religion include the impact of religious leaders and participation in religious service within the community (Marks, 2008). Additionally, the religious practices element is comprised of emphasis on prayer, presence of religion in the family as a whole, and remaining faithful to one’s spouse in marriage (Marks, 2008). The spiritual beliefs element, then, includes being in support of marriage and against divorce, sharing the same religious values and ideals, and believing that marriage will be upheld and strengthened by God (Marks, 2008). The element that was most often pointed out as having both direct and indirect effects on marriage, as spouses leaned on their faith in marriages with God at the center and the importance of sharing the same religious views, was spiritual beliefs (Marks, 2008). In looking into more specific marital situations, Lambert and Dollahite (2006) found that there were three main parts of religion that were the most beneficial in helping married couples successfully work things out after conflict in their marriage: attending religious services, listening to some form of a sermon based on their religion’s specific scripture, and praying.

Various studies have shown that aspects of religion can have a significant impact on couples’ marital relationships. One of these main aspects of religion is religiosity, which is

defined as defined as how religious people are or to what degree they consider themselves religious (Sullivan, 2001). Research suggests that many of the impacts of religiosity and other religious aspects are positive. First, it is important to look at the positive effects of religiosity, no matter the level of an individual's religiosity. Studies have shown that the incorporation of religious beliefs and behaviors in a marital relationship can help keep conflict from occurring, help solve the problems that do occur, and help couples restore their relationship to what it was prior to any conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). For reconciliations, any level of religiosity aided in strengthening the couple's commitment to their relationship and their likelihood of forgiving their partner (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Additionally, the presence of religion has been known to help couples define their sense of purpose and emphasize their values within their relationship, specifically through participation in religious activities (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

The combination of religiosity and religious participation has been tied to greater happiness within marriages, longer marriages, greater desire to stay devoted to one's spouse and marriage, and increased marital support (Marks, 2008). As couples transition from simple engagement in religion to participation in religious activities as part of a larger religious community, researchers have seen an increase in couples' happiness within their marriages, greater happiness and strengthening of bonds in their families, and a stronger desire to stay devoted to their marriages (Marks, 2008). Due to the subsequent increases in marriage satisfaction from participation in religious activities and other religious aspects, partners also tend to have better mental health (Marks, 2008). Prayer in and of itself, like religious participation and religiosity, has been reported to have positive effects on marriages through bringing couples closer to God, reminding partners of the love they have for their spouses and

their children, and better-preparing couples for successful conflict resolution (Marks, 2008). It is interesting to note, as well, that the above findings do not vary based on religion. The study conducted by Marks (2008) demonstrated that married couples of diverse religions (i.e., Christianity, Mormonism, Judaism, and Islam) believed all aspects of their religion were vital in ensuring a successful marriage, specifically in times when there is significant strain in their lives. In contrast, prior research has suggested very few negative effects come from the influence of religion on marriage due to certain characteristics of people's individual religious beliefs and activity (Marks, 2008; Waite & Lehrer, 2003).

While research suggests that there are many benefits of a marriage centered in religion, there are also a few inconsistencies in the literature. For example, inconsistencies have been found in whether some aspect of religious activity improves the quality of a marriage (Booth et al., 1995; Marks, 2008). Booth and colleagues (1995) argue that there is little evidence that a couple's quality of marriage will increase due to religious activity. More than a decade later, however, Marks (2008) found that religious affiliation is, in fact, only seen as beneficial to a couple's marriage when it involves some aspect of religious activity, contradicting Booth and colleagues' (1995) claim. There have also been inconsistencies found in whether religiosity increases marital satisfaction, as many researchers argue that there is a positive correlation, while Marks (2008) argues that religiosity without religious participation has a minimal effect on satisfaction (Marks, 2008). In addition, while the influence of religion in marriage tends to be positive, this association may only be supported when both partners have similar religious views (Marks, 2008). Three of Marks' (2008) studies show that lengthy marriages that last twenty-five to fifty or more years are best maintained when each partner in a marital couple shares similar religious beliefs and practices.

Lambert and Dollahite (2006) also argue that when couples' religious beliefs and behaviors differ, struggles within the marriage may ensue. Others argue that the incorporation of religion in a marriage can have certain negative effects on the marriage (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). For example, some experts have found that religion's presence in a marriage can be linked to a greater need for support due to issues in agreeing upon specific gender roles and failure of spouses to find ways to properly deal with the conflict within their marriages (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Religiosity, more specifically, has also been tied to certain negative consequences for both the individual partners in the marriage and for the marital relationship itself (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006).

### **Individuals' Perceptions**

Just as religious beliefs and behaviors may differ among two partners in a relationship, religious differences can be seen across individuals of various religions/worldviews. These differences may not always be so apparent to individuals, however, leading to potentially inaccurate perceptions of individuals of other religions/worldviews (Stangor et al., 2015). Much of how individuals perceive other individuals in a society may be due to their formations of opinions through stereotyping (Stangor et al., 2015). Stereotyping may occur among individuals and groups of individuals, and categories of individuals and groups that are stereotyped are constantly appearing and shifting (Stangor et al., 2015). For example, individuals may be stereotyped by others based on their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and more (Harper, 2007). Additionally, stereotypes can be perceived from a variety of angles including basic stereotypes, in which an ingroup forms an opinion about an outgroup, and meta-stereotypes, in which an ingroup forms a belief about an outgroup's opinion of the ingroup (Saroglou et al.,

2011; Stangor et al., 2015). For the purposes of this study, the main focus will be on basic stereotyping based on religion.

When considering religious stereotypes, it is important to remember that while this includes individuals who identify with various religions, it also must include individuals who do not consider themselves to be religious at all (Harper, 2007). Many religious groups and individuals consider their beliefs to be indisputably true, so any group that disagrees with their beliefs may be subject to stereotyping (Altemeyer, 2003). Religious and nonreligious groups are known to have very different viewpoints, and as is true with much of stereotyping, each group may consider itself to have much more positive qualities than the outgroup that is being stereotyped (Harper, 2007). For instance, prior research found that religious groups stereotyped nonreligious groups as lacking strong morals, having greater difficulties in their social functioning, and lacking any belief in spirituality or religion (Hood et al., 1996; Harper, 2007).

Despite all of the divided opinions and stereotypes that exist, there are still certain beliefs that many individuals and many religions have in common. One of these commonalities is that religious individuals, as a whole, typically exhibit prosocial characteristics (Saroglou et al., 2011). Additionally, religious individuals tend to be much less open-minded than nonreligious individuals, which contributes to the authoritarian and dogmatic beliefs (Saroglou et al., 2011). Religious individuals are also likely to engage in less impulsive and risky behaviors than their nonreligious counterparts (Saroglou et al., 2011). These behavioral findings may only worsen the pre-existing stereotypes of religious and nonreligious individuals, however (Saroglou et al., 2011). This is due to the fact that religious individuals continue to be viewed as having higher moral standards than nonreligious individuals who are considered to be self-indulgent and motivated by self-interest (Saroglou et al., 2011).

In considering individuals' perceptions of others based on their association or lack of association with a particular religion, there are various factors that contribute to the importance of studying these perceptions, especially through the lens of stereotypes. In general, there has been a somewhat limited amount of research that has been conducted on the perceptions of religious and nonreligious individuals, and even more specifically on how nonreligious individuals are viewed within societies that are primarily shaped by religion (Harper, 2007). Saroglou and colleagues (2011) also note that very little information has been recorded and analyzed on the relationships between both religious and nonreligious groups. Additionally, Zafar and Ross (2014) agree that although individuals' religious views play an integral role in their lives, very little attention has been given to the effects of religion within the field of psychology. This lack of emphasis on such a relevant part of individuals' lives calls for an increase in religious-focused research.

Another reason perceptions within and among religious groups and individuals should be studied is because of their stereotypical nature and what results from these stereotypes. It is not uncommon for people to act based off the beliefs they have, and this is what may ultimately lead to stereotypes turning into acts of prejudice (Harper, 2007). Stereotypes may even be used to convince an individual that their acts of prejudice are justified (Devine, 1989). While prejudice is in no way automatically associated with religion, the stereotypes that individuals form about others who are different from them do increase the likelihood of prejudice, especially among individuals who are part of minority groups or other outgroups (Altemeyer, 2003). Zafar and Ross (2014) reported that one successful way of decreasing prejudice among religious and nonreligious individuals and groups is through an increase in exposure of individuals to those who possess contrasting and differing beliefs than themselves.

### **Present Study**

The purpose of the present study is to (1) consider how religion and religiosity influence marital beliefs and behaviors; (2) examine the alignment of individuals' beliefs and behaviors; and (3) examine how individuals perceive others of various religions.

As such, the first research question explored participants' self-reported beliefs and behaviors among those of focus in this study. It was hypothesized that: (1) More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions will report that they do not believe in and have not behaved in accordance with pre-marital sex or cohabitation, whereas less than 50% of Atheists will report that they do not believe in and have not practiced pre-marital sex and cohabitation; (2) More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions and more than 50% of individuals with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview will report that they do not believe in and do not behave in accordance with inter-religious marriages; (3) More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions will report that they believe in and act in accordance with the husband acting as the head of the household while the wives hold a role of submission, whereas less than 50% of Atheists will report that they believe in and act in accordance with the husband acting as the head of the household while the wives hold a role of submission; (4) More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with divorce, whereas less than 50% of Atheists will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with divorce; and (5) More than 50% of individuals of the Jewish and Islamic faiths will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with remarriage, whereas less than 50% of Christians and Atheists/Agnostics will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with remarriage.

The second research question examined if participants' personal self-reported beliefs align with their reported behaviors. It was hypothesized that: (1) Individuals who endorse that their religion/worldview finds a specific behavior appropriate are more likely to self-report that they have engaged in that behavior; (2) Those who have a higher level of religious participation will be more likely to have behaviors that align with their reported beliefs of their associated religion/worldview; and (3) Those who indicate they have conformed to their religion/worldview will be more likely to have behaviors that align with their reported beliefs of their associated religion/worldview.

The third research question examined if participants' perceptions of the beliefs of individuals of various religions accurately represent those individuals' true beliefs. It was hypothesized that: (1) Individuals will inaccurately perceive the beliefs of the majority of others with different ideologies; and (2) Individuals will most accurately perceive the beliefs of individuals who identify as Atheists and Christians and will least accurately perceive the beliefs of individuals who identify as Jewish and Muslim.

The exploratory question examined if the traditionalism of participants' religious beliefs impacted the perceptions of their own and other religions/worldviews.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited from Prolific. Survey results from 256 participants were recorded for the Prolific sample<sup>1</sup>. All participants resided in the United States, were fluent in English, and were 18 years of age or older. In addition, all participants were required to identify

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, an additional 150 individuals were proposed to be sought from a community sample but the COVID-19 pandemic thwarted recruitment efforts. As such, the community sample portion of the study was not completed.

with one of the following religions or worldviews: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Atheist/Agnostic. Furthermore, Prolific participants were pooled from all over the United States but were required to have an approval rate of 75% or higher. Twenty individuals did not pass at least one of the two attention checks and were removed from the data file. Three additional individuals were removed from the data file after saying that their data should not be used. Nineteen additional participants were excluded from analyses for completing the survey in less than 5 minutes. Additionally, 10 participants were removed for not identifying as being a part of one of the religions/worldviews examined (Atheism/Agnosticism, Christianity, Islam, or Judaism), resulting in an analytic sample of 256 participants. The average age of participants was 31.58 years ( $SD = 10.76$ ). Approximately half of the sample was male (49.6%; 47.3% female). Half of participants identified as Christian (50.8%; 44.1% Atheist/Agnostic; 1.2% Muslim; 3.9% Jewish). Almost three quarters of participants were White (72.3%; .4% American Indian/Alaskan Native; 10.2% Asian; 6.6% Black/African American; 7.0% Hispanic/Latinx; .4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 3.1% other). About two-thirds of participants had either a Bachelor's degree or some college experience (67.6%; 2.7% had less than a high school diploma; 12.1% had a high school degree or equivalent; 12.9% had a Master's degree; 1.6% had a Doctorate degree; 2.7% had a Terminal degree; .4% other). About half of participants identified as being either extremely liberal or liberal (49.7%; 39.4% moderately liberal, moderate, or moderately conservative; 10.9% conservative or extremely conservative). About a third of participants reported being single and never married (33.6%; 8.2% casually dating; 18.0% in a committed relationship; 3.9% engaged; 3.9% in a domestic partnership; 28.5% married; 2.3% divorced; 1.6% widowed).

## **Measures**

The following measures are described in the order in which participants completed them (see Appendix A).

### ***Self-Reports of Beliefs and Behaviors***

Participants were asked to give self-reports on their beliefs and behaviors in regards to a variety of scenarios that may be affected by religious affiliation by answering a series of questions. These questions were framed differently based on the relationship status indicated by participants. Questions inquired about participants' experience with or willingness to engage in pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious relationships, specific gender roles, divorce, and remarriage. Participants answered yes or no in regard to their experience with or willingness to engage in these behaviors. Questions also inquired about how strongly participants agreed with statements about the acceptability of pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious relationships, specific gender roles, divorce, and remarriage according to their religion. Participants responded using a scale from 1-“Strongly disagree” to 5-“Strongly agree.”

### ***Religious Questions***

Participants were also asked a series of questions about their beliefs pertaining to their affiliation with a certain religion or worldview. This included being asked about how religious they consider themselves to be (scale from 1-“Not at all” to 5-“Extremely”), whether they identify with a certain Abrahamic religion (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) or Atheism/Agnosticism, how strongly they identify with their associated religion or worldview (scale from 1-“Not very strongly” to 5-“Extremely”), if they identify with a specific denomination, and how traditional or contemporary their personal beliefs are (scale from 1-“Very traditional” to 5-“Very contemporary”). The Belief into Action (BIAC) scale (Koenig et al., 2015) was then used to assess participants' top priorities in life (ranked from 1 to 10),

frequency of attending religious services (scale from 1-“Never” to 7-“About every week”), frequency of gathering with others for religious purposes (scale from 1-“Never” to 7-“About every week”), the extent to which they live under God’s direction, the percentage of income they give back to a religious institution (scale from “0-Not at all (really haven’t thought about it) to “10-Completely, totally”), the amount of time they engage with religious media (scale from 1-“0 minutes (never)” to 9-“3-4 hours”), the amount of time they spend reading religious texts (scale from 1-“0 minutes (never)” to 9-“3-4 hours”), the amount of time they volunteer within a religious community (scale from 1-“0 minutes (never)” to 9-“3-4 hours”), and the extent to which they have conformed their life to religious teachings (scale from 0-“Not at all (really haven’t thought about it)” to 10-“Completely, totally”).

### ***Reports of Perceptions of Other Religions’ Beliefs and Behaviors***

Participants were asked to answer items about how strongly they agree or disagree with statements made about the beliefs of each of the Abrahamic religions and/or Atheist/Agnostic worldview that they do not identify with. The items asked about the acceptance of pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious relationships, certain gender roles, divorce, and remarriage according to what participants believed to be true of other religions they do not identify with. Participants answered based on a scale from 1-“Strongly disagree” to 7-“Strongly agree” for each statement. For each series of items, participants were also asked to indicate how confident they were in their answers about other religions’ or worldviews’ beliefs (scale from 1-“Not at all confident” to 5-“Completely confident”), what their overall attitude was towards other specific religious groups (scale from 0-“Extremely unfavorable” to 100-“Extremely favorable”), and how often they have personal contact with individuals of other religions (scale from 1-“Never” to 10-“Daily”).

### ***Demographics***

Participants were asked questions about their gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, level of education, general employment status, political orientation, and relationship status.

### **Procedure**

Prior to recruitment, study approval from the International Review Board (IRB) was received. Additionally, this study was pre-registered with the Open Science Framework (OSF; [link](#)). Once participants were recruited, they automatically received an electronic link to the survey. The survey took participants an average of 11.69 minutes to complete. Upon survey completion/participation, individuals who passed both attention checks were compensated for their participation. Participants received an equivalent rate to \$7.50/hour, which came to about \$1.60 according to the almost 12-minute average time it took participants to complete the survey.

### **Results**

**Research Question 1: What are participants' self-reported beliefs and behaviors among those of focus in this study?**

***Hypothesis 1.1: More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions will report that they do not believe in and have not behaved in accordance with pre-marital sex or cohabitation, whereas less than 50% of Atheists will report that they do not believe in and have not practiced pre-marital sex and cohabitation.***

A dummy variable was created to compare Abrahamic versus Atheist/Agnostic religions/worldviews, and then descriptive statistics were conducted on participants' engagement in pre-marital sex and cohabitation. Next, chi-square tests were conducted to see if there were proportional differences in behavior based on religion/worldview. Independent samples *t*-tests also were conducted to see if there were significant differences in beliefs based on

religion/worldview. A constrained  $p$ -value of .01 was used to determine significance for the following analyses.

The pre-marital sex portion of this hypothesis regarding behaviors was partially supported. A chi-square test revealed a larger proportion of those with an Abrahamic religion had not engaged in pre-marital sex than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $X^2(1) = 4.57$ ,  $p = .033$ ). However, the proportion was not over 50%. Specifically, 26.06% of participants with an Abrahamic religion reported that they had not engaged in pre-marital sex and 15.04% of participants with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview reported that they had not engaged in pre-marital sex. The pre-marital sex portion of this hypothesis regarding belief was supported. An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that those with an Abrahamic religion were less likely to agree that pre-marital sex is acceptable than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $t(254) = -14.09$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-2.23, -1.68],  $g = 1.77$ ). Specifically, 50.4% of those with an Abrahamic religion disagreed that pre-marital sex is acceptable whereas 1.8% of those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview disagreed that pre-marital sex is acceptable.

The cohabitation portion of this hypothesis regarding behaviors was partially supported. A chi-square test revealed a larger proportion of those with an Abrahamic religion had not engaged in cohabitation than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $X^2(1) = 0.74$ ,  $p = 0.389$ ). However, the proportion was not over 50%. Specifically, 47.89% of participants with an Abrahamic religion reported that they had not engaged in cohabitation and 42.48% of participants with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview reported that they had not engaged in cohabitation. The cohabitation portion of this hypothesis regarding belief was partially supported. An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that those with an Abrahamic religion were less likely to agree that cohabitation is acceptable than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview

( $t(254) = -12.65, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-2.00, -1.46], g = 1.59$ ). Specifically, 38.5% of those with an Abrahamic religion disagreed that cohabitation is acceptable whereas 0.0% of those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview disagreed that cohabitation is acceptable.

***Hypothesis 1.2: More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions and more than 50% of individuals with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview will report that they do not believe in and do not behave in accordance with inter-religious marriages.***

The data file was split by Abrahamic versus Atheist/Agnostic, and then descriptive statistics were conducted on participants' engagement with inter-religious marriage. Chi-square tests were conducted to see if there were proportional differences in behavior based on religion/worldview. Independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to see if there were significant differences in beliefs based on religion/worldview. A constrained  $p$ -value of .01 was used to determine significance for the following analyses.

The behaviors portion of this hypothesis was supported. A chi-square test revealed a similar proportion of those with an Abrahamic religion had engaged in an inter-religious marriage compared to those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $X^2(1) = 7.85, p = 0.005$ ). Specifically, 73.43% of participants with an Abrahamic religion reported that they had not engaged in inter-religious marriage, and 87.61% of participants with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview reported that they had not engaged in inter-religious marriage. The beliefs portion of this hypothesis was partially supported. An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that those with an Abrahamic religion were more likely to agree that inter-religious marriage is acceptable than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $t(254) = 9.07, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.05, 1.63], g = 1.33$ ). Specifically, 35.7% of those with an Abrahamic religion disagreed that inter-religious

marriage is acceptable whereas 85.0% of those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview disagreed that inter-religious marriage is acceptable.

***Hypothesis 1.3: More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions will report that they believe in and act in accordance with the husband acting as the head of the household while the wives hold a role of submission, whereas less than 50% of Atheists will report that they believe in and act in accordance with the husband acting as the head of the household while the wives hold a role of submission.***

The data file was split by Abrahamic versus Atheist/Agnostic, and then descriptive statistics were conducted on participants' engagement in gender roles where the husband is the head of the household and the wives have a role of submission. Chi-square tests were conducted to see if there were proportional differences in behavior based on religion/worldview. A constrained p-value of .01 was used to determine significance for the following analyses. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to see if there were significant differences in beliefs based on religion/worldview.

The behaviors portion of this hypothesis was partially supported. A chi-square test revealed a larger proportion of those with an Abrahamic religion had engaged in roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household while the wife has a role of submission than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $X^2(1) = 7.85, p = .005$ ). However, the proportion was not over 50%. Rather, 26.57% of participants with an Abrahamic religion reported that they had engaged in roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household while the wife has a role of submission, compared to the 12.39% of participants with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview reported that they had engaged in these same roles. The beliefs portion of this hypothesis regarding belief was also partially supported. An independent samples *t*-test revealed that those

with an Abrahamic religion were more likely to agree that roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household while the wife has a role of submission is acceptable than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $t(254) = 19.96, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.05, 1.63], g = 1.14$ ). However, the proportion was not over 50%. Rather, 36.4% of those with an Abrahamic religion agreed that such roles are acceptable whereas 4.5% of those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview agreed that such roles are acceptable.

***Hypothesis 1.4: More than 50% of individuals of the Abrahamic religions will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with divorce, whereas less than 50% of Atheists will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with divorce.***

The data file was split by Abrahamic versus Atheist/Agnostic, and then descriptive statistics were conducted on participants' engagement with divorce. Chi-square tests were conducted to see if there were proportional differences in behavior based on religion/worldview. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to see if there were significant differences in beliefs based on religion/worldview. A constrained p-value of .01 was used to determine significance for the following analyses.

The behaviors portion of this hypothesis was partially supported, although a chi-square test revealed that there was not a significant difference in the proportion of those with an Abrahamic religion and those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview who had not engaged in divorce ( $X^2(1) = .03, p = .861$ ). More than 50% of those with an Abrahamic religion did, however, report that they had not engaged in divorce. Specifically, 90.91% of participants with an Abrahamic religion reported that they had not engaged in divorce. Additionally, 90.27% of participants with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview also reported that they had not engaged in divorce. Caution is warranted in interpreting these analyses, however, as a large proportion of

participants reported being single and never married, and thus automatically reported that they had not engaged in divorce. The beliefs portion of this hypothesis regarding belief was partially supported. An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that those with an Abrahamic religion were less likely to agree that divorce is acceptable than those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview ( $t(253) = 88.67, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.95, -1.41], g = 1.54$ ). However, the proportion was not over 50%. Rather, 40.1% of those with an Abrahamic religion disagreed that divorce is acceptable, and 5.3% of those with an Atheist/Agnostic worldview disagreed that divorce is acceptable.

***Hypothesis 1.5: More than 50% of individuals of the Jewish and Islamic faiths will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with remarriage, whereas less than 50% of Christians and Atheists/Agnostics will report that they do not believe in and would not act in accordance with remarriage.***

A dummy variable was created to compare Jewish and Islamic religions to Christian and Atheist/Agnostic religions/worldviews, and then descriptive statistics were conducted on participants' engagement in remarriage. Chi-square tests were conducted to see if there were proportional differences in behavior based on religion/worldview. Independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to see if there were significant differences in beliefs based on religion/worldview. A constrained  $p$ -value of .01 was used to determine significance for the following analyses.

The behaviors portion of this hypothesis was partially supported, although a chi-square test revealed that there was not a significant difference in the proportion of those with Jewish and Islamic religions and those with a Christian religion or Atheist/Agnostic worldview who had not engaged in remarriage ( $X^2(1) = .62, p = .433$ ). More than 50% of those with Jewish and Islamic religions did, however, report that they had not engaged in remarriage. Specifically, 100% of

participants with Jewish and Islamic religions reported that they had not engaged in remarriage. Similarly, 95.47% of participants with a Christian religion or Atheist/Agnostic worldview reported that they had not engaged in remarriage. Caution is warranted in interpreting these analyses, however, as a large proportion of participants reported being single and never married, and thus automatically reported that they had not engaged in remarriage. The beliefs portion of this hypothesis regarding belief was partially supported. An independent samples *t*-test revealed that those with a Christian religion or Atheist/Agnostic worldview were less likely to agree that remarriage is acceptable than those with Jewish and Islamic religions ( $t(253) = 6.84, p = .055, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.01, 1.10], g = .55$ ). Additionally, the proportion of those with a Christian religion or Atheist/Agnostic worldview who did believe in remarriage was not under 50%, and the proportion of those with Jewish and Islamic religions who did not believe in remarriage was not over 50%. Rather, 79.8% of those with a Christian religion or Atheist/Agnostic worldview agreed that remarriage is acceptable whereas 0.00% of those with Jewish and Islamic religions disagreed that remarriage is acceptable.

**Research Question 2: Do participants' personal self-reported beliefs align with their reported behaviors?**

***Hypothesis 2.1: Individuals who endorse that their religion/worldview finds a specific behavior appropriate are more likely to self-report that they have engaged in that behavior.***

A series of logistic regressions with a reduced p-value .01 were conducted using participants' personal behaviors as the dependent variable and their reported beliefs about their religion/worldview as the independent variable to examine the associations of personal behaviors and reported beliefs about individuals' religions/worldviews.

This hypothesis was only partially supported, as beliefs aligned with behaviors only for four of the six beliefs/behaviors examined: pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious marriage, and the specific gender roles. Participants who believed that pre-marital sex was acceptable were more likely to report engaging in pre-marital sex,  $B = .42$  ( $SE = .10$ ),  $p < .001$ ,  $OR = 1.52$ , compared to those who did not believe that pre-marital sex was acceptable. Participants who believed that cohabitation was acceptable were more likely to report engaging in cohabitation,  $B = .27$  ( $SE = .10$ ),  $p = .004$ ,  $OR = 1.31$ , compared to those who did not believe that cohabitation was acceptable. Participants who believed that inter-religious marriage was acceptable were more likely to report engaging in inter-religious marriage,  $B = .43$  ( $SE = .15$ ),  $p = .005$ ,  $OR = 1.54$ , compared to those who did not believe that inter-religious marriage was acceptable. Participants who believed that engaging in gender roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household while the wife has a role of submission was acceptable were more likely to report engaging in such gender roles,  $B = .54$  ( $SE = .12$ ),  $p < .001$ ,  $OR = 1.72$ , compared to those who did not believe that such gender roles were acceptable. There was not a significant difference in participants' engagement in divorce based on their belief as to whether divorce was acceptable,  $B = -.04$  ( $SE = .15$ ),  $p = .787$ . There was also not a significant difference in participants' engagement in remarriage based on their belief as to whether remarriage was acceptable,  $B = .25$  ( $SE = .36$ ),  $p = .498$ .

***Hypothesis 2.2: Those who have a higher level of religious participation will be more likely to have behaviors that align with their reported beliefs of their associated religion/worldview.***

A series of logistic regressions with a reduced  $p$ -value .01 were conducted using their personal behaviors as the dependent variable and their reported beliefs about their religion/worldview as the independent variable, with the addition of a religious participation

variable to examine the associations of personal behaviors and reported beliefs about individuals' religions/worldviews, as well as level of participation.

This hypothesis was not supported, as the addition of religious participation did not significantly enhance the models comparing participants who believed that certain behaviors were acceptable and participants who reported engaging in certain behaviors for pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious marriage, gender roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household while the wife has a role of submission, divorce, or remarriage (see Table 1).

***Hypothesis 2.3: Those who indicate they have conformed to their religion/worldview will be more likely to have behaviors that align with their reported beliefs of their associated religion/worldview.***

A series of logistic regressions with a reduced  $p$ -value .01 were conducted using their personal behaviors as the dependent variable and their reported beliefs about their religion/worldview as the independent variable, with the addition of a conforming to religion/worldview variable to examine the associations of personal behaviors and reported beliefs about individuals' religions/worldviews, as well as extent of conforming to religion/worldview.

This hypothesis was not supported, as the addition of conforming to religion/worldview did not significantly enhance the models comparing participants who believed that certain behaviors were acceptable and participants who reported engaging in certain behaviors for pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious marriage, gender roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household while the wife has a role of submission, divorce, or remarriage (see Table 2).

**Research Question 3: Do participants' perceptions of the beliefs of individuals of various religions accurately represent those individuals' true beliefs?**

*Hypothesis 3.1: Individuals will inaccurately perceive the beliefs of the majority of others with different ideologies.*

A series of RM-ANOVAs were conducted to compare individuals' perceptions of their own affiliation/worldview to their perceptions of other affiliations/worldviews for each behavior examined. Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc analyses were conducted to examine differences for each religion/worldview. A constrained p-value of .01 was used to determine significance for the following analyses.

This hypothesis was supported, as significant differences were found in individuals' perceptions of other religions/worldviews based on their own religion/worldview for each belief. Regarding pre-marital sex, the main effect of beliefs about religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .42$ ,  $F(3, 249) = 114.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .58$ ) was qualified by an interaction between beliefs and one's own religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .59$ ,  $F(12, 659) = 11.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .16$ ; see Figure 1). Regarding cohabitation, the main effect of beliefs about religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .46$ ,  $F(3, 248) = 97.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .54$ ) was qualified by an interaction between beliefs and one's own religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .60$ ,  $F(12, 656) = 11.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .16$ ; see Figure 2). Regarding inter-religious marriage, the main effect of beliefs about religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .52$ ,  $F(3, 247) = 77.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .49$ ) was qualified by an interaction between beliefs and one's own religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .58$ ,  $F(12, 654) = 12.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .17$ ; see Figure 3). Regarding gender roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household while the wife has a role of submission, the main effect of beliefs about religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .71$ ,  $F(3, 248) = 33.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .29$ ) was qualified by an

interaction between beliefs and one's own religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .55$ ,  $F(12, 656) = 13.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .18$ ; see Figure 4). Regarding divorce, the main effect of beliefs about religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .57$ ,  $F(3, 248) = 63.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .43$ ) was qualified by an interaction between beliefs and one's own religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .70$ ,  $F(12, 656) = 7.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .11$ ; see Figure 5). Regarding remarriage, the main effect of beliefs about religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .72$ ,  $F(3, 245) = 31.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .28$ ) was qualified by an interaction between beliefs and one's own religion/worldview (Wilk's  $\lambda = .68$ ,  $F(12, 649) = 8.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .12$ ; see Figure 6).

***Hypothesis 3.2: Individuals will most accurately perceive the beliefs of individuals who identify as Atheists and Christians and will least accurately perceive the beliefs of individuals who identify as Jewish and Muslim.***

The RM-ANOVAs from the prior hypothesis (Figures 1-6) were reviewed for trends, as it relates to this hypothesis.

This hypothesis was only partially supported. Overall, individuals tended to most accurately perceive the beliefs of Atheists, Christians, and Muslims and tended to least accurately perceive the beliefs of Jewish individuals. This was not the case, however, for every belief examined. Regarding pre-marital sex, results indicate that individuals most accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Muslim, Atheist, and Christian and least accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Jewish. Regarding cohabitation, results indicate that individuals most accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Muslim, Atheist, and Christian and least accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Jewish. Regarding inter-religious marriage, results indicate that individuals most accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Muslim and

Atheist and least accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Jewish.

Regarding specific gender roles, results indicate that individuals most accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Muslim and Christian and least accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Jewish. Regarding divorce, results indicate that individuals most accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Atheist and Christian and least accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Jewish and Muslim. Regarding remarriage, results indicate that individuals most accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Atheist and Christian and least accurately perceived the beliefs of individuals who identified as Jewish and Muslim.

**Exploratory Question 1: Does the traditionalism of participants' religious beliefs impact the perceptions of their own and other religions/worldviews?**

A series of RM-ANOVAs were conducted to compare individuals' traditional vs. contemporary religious leanings to their perceptions of the beliefs of various religions/worldviews. A constrained p-value of .01 was used to determine significance for the following analyses. For the models examining beliefs about pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious marriage, gender roles in which the husband acts as the head of the household and the wife has a supporting role, divorce, and remarriage, the main effects of beliefs about religion/worldview were not qualified by interactions between the traditional vs. contemporary nature of participants. None of the interactions were significant (see Table 3).

**Discussion**

In this study, the association between religious affiliation and individuals' marriage-related beliefs and behaviors was examined. Individuals' perceptions of others' beliefs and behaviors based on religion were also examined. The purpose of this study was not only to

highlight the differences in religious individuals' beliefs about and behaviors in marriage, but also to determine if the association between religion and marriage was consistent with prior research. Data were gathered through an online survey to measure religion/worldview, past behaviors, current beliefs, religious participation, extent of conformity to religion/worldview, perceptions of individuals of different religions/worldviews, and contact regularity with individuals of different religions/worldviews.

The first research question examined participants' self-reported beliefs and behaviors. Overall, it was found that Atheist and Agnostic individuals share both similarities and differences with individuals of Abrahamic religions in regard to their self-reported beliefs and behaviors. For example, results indicated that beliefs like pre-marital sex and cohabitation are more commonly accepted by Atheists and Agnostics than individuals of Abrahamic religions. This is to be expected according to the teachings of these religions. Similarities can also be seen in Atheists and Agnostics and individuals of Abrahamic religions, however, such as when considering beliefs like divorce and remarriage. Here, a much more similar percentage of Atheist and Agnostic individuals and Abrahamic individuals reported engaging in these behaviors. In looking at divorce, specifically, results supported Wilson and Musick's (1995) finding that Christians tended to agree more strongly that marriage is a bond that is not meant to be broken. These trends are not entirely consistent when considering individuals' reports of behaviors, however. Individuals of Abrahamic religions and Atheist and Agnostic worldviews reported similar levels of actual engagement in pre-marital sex and cohabitation, as well as divorce and remarriage. These findings are consistent with prior research that suggests that individuals of various levels of religiosity often have different viewpoints (Harper, 2007). Additionally, these findings support research that also suggests that nonreligious and religious individuals may share

similarities and differences depending on the specific religion they identify with (Saroglou et al., 2011). The results regarding individuals' engagement in divorce and remarriage, however, must be interpreted cautiously as about a third of participants reported being single and never married, skewing the overall percentage of participants who reported not engaging in divorce or remarriage.

The second research question examined whether or not participants' self-reported beliefs align with their reported behaviors. This study found that for four of the six beliefs examined - pre-marital sex, cohabitation, inter-religious marriage, and specific gender roles, participants' behaviors did, in fact, align with their beliefs. This aligns with previous research, including the Theory of Reasoned Action, which asserts that humans' behaviors are often a follow-up response to thoughts, intentions, or attitudes that they held first (Madden et al., 1992). This is understandable as it makes much more sense for individuals to act according to their beliefs, rather than contradicting themselves and believing one thing but behaving in a way that challenges that belief, or vice versa. There did not appear to be a trend, however, of beliefs predicting behaviors, when examining beliefs and behaviors surrounding divorce and remarriage. This finding is likely due to the fact that the survey was not created to accurately measure how single individuals' reports for their potential future engagement with divorce or remarriage. It was also hypothesized that level of religious participation would be associated with how well individuals' beliefs and behaviors aligned. When examining participants' responses, however, it was found that the level of religious participation did not have an impact on the association between individuals' beliefs and behaviors. This finding was surprising as religious participation has been known to play an important role in dating relationships marriages across various religions (Marks, 2008; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Considering each of the six beliefs and

behaviors examined were all related to relationships and marriages, finding no significant difference based on religious participation was unexpected. Finding no significant differences here could, however, be attributed to a possible decrease in religious participation, especially in younger generations. Individuals may find that their religion or worldview may still be supported without their physical attendance at religious events. An increase in spirituality, in comparison to association with an organized religion, could also be another possible reason that religious participation had no significant effect on individuals' beliefs and behaviors, as spirituality could be maintained on a more individual level. Additionally, it was hypothesized that the extent to which individuals reported conforming to their religion/worldview would be associated with how well individuals' beliefs and behaviors aligned. Similar to level of religious participation, the extent of conforming to one's religion/worldview did not have an impact on the associations between individuals' beliefs and behaviors. Conforming to one's religion or worldview is comparable to level of religiosity, which has also been reported to have positive impacts on individuals' relationships, making these findings surprising, as well (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Additionally, this finding does not support prior research conducted by Mahoney and colleagues (2001) who noted that an increased level of seriousness about living according to one's religion had an impact on Christians' attitudes surrounding pre-marital sex. These findings are important to make sense of individuals' behaviors and to understand the impacts made by different aspects of religion on marital beliefs and behaviors.

The third research question examined whether or not participants' perceptions of the beliefs of individuals of various religions or worldviews aligned with those individuals' true beliefs. The results of this study indicated that participants' perceptions of the beliefs of individuals of various religions and worldviews do not align with those individuals' true beliefs

overall. This is likely a result of existing stereotypes individuals have of individuals of differing religions and worldviews (Altemeyer, 2003; Harper, 2007). Individuals' existing knowledge of other religions could also have potentially played a role in the ways in which they perceived individuals of other religions/worldviews, as well as the accuracy of those perceptions. While little research has been conducted and published on religious and nonreligious individuals' perceptions of each other (Harper, 2007), it is important to further the existing research to ensure that society works toward eliminating religious stereotypes, in hopes of also preventing religious discrimination and promoting education geared towards understanding individuals' differences (Altemeyer, 2003). In partial support of this research question's second hypothesis, results indicated that individuals most accurately perceived the beliefs of Atheist and Agnostic individuals, Christian individuals, and Muslim individuals. Additionally, individuals least accurately perceived the beliefs of Jewish individuals. These findings may likely be the result of greater exposure to individuals who identify as Atheist or Agnostic, Christian, or Muslim, whether information is gathered through personal interaction or media coverage.

The exploratory question examined whether or not the traditionalism of participants' beliefs impacted the perceptions they had of their own and other religions/worldviews. Results indicated that the traditionalism of participants' beliefs had no significant impact on the perceptions individuals had of their own or other religions/worldviews. This may partially be due to the uneven distribution of traditionalism across participants, as over half of them reported being either slightly or very contemporary, almost a quarter of them reported being moderate, and only 15% of them reported being either slightly or very traditional. This may also be partially due to almost half of the participants politically identifying as either extremely liberal or liberal. Different results may have been seen had the political leanings of participants been more

representative of the political leanings of U.S. citizens as a whole. A general increase in knowledge about diverse individuals as society progresses may also have led to participants' traditionalism having no effect on their perceptions, as well.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While this research study has provided useful information for public awareness, changes and improvements could be made in future replications. One major limitation of this study was that the survey and its results did not take into account that any participant who identified as unmarried would have no experience to report on engaging in divorce or remarriage. This meant that a large portion of the responses that indicated no engagement with divorce or remarriage only answered that way because they had never been in the position to do so. A second limitation of the study was that a very small proportion of participants reported being either Jewish or Muslim. More specifically, only 3.9% of participants identified as Jewish and only 1.2% of participants identified as Muslim.

Based on these limitations, a few future directions are recommended. First, it is important for any future studies or replications to create the survey so that it considers how unmarried participants would report behaving in a potential, future scenario in regard to the divorce and remarriage behaviors. This would allow for a more accurate representation and may increase the chances for significant results to be found. Second, greater representation for Jewish and Muslim individuals is also vital for proportional representation. Additionally, it may be helpful to consider the location from which participants are reporting in future studies to ensure that the results are truly representative of the United States. It would also be interesting to use the survey within individual communities to compare various community samples. A community sample

was attempted as a part of this research study, but the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on recruitment restricted the researcher's ability to conduct any tests or report any findings.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study could be used in the future to emphasize the association between religion and marriage and to educate individuals about religious differences among individuals. The study reasserted that religion and religious values play an important role in marriage-related beliefs and behaviors. Additionally, this research supports the findings of the researchers who developed the Theory of Reasoned Action (Madden et al., 1992), as it indicates that individuals' behaviors are often associated with the beliefs they have. Finally, the study also found that individuals tend to inaccurately perceive the beliefs regarding relationships and marriage of individuals of varying religions. Greater attention should be drawn to these inaccurate perceptions to educate individuals about others' religions and their beliefs as a way to decrease the prevalence of stereotype usage and religious discrimination in our society.

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**Table 1.***Alignment of Beliefs and Behaviors Based on Religious Participation*

<b>Model</b>	<b><i>B</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b><i>OR</i></b>
Pre-marital Sex	-0.15	0.07	0.020	0.86
Cohabitation	-0.10	0.06	0.095	0.91
Inter-religious Marriage	0.00	0.06	0.993	1.00
Gender Roles	-0.02	0.06	0.765	0.98
Divorce	-0.15	0.11	0.162	0.86
Remarriage	-0.07	0.14	0.642	0.03

*Note.* Statistics from Block 2 of the Logistic Regressions

**Table 2.***Alignment of Beliefs and Behaviors Based on Conforming to Religion/Worldview*

<b>Model</b>	<b><i>B</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b><i>OR</i></b>
Pre-marital Sex	-0.04	0.05	0.506	0.96
Cohabitation	0.00	0.05	0.966	1.00
Inter-religious Marriage	0.03	0.05	0.518	1.03
Gender Roles	0.09	0.05	0.087	1.09
Divorce	0.06	0.07	0.363	1.07
Remarriage	0.11	0.09	0.242	1.11

*Note.* Statistics from Block 2 of the Logistic Regressions

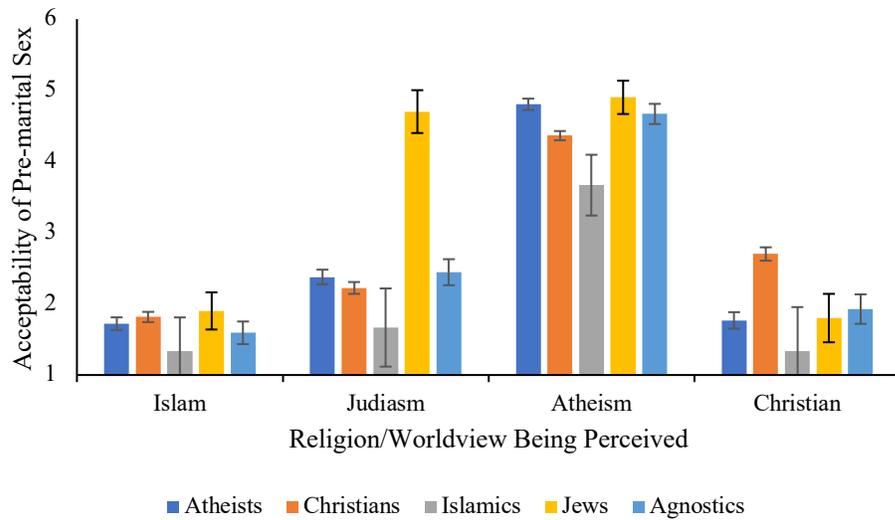
**Table 3.**

*Comparison of Individuals' Perceptions of Religions/Worldviews Based on Self-Reported Traditionality and Perceptions of Individuals who Identify with Each Religion/Worldview*

<b>Model</b>	<b>Wilk's <math>\lambda</math></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b><i>P</i></b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>
Pre-marital Sex	.26	(3, 248)	237.47	<.001	.74
Pre-marital Sex X Traditional/Contemporary	.95	(12, 656)	.98	.463	.02
Cohabitation	.28	(3, 247)	208.05	<.001	.72
Cohabitation X Traditional/Contemporary	.95	(12, 654)	1.05	.404	.02
Inter-religious Marriage	.32	(3, 246)	174.62	<.001	.68
Inter-religious Marriage X Traditional/Contemporary	.96	(12, 651)	.84	.606	.01
Gender Roles	.65	(3, 247)	43.49	<.001	.35
Gender Roles X Traditional/Contemporary	.92	(12, 654)	1.83	.040	.03
Divorce	.35	(3, 247)	154.33	<.001	.65
Divorce X Traditional/Contemporary	.97	(12, 654)	.70	.757	.01
Remarriage	.53	(3, 244)	71.16	<.001	.47
Remarriage X Traditional/Contemporary	.94	(12, 646)	1.24	.253	.02

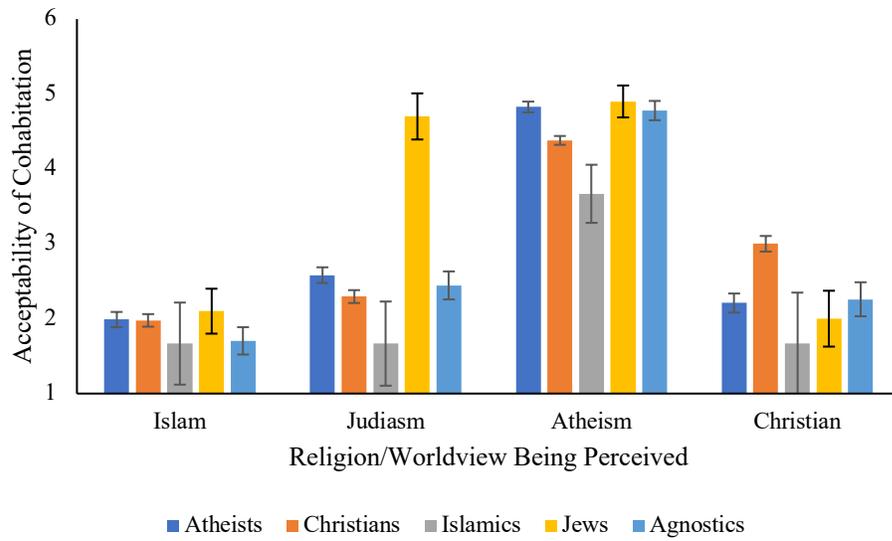
**FIGURE 1.**

*Participants' perceptions of individuals of other religions/worldviews about pre-marital sex*



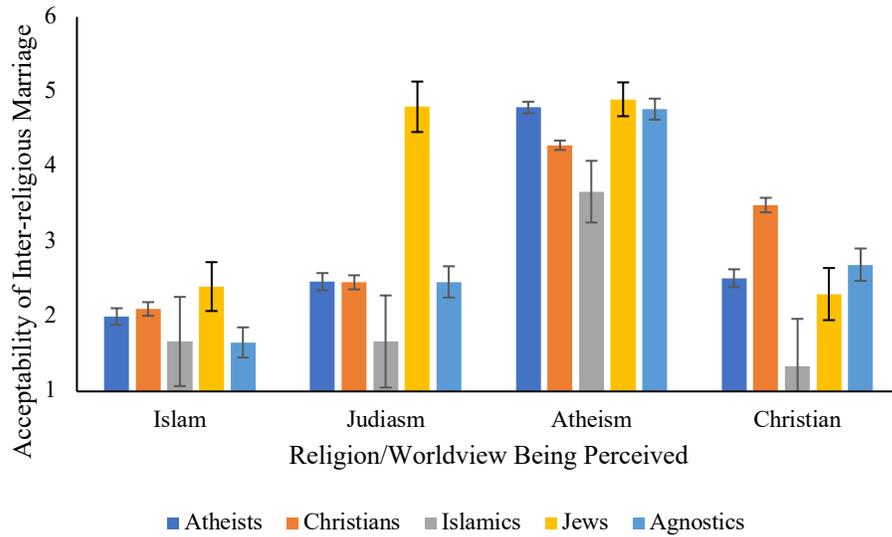
**FIGURE 2.**

*Participants' perceptions of individuals of other religions/worldviews about cohabitation*



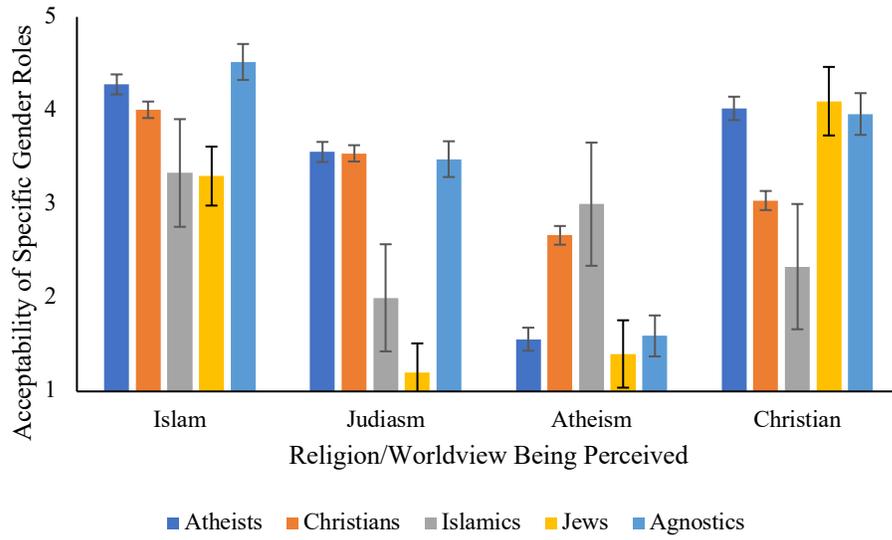
**FIGURE 3.**

*Participants' perceptions of individuals of other religions/worldviews about inter-religious marriage*



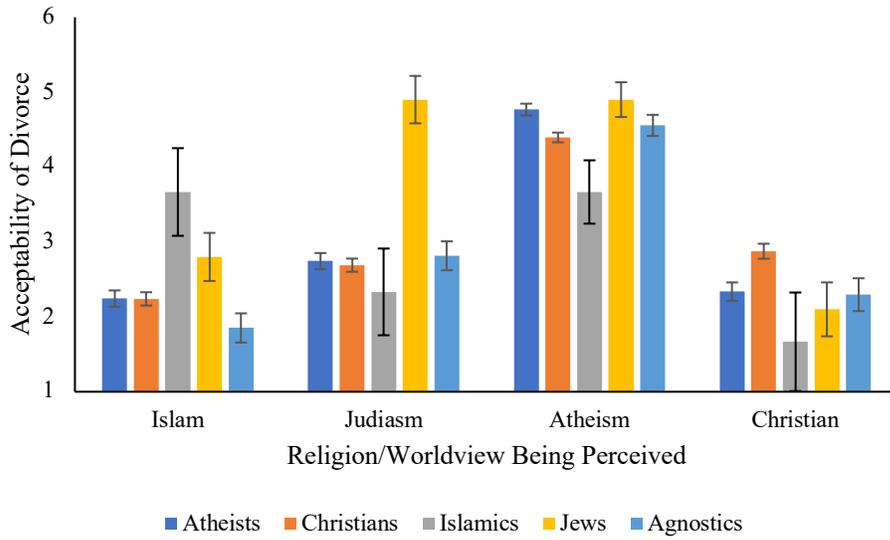
**FIGURE 4.**

*Participants' perceptions of individuals of other religions/worldviews about specific gender roles*



**FIGURE 5.**

*Participants' perceptions of individuals of other religions/worldviews about divorce*



**FIGURE 6.**

*Participants' perceptions of individuals of other religions/worldviews about remarriage*

