Student Name: Leung Cindy
University Number: 2009111723
Degree: Bachelor of Social Sciences
Title of Thesis: Religious Homogamy Revisited: A Study of Its Mechanisms and Effects on Dating and Married Christian Couples
Supervisor: Dr. Harry Hui
Year of Submission: 2012
Religious Homogamy Revisited:

A Study of Its Mechanisms and Effects on Dating and Married Christian Couples

Leung Cindy

The University of Hong Kong
Author note

Without others’ assistance, it would be impossible for me to complete an undergraduate thesis within a short period of eight months. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Harry Hui, for his unfailing support, invaluable advice and tremendous patience throughout the whole research process. I am thankful for Dr. Hui’s generous sharing of his wealth of knowledge, which enlightened me not only on the thesis topic, but also on various issues in psychology and religion. In particular, I am grateful for his willingness to provide remote supervision when I was on exchange during the second semester. His consistent guidance cultivated my fond interest in psychological research and encouraged me to persevere in the learning process despite challenges. Genuine appreciation also goes to Miss Jasmine Lam, who offered me preliminary technical support in cleaning data from the huge FTBC database, as well as precious insights into my research ideas at the start-up stage. I also wish to extend my sincere thankfulness to my family and friends for their unremitting support throughout the course of my research. Given that I am not a Christian, their help in distributing the questionnaires among their Christian networks greatly expedited the data collection process. Lastly, acknowledgment must go to all participants for their involvement in this study.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Cindy Leung,

Department of Psychology, The University of Hong Kong. Contact: cindy927@hku.hk
Abstract

Two studies were conducted to examine the interplay between religious homogamy and love relationships in Chinese Christian couples. Regarding prior investigation on religious homogamy that solely focused on married couples in western society, Study 1 replicated and explored the link between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction using a dating population. A cross-sectional correlational design was adopted. Analyses ($N = 352$) showed that religious homogamy was associated with higher relationship satisfaction in married but not dating individuals, implying that positive relational outcomes of religious homogamy may be specific to married dyads. Study 1 also examined mechanisms behind the homogamy-satisfaction link among married unions. Single and multiple mediation analyses revealed that among the four proposed mediators: joint church attendance, joint prayer, perceived coping similarity (in active coping and in coping by religion), only joint prayer and perceived similarity in active coping significantly mediated this association.

Study 2 used data from the longitudinal research of the Formation and Transformation of Beliefs in Chinese. Analyses ($N = 315$) demonstrated that religious homogamy predicted a higher quality of life in dating but not married individuals. Findings shed light on divergent benefits of religious homogamy on dating and married unions. Among married Christians, religious homogamy was associated with greater relationship satisfaction, and this association was mediated by joint prayer and perceived similarity in active coping. Among
dating Christians, religious homogamy predicted a higher quality of life through increasing their religiosity. Directions for future research and practical implications were discussed.
# Table of Contents

## Study 1

- LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................... 6
- METHOD ......................................................... 22
- RESULTS ......................................................... 26
- DISCUSSION .................................................... 46

## Study 2

- LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................... 62
- METHOD ......................................................... 67
- RESULTS ......................................................... 71
- DISCUSSION .................................................... 79

- GENERAL DISCUSSION ....................................... 94
- LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH .................. 98
- EMPIRICAL AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS .............. 102
- CONCLUSION .................................................. 105
- REFERENCES .................................................. 107

## Appendix

- Appendix I – The complete questionnaire used in Study 1 130
Religious Homogamy Revisited:

A Study of Its Mechanisms and Effects on Dating and Married Christian Couples

Similarity between two individuals has long been posited to be conducive to attraction and intimacy (Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993). Marital homogamy – similarity between a married couple – is encouraged based on the important, underlying assumption that individuals sharing similar characteristics (e.g. values, norms, beliefs, practices) can adjust more easily to one another (Bumpass & Sweet, 1972). According to Esterberg, Moen, and Dempster-McCain (1994), similarity is critical to marriage, as the increased agreement and common knowledge lessens conflicts, which in turn fosters attraction, prolongs marriage and facilitates conflict resolution. In other words, homogamy promotes harmony and marital success (Burr, 1973; Nye & Berardo, 1973), whereas heterogamy entails less consensus and increases the chances of discord and unhappiness (Ortega, 1988).

Religious Homogamy and Relationship Satisfaction

In particular, one type of homogamy – religious homogamy – was repeatedly demonstrated to be beneficial to marriage (Call & Heaton, 1997; J.G. Chinitz, 2002; Joshua G. Chinitz & Brown, 2001; Heaton, 1984; Heaton & Pratt, 1990). Religious homogamy can be defined as similarity in attitudes and beliefs about specific religious practices (Heaton, ...
Same-faith couples who belong to the same religion or denomination are regarded as homogamous, while inter-faith couples who differ in religious denomination are considered heterogamous (Heaton & Pratt, 1990).

Research indicated that religious homogamy promoted marital satisfaction and stability. In a study of patterns of interreligious marriage in the mid-1970s, Glenn (1982) combined data from six national surveys, General Social Surveys, conducted in the United States from 1973 to 1978. Each Spring, 1,500 respondents aged 18 or above were selected to represent the civilian non-institutionalized population of the 48 contiguous United States. Results pointed to moderate negative effects of religious heterogamy on marital happiness in males who were Protestants, Catholics and Jews (Glenn, 1982).

Also utilizing the data from the NORC General Social Survey (National Opinion Research Center, 1982) described by Glenn (1982) and including data in 1980 and 1982, Heaton (1984) examined the relationship between religious homogamy and marital satisfaction. With an inclusion of the separate effects of husband’s and wife’s religion on marital satisfaction in the log-linear models (Bishop, Fienberg, & Holland, 1975; Featherman & Hauser, 1978), this study controlled for the potentially spurious relationship between religious affiliation and marital satisfaction. Results indicated that homogamous marriages were more satisfying both with or without the presence of children (Heaton, 1984).
Later, Heaton and colleagues (1985) conducted a study which focused on the relationship between the timing of divorce and multiple independent variables, including wife's age at marriage, husband's age relative to the wife's, wife's religion, and denominational religious homogamy, which was conceptualized as similar religious preferences. Two competing models were suggested. The adjustment model hypothesized a decline in the effects of covariates as marital duration increased, whereas the perpetual model posited that the covariates would continue to influence the likelihood of divorce throughout the duration of the marriage. The dependent variable – timing of divorce – was operationalized as the duration-specific hazard rate of divorce, which represented the probability per unit of time that a marriage which had survived to the start of one time interval would end in divorce within that interval. Simultaneous effects of the aforementioned covariates were examined by including their appropriate marginal effects in the log-linear model. This study utilized data generated by Albrecht, Bahr and Goodman (1983) as part of their Intermountain Divorce Study conducted in late 1975 and early 1976. The dataset comprised 3,345 cases of white participants, who had no denominational affiliation, or were Catholics, Protestants, Mormons or Jewish. Results showed that the effects of denominational religious homogamy (regardless of religion) did not diminish over marital duration, indicating that when the husband and wife shared the same religious preference, divorce was less likely, irrespective of their marital duration (Heaton et al.,
While most prior studies emphasized denominational affiliation only, Heaton and Pratt (1990) tested the effects of three types of religious homogamy – namely denominational affiliation, church attendance, and belief in the Bible – upon marital satisfaction and stability. Data from the National Survey of Families and Households, a national probability sample of the adult, non-institutional United States population in 1988, was used. Among the 13,017 households who were interviewed, 61% were married and selected for analysis, comprising participants with no religion, Catholics, Baptists, Liberal, Moderate, Nondenominational and Conservative Protestants. Employing log-linear analysis, results indicated that denominational affiliation homogamy, regardless of the religion, was the most critical to marital satisfaction and stability. Church attendance homogamy only contributed slightly to marital success, while no statistically significant association was found between similar beliefs about the Bible with either marital satisfaction or marital stability (Heaton & Pratt, 1990).

**Religious Homogamy and Relationship Satisfaction: In Dating Couples**

In recent years, marriage rate has plummeted while cohabitation rate has risen (G. W. Jones, 2007; Kalmijn, 2007). Dating couples tend to get married at a later age than in the past (G. Jones & Gubhaju, 2009). However, past investigation focused solely on the effect
of religious homogamy on the relationship satisfaction of married couples (Albrecht, Bahr, & Goodman, 1983; Glenn, 1982; Heaton, 1984; Heaton & Pratt, 1990), which might not apply to the increasing population of non-married (dating) couples today.

Few studies have investigated homogamy among unmarried couples in intimate co-residential and non-co-residential relationships (e.g., Blackwell & Lichter, 2004; Kalmijn, 1998). Blackwell and Lichter’s (2004) study on homogamy among dating, cohabiting and married couples indicated that the stringent sorting criteria that men and women used in selecting a marital partner, such as religious, educational and racial homogamy were also used and manifested in dating and cohabiting relationships. Notably, another recent study showed that dating participants with high perceived similarity in religion with their partners reported higher satisfaction than their low-similarity counterparts, to the extent that they rated this type of similarity as being important to them (Lutz-Zois, Bradley, Mihalik, & Moorman-Eavers, 2006). However, no study to date has directly examined the relationship between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction in dating couples. In light of the changed patterns and trends of marriage, this study first endeavors to broaden the applicability of religious homogamy to couples in contemporary society, by examining whether dating couples experience the aforementioned effects of religious homogamy just like married couples.
Christian Couples in Chinese Society

In the present study, only religious homogamy in Christianity will be investigated due to the following reasons. As shown by the statistics of Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2011), approximately 43% of Hong Kong population is religious, among which 1.5 million are Buddhists and Taoists and 550,000 are Protestant Christians. Christianity is therefore the second main religion in Hong Kong. Although Buddhism and Taoism are the most prevalent religions in Hong Kong, the doctrines of Buddhism and Taoism place little emphasis on love and romantic relationships. Even when love is mentioned, it is portrayed somewhat negatively (Reuben, 1985). In contrast, the Christian doctrine highlights the importance of love, with the fundamental belief that “God is Love” (Fine, 1985). Christians’ values of love and romantic relationships are profoundly influenced by Bible teachings and the commandments of God (Young & Adams, 1999). Specifically, same-faith marriage between Christians is encouraged by the biblical mandate that Christians ought to marry religiously homogamous believers.

In addition, prior research on religious homogamy or heterogamy between Christian couples focused primarily on Caucasians and other western populations (Glenn, 1982; Heaton, 1984; Heaton et al., 1985; Heaton & Pratt, 1990). Conversely, religious homogamy in Chinese Christian couples are yet to be explored. Pertaining to the universal teachings of Christianity, it is believed that religious homogamy is also associated with higher
relationship satisfaction among Chinese couples.

**Mechanisms of Religious Homogamy on Relationship Satisfaction**

Despite a substantial body of research that supports the positive linkage between religious homogamy and marital satisfaction (e.g., Glenn & Weaver, 1978; Ortega, 1988), the mechanism behind this association is unclear. Apart from a few studies that documented the associations among religious homogamy, joint church attendance and marital satisfaction (e.g., Williams & Lawler, 2003), other studies failed to identify the specific components of religious homogamy that serve as the active ingredients in yielding the observed effects. The second aim of the study is thus to re-examine one factor – joint church attendance, and put forward three potential factors – praying together and perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion and active coping), which possibly mediate and explain the association between religious homogamy and marital satisfaction among married couples.

**Religious Homogamy, Joint Church Attendance and Relationship Satisfaction**

Prior research revealed that taking part in joint religious activities fostered positive relationship outcomes (Glenn & Supancic, 1984; Mahoney et al., 1999). Similarly, homogamy on any dimension of religiosity (e.g., affiliation, attendance, beliefs) was shown to promote similarities between spouses which were conducive to a more stable and
Attending church together, in particular, is a frequently studied joint religious activity. One study found a significant positive correlation between church attendance and marital satisfaction (H. Bahr & Chadwick, 1985). Larson and Golts (1989) also found that joint church attendance enhanced a couple’s level of personal and structural commitment to the marriage. Other research indicated that joint church participation, which was more common among religiously homogamous couples, bestowed both spouses with similar values and a sense of purpose that enhanced family commitment, promoted social integration and avoided divorce (Schumm, 1985; White, 1990).

Notably, early studies pointed to contradictory evidences concerning the associations among religious homogamy, joint church attendance and marital satisfaction. Glenn and Supancic (1984) pointed out that spouses’ joint participation in religious services played a more dominant role than denominational affiliation in marital stability. In another study, the link between religious homogamy and marital satisfaction disappeared when the frequency of church attendance was controlled (Heaton, 1984), suggesting that joint religious involvement might underlie greater satisfaction in homogamous couples. However, a later study conducted by Heaton and Pratt (1990) indicated that denominational affiliation homogamy, regardless of the religion, was the most crucial determinant of marital satisfaction and stability, whereas church attendance homogamy only contributed slightly to
Despite the incompatible findings, more recent studies confirmed that discrepancies in levels of engagement in religious activities caused problems in relationships (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). According to Call and Heaton (1997), when the wife regularly attended church but the husband never attended, the risk of marital dissolution was almost three times greater than when both spouses attended church with a similar frequency. In a study examining heterogamy in marriages, differences in both core theological beliefs and in religious attendance were linked with increased marital dissolution (Curtis & Ellison, 2002). Furthermore, Mahoney et al. (1999) indicated that joint religious activities and perceived sacred qualities of marriage were positively correlated with better marital functioning and more perceived benefits of marriage. In a qualitative study, couples reported that although some of their religious activities gave rise to challenges, they felt that shared religious activities had given their marriage an increased sense of meaning (Marks, 2005). In another qualitative study conducted by Dollahite and Lamber (2007), couples proposed that their joint religious activities were essential to their fidelity toward each other, which was integral to a satisfying relationship.

With regard to the above empirical evidences that document the ample benefits of joint religious attendance on relational outcomes, it is plausible that higher joint church participation accounts for the greater relationship satisfaction in religiously homogamous marital success.
couples. Hence, this study postulates that, in married couples, joint church attendance fully mediates the positive association between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction.

**Religious Homogamy, Joint Prayer and Relationship Satisfaction**

With regard to the central role of prayer in traditional beliefs of Christians, it is worthy to examine prayer’s role in their relationships. While most prior research focused on the impacts of individual prayer on relationships, several studies documented the direct positive effects of joint prayer on relationship outcomes. For instance, a recent study found a positive correlation between joint prayer and relationship satisfaction (Nathaniel M. Lambert, Fincham, LaVallee, & Brantley, 2011). Fincham and colleagues (2008) further proposed that when both partners are initially comfortable with prayer, joint prayer may be a natural extension of individual prayer that enables couples to experience even more benefits. Numerous related studies may shed light on the synergistic nature of joint prayer of couples on relationship satisfaction.

Firstly, joint prayer was shown to increase relational unity and trust in a recent study conducted by Lambert and colleagues (2011). Participants who prayed with and for their partner reported significantly higher unity and trust for their partner than their counterparts in the positive-interaction control group, in which participants engaged in discussions about a positive news article, and then reported aspects of their relationship in the online journal.
(Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011). This control condition ruled out the possibility that the change in trust levels in the joint-prayer condition was solely attributable to joint activities that fostered positive affect. Joint prayer facilitated a sense of couple unity, which was defined as emotional “oneness” and manifested in shared communication, values, goals, activities, beliefs, experiences, or practices (Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011). On the other hand, engaging in joint prayer promoted trust, which is often depicted as an integral cornerstone of a healthy relationship or a key component of an ideal love (Eckstein & Cohen, 1998; C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1983). Trust was also found to predict love and self-disclosure (Larzelere & Huston, 1980), as well as to mediate the relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction (Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009).

Notably, higher unity and trust resulting from joint prayer might be conducive to a satisfying relationship.

Secondly, joint prayer promotes perspective-taking and empathy for the partner, which might be a major marital influence process with vital long-term impacts on marital outcomes (Frank D. Fincham et al., 2008; Long, 1990). In a study of the phenomenological experience of prayer during marital conflict, Butler, Stout, and Gardner (2002) found that prayer encouraged spouses to shift their focus from their personal needs to the needs of the relationship and to behaviors favorable to their partner. Similarly, evidence indicated that prayer promoted empathy and blending of perspectives (Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998).
Dudley and Kosinski (1990) further confirmed that praying for the partner might prime partners to think of each other in more loving or empathetic terms, hence treating each other with greater sensitivity and respect. As joint prayer improves empathetic understanding, it may also reduce the frequency or intensity of harmful relationship behaviors, as well as the reciprocation of unfavorable partner behaviors. In other words, couples who pray together may less likely experience vicious interactions which undermine their relationship satisfaction, just like those who engage in individual prayer (F. D. Fincham & Beach, 1999).

Thirdly, couples indicated that joint religious participation provided them with a shared sacred vision and purpose (N. M. Lambert & Dollahite, 2006), which might be achieved by praying together. Likewise, shared values (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & A., 2004) were found to be a key predictor of relationship happiness. One underlying premise of Symbolic Interaction Theory (Blumer, 1962) is that individuals attach meaning to people, things and situations in their lives. Interpersonal interactions are based on these meanings and relationships stem from the use of symbols with shared meaning for the people involved. In this regard, praying together might remind couples of the symbolic meaning of their shared values (Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011), such as love and tolerance that are emphasized in religious teachings. Praying for positive outcomes for the relationship and the partner may also direct couples to re-affirm the core values that support the long–term trajectory of
RELIGIOUS HOMOGAMY IN DATING AND MARRIED COUPLES

relationships, such as love, compassion and understanding (Frank D. Fincham et al., 2008). Such prayer also enables couples to reflect on the depth of their connection and their relationship’s value, thus reminding them that their marriage is worth protecting and sustaining. Consistent with this speculation, prayer might prime couples of their long-term commitment to each other (Frank D. Fincham et al., 2008), which fosters greater willingness to devote positively in one’s relationship.

Furthermore, empirical evidences indicate that in the contexts of conflicts, individual prayer initiates an experience of relationship with God that is associated with diffused hostile emotions, reduced emotional reactivity, increased couple empathy, increased self-change focus, and encouragement for couple responsibility for problem-solving and reconciliation (Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998; Butler, Stout, & Gardner, 2002). In a similar vein, joint prayer can be a vital conduit through which couples include God in their relationship, which then serves as a “softening” event to alleviate tension in conflicts like individual prayer (Butler et al., 1998). Prayer is found to function as a time-out in conflicts, during which cooperative motives can reclaim their dominance over competition-oriented or revenge-oriented goals (F. D. Fincham & Beach, 1999). Partners in a qualitative study (N. M. Lambert & Dollahite, 2006) reported that praying during a conflict facilitated open communication and helped restore harmony in their relationship. Another qualitative study (Marsh & Dallos, 2001) found that religious practices like prayer helped couples to control
their anger during marital conflicts, which might also apply to joint prayer.

In light of the potential benefits of joint prayer mentioned above, it is speculated that religiously homogamous couples are more likely to pray together; which may subsequently contribute to their higher relationship satisfaction. The current study thus puts forward joint prayer as a factor that explains the religious homogamy-satisfaction link.

**Religious Homogamy, Perceived Coping Similarity and Relationship Satisfaction**

Although actual spousal similarity in various aspects like religiosity (affiliation, attendance, beliefs) (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009) and personality (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999; Caspi & Herbener, 1990; Russell & Wells, 1991) have consistently been linked to greater marital satisfaction, perceived similarity of coping styles was found to be a stronger positive predictor of marital well-being than actual similarity (Acitelli et al., 1993). Recent research further confirmed that perceived similarity led to attraction in existing relationships (Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008). In particular, Ptacek and Dodge’s (1995) study of coping and relationship satisfaction in 70 dating and married couples found limited support for the link between actual coping similarity between partners and their relationship satisfaction. Instead, results indicated that the more similarly partners perceived they coped, the more satisfied each member was with the relationship. It follows that perceived coping similarity might be more conducive to relational attraction
and satisfaction than actual coping similarity. This study hence puts forward perceived coping similarity as an explanation of the homogamy-satisfaction link.

Spouses were most frequently mentioned as partners for collaborative daily problem-solving (Strough, 2003), which were found to be closely associated with specific person- and couple-characteristics (Hopmann & Blanchard-Fields, 2011), such as coping styles. As couples sharing the same religion are influenced by similar teachings and beliefs, they are likely to show a higher level of value consensus (Albrecht et al., 1983). Such consensus among family members and between spouses has been verified by both theory and research to foster coherent and adaptive coping mechanisms, whereas a lack of consensus results in little coherence among family members (Antonovsky, 1988; Booth & Welch, 1978; Deal, Wampler, & Halverson, 1992).

In light of this, the present study focuses on two types of coping: coping by religion and active coping, both of which are shown by a number of studies to be related to marital problem-solving and relationship satisfaction (Hünler & Gençöz, 2005; Lussier, Sabourin, & Turgeon, 1997). Regarding coping by religion, homogamous couples with a Christian affiliation are found to regularly depend on God for help and comfort. For instance, Butler, Gardner, and Bird (1998) indicated praying as a “softening” activity for religious couples when they experience a conflict, reducing hostile emotions and increasing empathy. Concerning active coping, Scanzoni (1995) depicted that when spouses focused on the
problem and participated in reciprocal give and take activity, their shared decision could be
maintained and their decision-making helped them “feel good about their partner,
themselves, and their relationship” (p. 237).

With regard to these findings, it is postulated that same-faith married couples are more
likely to perceive and adopt similar coping, which in turn enhances the effect of religious
homogamy on relationship satisfaction.

**Hypotheses**

**H1**: In both dating and married couples, religious homogamy is associated with higher
relationship satisfaction.

**H2**: Among married couples, joint church attendance fully mediates the positive association
between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction.

**H3**: Among married couples, joint prayer partially mediates the positive association
between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction.

**H4**: Among married couples, perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion) partially
mediates the positive association between religious homogamy and relationship
satisfaction.

**H5**: Among married couples, perceived coping similarity (in active coping) partially
mediates the positive association between religious homogamy and relationship
satisfaction.
Method

Participants

Convenient and snowball sampling were used to recruit prospective participants via several channels (social networks in universities, Internet, churches and workplaces). 316 participants completed the questionnaire online and 129 participants filled in the hard copy of the questionnaire. A total of 445 individuals filled in the questionnaire, of whom 352 met the criteria to be the sample of the present study. There were two inclusion criteria of this sample: The first criterion was that the individual had to be currently dating or married. The second criterion was that, in the individual’s dating relationship or marriage, either one or both members was (were) Christian(s). The sample consisted of 136 males (40%) and 205 females (60%). Among them, 315 were Christians (91%), 5 were Catholics (1%), 3 were Buddhists (1%), 1 was Taoist (0.29%) and 22 reported having no religious affiliation (6%). The numbers of married and dating participants were 192 and 160 respectively. All participants were Chinese, and could read Chinese. The analyses reported next were based on this sample.

Materials

*Background questionnaire.* Participants were asked to report demographic information (gender, age, religious denomination, educational level, occupation,
relationship status), duration of their current relationship and their partner’s religious denomination.

**Religious homogamy.** Couples were categorized as “religiously homogamous” if both partners were Christians, and as “religiously heterogamous” if they differed in their type of religious affiliation, with only one partner being a Christian.

**Coping style.** Coping style was measured by the Chinese version of the Brief COPE (Liu, Lambert, & Lambert, 2007). It was translated from the original Brief COPE (Carver, 1997), which comprises 14 sub-scales that cover a diversity of coping responses, such as “Active coping” and “Religion”. Table 1 provides a summary of these sub-scales. Participants were asked to report the extent to which they agreed or disagreed in regard to how each item applied to them (1 = never, 4 = always) on a 4-point Likert scale. A higher score represents higher use of that specific type of coping. All the sub-scales displayed moderate to high internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .48 to .85. The two sub-scales used in this study, “Active coping” and “Religion”, showed low Cronbach’s alpha of .59 and high Cronbach’s alpha of .85 respectively.

**Perceived partner’s coping style.** The Brief COPE was also used to assess the coping
styles that participants perceived their partners to have. The items were adapted to measure perceived partners’ coping instead of participants’ own coping style. Internal consistency of all sub-scales was low to high with a range from .35 to .90. The “Active coping” and “Religion” sub-scales used in the current study had high internal reliability of .70 and .90 correspondingly.

Table 1
Sub-scales from the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-scale</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active coping</td>
<td>Exerting effort to remove or circumvent the stressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Thinking about how to confront the stressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental support</td>
<td>Seeking advice, assistance or information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>Seeking moral support, sympathy or understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Engaging in religious activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reframing</td>
<td>Making the best of the situation by viewing it in a more favourable light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Accepting the fact that the stressful event has occurred and is real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venting</td>
<td>Gaining awareness of and ventilating emotional distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Attempting to reject the reality of the stressful event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-distraction</td>
<td>Disengagement from the goal with which the stressor is interfering through daydreaming, sleep or self-distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural disengagement</td>
<td>Withdrawing effort from the attempt to attain the goal the stressor is interfering with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>Using alcohol or other drugs to disengage from the stressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>Making jokes about the stressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>Criticizing or blaming oneself for the stressor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Joint church attendance. Joint church attendance was measured with a single item from the Joint Religious Activities Questionnaire (JRAQ) developed by Mahoney and colleagues (1999). This item was translated into Chinese in this study. Participants was asked to report how often they and their spouse “attend church together” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = never; 7 = very often). Higher scores represent higher levels of joint church attendance.

Joint prayer. Another item from the Joint Religious Activities Questionnaire (JRAQ) (Mahoney et al., 1999) was self-translated and used to assess joint prayer. Participants rated the frequency that they and their spouse “pray together” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = never; 7 = very often). Higher scores mean participants engage in joint prayer more often.

Relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was assessed by the Chinese translation (Wong, 2009) of the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (S. S. Hendrick, 1988). The RAS is a 7-item measure of global relationship satisfaction. The anchors are different in each item. For instance, the first item is “How well does your partner meet your needs?” Participants were asked to report the extent to which each item applied to them on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = poorly, 5 = extremely well). Higher scores represent higher relationship satisfaction. Validity of the RAS was shown by significant positive correlations.
with other relationship satisfaction measures (S. S. Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988).

Internal reliability was high with a Cronbach’s alpha of .94.

**Procedures**

This study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design. Prospective participants were invited to complete either the hardcopy or online version of the questionnaire. All the participants first read the informed consent form and indicated their willingness to participate. They were then instructed to complete the questionnaire, which included the background questionnaire, Brief COPE, JRAQ and RAS. The questionnaire session lasted for about 10-15 minutes. No difficulties were reported by participants while filling in the questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire, they were thanked and given a short debriefing.

**Results**

**Statistical Analyses**

Data in this study was analyzed using SPSS (version 16).

**Initial Analyses**

Descriptive statistics about sample characteristics are summarized in Table 2. Among married participants, 127 participants were in a religiously homogamous marriage (with both
members as Christians), while 65 were in a religiously heterogamous marriage (with only one member as Christian, and another member with no or with other religion). Regarding participants who were dating, 113 were in a religiously homogamous relationship, and 47 were in a religiously heterogamous relationship.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married (n = 192)</th>
<th>Dating (n = 157)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homogamous</td>
<td>Heterogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>127 (66%)</td>
<td>65 (34%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 displays mean scores and standard deviations of study variables. The following points are noteworthy. For married individuals, the mean relationship satisfaction reported by those in a religiously homogamous marriage ($M = 29.03, SD = 4.20$) was higher than that reported by those in a heterogamous marriage ($M = 16.38, SD = 5.04$). Individuals in a same-faith marriage also had higher mean ratings on joint church attendance ($M = 6.26, SD = 1.48$), joint prayer ($M = 4.18, SD = 1.62$), perceived coping similarity in coping by religion ($M = 6.05, SD = 1.19$), and perceived coping similarity in active coping ($M = 6.10, SD = .86$) than individuals in an inter-faith marriage. All dating individuals reported moderately high relationship satisfaction, with those in a religiously homogamous relationship ($M = 28.30, SD = 4.88$) having a higher mean than those in a religiously heterogamous relationship ($M = 24.00, SD = ...
To examine possible relationships among variables used in this study, Pearson correlation analyses were performed. Analysis results are presented in Table 4. Regarding noteworthy correlations, religious homogamy in dating individuals were significantly and positively correlated with joint church attendance \((r = .62, p < .001)\), joint prayer \((r = .57, p < .001)\), as well as perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion) \((r = .64, p < .001)\). Religious homogamy in married individuals was significantly and positively correlated with
joint church attendance ($r = .87, p < .001$), joint prayer ($r = .61, p < .001$), perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion) ($r = .80, p < .001$), perceived coping similarity (in active coping) ($r = .70, p < .001$), and relationship satisfaction ($r = .78, p < .001$). Joint church attendance was also found to have significant and positive correlations with joint prayer ($r = .55, p < .001$), perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion) ($r = .64, p < .001$), perceived coping similarity (in active coping) ($r = .41, p < .001$), as well as relationship satisfaction ($r = .49, p < .001$). Positive and significant correlations were shown between joint prayer and perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion) ($r = .54, p < .001$), perceived coping similarity (in active coping) ($r = .33, p < .001$), as well as relationship satisfaction ($r = .45, p < .001$). Perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion) was positively and significantly correlated with perceived coping similarity (in active coping) ($r = .54, p < .001$), and relationship satisfaction ($r = .57, p < .001$). Positive and significant correlations occurred between perceived coping similarity (in active coping) and relationship satisfaction ($r = .63, p < .001$).

Skewness tests were also conducted to check if the results for the three measurements (Brief COPE, JRAQ, RAS) were normally distributed. No significant positive or negative skewness was found for all measurements.
RELIGIOUS HOMOGAMY IN DATING AND MARRIED COUPLES

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Religious homogamy (dating)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Religious homogamy (married)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Joint church attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>.62***</td>
<td>.87***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Joint prayer</td>
<td></td>
<td>.57***</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Perceived coping similarity (coping by religion)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.64***</td>
<td>.80***</td>
<td>.64***</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Perceived coping similarity (active coping)</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>.70***</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.78***</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>.57***</td>
<td>.63***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05.  ** p < .01.  *** p < .001

Note.  a cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant

Differences in Relationship Satisfaction between Participants in Religiously Homogamous Relationships and Those in Heterogamous Relationships

The first aim of the study was to explore if religious homogamy was related to higher relationship satisfaction in both dating and married couples. A 2 (Religious Homogamy / Religious Heterogamy) x 2 (Dating / Married) between-participants analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on relationship satisfaction (Fig. 1). Results of ANOVA showed a significant religious homogamy x relationship status interaction, $F(3,1) = 97.78, p < .001$. ANOVA also found a significant main effect of religious homogamy, $F(3,1) = 156.55, p < .001$, and a significant effect of relationship status, $F(3,1) = 66.65, p < .001$.

Independent-samples $t$-test demonstrated that among dating individuals, there was no significant difference in relationship satisfaction between religious homogamy and
heterogamy, $t(153) = -1.66, p = .10$. However, among married individuals, relationship satisfaction of those in a religiously homogamous marriage was significantly higher than those in a religiously heterogamous marriage, $t(184) = -17.06, p < .001$.

![Graph](image_url)

*Fig. 1* Relationship satisfaction of dating and married participants as a function of religious homogamy

**Perceived coping similarity**

Prior to further mediation analyses, perceived coping similarity between participants and their spouse was computed for two coping styles: coping by religion and active coping. For each type of coping, the difference in scores between participants’ self-reported use and their perceived use by their spouse was first obtained. These difference scores represented perceived coping differences between respondents and their spouse in that particular type of coping. These scores were then converted into absolute values and reverse-coded as scores to indicate perceived coping similarity.
Single Mediation Analysis Procedures

Concerning the relationship between religious homogamy in married couples (RH(married)) and their relationship satisfaction (RS), four single-mediator models were tested, in which RH(married) was hypothesized to influence RS both directly and indirectly through (a) joint church attendance (Fig. 2a); (b) joint prayer (Fig. 2b); (c) perceived coping similarity in coping by religion (Fig. 2c); and (d) perceived coping similarity in active coping (Fig. 2d) separately.

$$c_1, c_2, c_3, c_4^{***}$$

![Diagram](image_url)

**Fig. 2a** Path model for a single-mediator analysis. The c1 coefficient represents the total relationship between religious homogamy in married participants (RH(married)) and relationship satisfaction (RS) (not controlling for joint church attendance). The c’1 coefficient represents the strength of the association between RH(married) and RS after controlling for joint church attendance. The a1 and b1 paths represent the mediated or indirect path involving joint church attendance.
**Fig. 2b** Path model for a single-mediator analysis. The $c'2$ coefficient represents the strength of the association between RH(married) and RS after controlling for joint prayer. The $a2$ and $b2$ paths represent the mediated or indirect path involving joint prayer.

*Note.* The $c2$ coefficient in Fig. 2a represents the total relationship between RH(married) and RS (not controlling for joint prayer).

**Fig. 2c** Path model for a single-mediator analysis. The $c'3$ coefficient represents the strength of the association between RH(married) and RS after controlling for perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion). The $a3$ and $b3$ paths represent the mediated or indirect path involving perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion).

*Note.* The $c3$ coefficient in Fig. 2a represents the total relationship between RH(married) and RS (not controlling for perceived coping similarity (in coping by religion)).
According to Baron and Kenny (1986), four conditions are necessary for a variable to be considered a mediator: (a) the independent variable must be significantly associated with the hypothesized mediator, (b) the independent variable must be significantly associated with the dependent measure, (c) the mediator must be significantly associated with the dependent variable, and (d) the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is reduced after controlling for the mediator. These four conditions can be examined using three multiple regression equations.

In order to test for mediated effects with the regression approach, the product of unstandardized path coefficients and their standard errors is calculated to test for significance of indirect effects and generate confidence intervals around the estimate of the indirect effect.

Fig. 2d  Path model for a single-mediator analysis. The c’4 coefficient represents the strength of the association between RH(married) and RS after controlling for perceived coping similarity (in active coping). The a4 and b4 paths represent the mediated or indirect path involving perceived coping similarity (in active coping).

Note. The c4 coefficient in Fig.2a represents the total relationship between RH(married) and (RS) (not controlling for perceived coping similarity (in active coping)).
This method implicitly assumes a normal sampling distribution; however, mediation can be present even when this assumption is not valid (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Therefore, bootstrapping – a nonparametric re-sampling procedure – can be considered a better alternative that makes testing for mediation less problematic, even if there is any violation of the assumption of normal distributions.

The bootstrapping approach creates a large number of datasets through random sampling with replacement from the original sample. For each dataset, the mediated effect and its standard error are computed. The probability distribution from all the re-sampled estimates is then used to construct a confidence interval around the indirect (i.e. mediated) effect (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Mediation is considered present if zero does not fall into this interval.

In this study, a SPSS macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was used to estimate total and indirect effects of RH(married) on RS, with \( k = 1000 \) bootstrap samples and generating 95% confidence intervals (CIs) around the mediated effect. In the following analyses, the predictor was RH(married) and the outcome variable was RS. The four mediators - joint church attendance, joint prayer, perceived coping similarity in coping by religion, and perceived coping similarity in active coping - were tested one by one.
Single Mediation Effects

Pertaining to H2, the role of joint church attendance as a mediator of the relationship between RH(married) and RS was tested (Table 5). Results indicated a significant path from RH to joint church attendance (a1) \( (B = 4.90, p < .001) \), as well as a significant path from joint church attendance to RS (b1) \( (B = .81, p = .001) \). Significant paths of total effect (c1) \( (B = 12.65, SE = .71, p < .001) \) and direct effect (c’1) \( (B = 8.66, SE = 1.39, p < .001) \) of RH(married) on RS were also found. As the indirect effect of joint church attendance on RS (d1) was significant \( (B = 3.99, p = .009, 95\% \text{ CIs } [1.81 \text{–} 8.14]) \), joint church attendance was a significant and partial mediator of the relationship between RH(married) and RS. All significant paths showed directions that were in line with the hypothesis that RH(married) was positively associated with joint church attendance, which was linked to higher RS. Joint church attendance accounted for about 65.88% of the variance of RS explained by RH(married).
Table 5
Mediation Results for RH(married) on RS: Joint Church Attendance as the Mediator
(n = 180; 1000 bootstrap samples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (IV)</th>
<th>Mediating variable (M)</th>
<th>Dependent variable (DV)</th>
<th>Effect of IV on M (a)</th>
<th>Effect of M on DV (b)</th>
<th>Direct effects (c')</th>
<th>Indirect effects (a x b)</th>
<th>Total effects (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH(married) Joint church attendance</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>B 4.90***</td>
<td>.81**</td>
<td>8.66***</td>
<td>3.99**</td>
<td>12.65***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>17.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boot strap</td>
<td>Lower:</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% CIs</td>
<td>Upper:</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05.  **p < 0.01.  ***p < 0.001.

Note. RH (married) = religious homogamy in married couples; RS = relationship satisfaction

With regard to H3, whether joint prayer mediated the RH(married)-RS link was also examined (Table 6). Results revealed that the path from RH(married) to joint prayer (a2) was statistically significant ($B = 2.23, p < .001$), as was the path from joint prayer to RS (b2) ($B = .83, p = .0004$). Although there was a significant indirect effect of joint prayer on RS (d2) ($B = 1.85, p < .001$, 95% CIs [.95 – 2.97]), the direct effect of RH(married) on RS (c’2) remained significant after including joint prayer as the mediator ($B = 10.80, SE = .86, p < .001$). Therefore, joint prayer was shown to significantly and partially mediate the link between RH(married) and RS. Directions of significant paths were consistent with the
hypothesis. RH(married) was correlated with higher levels of joint prayer, which was positively linked to RS. Joint prayer accounted for about 66.23% of the variance of RS explained by RH(married).

Table 6
Mediation Results for RH(married) on RS: Joint Prayer as the Mediator
(n = 180; 1000 bootstrap samples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (IV)</th>
<th>Mediating variable (M)</th>
<th>Dependent variable (DV)</th>
<th>Effect of IV on M (a)</th>
<th>Effect of M on DV (b)</th>
<th>Direct effects (c')</th>
<th>Indirect effects (a x b)</th>
<th>Total effects (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH(married) Joint prayer</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.23***</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>10.80***</td>
<td>1.85***</td>
<td>12.65***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(a2)</td>
<td>(b2)</td>
<td>(c'2)</td>
<td>(d2)</td>
<td>(c2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>12.61</td>
<td>17.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .0004</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Z</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Lower:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Upper:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05.  **p < 0.01.  ***p < 0.001.

Note.  RH (married) = religious homogamy in married couples;
RS = relationship satisfaction

According to H4, the mediating role of perceived similarity in coping by religion between RH(married) and RS was explored (Table 7). Both the path from RH(married) to perceived similarity in religious coping (a3) (B = 3.72, p < .001), and the path from perceived similarity in religious coping to RS (b3) (B = .79, p = .002) were significant. Results also
showed a significant direct effect (c’3) \( (B = 9.69, SE = 1.17, p < .001) \) of RH(married) on RS.

As indicated by the significant indirect effect of perceived similarity in coping by religion on RS (d3) \( (B = 2.96, p = .002, 95\% \text{ CIs } [.81 – 5.70]) \), perceived similarity in coping by religion was shown to be a significant and partial mediator of the relation between RH(married) and RS. Significant paths had the same directions as depicted in the hypothesis: RH(married) was positively correlated with perceived similarity in coping by religion, which was linked to higher RS. It was estimated that perceived similarity in religious coping accounted for 65.66% of the variance of RS explained by RH(married).

### Table 7

**Mediation Results for RH(married) on RS: Perceived Coping Similarity (in Coping by Religion) as the Mediator**

\( (n = 180; 1000 \text{ bootstrap samples}) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (IV)</th>
<th>Mediating variable (M)</th>
<th>Dependent variable (DV)</th>
<th>Effect of IV on M (a)</th>
<th>Effect of M on DV (b)</th>
<th>Direct effects (c’)</th>
<th>Indirect effects (a x b)</th>
<th>Total effects (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH(married)</td>
<td>Perceived coping similarity (coping by religion)</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>B 3.72***</td>
<td>.79**</td>
<td>9.69***</td>
<td>2.96**</td>
<td>12.65***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(a3)</td>
<td>(b3)</td>
<td>(c’3)</td>
<td>(d3)</td>
<td>(c3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>18.17</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>17.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boot strap: Lower: .81

95% CIs: Upper: 5.70

\( *p < 0.05. \quad **p < 0.01. \quad ***p < 0.001. \)

**Note.** RH (married) = religious homogamy in married couples;

RS = relationship satisfaction
To investigate H5, perceived coping similarity in active coping was examined as a potential mediator of the RH(married)-RS link (Table 8). Significant paths were noted between RH(married) and perceived similarity in active coping (a4) ($B = 2.72$, $p < .001$), and between perceived similarity in active coping and RS (b4) ($B = 1.41$, $p < .001$). It was found that the direct effect of RH(married) and RS (c’4) was still significant after accounting for the mediating effects of perceived coping similarity of active coping ($B = 8.80$, $SE = .91$, $p < .001$). Thus, regarding the significant indirect effect between RH(married) and RS (d4) ($B = 3.85$, $p < .001$, 95% CIs [2.58 – 5.36]), perceived similarity in active coping was a significant mediator that partially mediated the association between RH(married) and RS. Directions of significant paths were in line with the hypothesis that RH(married) was linked to higher perceived similarity in active coping, which was correlated with higher RS. Perceived similarity in active coping accounted for approximately 69.87% of the variance of RS explained by RH(married).
Table 8

*Mediation Results for RH(married) on RS: Perceived Coping Similarity (in Active Coping) as the Mediator*

\( (n = 180; 1000 \text{ bootstrap samples}) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (IV)</th>
<th>Mediating variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable (DV)</th>
<th>Effect of IV on M (a)</th>
<th>Effect of M on DV (b) (c')</th>
<th>Direct effects (c')</th>
<th>Indirect effect (a x b)</th>
<th>Total effects (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH(married)</td>
<td>Perceived coping</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2.72***</td>
<td>1.41**</td>
<td>8.80***</td>
<td>3.85***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>similarity</td>
<td></td>
<td>(a4)</td>
<td>(b4)</td>
<td>(c'4)</td>
<td>(d4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(active coping)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>13.21</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boot strap

95% CIs

*\( p < 0.05 \). **\( p < 0.01 \). ***\( p < 0.001 \).

Note. RH (married) = religious homogamy in married couples; RS = relationship satisfaction

Multiple Mediation Analysis Procedures

Results of the single-mediator models showed that when the four mediators were added up, they accounted for over 100% of the variance of relationship satisfaction (RS) explained by religious homogamy in married couples (RH(married)), which suggested redundancy among these mediators. Therefore, multiple-mediation analysis was further carried out. When compared to separate univariate single-mediator analyses, a multiple-mediation model can better (a) examine an overall mediation effect of all the proposed mediators, (b) identify unique mediating effect of each specific mediator while controlling for the presence of other mediators;
and (c) ensure greater precision in model specification, which increases statistical power and reduces probability of Type I errors (K. Preacher & Hayes, 2008; K. J. Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

The same macro written by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was used to perform the multiple-mediation test. For the subsequent analyses, the predictor was RH(married) and the outcome variable was RS. The four mediators - joint church attendance, joint prayer, perceived coping similarity in religious coping and perceived coping similarity in active coping - were tested in the same model simultaneously (Fig. 3).
RELIGIOUS HOMOGAMY IN DATING AND MARRIED COUPLES

**Fig. 3** Path model for a multiple-mediator analysis of relationships between religious homogamy in married couples (RH(married)) and relationship satisfaction (RS) as mediated by joint church attendance, joint prayer, perceived coping similarity in coping by religion, and perceived coping similarity in active coping.

- **Direct Effect of RH (married)**
  - $B = 2.72, p < .001^{***}$
  - $B = 3.26, p < .001^{***}$
  - $B = 1.20, p < .001^{***}$

- **Indirect Effects via Mediators**
  - $B = 1.80, p = .13$
  - $B = .37, p = .13$
  - $B = .47, p = .04^*$
  - $B = 1.34, p = .13$
  - $B = .36, p = .14$
  - $B = 1.05, p = .04^*$
  - $B = 2.23, p < .001^{***}$
  - $B = 3.72, p < .001^{***}$
  - $B = 4.90, p < .001^{***}$
  - $B = 5.19, p = .0004^{**}$
  - $B = 12.65, p < .001^{***}$
  - $B = 3.26, p < .001^{***}$
  - $B = 1.80, p = .13$
  - $B = .37, p = .13$

**Total Effect of RH (married)**

---

*Note: The significance levels are marked with asterisks: $p < .01^{**}, p < .001^{***}$.*
Multiple Mediation Effects

When all the four mediators were included simultaneously (Table 9), a significant total indirect effect of RH(married) on RS was found ($B = 7.46$, $SE = 1.32$, $p < .001$, 95% CIs [4.56 – 11.23]). However, only joint prayer ($B = 1.05$, $SE = .51$, $p = .04$, 95% CIs [.15 – 2.14]) and perceived similarity in active coping ($B = 3.26$, $SE = .68$, $p < .001$, 95% CIs [1.97 – 4.71]) emerged as significant mediators of the association between RH(married) and RS. Neither joint church attendance nor perceived similarity in religious coping was found to have significant mediating effects. As the residual direct effect of RH(married) on RS ($B = 5.19$, $SE = 1.44$, $p = .0004$) remained significant, the four mediators only partially mediated the RH(married)-RS link. Altogether, these four mediators accounted for approximately 71.70% of the variance in RS explained by RH(married). Examinations of pair-wise contrasts of the indirect effects showed that the specific indirect effect through perceived similarity in active coping was significantly larger than the specific indirect effect through joint prayer (95% CIs [.47 – 4.89]). Among the four proposed mediators, perceived similarity in active coping ($B = 3.26$) accounted for the greatest mediational effects of the total indirect effects ($B = 7.46$).
Table 9

Multiple Mediation Results for RH(married) on RS: Four Proposed Mediators

(n = 180; 1000 bootstrap samples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH (married) to mediators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint church attendance</td>
<td>4.90***</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint prayer</td>
<td>2.23***</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived coping similarity (coping by religion)</td>
<td>3.72***</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-18.17</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived coping similarity (active coping)</td>
<td>2.72***</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-13.21</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Effects of mediators on RS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint church attendance</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint prayer</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived coping similarity (coping by religion)</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived coping similarity (active coping)</td>
<td>1.20***</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total effect of RH(married) on RS</td>
<td>12.65***</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>17.85</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect of RH(married) on RS</td>
<td>5.19**</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.0004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indirect effects of RH (married) on RS via mediators (bootstrap results)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>lower</th>
<th>upper</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effects</td>
<td>7.46***</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>11.23</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint church attendance</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>- .68</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint prayer</td>
<td>1.05*</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived coping similarity (coping by religion)</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived coping similarity (active coping)</td>
<td>3.26***</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05.  **p < 0.01.  ***p < 0.001.

Note.  RH (married) = religious homogamy in married couples;
RS = relationship satisfaction
Discussion

**Religious Homogamy and Relationship Satisfaction in Dating and Married Individuals**

The first purpose of this study was to examine if religious homogamy in dating individuals is correlated to their relationship satisfaction. Although results supported the homogamy-satisfaction link among married individuals as hypothesized in H1, the predicted association between dating individuals’ religious homogamy and their relationship satisfaction was not found.

One possible reason is that value consensus on religious beliefs may not be as important for dating couples as it is for married couples in fostering relationship satisfaction. This explanation is consistent with a substantial body of research that indicates religious homogamy, which encompasses similarity in religious values between spouses, as crucial to positive marital outcomes (Heaton, 1984; Heaton & Pratt, 1990; Ortega, 1988). Coherent religious values shared by a married dyad may play an indispensable role in their problem-solving processes, daily interactions and formation of shared life goals.

**Dyadic Problem-solving**

Contrasting to spouses who are the most often nominated partners for joint problem-solving on a wide variety of issues such as finance, household chores and health (Strough, 2003), dating couples - particularly those in early or premature relationship stages...
- have to jointly handle and agree on a relatively narrower scope of issues. The higher need for compromise between married unions may thus demand higher value consensus, which eases communication (Coombs, 1966) and facilitates their daily negotiations and collaborative decision-making. Sharing of common values also promotes consistent coping and conflict-resolution styles between religious couples like praying (Antonovsky, 1988; Booth & Welch, 1978; Butler et al., 2002; Deal et al., 1992), which reduce disagreement over ways to solve problems and thus maintain their relationship satisfaction even in times of marital challenges.

**Daily Interactions**

Religious homogamy may also encompass both actual and perceived similarities in values which contribute to satisfying interactions between two individuals, through validating each other’s sense of self and beliefs (Wolf, 1936), fostering reciprocal expressions of positive affect and acceptance (Izard, 1960), promoting emotional satisfaction (Coombs, 1966) and reducing ego-challenging disputes that stem from dissimilarities in core values (Festinger, 1955). Regarding the nature of marriage that involves co-habitation and somewhat more in-depth, frequent interactions than dating relationships, agreement upon core values may be much more critical to married than to dating dyads. With high value consensus in religion, spouses are less prone to
value-oriented conflicts and more likely to experience the abovementioned, mutually 
rewarding communication on a daily basis, thereby enhancing their relationship satisfaction. 
This association found between married participants’ religious homogamy and their 
relationship satisfaction in this study supports and echoes findings of prior research that 
consistently linked spousal similarity in religious beliefs and values to favorable relational 
outcomes (Heaton et al., 1985; Heaton & Pratt, 1990). However, as the study did not set any 
selection criteria concerning the dating duration of the sampled couples, 56 dating 
participants (35%) have short dating durations for 1 year or even less. An argument can be 
made that these romantic relationships are simply too short to involve in-depth discussions 
or considerations about deep-rooted values of partners, such as religious values, which 
might be integral to experiencing higher relationship satisfaction.

**Formation and Pursuit of Long-term Goals**

In addition, married unions’ long-term goals which involve God or are grounded in 
religious values may be instrumental in enhancing relationship satisfaction. Church and 
Bible teachings provide religious couples with values and guidelines about goals pertaining 
to a desirable, shared family life (Mahoney, 2005; Rocca, 2005). These joint and faith-based 
goals may then become centrally involved in plans and fulfillment of a shared life. While 
compatibility in the choice of goals and conduits to pursue these goals bind religious
spouses closer to each other, incompatibility between heterogamous spouses gives rise to additional conflicts and burden that impede marital relationships (F. D. Fincham & Bradbury, 1991; Silberman, 2005). These joint agreements on goals are related to positive appraisal of marriage, while spouses’ reciprocal support in goal-accomplishment might further contribute to their marital satisfaction (Davidson, 1972). Conversely, these goal-setting processes might not be seen in dating couples even when they share the same religious affiliation. Dating relationships, especially those that are casual or at early stages, are distinguished by reports of low levels of love, perspective-taking and interdependency (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Stets, 1993). Without adequate knowledge of one’s partner goals and lacking concern of his or her values, dating couples may be relatively less able to delineate shared goals founded in religion. Regarding the non-cohabiting nature and generally shorter dating duration of the large proportion of dating participants, it is questionable whether they have long-term visions of their relationships or sufficient mutual understanding that lay the groundwork for setting joint, faith-based goals with their partners.

Motivations and Mate-selection Criteria for Dating Relationships and Marriage

The absence of relation between dating individuals’ religious homogamy and their relationship satisfaction may also be attributed to people’s different motivations to engage
in marital and non-marital relationships, as well as the distinct selection criteria of partners in these two types of relationships.

While the incentives to initiate a dating relationship comprise ego-development, fun and companionship, the motivations for marriage arise largely from the desire to embark on a shared life with one’s partner (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). Recalling that marriage is a long-term trajectory that entails continuous dyadic problem-solving, communication and pursuit of life goals, selecting a like-minded partner instead of one with disparate values may better facilitate agreement and prevent conflicts (Gaunt, 2006). Specifically, religious homogamy endows married dyads with congruent values concerning significant life decisions that are unique to a marriage, such as to compromise on childbearing and the standards of conduct to be instilled into children (Mahoney, Pargament, Aaron, & Murray-Swank, 2003). At the same time, the excitement that accompanies a dissimilar partner becomes less crucial for perceiving romance in relationships for older adolescents (Shulman & Scharf, 2000), implying that value consensus between similar partners may gain increasing salience as relationships mature. This speculation is validated by studies which revealed that relationships between dissimilar persons tended to be more short-lived and less satisfying than those developed between similar individuals (Coombs, 1966; Kalmijn, 1998). It is plausible that only relationships between dating unions who possess high compatibility, such as regarding religious values, can persist and progress towards
Moreover, relational benefits of religious homogamy may pertain to the commitment between spouses - an element unique to marriage which distinguishes dating from marital unions. Given that the current sample of dating participants consists mostly of students with short dating duration, their relationships may generally lack the premeditated commitment of married dyads, involving less emotional and financial commitment, or obligations over household maintenance and childcare (Seltzer, 2000). As opposed to dating relationships which may be triggered by novelty and excitement, marriage revolves around stronger commitment which entails two deliberate choices - first in the decision to love and another in the decision to maintain that love (Sternberg, 1986). This might be especially true for Christians, who are influenced by the biblical doctrine to uphold marriage as a lifelong commitment to be preserved amid all life circumstances. Religious homogamy in married couples may therefore be regarded as a result of individuals’ cautious, well thought-out decision to choose a same-faith partner, whom they believe endorse compatible values about marriage and are willing to be equally devoted to safeguarding their marriage. A rewarding marriage is likely to emerge with such commitment, which was portrayed as the vital cornerstone of adult romantic relationships, as well as the most powerful and consistent predictor of relationship satisfaction (Acker & Davis, 1992). The commitment embedded in religiously homogamy marriage may therefore account for their higher
satisfaction. At the same time, to jointly achieve and maintain this lifelong commitment as enlightened by the Bible, selection of a marital partner who shares matching long-term visions may be of paramount importance. Therefore, although heterogamy can sometimes be favored in early stages of intimate relationships, homogamy may be deemed more desirable for embarking on and sustaining long-term marriage. In support of this postulation, three mate-selection theories may be pertinent.

The distinct incentives that give rise to diverse criteria for partner selection in dating or married relationships may first be illustrated by Murstein’s (1970) stimulus-value-role theory of marital choice. It depicts that romantic relationships can be initiated and satisfied by non-interactional stimuli like physical attractiveness. Nevertheless, the progression from dating to marital unions requires couples to first attain mutual appreciation for each other’s values, as well as to perceive each other as capable of functioning in mutually assigned roles, such as a faithful husband who can infuse the family with God’s teachings. The conventional wisdom of the winnowing hypothesis can also be applied to explain the increasingly stringent sorting criteria in matching processes between dyads through the evolvement of intimate relationships (Blackwell & Lichter., 2000). In early mate selection, individuals may focus on physical traits like appearance (Keller, Thiessen, & Young, 1996) rather than homogamy when seeking a romantic dating partner. However, in long-term relationships like marriage, they may place a heavier emphasis on psychological attributes
and beliefs, set more criteria and expect a high degree of similarity with a potential life-long candidate. Therefore, religious homogamy may be expected on a marital level but not in dating relationships. Having a dating relationship that does not fulfill this criterion hence may not affect dating individuals’ relationship satisfaction. Lastly, dating may represent a form of “premarital adaptive socialization” (Oppenheimer, 1988), an experimental and explorative process through which partners examine each other’s marital compatibility. Only when partners view each other as well-suited can they develop and strengthen emotional bonds which are necessary for marriage. All three theories converge to demonstrate that religious homogamy comprises similar values and beliefs that may be critical to a satisfying marriage, but not as essential for dating relationships.

**Mechanisms behind the Homogamy-Satisfaction Link in Married Individuals**

Another objective of this study is to investigate the mechanisms behind the homogamy-satisfaction link in married individuals by separately testing the mediating effects of four factors – joint church attendance, joint prayer, perceived coping similarity (in active coping and coping by religion) – that may underlie and explain this association.

**Joint Church Attendance**

The first factor is joint church attendance. Results from the multiple meditation
analyses were inconsistent with H2, showing that joint church attendance did not mediate
the relation between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction after controlling for
the effects of three other mediators: joint prayer, perceived similarity in religious coping and
perceived similarity in active coping. Notably, this finding went against previous research
which argued that joint church participation played a more central role in marital
satisfaction and stability than denominational affiliation (Glenn & Supancic, 1984), and
Heaton’s (1984) finding that the association between religious homogamy and marital
satisfaction became non-significant when controlling for the levels of joint church
attendance. Regarding that joint church attendance did not account for any variance of
relationship satisfaction explained by religious homogamy, joint church attendance might
have become an even more trivial factor of marital outcomes than the slight contributor as
depicted by Heaton and Pratt (1990) in the past.

One plausible explanation is that other types of joint religious activities may outweigh
joint church participation in influencing marriage. This speculation is supported by the
finding that joint prayer, but not joint church attendance, accounted for the benefits of
religious homogamy on relationship satisfaction. Since religious couples may attend church
together only once every week, this joint activity may affect marriage to a lesser extent than
joint prayer, which can be practiced more frequently over a broader range of occasions.

Another possibility is that the positive impacts of religious homogamy on other
realms of marital life are more decisive in enhancing relational outcomes than joint church attendance. For instance, jointly participating in religious activities on a weekly basis may be less conducive to relationship satisfaction than congruent religious values manifested in dyadic problem-solving, which largely dominates married unions’ everyday life. Although joint church attendance remains an important ritual shared by religious couples, spouses’ daily behavior or perceptions pertaining to their faith may have a more pervasive influence on marital outcomes. This may justify why perceived coping similarity was found to be a stronger component than joint church attendance in same-faith dyads’ satisfying marriage in the current study.

**Joint Prayer**

Consistent with H3, the second factor, joint prayer, was shown to partially mediate the homogamy-satisfaction association. A recapitulation of benefits of prayer revealed in past research can illustrate five ways in which joint prayer may contribute to relationship satisfaction.

Firstly, just as individual prayer, joint prayer facilitates perspective-taking and perspective-blending by reallocating spouses’ focus from personal needs to shared needs of the dyad (Butler et al., 1998; Butler et al., 2002). Praying for the relationship also enables religious couples to think of each other in more affectionate terms, which promotes
empathetic understanding and greater sensitivity to each other’s emotions, as well as reduces the frequency, intensity and reciprocation of detrimental relationship behaviors (F. D. Fincham & Beach, 1999).

Secondly, in the midst of conflicts, prayer serves as an essential conduit for couples to include God in their marriage, thereby alleviating hostility and tension (Marsh & Dallos, 2001), as well as encouraging responsibility for dyadic conflict-resolution and reconciliation (Butler et al., 1998; Butler et al., 2002). Joint prayer may function like individual prayer as a time-out in disputes, which helps couples resume open communication, regain cooperative motives and restore relational harmony (F. D. Fincham & Beach, 1999; N. M. Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

Thirdly, praying together increases trust and couple unity (Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011), which facilitates emotional convergence between spouses in joint beliefs, goals and practices. Both trust and unity are frequently portrayed as vital elements underlying an ideal and satisfying marriage (Eckstein & Cohen, 1998; C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1983).

Fourthly, like other forms of joint religious participation, praying together may contribute to positive relational outcomes by promoting compatible levels of engagement in religious activities between spouses. Praying together habitually as a ritual or routine enables abundant time and occasions for couples to create shared, enjoyable experiences (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001), which do not only foster intimacy within the dyad, but also add
spice and color to their relationship. On the contrary, divergent levels of prayer may deprive couples of opportunities to take part in mutually rewarding interactions, as well as magnify existing discrepancies in their core religious beliefs and lifestyles, leading to increased disputes, heightened risks of marital dissolution (Call & Heaton, 1997; Curtis & Ellison, 2002) and other marital problems (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009).

Lastly, joint prayer may infuse the married union with a shared, religion-oriented vision and purpose (N. M. Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Couples can, through joint prayer, reiterate core religious values that support them through the lifelong trajectory of marriage, such as love and tolerance (Frank D. Fincham et al., 2008). Likewise, praying together reminds couples of the biblical mandate to uphold fidelity toward each other (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007), which forms the foundation of a trusting relationship. Through instilling congruent religious values into partners, joint prayer enhances commitment both on an individual basis and as a shared consensus within the dyad (Larson & Goltz, 1989). Religious couples may also perceive a marriage that entails close connections with God as sacred – an element that infuses the marriage with additional benefits, purposes and meaning (Mahoney et al., 1999; Marks, 2005), thereby making it a more gratifying life-long commitment. Last but not least, joint prayer may bear symbolic meaning that reminds religious couples of the value of their marriage (Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011), thus directing them to willingly devote to each other and to preservation of the relationship.
As homogamous couples engage in higher levels of joint prayer, the abovementioned processes can be enhanced, resulting in positive outcomes for their marriage and greater relationship satisfaction. This finding supports Fincham and colleagues’ (2008) speculation that natural and coactive extension of individual prayer to joint prayer may endow religious couples with additional benefits. It also sheds new light on the synergistic nature of prayer in couples and the accompanying effects on their relationship, which is yet to be explored in prior research focusing primarily on individual prayer.

**Perceived Coping Similarity (in Active Coping and Coping by Religion)**

Regarding perceived coping similarity, only perceived similarity in active coping, but not in coping by religion was shown to underlie greater relationship satisfaction in homogamous married couples. H4 was refuted while H5 was supported.

One possible explanation is that religiously congruent couples are more likely to adopt similar coping, thus resulting in perceptions of higher coping similarity within the dyad and the subsequent greater satisfaction. Such perceptions may stem from past experiences in which the two spouses adopted comparable coping mechanisms. In this regard, religious homogamy gives rise to value consensus between spouses, which facilitates their use of consistent and adaptive coping strategies (Antonovsky, 1988; Booth & Welch, 1978; Deal et al., 1992). In contrast, a lack of consensus in religiously heterogamous couples lowers
coherence between spouses, resulting in divergent coping strategies in the face of everyday problems.

The finding of the this study highlighted the independent mediating role of perceived similarity in active coping, which has been consistently and positively linked to relationship satisfaction (Lussier et al., 1997; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995) and marital-functioning (Butler et al., 1998; Butler et al., 2002; Scanzoni, 1995). It is plausible that, a couple’s shared religious affiliation endows them with a repertoire of coping behavior that would presumably be condoned by God, such as to cooperate and actively resolve dyadic stressors or inescapable hardships like illnesses. Couples might at the same time evade maladaptive coping strategies that do not align with church teachings, such as using verbal aggression. Therefore, when both members of a religious dyad congruently employ active coping, it is likely that they can avoid adverse consequences stemming from harmful coping behavior, thus protecting their marriage and enhancing their relationship satisfaction. This finding also aligns with Scanzoni’s (1995) assertion that a couple’s collaborative active coping might lead them to feel good about each other and the relationship.

Nevertheless, only perceived similarity in active, but not religious coping was found to mediate the homogamy-satisfaction link. As coping by religion involves engagement in religious activities such as “praying” and “turning to God for help” (Carver, 1997), it is plausible that the meditational effects of “perceived coping similarity in religious coping”
was redundant or overlapped with those of “joint prayer”. Therefore, although “perceived coping similarity in religious coping” accounted for the greater relationship satisfaction in same-faith married couples when it was tested as the only mediator in the homogamy-satisfaction link, its meditational effects became non-significant when the effects of joint prayer was controlled.

It should also be noted that perceived coping similarity does not necessarily equate with actual coping similarity. As demonstrated in some studies, religiousness did not improve abilities to solve problems (Hünler & Gençöz, 2005), nor was the inclusion of God in marriage linked to reduced use of maladaptive coping strategies by spouses (Mahoney et al., 1999). Therefore, religious homogamy does not essentially cause actual similarity in coping behavior between spouses. Instead, religious homogamy may provide same-faith couples with shared, matching beliefs concerning their marriage which facilitate their construction of a “shared relational reality” (Duck, 1994). Such shared reality encompasses perceived agreement, shared meaning and mutual understanding, all of which enable spouses to perceive consensus upon their values and actions in various life situations. For instance, a religious couple’s shared reality can be anchored to their common belief that “marriage is a precious union bestowed by God”. When marital conflicts arise, this shared reality may activate their perceived and shared consensus that “both of us will endeavor to protect the marriage amidst all difficulties”. In other words, spouses may presume each other to
perform according to their shared religious virtues. In view of that, religious homogamy may lead religious couples to perceive high similarity in each other’s coping.

Therefore, another way to interpret the current finding is that merely perceiving each other as coping similarly is sufficient to yield favorable relational outcomes for both marital partners, regardless of their actual coping behavior. This explanation is consistent with previous studies that documented perceived or assumed similarity to be more critical to mutual attraction in existing relationships and marital well-being than actual similarity (Broxton, 1963; Montoya et al., 2008; Newcomb, 1956; Wolf, 1936). In particular, this finding echoes Dodge’s (1995) argument that the more similarly spouses perceived they coped or dealt with conflicts, the more satisfied they would be with the relationship. Perceived similarity in coping styles may also lead couples to perceive an assumed agreement on how to deal with marital problems, which was positively correlated with marital satisfaction (Levinger & Breedlove, 1966). Along this line, the current finding substantiated Duck’s (1994) conclusion that a married union’s development of a shared relational reality as exemplified above was integral to marital adjustment and satisfaction.

A noteworthy implication of this finding is that when compared to couples who differ in religious affiliations, spouses sharing the same Christian faith perceive each other as more alike not only in religious values, but also in terms of behavior. In light of this, it is conceivable that religious homogamy may greatly influence couple’s cognitions, leading
them to perceive and believe each other as coherent in various significant domains of marital life, including cognitive beliefs and behavioral responses to daily stressors. This high degree of coherence may consequently lead to a highly satisfying marriage.

**Study 2**

Study 1 demonstrated an association between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction among Chinese Christian married unions, which provided further support for past literature that documented the same link in other populations (e.g., Glenn, 1982; Heaton, 1984). However, most prior studies focused solely on positive relational outcomes of religious homogamy. No research to date has attempted to explore other potential benefits of religious homogamy. Therefore, Study 2 seeks to investigate whether religious homogamy indirectly and independently affects quality of life through religiosity and relationship satisfaction. As earlier conceptual analyses from Study 1 described effects of religious homogamy which might unfold over time, Study 2 employs longitudinal data, which is believed to be superior to cross-sectional data in examining whether religious homogamy can predict later quality of life among Christians.

**Religious Homogamy, Religiosity and Quality of Life**

The World Health Organization defines quality of life (QOL) as “an individual’s
perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (WHOQOL, 1993). The measurement of individuals’ subjective quality of life therefore takes into account how satisfied or bothered they are by important aspects of their life (WHOQOL, 1994), which may include four main domains: Physical health, psychological health, social relationships and environment (WHOQOL, 1994).

A large body of research has illustrated that an individual’s higher religiosity is linked to his or her higher perceived quality of life and individual well-being (Ellison, 1991; Ferriss, 2002; Hadaway & Roof, 1978) An individual with stronger religious faith tends to report higher levels of life satisfaction, greater personal happiness and fewer psychosocial consequences of traumatic life events (Ellison, 1991). People who feel that their religious faith is important and who participate in religious activities tend to report their life as more worthwhile and of a higher quality than people who do not have or practice religion (Hadaway & Roof, 1978).

On the other hand, no former research has directly examined the effects of religious homogamy on quality of life. However, past literature may illuminate a possible link between religious homogamy and quality of life, which may be mediated by religiosity.

Joint religious activities, which are promoted by religious homogamy, may foster growth of faith and religiosity both in the couple as a dyad and in each partner individually.
Religiously homogamous couples were shown to share their spiritual lives and jointly participate in religious activities, such as praying, reading Bible and attending church together more often than heterogamous couples (Heaton & Pratt, 1990). According to Filsinger & Wilson (1984), joint church membership and regular religious practices embed a couple in a broad network of religious affiliations which expose them to conventional religious values. Lambert and Dollahite (2006) further indicated that joint religious participation endowed couples with a shared sacred vision and purpose, which may be incorporated as a common goal and commitment of their lives.

The Symbolic Interaction Theory (Blumer, 1962) can also be used to exemplify how joint religious participation enhances individual religiosity. This theory posits that individuals attach meaning to people, things and situations in their lives. Interpersonal interactions are founded on these meanings and involve the use of symbols with shared meaning for the people involved (Blumer, 1962). In this respect, joint religious activities might remind couples of the symbolic meaning of their shared religious values (Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011), such as love and compassion for the partner and other people. Religious couples’ discussions on religious issues may also lead them to re-affirm and reinforce their core Christian beliefs and virtues; For instance, the essence of life lies largely in living out the spirit of God by spreading His love through missionary work. All these evidences converge to show that religious homogamy enables a couple to mutually
Religious Homogamy, Relationship Satisfaction and Quality of Life

Past literature has consistently associated religious homogamy with higher marital satisfaction (Burns, 1984; Heaton, 1984), higher marital stability (Shehan, Bock, & Lee, 1990), more marital happiness (Ortega, 1988; Shehan et al., 1990) and less marital conflicts than heterogamous couples (Call & Heaton, 1997; Mahoney, 2005). As love and marital relationships constitute a large domain of life, good marital functioning and harmonious relationships with significant others might play a crucial role in an individual’s life satisfaction (Adams, King, & King, 1996) and subjective quality of life (Monga, Alexandrescu, Katz, Stein, & Ganiats, 2004). For instance, marital relationships were revealed to be a major source of satisfaction in life for Americans (Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). Two studies also indicated that marital satisfaction was associated with leading a spiritually meaningful life (Stinnett, 1983; Darwin L. Thomas & Roghaar, 1990).

Besides, value congruence in religiously homogamous couples facilitates harmonious communication and emotional well-being, both of which are closely associated with quality of life. Homogamous partners are more likely to enjoy higher value consensus (whether actual or perceived), which fosters mutually rewarding interactions (Coombs, 1966). The underlying rationale is that the sharing of similar values serves as a validation of one's self,
which promotes communication ease and enhances emotional satisfaction (Notcutt & Silva, 1951; Wolf, 1936). In contrast, dissimilar individuals are prone to disagreements which might be ego-threatening, as they may confront an individual’s values and sense of social reality (Byrne, 1961). As a result, communication between dissimilar persons tends to be more restrained and less emotionally rewarding (Coombs, 1966). Such value consensus may also be tied with fewer conflicts between the dyad (Barry, 1970), thus reducing the accompanying stress that undermines both physiological health (Kiecolt-Glaser & K., 1996) and quality of life. Another study pointed out that incongruence between personal values and those prevailing in the environment was correlated with lower subjective well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). When one has to make decisions, incoherent values arouse internal conflicts (Schwartz, 1992; Tetlock, 1986) that impede subjective well-being (Oles, 1991). Similarly, incongruence between personal and family values, which are largely determined by one’s spouse, may undermine subjective well-being. Religious homogamy, which facilitates matching goals and value among couples, may therefore be linked to higher subjective well-being and quality of life.

Based on the above empirical evidences as well as results from Study 1, Study 2 speculates that among dating couples, religious homogamy enhances quality of life indirectly through promoting individual religiosity. As for married couples, religious homogamy promotes quality of life indirectly through increasing both religiosity and
Hypotheses

H6: In dating individuals, religious homogamy has an indirect positive effect on quality of life, through religiosity as a mediator.

H7: In married individuals, religious homogamy has an indirect positive effect on quality of life, through religiosity as a mediator.

H8: In married individuals, religious homogamy has an indirect positive effect on quality of life, through relationship satisfaction as a mediator.

Method

Participants

Data used in the present study came from a longitudinal research on the Formation and Transformation of Beliefs in Chinese (FTBC) (Hui, Ng, Mok, Lau, & Cheung, 2011), which was conducted by a group of scholars in Hong Kong and Macao. The full sample of participants of the FTBC study comprised 6,241 individuals, of whom 315 met the criteria to be the sample of the current study. There were three inclusion criteria of this sample: The first criterion was that the individual was currently dating or married. The second criterion was that, in the individual’s relationship or marriage, either one or both members was (were)
Christian(s). The third criterion was that the individual had filled in the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS), Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) and World Health Organization Quality of Life Measures (WHOQOL-BREF)(HK), which measured variables involved in the present study.

The sample consisted of 315 individuals, with 107 males (34%) and 208 females (66%). All of them were Christians. The numbers of married and dating participants were 161 and 154 respectively. The analyses reported next were based on this sub-sample.

Materials

**Religious homogamy.** Religious homogamy was measured in February 2010. Couples were categorized as “religiously homogamous” if both partners were Christians, and as “religiously heterogamous” if they differed in their type of religious affiliation, with only one partner being a Christian.

**Religiosity.** Religiosity was measured in September 2010. It was assessed by the Chinese version of the 12-item short form of the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) (Chou & Chen, 2005; Fu, 2008), which was translated from the original FMS (Ji, 2004). In the FTBC study, only Christian participants were asked to fill in the FMS, by rating items such as “*I feel God’s presence in my relationships with other people*” on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = never,
Two items were dropped in the FTBC dataset. According to Hui and colleagues (2011), they were dropped as they both showed low item-total correlations and that one of them was found to inconsistently load on the vertical and horizontal dimensions in different studies (Ji, 2004; Piedmont & Nelson, 2001). Higher scores represent higher religiosity.

Internal consistency of the remaining 10 items displayed adequate internal consistency of .85. Cronbach’s alpha of the vertical and horizontal dimensions were between .77 and .89.

**Relationship satisfaction.** Relationship satisfaction was measured in February 2010 with the Chinese translation (Wong, 2009) of the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (S. S. Hendrick, 1988). Details of the scale have been described in Study 1. The RAS showed high internal reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .88.

**Quality of life.** Quality of life was measured in September 2010. To assess the quality of life, the 28-item Hong Kong Chinese version of World Health Organization Quality of Life Measures (WHOQOL-BREF)(HK) was used (K. F. Leung, Tay, Cheng, & Lin, 1997). It has been widely used in studies on Chinese population in Hong Kong (C. Y. S. Leung & Tsang, 2003; K. F. Leung et al., 1997; Tsang, 2005). Two items were dropped in the current study. One concerns sex life, while the other is about the availability of the food one likes. The former was considered too intrusive and the latter was deemed unimportant. This
measurement comprises scores on four domains: Physical Health, Psychological Health (adjusted culturally to fit Hong Kong population), Social Relationships, and Environment. One item was used to indicate overall quality of life and overall health respectively. Items include “How would you rate your quality of life?” Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very poor, 5 = very good). Higher scores indicate higher subjective quality of life. The 26 items displayed high internal reliability with a Cronbach’s alpa of .89.

**Procedures**

The longitudinal FTBC study recruited prospective participants by sending bulk e-mail through educational institutes (including 5 universities and a community college in Hong Kong and Macao), announcing in two churches in Hong Kong, advertising on the Internet and snowballing (Hui et al., 2011). Informed consent was first obtained from all participants. Then, they were directed to an online questionnaire which took around 30 minutes to fill in. Upon completion, all participants were thanked and given a brief personality analysis. Subsequent to the first questionnaire, the same pool of participants would receive other sets of online questionnaires at 6-month intervals. In the present study, only two waves of the FTBC data were used. They were collected in February 2010 and September 2010 respectively. Analyses in the following parts were based on these two waves of data.
Results

Initial Analyses

Table 10 displays the descriptive statistics about gender and relationship characteristics of the Christian sample. Among Christian participants who were dating, 99 were in a religiously homogamous relationship (with both members as Christians), while 55 were in a religiously heterogamous relationship (with only one member as Christian, and another member with no or with other religion). Regarding married Christian participants, 135 participants were in a religiously homogamous marriage, whereas 26 were in a religiously heterogamous marriage.

Table 10
Gender Distributions of Religious Homogamy (RH) across Married and Dating Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married (n = 161)</th>
<th>Dating (n = 154)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homogamous</td>
<td>Heterogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homogamous</td>
<td>Heterogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>135 (84%)</td>
<td>26 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>99 (64%)</td>
<td>55 (36%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 presents mean scores and standard deviations of study variables in the sample. Among dating individuals, those in a religiously homogamous relationship reported higher mean scores on all the three variables (religiosity, relationship satisfaction and quality of life) than those in a religiously heterogamous relationship. Likewise, for married Christians, average scores on these three variables were higher in individuals in a same-faith marriage.
than those in an inter-faith marriage. Regarding quality of life, married individuals in a same-faith marriage had a higher mean ($M = 95.27$, $SD = 9.97$) than those in an inter-faith marriage ($M = 91.35$, $SD = 12.47$), although both groups reported moderately high levels of quality of life. Dating individuals in a homogamous relationship reported higher quality of life ($M = 92.79$, $SD = 10.11$) than those in a heterogamous relationship ($M = 87.02$, $SD = 12.86$).

Table 11
Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Married ($n = 161$)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dating ($n = 154$)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homogamous ($n = 135$)</td>
<td>Heterogamous ($n = 26$)</td>
<td>Homogamous ($n = 99$)</td>
<td>Heterogamous ($n = 55$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>48.38</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>44.42</td>
<td>9.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>28.28</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>24.27</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life</td>
<td>95.27</td>
<td>9.97</td>
<td>91.35</td>
<td>12.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine possible relationships among variables used in the subsequent mediation analyses. Results of this analysis results are summarized in Table 12. Concerning noteworthy correlations, religious homogamy in dating individuals was significantly and positively correlated with religiosity ($r = .32$, $p < .001$) and quality of life ($r = .24$, $p = .003$). Significant and positive correlations occurred between religious homogamy in married individuals and religiosity ($r = .18$, $p = .02$) and relationship
satisfaction \((r = .29, p < .001)\). However, no significant correlation emerged between religious homogamy in married individuals and quality of life \((r = .14, p = .08)\). Religiosity was found to have significant and positive correlations with relationship satisfaction \((r = .23, p < .001)\) and quality of life \((r = .33, p < .001)\). Relationship satisfaction also had positive and significant correlations with quality of life \((r = .36, p < .001)\).

Skewness tests were also performed to check if the results for the three measurements (FMS, RAS, WHOQOL-BREF(HK)) were normally distributed. For all measurements, no significant positive or negative skewness was found.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Religious homogamy (dating)</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Religious homogamy (married)</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Religiosity</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.32^{***})</td>
<td>(.18^*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>(.29^{***})</td>
<td>(.23^{***})</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Quality of life</td>
<td>(.24^{**})</td>
<td>(.14)</td>
<td>(.33^{***})</td>
<td>(.36^{***})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(p < .05\).  **\(p < .01\).  ***\(p < .001\)

Note. \(a\) cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant

**Single Mediation Analysis Procedures**

To investigate the relationship between religious homogamy (RH) and quality of life (QOL) in dating or married Christians, three single-mediator models were tested, in which RH was hypothesized to influence QOL both directly and indirectly through (a) religiosity in
Religious homogamy in dating couples (Fig. 4a); (b) religiosity in married couples (Fig. 4b); and (c) relationship satisfaction in married couples (Fig. 4c) respectively.

Fig. 4a  Path model for a single-mediator analysis. The c5 coefficient represents the total relationship between religious homogamy in dating participants (RH(dating)) and quality of life (QOL) (not controlling for religiosity). The c’5 coefficient represents the strength of the association between RH(dating) and QOL after controlling for religiosity. The a5 and b5 paths represent the mediated or indirect path involving religiosity.
**Fig. 4b**  Path model for a single-mediator analysis. The c6 coefficient represents the total relationship between religious homogamy in married participants (RH(married)) and quality of life (QOL) (not controlling for religiosity). The c’6 coefficient represents the strength of the association between RH(married) and QOL after controlling for religiosity. The a6 and b6 paths represent the mediated or indirect path involving religiosity.

**Fig. 4c**  Path model for a single-mediator analysis. The c’7 coefficient represents the strength of the association between RH(married) and QOL after controlling for relationship satisfaction. The a7 and b7 paths represent the mediated or indirect path involving relationship satisfaction.

Note.  The c7 coefficient in Fig. 4b represents the total relationship between RH(married) and QOL (not controlling for relationship satisfaction).
As in study 1, the SPSS macro contributed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was used to estimate total and indirect effects of RH on QOL in this study, with $k = 1000$ bootstrap samples and generating 95% confidence intervals (CIs) around the mediated effect.

In the following analyses, the predictor was RH in married individuals (RH(married)) or RH in dating individuals (RH(dating)), while the outcome variable was QOL. Either religiosity or relationship satisfaction served as the mediator.

**Single Mediation Effects**

*Dating individuals.* Concerning H6, the mediating role of religiosity between RH(dating) and QOL was explored in dating Christian individuals (Table 13). Both the path from RH(dating) to religiosity ($a_5$) ($B = 5.38$, $p = .0001$), and the path from religiosity to QOL ($b_5$) ($B = .33$, $p = .004$) were significant. Results also showed a significant total effect ($c_5$) ($B = 5.77$, $SE = 1.88$, $p = .003$), and a significant direct effect ($c’_5$) ($B = 3.98$, $SE = 1.93$, $p = .04$) of RH(dating) on QOL. As indicated by the significant indirect effect of religiosity on QOL ($d_5$) ($B = 1.79$, $p = .02$, 95% CIs [.49 – 4.09]), religiosity was indicated to significantly and partially mediate the relationship between RH(dating) and QOL. Directions of significant paths were the same as depicted in H6: RH(dating) increased religiosity, which in turn led to a higher QOL.
Table 13

Mediation Results for RH(dating) on QOL: Religiosity as the Mediator
(n = 154; 1000 bootstrap samples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (IV)</th>
<th>Mediating variable (M)</th>
<th>Dependent variable (DV)</th>
<th>Effect of IV on M (a)</th>
<th>Effect of M on DV (b)</th>
<th>Direct effects (c')</th>
<th>Indirect effects (a x b)</th>
<th>Total effects (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH (dating)</td>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>QOL</td>
<td>5.38**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>3.98*</td>
<td>1.79*</td>
<td>5.77*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(a5)</td>
<td>(b5)</td>
<td>(c'5)</td>
<td>(d5)</td>
<td>(c5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>**p &lt; 0.05, **p &lt; 0.01, ***p &lt; 0.001.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. RH (dating) = religious homogamy in dating couples; QOL = quality of life

**Married individuals.** Regarding H7, the mediating role of religiosity in the relation between RH(married) and QOL was examined (Table 14). In married couples, there were no significant total effects of RH(married) on QOL. Religiosity was not a significant mediator in the RH(married)-QOL link.
Table 14

Mediation Results for RH(married) on QOL: Religiosity as the Mediator
(n = 161; 1000 bootstrap samples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (IV)</th>
<th>Mediating variable (M)</th>
<th>Dependent variable (DV)</th>
<th>Effect of IV on M (a)</th>
<th>Effect of M on DV (b)</th>
<th>Direct effects (c')</th>
<th>Indirect effects (a x b)</th>
<th>Total effects (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH(married)</td>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>QOL</td>
<td>3.95* (a6)</td>
<td>.39** (b6)</td>
<td>2.40 (c'6)</td>
<td>1.53 (d6)</td>
<td>3.93 (c6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.69 (SE)</td>
<td>.10 (t)</td>
<td>2.17 (.02)</td>
<td>.76 (.04)</td>
<td>2.23 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.34 (Z)</td>
<td>3.88 (P bootstr)</td>
<td>1.19 (.0002)</td>
<td>1.76 (Bootstrap)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% CI

Lower: .08
Upper: 3.37

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.

Note. RH (married) = religious homogamy in married couples;
QOL = quality of life

Pertaining to H8, the mediating role of relationship satisfaction in the RH(married)-QOL link was also tested (Table 15). Results revealed no total effect of RH(married) on QOL, and that relationship satisfaction was not a significant mediator of the relationship between RH(married) and QOL.
### Table 15

*Mediation Results for RH(married) on QOL: Relationship Satisfaction as the Mediator*

\( n = 161; \) 1000 bootstrap samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable (IV)</th>
<th>Mediating variable (M)</th>
<th>Dependent variable (DV)</th>
<th>Effect of IV on M (a)</th>
<th>Effect of M on DV (b)</th>
<th>Direct effects (c')</th>
<th>Indirect effect (a x b)</th>
<th>Total effects (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH(married)</td>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>QOL</td>
<td>B 4.01** (a7)</td>
<td>.69*** (b7)</td>
<td>1.16 (c'7)</td>
<td>2.77* (d7)</td>
<td>3.93 (c7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE 1.03</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t 3.88</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>p .0002</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Z 2.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boot strap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CI 5.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < 0.05. \) ** \( p < 0.01. \) *** \( p < 0.001. \)

**Note.** RH (married) = religious homogamy in married couples; QOL = quality of life

### Discussion

Using data from a longitudinal research, study 2 seeks to explore if religious homogamy predicts a higher quality of life in Christian couples over time, through increasing religiosity in dating individuals, and increasing both religiosity and relationship satisfaction among married individuals.

### Dating Individuals

Concerning dating Christians, results indicated that religious homogamy predicted a
higher quality of life, and this homogamy-quality of life link was partially mediated by religiosity. H6 was supported. Although no prior studies have directly investigated the effects of religious homogamy on quality of life, prior research may provide some hints about the processes in which religious homogamy fosters religiosity and hence improves quality of life.

**Impacts of Religious Homogamy on Religiosity**

The higher religiosity of individuals in same-faith dating relationships may be attributed to their higher shared religious practices with their partners than inter-faith couples, such as praying and Bible-reading. It is plausible that, just like religiously homogamous married dyads, dating couples sharing the same faith may jointly engage in more religious activities than couples who differ in religious affiliations (Heaton & Pratt, 1990). In particular, joint prayer may grant religious couples shared visions and purposes which can be incorporated into their lives as a common goal (N. M. Lambert & Dollahite, 2006), such as to enrich their individual and joint spiritual lives. Likewise, in quest for a deeper understanding of the Bible as a short-term goal, they may attend religious education classes together, which strengthens their faith as well as instills additional meaning into their ordinary routine. In addition, regular attendance at church and religious services exposes a couple to conventional Bible teachings, as well as embeds them in a broad
network of religious affiliations with whom they gain increased contact with and discussions on religion-related issues. Both elements may consequently enhance their faith.

In accordance with Blumer’s (1962) Symbolic Interaction Theory, joint religious participation serves as a reminder for couples of the symbolic meaning of their common religious virtues (Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011), such as love and tolerance for each other and other people. Couples’ daily conversations with religion as a recurrent theme may also direct them to reiterate and reciprocally strengthen their core Christian values beliefs; For instance, that a meaningful life reveals largely in spreading God’s love through missionary work. Communication between same-faith dating couples may therefore function like a “feedback loop” that was posited to be present among family members with the same religion (Mahoney et al., 2003), promoting growth of religiosity both in each member individually and within the couple as a dyad.

**Impacts of Religious Homogamy on Quality of Life**

Notably, results of the present study revealed that religious homogamy in dating participants had independent effects on their quality of life over and beyond the indirect effects explained by religiosity. Past investigation, however, has solely focused on religion and quality of life, with a considerable proportion being conducted on adults in their middle or old ages (e.g., Browne et al., 1994; Hummer, Rogers, Nam, & Elison, 1999; C. Y. S.
Leung & Tsang, 2003). A recapitulation of literature examining individuals in their adolescence and early adulthood (Donahue & Benson, 1995) may shed light on how religious homogamy can improve quality of life further than religiosity alone. Sharing of the same Christian faith with one’s partner may impact one’s quality of life through influencing four core dimensions: physical health, psychological health, social relationships and environment (WHOQOL, 1994), as well as through increasing companionship and reducing needs for lifestyle adjustments between the Christian couple.

**Physical Health**

Concerning physical well-being, faith and church attendance have been consistently associated with various health behaviours, including balanced dietary habits, regular exercise, having adequate sleep and using seatbelts (Musick, 1996; Musick, Blazer, & Hays, 2000). Also, certain religious activities like prayer were demonstrated to avoid suicidal attempts (Borowsky, Ireland, & Resnick, 2001), prevent and mitigate depression (Harker, 2001), manage anger (Marsh & Dallos, 2001), disperse hostile emotions as well as reduce emotional reactivity (Butler et al., 1998; Butler et al., 2002). All these behaviors are conducive to better physical health and a longer lifespan.

As Christian couples may individually and jointly participate in more religious activities, they may experience more positive health outcomes than inter-faith couples. On
top of that, when couples engage in functional religious practices together, such as by extending solitary prayer to joint prayer, the benefits enjoyed by both partners can be amplified. For instance, joint prayer in the context of conflicts may foster self-change focus, promote forgivingness, restore open communication and motivate reconciliation (Beach, Fincham, Hurt, McNair, & Stanley, 2008; Butler et al., 1998; Butler et al., 2002), thereby minimizing adverse physiological impacts caused by prolonged anger and contempt of both members. In a similar vein, when both partners uphold and adhere to Christian virtues like tolerance, relational harmony can be promoted, whereas destructive interaction patterns that are potentially health-degrading can be avoided.

**Psychological Health**

Regarding psychological health, religious couples’ congruent religious beliefs give rise to value consensus that is tied to numerous emotional benefits. Communication with a same-faith partner who shares similar values with oneself may function as a validation of the self, which enables emotionally satisfying interactions (Coombs, 1966; Notcutt & Silva, 1951; Wolf, 1936). In contrast, a lack of value consensus may lead dissimilar couples to engage in more reserved interactions that generate less emotional rewards. Arguments are also likely to erupt between partners who advocate disparate values. Specifically, disputes which confront an individual’s core religious values and sense of social reality can be
ego-threatening (Byrne, 1961; Coombs, 1966). Likewise, incompatibility between personal values and values that dominate in the environment, such as those of one’s partner, was associated with lower subjective well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). At times of joint decision-making, initially inconsistent values of inter-faith couples may escalate into internal conflicts which further obstruct both partners’ subjective well-being (Oles, 1991; Schwartz, 1992; Tetlock, 1986).

Compared to Christian couples, religiously heterogamous couples may be more prone to conflicts arising from divergent religious views. For instance, an inter-faith couple pre-occupied with different fundamental beliefs may have disagreements over long-term goals of the relationship. While the faithful Christian member aspires to foster a relationship that encompasses mutual spiritual growth, the non-religious member may aim solely for pleasure and excitement through dating. Likewise, people without religious affiliations may not understand the meaning of religious practices performed by their Christian partners, such as tithing – a regular contribution of a one-tenth portion of income to church. These incongruent virtues may pose inter-faith couples at risks for conflicts time and again, resulting in stress that hampers their physical and psychological health (Kiecolt-Glaser & K., 1996). On the contrary, Christian couples are influenced by similar church teachings. With relatively smaller discrepancies in religious values, they may reach a consensus more easily in short-term dyadic decision-making and long-term goal-setting (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner,
Social Relationships

Socially, the impacts of religion on interpersonal relationships are manifold. The tight-knit networks in religious organizations provide individuals with ample social support and resources (Christian, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus., 2002; C. Smith, 2003). These religious bonds influence their social attitudes and behaviours (Regnerus, 2003), as well as foster religious and positive self-images among believers (Donahue & Benson, 1995). Religious activities are also linked to better social adjustment (Mosher & Handal., 1997), endowing adolescents with coping, community and leadership skills (C. Smith, 2003) which are imperative to social functioning. Notably, same-faith partners may help each other practice coping strategies promoted by the church (e.g. to resort to God in the face of unmanageable stress, or to resolve family disputes through open communication) before they can master these skills effectively in broader social contexts. Same-faith couples may also offer positive reflected appraisals to each other to foster their perceived self-competence in handling interpersonal affairs in ways condoned by God (Bergin, 1983; Donahue & Benson, 1995). Among dating adolescents whose self-concept is not yet fully established, mutual reassurance of their self-images as religious and benevolent may be vital for them to form a favorable self-identity (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993).
Similarly, same-faith partners can promote each other’s psychosocial maturity by re-affirming the essence of hope, fidelity and care, thereby encouraging each other to develop these elements that underlie mature, adaptive and enduring social relationships (Benson, Williams, & Johnson., 1987).

Environment

Christian individuals who see the world as created by God are propelled to engage in pro-environment behaviors and attitudes (Owen & Videras, 2007), such as environmental conservation. Morally, church teachings also motivate individuals to preserve social harmony and uphold obligations as a responsible citizen. Through moral order, religion is found to prompt adolescents to conform to social and legal norms (S. J. Bahr, Hawks, & Wang, 1993; C. Smith, 2003), which paves way for a desirable and harmonious community to live in. While religion lays down these fundamental guidelines for individuals on how to live an upright life, religiously homogamous couples may mutually reinstate and enforce each other to abide by these instructions and perform accordingly. As the current sample of dating individuals comprise largely of adolescents, many of them may be in the midst of an identity crisis, during which adolescents engage actively in role-experimentation in search for a suitable self-identity (Marcia, 1980). This is a turbulent phase in which adolescents may undertake negative roles and troubling, law-breaking behaviours that are destructive to
their health and future (Jessor, 1998), such as drug abuse. In view of that, religiously homogamous couples exposed to similar Church teachings may remind each other to adhere to their shared religious beliefs, to resist external temptations and not to go astray. Either member within a couple may also act as a proximate role model of another to encourage his or her pro-social thoughts and behaviour (Bandura, 1975). Given that religious participation is associated with civic virtue and volunteering (E. S. Smith, 1999), same-faith couples with both partners being religiously involved may jointly do community services through the church more often than inter-faith couples, thus enhancing their respective sense of moral self-worth and mastery over the environment (Batson et al., 1993; Bergin, 1998; Donahue & Benson, 1995). These altruistic goals, behaviours and perceived abilities to contribute to society may be an indicator of social well-being that leads to a higher quality of life (Post, 2005).

In sum, “religions, as authoritative faith traditions, are systems of information that provide individuals with knowledge and resources for living a life of purpose and direction” (Emmons, 1999, p. 879). On top of that, religious homogamy provides couples with ample opportunities to mutually reinforce each other’s faith, practice religious activities in a joint fashion and magnify the accompanying benefits in a wide range of contexts, which consequently imbue their respective and shared lives with additional purpose and meaning.
Companionship

Besides influencing the four core domains of life, sharing the same Christian faith may enable higher companionship between Christian dating couples. Dating individuals, especially those who are younger adolescents may primarily and more frequently base their romantic perceptions on companionship (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004; Shulman & Scharf, 2000). Spending abundant time and engaging in activities together may therefore be integral to a satisfying dating relationship, which may in turn promote a higher subjective quality of life. In contrast, just as married couples, differing levels of religious participation may deprive dating couples of opportunities to take part in shared activities, as well as amplify prevailing discrepancies in their core religious beliefs and lifestyles, leading to heightened risks of dissolution, relational problems and disputes (Call & Heaton, 1997; Curtis & Ellison, 2002) thereby obstructing their quality of life.

Change in Lifestyles

Furthermore, an inter-faith relationship may require partners with discrepant spiritual lives, religious affiliations and networks to adjust their solitary lifestyles for each other. This change in lifestyle can be stressful and unpleasant (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983), and may entail sacrifice of preferred activities. For instance, highly religious Christians may have to forgo religious gatherings in exchange for more time to accompany their non-religious
partners. Conversely, when two persons who habitually practice religion as a core element of life embark on a relationship, they are more likely to acknowledge, respect and encourage each other’s lifestyle than inter-faith couples, particularly in religious domains. Both members can hence sustain personal habits they regard as meaningful to their lives.

**Dating Individuals in Same-faith Relationships (Both Non-Christians)**

It should be noted that the abovementioned findings and explanations may only apply to dating couples sharing the same Christian faith, as the current study did not include couples who were both atheists, or same-faith couples who were not Christians. However, it may be possible for dating couples who are both non-Christians to experience a higher quality of life than inter-faith couples. Similar to Christian couples, their perception of a more satisfying life may arise from reduced religion-oriented conflicts, lower need for adjustments and higher companionship.

Regardless of whether they are Christians or not, same-faith couples are less likely to suffer from the aforesaid misunderstandings regarding religious virtues and practices (e.g. tithing) that trigger arguments among inter-faith couples. Along this line, non-Christian couples may be exempted from destructive interactions stemming from value incongruity (Coombs, 1966) that impedes both relational outcomes and life quality.

In a similar vein, a relationship between two non-Christians is less susceptible to
pre-existing discrepancies in religious lifestyles than an inter-faith relationship.

Non-Christian partners have a lesser need to compromise on spiritual issues. Being free from presuppositions endowed by the Bible of how to live an upright life, they can negotiate for a mutually acceptable lifestyle without intimidating or abandoning desired religious values or practices.

In addition, when compared to inter-faith couples, low and similar levels of church attendance between non-Christian partners may enable them to spend more time together on other activities. Although they may not obtain the benefits of joint religious practices like religious couples, they can jointly create alternative forms of positive experiences, such as volunteering in community work together which both fosters companionship within the dyad and contributes to a more fulfilling life individually (Post, 2005). Therefore, although non-Christian dating couples were not examined in the current study, it is plausible that these benefits may enhance their quality of life just like in Christian couples.

**Married Individuals**

Regarding married Christians, religious homogamy did not predict a higher quality of life as hypothesized in H6 and H7. Results only indicated that religious homogamy was related to higher religiosity and higher relationship satisfaction respectively, and both of them were separately linked to a higher quality of life. The finding that religious homogamy
in married couples was associated with higher religiosity aligned with Thornton and Camburn’s (1989) view that family behaviour and religiosity are reciprocal in nature. A same-faith married union is more likely to practice joint religious behaviour and embed the family with their shared religious beliefs, such as in transmitting faith-based moral standards to the next generation in childrearing and attending church as a family. These family interactions may in turn enhance religiosity of each member in the family. On the other hand, the positive link between married couples’ religious homogamy and their relationship satisfaction echoed with the same finding in Study 1 and considerable past research that connected same-faith marriage to higher marital satisfaction (Burns, 1984; Heaton, 1984), marital stability and marital happiness (Ortega, 1988; Shehan et al., 1990).

**Possible Differences in Definition and Experience of Quality of Life Across Cultures and Life Stages**

Despite their higher religiosity and relationship satisfaction, religiously homogamous married couples did not experience a higher quality of life than their heterogamous counterparts. This finding conflicted with previous studies that depicted good marital functioning as a critical determinant of life satisfaction (Adams et al., 1996) and subjective quality of life (Monga et al., 2004). It also disagreed with past investigation that associated individuals’ marital satisfaction with a spiritually meaning life (Darwin L. Thomas &
Roghaar, 1990). These contradictions may stem from cultural differences in subjective
definition and experience of quality of life. Since most prior studies were conducted among
Americans and Caucasians (e.g. Veroff et al., 1981), it can be reasonably speculated that
marital satisfaction is deemed a major source of life satisfaction only among westerners.
However, among the current sample of Chinese individuals, a satisfying marriage may be
considered as less essential to their subjective quality of life.

As religious homogamy predicted a higher quality of life only among dating but not
married participants, it may be possible that individuals in different relationship or life
stages emphasize different domains of life when evaluating their life quality, and these
domains are differentially associated with religious homogamy. While religious homogamy
facilitates spiritual growth that makes life more meaningful for dating individuals, other
aspects may have replaced this type of personal growth to be the major focus of married
individuals’ lives, such as their children’s well-being. For married couples, their subjective
quality of life may mainly be affected by their children’s physical and intellectual
development, which is neither directly related to nor influenced by religious homogamy
between spouses. In this phase of life, their major role of parenthood may gain meaning and
direction by pursuing generative goals oriented towards their children (Emmons, 2003),
such as “to teach my child to be a person of integrity”, but not by attaining own relational
satisfaction or spiritual maturation. Thus, even though religious homogamy promotes
stronger faith and a more satisfying marriage, it may have little impact on facets regarded
by married individuals as important to their life satisfaction in this particular life stage.

**Potential Problems in Devoutly Religious Families**

Furthermore, religiously homogamous married couples may risk experiencing unhealthy outcomes stemming from rigid perceptions of and strict adherence to religion, thereby impinging on their life quality. Although same-faith married couples are less prone to marital conflicts, not all religious families are free from problems. Josephson (1993) illustrated three types of vicious interaction patterns among some devoutly religious Christian households: the enmeshed family which was over-involved in safeguarding children from the sinful world, the rigid family that prohibited self-expressions and challenges against standards of conduct, and the cold family that abandoned emotional expressions which were deemed disrespectful (Josephson, 1993). Conflicts arising from these patterns and the lack of family warmth may impede the quality of life of both religious parents and their children. Also, the idealization of marital harmony of religious dyads may lead them to be reluctant to admit marital discord and family conflicts (Mahoney, Pargament, A. Swank, & Tarakeshwar, 2001; Mahoney et al., 2003). Such denial deters coping and may aggravate psychological distress of a couple. Adverse physical and psychological impacts may also result from inflexibly and strictly following religious norms.
For instance, prolonged suppression of negative emotions and complaints to avoid tarnishing family harmony can make individuals feel guilt-ridden and cause hypertension, which in turn undermine their quality of life (J. S. Levin & Markides, 1985).

**General Discussion**

This study presents a more extensive framework of the intersections of religious homogamy and love relationships than is available from prior studies focusing on religious homogamy (Glenn, 1982; Heaton, 1984; Ortega, 1988). Different from most past literature which solely examined married couples (Albrecht et al., 1983; Glenn, 1982; Heaton, 1984; Heaton & Pratt, 1990), this study is the first to investigate religious homogamy in a non-married dating population. However, the predicted association between dating couples’ religious homogamy and their relationship satisfaction was not supported in Study 1. The absence of this link in dating couples may be attributed to their lower need for value consensus and compromise, which stems from a lesser extent of collaborative problem-solving, everyday interactions and pursuit of shared goals when compared to married dyads (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004; Coombs, 1966; Strough, 2003).

On the contrary, among married couples, results of Study 1 revealed a strong positive link between religious homogamy and their relationship satisfaction, which was in line with a large body of early research that documented the same link (e.g. Heaton & Pratt, 1990;
Ortega, 1988). This finding affirms that albeit changes in love concept and social trends in the last few decades (Rindfuss & A.Vandenheuvel., 1990; Waite & Bachrach, 2000), religious homogamy remains a critical element of a satisfying marriage in contemporary society. By replicating the homogamy-satisfaction association with a Chinese sample, the current study also broadens the application of this association from Caucasians and other western populations (e.g. Glenn, 1982; Heaton, 1984; Heaton et al., 1985; Heaton & Pratt, 1990) to the Chinese population. The profound influences of religious homogamy on relationship satisfaction, however, may be unique to married unions and do not apply to non-married couples.

Apart from examining religious homogamy in dating and Chinese populations, the present study also makes a novel attempt to investigate the mechanisms that lie beneath the homogamy-satisfaction association. Consistent with the call for the use of more proximal indices to study intricate connections between romantic relationships and religion (Mahoney et al., 1999), specific constructs which are closely intertwined in religious couples’ relationships - joint church attendance, joint prayer and perceived coping similarity are employed in Study 1 to delineate clear linkages between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction than previous research. In this regard, this study is one of the sparse studies that directly documents how engagement in dyadic spiritual behavior or perception of one’s spouse contributes to relationship satisfaction (Frank D. Fincham et al., 2008;
When tested separately, joint church attendance, joint prayer and perceived coping similarity were all shown to play a role in the homogamy-satisfaction relationship. These results provided further support for the notion that homogamy on any dimension of religiosity, from affiliation to behavior and perception, may promote similarities between spouses which are conducive to a satisfying relationship (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). However, when tested simultaneously, only joint prayer and perceived similarity in active coping emerged as mediators that underlay the homogamy-satisfaction association. This finding contradicted considerable prior research that posited joint church attendance to be critical to relationship satisfaction of same-faith couples. Nevertheless, findings illuminate relational benefits brought about by joint prayer, which was a more powerful element than joint church attendance in the homogamy-satisfaction link. Moreover, the finding that members in a religiously homogamous marriage perceived each other as more similar in active coping highlights the pervasive influence of religious homogamy on couples’ cognitions and beliefs regarding core dimensions of marital life. It enriches past literature by suggesting that religious homogamy does not only manifest itself in similar religious beliefs, but also in assumed agreement between spouses on how to respond to dyadic stressors or decipher marital problems.

The last aim of this study is to explore if religious homogamy can lead to a higher
quality of life in both dating and married Christian couples over time. Interestingly, as
shown in Study 2, religious homogamy predicted a higher quality of life over time through
increasing religiosity only among dating, but not married Christians. This finding sheds
light on benefits of religious homogamy beyond improving relationship satisfaction, which
is yet to be discovered in past literature. It also raises a noteworthy implication that religious
homogamy may foster diverse favorable outcomes for different types of romantic
relationships through different processes. While sharing of the same Christian faith
promotes satisfaction in married unions, it affects dating individuals in another way by
enhancing their quality of life. Along this line, religious homogamy may encompass
multiple features such as value systems, expectations, lifestyles that direct dating Christians
towards a more fulfilling life (Hünler & Gençöz, 2005). Moreover, regarding existing
research on religious homogamy and quality of life that have largely progressed along
parallel paths, the current study offers a closer investigation into the interplay among
religious homogamy, religiosity, relationship satisfaction and quality of life in married and
dating individuals.

Taken together, the above findings form a more fine-grained theoretical framework
than past research that underscores specifically what it is about religious homogamy that
promotes a satisfying marriage or a high-quality life. This more comprehensive framework
does not only offer a richer set of empirical associations which can facilitate future research
and applications (Mahoney et al., 1999; D. L. Thomas & Cornwall, 1990), but may also
draw clinicians’ awareness of religion-related issues as an integral part of marital
functioning that should not be overlooked.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The current studies did not take into account the relationship stage which the dating
samples are in. Partners in premature or casual romantic relationships may not have
developed adequate understanding and concerns of each other’s religious beliefs, or
demarcated shared long-term goals which might be the pre-requisite for religious
homogamy to have an impact on their relationships (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). Whether
religious homogamy of dating couples is associated with different relational outcomes in
different relationship stages (e.g. serious dating, dating which involves mutual desires to
marry) (Haunani Solomon & Leanne, 2002) awaits further empirical attention.

Another limitation that should be acknowledged is the cross-sectional,
non-experimental design of Study 1. Causal relationships among variables could not be
demonstrated, as alternative explanations for associations among variables were not ruled
out. For instance, significant correlations and path coefficients between joint prayer and
relationship satisfaction do not necessarily indicate that joint prayer causes relationship
satisfaction. It is also possible that satisfied couples are more likely to engage in joint prayer,
or that some other variables predict or influence levels of both joint prayer and relationship satisfaction. Longitudinal, prospective designs are thus required to delineate path directionality or causal relationships among variables involved in Study 1.

It is also important to recognize that the impacts of coping similarity within a dyad depend on both the type of coping and the stage of the stressor (J. B. Levin, Sher, & Theodos, 1997). Perceived coping similarity may be particularly salient and yield the most successful outcomes when married couples deal with relationship-related issues (Ptacek & Dodge, 1995), such as child-rearing. Nevertheless, in the face of intense stressors like a life-threatening illness that directly involves only one spouse, a combination of different coping mechanisms (e.g. one’s own active coping matched with the spouse’s emotional support) may generate greater satisfaction than when both spouses cope similarly (J. B. Levin et al., 1997; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995). As Study 1 employed a cross-sectional design, longitudinal studies which assemble coping information over time are needed to elucidate how dispositional coping styles and perceived coping similarity enhance or impede relationships across numerous life events. Besides, Study 1 only examined two types of coping. It remains an empirical question that whether perceived similarity in other coping styles also enhances relationship satisfaction.

Another issue that deserves attention is that Study 1 reveals denominational religious homogamy to have extra and independent effects on married people’s relationship
RELIGIOUS HOMOGAMY IN DATING AND MARRIED COUPLES

satisfaction, even after controlling for joint church attendance, joint prayer and perceived coping similarity simultaneously. A direction for future research is thus to explore some other mechanisms that play a more crucial role than these factors in the homogamy-satisfaction link. Apart from constructs used in this study, other specific and proximal indices, such as couples’ perception of sanctification of marriage (Mahoney et al., 1999), may be required to study the intersection of marriage and religious homogamy.

Study 2 also raises an intriguing question of why religious homogamy predicts a higher quality of life only among dating but not married individuals. A plausible explanation for this discrepancy is that individuals at different stages of life may emphasize different domains when evaluating their quality of life; and these domains are related to religious homogamy to a differential extent. Further investigation is necessary to provide a closer look into the role of religious homogamy in the quality of life of these two groups of populations. Among married individuals, religious homogamy may impact subjective life quality through influencing their family relationships or their children’s well-being, instead of self-oriented facets of life. As for dating people, whether religious homogamy can generate salient benefits to their quality of life even during major adverse life events remains an empirical question. Future research may explore whether religious homogamy is a protective factor for distressed dating individuals, such as those facing chronic illnesses.

Since both studies employed self-report measures, accuracy of the collected data was
subject to individuals’ social desirability. Chinese’s response style which is oriented towards choosing midpoints on scales might also affect empirical results (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995), rendering the measure of “perceived coping similarity” less sensitive in assessing coping difference. For instance, this tendency might result in smaller difference scores between participants’ own and perceived partners’ coping, resulting in similarity scores that reflected higher perceived coping similarity than was their actual perception. Coping style might be better assessed with more objective content analysis or behavioral measurement. Another weakness that should be noted is the low internal reliability of the measure of “active coping” for participants’ own coping style. However, since the same instrument showed adequate reliability in measuring perceived partner’s coping style, “active coping” was still used in subsequent analyses.

The lack of investigation into gender differences is also a shortcoming of the current study. While women were found to be more religious than men in general (de Vaus & McAllister, 1987; Francis, 1997), only fathers’ but not mothers’ religious participation was consistently linked to better marital quality (Nicholas & Wilcox, 2008). Since religious effects potentially vary by gender (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001), an intriguing field of future research lies upon gender differences in experiences and perceptions of religious homogamy and other dyadic religious behavior like joint prayer.

The last caveat of this study is its limited generalizability to Chinese Christian
couples. As different results may emerge for populations with other ethnic and religious backgrounds, additional research is required to identify for whom, when and how religious homogamy fosters or obstructs relationship satisfaction and quality of life. For instance, as suggested in earlier discussions, dating couples who are both atheists, or those who share other religion may be less prone to religion-oriented conflicts, which in turn enables them to experience a higher quality of life than inter-faith couples just like Christian couples.

Empirical and Clinical Implications

Mounting correlational and empirical evidences point to religion as a core domain of marriage and romantic relationships that deserves attention and closer inspection by both researchers and clinicians.

Empirically, most past literature relied solely on distant, global indices like religiosity and religious homogamy to depict the link between religion and marital functioning (Darwin L. Thomas & Roghaar, 1990). It was until recently that research began to employ more proximal, specific constructs, such as beliefs and behavior in examining religion in relationships (Mahoney et al., 1999). This study, with the use of both global (e.g. religiosity, religious homogamy) and proximal constructs (e.g. dyadic prayer, perceptions of coping similarity), offers a fuller picture of the complex interplay between religion and romantic relationships. For instance, the more fine-grained examination of the mechanisms
involved in the association between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction elucidates specific behavior and cognitions that lie beneath a satisfying marriage. By extending linkages of religious homogamy to quality of life in dating individuals that were not found in married couples, this study also underscores the importance of more in-depth research to promote a more balanced, thorough understanding of religion amid close relationships.

Practically, mental health professionals were found to be less oriented towards religion than the general population in the past decade (Shafranske, 1996; Shafranske & Malony, 1990). Likewise, marital therapists were seldom trained to approach religious issues and might neglect clients’ religious experiences in therapy (Mahoney et al., 1999). For instance, they may overlook a decline in spouses’ joint religious activities as an early signal of marital problems. However, the call for more empirical work on spiritually-oriented treatment (Aten & Worthington, 2009) has been followed by increasing applications of religious practices in interventions. Prayer, in particular, has been verified to be a useful aid with religious couples (Nathaniel M. Lambert et al., 2011). When prayer was integrated into the most extensively examined marital distress prevention program (PREP) (Beach et al., 2010), African American wives who prayed for their husbands whenever conflicts arose showed more pronounced positive outcomes, when compared to the standard PREP without the prayer component (Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999). Along this
line, findings of the current study may shed light on other possible applications of prayer in
couple and marital therapies. Apart from being practiced as a solitary coping tactic of an
individual, joint prayer can also be incorporated into interventions and into religious
couples’ repertoire of dyadic activities to enhance relationship satisfaction.

Nevertheless, a noteworthy reminder is that the therapeutic use of religion or
spirituality has to be handled with caution. Practitioners have to be aware of situations
under which prayer can be detrimental to relationships, such as when it is used within a
couple with pre-existing power imbalance or with a judgmental attitude (Gardner, Butler, &
Seedall, 2008). To avoid misuse, careful assessment should always accompany and precede
any intervention plans that draw on religious resources. Training programs can also
emphasize more on religious processes to assist practitioners in addressing related issues
and applying interventions when appropriate situations arise.

With regard to the closely intertwined links between various religion-related
constructs and relational outcomes, religion represents a potential resource and a powerful
therapeutic tool in contemporary couple, marital and family therapies. However, a challenge
remains for scholars and mental health professionals to exemplify who and under what
circumstances is an individual or a couple best-suited for obtaining benefits from religion.
Conclusion

With regard to prior investigation on religious homogamy that studied only married couples in western society, Study 1 first aimed to replicate and extend the association between religious homogamy and relationship satisfaction with a Chinese dating sample. However, the hypothesized correlation was not observed. Religious homogamy only predicted higher relationship satisfaction in married but not dating individuals. This finding implies that although religious homogamy remains a vital component of a satisfying marriage in modern society, pervasive influences of religious homogamy on relationship satisfaction may be specific to married dyads and do not apply to non-married couples, who take part in less dyadic problem-solving and goal-setting and thus require lower value consensus on religious issues.

To explore the mechanisms that underlay the homogamy-satisfaction link among married unions, the roles of four factors – joint church attendance, joint prayer, perceived coping similarity (in active coping and coping by religion) – were examined. Only joint prayer and perceived similarity in active coping were significant mediators of this association. Contradictory to past literature, this finding did not support joint church attendance to be an important factor in the homogamy-satisfaction link. Instead, results highlighted the synergistic power of joint prayer, which may endow religious couples with additional benefits beyond solitary prayer. The finding that same-faith spouses perceived
each other as more similar in coping than inter-faith spouses implies the profound influence of religious homogamy on married unions’ cognitions and beliefs regarding core domains of marital life, such as assumed agreement on ways to decipher marital problems.

Study 2 was conducted to examine if religious homogamy can lead to a higher quality of life in both dating and married couples over time. Results revealed that religious homogamy predicted a higher quality of life in dating but not married Christians. This finding had two noteworthy implications. Firstly, religious homogamy contributes to positive life outcomes for individuals apart from enhancing relationship satisfaction. Secondly, religious homogamy differentially benefits different types of romantic relationships through diverse mechanisms. Among married dyads, religious homogamy fostered marital satisfaction through factors elucidated in study 1 (joint prayer and perceived similarity in active coping). In dating couples, sharing the same Christian faith enhanced each member’s religiosity, which in turn promoted a higher quality of life. It follows that religious homogamy may comprise value systems and lifestyles that propel dating individuals towards a more rewarding life.

To conclude, the two studies provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how and for whom religious homogamy facilitates a satisfying marriage or a high-quality life. This fine-grained framework enriches past literature on religious homogamy and offers valuable empirical associations for future research and applications.
References


well-lived (pp. 105-128). Washington, DC, USA: American Psychological Association.


Spiritual behaviors and relationship satisfaction: A critical analysis of the role of

integration of research and treatment. In J. Vincent (Ed.), *Advances in family


Francis, L. J. (1997). The psychology of gender differences in religion: A review of

Fu, L. (2008). *A correlation analysis of religiosity, authentic happiness, and altruistic
behaviors among college freshmen*. (Master thesis Master's thesis), Tunghai
University, Taiwan.

relationship: Clinical implications of power and process *Contemporary Family
Therapy: An International Journal, 30*, 152-166.


Haunani Solomon, D., & Leanne, K. K. (2002). Relationship uncertainty, partner


Kalmijn, M. (2007). Explaining cross-national differences in marriage, cohabitation, and


Religious homogamy in dating and married couples.

Counseling and Development, 82, 58-68.


Personality and Individual Differences, 12, 407-412.


preventive approaches in couple therapy. New York: Brunner/Mazel.


and relationship satisfaction (Undergraduate thesis), City University of Hong Kong.

Retrieved from http://www.oapsportal.org/handle/123456789/130


Appendix I – The complete questionnaire used in Study 1

研究資料提供同意書

本人 Cindy Leung 是香港大學心理學學士之學生，現正於本人之論文導師 Dr. Harry Hui 的指導下進行一項社會心理學的畢業論文，並誠意邀請您參與這次的研究調查。

您需要提供簡單的個人資料，並完成一份有關人際關係的問卷（需時 10-15 分鐘）。本研究並無任何風險，同時，是次研究並不為閣下提供個人利益，但所搜集數據將對研究的人際關係提供寶貴資料。是次參與屬自願性質，您可隨時終止參與是項行動，有關決定將不會引起任何不良後果。

所收集的資料只作研究用途，而問卷內容只有負責是次研究的人員才能存取，而個人資料絕對保密。如你對是項研究有任何問題，請現在提出。

如日後您對是項研究有任何查詢，歡迎隨時與本人 Cindy Leung（電話號碼：6181-9733；電郵地址：cindy927@hku.hk）或本人之論文導師 Dr. Harry Hui（電話號碼：2859-2291；電郵地址：huiharry@hku.hk）聯絡。如你想知道更多有關研究參與者的權益，請聯絡非臨床香港大學研究操守委員會（2241-5267）。

謝謝您對是次心理學研究的支持和參與。

________________________                    ____________________
簽署  日期

本人___________（姓名）同意參與此項心理學研究並提供真實資料，而我明白所提供的資料只供學術用途，將絕對保密。
第1部分

請以「 ✔ 」選擇最適合您的答案。

1. 您的宗教信仰是：
   ○ 沒有
   ○ 基督教
   ○ 天主教
   ○ 佛教
   ○ 道教
   ○ 孔教
   ○ 回教
   ○ 印度教 / 錫克教
   ○ 其它： ________________

2. 您的婚姻狀況是：
   ○ 單身 → 請繼續回答題目3
   ○ 已婚 → 請跳到題目6
   ○ 喪偶 → 請繼續回答題目3
   ○ 分居 / 離婚 → 請繼續回答題目3

3. 您現在有沒有拍拖？
   ○ 沒有 → 已完成問卷，感謝您對是次社會心理學研究的支持和參與！
   ○ 有 → 請繼續回答題目4
   ○ 不清楚 → 已完成問卷，感謝您對是次社會心理學研究的支持和參與！

4. 若您現在有拍拖，您跟這人拍拖多久？(以月份計算)
   請在這兒填上你的答案： ________________
5. **若您現在有拍拖**，這人的宗教信仰是：

- [ ] 不知道 / 不清楚
- [ ] 沒有任何宗教信仰
- [ ] 基督教
- [ ] 天主教
- [ ] 佛教
- [ ] 道教
- [ ] 孔教
- [ ] 回教
- [ ] 印度教 / 錫克教
- [ ] 其他：_______________

6. **若您已結婚**，您結婚有多久？(以月份計算)

請在這兒填上你的答案：_____________

7. **若您已結婚**，您伴侶的宗教信仰是：

- [ ] 不知道 / 不清楚
- [ ] 沒有任何宗教信仰
- [ ] 基督教
- [ ] 天主教
- [ ] 佛教
- [ ] 道教
- [ ] 孔教
- [ ] 回教
- [ ] 印度教 / 錫克教
- [ ] 其他：_______________
第2A 部分

如果你是已婚或正在拍拖，
A) 當您遇到重大困難時，您會做以下事情嗎？
B) 當您的伴侶遇到重大困難時，他/她會做以下事情嗎？
請圈出您認為最適合的答案。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A) 您</th>
<th>B) 的伴侶</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>從不</td>
<td>有時</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>這樣做</td>
<td>這樣做</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.集中全力來解決所面臨的問題</td>
<td>2.對所要處理的問題先定出一個策略</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.投入工作或其他的活動，來使自己不去想那些遇到的問題</td>
<td>10.告訴自己「這不是真的」</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
第3A部分

如果你是 已婚 或 正在拍拖，
請就您的 婚姻 / 恋愛關係，以「✓」選擇最適合您的答案。

1. 他/她滿足您各項需求的程度如何？
   1      2      3      4      5
   低 ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ 高

2. 整體而言，您滿意您倆的關係嗎？
   1      2      3      4      5
   非常不滿意 ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ 非常滿意

3. 和大多數人相比，您倆的關係如何？
   1      2      3      4      5
   非常不好 ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ 非常好

4. 「若不曾與他/她有這段關係那該多好。」你曾否有以上的想法？
   1      2      3      4      5
   從沒有想過 ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ 時常這樣想

5. 您倆的關係符合您原先的期望嗎？
   1      2      3      4      5
   非常不符合 ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ 非常符合

6. 您有多愛他/她？
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

第 3B 部分

1. 我和我的伴侶一起祈禱

2. 我和我的伴侶為對方祈禱

3. 我和我的伴侶討論有關如何活出上帝的旨意

4. 我和我的伴侶討論我們個人的道德和靈聖

5. 我和我的伴侶一起出席教會

6. 我和我的伴侶一起去宗教教育課 / 慕道班

7. 我和我的伴侶一起研究聖經
8. 我和我的伴侣一起去宗教退修

9. 我和我的伴侣读关于宗教或信仰为主题的书籍或文章

10. 我和我的伴侣通过宗教组织一起参与义务工作

11. 我和我的伴侣讨论上帝在我们的婚姻/爱情关系中的角色

12. 我和我的伴侣一起庆祝宗教节日

13. 我和我的伴侣一起进行宗教仪式（如斋戒，冥想）

第4部分：基本资料
请以「✓」选择最适合您的答案。

1. 性别： 〇男 〇女

2. 年龄： 〇19岁或以下 〇20-29岁 〇30-39岁 〇40-49岁
研究目的

由於近年離婚個案不斷上升、青年人對愛情的觀念亦有所改變，近年有不少有關不同因素如何影響婚姻和戀愛關係的研究。當中有研究顯示，擁有共同宗教信仰有助於維持夫妻間的和睦。同時，夫妻／情侶中其中一方在面對困難時的應對方式，亦有可能影響自己和伴侶對這段婚姻／戀愛關係的看法。

本研究的目的就是調查個人「面對困難時的應對方式」及夫妻／情侶間的「共同宗教信仰」如何影響男/女對戀愛和婚姻關係的滿意程度。閣下的資料只供學術用途，將絕對保密。

如日後有查詢，歡迎隨時與本人 Cindy Leung（電話號碼：6181-9733；電郵地址：cindy927@hku.hk）或本人之論文導師 Dr. Harry Hui（電話號碼：2859-2291；電郵地址：huiharry@hku.hk）聯絡。如想知道更多有關研究參與者的權益，請聯絡非臨床香港大學研究操守委員會（2241-5267）。

感謝您對是次社會心理學研究的支持和參與。