Religion's Influence on Adoption Practices

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Introduction

• Currently, over 130,000 children in the United States are in foster care
• Recruiting adoptive parents remains elusive
• Finding placements is critical to the emotional and physical well-being of children in substitute care
• Little is known regarding the influence of religion as a social institution on adopting behavior

Research Questions

• Do levels of religiosity influence the likelihood of adopting a child?
• Does religious affiliation affect the decision to adopt?
• Is there variation if the adoption is a relative adoption—including the adoption of a spouse's biological child—or a non-related adoption?

Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism (S.I.)

• S.I. focuses on socialization, roles (Mead 1934), and identity (Stryker 1968)
• Religious individuals are socialized to be altruistic—to help those in need and do good deeds
• Research shows a positive relationship between religiosity and certain forms of altruism (e.g. Batson and Gray 1981; Hunsberger & Platonow 1986; Watson, Hood, Morris, & Hall 1984)
• We argue that, for some, adopting a child may be an altruistic gesture

Background Literature

• Previous research finds age, marital status, number of children, race, and income as strong predictors of adopting a child (Jones 2009)
• Additionally, women who are sterile or subfecund, and those who have difficulties bearing children, are more likely to adopt children (Bonham 1977, Bachrach 1983, Stolley 1993, Chandra et al. 1999)
• Research has examined the importance of religion among adoption seekers (Hollingsworth 2000)

Hypotheses

• If religion is a salient aspect of an individual's identity, then more religious individuals should be more likely to adopt
• More religious individuals should also be more likely to adopt a non-related child compared to a related child

Data and Methods

• Wave I of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH)
    - Nationally representative
    - Collected in 1987-1988
    - Numerous questions regarding religion
    - Extensive information regarding adoption
• Dependent Variables
    - Whether the respondent has adopted a child
    - Whether adopted child in household is a related or non-related child
• Independent Variables
    - Religiosity and religious affiliation
• Control Variables
    - Measures of marital and parenthood histories
    - Sociodemographic characteristics

Logistic Regression Results of Religiosity on Adopting a Child (N= 12445)

Predictor	Model 1 B	Model 1 SE B	Model 1 e^B	Model 2 B	Model 2 SE B	Model 2 e^B	Model 3 B	Model 3 SE B	Model 3 e^B	Model 4 B	Model 4 SE B	Model 4 e^B	Model 5 B	Model 5 SE B	Model 5 e^B
Religiosity															
Religiosity	0.06 ***	0.01	1.06				0.05 ***	0.02	1.06	0.05 **	0.02	1.05	0.05 **	0.02	1.05
Religious Affiliation															
Catholic[a]				0.33	0.27	1.39	0.14	0.28	1.15	0.12	0.28	1.13	0.12	0.28	1.13
Jewish				0.57	0.46	1.77	0.52	0.46	1.31	-0.03	0.47	0.97	-0.02	0.47	0.98
Evangelical Protestant				0.59 *	0.26	1.80	0.28	0.28	1.32	0.15	0.29	1.16	0.16	0.29	1.17
Mainline Protestant				0.71 *	0.26	2.03	0.50	0.27	1.64	0.23	0.28	1.26	0.23	0.28	1.26
Other Religious Affiliation				0.71 *	0.32	2.02	0.43	0.33	1.54	0.42	0.34	1.60	0.43	0.34	1.53
Sociodemographic Controls															
Education										0.01	0.02	1.01	0.01	0.02	1.01
Family Income										0.08 **	0.03	1.08	0.08 **	0.03	1.08
Number of biological children										-0.36 ***	0.04	0.70	-0.27 ***	0.05	0.76
Black[b]										0.35 *	0.15	1.41	0.33 *	0.15	1.39
Hispanic										-0.05	0.28	0.95	-0.06	0.28	0.95
Other Race										-0.20	0.60	0.82	-0.20	0.60	0.82
Female										-0.45 ***	0.12	0.64	-0.17	0.17	0.85
Age										0.04 ***	0.00	1.04	0.04 ***	0.00	1.04
Separated or Divorced[c]										-0.25	0.15	0.78	-0.23	0.15	0.79
Widowed										-0.86 ***	0.20	0.42	-0.86 ***	0.20	0.43
Never Married										-2.64 ***	0.39	0.07	-2.62 ***	0.39	0.07
Employed Full-Time[d]										0.38 *	0.16	1.46	0.38 *	0.16	1.43
Employed Part-Time										0.02	0.20	1.02	0.02	0.20	1.02
Interactions															
Female * Number of biological children													-0.18 *	0.08	0.83
Constant	-3.53 ***			-4.05 ***			-3.84 ***			-4.85 ***			-4.92 ***		

Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.
Excluded categories are: (a) No religious affiliation, (b) White, (c) Currently Married, (d) Unemployed.
Percent having ever adopted a child: 2.9% (N=361).

Source: NSFH Wave I

Logistic Regression Results of Religiosity on Having a Non-Related Adopted Child in the Household (N=187)

Predictor	Model 1 B	Model 1 SE B	Model 1 e^B	Model 2 B	Model 2 SE B	Model 2 e^B	Model 3 B	Model 3 SE B	Model 3 e^B	Model 4 B	Model 4 SE B	Model 4 e^B
Religiosity												
Religiosity	0.10 *	0.04	1.10				0.13 **	0.05	1.14	0.12 *	0.05	1.13
Religious Affiliation												
Catholic[a]				0.62	0.43	1.85	0.98 *	0.46	2.67	0.35	0.52	1.44
Mainline Protestant				0.61	0.38	1.84	0.93 *	0.41	2.53	0.57	0.47	1.76
Other and No Religious Affiliation				0.21	0.50	1.24	0.62	0.54	1.87	0.34	0.61	1.40
Sociodemographic Controls												
Education										0.12 †	0.07	1.13
Family Income										-0.01	0.08	0.99
Number of Biological Children										-0.20 †	0.10	0.83
Nonwhite[b]										-1.11 *	0.46	0.33
Female										1.51 ***	0.44	4.51
Age										0.04 *	0.02	1.05
Not Currently Married[c]										-0.35	0.49	0.71
Employed[d]										0.12	0.48	1.12
Constant	0.50 **			0.23			-0.11			-3.39 *		

Notes: † p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.
Excluded categories are (a) Evangelical Protestant, (b) White, (c) Currently Married, (d) Unemployed.
Percent having a non-relative adopted child in their household: 64% (N=120).

Source: NSFH Wave I

Major Findings

• Religiosity increases the likelihood of adopting a child
• Religious affiliation is associated with adopting, with Evangelical and Mainline Protestants more likely to adopt than those with no religious affiliation,
    - but this relationship is mediated by religiosity, indicating that religiosity, not religious affiliation, is the key predictor
• Consistent with previous research, income, age, being currently married, and employment are positively associated with adopting
• Females and respondents with more biological children are less likely to have adopted a child
• Blacks are more likely, compared with whites, to have adopted

Major Findings

• More religious respondents are more likely to adopt a non-related child
• Education, age, being female, and being white are positively associated with adopting a non-related child compared to a related child
• Women's odds of adopting a non-related child are 4 ½ times greater than men's
• Having more biological children is negatively associated with adopting a non-related child

Conclusions

• Religiosity does appear to be related to both adopting a child and adopting a non-related child,
    - therefore, it does appear that the altruistic socialization associated with religiosity may be manifested in adoption behavior
• Our sociodemographic controls are consistent with previous findings
• Adoption agencies may benefit by focusing attention on individuals who actively participate in religious organizations

Limitations

• Small sample sizes reduced the interpretability of the effect of religious affiliation
• The NSFH does not contain detailed accounts of infertility

Future Research

• Distinguish between the effects of religious behavior and religious ideology
• Replicate findings across other data sets
• Determine if adoptive parents' religiosity influences child's religiosity

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