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Family of Origin Predictors of Marital Outcomes Among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American Couples

Christina Salama^a, Jeffrey B. Jackson^b , Sesen Negash^c , and Manijeh Daneshpour^a

^aAlliant International University, Irvine, California, USA; ^bVirginia Tech, Church Falls, Virginia, USA; ^cSan Diego State University, San Diego, California, USA

ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of family within the Coptic community, the extant literature on Coptic family relationships is remarkably limited. The purpose of this study was to explore parental marital quality and family of origin (FOO) quality as predictors of marital satisfaction and marital stability among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American couples. Self-report survey data from 255 married Coptic couples living in the United States were analyzed using an actor-partner interdependence model. Results indicated husband FOO quality predicted both marital satisfaction ($\beta = .51, SE = .18, p = .005$) and marital stability ($\beta = .51, SE = .22, p = .022$) among Coptic husbands but not among Coptic wives. Results further indicated wife parental marital quality, wife FOO quality, and husband parental marital quality were not predictive of marital satisfaction or marital stability among Coptic husbands or wives. Clinical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Couple; marital; satisfaction; stability; Coptic

Divorce rates in the United States have remained fairly high over the past couple decades (Stanley, 2015; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007), and researchers have been interested in investigating factors that contribute to marital dissolution. Researchers have found that family of origin (FOO) has an important impact on adult relationships (Holman, 2001). There is also evidence to support an association between negative FOO experiences, lower relationship quality, and increased risk of divorce (Amato, 1996). Although marital outcomes have been evaluated for several decades, there is limited literature on FOO factors for minority populations, specifically with Middle Eastern and Arab families. Since family is the key social unit within Coptic Christian culture and Arab culture (Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014), the evaluation of intergenerational familial patterns may contribute to increased understanding of the relationship between FOO and marital outcomes.

However, to date, no research has been conducted on the influence of FOO experiences among Coptic couples.

The purpose of this study was to use actor-partner interdependence modeling (APIM) on cross-sectional self-report dyadic data to determine FOO factors that contribute to marital outcomes among Coptic Egyptian-American couples. Specifically, we sought to identify associations of parental marital quality and FOO quality with marital outcomes with Coptic Egyptian-American couples using online survey data. We selected Bowen Family Systems (BFS) theory as the theoretical framework for this study because BFS theory focuses on the impact of FOO intergenerational relationships on shaping adult relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), and concepts from the theory allow for culturally sensitivity in understanding intergenerational processes among minority families (McGoldrick, 2011). In addition, there is some evidence that BFS theory is an effective framework for understanding Middle Eastern Muslim families (Sauerheber, Nims, & Carter, 2014), who often have cultural similarities to Copts, notwithstanding religious differences.

Overview of Coptic Christianity

Coptic Orthodox Christianity is the largest Christian Church in the Middle East and North Africa (Henderson, 2005; Van Dijk & Botros, 2009). The term *Coptic* (synonymous with Egyptian) comes from the Greek word for Egypt, which is *Aigypotos* (www.coptic.net). Orthodox Christians are the second largest unified group of Christians in the world, comprising approximately 200 million (Dunaway, 1995) of the 1,700 million Christians in the world (Farrington, 1998). The Coptic Church is the Church of Alexandria (hereafter referred to as the Coptic Church). St. Mark, one of the 70 apostles and one of the four gospel writers, established the Church in the middle of the first century (Dass, 2008). Since St. Mark's papacy, there has been an unbroken lineage of popes who have preserved the church rites and dogma to present day (Elmasry, 1987). The Coptic Church follows the beliefs set forth in the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.), a cornerstone statement for the Orthodox faith, which asserts the belief in the Holy Trinity. The first Coptic Church in the United States was established in 1970 in Jersey City, NJ (Coptic Orthodox Church of Saint Mark, n.d.). The diaspora in the United States has continued to increase, and 41 parishes had been established by 1989 (Saad, 2010). There are currently approximately 298 parishes in the United States (Coptic World, 2018), with plans to continue expansion due to the recent influx of immigrants fleeing religious persecution in Egypt. There are approximately 10 to 12 million

Copts in Egypt (i.e., 12% to 15%; U.S. Copts Association, 2007) and upward of 350,000 Copts in the United States (Hickey, 2013).

Middle Eastern families

Egypt is geographically located in North Africa and the classification of the Egyptian people is largely Arab or Middle Eastern. Sociologists describe Egyptian families (hereafter referred to Egyptian families by ethnicity, regardless of religion) as *high context*, meaning that individuals are largely influenced by their family and community (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2005). Egyptian families are collectivistic (Darwish & Huber, 2003) and highly patriarchal (Abudabbeh, 2005). Family members from Middle Eastern backgrounds generally provide a strong support for one another (Al-Krenawi & Jackson, 2014). A brief comparison between families who are Muslim and families who are Coptic may provide better contextual understanding for the findings in this study.

The Middle Eastern Muslim family tends to be more patriarchal in nature with a power imbalance between men and women (Moghadam, 2004), whereas the Middle Eastern Coptic family is hierarchical to a lesser extent, yet socially influenced by the Muslim majority in Egypt (As'ad, 1991). In addition, husbands from Arab backgrounds often hold more authority than wives in social structure, regardless of religion (Feather, 2004), further perpetuating the power imbalance between husband and wife.

Marriage and divorce

Marriage is a highly religious and sacred ceremony for both Coptic and Muslim families (Abudabbeh, 2005). Marriage is viewed as a family affair in which parents play a significant role in the process of mate selection (Abudabbeh, 2005). Coptic marriage is based upon biblical standards that encourage husbands to love their wives in the same way as Christ loves the church, and for wives to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22–25, New King James Version). Divorce is not permitted in the Coptic Church except because of adultery or conversion to another religion (Rowberry & Khalil, 2010), and there is an ecclesiastical council that reviews cases for couples who request annulment or divorce. Because both Copts and Muslims share a bicultural identity (maintaining heritage of their native culture within their current society; Schwartz & Unger, 2010), findings from research with Muslim American couples may be generalizable to Coptic American couples (Phinney, 2003). Research on marital satisfaction of Muslim couples indicates that Muslims report moderate to high satisfaction (Alshugairi, 2010; Chapman & Bennett Cattaneo, 2013), yet have experienced an increase in marital dissolution within the past few decades (Ghayyur, 2010).

Copts and marital satisfaction

Most research on marital satisfaction is based predominantly on the experiences of White participants (Jackson, Miller, Oka, & Henry, 2014). Little is also known about Coptic couples in comparison to White couples and other minority populations such as African-American, Hispanic, and Asian couples (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Furthermore, even though divorce seems to be decreasing in the United States (Heaton, 2002), it seems to be increasing for couples in Egypt (Shawky, El-Awady, Elsayed, & Hamadan, 2011). Although there are no specific statistics regarding the rate of divorce among Coptic couples in the United States, since divorce is generally not accepted within the Coptic community, Copts who are dissatisfied with their marriage may be likely to remain in the marriage because of their religious beliefs, and Copts who divorce may face internal consequences (e.g., shame) and external consequences (e.g., disapproval by family and religious community).

Since the area of research concerning marital outcomes with Coptic families is fairly limited, a review of a previous study will assist in learning more about factors contributing to marital outcomes with this population. To date, one study by Atta-Alla (2009) has qualitatively examined the marital satisfaction of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. Atta-Alla found that both Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives experienced increased marital satisfaction when their marriage was strongly founded on Christian faith and they viewed their marriage as a sacrament. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives valued their children more than their marital satisfaction and believed their relationship was influenced by Western ideology (as opposed to Middle Eastern ideology). Some differences between wives and husbands that emerged were that wives had higher expectations for communication, affectional involvement, and commitment to marriage, whereas husbands had higher expectations for respect and sexual intimacy. Finally, the study found that both spouses attributed marital distress to a lack of premarital preparation. Given the limited information known about Coptic couples overall, the findings of this research study could be used to help prepare, educate, and inform premarital and married couples about risk and protective factors for marital distress and dissolution.

Marital outcomes

Researchers have identified benefits of being in a stable and satisfactory relationship, such as a longer life span and reduced physical and mental health risks (Graham, Christian, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006; Kaplan & Kronick, 2006). Despite the benefits of marriage, it is currently estimated that nearly half of all marriages are predicted to end in separation or divorce (Stanley,

2015; Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Given these statistics, researchers and clinicians are interested in further exploring factors that increase marital quality and stability (Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008).

The most important contexts to examine when evaluating couple relationships have been organized into four major contexts: individual, culture, couple, and FOO (Busby, Holman & Taniguchi, 2001; Holman, 2001). The research on FOO factors as predictors of marital outcomes suggests that experiences in early life influence relationship satisfaction in adulthood (Dagley, Sandberg, Busby, & Larson, 2012). For example, children of parents who report a mutually satisfying relationship are likely to have higher satisfaction in their own couple (Amato & Booth, 2001). Further, parental behavior (e.g., effective communication, expectations) influences the way individuals make sense of the world on a macro level and the quality of relationships during childhood on a micro level, which in turn are associated with subsequent relationship quality during adulthood (Dattilio, 2006; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003).

FOO has significant influence on marital adjustment among couples (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000), particularly for wives more than husbands (Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003). In addition, parents' marital quality and stability are predictive of their children's marital quality and stability (Amato, 2001). For instance, women of divorced families are more likely to have increased marital dissatisfaction than women from intact families (Feng, Giarrusso, Bengtson, & Frye, 1999; Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Children of divorced parents also show slightly less relationship commitment than children of intact parents (Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011). Poor parental marital quality also tends to be associated with poor marital quality among their children (Amato, 2001). Additionally, parents who are not divorced but have high-conflict intact marriages may also have negative effects on their children, such as lower emotional well-being, poor relationship skills, and poor problem-solving skills (Amato, 2000). Parental pressure and over-involvement also decrease marital satisfaction among adult children (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie 2004). Furthermore, within the context of couple relationships, each partner brings expectations based on FOO experiences such as the status of parents' relationship, quality of relationship with parents, and childhood experiences into the couple relationship.

Although it is widely accepted that individuals, to varying degrees, are influenced by their FOO (Amato, 1996, Dattilio, 2006; Halford et al., 2003; Holman, 2001), research examining the link between FOO experiences and marital outcomes has been based on predominately White samples and has yielded inconsistent results (Botha, Van den Berg, & Venter 2009; Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003). Comparatively scant literature has examined the influence of FOO experiences on marital outcomes among ethnic and

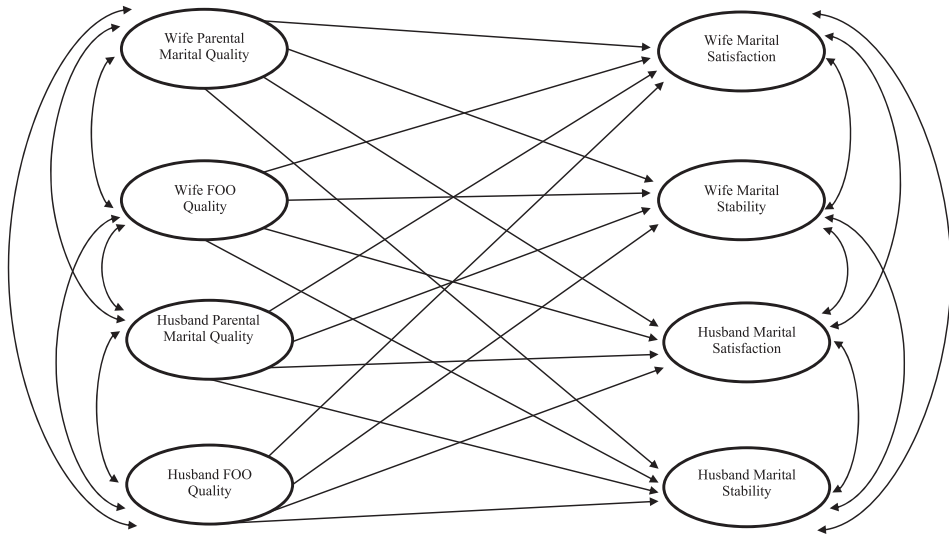


Figure 1. Actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) for the associations between parental marital quality and family-of-origin (FOO) quality with marital satisfaction and marital stability for wives and husbands.

religious minorities from collectivist cultures such as Copts. Given the absence of research on the connection between FOO experiences and marital outcomes among Copts, perhaps FOO plays an even greater role in marital satisfaction and stability because Copts tend to be family-centric.

Statement of the problem

Marriage is perceived as the most important human relationship (Larson & Holman, 1994) and traditionally a means of establishing a family (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1987). The majority of existing research on marital outcomes explores primarily straight, college-educated, middle socioeconomic status (SES), White couples without considering multiple cultural and contextual factors (Usita & Poulsen, 2003). Furthermore, to date, only one qualitative study on Coptic couples has been conducted (i.e., Atta-Alla, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to quantitatively identify the FOO factors that predict marital outcomes among Coptic Egyptian-American couples. The results of this study may provide both clinicians and clergy a better understanding of the familial factors associated with Coptic couple marital outcomes.

Research questions

Figure 1 presents the APIM path diagram used in this study. The research questions were as follows (FOO experience includes both parental marital

quality and FOO quality latent variables and marital outcomes includes both marital satisfaction and marital stability latent variables): Among married Copts, what is the association between (a) wife FOO experience and wife marital outcomes, (b) wife FOO experience and husband marital outcomes, (c) husband FOO experience and husband marital outcomes, and (d) husband FOO experience and wife marital outcomes?

Method

Participants

We used nonprobability purposive sampling in this research study, as it was the most feasible way of contacting potential participants who were likely to meet inclusion criteria (Glickens, 2003). We established the following inclusion criteria for the sample of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American couples: Each participant had to (a) have parents who were both born in Egypt to ensure participants came from an Egyptian FOO, (b) be married in the Coptic Church, (c) be in a first-time marriage, (d) reside in the United States, (e) be proficient in the English language, as the study questionnaire was only made available in English, and (f) have access to a computer or smartphone and the Internet to complete the questionnaire. In addition, both spouses had to agree to participate in this study.

In an effort to obtain a more geographically diverse sample, participants were recruited from various regions of the United States through the assistance of Coptic clergy members who informed their congregants about this study by way of church announcements, posted flyers, and parish listservs (for more details, see Procedures section). Of the 1,653 respondents, 19 individuals did not provide informed consent, 19 individuals were ineligible because they were not married in the Coptic Orthodox Church, 43 individuals were ineligible because they were not proficient in the English language, 87 individuals were ineligible because they were not born of Egyptian parents, 11 individuals were ineligible because their current marriage was not their first marriage, 54 individuals were ineligible because they did not reside in the United States, and 461 completed individual responses were excluded because their partner did not complete the questionnaire. Furthermore, responses were set to be included in analysis only if a threshold of responses were completed (i.e., included only if 3 out of 4 and 5 out of 7 items were answered on a specific scale). The final data set consisted of 255 couples who met inclusion criteria.

The sample ($N = 510$) consisted of 255 husbands and 255 wives, with an average age of 39.8 years ($SD = 13.2$) for husbands and 35.9 years ($SD = 12.1$) for wives. The respondents reported an average length of

marriage of 14.8 years ($SD = 12.9$), with a mean age at marriage of 29.0 years ($SD = 4.1$) for husbands and 25.2 years ($SD = 3.6$) for wives. The average number of children reported was 1.5 ($SD = 1.1$). The participants were highly educated, with 94% of the husbands and 95% of the wives having completed a bachelor's degree (60% of husbands and 53% of wives had completed a graduate degree). Overall, the participants had high income levels, with 40% of husbands and 28% of wives reporting a pretax personal yearly gross income between \$100,000 and \$200,000, and 20% of husbands and 14% of wives reporting a pretax personal yearly gross income of more than \$200,000.

Measures

The RELATionship questionnaire (RELATE) is a multiscale instrument that comprehensively assesses relationships by examining factors related to marital outcomes (www.relate-institute.org). RELATE was initially developed in 1979 by the Marriage Study Consortium to further the study of adult romantic relationships and has subsequently undergone several revisions (Busby & Loyer-Carlson, 2003). The primary relationship areas assessed in RELATE are individual factors (e.g., gender, personality traits, beliefs, attitudes), couple factors (e.g., communication, conflict, sexual intimacy), FOO factors (e.g., parental marital relationship, parent-child relationship, family stressors), and contextual factors (e.g., race, religion, socioeconomic status; Busby et al., 2001). The four RELATE scales used for this study (i.e., Parent's Marriage Scale, Family Quality Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, and Relationship Stability Scale) have established sound psychometric properties (e.g., internal consistency, test-retest reliability, construct validity; Busby et al., 2001).

Parental marital quality

The Parent's Marriage Scale consists of three Likert-scaled items (i.e., "My father was happy in his marriage," "My mother was happy in her marriage," and "I would like my marriage to be like my parents' marriage") scored as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *depends*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*, such that higher scores indicated higher happiness in parent's marriage. The established internal reliability for the scale is .91; the internal reliability for the sample was .94.

FOO quality

The Family Quality Scale consists of four Likert-scaled items (i.e., "From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are safe,

secure, rewarding, worth being in, and a source of comfort”; “From what I experienced in my family, I think family relationships are confusing, unfair, anxiety provoking, inconsistent and unpredictable”; “We had a loving atmosphere in our family”; and “All things considered, my childhood years were happy”) scored as follows: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *depends*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree* (with one item was reverse coded), such that higher scores indicated higher FOO quality. The established internal reliability for the scale is .86; the internal reliability for the sample was .84.

Marital satisfaction

The Relationship Satisfaction Scale consists of seven Likert-scaled items (e.g., “In your relationship, how satisfied are you with the following: the physical intimacy you experience, the love you experience, how conflicts are resolved, the amount of relationship quality you experience, the amount of time you have together, the quality of your communication, your overall relationship with your partner”) scored as follows: 1 = *very dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *satisfied*, and 5 = *very satisfied*, such that higher scores indicated higher levels of relationship satisfaction. The established internal reliability for the scale is .88; the internal reliability for the sample was .91.

Marital stability

The Relationship Stability Scale consists of three Likert-scaled items (i.e., “How often have you thought your marriage might be in trouble,” “How often have you and your partner discussed ending your relationship,” “How often have you broken up or separated and then gotten back together”) scored as follows: 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *very often* (all items were reverse coded), such that higher scores indicated higher levels of relationship stability. The established internal reliability for the scale is .81; the internal reliability for the sample was .78.

Procedures

We obtained institutional review board approval prior to collecting data. Coptic church leadership circulated a recruitment flyer about participating in our study across the United States through (a) church services in which couples would likely be present (e.g., liturgical services, marital meetings, family conventions) and (b) church e-mail listservs. Interested potential participants were invited to follow a link on the flyer to determine

eligibility prior to completing the questionnaire (see inclusion criteria). Potential participants who did not meet eligibility criteria were directed to a screen that informed them that although they were ineligible to participate in the study, they could complete the full version of RELATE online for a fee of \$20 per person if they were interested. Potential participants who met eligibility criteria were directed to read and agree to the informed consent; participants who provided informed consent were invited to take the questionnaire online. In an effort to increase the response rate, eligible participants were informed that upon completion of the survey, they could e-mail the researcher to (a) receive a coupon that would allow them to complete the full version of RELATE online for free and (b) be entered in a raffle to win one of twenty \$20 gift cards (limited to one per couple) that would be emailed to the participants after data collection was completed and winners were selected. Participants completed the questionnaire individually, answering questions related to themselves, romantic partners, family, and their marital relationship. Participants did not have a time limit for completing the survey.

Analysis

We used APIM to answer our research questions about relationships between theoretical constructs (represented by latent factors) by analyzing multiple independent variables and dependent variables simultaneously (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Dyadic data statistical analyses were conducted using Mplus version 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015).

Results

Bivariate correlations between the main variables (Table 1) indicated that predictor variables correlated in the expected directions with other predictor variables and outcome variables. Bivariate correlations between the main variables and collected continuous demographic variables (i.e., spouse age, length of marriage, and number of children) were conducted to determine whether any of the demographic variables should be included as control variables; because none of the continuous demographic variables were correlated with two or more main variables, no control variables were included in the APIM (Falconier, 2013). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to determine the factor loadings for the latent variables (Table 2). Skewness statistic values indicated that most of the scales were nonnormal (Table 1). The kurtosis for wife parental marital quality and husband marital satisfaction indicated a platykurtic trend, whereas the kurtosis for both husband and wife marital stability and husband FOO

Table 1. Family of origin (FOO) experience variables and marital outcome variables: correlations and descriptive statistics ($N = 255$ couples).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Wife parental marital quality	—							
Husband parental marital quality	.22***	—						
Wife FOO quality	.75***	.26***	—					
Husband FOO quality	.13*	.65***	.22***	—				
Wife marital satisfaction	.09	.11	.14*	.18**	—			
Husband marital satisfaction	.07	.11	.11	.25***	.53***	—		
Wife marital stability	.09	.19**	.16*	.23***	.69***	.48***	—	
Husband marital stability	.08	.22**	.16*	.34***	.49***	.52***	.67***	—
M	10.43	10.63	16.50	16.66	26.84	27.21	13.40	13.61
SD	3.58	3.32	3.31	2.94	6.13	5.41	1.92	1.75
Range	3–15	3–15	4–20	4–20	7–35	7–35	3–15	3–15
α	.94	.93	.85	.82	.92	.90	.76	.79
Skewness	-2.94	-3.40	-6.14	-7.25	-5.69	-4.12	-10.39	-10.78
Kurtosis	-2.60	-1.71	0.30	5.39	1.41	-2.73	7.63	8.55

Note. Skewness measures the asymmetry of a distribution. A value of zero denotes a normal symmetrical distribution, whereas in an asymmetrical distribution, a positive sign denotes a tail skewed toward the right and a negative sign indicates a tail skewed toward the left. Skewness statistic values greater or less than the absolute value of 3 indicate nonnormality (Kline, 2005). Kurtosis measures the peak of the distribution. A value of zero denotes a normal distribution; positive values indicate leptokurtic kurtosis and negative values indicate platykurtic kurtosis (Kline, 2005).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Standardized factor loadings for latent variables ($N = 255$ couples).

Latent variable	Wives				Husbands			
	β	SE	p	S_e^2	β	SE	p	S_e^2
Parental marital quality								
Item 1	.97	0.01	.000	.06	.96	0.01	.000	.07
Item 2	.85	0.02	.000	.27	.83	0.04	.000	.31
Item 3	.96	0.01	.000	.09	.92	0.02	.000	.15
FOO quality								
Item 1	.78	0.05	.000	.39	.73	0.06	.000	.47
Item 2	.76	0.05	.000	.42	.58	0.06	.000	.67
Item 3	.78	0.04	.000	.39	.83	0.04	.000	.31
Item 4	.71	0.05	.000	.50	.69	0.05	.000	.52
Marital satisfaction								
Item 1	.63	0.05	.000	.61	.67	0.04	.000	.55
Item 2	.84	0.03	.000	.29	.82	0.03	.000	.32
Item 3	.82	0.03	.000	.33	.64	0.05	.000	.59
Item 4	.81	0.03	.000	.35	.81	0.03	.000	.35
Item 5	.70	0.04	.000	.50	.65	0.04	.000	.58
Item 6	.84	0.02	.000	.29	.79	0.04	.000	.38
Item 7	.89	0.02	.000	.21	.92	0.02	.000	.15
Marital stability								
Item 1	.85	0.03	.000	.27	.79	0.04	.000	.37
Item 2	.80	0.04	.000	.36	.83	0.06	.000	.31
Item 3	.59	0.07	.000	.65	.67	0.07	.000	.55

Note. Factor loadings are statistical estimates of direct effects (Kline, 2005). β , standardized estimates; SE , standard error; p , two-tailed significance test value; S_e^2 , error variance.

quality indicated a leptokurtic trend. Since normality testing indicated non-normal data, maximum likelihood robust (MLR) estimation was used to test the APIM and estimate model fit.

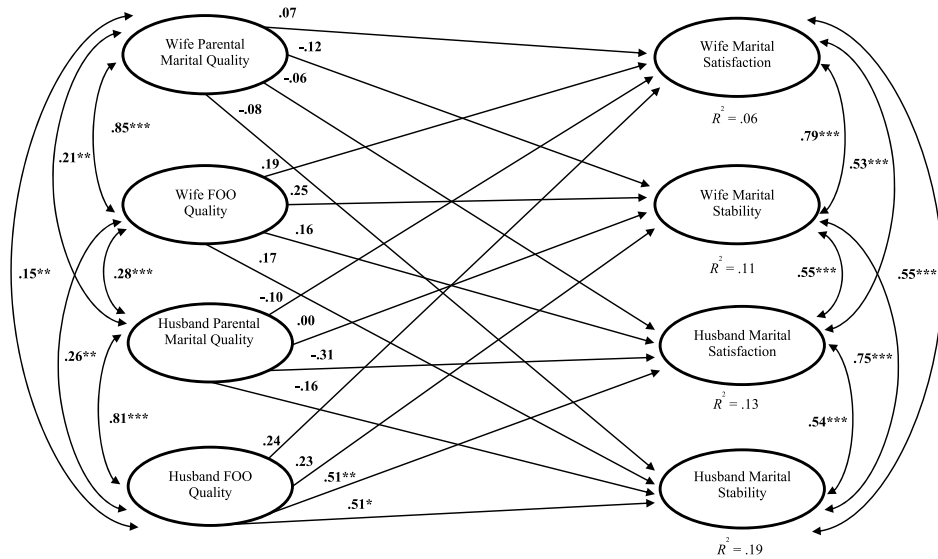


Figure 2. Actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) with standardized path coefficients between parental marital quality and family-of-origin (FOO) quality with marital satisfaction and marital stability for wives and husbands. Factor loadings and error covariances were omitted for parsimony. R^2 = the amount of variance accounted for in endogenous variables. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Model fit indices were used to assess the fit between the actual data and the proposed structural model (Figure 1; Hancock & Mueller, 2013). All model fit indices were within acceptable limits (Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2006) except for the chi-squared test ($\chi^2 = 691.86$, $df = 473$, $p = .000$); given that all of the other indicators of model fit were within acceptable limits, it is likely that the chi-squared test was significant due to the size of the sample (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). The comparative fit index (CFI) was .96 and the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) was .95 (values equal to or greater than .95 are considered acceptable). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was .05 (values equal or less than .08 are considered acceptable) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was .04 (90% confidence interval [CI] = .04, .05; values equal to or less than .06 are considered acceptable). Results of the APIM are presented in Figure 2.

The first research question concerned whether wife parental marital quality predicted wife and husband marital outcomes. Results revealed a non-significant relationship between wife parental marital quality and both wife marital satisfaction ($\beta = -.07$, $SE = .17$, $p = .670$) and husband marital satisfaction ($\beta = -.08$, $SE = .16$, $p = .625$). Results also revealed a nonsignificant relationship between wife parental marital quality and both wife marital stability ($\beta = -.12$, $SE = .16$, $p = .459$) and husband marital stability ($\beta = -.08$, $SE = .17$, $p = .623$).

The second research question concerned whether wife FOO quality predicted wife and husband marital outcomes. Results revealed a nonsignificant relationship between wife FOO quality and both wife marital satisfaction ($\beta = .19$, $SE = .19$, $p = .320$) and husband marital satisfaction ($\beta = .15$, $p = .39$). Results also revealed a nonsignificant relationship between wife FOO quality and both wife marital stability ($\beta = .26$, $p = .13$) and husband marital stability ($\beta = .16$, $SE = .19$, $p = .379$).

The third research question concerned whether husband parental marital quality predicted wife and husband marital outcomes. Results revealed a nonsignificant relationship between husband parental marital quality and both husband marital satisfaction ($\beta = -.31$, $SE = .18$, $p = .089$) and wife marital satisfaction ($\beta = -.10$, $SE = .13$, $p = .442$). Results also revealed a nonsignificant relationship between husband parental marital quality and both husband marital stability ($\beta = -.16$, $SE = .22$, $p = .474$) and wife marital stability ($\beta = .00$, $SE = .15$, $p = .985$).

The fourth research question concerned whether husband FOO quality predicted wife and husband marital outcomes. Results revealed a nonsignificant relationship between husband FOO quality and both wife marital satisfaction ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .17$, $p = .163$) and wife marital stability ($\beta = .23$, $SE = .16$, $p = .137$). Results revealed large positive effects between husband FOO quality and both husband marital satisfaction ($\beta = .51$, $SE = .18$, $p = .005$) and marital stability ($\beta = .51$, $SE = .22$, $p = .022$).

Discussion

The results from the current study indicated parental marital quality was not a good predictor of marital outcomes (i.e., the endogenous variables marital satisfaction and marital stability) among Coptic Egyptian-American couples. FOO quality, however, did predict marital outcomes for Coptic husbands, but not wives. Said differently, Coptic husbands who reported higher quality experiences within their FOO were significantly more likely to report being in more satisfying and stable marital relationships. This finding is consistent with research that links FOO factors to romantic relationship outcomes among adult children from collectivist cultures (Wu et al., 2010). For instance, using a sample of Iranian couples, Ghoroghi, Hassan, and Baba (2012) found that compared to women, men were significantly more likely to report that their FOO experiences influenced their marital experiences (i.e., marital adjustment). The current findings suggest that the perceptions Coptic husbands have about their FOO may leave a lasting imprint on their romantic relationships. Thus, it appears that FOO experiences have long-term relational implications for Coptic husbands.

Findings linking FOO quality to marital outcomes did not extend to Coptic wives. More specifically, FOO quality was not predictive of Coptic wives' marital satisfaction or marital stability. A possible explanation for why there was no link between Coptic wives' FOO experience and their marital outcomes may be because Coptic wives are influenced by individuals that include, but are not limited to, their FOO. These extended relationships may give women a more multifaceted understanding of relationships. Therefore, they may use their FOO experiences to inform, but not define, their marital experiences. For example, literature suggests that Coptic women have broader networks, including God, friends, and mentors in their community (Agaibi, 2014). Thus, to predict and understand Coptic wives' marital quality and stability, researchers should look beyond the quality of Coptic wives' experiences within their FOO. Instead, social networks and other ecological determinants may be better indicators of marital outcomes for Coptic wives. Another explanation for the findings may be that there is more demand from society and family on women to prioritize their spousal responsibilities and identity above everything else. Such demands may psychologically force them to leave behind ideas about their FOO and instead adopt influences embedded in the present, within their partners' FOO, and within their marriage.

Despite finding some gender differences in this study, a more comprehensive examination of the results suggest that FOO dynamics have little influence on marital outcomes among Coptic Egyptian-American couples. What this may suggest is that the relationships between FOO and couples' outcomes is more complex than otherwise suggested in literature based on collectivist cultures (Bender & Castro, 2000). Not unlike other families who have immigrated to the United States from collectivist societies (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), many Coptic American couples may attempt to maintain a bicultural identity (Van Dijk & Botros, 2009). For instance, couples linked to collectivist communities often shift between adopting values, beliefs, and practices closely related to their FOO and adopting values, beliefs, and practices linked to their current social network (i.e., friends, partners, coworkers, social media). This may, in part, also explain why FOO quality appears to have little influence on Coptic Egyptian-American marital outcomes.

Caution is warranted when interpreting these results. What these results do not suggest is that FOO experiences are not important or that family does not play a central role among Coptic Egyptian-American couples and other couples from collectivist cultures. Although not examined in this study, research suggests that FOO is, in fact, important to couples from collectivist cultures. For instance, FOO plays a significant role in mate selection (Lev-Wiesel & Al-Krenawi, 1999; Manohar, 2008). Furthermore,

conflict with and interference from FOO members, as well as considerable geographic distance from FOO, can influence couples' sense of marital satisfaction and stability (Lev-Wiesel & Al-Krenawi, 1999; Wu et al., 2010). Moreover, studies from collectivist cultures suggest that the emotional and instrumental support offered by FOO may ultimately influence their marital well-being (Bender & Castro, 2000). In sum, FOO may influence marital onset and outcomes in some but not in all regards. Although previous research suggests direct input and actions from FOO influence marital outcomes, findings for this study suggest that perceptions among Coptic Egyptian-Americans about the quality of their parents' marriage do not significantly influence their marital outcomes; additionally, the quality of their FOO does not significantly influence wives' marital outcomes, yet does influence husbands' marital outcomes. Therefore, it appears that in the context of marital outcomes among couples from collectivist cultures, actions from FOO speak louder than thoughts about FOO experiences.

Limitations

The present study had several limitations. The sample consisted predominately of college-educated Copts with high SES; therefore, the results should be interpreted cautiously in terms of extrapolation to couples with demographic characteristics other than those reflected in this sample. Despite some overlap due to cultural similarities, the religious and ethnic sample homogeneity limits generalization of findings to other Arab or Middle Eastern populations. Furthermore, exploratory analyses indicated collinearity between the parental marital quality scale and the FOO quality scale, which suggests that the two scales possibly measured the same construct. Despite attempts to manage collinearity through efforts such as combining the two scales into one scale, these attempts were not successful in improving model fit. In addition, because the RELATE scales used in this study have not been validated with Coptic couples, construct bias may have affected the measurement of FOO experience and marital outcomes among Copts. Relatedly, we did not measure degree of acculturation to non-Coptic values or the degree of patriarchal hierarchy endorsement, which may have been important variables to control for in our analyses.

Clinical implications

In addition to the stigma associated with seeking social support, there is heavy reliance on religion, spirituality, and traditions to address life issues among Copts (Bryant-Davis & Alejandre, 2014). To mitigate the stigma, leaders in the church community and clinicians in the larger community

should build considerable rapport and exercise culturally sensitive approaches with those seeking help for their relationship. For example, Coptic leaders and clinicians may emphasize the importance of Coptic husband FOO experiences as predictors of Coptic husband marital outcomes in a premarital counseling or one-on-one setting. Coptic leaders may also utilize a spiritual lens to help male spouses understand and accept their FOO experiences by practicing prayer, asking for forgiveness, reconciling, and seeking counsel.

Bowen Family Systems (BFS) therapy may be an appropriate fit for working with Coptic couples. With the help of a culturally competent clinician, the basic tenets and theoretical framework from BFS can be applied in a way that is respectful to Coptic couples. Emphasis on the assessment of FOO processes may help Coptic husbands gain insight about how those processes influence interactions in their marital relationships. For example, an intervention unique to BFS therapy is coming to terms with, or managing, FOO experiences, which assists the individual in working through past experiences and learning to be at peace with them. Partners who come to terms with their FOO experience are more likely to have higher marital satisfaction than partners who did not come to terms with their FOO experience (Martinson, Holman, Larson, & Jackson, 2010). Clinicians using a BFS therapy approach may also utilize genogram work to increase partners' awareness about their own FOO experience and their partner's FOO experience.

Conversely, clergy and clinicians should exercise caution when adopting a FOO framework to work with Coptic wives in couples therapy. Rather than focus on their FOO, clergy and clinicians should carefully assess for intrapersonal, societal, and marital factors that may influence wives' marital quality and stability.

Future research implications

Given the homogeneous nature of our sample, further research is needed to better understand FOO experiences on marital outcomes across a more heterogeneous Coptic population. Future research can compare FOO experiences of more diverse samples by including couples that are interethnic (i.e., one partner is Egyptian and one partner is non-Egyptian) and interfaith (i.e., one partner is Coptic and one partner is not Coptic). Additionally, future studies can continue to explore how Copts compare to nationally representative samples in terms of similarities and differences of other predictors contributing to marital outcomes.

Although it was not within the scope of this study to analyze the extent or impact of the role of religion and the role of culture as mediators or

moderators between FOO and marital outcomes, future research should attempt to investigate the overlap between religious, ethnic, and cultural dimensions with Arab and Middle Eastern communities. Additional exploration within these intersecting factors may be useful in identifying the extent to which the religious beliefs of Copts impact their marital relationships. To expand on this study, researchers should also carefully examine how family structural systems (i.e., patriarchal hierarchies) are linked to marital outcomes among Coptic couples. Furthermore, researchers should also identify factors that predict Coptic wives' marital outcomes. Such findings may help Coptic couples, clergy, and clinicians identify protective and risk factors that may influence Coptic marriages.

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ORCID

Jeffrey B. Jackson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9756-7841>

Sesen Negash  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1177-9753>

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