



The Association Between Immigration Status and Relational Happiness

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Introduction

- Immigrant populations may play a foundational role in exploring and understanding marriage. For instance, there exists the unexplained “nuptial paradox” in which the marriage and divorce rates of Hispanics, a socioeconomically disadvantaged group, align with those of non-Hispanic Whites, a historically privileged one (McNamee, 2018)
- Evidence for whether immigration status is related to marital happiness is mixed.
 - A study found that foreign-born individuals were significantly less likely to report being “extremely happy” in their marriages (Mitchell, 2010).
 - Research on intermarriages found that decreased marital happiness was correlated with socioeconomic challenges (Choi & Cheung, 2017).
 - Another study found that immigrant’s cultural assimilation was related to higher satisfaction (Gawron & Carol, 2023).
- Immigration status’ effect on marital happiness may be affected by other cultural components such as age, gender, and religiosity (Mitchell, 2010).

Methods

Sample

- Adults who reported being married or in a cohabiting relationship (n=2350) were drawn from the 2021 General Social Survey (GSS)
- GSS is a national sample of civilian, non-institutionalized adults in the U.S. The 2021 edition was under representative of Blacks.

Measures

- Immigration Status was measured with the question “Were you born in this country?”
- Connection to immigration was created by collapsing responses to the question “How many [of your grandparents] were born outside of the U.S.?”(range 0-4).
- Relationship Happiness individuals was measured by the question “Would you describe your relationship...as very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?” “Very happy” was coded 1. “Pretty happy” or “not too happy” was coded 0.

Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between immigration status and marital or cohabitory happiness?
- Does a relationship between immigration status and marital happiness persists in those who are not immigrants but have grandparents who are?

Results

Bivariate

- A chi-square test of independence revealed that among adults in married or cohabiting relationships, immigrants were likely to say that they were “very happy” with their relationship compared to those born in the U.S. ($p=.7824$) (Figure 1).
- A chi-square test of independence revealed that among adults in married or cohabiting relationships, individuals with grandparents who were immigrants were no more likely to say that they were “very happy” with their relationship compared to those whose grandparents were all U.S born ($p=.6988$).

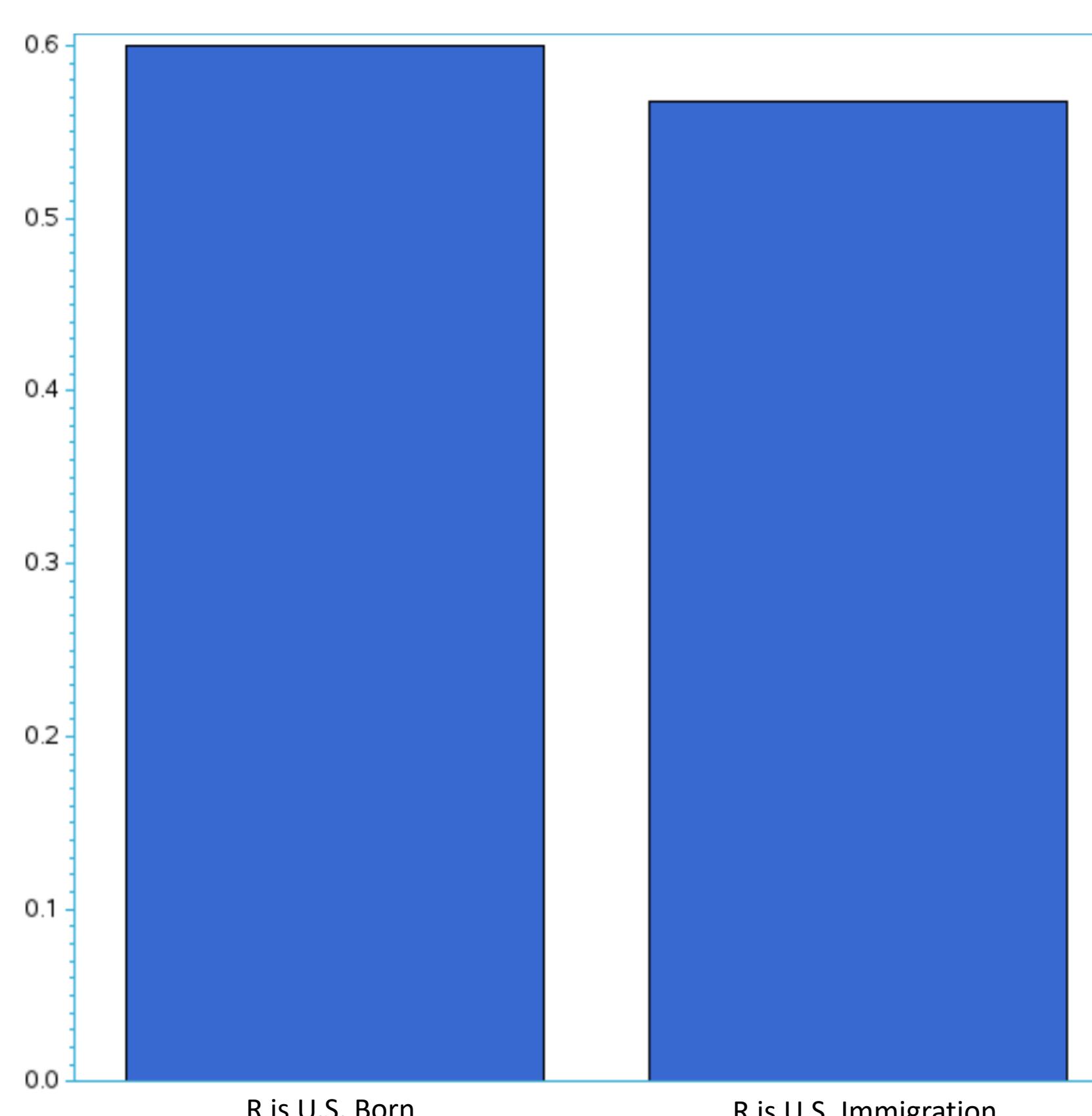


Figure 1. Rate of Being “Very Happy” with Relationship by Immigration Status among Married and Cohabiting Adults

Multivariate

- Logistic Regression determined that while a connection to immigration (O.R. 1.026, CI 0.860-1.225) was not significantly associated with individuals’ marital happiness, individuals’ gender (O.R. 1.318, CI: 1.103-1.574, $p=0.0023$) was positively associated with relational happiness, even when controlling for age and religiosity.

Multivariate (cont.)

- Likewise, beliefs about extramarital sex (O.R. 1.287, CI: 1.120-1.478) were significantly associated with relational happiness after controlling for religiosity, age, and gender. In particular, the odds of being “very happy” with their relationship were expected to increase by a factor of 1.3 as beliefs about extramarital sex shifted from “always wrong” (score of 1) to “not at all wrong,” (score of 4), holding all other variables fixed.
- It appeared that individuals’ religiosity (O.R. 1.160, CI: 1.070-1.257, $p=.0003$) was significantly associated with relational happiness (Figure 2). But beliefs about extramarital sex turned out to be a cofounder. After controlling for beliefs about extramarital sex, individuals’ religiosity (O.R. 1.078, CI: 0.969-1.200, $p=0.1680$) were no longer significantly associated with marital happiness.
- Finally, individuals’ age (O.R. 0.999, CI: 0.994-1.005, $p=0.7632$) was not significantly associated with relational happiness.

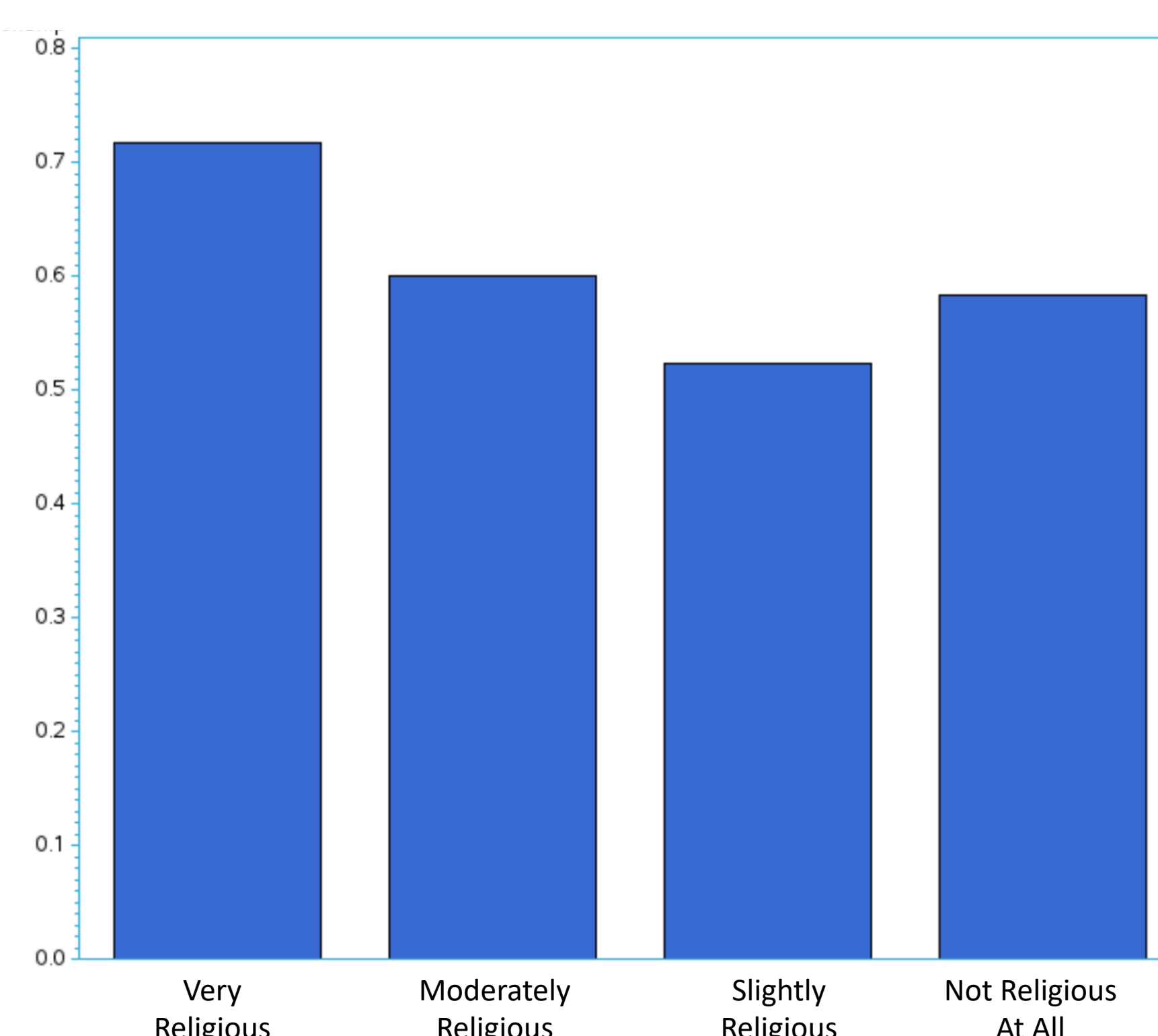


Figure 2. Rate of Being “Very Happy” with Relationship by Religiosity among Married and Cohabiting Adults

Discussion

- Immigration Status and Connection with Immigration was not significantly associated with marital or cohabitory happiness.
- However, Individuals’ relational happiness was positively correlated with gender and beliefs about extramarital sex. As beliefs about extramarital sex shifted to “not at all wrong,” relational happiness increased. Also, male individuals were significantly more likely to say that they were “very happy” with their relationship.
- Since the data was cross-sectional further research is needed to determine how relational happiness may develop over time and in conjunction with the acculturation process.
- One limitation of the study is that there was no information about individuals’ partners. Therefore, further research is needed to determine how type of partner may affect relational happiness.
- Additional research is also needed to examine the role the nuptial paradox may play in marital and relational happiness.

Choi, S. Y. P., & Cheung, A. K.-L. (2017). Dissimilar and Disadvantaged: Age Discrepancy, Financial Stress, and Marital Conflict in Cross-Border Marriages. *Journal of family issues*, 38(18), 2521-2544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X16653436>

Gawron, A., & Carol, S. (2023). Immigrants’ Life Satisfaction in Intermarriages with Natives: A Family Life Course Perspective. *The International migration review*, 57(OnlineFirst), 1069--.. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221133320>

Mitchell, B. A. (2010). Midlife Marital Happiness and Ethnic Culture: A Life Course Perspective. *Journal of comparative family studies*, 41(1), 167-183. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.41.1.167>

McNamee, C. B. (2018). White and Latino Remarriage Differences in the United States: A Case for Moving Beyond the Catholic Assumption. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 49(2), 231-250. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.49.2.231>