

## “Whose Marriage is this?” - Mate Selection Patterns in Modern Orthodox Society in Israel: A Dialogue between Two Cultural Systems

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Rec date: Mar 26, 2015; Acc date: May 07, 2015; Pub date: May 13, 2015

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### Abstract

In modern societies, mate selection process has received extensive attention in the theoretical and research literature. Researchers were primarily concentrated in identifying the parameters that motivate and influence the choice of partner, as similarity, mutual benefits, and emotional aspects. Little attention, however, was given to the social and cultural context under which the selection process takes place. The present study attempted to explore this process among Modern Orthodox couples in Israel, as they combine two simultaneous cultural systems; modern and traditional. 36 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with couples during their first year of marriage. The analysis revealed several mate selection styles, which were classified into two main groups: the "cognitive selectors" and the "emotional selectors". Both groups relate to their social context as a main factor in their selection process and outcome. The study findings throw light on the cultural complexity and duality of parallel value systems.

**Keywords** Israel; Mate selection patterns; Modern- orthodox; Newlywed; Qualitative

### Introduction

In modern societies, mate selection is a familiar, accepted process, which has received extensive attention in the theoretical and research literature. Researchers have been primarily concerned with what motivates and influences mate selection and with the variables that affect the choice of partner. Based on different theories and models, scholars attempted to characterize the physical, emotional and cognitive components involved in the process, as well as social processes that may be involved. Little attention, however, was given to the social and cultural context under which the selection process takes place. The present study attempted to explore this process among Modern Orthodox couples in Israel, as they combine two simultaneous cultural systems; modern and traditional.

### Mate Selection

Mate selection as driven from sole physical and reproductive needs has been suggested based on the evolutionary approach. It claims that mate selection is to be directly motivated by the desire and/or need to produce offspring with high survival ability [1,2]. Similarly, studies in recent years have shown that genetic similarity or difference is a factor involved in mate selection [3,4]. The scientific development in gene research provides researchers with detailed information regarding the genetic profile of couples and enables an examination of the mate selection process based also on these data. Thus, for example, in a study of three population groups, European-American, Mexican, and African, the first two groups were found to have a pattern of skin-related genetic similarity or difference, such as a tendency to pigmentation, whereas in the African population group, genetic similarity was found in morphogenetic traits related to growth and height in adulthood. The researchers addressed the fact that selection

processes based on genetic similarity or difference are culture-dependent and vary from one population group to another. Thus, for the same gene, a tendency to similarity can be seen in one group and a tendency to difference in another [4]. In addition, researchers dealing with mate selection from the biological and genetic perspective have not only investigated the topic among couples, but have also investigated parents' influence on their offspring in the mate selection process [5,6]. It was found, for example that parents tended to prefer in-laws with similar traits to their children, and considered some of these similarity traits to have greater value than others [7].

Studies grounded in psychodynamic theories associated mate selection with the individual's need to reproduce the early parent-child relationship [8-11]. Similarity and complementarity theories assumed that individuals would choose a partner with similar viewpoints, values and outlooks to their own and would therefore prefer partners with similar religion, education and family background variables [12]. These and other theories painted a comprehensive picture of the personal and interpersonal variables that are at work when choosing a marriage partner, and served as a basis for studying the beginnings of romantic relationships and mate selection [13].

By the beginning of the 1980s, researchers were already beginning to criticize these models and theories, claiming that they perceived mate selection as a one-time, static event that takes place within the individual's intrapersonal space. They began to observe the choice of partner as composed of a sequence of events and occurrences. Murstien [12] developed a mate selection model in which couples proceed through three stages: the stimulus, value and role. The mutual assessment of the partners' characteristics that are relevant at each stage determines whether or not they will move on to the next stage. Backman [14] developed a four-stage model from the initial acquaintance phase to the marriage itself: exploration, bargaining, commitment and institutionalization. These models were also criticized for lack of acknowledgment that external forces are involved in mate selection, such as the couple's social and family systems or

significant events in their lives. In the mid-1980s, multidimensional models began to emerge, which made room for the influence of social systems and the physical environment on the choice of partner. Relationships were perceived not only as a fusion of the couple's emotional, social or physical characteristics, but also as an experience interacting with different systems [15,16].

Studies by Surra and colleagues [17-19] were also innovative in the way that they examined mate selection within a wider context. Their findings led to the development of the interpersonal process model, which, for the first time, gave genuine space to the social variable as one of the components considered when choosing a partner. These studies mapped the partners' subjective reasons for developing a relationship, from the first meeting until the wedding, but failed to address the cultural aspects of mate selection, and were focused on contemporary North American society.

Only a few studies have addressed the couple's cultural and social context as a factor in the choice of marital partner. Most of these studies were conducted in societies in transition from traditionalism to modernism, or vice versa, among immigrant populations who had migrated from traditional societies to Western countries. One study was carried out in Taiwan by Chang and Chan [20], who attempted to reconstruct the study by Surra et al. [19], to compare the reasons for marriage in North American society with the reasons for marriage among the Chinese population in Taiwan, which is undergoing a transition from traditionalism to modernism. In a different study that dealt with courtship and mate selection in Chinese society, Zhang and Kline [21] attempted to identify and examine the impact of the social and family systems on the process of choosing a partner. The researchers compared Chinese and North American study participants and found Chinese mate selection to be more heavily influenced by the social network, and to rely more on the opinions of friends and family regarding the chosen partner rather than on the individual's own opinion.

Various studies examined patterns of courtship and mate selection among the young second-generation immigrant population [22-26]. These studies revealed, for example, that young Indians had to maneuver between two cultural systems—the traditional and the modern—and had different ways of coping with their own expectations of choosing a marriage partner for themselves versus the society's and family's expectations that this choice would be made by their parents. Manohar [22] found that this cultural dualism and the simultaneous commitment to two value systems led young Indians to manage the courtship process and the choice of marital partner in secret, away from their parents' gaze, and thus avoided parental judgments and criticism as well as the pressure to marry. A different study [23] revealed that young Indians represented different mate selection patterns: traditionalist, rebellious and negotiating. The most prevalent were the negotiators, who chose their partner independently, but considered their parents' support and consent as an important condition for marriage.

In a recently published qualitative study [27], which explored patterns of mate selection among second-generation immigrants to the USA from different ethnic groups, it was found that the choice of marital partner does not take place in a vacuum. The parents' opinion about an appropriate partner, the length of time the youngsters and their families had been in the USA, the nature of the parents' absorption and assimilation process, among other things, all influenced and shaped the process of courtship and mate selection.

Furthering this trend and out of the perception that a dialogue exists in different cultural groups between the patterns of mate selection and the local society's values and culture, the present study attempted to explore this process among Modern Orthodox Jewish couples in Israel. This study population is unique in that its members are born into a bicultural environment, resulting in a unique identity that differentiates them from other groups in Israeli society. The present study was targeted to explore how mate selection is done in this community and how this process interacts with the bicultural context of the participants.

## Method

### Sampling

The study was based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 36 participants, 18 Modern Orthodox couples, who were married for the first time and had no children. The sampling procedure was based on two principles: the qualification principle, which seeks participants who are most compatible with the aims of the study; and the completeness/integrity principle, which seeks to ensure that the data collected are comprehensive and reflect the participants' full elaboration of their experiences. Based on a purposive (criterion-based) sampling method, two main criteria were used to select participants: couples who represented mainstream Modern Orthodox society in terms of Jewish education, dress codes and codes of religious behavior; and couples who had been married between four months and one year. An attempt was also made to locate couples with varied demographic characteristics, including age, ethnic origin, place of residence and education.

### Participants

The Modern Orthodox population is among five groups of Jewish Israelis distinguished by degree of self-reported religious observance as recorded in Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics [28]. At one end of the spectrum are the Ultra-Orthodox, who comprise 8.1% of the population; at the other end are the secular Jews, who comprise 41.5%. In between are three similar-sized groups, distinguished from each other by their subjective self-definition of their religious observance: religious, traditional and not so religious. The Modern Orthodox are distinguished from the Ultra-Orthodox in that they combine two simultaneous cultural and value systems; modern and traditional. Nevertheless, they are not an entirely homogenous group, but are arrayed along a continuum from "Hardalim," who live an Ultra-Orthodox national religious lifestyle and "sociologically religious" Jews, who engage in a religious lifestyle in the social and community context only [29]. Based on the Modern Orthodox lifestyles, all the members of the "religious" group and about half of those in the "traditional-religious" group can be regarded as Modern Orthodox. They comprise approximately 15% of the Jewish population of Israel. The participants of the present study can be located at the center of the Modern Orthodox continuum.

The various streams of Modern Orthodox society are distinguished from one another by an array of features, including their style of clothing, the type and size of the man's skull cap, the type of women's head covering (complete, partial, or none), choice of education system, leisure activities (whether or not they have a television at home), and religious education. The participants in the present study were generally homogeneous in their affiliation with mainstream Modern Orthodox society. All the men wore crocheted skullcaps, an

identifying feature of the Modern Orthodox sector. Of the 18 men, 14 had enrolled in a Yeshiva after high school-most of them in the Hesder framework (army service combined with Yeshiva study), and several in a high-level Yeshiva or pre-army preparatory academy. All of them had served in the army. All of the women covered their hair, whether completely or partially. All had served in the army or done national service. All the participants described their religious faith and the importance of the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, which are central themes in the Modern-Orthodox world, as fundamental to their self-perceptions.

The average age of the participants was 23.2 years, ranging from 19 to 29. Twelve couples resided in cities in central Israel, one couple lived on kibbutz, and five couples lived in communal localities in non-urban areas in the central and northern regions of the country. None of the couples were living in the West Bank. All were born in Israel. Regarding education, 12 of the women were undergraduates, two had a BA or Master's degree, two were doing national service, and two had applied to an institution of higher education. Eight of the men were studying for a BA or Master's degree, six were in the Hesder program, and four were working after having completed their compulsory military service. They had been married for between four months and one year, with mean duration of marriage being 6.8 months. Table 1 summarizes the participant's statistical data.

| Age (Women) | Age (men) | Dating period (months) | Length of marriage (months) |      |
|-------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------|
| 22.8        | 23.6      | 9.8                    | 6.8                         | Mean |
| 2.9         | 2.9       | 6.3                    | 2.2                         | SD   |

**Table 1:** Participants' data – 18 men and 18 women

## Procedure

Once the study was approved by the university ethics committee, notices were publicized at the university, on websites for Modern Orthodox couples, and through personal contacts. Participation in the study was voluntary, through self-selection. Before the interviews were set up, potential participants received explanations of the research aim and the spouse's agreement to participate in the study was obtained. Separate interviews for the two were arranged at the couple's home or at the university, in accordance with the couple's preferences.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2007 to 2008. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, allowing the participants to develop their unique meanings and experiences of the transition to married life, including their first experience of sex. The interviews were dynamic and interactive, and the topics and order of the questions changed from interview to interview, enabling the researcher to move between subjects according to the inclination and the pace of the participants [30].

The interview enabled the interviewees to talk about a sensitive subject, which many of them had not previously discussed. Birch and Miller [31] noted that in studies of sensitive and intimate subjects, the researcher can serve as a catalyst for the participants to raise personal issues and experiences that are not necessarily pleasant, as well as providing an opportunity for new insights and positive change in their lives. In the present study, the fact that the researcher was also a qualified couple and family therapist enabled her to identify distress that required referral to therapy, while adhering to the research boundaries. In practice, no difficulties or distress that threatened to

turn the situation into a therapeutic encounter were apparent in any of the interviews. When interviewing married couples, the researcher is faced with the question of whether to interview them separately or together [32-34]. In the present study, we chose the separate interview method because of the concern that the participants might feel uncomfortable talking about the sensitive subject in the presence of their spouse.

## Data Analysis

A phenomenological approach [35] was considered appropriate for this study, as it is concerned with how human beings construct and give meaning to their actions in concrete social situations. In line with the phenomenological method, two coders (researchers experienced in qualitative analysis) separately performed cross-case thematic content analysis [36]. The analysis was conducted in three stages [35,37]. First, open coding via line-by-line analysis of the interview transcripts was used to discover and identify units of meaning in the data. Following their separate analyses, the coders compared the units of meaning they identified and the quotations they marked as illustrating them. Following discussion, they reached complete agreement on all the units of meaning and the quotations. In the second stage, Axial coding [37] was applied. The coders identified the relationships among units of meaning, as related by context and content, and organized them into themes. The third stage was Integration. At this stage, the coders, first separately and then together, looked for interrelations and organized the themes in such a way that would encompass the couples' feelings and experiences in the process of mate selection.

## Study Findings

Both the men and women study participants described the choice of partner and the decision to marry as significant and central to their lives. The vast majority related to the fact that, in addition to the personal and interpersonal dimensions involved in mate selection, they also held an overt and covert dialogue with the Modern Orthodox context and their dual belonging to modern secular Israeli society and to religious society. For example, they described their freedom to locate a potential partner, to choose whom to meet and when, and how to get to know their future spouse. Nevertheless, once they had found a potential partner, they addressed the limited time available to them for acquaintance and expressed the feeling of having to decide quickly whether to get married or to finish the relationship. Thus, it emerged that once they had chosen a potential partner independently, the dating period and the decision to marry occurred within the traditional religious space, where a relationship between the genders is perceived as having one goal-the establishment of a home and a family.

The analysis of the findings revealed several mate selection styles, which were classified into two main groups: the "cognitive selectors" and the "emotional selectors". Despite the difference between the groups, all the group members faced the challenge of their dual commitment to two cultural systems-the traditional religious system versus the secular Western system.

The participants in the cognitive selectors group gave cognitive explanations for their choice of partner. Their descriptions did not include the expression of love and affection for their partner and when indecisions arose, they reached their choice via a rational solution.

The participants in the emotional selectors group explained their choice as an internal emotional process, while relating subjectively to

their partner's unique characteristics or to their special relationship. In both groups, it was possible to discern the participants' dialogue with the two different cultural systems as well as the need to connect them or to bridge between them to be capable of reaching a decision.

### Cognitive selectors

In this group, two main mate selection patterns were identified: the "rational gamblers" and the "compatibility seekers". In both these subgroups, the participants entered the selection process in pursuit of the conscious goal to find a partner for marriage. The gap between the traditional social need to find a marital partner and the Western perception that couple relationships have romantic dimensions of love and spontaneity emerges from the texts.

The study participants did not allow themselves a prolonged dating period in which to get to know their partner and to make a decision based on deep acquaintance. They perceived the courtship period as having a time limitation because in the traditional view, it is not acceptable for the couple relationship to fulfill shared recreational needs or enjoyment. The participants sensed the need to utilize this period to assess the compatibility of the potential partner as a husband or wife. Nevertheless, they negotiated with the accepted norms in Western society and related to the difficulty in containing the speedy decision.

This is illustrated in the description by one of the male participants in the rational gamblers group, who referred to the Western norms that encouraged a prolonged dating period, even though he reached a decision in a short space of time, and made reference to his tension and difficulty following the rapid decision:

*"There's nothing you can do about it. Even when you decide to get married, it doesn't help. Especially in the religious world, when you're not used to living with someone for two or three years. You don't really know what you're letting yourself in for. It's not as if we were dating for two years, but only six or seven months. I was quite worried..."*

The participant in the next quote also expressed his fears about having made a speedy decision, without a lengthy period in which to get to know his partner. His choice is described as a real gamble, with which he felt uncomfortable, and he brought explanations and justifications for feeling confident with his decision:

*"I felt as though I didn't know the person standing in front of me at all. And after about two months, we decided to get married, a bit less than two months...I was aware that I didn't know her well, and I said to myself that it is impossible to know someone well. She is a good person, after all, there's no reason that...that there should be a mess. All in all, we're both normal people, and God willing, it will be good."*

A female participant described how she and her partner were swept along by life's circumstances into making a rapid decision. She did not use the word "marriage" or "wedding" in her description, but referred to "this issue." Nevertheless, the description finishes with mention of a romantic proposal. Here, also, the traditional and modern spaces are simultaneously present in the choice and the decision to marry.

*"We talked about it; we started talking about it after we'd been dating for about a month and a half...he asked me what my plans were for next year. He brought it up because he was worried that I might register at university somewhere. What happened in the end was that we began to talk about it now and again [marriage]...we became very*

*open about this issue...[the wedding]...and...and then, yes, there was a romantic proposal."*

The second pattern that was identified in the cognitive selectors group was the compatibility seekers. These participants approached the mate selection process with a fixed internal model or representation of the "right" type of person, and during the process, examined the extent to which the potential partner fit this model. Most of these internal representations were associated with the partner's religious identity and behavior, and with his or her values and attitudes regarding religious subjects. For some of the participants in this group, these gaps expressed the conflict between the two cultural sources from which they drew their expectations: the secular world, which encourages the choice of a partner who meets personal and internal needs and with whom they can build a close, intimate relationship, and the world of traditional religious values, which encourages choosing a partner with whom they can establish a home and a family based on religious values.

This conflict is apparent in the following quote:

*"We dated for nine months before getting engaged. And I spent most of that time trying to decide whether to marry him, or not. It was very hard for me to decide. I felt good with him in the relationship, but I couldn't take that step. I never imagined that my partner would be like that, I expected something else. Although we had a great relationship, there were all sorts of gaps in the religious issue."*

### Emotional selectors

The participants in this group described a mate selection process that included emotional elements or their attitude to the couple relationship as central criteria for choosing a marriage partner. The emotional selectors were divided into two subgroups, distinguished by two dimensions: the age at which they had met and the age at which they had married. These groups will hereafter be referred to as the youngsters group and the mature group.

The youngsters group included participants aged 19 to 21, who had known their partner since adolescence and had married young. Their relationship had begun as first love that developed into a teenage romance, and they had been too young to contemplate marriage during the dating period. Once they finished high school at the age of 18, marriage became a viable possibility and they described a kind of artificial turning point at which they had to decide about the future of the relationship. In this group also, the questions that occupied the participants arose out of the conflict of loyalties between the world of religious values, which perceives couple relationships as marriage-oriented and limits the courtship period and the desire for self-fulfillment and to realize the secular Israeli model of serving the country through enlistment in the army or national service at age 18. It was clear to most of the study participants that marriage would hinder their full realization of personal goals and self-fulfillment in the army or national service. This was set against the difficulty of forgoing what they perceived as a close and meaningful relationship. Timing was a central question in this group.

The following quotes describe the development of the relationship of two couples, whose friendship began at the age of 17, and their vacillations regarding the decision to marry:

*(Woman, age 19): "I said [to myself], this person is worth his weight in gold, something attracts me to him . . . we understood that the relationship was getting serious. Then we started to talk about what we*

wanted from each other, whether we wanted to develop the relationship or to stop because we were so young. We came to the conclusion that it would be a shame to let it go, and who knows where we would be in a few years' time, maybe we would miss each other . . . so toward the end of 12th grade, I knew that we were definitely going to get married during my national service . . ."

(Man, age 19) ". . . And in the end, it was clear that we would get married, the question was when . . . we had some indecision now and again. At the beginning, like I said, we were undecided as to whether to continue the relationship or to stop now and continue later on, or to keep things on a low flame, and in the end, as we decided, to try and speed things up and get married . . ."

**The mature group**

The mature group included couples who got to know each other at a relatively later stage (age 23). From the outset, the acquaintance was goal-directed toward marriage and the partners were preoccupied with the decision from the beginning. Nevertheless, unlike in the other groups, these participants chose their partners according to modern Western values and perceptions. The participants examined the couple relationship from a personal point of view and mentioned the fact that they had not allowed the traditional religious space to influence their choice.

One participant described her choice of partner as follows:

(Woman, age 29) ". . . It flowed very well, right from the beginning. I think that I was much more ready for it inside. I came to it much more mature. If I had met him a few years ago, I'm not sure that it would have worked . . . you reach a stage in your life when you have a lot more self-confidence. I could come to the date and be completely open about myself; who I am, my fears, my shortcomings, what I do want, what I don't want, and things for which, in previous dates, I was definitely much more acting a role..."

Her partner described how he made his choice, as follows:

(Man, age 29): "Lots of things that I call external, social, religious things, which didn't fit one hundred percent, but even so, I felt safe with them. I come from a place that is a bit more religious than my wife and I felt completely calm about that. I've reached the position of: I know who she is, I don't make demands of her, I accept her, and as opposed to other, previous relationships I'd had, I felt good with her, I believe in her."

In summary, the findings show that different mate selection patterns can be identified, and within each pattern, the study participants were moving between the traditional and modern spaces. In describing their mate selection process, they were running a dialogue between these two spaces. Table 2 below summarizes the different groups and mate selection themes.

|                   | Cognitive selectors  |  | Emotional Selectors   |  |
|-------------------|--|--|---|--|
|                   | The rational gamblers  | The compatibility seekers  | The youngsters group  | The Mature Group   |
| The main theme    | Mate selection as a gambling process:<br>The participants allowed themselves only a brief dating period, so decision is not based on significant acquaintance of the partner | Mate selection as a screening process:<br>The participants approached the process with a fixed internal representation of the "right" type of partner, and during the process, examined the extent of which the potential partner fit this model | Mate selection as a social process:<br>The participants experienced a conflict of loyalties between social and religious values, "forcing" young people to get married quickly, and their desire for self-fulfillment | Mate selection as an internal process:<br>The participants examined potential partners from a personal point of view and mentioned the fact that they had not allowed the traditional and social space to influence their choice |
| Number of couples | 4 couples  | 3 couples  | 5 couples   | 6 couples  |

**Table 2:** Mate selection themes summary

The analysis of the findings presented above dealt with each partner's text separately. Nevertheless, in light of the fact that the study participants were married couples, it was meaningful to observe the couple as a unit beyond each individual's personal experience. This examination included triangulation process that shows great similarity in the partners' mate selection patterns. We triangulated the interview data and classification of the couples, and found the reports of each of the pairs similar. Most of them described similar patterns and matching considerations to those of their partner and were classified into the same selection group. Although the mate selection process is apparently an individual and internal issue, the comparison between the members of each couple revealed compatibility and similarity that spilled over from the individual's internal world into the couple space.

**Discussion**

An examination of the study findings shows that mate selection in Modern Orthodox society in Israel does not take place in a vacuum, but occurs through a dialogue with the cultural space to which the partners belong. The analysis of the interviews enabled identification of two main groups differentiated by mate selection patterns and the ways in which they made their decision: the cognitive selectors and the emotional selectors.

The group of cognitive selectors was divided into two subgroups: the rational gamblers and the compatibility seekers. In both groups, the study participants were committed to the traditional space and gave cognitive explanations for their choice of partner, perceiving the relationship as goal-directed toward raising a family and not toward meet personal needs such as enjoyment and growth. The compatibility seekers sought a partner who matched their internal model, which related to the potential partner's religious and value-based

characteristics, whereas the rational gamblers despaired of their ability to find a compatible partner and made their choice through a "rational gambling" strategy, putting their faith in destiny and circumstance. Nevertheless, the participants in this group were aware of the option of choosing a partner based on love and attraction and held a dialogue with the modern space, with some interviewees expressing their difficulties and fears that arose out of their rational choice.

The second group was the emotional selectors. In this group, the choice is explained as an emotional, internal process, relating to subjectivity and interaction with the partner. This group included couples who had married very young after a period of friendship that had begun in adolescence, as well as older couples who had chosen their partner based on past experience, out of the sense of knowing the person and attraction to their personality. It seems that the members of both these subgroups adopted the modern Western perception of mate selection. Nevertheless, the participants in the mature group related to their unconventional choice and to the fact that they might have gone against society's social expectations. In the younger group, the issue of timing arose out of the traditional expectation that a relationship should lead to establishing a home and raising a family. Thus, despite using the modern selection process, the participants in this group also held a dialogue with the two cultural systems to which they belong.

The present research joins other studies conducted in recent years, which examined mate selection as a process occurring in a unique cultural and social context [22-27]. Most of these studies addressed the second-generation immigrant population. Their findings show that second generation immigrants manage relationships within the modern Western world and have a Western world perception, whereas their parents and families represent their traditional culture of origin. When required to choose a partner, these second-generation immigrants make room for the views of the parents and family, who are perceived as expecting them to choose a partner within the space that will preserve their traditions and culture of origin. Similar to the present study, previous studies related to the different types of dialogue with their parents' expectations, while using a typology that characterizes the participants' coping with a dual value system. Nevertheless, unlike these studies, the present study dealt with a unique population in which the bicultural dimension is not derived from a migration process, but is an integral component of the participants' identity. The population of the present study was born into an essentially bicultural identity, meaning that they carried the same identity as their parents and families. Hence, the dialogue held by the participants in this study was not with parents or family, but with an internal representation of dual Western and traditional values. The participants of the present study were coping with internal movement on a continuum between commitment to two cultural systems, and the conflict between these two systems translates into a personal, internal self-dialogue for the participant and not necessarily versus parents or family.

### Limitations of the study and implications for practice

This study had several limitations. One was its sample size, as the findings are based on interviews with 36 participants: 18 men and 18 women. Although this is larger than the sample sizes of other qualitative studies of couples [38-40], the findings cannot be generalized to the religious population as a whole or even to the Modern Orthodox population in Israel. As this study method is qualitative, there was no comparison to other groups in the Israeli

society as Ultra-Orthodox or traditional couples. The limitation of generalizability is inherent in qualitative research.

A second limitation was the sampling method, in which the study participants were obtained through self-selection. It may be that the couples who chose to participate in the study were those for whom the bicultural issue created a conflict. The need to process this conflict might have been the trigger for their participation in the study and hence, the subject arose as part of the selection process. Couples who did not feel conflicted might have chosen not to participate, and their selection process might not have involved bicultural aspects, but might have occurred solely within the intrapersonal and interpersonal space.

The study findings throw light on the complexity of mate selection in a bicultural context, and might be relevant for couple and family therapists as well as for educators and consultants accompanying individuals and couples both pre- and post-marriage. This study, which highlights the cultural complexity and duality of value systems, will allow practitioners to broaden their viewpoint and to look beyond the individual and the couple, to observe the cultural and value space in their environment.

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