Marital Stability Among Jewish and Mixed Couples Following Immigration to Israel From the Former Soviet Union

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Abstract. This research aims to identify factors associated with marital instability among Jewish and mixed (Jewish and non-Jewish) couples following immigration from the former Soviet Union. Based on the Strangeness Theory and the Model of Acculturation, we predicted that non-Jewish immigrants would be less well adjusted personally and socially to Israeli society than Jewish immigrants and that endogamous Jewish couples would have better interpersonal congruence than mixed couples in terms of personal and social adjustment. The sample included 92 Jewish couples and 92 ethnically-mixed couples, of which 82 couples (40 Jewish, 42 mixed) divorced or separated after immigration and 102 couples (52 Jewish, 50 ethnically mixed) remained married. Significant differences were found between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in personal adjustment, and between endogamous and ethnically-mixed couples in the congruence between spouses in their personal and social adjustment. Marital instability was best explained by interpersonal disparity in cultural identity and in adjustment to life in Israel. The findings expand the knowledge on marital outcomes of immigration, in general, and immigration of mixed marriages, in particular.

Keywords: cultural identity, immigration, intermarriage, marital stability, marital fit, social adjustment

This article is concerned with two risk factors for marital dissolution: migration and interethnic marriage. First, migration to a new country is a stressful encounter for couples and families. Since stressful events are associated with decreased marital quality and increased relationship instability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Lavee, in press), the migration process may pose a risk for relationship stability. Second, interethnic and interracial marriages were found to increase marital conflicts and were associated with decreased marital satisfaction and stability (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). In the current study, we examine several migration-related factors to better understand what predicts marital dissolution among ethnically-mixed and endogamous immigrant couples.

Immigration, Stress, and Marital Quality and Stability

In their extensive review of the literature on the longitudinal course of marital quality and stability, Karney and Bradbury (1995) found that stress is associated with decreased marital quality and with increased marital instability. They concluded that changes in marital quality and stability over the life course are best explained by the family stress theory (Boss, 2002; Hill, 1958; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) and suggested a process model whereby the effect of stressful events on marital quality and stability is mediated by the couple’s adaptive process.

In family stress research, the emphasis has commonly been on the impact of major life events, normative events and transitions, and the everyday demanding stressors on couples and families. Migration tends to fall between these categories; it is a volitional-transitional event, which encompasses stressful periods through which countless family changes take place (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994; Shuval, 1979). It involves changes in climate and lifestyle; a sense of isolation and loneliness due to disengagement from their network of social relations; and a need to abandon old norms and values and adopt new ones (Levenbach & Lewak, 1995; Shuval, 1993). Moreover, differences between family members in their willingness to immigrate and differences in their rate of integration intensify interpersonal conflicts and create shifts in patterns of closeness-distance in couples (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994). Given the pileup of demands and challenges associated with migration, it is interesting to note a dearth of
empirical research on marital stability following immigration (Glick, 2010). In the current study, we assess personal, social, and interpersonal variables that may predict marital dissolution following immigration.

**Mixed Marriages and Marital Quality and Stability**

Evidence from studies in the United States (e.g., Hohmann-Mariott & Amato, 2008; Johnson & Warren, 1994; Zhang & van Hook, 2009) as well as research in Europe (Kalmijn, 1998; Neda, 1986; Neryard & M'Sili, 1998) and South-East Asia (Nah, 1993; Park, Park, & Kim, 2007) indicates that couples in mixed marriages, variously termed intercultural, interracial, or interethnic marriages, tend to experience more conflicts, lower marital quality, and are at greater risk for divorce than endogamous couples.

The scientific literature describes a variety of factors that threaten the quality and stability of the marital union, including differences in cultural values, attitudes, and norms; conflicts that stem from differences in social, cultural, and ethnic identity; and negative attitudes of the society toward intermarriage (Breger & Hill, 1998; Hohmann-Mariott & Amato, 2008). A basic assumption of the homogamy perspective in research on the instability of interracial marriages is that couples with similar characteristics have fewer misunderstandings, less conflict, and enjoy greater support. Attitude homogamy, in particular, was found to be positively associated with marital satisfaction and with marital stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In addition, mixed couples may face group sanctions if racial or ethnic heterogamy threatens ingroup solidarity (Kalmijn, 1998) and social discrimination against such couples may be especially harsh (Yancey, 2007).

For ethnically-mixed couples, the migration to a new society exerts a significant impact on the couple’s life and relationships (King, 1993; McGoldrick & Preto, 1984). The migration process brings into the surface the need of each partner to define his or her cultural identity, rituals, and symbols to ease the cultural change and ensure cultural continuity. After immigration, ethnic differences between partners may be reflected in the gaps between their original culture and that of the host country and in differences in their rates of personal and social adjustment. Such differences may intensify interpersonal conflicts and threaten the stability of the marital union, whereas shared perceptions, attitudes, and cultural identities make for a coping resource that eases the transitional change and strengthen marital stability.

**Endogamous and Mixed-Marriage Immigrants: The Israeli Scene**

Since the 1990s, more than one million diaspora migrants arrived in Israel from the former Soviet Union. About one third of them are mixed couples, whereby one of the spouses is not Jewish or is not classified as a Jew by the Jewish religious law. In 2008, nearly 93,000 couples were mixed and more than 118,000 children were living in mixed families (Knesset’s Center for Research and Information, 2008). Members of these families experience many challenges in their attempts to integrate into Israeli society, particularly relating to matters such as marriage, divorce, burial, conversion to Judaism, civil status, and reunification with family members remaining in their countries of origin (Association for the Protection of Mixed Families’ Rights, 2005).

Upon their arrival in Israel, the national identity of immigrants from the former Soviet Union – Jews and non-Jews alike – is not homogeneous; rather, it varies with their culture of origin and degree of foreignness and familiarity with and attitudes toward Jewish culture and the Jewish religion (Shumsky, 2002; Zilberg, 2002). Nevertheless, as immigrants, they all experience a sense of foreignness at the start of the adaptation process. Each immigrant begins to “domesticate” the unfamiliar cultural space from a different starting point, due to the characteristics of their cultural background.

With respect to marital relationships, immigrant couples from the former Soviet Union, in general, and mixed couples, in particular, experience difficulties in retaining marital stability. There is a higher rate of divorce and a relatively higher number of single-parent families among immigrants from the former Soviet Union, compared to the country’s population (Markowitz, 1994). According to recent research conducted by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (Dobrin, 2005), the risk of divorce for mixed couples is significantly higher than that of endogamous marriages. The couples’ different pace of integration appears to be a substantial part of the difficulty (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994), whereby such a predicament is universal during intercultural transitions (Drachman & Halberstadt, 1992; Sluzki, 1979).

**The Current Study**

The goal of the current research was to identify factors associated with marital instability among Jewish and mixed (Jewish and non-Jewish) couples following immigration. For this purpose, we sampled four groups of immigrants from the former Soviet Union: Jewish and mixed couples who remained married and Jewish and mixed couples who divorced or separated after immigration.

The study is based on three theoretical models that share a common conceptual idea, namely, that forces of closeness-distance exist in various kinds of intercultural encounters as a result of similarities or differences between the sides: (1) The Strangeness Theory (Bauman, 1990; Schutz, 1944; Simmel, 1950), which explains the individual’s degree of affinity to an unfamiliar environment, according to the similarity/disparity between his/her own characteristics and the characteristics of the environment; (2) The Model of Acculturation (Berry, 1984), which addresses the degree of affinity between the group of immigrants and the absorbing society, according to the similarity/disparity between the social groups in terms of status; and (3) Family Systems Theory (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993), which describes processes of couple relationships.
Based on these theories, we conceptualized individual adjustment, social adjustment, and couple’s interpersonal fit/disparity, respectively, as factors that may explain marital stability/instability among endogamous and mixed-couple immigrants.

**Individual Adjustment**

According to Simmel’s (1950) Strangeness Theory, social interactions are characterized by their relative degree of proximity and distance among individuals and groups. In intercultural encounter, the “stranger” may be aware of cultural differences and overestimate the effect of cultural identity on the behavior of people in an unfamiliar society. Immigrants’ acquaintance with the culture of the host society decreases a sense of “strangeness” which in turn contributes to their total affiliation to it. Although Jewish immigrants, in general, are better acquainted than their non-Jewish counterparts with the mainstream culture of Israeli society, they nevertheless bring their own cultural values and social stratification from their country of origin. They tend to accept the values of the new society not only with great caution, but also with constant comparisons to their past values (Bauman, 1990).

This notwithstanding, the non-Jews’ process of adaptation may well incorporate challenging issues, considering the fact that their culture is manifestly foreign to the Jewish culture, and that the State of Israel is defined as the Land of the Jewish People. Krivosh (2003) described a sense of discrimination experienced by non-Jews due to their ethnic origins and loyalty to their culture of origin vis-à-vis their aspiration to stay in Israel and be part of society. We therefore conceptualize individual adjustment as a person’s sense that his or her cultural identity is closer to the host society’s culture, a sense of being “at home” in the new country, and a desire to stay there.

**Social Adjustment**

One may observe the intercultural encounter between Israeli society and the mixed couples using Berry’s Model of Acculturation (1984). According to this model, the relations between the host society and the group of immigrants are based on the distance between their mutual expectations and their different position in the social hierarchy. According to Berry (1990), in order for the minority group to be accepted, the immigrants’ choice of an integration strategy alone will not suffice. No less important is the need for the dominant group to be open to mutual adaptation.

In this regard, research on the attitudes of the Israeli public toward immigrants from the former Soviet Union indicates that the melting pot approach is still the dominant ideology (Horenczyk, 1996). Gavison (1995) argues that the Israeli public views mixed marriages of Jews with non-Jews as contradicting the national Zionist, cultural, and religious ideology and that negative references to such marriages are part and parcel of the self-definition of society as Jewish. Based on this notion, we conceptualize social adjustment as immigrants’ sense of acceptance by society, caring and friendliness of people in society toward them, and a sense that one is connected to society.

**Marital Fit/Disparity**

According to Family Systems Theory, the pace and patterns of adjustment of one spouse affect the other. If one spouse’s integration to society differs from that of the other, it will affect their ways of responding to each other and their relationship, because the need for closeness may change (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994; Lavee, in press).

Due to differences between Jews and non-Jews in terms of foreignness/familiarity with the mainstream Jewish culture and because of Israeli society’s unequal attitudes toward them, a substantial difference in adjustment and in the motivation to integrate may exist between intimate partners in mixed couples, whereby the non-Jewish spouse may face considerable obstacles in his or her route to integration (Lissak & Leshem, 1995). In addition, the social status of the non-Jewish spouses shifts from being dominant and superior in the former Soviet Union to inferior in Israel, while the structural position of the Jewish spouses shifts from a national minority to being part of the Israeli majority. These differences in cultural identity, in motivation for and rate of adjustment, and in the structural position in society among ethnically-mixed couples may create increased marital conflicts among these couples, weaken their ties, and threaten their marital stability.

Hence, in the current study, we examine the degree to which the stability of the marital relationship following immigration entails differences in the couple’s ethnic origins. According to the research model (Figure 1), the marital stability following immigration (the outcome variable) is related to personal adjustment of immigrants to Israeli society (cultural identity, feeling at home in Israel, desire to stay in this country, and overall sense of well-being); the social adjustment of immigrants (a sense of acceptance, inclusion, friendliness, and caring by society); and the spouses’ similarity/disparity in their personal and social adjustment.

It was hypothesized that Jewish immigrants would have higher levels of personal and social adjustment to Israeli society and a sense that one is connected to society.

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*Figure 1.* Research model predicting post-migration relationship outcomes by personal and social adjustment and marital fit.
society than their non-Jewish counterparts, and, as a result, the Jewish couples would have lower levels of interpersonal disparity. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the larger the gap between the spouses in personal and social adjustment, the greater their chances of divorce.

Method

Participants

Participants were immigrants from the former Soviet Union who resided in cities in northern Israel. Potential participants were invited to take part in the study by advertisements posted in community centers and social and health services, others were referred to the researchers by social and health service providers in their communities. Of those who responded, 400 participants (200 couples) were contacted, and 376 (94%) of them returned the questionnaires. Eight of these (2.1% of the returned questionnaires) were incomplete and were not included in data analysis.

The final sample included 184 couples: 92 Jewish couples and 92 ethnically-mixed couples. Of these, 102 couples (52 Jewish, 50 ethnically mixed) were married and living together, and 82 couples (40 Jewish, 42 mixed) were divorced or separated. All couples in the divorced or separated group immigrated as intact marriages and divorced or initiated the divorce procedure after immigration.

The subjects had immigrated to Israel from all parts of the former Soviet Union. Most of them had emigrated from Slavic Republics (84%); approximately 9% had emigrated from Asian Republics, 6% from the Caucasus, and approximately 1% from the Baltic Republics. Participants had been living in Israel for an average of 11.5 years (SD = 3.39).

The average ages of the subjects were 45 and 41.7 years for men and women, respectively. Jewish and mixed married couples were older than the divorced or separated couples (see Table 1). Significant differences were also found between married and divorced or separated men in terms of education, whereby married men, on average, had higher levels of education than the divorced or separated groups (14.6 and 13.2 years of schooling, respectively). Women in all four groups had an average of 14.2 years of education. Additional analyses (not shown) indicated that married couples differed from the divorced or separated couples in terms of employment ($\chi^2 = 145.92, p < .001$). More specifically, 70% of the married participants were employed full-time, compared with approximately 58% in the divorced or separated couples. The rate of unemployment was also significantly higher among the divorced or separated couples (17%) than among married couples, especially among Jewish men and women (approximately 5%). These differences between the groups, in terms of their background data, were controlled for in subsequent data analyses.

Instruments

The data were collected by a structured self-report questionnaire in Russian that measured personal and social adjustment in Israeli society, as well as couple relationships.

Personal adjustment to Israeli society was assessed by items examining participants’ acculturation in terms of cultural identity, sense of belonging, and “feeling at home” in Israel and their desire to stay in the country. Items were adopted from a standard questionnaire of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption (Damien & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1997) and from the Survey Questionnaire for Russian Jews (Ryvkina, 1996). Based on item analysis, four items were included in the current study: Cultural identity was measured by a four-level scale measuring the distance from the mainstream Jewish culture, ranging from 1 (only Russian) to 4 (only Jewish). Feeling at home in Israel and desire to stay in the country were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Well-being was measured by an item from a Life Satisfaction scale that asked for overall sense of well-being, measured on the same 5-point Likert-type scale.

Social adjustment was assessed by means of the participants’ perception of the host society’s attitudes and policies toward them as Russian immigrants and toward their type of marriage (i.e., Jewish vs. mixed). Items were adopted from the Social Support Index (McCubbin, Patterson, & Glynn, 1982) and the Majority-Minority Relations Index (Smoha, 1989). Based on item analysis, four items were included in

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (in parentheses), and univariate analysis of variance of background variables among Jewish and mixed married and divorced/separated couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Married couples</th>
<th>Divorced/separated couples</th>
<th>ANOVA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jewish (n = 52)</td>
<td>Mixed (n = 50)</td>
<td>Total (n = 102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Men)</td>
<td>47.73 (8.69)</td>
<td>45.60 (8.60)</td>
<td>46.62 (8.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Women)</td>
<td>45.65 (7.99)</td>
<td>43.04 (7.88)</td>
<td>44.37 (8.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Men)</td>
<td>14.69 (2.65)</td>
<td>14.56 (2.71)</td>
<td>14.62 (2.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Women)</td>
<td>14.56 (2.52)</td>
<td>14.79 (1.91)</td>
<td>14.71 (2.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority in Israel</td>
<td>12.90 (3.26)</td>
<td>10.14 (3.11)</td>
<td>11.72 (3.45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01.
the current study: Acceptance by society (“I do not feel rejected by society”), perceive people’s friendly attitudes (“People show me love and affection”), sense of inclusion (“Society’s attitude towards me makes me feel that I belong to it”), and caring (“I feel that people care for me”). All items were measured on a five-level Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (fully agree).

Principal factor analysis with varimax rotation indicated that, for both men and women, items loaded on two separate factors that represented the aforementioned personal and social adjustment. Internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha) were .71 for Personal Adjustment scale and .89 for Social Adjustment scale.

Marital fit/disparity of the couple was measured by the absolute difference scores between the relationship partners in the scales’ items.

All instruments were adapted to the current study’s population and were pretested with four couples in each of the study groups: Jewish couples and ethnically-mixed couples in intact marriages, and Jewish and ethnically-mixed spouses in divorced or separated couples.

Results

The data were analyzed in a number of stages. First, we tested for differences between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in their personal and social adjustment. Second, we analyzed differences between Jewish and mixed couples and between couples who remained married and those who separated or divorced in couple discrepancy scores in personal and social adjustment. Third, we conducted multivariate discriminant analysis to examine factors that best predict marital status (i.e., married vs. divorced/separated couples) among Jewish and among mixed couples.

Jewish and Non-Jewish Immigrants: Personal and Social Adjustment

To examine differences between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in personal and social adjustment, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for nationality and gender. The analysis (see Table 2) indicated significant differences between the Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in terms of their personal adjustment to Israel among both men and women. Compared to the non-Jewish immigrants, Jewish immigrants reported a cultural identity which is more similar to the mainstream Israeli culture and a stronger sense of feeling at home, desire to stay in the country, and well-being. The findings also show significant gender differences, whereby women experience stronger identification with the host country’s culture and a stronger sense of being “at home” and wish to remain in the country.

With respect to social adjustment, the findings in Table 2 show that Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants have quite similar perceptions of the host society attitudes toward them. No significant differences were found between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in the sense of inclusion and perceptions of acceptance, friendliness, and caring toward immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Significant gender differences were found in all indices of social adjustment, with female immigrants reporting a stronger sense of inclusion and perceptions of more positive attitudes of society toward immigrants.

Interpersonal Discrepancy in Couples

In light of these differences between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants and between men and women, it has been postulated that discrepancies between spouses in personal and social adjustment
social adjustment (i.e., lower marital fit) would be greater among mixed couples compared with Jewish couples and that larger disparity between spouses would be associated with marital separation or divorce. To test this hypothesis, we conducted MANOVA for marital status (i.e., married vs. separated/divorced) and couple type (i.e., Jewish vs. Mixed couples) in couple discrepancy scores of personal and social adjustment indices. The findings (see Table 3) indicated significantly larger couple discrepancies among divorced/separated couples as compared with those who remained married, suggesting that couples who have experienced marital crisis following immigration were characterized by disagreements regarding cultural identity, feeling at home, and desire to remain in the country (i.e., personal adjustment), as well as perceptions of their acceptance by the new society (i.e., social adjustment).

The findings in Table 3 also show that couple discrepancies were significantly larger among ethnically-mixed couples as compared with endogamous couples in a feeling at home and their overall well-being. Mixed couples also experienced somewhat larger interpersonal discrepancy than Jewish couples in their sense of inclusion and acceptance.

### Predictors of Marital Instability in Jewish and Mixed Couples

In the final stage, we examined the variables that best explain the affiliation to the group of family status (i.e., intact marriage vs. divorced/separated). For this purpose, we conducted discriminant analysis between married and divorced/separated couples in terms of male and female immigrants’ adjustment and in couple discrepancy scores of personal and social adjustment. The analysis was conducted with data of Jewish and mixed couples separately, in order to examine the best discriminating variables within each group. The findings are presented in Table 4.

The discriminant analysis correctly classified 75.8% of the married versus divorced couples in Jewish couples and 81.1% in mixed couples. As the findings in Table 4 indicate, couple discrepancy scores explained group affiliation (i.e., intact marriage vs. divorced/separated couples) in both the Jewish and mixed-couple groups. Although there is no straightforward way to compare the discriminant results of these two groups, a few differences are worthy of note. First, from the tests of equality of group means (i.e., smaller values of Wilk’s lambda and larger values of the $F$ test), which are indicative of the magnitude of difference between intact and divorced couples, it appears that these differences are larger among mixed couples than among endogamous couples. This conclusion is also supported by the summary values of the discriminant function at the bottom of Table 4 – a larger overall standardized canonical discriminant function and smaller overall Wilk’s lambda for data of the mixed couples as compared with Jewish couples. The data also show that couple discrepancies in cultural identity and a sense of caring differentiate divorced from intact marriages among mixed couples but not among Jewish couples.

Second, the findings in Table 4 reveal some differences between Jewish and mixed couples in the couple discrepancy scores that best differentiate divorces/separated from married couples. This is indicated by the values of the standardized canonical discriminant functions: The larger the size of this value within a group, the stronger is the variable’s discriminant power. Thus, among Jewish couples the strongest predictor of divorce is couple discrepancy in the sense that people in society are friendly toward...
immigrants, whereas among ethnically-mixed couples it is a couple discrepancy in feeling at home in the new country.

**Discussion**

The findings of the current study support some but not all of our hypotheses. As expected, Jewish immigrants reported a higher level of personal adjustment than did non-Jews. Their cultural identity is closer to the mainstream Israeli cultural, they feel more “at home” in the country and report stronger desire to build their lives in Israel. This finding supports the thesis of Strangeness Theory (Bauman, 1990; Simmel, 1950), according to which the foreigner tries to become part of the new society with the help of cultural marks. Despite the fact that Soviet Jews were not versed in Jewish tradition, they had attributed some meaning to their Jewish culture, although different from the traditional religious meaning. These findings coincide with those of some other studies that point to the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in terms of their identity (Kenigshtein, 2007; Khanin, 2007; Leshem & Lissak, 1999). It is important to note, however, that the non-Jewish immigrants feel at home and wish to stay in Israel, although to a lesser extent than the Jewish immigrants.

Unlike our expectation, no differences were found between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in their social adjustment. This finding suggests that veteran Israelis do not differentiate between ex-Soviet immigrants based on their ethnic/religious affiliation; in fact, they may not be aware of the ethnic/religious origin of immigrants. To the extent that the host society’s attitudes toward immigrants are transmitted through people’s behavioral manifestations of acceptance and friendliness or hostility and rejection or by means of national policy (Berry, 1984), the findings of the current study reflect similar societal attitudes toward Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants.

We have had no a priori hypotheses regarding gender differences, but the findings clearly show that compared to men, women report higher levels in all personal and social adjustment indices. Additionally, marital dissolution was explained by men’s adjustment but not by women’s. These findings may suggest that immigrant women are more flexible and more adaptable in their acculturation and integration. In a similar vein, Ptacek, Smith, and Zanas (1992) found gender differences in coping with stressful situations, including immigration and divorce, whereby women were more flexible than men in coping with difficult life situations.

The differences between men and women translate into couples’ interpersonal discrepancies in personal and social adjustment. We hypothesized that such discrepancies would be larger among mixed couples than endogamous ones and that it would be associated with marital dissolution. The findings largely support the latter prediction but the former hypothesis is supported only to a limited degree. Ethnically-mixed couples had higher discrepancy scores than endogamous couples in feeling at home in the new country.

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The differences between men and women translate into couples’ interpersonal discrepancies in personal and social adjustment. We hypothesized that such discrepancies would be larger among mixed couples than endogamous ones and that it would be associated with marital dissolution. The findings largely support the latter prediction but the former hypothesis is supported only to a limited degree. Ethnically-mixed couples had higher discrepancy scores than endogamous couples in feeling at home in the new country and in feelings of inclusion and acceptance by society. Married and divorced/separated couples, in contrast, differed in the extent of couple discrepancies in all personal and social adjustment indices. This observation should be comprehended in the context of the immigration being primarily a familial phenomenon. These findings support our main argument, namely that discrepancy between spouses in their

**Table 4.** Discriminant analysis between married and divorced/separated couples among Jewish and mixed couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jewish couples</th>
<th>Test of equality of group means</th>
<th>Mixed couples</th>
<th>Test of equality of group means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized canonical function</td>
<td>Wilk's lambda</td>
<td>F(df = 1, 89)</td>
<td>Standardized canonical function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male personal adjustment</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>7.66**</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male social adjustment</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>7.13**</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female personal adjustment</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female social adjustment</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple discrepancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural identity</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling at home in Israel</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>11.08**</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to stay in Israel</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>12.85**</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>8.15**</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>10.73**</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>19.67**</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>-.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.** Discriminant function summary

For Jewish couples: Standardized Canonical Correlation .62, Wilk’s lambda .61, $\chi^2(12) = 40.56$.

For mixed couples: Standardized Canonical Correlation .65, Wilk’s lambda .58, $\chi^2(12) = 44.60$.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
pace of integration and acculturation affects their marital adjustment following the intercultural transition (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994; Drachman & Halberstadt, 1992) and threatens the stability of the relationship (Suzuuki, 1992; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In such cases, a social support system is of increasing importance for the couple’s adaptation to the new life conditions.

The finding that couple type (endogamous vs. mixed marriage) accounts for only limited degree of couple discrepancy may be explained by some characteristics of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The 1990s immigration from the former Soviet Union is largely regarded as one social/cultural group (e.g., Ben-Rafael, 1998; Cohen & Susser, 2009; Horenczyk, 1996), because Jews were not practically connected to Judaism prior to their arrival in Israel. Their affiliation to Russian culture was greater than their affiliation to Jewish culture, which is why cultural differences between Jewish and non-Jewish spouses were not noticeable. Upon migration to a Jewish state, however, the non-Jewish spouses differ from their Jewish partners in the sense that Israel is “home” for them and perceive less acceptance by society.

The multivariate discriminant analysis sheds light on the yet other differences between endogamous and mixed couples. As expected, larger couple discrepancies in all personal and social adjustment indices predict marital dissolution for both Jewish and mixed couples. However, these discrepancies are more pronounced and result in somewhat stronger prediction of divorce for couples in mixed marriages than for those in endogamous couples. This finding may partly explain large-scale research (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009) that found interracial marriages to be less stable than endogamous marriages, but failed to provide evidence that intermarriage per se is associated with higher risk of marital dissolution.

The differences between the married and divorced or separated couples shed light on personal, social, and marital predictors of marital breakup following immigration. They further demonstrate the complex picture of the impact of immigration on families. It appears that immigration threatens family cohesion, family functioning, and the quality of family relations (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Cohen & Haberfeld, 2003; Horowitz, 1999; Roer-Strier, 2001). The stress and the threat to the integrity of the marital relations are evoked primarily when the couple experiences an imbalance between internal and external demands and the resources available to them (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Miller, 1978). In the current research, this entails a deficiency in personal and social adjustment, as well as disparities between the partners’ adaptation. The finding that greater disparity between spouses is associated with marital instability may be explained by Family Systems Theory (Montgomery & Fewer, 1988), which describes intimate relationships as comprised of a series of behaviors and interactions that may lead to a shared worldview and perception of reality. Interpersonal conflicts and relationship difficulties arise when couples do not reach such a view (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2007; Lavee, in press; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2007).

Concluding Remarks

There is a strong evidence in the scientific literature for the relationship difficulties and marital instability experienced by interracial and ethnically-mixed couples. In contrast, little research has focused on marital [instability of immigrant couples and even less research has been conducted on the marital outcomes of ethnically-mixed married immigrants.

The current study fills this gap by further extending our understanding of immigrant couples. Despite the absence of a direct link between the ethnic homogeneity of the couple and the adaptation of their marital relationship, the ethnic differences seem to play a part in molding the reactions of the couple to the pressures of immigration and their intercultural transition.

Despite all of their difficulties, immigrants strive to integrate into the host society and adopt its values, notwithstanding their ethnic affiliation. It would, therefore, be advisable to invest in policies that would make it easier for immigrant couples, in general, and ethnically-mixed couples, in particular, to adjust to the new life conditions. This requires an active participation of various relevant disciplines: From therapeutic professionals and service providers to policy makers and the media to facilitate and advance positive attitudes of host societies toward immigrants.

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