

In a recent article Cofnas (2021), once again, argues against MacDonald's (1994) proposed Jewish group evolutionary hypothesis. I am agnostic as to the merits of MacDonald's theories and Cofnas' alternative so-called "default hypothesis" concerning Jewish attitudes and behaviors. However, I am not agnostic as to the manner in which debates and discussions are held. Discourse should be in good faith with a weighing of the available evidence and I don't believe Cofnas' article reaches this standard.

In his article Cofnas (2021) poses the question "Are Jews particularly ethnocentric?", and then answers it by stating, "...the evidence suggests Jews are not particularly ethnocentric... (p. 1332)" To support his answer Cofnas (2021) relies primarily on the percentage of Jews that marry outside of the group. If counter evidence is not available, then fair enough¹. However, it seems reasonable to examine other possible elements of ethnocentrism besides out-group marriage and, indeed, there is evidence that runs counter to his position that he simply chooses to ignore. Note that he does this while admonishing those who "... misrepresent or ignore all the counternarrative evidence... (p. 1333)".

Dunkel and Dutton (2016) found that Jews, despite being less religious, exhibited higher levels of agreement with statements of in-group favoritism (e.g., How much do you prefer to be with other people who are the same religion as you?) than Catholics and Methodists. Note that in Dunkel and Dutton (2016) Baptists exhibited the equivalent degree of in-group favoritism as Jews but were much more religious. These findings were recently replicated and extended. Dunkel (2019) once again found

¹ In his article after stating that Jews are not high in ethnocentrism Cofnas rephrases the question to that of the presence or absence of a group evolutionary strategy. He then remarks that of course Jewish ethnocentric political groups, such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), emerged due to anti-Semitism and are not reflective of a group evolutionary strategy. But if the original question of ethnocentrism was kept, then the presence of ethnocentric political groups such as the ADL would be supportive of heightened Jewish ethnocentrism.

Cofnas also states that, "Members of all human groups are ethnocentric to varying degrees." Human groups are necessarily fuzzy at the borders, yet if one was to include White liberals as a group then his statement is verifiably incorrect (<https://twitter.com/ZachG932/status/1074524252638982144>).

that while Jews were less religious they were more likely to endorse statements reflecting in-group preference than Catholics and Lutherans. Additionally, when asked about the importance of various identities (e.g., work identity), Jews reported that being ethnically Jewish was an especially important self-defining feature. These results suggest that Jews view themselves as a distinct ethnic group, that being a member of that group is important to their identity, and that they favor other members of the group. The pattern of these findings is clearly suggestive of a heightened level of ethnocentrism or in-group favoritism.

In summary, I agree with Cofnas that the issue of Jewish ethnocentrism or in-group preference should be seen as an empirical question and that by viewing it as such it is hoped that the rhetoric surrounding this question is reduced. It is also important to note that if the answer to the question of Jewish in-group preference is in the affirmative, as I believe it is, that this in and of itself doesn't lend support to any theory as to why or even if said ethnocentrism is "good" or "bad". The ultimate explanation proffered by MacDonald of a group evolutionary strategy could be correct or false, but the accuracy of this possibility is independent of a proximate explanation for the possibility of heightened Jewish in-group favoritism. It seems reasonable, for example, to expect a group that experienced genocide and defines themselves primarily by the genocide (Pew Research Center, 2020) to respond with heightened in-group preference as a mechanism of self-preservation.

References

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