

Racial and Ethnic Diversity, Immigration, and Changing Interracial Marriage, 1980-2008

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Abstract

Past research shows that interracial marriage has been increasing over the past decades but the pace of increase slowed down in the 1990s, especially for Hispanics and Asian Americans. Most of the studies on intermarriage only focus on married couples and neglect the important role marriage market conditions may play in interracial marriage. First, we use data from 1980 to 2000 decennial censuses and the 2005-2008 American Community Survey to update the trends in interracial marriage. We show how changes in racial/ethnic composition, immigration, and educational expansion have contributed to changing patterns of interracial marriage in U.S. metropolitan areas. Second, we take advantage of newly released 2008 ACS, which include age at first marriage, and can be compared with similar data from the 1980 census. Unlike recent studies of intact marriages, these data allows us to identify never married individuals “at risk” of marriage and to estimate changing probabilities of interracial marriage since 1980 across different population groups.

Extended Abstract

Interracial marriage increased from .7% in 1970 to 2.6% of all marriages in 2000. Whites, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and American Indians have all experienced varying degrees of increases in interracial marriage (Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Qian and Lichter 2001). Yet, the 1990s also witnessed overall declines in interracial marriage with whites and increases in marriage between native-born and foreign-born co-ethnics among Hispanics and Asian Americans (Qian and Lichter 2007). The decline, in part, is due to increases in the minority populations. The growing availability of marriageable partners of the same race/ethnicity may have reinforced cultural traditions of native-born minorities and promoted in-group contact opportunities and endogamous marriages. However, educational upgrading of racial minorities may have created social distance between the highly educated and the less educated and increased contact opportunities with whites and promote intermarriage.

In this paper, we explore changes in interracial marriage in the context of changes in racial/ethnic distribution, nativity mix, and educational composition among the marriageable populations. We argue that availability of partners in terms of race/ethnicity, nativity, and educational attainment shapes and influences marriages formation and whether a marriage is interracial. This indicates that differences in these characteristics by metropolitan area may lead to differences in interracial marriage. Furthermore, changes in these characteristics over time for a given metropolitan area also influence interracial marriage.

We propose to use 5% PUMS data from the 1980 to 2000 censuses and data from 2005-2008 American Community Surveys to examine how marriage market conditions in metropolitan areas affect interracial marriage. Our first goal is to update the trend in interracial marriage for the five major racial/ethnic groups (non-Hispanic whites, blacks, Asians, and American Indians, and Hispanics). Our second goal is to explore the impact of marriage market conditions on interracial marriage. We propose two measures to fulfill our goals – prevalence and incidence. We first examine prevalence of interracial marriage given that data from the 1990 and 2000 censuses as well as data from the early years of ACS do not have information on marriage dates. This measure allows us to use all the data available, but the downside is that it is difficult to define the populations at risk of marriage because marriages can happen at any point of time. We will limit the analysis to young married couples (ages 20-34) to increase the likelihood that marriages take place in recent years. Our second measure is incidence of interracial marriage. This analysis will be limited to data from the 1980 census and 2008 ACS, both of which have information on marriage dates. We will compare intermarriages formed in the past three years for metropolitan areas included in the ACS. Populations at risk of marriage will be properly defined.

We will compare differences in interracial marriage among metropolitan areas and then explore how metropolitan area racial/ethnic diversity, nativity mix, and educational compositions influence interracial marriage. We will evaluate whether shortages of potential partners in each racial and ethnic, nativity, and educational group encourage persons to redefine their pool of eligible partners (Guttentag and Secord 1983) and lead to marriages across group boundaries. We will then examine how changes in metropolitan area characteristics influence interracial marriage.

The statistical methods to carry out this analysis are log-rate models. The models enable us to examine temporal changes and racial/ethnic group variation in assortative mating and marital assimilation (Kalmijn 1998; Qian 1997). This modeling strategy provides measures of social distance among racial/ethnic immigrant groups, and reveals patterns of intermarriage between population groups distinguished by race/ethnicity, nativity, and educational attainment. More importantly, the models take into account the marginal distributions of the variables under consideration as well as population at risk of marriage (never married populations by race and ethnicity, nativity, and educational attainment).

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