The Reshaping of Racial Boundaries in Intimate Relationships

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Council of Contemporary Families
Is love is (color) blind?
Interracial Marriage Trend, 1980-2008

% married someone of a different race/ethnicity

- **Newly married**
  - 1980: 6.7
  - 1990: 4.5
  - 2000: 6.8
  - 2010: 14.6

- **Currently married**
  - 1980: 3.2
  - 1990: 5.0
  - 2000: 7.6
  - 2010: 8.0
Past, Present, and Future

- Background: Some less appreciated facts
- What’s different from the past?
- The future: Integration or fragmentation?
Why Intermarriage Matters

• Proxy for inter-group relations, social distance, or as the “final step” in the assimilation process
• Intermarriage indicates that different groups are similar or equal
Racial Boundaries and Intermarriage

• Boundary crossing, shifting, and blurring (i.e., the spoon that stirs the melting pot).

• Why intermarriage rates change
  – Easing of third party constraints (e.g., anti-miscegenation laws)
  – Shifting racial attitudes
  – Changing demographic opportunities to marry
Interracial marriage: A Complicated Story

Black Exceptionalism

• Racial variation in out-marriage
  – Big variation within pan-ethnic groups
• Gender asymmetry
• Most interracial marriages are between whites and minorities rather than between minorities
• Changing link between education and intermarriage
• Mixed-race populations and demographic momentum
• Cohabitation and interracial unions
What’s Different Today? Immigration and the “New” Marriage Market

• Immigration
  – 1 million legal immigrants a year until recently
  – Nearly 40 million foreign-born
  – 15% of US population is Hispanic
  – Uneven spatial spread and segregation
  – Economic incorporation and the future

• Demographic axiom: *Out-marriage is inversely correlated with group size*
Implications

• Increase marriage opportunities for co-ethnics
• Increase ancestral and cultural identity among the native-born, depress out-marriage rates, slow the assimilation process, and lead to racial fragmentation
  – This will be revealed in the second-generation “returning” ethnic heritage through marriage
  – A hardening of generation and racial boundaries
Interracial Marriages, 1980 and 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US-Born Black Women</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>US-Born American Indian Women</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>US-Born Asian American Women</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>US-Born Hispanic Women</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
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</table>

Changes among Hispanics
Retreat from Intermarriage?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First generation</th>
<th>Second generation</th>
<th>Third generation</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marry Hispanics</td>
<td>94.42</td>
<td>81.28</td>
<td>67.75</td>
<td>86.33</td>
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<td>84.56</td>
<td>39.66</td>
<td>10.48</td>
<td>60.48</td>
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<td>7.79</td>
<td>28.27</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>12.60</td>
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<td>2.07</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>45.13</td>
<td>13.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marry non-Hispanics</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>18.73</td>
<td>32.24</td>
<td>13.68</td>
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<td>4.63</td>
<td>14.78</td>
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<td>0.94</td>
<td>3.95</td>
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<td>Total %</td>
<td>99.99</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>4927</td>
<td>1528</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>8266</td>
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</table>

Source: Lichter, Carmalt, and Qian (*Sociological Forum*, June 2011)
What about the Future?

- Changing volume of new immigrants
- Changing generational mix
- Changing racial and ethnic identity
- Growing bi-racial population
- Changing racial and ethnic inequality (e.g., education)
- Increasing cohabitation and transitions to marriage
- Changing sex ratios (e.g., more highly-educated women than men)
Implications for Public Policy

• Growing racial and ethnic diversity is here to stay, even with highly restrictive immigration policy

• New and uneven geography of immigrant assimilation – concerns about a new racial and economic balkanization (i.e., ethnic enclaves/ghettos)

• The “pause” or retreat in intermarriage with whites, and new native-immigrant marriages, reflect and reinforce changing ethnic identity