Family Diversity Within and Across Ethno-Racial and Socioeconomic Groups: The Role of Assortative Mating

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Agenda

• Why I study assortative mating – particularly interracial unions

• Patterns of interracial unions

• Existing approaches and limitations

• Pose questions so that we can collectively come up with potential solutions
They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient -- though untitled -- families.

They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses.

If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up."

``In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal.‘’

- Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*
Why study assortative mating?

- **Barometer of social inequality**
  - Intermarriage patterns tells us about distance across ethno-racial groups
  - Intermarriage trends tells us whether distance across social groups is diminishing

- **Implications for future population composition**
  - Rise in intermarriage may portend a rise in multiracial populations
  - Inequality in resources available to the next generations
Interracial marriage trends

Source: Pew Research Center
Attitudes towards intermarriage

Acceptance of Blacks and Whites Dating Each Other, 1987-2009

% agreeing with the statement that it is all right for blacks and whites to date each other

Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 1987-2009
PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Barriers and implications

- Racial differences continue to be one of the most formidable barriers to marriage (Campbell & Martin, 2019)

- Barriers are particularly pronounced for White-Blacks (Qian and Lichter, 2007; Choi & Tienda, 2017)

- It has implications for
  - Who selects into these unions
  - Type of family arrangements
  - Challenges that they face after union
  - Union dissolution and family instability
  - Wellbeing and outcomes
Current approaches

Most datasets do not collect “detailed” information on the ethno-racial backgrounds for multiracial individuals

To identify multiracial individuals,

- Link mothers and fathers in households
- Rely on marital/cohabitation histories which offers self-reports of respondent’s race and proxy reports of partners’ ethno-race
- Empirical focus: multiracial individuals/children who are living with two parents

**Question:** What would be a good sampling frame and method of data collection that allows to capture interracial couples and multiracial individuals in a wide array of families?
Current approaches (cont’d)

• Sample size issues
  • Multiracial individuals are 3% of the population in 2010
  • Multiracial populations need to be disaggregated further into subgroups (e.g., Black/Hispanic ≠ White/Asian)
  • Even if we pool multiple waves of data, we often do not have sufficient numbers of interracial couples or multiracial children

**Question**: We need to oversample, but how do we balance the issue of “representativeness” versus “sample size”?
Current approaches (cont’d)

• Processes: Selection into & causal effects of being in an interracial union
  • Barriers mean differential selectivity into the unions
  • Family organization, dynamics, and impact of family structure may differ across ethno-racial groups and b/w interracial and same-race couples
  • Within-group analysis is not the solution because dual/triple membership of multiracial individuals
  • Still need to maintain our ability to examine how interracial couples compare with their same-race counterparts

**Question:** How can we capture these *within* group family processes without losing our ability to capture differences in family processes *across* groups?