

Interracial Dating and Endogamy among Mixed-Race Youth in the United States

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Abstract

Research shows that multiracial individuals are more likely than their single-race counterparts to intermarry with and cohabit with whites. However, little is known regarding why this is the case. While some researchers speculate that biracial Asian-white and American-Indian-white people are more likely to marry whites because they themselves may primarily identify as white, this hypothesis has not yet been tested. The present study tests the hypothesis that multiracial partnerships are indeed reflective of endogamous dating practices using data from the first wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Preliminary results provide support for this hypothesis.

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Introduction

This study examines dating patterns among mixed race youth in the United States. In recent years, multiracial identity has come to the forefront of discussions of race and ethnicity due in large part to the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) decision to allow respondents to mark more than one race on the 2000 census (Williams 2006). This decision made it possible to identify multiracial individuals and collect systematic information on the particular races that they identified with. It also raised controversy over the meaning of "multiracial" for the future of U.S. race relations. Some argued that the recognition of a multiracial identity would improve race relations in the U.S. by breaking down racial categories and the racial hierarchy. Others argued, on the other hand, that the first step to "doing away with race" was to accept a multiracial identity and to recognize that as more people married interracially, everyone would be "mixed" and there would no longer be a need for racial categories. The data, however, provide mixed support for these hypotheses.

While data show that interracial marriage has increased since 1970, rates of intermarriage vary dramatically across racial groups, with blacks being the least likely to intermarry with whites (Rosenfeld 2002). Other research finds that people who identify as monoracial are less likely to intermarry with whites than are those who identify as multiracial (Qian & Lichter 2007). However, even among multiracial individuals, rates of intermarriage with whites reflect marriage patterns similar to those of single-race individuals—biracial American Indian/white individuals and biracial Asian/white individuals are still the most likely to intermarry with whites (Qian & Lichter 2007). What do these findings mean for the interpretation of "intermarriage" among mixed race people and what factors influence partner selection?

Research Question

The current study seeks to address the following research question:

Do partnerships among multiracials reflect endogamous dating practices? To examine this question, I test the hypothesis that mixed race individuals who identify most with a race other than white are less likely to have a white first partner than are individuals who identify as white most.

Data

Using data from the first wave of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), this study examines the role of racial identification in partner selection among multiracial individuals. Add Health is a nationally representative, longitudinal study of a sample of adolescents that were in grades 7-12 in 1994-1995. This study uses data from the in-home sample of respondents, which includes detailed information on respondents' racial self-identification (including multiracial identification and "best single race" identification) and relationship and partnership histories. The final sample included 181 respondents who identified with more than one race and who had ever had at least one romantic partner.

Several features make the Add Health data well-suited for this analysis. First, the data include measures of racial identification that allow for the selection of more than one race and also include a measure that asks respondents who selected more than one race to choose a single race category that they believe best represents them. The data also include an oversample of blacks which increases the potential sample of black-white adolescents (a key concern given the small number of blacks, and the even smaller proportion of mixed-race individuals, captured in surveys). And lastly, though the overall sample of adolescents included in this study is still quite small, the data do have enough information on a sample large enough for statistical analyses.

Methodology

First, this study presents cross-tabulations on patterns of dating among multiracial youth. The cross tabulations display information on the percentage of respondents with a white first romantic partner according to the best single-race of the respondent.

For the multivariate analysis, this study uses logistic regression models to examine the odds of having a white first romantic partner. The central independent variables are indicator variables for the respondent's best single race; the models also include controls for age, sex, mother's education, and the interviewer's observation of the respondent's race.

Preliminary Results

Table 1. Percentage of Mixed Race Respondents with a White First Romantic Partner, by Respondent's Best Single Race

	Race of Respondent's First Romantic Partner (%)	
	Non-White	White
Respondent's Best Race		
White	19.2	80.8
Black	77.0	23.0
Other	60.4	39.6
Native American	51.1	48.9
Asian	80.3	19.7

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Wave I

N=181 adolescents who selected more than one race and had at least 1 romantic partner

Note: Data adjusted to account for complex sampling design

Preliminary data show that even among multiracial adolescents, dating partnerships do indeed reflect homophilous practices.

References

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