THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE AND GENDER IN RELATIONSHIP INVOLVEMENT AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN THE UNITED STATES: ARE ASIAN AMERICAN MEN AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE?

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Extended Abstract

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ABSTRACT

Previous research oversimplifies the racial and gender gaps in relationship involvement by focusing on different-sex co-residential relationships. We use data from the first and fourth waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to examine differences by gender and race/ethnicity in relationship among young adults. Add Health includes oversamples of some minorities, and Wave IV collected information on current and prior romantic and sexual relationships, regardless whether the partners cohabited or married. We document race gaps in marriage between whites and other race/ethnicity groups but reveal how they diminish when the current definition of relationship is broadened to encompass sexual or romantic involvement. Asian men differ dramatically from white men in both current romantic/sexual involvement but also marriage, and they are the least likely of any group (e.g., black women) to be partnered. Our goal is to determine whether race gaps in relationship involvement are due more to preferences or constraints.

INTRODUCTION

Studies have long documented racial gaps in marriage, with blacks having considerably lower rates of marriage than whites or Hispanics. Marriage rates among Hispanics, however, vary according the nativity and national origin (Landale and Oropesa 2007). These race gaps are evident for men and women and across individuals with different levels of educational attainment (Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Schneider 2011). However, it appears that the size of these disparities is largely dependent on how relationships are defined. For instance, Raley (1996) found that the racial gap between whites and blacks in the timing of first unions was smaller for co-residential relationship involvement (i.e. marriage or cohabitation) than for marriage). Studies concerning relationship involvement among Asians typically restrict their samples to currently married couples and examine interracial involvement (Qian 1997). In other words, we know almost nothing about other types of romantic involvement for Asians or Hispanics.

Missing from previous studies is a broader definition of relationship involvement. Delays in marriage necessitate a broader conceptualization of relationship involvement, especially when focusing on young adults. We argue that when the definition of relationships is broadened to include any romantic or sexual involvement, most of the gaps between white, blacks, and Hispanics will diminish. Previous studies suggest educational attainment has different implications for cohabitation and marriage; marriage increases as degrees accumulate but cohabitation decreases. We also expect racial hierarchies in involvement to differ for men and women, reflecting sex differences in interracial involvement among blacks and Asians (Qian 1997). Previous studies suggest black men's greater interracial involvement ultimately reduces black women's prospects for marriage (Crowder and Tolnay 2000).

In addition, previous research largely fails to consider relationship involvement of Asian Americans. Studies based on recent cohorts of men and women suggest that greater educational attainment delays the timing of marriage but increases its eventual likelihood (Goldstein and Kenney 2001). If higher socioeconomic attainment of men is associated with increased desirability of them as potential romantic partners, we might expect that given the much higher levels of educational attainment and income for Asian American men might make them have better or at least similar prospects as their white, black, or Hispanic male counterparts. Kao, Vaquera, and Goyette (Forthcoming, 2013) find that among adults 25 and older, almost 50% of Asian Americans have a B.A. Degree or higher, compared to about 30% of whites, 18% of blacks, and 13% of Hispanics. While they did not present numbers by gender, we suspect that the gaps are even greater given that black men have lower levels of educational attainment compared to black women but Asian men have higher levels of educational attainment than Asian women. We will document these differences in greater detail in our manuscript prior to PAA.

However, media observers have noticed significant variation in how men and women of different racial groups are perceived in terms of their desirability as sexual partners. For example, black men may be viewed as hyper-masculine, while Asian women are seen as passive and docile and hyper-feminine. While film scholars and media commentators have described these stereotypical images of race and gender groups, we believe that quantitative social scientists have generally not linked these images to patterns of union formation largely because they have focused on blacks and whites, and by doing so, they have potentially missed the large differences in union formation between whites and other racial/ethnic groups.

In particular, we argue that Asian American men face additional challenges as stereotypical portrayals of them in Hollywood movies and advertisements promote them as

geeky and awkward romantic partners. Many film scholars and Asian American commentators have long lamented the fact that Asian American men rarely play romantic leads in films. Film scholar Peter Feng writes that "(t)he sexual dimension of the the image of Asians and Asian Americans cannot be overemphasized" (Feng, 2002, pp 9-10). He further argues that the feminization of Asian American men is visible throughout Hollywood film and even to straight and gay pornography. Even when Asian American men are present as the lead male (usually in martial arts or action films), they rarely have the opportunity to demonstrate any physical displays of affection. For example in *Romeo Must Die*, a 2002 film by Andrzej Bartkowiak based on Romeo and Juliet starring Chinese actor Jet Li and Aaliyah (an African American actress), the two leading characters never kiss despite the romantic link between them. A kiss between the actors was tested with a focus group, but they were uncomfortable with it, so in the cinematic release of this film, the two characters (again, based on Romeo and Juliet) hug instead.

In fact, Asian American males usually serve as exemplar in their awkwardness around women. In Sixteen Candles (1984), a film by John Hughes, the character Long Duk Dong has been well-cited as the quintessential Asian American geek that well-known to Asian Americans males who were adolescents in the 1980s. In a 2008 story on National Public Radio, Martin Wong and Eric Nakamura, co-founders of Giant Robot (a magazine that examines Asian American popular culture stated that "Every single Asian dude who went to high school or junior high during the era of John Hughes movies was called 'Donger'" (Wong and Nakamura quoted in MacAdam, 2008). Most recently, Asian American basketball player Jeremy Lin became the darling of the Asian American community, and in no small part due to his shattering of the popular portrayals of Asian American men as geeks and undesirable romantic partners. After Jeremy Lin's 38-point performance in a game between the New York Knicks and the Los

Angeles Lakers, Fox Sports News Commentator Jason Whitlock tweeted on February 11, 2012 "(s)ome lucky lady is NYC is gonna feel a couple of inches of pain tonight" (quoted in Laird, 2012).

Feliciano, Robnett and Komaie (2009) find that among white internet daters on Yahoo Personals who expressed a racial preference in who they would date, the vast majority of white women (94%) excluded Asian American and black men. In another paper, Robnett and Feliciano (2011) find using the same data set, that while less than 10% of Asian men would not date an Asian woman, approximately 40% of Asian women would not date an Asian man. Asian men (along with black women) were excluded at the highest rate by their same-race counterparts as well as by other race groups. Feliciano and Robnett only examined heterosexual daters, so it is unclear whether dating preferences for certain racial/gender groups are similar among the LGBT population. However, given that their analyses only examines a sample that is not representative of the U.S. population and also only represents those who expressed racial preferences in their profiles, it is difficult to gauge whether these preferences are present in the general U.S. population.

DATA AND METHODS

This project uses information from the first and fourth waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to examine differences by gender and race/ethnicity in relationship involvement among young adults. Add Health is a longitudinal school-based study. Using rosters from each school, Add Health selected a nationally representative (core) sample of 12,105 adolescents in grades seven to twelve to participate in the first in-home interview. Add Health additionally selected oversamples of four racial groups:

1,038 black adolescents from well-educated families, 334 Chinese adolescents, 450 Cuban adolescents, and 437 Puerto Rican adolescents. The first in-home interview was conducted between April and December of 1995.The response rate for the in-home sample was 79%. In 2007 and 2008, the project conducted a fourth wave of in-home interviews for 15,701 of the original 20,745 respondents (a retention rate of over 75%). By the time of the fourth in-home interview, respondents were between the ages of 24 and 32. Our sample is restricted to 6,772 males and 7,708 females (total N = 14,480) who report their relationship status at Wave IV.

Variables

Our models utilize two dichotomous dependent variables that correspond to the time of the fourth wave interview: 1) whether the respondent is married to someone of a different sex at the time of the fourth wave, and 2) whether the respondent is in a current romantic or sexual relationship, regardless of the sex of the partner. The use of these two variables enables us to corroborate the results of conventional analyses that focus on different-sex marriage and to consider how patterns by gender and race/ethnicity change when the definition of relationship involvement is broadened to take into account any romantic/sexual involvement.

Our independent variables include the respondent's race/ethnicity, gender, educational attainment and age. We additionally measure current romantic involvement (including same-sex partners and different-sex partners) based on the first in-home interview and the total number of times respondents were nominated by male and female peers at the time of in-school questionnaire administration (occurring prior to the date of the first in-home interview). The majority of respondents who participated in the in-home interview was listed on the school rosters, and consequently we have information on this measure of "popularity" for them.

We divide respondents into mutually exclusive categories on the basis of their answers to questions on race and Hispanic descent at the Wave I interview: Hispanic (of any race), and non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic Asian, and non-Hispanic white (the reference category). Non-Hispanic respondents who report more than one race were asked what category that best described their race and classified accordingly. We place respondents into four educational attainment categories on the basic of their highest degree at Wave IV: less than high school, high school degree (reference category), some college, and college degree. Current romantic relationship involvement at Wave I is coded as a dichotomous indicator, while number of friendship nomination is retained as a continuous variable.

Methods

For our multivariate analyses, we use survey logistic regression given our dichotomous dependent variables and the complex survey design of Add Health. We estimate four different models for both of the independent variables: Model 1 includes only race/ethnic groups, Model 2 adds age and educational attainment, and Models 3 and 4 add the Wave I romantic relationship indicator and the measure of popularity, respectively.

Results

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics (survey-adjusted means and standard deviations) for our sample of young adults (N=14,480) at the time of the wave-four interview. Roughly one-half of respondents in the sample are female and the match the general population in terms of race/ethnicity. Turning to our key focal outcomes, approximately 77% of the study respondents

are currently involved in romantic or sexual relationship, with 40% currently married. Respondents are, on average, 28.4 years old. A third report having some college experience, while 30% report obtaining a college degree. A third of respondents also note that they are in a current romantic relationship at the wave one interview. We also have information on received friendship nominations for a subsample of respondents, and they are the focus of a supplementary analysis (N=10,020). On average, respondents received 4.3 nominations of friendship.

[Table 1 about here.]

Table 2 presents the mean levels (and confidence intervals) of our relationship status measures across race/ethnic groups for men and women. Reflecting gender differences in entry into more serious relationships, women generally are more likely to be married or romantically partnered than men. In addition, it is worth noting several other patterns. As previous studies show, race gaps in marriage are clearly evident, with blacks having lower rates of marriage than whites. Forty percent of white men and almost 50% of white women are married by Wave 4, compared with just 23% of black men and 22% of black women. In concert with previous studies, Hispanics appear closer to whites than blacks with respect to both marriage and romantic involvement. Our large sample also enables us to additionally distinguish patterns for Asian men and women. This distinction reveals a gap between Asians and whites in both marriage and relationship involvement among men but not among women. Compared to 40% of white men, just 31% of Asian men are married. Further, less than two-thirds (63%) of Asian men report having any romantic relationship compared with almost 77% of white men. Interestingly, black women exhibit the lowest rates of marriage (21.6%) of any race/ethnic or gender group, while Asian men have the lowest rates of romantic involvement (63%). Asian men are also

disadvantaged in their relationship status compared to Asian women. Specifically, 79% of Asian women compared to 63% of Asian men are currently in a relationship. For all other racial/ethnic groups, the gender gap is no more than a few percentage points.

[Table 2 about here.]

To better highlight racial differences in marriage and romantic involvement, and to examine the role of demographic factors and earlier experiences in these gaps, we turn to multivariate analyses. Given the distinctive gender differences in patters of relationship outcomes being measured, we present models separately for males (Table 3) and females (Table 4).

Table 3 presents the odds ratios from a logistic regression models predicting the log-odds of marriage (the first panel) and the log-odds of any current relationship (the second panel) among young adults. Model 1, largely of descriptive interest, shows the unadjusted racial gap in marriage. Black men, as well as Asian men, exhibit significantly lower odds of marriage than white men. The unadjusted odds of marriage differ only marginally between Hispanic and white men. Previous studies demonstrate that the likelihood marrying increases with greater education and age (citations). Therefore, in Model 2, we tested whether the marriage advantage persists for white men controlling for respondent's age and educational attainment. Taking into account age and educational attainment, black, Asian, and Hispanic men have significantly lower odds of marriage than do white men. After controlling for prior adolescent relationships, as well as popularity, differences between the racial groups remain significant for Asian and black men.

[Table 3 about here.]

We find that the odds of marriage increase significantly with age, but not with greater educational attainment. That is, there are no statistical differences in the likelihood of being married at Wave IV between high-school educated men and their counterparts with less or more education. We ran additional analyses (results not shown) to determine why these models failed to detect a strong education gradient with respect to marriage. For instance, we estimated a model that included only education dummies and ran model to for older respondents. Still, we found no significant differences between high school educated and other groups of men. Not surprisingly, current relationship involvement at Wave I significantly increases men's likelihood of being married at Wave Four.

Results of the regression for any romantic relationship are somewhat similar, with enduring differences for black and Asian men, in comparison to white men. As in marriage, net of several background factors, Asian men and Black men have significantly lower odds of being in a romantic relationship than do white men. Again, no significant differences are evident between Hispanic and white men in the likelihood of being in a romantic relationship in the model with the full set of controls. There is some evidence that college attendance and completion increases relationship involvement. Romantic involvement and popularity at Wave I significantly increase the likelihood of relationship involvement at Wave Four.

Results from parallel regression analyses of relationship status among women in **Table 4** show some similarities in how background characteristics affect relationship status for men, but significantly different patterns by race/ethnicity. As is the case for white men compared to black men, white women have significantly higher odds of marriage by Wave IV than do black women. Contrary to the results for men, the odds of marriage fail to differ significantly between white and Asian women, but the odds of marriage for Hispanic women are significantly lower.

Controls for education and age do alter some of the differences between whites and other racial and ethnic groups' odds of marriage, yet all three groups exhibit lower odds of marriage compared to whites. These differences persist in Model 3, which adds a control for earlier romantic involvement. Asian women are no longer significantly different from white women once popularity is taken into account; however, this model is based on a subset of women. Among men, education was not a significant predictor of marriage. In contrast, Models 2 and 3 show a clear education gradient with respect to marriage for women. College educated women have a higher odds of marriage than do women who possess only a high school education. Both popularity and romantic involvement at Wave I increase the odds of marriage at Wave IV for women.

[Table 4 about here.]

Turning to any romantic relationship, we see a continued pattern of exclusion of black women, but not Hispanic women. The odds of being in any romantic relationship by Wave IV are 61% as high for black women as they are for white women. We find no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of being in a romantic relationship for Hispanic or Asian women as compared to white women. These patterns persist across all four models. As in the case of marriage, a strong education gradient is evident in Models 1 and 2, with education increasing romantic involvement. In addition, both of the wave one measures of sociability increase the odds of marriage at Wave 4 for women.

CONCLUSION

We expected to find racial gaps in marriage among young adult men and women alike based on the findings of previous studies. Specifically, we anticipated finding lower rates of marriage for black men and women in comparison to their same-sex white counterparts. We also suspected that we would find lower rates of marriage for Hispanics relative to whites, but expected the magnitude to be smaller. We also expected that marriage gaps would persist even after controlling for educational attainment, as previous studies on marriage have found. Finally, we anticipated that racial gaps for romantic involvement would be smaller than gaps for marriage, reflecting the resources associated with marriage.

Our results were largely consistent with these expectations. In models run separately for men and women blacks and Hispanics exhibited a lower likelihood of being of married than whites, even in models with controls for demographic characteristics. Racial gaps in romantic involvement were much less pronounced. For instance, we failed to detect any significant differences in romantic involvement between Hispanics and whites. In comparison to their white counterparts, black men and black women had roughly two-thirds and three-fifths the odds of being partnered, respectively, in contrast to two-fifths and one-third the odds of being married.

Our inclusion of a substantial number of Hispanics enabled us to also identify gaps between Asians and whites as well. Among men and women, Asians were significantly less likely to be married than whites. Like Hispanic, Asian women failed to differ from their white counterparts once we broadened the definition of current involvement to include sexual and romantic relationships. However, Asian men had a significantly lower likelihood of involvement than white men. In fact, differences between Asian and white men was more pronounced for models of any involvement than marriage. These substantial differences are consistent with

findings regarding dating preferences using nonrepresentative samples, as well as observations and analyses by Asian American film scholars and media observers, and we believe that the relationship between these images and empirical findings is new and will also be consistent in explaining the gap between black women and women from other racial/ethnic groups.

We have a number of analyses that we plan to conduct prior to the PAA Meetings. First of all, we plan to run multinomial logistic regression models that distinguish no current involvement from dating, cohabitation, and marriage. These models will enable us examine how the effects of variables by type of current involvement. The overlap in outcomes we examined (i.e., all married women are defined as partnered) could produce similarity in the effects of variables such as educational attainment. If cell size permits, we will also examine whether same-sex relationships should constitute a separate category in these models or combined with different-sex couples in the dating and cohabiting categories. (Very few married individuals report having a same-sex partner and some of them appear to have misclassified the sex of partner.)

We also plan to incorporate variables that help explain the race gaps that we have identified here. Ideally, we would like to determine whether the race gaps observed reflect preferences for involvement versus constraints in mate markets. For instance, to address desirability in broader mate markets, we can measure the number of nominations received from individuals of a different sex in adolescence. We can additionally measure preferences for different types of relationships at earlier interviews. We can also look at the number of sex partners in the past year and virginity status to address preferences and opportunities. It may be the case that the currently un-partnered individuals in this sample are abstaining from sex altogether or engaging in sex with multiple partners but not defining any as current. A

consideration of the race of and age of partners can potentially help explain gaps between men and women within racial groups.

It may be the case that the race gaps we observe, particularly for marriage, reflect delays in the formation of relationships altogether. For instance, we ran descriptive statistics for current marital status by gender, race, and age using data CPS March Supplement (ASEC) 2007 and 2008. These data provide an ample number of men and women from our four different racial groups to break analyses down by age, in addition to gender and race/ethnicity. These analyses suggested that by age 32 the gap in current marriage between Asian and white men had close, reflecting the fact that Asian men marry later than white men. While these analyses were informative, they did not distinguish Asian men by whether they were married in the United State, We plan to break subsequent analyses for Asian men down by nativity status to ascertain whether their marital prospects differ according to where they search for a partner (e.g., in the United States versus China).

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Variables Used in Analyses: Add Health Wave Four Respondents Classified at Wave I as White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian

Variables	Mean	SD
Wave Four Outcomes		
Currently in different-sex marriage	.398	(.012)
Current romantic or sexual relationship	.766	(.008)
Demographic Characteristics		
Female	.495	(.006)
White	.686	(.029)
Black	.161	(.021)
Hispanic	.121	(.017)
Asian	.032	(.007)
Age in years	28.4	(.118)
Less than HS	.092	(.007)
High school degree	.271	(.011)
Some college	.334	(.008)
College degree	.302	(.017)
Wave One Measues of Sociability		
Current romantic relationship	.333	(.378)
Number of friendship nominations received	4.3	(4.8)
Unweighted N	14,480	

Notes: Results are adjusted for survey design effects.
Unweighted N for popularity measure is 10,470.

Table 2. Means and Confidence Intervals for Wave Four Outcomes

	Wave Four Outcome					
	Current Marriage			Current Relationship		
	Mean	95% CI		Mean	95% CI	
Male						
White (N = 3,828)	0.399	0.371	0.426	0.767	0.746	0.788
Black (N = 1,359)	0.227	0.179	0.274	0.693	0.635	0.751
Hispanic (N = 1,111)	0.356	0.307	0.404	0.754	0.718	0.791
Asian (N = 464)	0.309	0.225	0.393	0.631	0.558	0.704
Female						
White (N = 4,254)	0.492	0.465	0.520	0.803	0.784	0.822
Black (N = 1,791)	0.216	0.185	0.247	0.709	0.687	0.732
Hispanic (N = 1,230)	0.409	0.341	0.476	0.772	0.725	0.820
Asian (N = 433)	0.417	0.327	0.508	0.791	0.709	0.874
Female - Male						
White	0.094			0.036		
Black	-0.011			0.016		
Hispanic	0.053			0.018		
Asian	0.108			0.160		

Notes: Results are adjusted for survey design effects.

Table 3. Odds Ratios from Logit Models of Wave Four Outcomes: Males (N = 6,772)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4[a]
Current Marriage				
Black	.442 ***	.414 ***	.401 ***	.381 ***
Hispanic	.834	.815 *	.818 *	.818
Asian	.675 *	.634 **	.662 *	.609 *
(Reference category = white)				
Age		1.21 ***	1.19 ***	1.22 ***
Less than HS		.852	.834	.869
Some college		1.14	1.12	1.05
College		1.08	1.08	.943
(Reference category = HS graduate)				
Current relationship at wave one			1.42 ***	1.37 ***
Friendship nominations at wave one				1.02
Current Relationship				
Black	.686 *	.696 **	.659 **	.672 *
Hispanic	.933	.949	.958	.966
Asian	.520 ***	.487 ***	.516 ***	.536 **
(Reference category = white)				
Age		1.07 *	1.03	1.06 ^
Less than HS		1.10	1.05	1.07
Some college		1.35 **	1.32 **	1.23 ^
College		1.37 *	1.38 *	1.14
(Reference category = HS graduate)				
Current relationship at wave one			1.88 ***	1.73 ***
Friendship nominations at wave one				1.04 ***
Fit Statistic				

a. Model 4 is a subset of respondents (N = 4,830).

*** p≤.001; ** p≤.01; * p≤.05

Table 4. Odds Ratios from Logit Models of Wave Four Outcomes: Females (N = 7,708)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4[a]
Current Marriage				
Black	.284 ***	.272 ***	.271 ***	.260 ***
Hispanic	.713 *	.726 *	.750 *	.667 *
Asian	.739	.654 *	.683 *	.711
(Reference category = white)				
Age		1.19 ***	1.16 ***	1.19 ***
Less than HS		.656 **	.633 **	.736
Some college		1.04	1.05	.976
College		1.31 **	1.34 **	1.10
(Reference category = HS graduate)				
Current relationship at wave one			1.39 ***	1.33 **
Friendship nominations at wave one				1.05 ***
Current Relationship				
Black	.599 ***	.619 ***	.617 ***	.606 ***
Hispanic	.834	.880	.918	.925
Asian	.931	.894	.949	1.28
(Reference category = white)				
Age		1.01	.977	.999
Less than HS		.729 *	.694 *	.871
Some college		1.05	1.05	.976
College		1.28 *	1.30 *	1.09
(Reference category = HS graduate)				
Current relationship at wave one			1.56 ***	1.61 ***
Friendship nominations at wave one				1.07 ***
Fit Statistic				

a. Model 4 is a subset of respondents (N = 5,640).

*** p≤.001; ** p≤.01; * p≤.05