Metropolitan Context and Racial-Ethnic Marriage Patterns among Young Adults

By

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Abstract:

Previous research has highlighted racial/ethnic disparities in marriage behavior and has linked it with contextual factors such as neighborhoods and cultural differences. Yet, to my knowledge, there are no studies that offer a comparison of White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian individuals across metropolitan areas to compare how an individuals' race/ethnicity is linked to both metropolitan context and whether or not they have ever married. This paper seeks to understand the relationship among the processes by using 2006-2010 American Community Survey data. This study uses a multi-level approach to predict the probability that young adults have never married based on a cluster of metropolitan-level characteristics.

Introduction:

Changes in marital behavior over recent decades have resulted in a marked increase in the proportion of the population that has never married (Cherlin 2009; Fry & Cohn 2010; Banks 2011). This decline is present across all racial/ethnic groups, though it is especially pronounced in the African American population. Studies have shown that the decline in marriage has led to an increase in the proportion women and children that live in poverty, and there is some evidence that suggests an association between the decline in marriage and the increase in the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections such as herpes and HIV (Dixon 2009; Banks 2011; Adimora et al. 2002).

There has been a range of research that has examined the relationship between context and demographic behavior, including marriage (Wilson 1987, South & Crowder 2000; Mclaughlin et al. 1993; Snyder, Brown & Condo 2004). The aim of the paper is to determine what, if any, metropolitan-level characteristics have a relationship to the probability as to whether or not individuals have ever-married. Examining marital behavior from a contextual level is important as it provides insight as to how the larger environment in which individuals resides shapes demographic behaviors. Metropolitan areas are selected as representative of contextual environments as they largely represent labor markets and the areas in which the increasingly mobile young populations work and participate in leisure activities (Frey 2011). Metropolitan areas are also the unit of analysis that maybe most significant in its overall influence on individual marital behavior.

Background:

Past research has relied on a variety of approached to explain the influences to marriage transition and the varying factors that may explain racial/ethnic disparities in the propensity to transition at all. Some studies indicate the importance of sex ratios within racial/ethnic groups to highlight marriage market

conditions as they relate to individual marriage outcomes (Lloyd 2006; Crowder & Tolnay 2000). The sex-ratio hypothesis states that marriage rates are affected by the "demographic availability of appropriately aged members of the opposite sex" (Tolnay & Crowder 2000:793). African American women are at a particular disadvantage in many local marriage markets when selecting a potential mate because of skewed sex ratios which favor men and result in a surplus of unmarried women (Fossett & Kiecolt 1993; South & Lloyd 1992). When there is an imbalance of sex ratios that favor men, a rational choice perspective would assume that marriage rates will be low because many men will delay marriage and prolong the mate search because of the increased number of options (South & Lloyd 1992; Becker 1981; White & Klein 2002).

There have been several explanations that aim to explain the ethnic disparities in marriage patterns. One of the most commonly cited explanations that specifically aims to explain the disparate marriage patterns of African American is the "Wilson Hypothesis", an extension of the sex-ratio argument (Wilson 1987). Past research, led by Wilson (1996) indicate that the number of "marriageable men" in a given marriage market is greatly reduced when high rates of Black male mortality, incarceration, unemployment/underemployment, and institutionalization are taken into account (Lichter et al. 1991; Crowder & Tolnay 2000). Wilson (1987; 1996) and others also find that equal or higher levels of education for men, when compared to a similar pool of women, is important in attracting a potential mate. Qian and Preston (1993) find that educational attainment is a critical factor and one of the most "important social influences in the marriage process" (p. 482).

Furthermore, there is some evidence that neighborhood context may matter when it comes to marriage transitions and marital stability (Anderson 1990; Fossett & Kiecolt 1993; South & Crowder 2000; South 2001). South and Crowder (2000) find that African Americans in neighborhoods that have high levels of social disorganization have lower probabilities of marriage transitions than individuals in

neighborhoods with more households with normative structures. However, this relationship was reversed for Non-Latino Whites: living in a disadvantaged neighborhood hastens the entry into marriage for this group. One of the possible explanations South and Crowder offer is that even though the Non-Latino Whites also live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, they are not as socially isolated from people and institutions of more stable environments and thus, the differences in effects of living in a socioeconomically disadvantaged setting (South & Crowder 2000). Perhaps the Latino populations' lower levels of segregation are factors in the differences in marriage prevalence, especially amongst the U.S. born group. African Americans and Latinos may be faced with similar socioeconomic conditions, but there is substantial evidence that Latinos are more likely to live in less segregated conditions than African Americans (Massey & Denton 1993; Frey 2011), though many foreign born Latinos are more likely to live amongst coethnics (Oropesa & Landale 2004).In regards to the Asian population, relatively research has focused on this population with exception of the vast number of studies that examine the prevalence of intermarriage among this population, especially for Asian-origin females (see Qian & Lichter 2007; Jacobs & Labov 2002). With the growth of intra-metropolitan mobility via employment and Labor Market Areas, perhaps it is the metropolitan area that may serve as a proxy in the current era to the neighborhood effects in the earlier marriage literature.

Research Questions and Hypotheses:

This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the association between contextual characteristics on the probability of individuals between ages 20 -34 being never married v. ever married?
    a. Does this differ by gender?

2. Are metropolitan level socio-economic indicators, such as income segregation and educational attainment important when predicting the probability of remaining never-married?
    a. Does this differ by gender?

3. Is metropolitan-level racial segregation important in predicting the probability that individuals are never married?
    a. Does this differ by gender?

Hypotheses:

H1a: Individuals in metropolitan areas with a higher prevalence of individuals that are currently married will have a lower probability of being in the never married category versus individuals in metropolitan with lower marriage prevalence.

H1b. Individuals in metropolitan areas with less balanced intraracial/interethnic sex ratios will have a higher probability of being in the never married category versus individuals that live in more a more balanced metropolitan context.

H2: Individuals in metropolitan areas with higher indicators of socio-economic stability or growth (via economic segregation and educational indicators) will have a lower probability of being in the never married category versus individuals in declining metropolitan areas.

H3: Individuals in metropolitan areas with lower levels of racial segregation will have a lower probability of being in the never married category versus individuals in metropolitan areas with higher levels of racial segregation.

Data and Methods:

The data are derived from two sources: the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for 2010 and Brown University's Longitudinal Tract Database for 2010. Both of these sources rely on both historical decennial census data , though for the purposes of this research paper the American Community Survey (ACS) will be used analytically. Both are nationally representative data sources of the entire United States population as they are derived from survey data from the US Census Bureau.

IPUMS. The IPUMS project essentially standardizes a vast number of variables across censuses, making it possible to analyze changes over time. Though the nature of the census is not longitudinal, using data from the IPUMS allows the comparison of several individual characteristics using a cross-

sectional approach. The IPUMS includes information about individual demographics, household composition, and geographic indicators such as metropolitan area. The IPUMS also provides weighting variables as much of the information comes from sample data. For this analysis, I will use information from the 1990 and 2000 census 5% samples, and 2006-2010 ACS 5% sample to examine individuals within metropolitan areas.

LTDB. The Longitudinal Tract Database, like the IPUMS, standardizes a set of population variables across census years to fit 2010 census boundaries. One of the key differences is that the LTDB is geographically based. The central goal is to provide standardized tract data to allow geographic comparisons over time. Both the population and area weighting are considered to have a "high degree of accuracy" (Logan, Xu & Stults 2012), specifically for the 2010 data files. Data from these two sources will be appended by metropolitan level FIPS (CBSA) codes and IPUMS codes to provide both information about individuals and the characteristics of the larger metropolitan areas in which they reside.

Measures

Dependent Variable: The dependent variable for these analyses will be never married versus ever married. Those who are single and never married are in the never married category, while individuals that are currently married, separated, divorced or widowed are in the ever married category.

Level 1 Individual Covariates:

Year: 2006-2010 American Community Survey (Individual-data)

Age: Age is a critical characteristic that shapes individual mate selection choices. This study is limited to individuals that are between ages 20 and 34. These ages are selected because they are more likely to reflect individuals that if married, are most likely to be in their first marriage.

Sex: I will include a variable for sex. This will allow the measurement of any sex differences in the probability of being never married.

Race/Hispanic origin: Race will consist of four categories including Non-Hispanic white, Non-Hispanic black, Non-Hispanic Asian, and Hispanic.

Nativity: Nativity is likely to be a factor for the Asian origin and Hispanic origin population as shorter exposure to U.S. culture for the foreign-born may have an influence on marital behavior.

Education: Education will consist of four categories including those who achieve less than high school, high school, some college, and Bachelor's degree or greater.

Employment Status: Employment status will indicate whether or not the respondent is currently employed.

Level 2 Metropolitan Covariates:

Year: 2006-2010 American Community Survey (Aggregate data)

Age/Sex distribution: This provides information about the proportions of the metropolitan population by age and sex.

Sex Ratios: Metropolitan- level intraracial/intraethnic sex ratios will be calculated to determine the number males per 100 females. The literature suggests that sex-ratios are an important factor to consider in marriage behavior at the population-level (Wilson 1987; Banks, 2011).

Proportion of Racial/Ethnic group: The metropolitan level proportion of the following racial/ethnic groups, Non-Hispanic white, Non-Hispanic black, Non-Hispanic Asian, Hispanic (of any race)

Proportion currently married: this is the proportion of the population that is currently married.

Proportion unemployed: The metropolitan level proportion of the population that is currently unemployed.

Index of Dissimilarity: The metropolitan level index of dissimilarity is used to determine the differences in the racial-ethnic distribution of one group compared to another. According to Logan et al. (2012), "a high value indicates that the two groups tend to live in different tracts". The number represents the proportion of one group that would need to move to different census tract in order for the two groups

to be equally distributed. The summary measure then reflects the overall level of residential segregation experienced by one racial or ethnic group averaged across the entire metropolitan area. Data is available for not only each group compared to whites, but for each group compared to each other (i.e. White-Black, Black-Hispanic, Hispanic-Asian, etc).

Income Segregation: The number of families in the metropolitan area that live in poor census tracts (median income ratio of <.67) (Logan et al. 2012). Unlike the other metropolitan level variables for 2010, this variable is constructed from the 2005-2009 ACS, but adjusted to the 2010 metropolitan area boundaries (Logan et al. 2012).

Preliminary Descriptives:

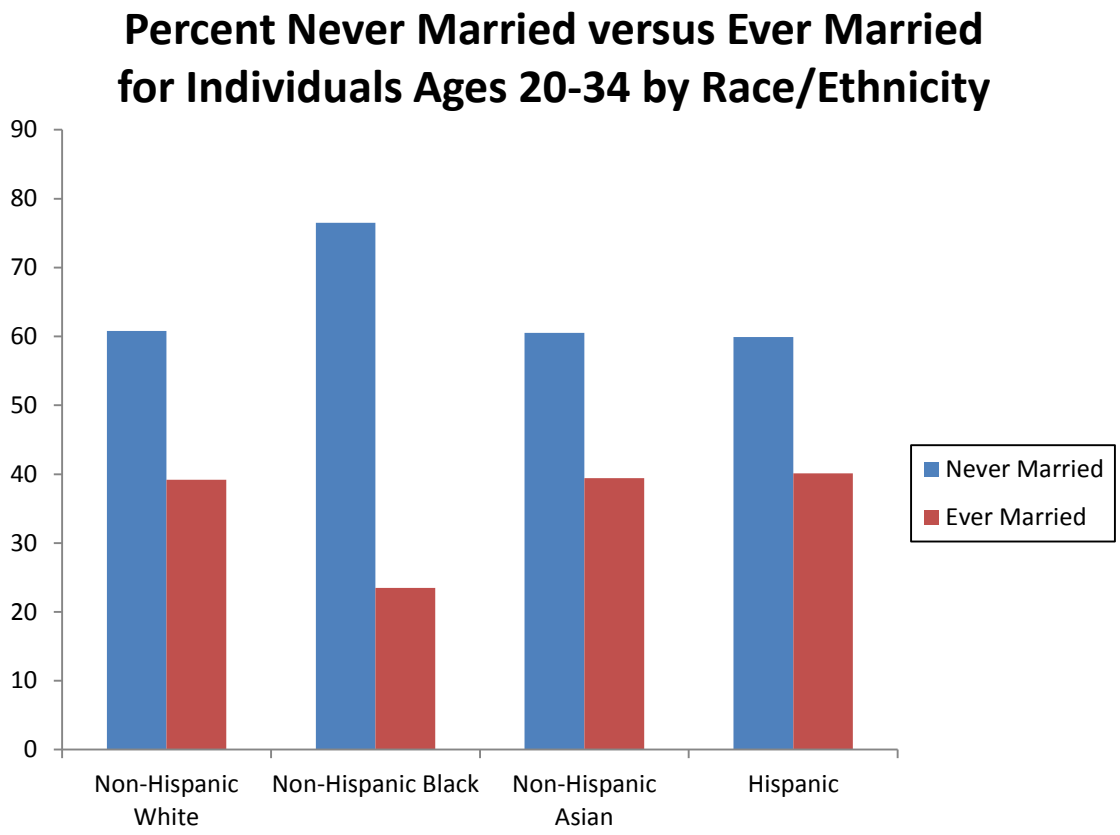
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Individuals Ages 20-34, 2006-2010 American Community Survey*

Race/Ethnicity (%)	
Non-Hispanic White	74.8
Non-Hispanic Black	14.9
Non-Hispanic Asian	10.3
Hispanic	15.8
Sex (%)	
Male	49.6
Female	50.3
Age	26.4
Marital Status (%)	
Never Married/Single	62.6
Currently Married	32.2
Divorced/Separated	5.0
Widowed	0.16
Nativity (%)	
Foreign Born	19.1
U.S. Born	80.9
Educational Attainment (%)	
Less than 12 years	9.2
High School Diploma	33.9
Some College	29.3
Bachelor's Degree or higher	27.6
Employment Status (%)	
Working	70.9
Not Working	29.1

Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata
**Weighted*

Table 1 contains the descriptive means for the analytic sample of individuals ages 20-34. This sample consists of approximately 3.5 million individuals residing in over 100 metropolitan areas across the United States. Table 1 shows racial/ethnic distribution of these individuals. The average age within this sample is just over 26 years with the majority of individuals born in the United States. The majority of this sample has at least a high school education, with a generous proportion having at least some college experience.

Figure 1.



Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey

Describe Table Here:

The bar chart in Figure 1. depicts the percentage of each racial/ethnic group in the ever married versus never married categories. The results are relatively similar for Whites, Hispanics, and Asians. The proportion of the Black population that is in the never married category is striking in comparison. The majority of young adults in this sample, however, have never been married.

Next Steps:

The next steps are to formally test the hypotheses via the use of multilevel logit models that will predict the probability that an individual will be in the never married category versus the ever married category based on metropolitan level characteristics. This effect will allow me to see whether there are specific clusters of contextual indicators, as suggested by the literature, that are associated with the marital outcomes of young adults. This is important because it could be that there are substantial racial-ethnic differences in the types of metropolitan areas certain groups tend to reside in, thus having a relationship to the marital behavior of these sub-populations. Each of the metropolitan-level variables highlighted in the data and methods are available, and will be incorporated into the final version of this paper.

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