What about (having) the children?: Fertility patterns among interracial couples

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Introduction

Racial differentials in fertility provide important markers for the ways that "race matters" in family formation. However, studies of racial differences in childbearing rarely account for the race of the spouse or partner because demographic studies of fertility rates and trends tend to focus on individual-level rather than couple-level characteristics. By implication, racial patterns in fertility may not address the childbearing patterns of interracial couples, a rare but increasingly common pathway of family formation (King and Bratter 2007). Thomson, et al. (2002) demonstrated that couple-level fertility patterns differ by whether the husband or the wife has previous biological children when entering a marriage. We similarly propose that group-level fertility differentials associated with other characteristics of husbands and wives, like race, may also matter differently in determining couple-level behavior. We ask whether the race-specific group-level fertility pattern associated with the female partner or with the male partner plays a dominant role in shaping the fertility behavior of the couple.

Discussions of interracial family formation and experiences of interracial couples have been dominated by the assumption that raising mixed-race children presents unique challenges for couples. But few researchers have paid attention to how frequently children are born to married versus cohabiting interracial couples, the timing of those births within the relationship, and the sibling context of those births (i.e., full-siblings versus monoracial half-siblings from previous relationships, average sibship size). We take a life course perspective in analyzing fertility to establish at what point during the childbearing trajectory interracial couples "stand out" and at what point their fertility mirrors their component racial groups. We compare fertility behaviors of couples along race-gender lines. For example, we will examine whether white women with non-white partners behave similarly to white women with white partners or to non-white women of their partner's racial/ethnic group. We expand our focus of study from married couples to cohabiting partnerships, too.

Using data from the 2002 NSFG (Cycle VI) male file, we examine the following facets of the fertility between interracial and same race couples:
- The number of children born per unit of time in relationship. Interracial couples have shorter durations reflecting their higher rate of divorce, structurally depressing the level of fertility.
- The length of time leading up to the first birth. Hypothetically, concerns about raising mixed-race children may inspire interracial couples to deliberate longer than same-race couples. But we will assess whether this is equally true at both younger and older ages, as potential concerns about diminished fertility enter the decision-making process.

- The relationship status at the time of the first birth, providing one of the first assessments of interracial fertility and mixed-race children within and outside of marital unions.

Data

We use data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle VI (NSFG), a nationally representative sample of 7,643 women and 4,928 men ages 15 to 44 (National Center for Health Statistics 2004). We restrict our analyses to male respondents who reported at least one marital or cohabiting relationship and who have valid information on the race of their partner and whether or not a birth occurred within the relationship, as well as on other predictor and dependent variables. Our final analytical sample is XXX males.

We use only the male file of the NSFG because of the difference between the reporting of births between the male and female files. In the male file, births are reported within the context of relationships, and thus we know explicitly the race/ethnicity of both parents. In the female file, births are reported in one history and unions in a separate history, and thus the identity of the father must be inferred by comparing the relative timing of the birth and the union. Since the female file lacks an explicit identification of the father, we refrained from using those data for these analyses that are already sensitive to error due to the rarity of the outcome.

Measures

<u>Racial and Ethnic Identity of Respondents and Partners</u>: As is standard for many large-scale social surveys, including the U.S. Census, the NSFG gathers information on the race of respondents and their partners (coded as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, White, or Black) separately from Hispanic origin . Although viewing "Hispanic" identity as an ethnic as opposed to a racial category is currently debated among social scientists and policy makers (e.g., Rodriguez 2000), our race/ethnicity variables follow the essential logic of the U.S. Census (Office of Management and Budget 1997). We first code four major non-Hispanic racial subpopulations (Non-Hispanic Whites, Non-Hispanic Blacks, Non-Hispanic Asians [and Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians], Non-Hispanic American Indians [and Native Americans]) and then, instead of grouping all Hispanics into one "pan-racial" category, we separate them as well by their racial background (Hispanic Whites, Hispanic Blacks, Hispanic Asians [and Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians], Hispanic American Indians [and Native Americans]).

While grouping all respondents into one pan-ethnic/racial "Hispanic" category has been done in prior studies on interracial relationships (Qian 1997), other work notes that crossing the Hispanic ethnic barrier is less contested than crossing an explicitly racial one because many Hispanics who engage in what may be considered interracial marriage by marrying non-Hispanics are actually marrying within race (Qian & Cobas 2004). To exploit this level of complexity in our data, as well as to elaborate on how certain types of

interracial childrearing may be viewed as more challenging than others, we model where differences between spouses are specifically between different racial groups as opposed to between persons of different ethnic (Hispanic/non-Hispanic) backgrounds.

The NSFG also allows for the reporting of multiple races for individual spouses and respondents. For respondents who indicate multiple races for their partner, the interviewer then asks respondents to report the race that "best describes" that partner (wording taken from the NSFG questionnaire). We code multiracial respondents who refused to provide a "best" race according to the first race listed, as that response reflects their initial reaction to the question. We assess whether the child is interracial on the basis of the spouse's "best" reported race as this reflects the degree to which the respondent views racial difference existing between the parents. We dropped cases where the race of spouse or partner was not provided. Our models include dichotomous indicators for multiple race male respondent and multiple race female partner (1=mixed race, 0=otherwise).

Interracial fertility therefore includes any birth where a difference exists in the racial or ethnic background of the respondent and the partner. Same-race fertility in our analyses occurs between two individuals of the same race who are either both non-Hispanic or both Hispanic.

Results

Table 1: descriptive statistics on sample
Table 2: fertility rates (births/year of relationship time) for interracial vs. same-race couples by union status and five-year age group of female partner
Table 3: event history models for time to first birth with time-varying age and union status covariates