

### Research Question

The current perspectives on racial/ethnic intermarriage view it as an important aspect of assimilation (Gordon, 1964; Liberson & Waters, 1988; Rosenfeld, 2002). Intermarriage between members of different groups is regarded as an indicator for the social distance and the permeability of boundary between the groups (Fu, 2001; Gordon, 1964; Liberson & Waters, 1988; Rosenfeld, 2002). Research on racial/ethnic intermarriage often considers the simple cross-tabular intermarriage rate for different racial and ethnic groups (see a review by Lee & Bean, 2004). A missing element in this type of research is that couple characteristics in the intermarriage pairings are not examined. In dealing with this missing element, recent drawing on Merton's (1941) and Davis' (1941) theory of status-caste exchange often finds that characteristics of intermarried couples reveal a pattern of *status exchange* (Davis, 1941; Merton, 1941, see Fu, 2001). Individuals from lower status racial groups with higher educational attainment tend to marry individuals of higher status racial groups with lower educational attainment (Kalmijn, 1993; Qian, 1997; Fu, 2001). Therefore, although the crude increases in intermarriage rates between different racial/ethnic groups would suggest a relaxation of social boundaries between the groups, the status mismatch found among the intermarried couples in fact points to persisting racial/ethnic status hierarchy.

Although research based on Merton's and Davis' theory of status-caste exchange that taking into consideration the couples characteristics represents significant improvements, the following shortcoming remains: research drawing on this theory often only considers intermarriage between different racial/ethnic minority groups and non-Hispanic Whites (e.g. Hwang et al., 1997; Jacobs & Labov, 2002; Lee & Fernandez, 1998; Labov & Jacobs, 1986; Lee & Bean, 2004; Kalmijn, 1993; Fu, 2001; Qian, 1997; Wong, 1989). Intermarriage patterns between two minority groups are largely under-researched. As America is projected to become a Majority-Minority society by 2043 (Lichter, 2013), this "Third Demographic Transition" (Coleman, 2006) poses great implications for the changing racial relations- or in Lee & Bean's (2004) term, "the changing color line"- in contemporary American society (Lichter, 2013). Research in racial relations has suggested that the racial hierarchy in the United States is moving beyond the traditional hierarchy of Whites over non-Whites and into non-Blacks over Blacks (Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996). Assimilation research has shifted from adopting a "straight-line model" (Gordon, 1964) to viewing the assimilation process as "segmented" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, see also Lee & Bean, 2004). Assimilating into the White middle-class is no longer the only path. For some groups, especially those perceived as non-White, assimilation now means joining the Black inner-city underclass (Rosenfeld, 2002). Thus, such shifts in the racial relations and assimilation patterns in the contemporary US call for investigation of the racial/ethnic boundaries and status hierarchy between different minority groups, in addition to examining the boundaries and hierarchy between racial/ethnic minority groups and the Whites. The primary objective of this paper is to examine the intermarriage patterns in minority-minority pairings. Particularly, this paper focuses on intermarriage patterns between non-Black minorities and non-Hispanic Blacks.

In this paper, in addition to non-Hispanic Blacks, following previous research (Hwang et al., 1997; Jacobs & Labov, 2002; Lee & Fernandez, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2002), other ethnic minorities analyzed are Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Mexican and Puerto Rican. More broadly

speaking, these seven ethnic groups fall into the categories of Asian and Latino. The scope of this article is limited to 2000 Census 5% Public Use Micro Sample. The analytical techniques are multinomial logistic and log-linear modeling, both of which are standard choices of models in intermarriage research.

This paper aims to make two contributions to the existing literature on racial/ethnic intermarriage: First, through focusing on couple characteristics in different intermarriage pairings, this paper modifies previous views on intermarriage and assimilation by drawing a conceptual distinction between group *boundary* and group *hierarchy*. Secondly, by examining intermarriage patterns in minority-minority pairings, this paper furthers the empirical understandings of racial/ethnic group boundary and hierarchy that are especially relevant in the contemporary context of shifting racial relations and “changing color line”.

### **Research Design and Hypotheses**

Previous research has highlighted three scenarios of racial/ethnic intermarriage, i.e. status-exchange, endogamous intermarriage and in-group preference (Fu, 2001). Each scenario holds different implications for group boundary and group hierarchy. I developed four main hypotheses. Using Log-linear modeling and multinomial logistics, I test which scenario best describe the intermarriage patterns for a given group, and by doing so, further illustrate the salience of group boundary vis-à-vis group hierarchy in the context of the “changing color line”.

#### **Intermarriage as Status Exchange**

Merton (1941) hypothesized that Blacks with low socioeconomic status can hardly marry Whites with high socioeconomic status, whereas the reverse is possible (Merton, 1941, see also Rosenfeld, 2005). In empirical studies, educational attainment measured in years of schooling is often used to proximate socioeconomic status (Fu, 2001). According to Merton, marriage between Blacks with high socioeconomic status and Whites with low socioeconomic status represents “an informal exchange of status” (Rosenfeld, 2005). Hence, within the framework of status-caste exchange theory, the crude increase in racial/ethnic intermarriage does not simply signify loosening group boundaries. Rather, findings of status mismatch among intermarried couples of different race/ethnicity could in fact points to persisting racial status hierarchy. Immigration has increased the racial/ethnic diversity in the US over the last four decades (Lee & Bean, 2004). The unprecedented immigration influx poses significant implications for the traditional White/Black bipolar racial boundary (Lee & Bean, 2004; Lichter, 2013). A puzzle of both theoretical and social significance is: Where do immigrant groups fall in the Black/White divide and whether the arrival of immigrants is eradicating the traditional racial boundaries and changing the “color line” (Alba 1999; Bean & Stevens 2003; Gans 1999; Lee & Bean 2003; see also Lee & Bean, 2004 for a review). Are new immigrant groups (such as Asians and Latinos) “racialized minorities falling closer to Blacks” in the status hierarchy (Lee & Bean, 2004), or are they seen as new groups that will eventually “join the economic and social mainstream” and hence fall closer to the Whites? This difficulty in determining which interpretation to adopt partly stems from analyzing only the intermarriage patterns between racial/ethnic minorities and the Whites. Such analyses provide no direct assessment of the relative status ordering of two minority groups. Therefore, in order to elucidate whether/how the color line is changing in terms of group boundary rigidity and status hierarchy, further extension of the status-caste exchange theory to incorporate intermarriage pairings of non-Black minorities and non-Hispanic Blacks is

needed. By doing so, it becomes possible to empirically test whether, and to what extent, the color line has changed to form a non-Black over Black status hierarchy. Following the formulation of the original status-caste exchange theory, I hypothesize that:

***Proposition 1.*** In the context of “the changing color line”, if a hierarchy of non-Black over Black exists, in non-Black/Black intermarriage pairings, a pattern of status exchange will be observed. Black partners will have higher socioeconomic status (measured in years of schooling) than their non-Black partners.

### **Endogamous Intermarriage**

Endogamous intermarriage conceptualizes racial/ethnic intermarriage as similar to racial/ethnic endogamous marriage. In the case of endogamous intermarriage, the characteristics of the intermarried couples are similar to that of the endogamous couple (Fu, 2001). Crossing group boundary does not affect patterns of intermarriage (Fu, 2001). Hence, endogamous intermarriage signifies loosening group boundary and eroding status hierarchy.

The assortative marriage literature often focuses on endogamous marriage. Empirical research in this area has consistently found a pattern of homogamy, that is, couples tend to be similar along a variety of aspects. Previous studies have examined patterns of homogamy along different dimensions, such as educational attainment (Rockwell, 1976; Mare, 1991); religion (Johnson, 1980) and occupation (Hout, 1982). Among them, greater attention has been given to investigating the trends and patterns of educational homogamy. This is because educational homogamy is often linked to patterns of social stratification (Mare, 1991) as education is both a consequence of family background and a determinant of labor market success (Jencks et al., 1979; Mare, 1991). Individuals tend to marry others who have similar educational background, measured in years of schooling.

Given that endogamous intermarriage happens when crossing group boundaries have no effect on intermarriage patterns (Fu, 2001), in the case of non-salient group boundary and status hierarchy, racial/ethnic intermarriage patterns are more likely to fit the conceptualization of endogamous intermarriage. Specifically, I hypothesize that:

***Proposition 2.*** If racial/ethnic group boundaries are weak and status hierarchy non-existent, the characteristics of intermarried couples will be similar to that of endogamous couples. Instead of status mismatch, a pattern of educational homogamy will be observed among intermarried couples.

### **In-group Preference**

Gordon (1964) has argued that individuals prefer “the comfort of [their groups’] communal institutions” (cited from Fu, 2001). The in-group preference perspective suggests that individuals would always prefer marrying spouses from their own group (Fu, 2001). Racial/ethnic identity is a “cultural resources” (Kalmijn, 1998) that allows individuals to “forge a common lifestyle and enhances mutual support” (Fu, 2001). If marriage follows a pattern of in-group preference, more desirable individuals will be more likely to marry within their own groups.

Contrary to endogamous intermarriage, in-group preference implicates more rigid group boundaries (Fu, 2001). However, in the case of in-group preference, there is no particular status

ordering of different groups (Gordon, 1964; Fu, 2001). In-group preference represents a scenario that is in line with Gordon's discussion of cultural pluralism (Fu, 2001) in which strong boundary does not imply status hierarchy. Hence, racial/ethnic intermarriage patterns are more likely to fit the conceptualization of in-group preference in the case of strong group boundary and eroding status hierarchy. Specifically, I hypothesize that:

**Proposition 3a.** If racial/ethnic group boundaries are strong and status hierarchy non-existent, in-group preference will be observed. Individuals with lower socioeconomic status (measured in years of schooling) are more likely to marry outside their own groups.

**Proposition 3b.** If in-group preference exists, a pattern of educational homogamy, rather than status mismatch, will be observed in intermarried couples.

Thus, we see that status exchange, endogamous intermarriage and in-group preference implicate group boundary and status hierarchy in different ways. When intermarriage characterized by status exchange is prevalent, a status ordering exists between the groups while the group boundaries remain permeable. This implication for group boundary and status hierarchy is opposite from that of in-group preference. When intermarriage is characterized by in-group preference, the boundaries between different groups are strong. Yet groups do not fall into a status hierarchy. Neither group boundary nor status hierarchy is salient if intermarriage follows the similar patterns of endogamous marriage.

If the color line is changing, this would suggest that the boundaries between Asians/Latinos and Whites are more permeable, comparing to that of Blacks and Whites. Furthermore, the changing color line also assumes a racial/ethnic status hierarchy of non-Blacks over Blacks. Rather than being the "racialized minorities falling closer to Blacks" (Bean & Lee, 2004), ethnic/racial minorities such as Asians and Latinos belong to the non-Black category and fall closer to Whites in the status hierarchy. Therefore, in addition to previous propositions, I hypothesize that:

**Proposition 4a.** In the context of "the changing color line", intermarriage between non-Black minorities and Whites will follow patterns of endogamous intermarriage and/or in-group preference.

**Proposition 4b.** In the context of "the changing color line", intermarriage between Blacks and Whites will follow patterns of status exchange, or a combination of status exchange and in-group preference.

**Proposition 4c.** In the context of "the changing color line", intermarriage between Blacks and non-Black minorities will follow patterns of status exchange, or a combination of status exchange and in-group preference.

## **Preliminary Findings**

Preliminary finding shows that comparing to Mexican Americans, East Asian groups (Japanese, Chinese and Korean Americans) exhibit different educational preference when marrying non-Hispanic Blacks. Mexican American with higher education attainment are more likely to marry out to both non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks, whereas in-group preference is the most salient feature for East Asian women and more educated East Asian men are more likely to marry White women, but are less likely to marry Black women.