

The Educational Gradient in Inter-marriage**The Educational Gradient in Inter-marriage: A Comparative Analysis of Immigrant Groups in the United States**Matthijs Kalmijn, *University of Amsterdam, Netherlands*

A common claim in the literature is that higher-educated persons are more likely to marry outside their ethnic/racial group than lower-educated persons. We re-examine this “educational gradient” with a multilevel analysis of 46 immigrant groups in the Current Population Survey. We find that there are positive effects not only of individual education on inter-marriage but also of the educational level of a group. Moreover, the educational gradient declines when the aggregate level of education of an immigrant group is higher. The aggregate effect of education points to cultural explanations of the gradient that emphasize the role of inter-ethnic attitudes. The interaction effect points to a structural explanation that explains the gradient in terms of opportunities of finding similarly educated spouses within the group.

Introduction

A well-known hypothesis in the sociological and demographic literature on inter-marriage is that higher-educated members of ethnic and racial minority groups marry more often outside the group than lower-educated members of such groups (Kalmijn 1998; King and Bratter 2007; Qian and Lichter 2007). A strong positive effect of education on ethnic inter-marriage has been found among white ethnic groups (Alba and Golden 1986; Kalmijn 1993), blacks (Fu 2001; Fu and Heaton 2008), and Hispanic Americans (Qian and Lichter 2007). For Asian Americans, research has generally not shown a positive effect on inter-marriage, and some studies even find a negative effect (Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre 1995; Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre 1997; Qian, Blair, and Ruf 2001; Qian and Lichter 2007).

In this paper, we re-examine the educational gradient in inter-marriage by looking at the role of education at two levels: the individual level and the group level. It is well-known that there are considerable differences among immigrant groups in their average level of education (Borjas 1992). Some groups, such as Mexican Americans and Dominican Americans, are low educated on average,

whereas other groups, such as Indians and Taiwanese, are higher educated. These group differences in education lead to a number of new questions. One question is whether there are differences in the chances to intermarry depending on the group level of education. For example, the white American majority may have a more favorable view of high-status immigrant groups than of low status immigrant groups and this could result in higher rates of intermarriage in high-status groups, regardless of the individual level of education of the individuals involved.

Another question is how the individual and group level interact. Even though the educational composition of immigrant groups will be relatively homogeneous, in each group, there is considerable room for individual deviations from the group average. This means that there are higher-educated persons in lower-educated immigrant groups and lower-educated persons in higher-educated immigrant groups. Given the strong tendency to marry homogamously with respect to education (Schwartz and Mare 2005), it is plausible that the chances to find an attractive spouse within the immigrant group are relatively poor for such persons. As we explain below, differences in the marriage market opportunities of lower- and higher-educated members of immigrant groups may suggest that the effect of education on intermarriage may be different for the different groups, depending on the average level of education of that group. In other words, there could be an interaction effect of the individual and the aggregate level of education on intermarriage.

To examine these issues, we examine the educational gradient in a large number of immigrant groups in the United States. We first examine how general the gradient is: are the groups for which no evidence was found in past research the only exceptions or is negative evidence more systematic? Second, we develop a multilevel logit model in which individuals are nested in 46 different immigrant groups. The multilevel model allows us to estimate the effects of education at two levels simultaneously and it makes it possible to examine cross-level interactions. As will be explained below, the multilevel analysis allows us to gain more insight into the underlying theoretical explanations of the gradient. The data we use are from the pooled series of the Current Population Surveys 1994-2006 (King et al. 2004). The analytical focus is on immigrants and the children of immigrants, together called "immigrants" in this paper (i.e., the first and second generation). Groups are defined in terms of national origins and intermarriage is defined as marrying into the white native stock.

Background and Hypotheses

Several explanations have been suggested for the educational gradient in intermarriage. These explanations can be categorized in cultural and structural perspectives (Kalmijn 1998). The cultural perspective on intermarriage focuses on the preferences, norms, and values that people have and that play a role in which spouse they select. The structural perspective emphasizes the chances that people have to meet ingroup and outgroup members and the way such chances are shaped by social and geographical constraints. We start with explanations suggested by the cultural perspective.

A cultural explanation of the gradient is based on the views and attitudes that people have of ethnic and racial minority groups. Many studies in the past have demonstrated a strong link between education, on the one hand, and interethnic attitudes, on the other hand. In general, higher-educated persons have less prejudice toward ethnic and racial minorities, are more positive toward different cultures and religions, and are more tolerant of immigration than lower-educated persons (Hello, Scheepers, and Gijsberts 2002; Jackman and Muha 1984; Kunovich 2004; Quillian 1995; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders 2002; Wagner and Zick 2006). As a result, higher-educated persons in the majority population would be more likely to accept a minority person as a possible spouse.

A higher education could also weaken the possible prejudices and ingroup preferences that ethnic minorities themselves have. The link between education and attitudes has less often been studied for ethnic minority populations and the few studies that have done so are less consistent. Some studies find the expected positive effects of education on intergroup tolerance but these effects appear weaker among minority groups than among the majority (Tolsma 2009). Other studies find no effects of education on the strength of ethnic identities among minorities (Feliciano 2009; Nesdale 2002). Hence, it is not clear if the gradient in intermarriage can be explained by educational differences in ethnic attitudes in the minority population, although more research on ethnic minorities is needed to support these expectations.

Another way in which interethnic attitudes may operate lies in the way society at large looks at individual members of minority groups. Majority persons, regardless of their education, may be more accepting of a member of an ethnic minority when this person has a higher socioeconomic status. In part, this may be because a higher status is correlated with cultural assimilation on the part of immigrants. For example, higher-status immigrants may be more likely to have adopted the traditions and customs of the receiving society, which would lead to a reduction in the social and cultural distance with the majority group (Alba and Nee 1997; Alba and Nee 2003). For another part, there may be a form of exchange in which the higher status of the minority person in the marriage market compensates for the lower prestige that the majority attaches to an immigrant group (Gullickson and Fu 2010; Jacobs and Labov 2002; Rosenfeld 2005).

The status aspects of education may also work at the group level. Persons in the majority may have a more favourable view of higher-status immigrant groups than of lower-status immigrant groups. One reason for this lies in statistical discrimination, i.e., the tendency to attribute group traits to individual members of a group (Quillian 2006). For example, people may believe that a member of a high-status immigrant group is culturally more assimilated, regardless of the actual degree of assimilation of this individual. Another reason why there may be an effect at the group level lies in the prestige that is attached to different immigrant groups. Social-psychological studies have shown that the degree of prejudice that people have toward immigrants and ethnic minorities depends on the characteristics of not only the people holding these views but also the

target group (Hagendoorn 1995). One finding in these studies is that immigrant groups of higher socioeconomic status are looked upon in a more positive light than immigrant groups of lower socioeconomic status (Hagendoorn, Veenman, and Vollebergh 2003; Verkuyten and Kinket 2000). Other social-psychological research suggests that high-status immigrant groups are regarded as more competent and intelligent, although not necessarily as more friendly and warm (Fiske and Cuddy 2005). However, it is also true that high-status groups are not viewed as *less* friendly and warm; it is only when an immigrant group is perceived as competing for scarce resources that it is considered cold and unfriendly (Fiske and Cuddy 2005).

A second explanation of the educational gradient comes from the structural perspective. In past research, the importance of structural conditions for intermarriage has been studied frequently, in particular by examining differences among geographical regions such as states and Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (Blau and Schwartz 1984; Blum 1985) and differences among ethnic, racial and immigrant groups (Hwang, Saenz, and Aguirre 1997; Kalmijn and Van Tubergen 2010; Lieberman and Waters 1988). Studies have shown that the relative size of the group and the degree of residential segregation of a group are important factors in understanding why certain groups are more closed than other groups (for a review, see Kalmijn 1998).

The focus of these studies, so far, has been on the overall degree to which people intermarry. The structural perspective is also relevant, however, for explaining the educational gradient in intermarriage. This argument starts from the assumption that people take multiple characteristics into account when they are looking for a spouse (Kalmijn 1998). Next to ethnic and religious origins, people consider socioeconomic characteristics, in particular education. Many studies have shown that there is a strong tendency to marry persons of the same educational level (Schwartz and Mare 2005). Because preferences for educational homogamy will also be present in immigrant groups, the marriage market looks quite different for lower- and higher-educated members of these groups. Insofar as immigrant groups have a lower position in the stratification system than the majority, higher-educated members of these groups who look for a spouse (of the same level of education) will generally find fewer coethnic members than lower-educated members who look for a spouse. These differences in opportunities between lower- and higher-educated persons may be an important reason why there is an educational gradient in intermarriage.

If this explanation is true, there will also be systematic differences in the educational gradient across immigrant groups. More specifically, the structural perspective implies an interaction between the effect of individual education, on the one hand, and the effect of the level of education of the immigrant group, on the other hand. In lower-educated immigrant groups, the higher educated will have fewer chances of meeting a coethnic spouse than the lower educated (Qian and Lichter 2007). In higher-educated immigrant groups, in contrast, higher educated members will have better chances to meet a coethnic spouse of the same level of education than the lower educated. In other words, the educational gradient in intermarriage is expected to decline when the average level of education increases.