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SMART
Strengthening Marriages and Relationships Training

THE GROWING RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVIDE IN U.S. MARRIAGE PATTERNS[1]

[1] Adapted from "*The Growing Racial and Ethnic Divide in U.S. Marriage Patterns*" by R. Kelly Raley, Megan M. Sweeney, and Danielle Wondra, "*The Future of children", Volume 25(2),* p. 89. Copyright 2015 by the *Center for the Future of Children, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.*

"Racial and ethnic differences in marriage are striking (p.91)."

1. "In 2014, 70 percent of non-Hispanic white children (ages 0-18) and roughly 59 percent of Hispanic children were living with both of their biological parents (p.90)." However, this was true for only about one-third of black children (U.S. Census Bureau).
2. "Single-parent families are associated with poorer outcomes for children (p.90)," including "low educational attainment and teen childbearing (p.90)" (Cherlin, 1999; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012).
3. Children's development may be negatively impacted by single-parent families, due to decreased parental investment, family instability, economic distress and other developmental problems association with children (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007).

Black-White Differences in Marriage and Marital Stability

Contemporary Differences

1. The median age at first marriage for black women is 30 years while that for white women is 26 years with an average difference of four years.
2. Irrespective of age, marriage rates among black Americans are lower than among other racial and ethnic groups.
3. Marital instability and divorce are higher among black women.
4. Divorce rates, on average, are lowest within Asian women and foreign-born Hispanic women (Bean, Berg, & Van Hook, 1996; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005).
5. Compared to black women, the process of transition from separation to legal divorce is faster among white women (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001; Bumpass & Raley, 2007; Sweeney & Phillips, 2004).
6. "The nature of (marriage) instability varies by race (p.92)."
7. Among women with previously ended marriage, "black women are more likely to have been married only once, whereas white women are more likely to have married multiple times (p.93)."

Historical Trends

1. Between 1890 and late 1940, black women were more likely to get married earlier than white women; during the mid 20th century black and white women married at similar ages (Elliott at al., 2012).
2. In the early 1900s, although the percentage of divorce was relatively lower, the proportion of divorced black women was twice that of divorced white women (Ruggles, 1997).
3. The divorce rate for all racial and ethnic groups increased between 1940 and 1980, however, for black women this rate of increase happened more rapidly and steeply (Espenshade, 1985).
4. The 1960s saw, irrespective of age, a rapid decline in marriage rates among black women as compared to white women (Mare & Winship, 1991).
5. During the 1970, the racial differences in marriage patterns were not profound, with "94.8 percent of white women and 92.2 percent of black women (p.93)" being married (Elliott at al., 2012).
6. In the early 20th century, "marriage was more common among black families (p.93)" (Wilson & Neckerman, 1987).
7. "By 2012, roughly 73 percent of white women in their early 40s who had ever married were still married and living with their spouses, compared with just over half (52.7 percent) of black women the same age (p.)" (American Community Survey, 2012).

Explaining the Black-White Marriage Gap

1. Disparities in the labor market, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, and other structural disadvantages like unemployment, lack of education, and higher rates of incarceration faced by black individuals contributed towards the black-white marriage gap. These disparities created an imbalance in the availability of marriageable number of black men and women (Dixon, 1971; Guttentag & Secord, 1983; Wilson & Neckerman, 1987; Farley & Allen, 1987; Pettit & Western, 2004; Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992; Western, 2006; Charles & Luoh, 2010).
2. However, it is important to note that, "black marriage rates fell at the same time that racial discrimination was declining and black men's wages were growing (p.95)" (Farley, 1984).
3. Women prefer to marry men with same or higher levels of education as themselves. The unavailability of equally or more educated black men restrained the availability of partners for black women (Kalmijn, 1998; Mare, 1991; Schwartz & Mare, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).
4. Compared to black women, black men are twice as likely to marry outside his race, further restraining marriage opportunities for black women (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000).
5. According to one of the specialization model of marriage, the potential gains to a marriage "are greatest when men's wages are high relative to women's (p.)". Compared to white, the ratio of black men's to black women's wage is smaller, hence, decreasing the marriage rates for blacks (Moffitt, 2000).
6. However, other findings like "marriage rates fell, while the female-to-male wage ratio remained similar (p.96)", suggest that the argument relating to marriage and gender specialization might be outmoded (Moffitt, 2000; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn, & Lim, 1997).

Social Class and the Racial Gap in Marriage

> *"Increase in divorce preceded declines in marriage, beginning first among the most disadvantaged blacks (p.98)."*

1. Marriage gap exists within the different levels of educational distribution. This gap is more profound among black women.
2. Retreat from marriage has been higher among white women with a high school degree or less than among white women with college degrees.
3. "Marriage rates for college-educated white women in their late 20s and early 30s are higher than those for white women with less education at any age (p.98)." This pattern continues until their mid-40s.
4. Compared to college-educated white women, the rate of marriage for white women without a college degree may fall even more in the future (Martin, Astone & Peters, 2014)
5. "Whites and blacks of all classes have experienced delays in marriage, but declines in proportion who have ever married at age 40-44 appeared first for blacks with low levels of education (p.98)."
6. "In the third generation and beyond, Hispanic women's family patterns increasingly resample those of black Americans (p.102)."

> *"Educational gap in marriage will continue to widen over time (p.103)." (66).*

Explanations for the Black-White Marriage Gap by Education

1. "Both middle-class black men and middle-class black women have more trouble finding spouses because their social worlds consist mostly of (white) people who are not likely to connect them to potential mates (p.101)" (Lee & Bean, 2010; McClendon, Kuo & Raley, 2014; Raley, Sweeney & Wondra, 2015).
2. It is comparatively more difficult for black men to find stable full-time employment than white men. This is true for both college-educated and less educated black men (Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lim, 1997). These career differences might explain black men's slower entry to marriage than white men.
3. Accumulation of wealth is a lot less among black men than white men, further hindering black men's potential entry to a marital union (Schneider, 2015).
4. Hispanic and black Americans experience similar types and levels of economic and social disadvantages. However, "Hispanic marriage patterns are more closely resemble those of whites than those of blacks (p.102)" (Oropesa, Lichter & Anderson, 1994). This could be because a large majority of America's Hispanic population consists of first or second generation of immigrations who believe in collectivism and importance of marriage (Oropesa & Landale, 2004).
5. Hispanic women who are third generation immigrants and beyond are increasingly exposed to economic disadvantages and the American ethos of individualism. This overturns the "pro-marriage disposition" than Hispanic families initially had.

The Growing Importance of Economic Status for Marriage

1. "The age of marriage rose, non-marital cohabitation became common, and divorce rates skyrocketed (p.102)" among all social and demographic groups in both the United States and Europe.
2. The broad changes in patterns of family life and marriage have been referred, by some demographers, as the Second Demographic Transition.
3. Changes in patterns of marriage have occurred in both strong and weak economic times and have affected people of all socioeconomic groups (Lesthaeghe, 2014).
4. "Shifts in labor force likely also contributed to the Second Demographic Transition's changes in family life (p.103)." Women started to attain higher education to enter the labor force which delayed their entry to marriage (Fischer & Hout, 2006; Mare & Winship, 1991).

5. Urbanization and other social and labor market shifts of the 20th century contributed towards increased divorce rates, especially among the blacks.

> *For women, "marriage has become increasingly linked to employment and earnings (p.104)".*

Inequality and the Continuing Significance of Race

1. Compared to white women, "black women are less likely to marry and to remain (p.104)."
2. Racial gaps in marriage exist among all levels of the educational distribution, however, among people with lower levels of education this gap is the largest.
3. Marriage rates have fallen among both black and white women with education no more than a high school degree.
4. "For both black and white women, marital instability rose before marriage formation fell (p.104)."
5. "Educational gradients in marital instability emerged before educational gradients in marriage formation (p.104)."

> *"There may be meaningful linkages between broad trends in marriage formation and marital stability and the differences we see by race (p.104)."*

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