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ABSTRACT

One of the most interesting aspects of the study of interracial marriage is the variation in approval that exists along racial, regional, age and gender lines. Among mixed black and white couples, the most common combination is a white wife and a black husband. Black men that enter marriages with women of a different race tend to have a high level of education, high level of income, and high status career compared to the average black male. The marrying-out of desirable black men, in combination with other factors such as institutionalized racism and high rates of mortality and incarceration, limit the number of potential black male partners considered economically viable. This tightened marriage market is particularly salient for well-educated black women, who have a harder time finding black mates with similar levels of education and economic prospects than do their white counterparts. This paper will utilize data from the General Social Survey to compare white and black females' views on interracial relationships, tracking trends in opinion over the past three decades. Using the GSS data, I will test the effects that a series of independent variables, including race, age, level of education, geographic region, and urbanicity, have on opinion about racial intermarriage for these two groups of women over time.

http://depts.washington.edu/chid/intersections_Winter_2009/Madeline_Baars_Marriage_in_Black_and_White.pdf

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Marriage in Black and White: Women's Support for Laws Against Interracial Marriage, 1972-2002

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While great strides in race relations have been made in the United States since the days of the Civil Rights Movement, racial divisions have by no means disappeared. Laws preventing interactions no longer exist, but strict social lines have been drawn that still separate American society by race. Most people live, work, and intermarry with those of their own race (Childs 2005). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, only 2.9 percent of all American marriages are interracial (Joyner and Kao 2005). This number is lower than would be expected if marriages were formed at random (without race as a factor in mate selection) (Moran 2001). Well-established demographic factors, such as imbalanced sex ratios, small minority populations (in the U.S. overall, but particularly in certain communities), and age composition, suggest that interracial marriage should be occurring at a higher level than is observed (Root 2001).

Race laws separating Blacks and Whites have existed since this country's founding, and taboos about personal relationships between races have reinforced these divisions. Over the past few centuries, states have adopted numerous laws encouraging the separation of Blacks and Whites, punishing those in intimate relationships outside of their race. These laws were created to ensure that slave status corresponded with race (Romano 2003). For centuries, Whites and minorities were not allowed to mix freely, and so a social structure of race-separate communities was established (Childs 2005).

At various times in our country's history, thirty-eight states passed anti-miscegenation laws regulating sex and marriage between members of different racial groups. Anti-miscegenation laws were especially strict in separating Blacks and Whites, and their legal separation lasted longest. All thirty-eight states prevented marriage between African-Americans and Whites, with regulations of Asian-White relationships differing from state to state (Moran 2001). There has never been a law preventing marriage between White Americans and Hispanics, although there were reports of Latinos being denied marriage licenses for appearing "too dark" (Moran 2001). The Supreme Court struck down all laws

prohibiting interracial marriage in 1967, with its decision in *Loving v. Virginia*. Anti-miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional on the grounds that they violated racial equality and limited personal liberty (Moran 2001). According to the 1970 census, a mere 0.7 percent of American marriages at that time were interracial (Qian 1997). Clearly, although laws preventing intermarriage were gone, strict social barriers remained to keep races separate.

When South Carolina struck down its constitutional clause prohibiting interracial marriage in 1998, more than 40 percent of residents in some counties voted to uphold the symbolic ban (Yancey and Emerson 2001). It wasn't until the year 2000 that Alabama became the last state to remove its long-vestigial laws barring interracial marriage (Wallenstein 2002). It is examples like these that serve to remind us that while America has changed in many ways since the days when interracial marriage was punishable by law, in many parts of the country, a change in opinion has yet to arrive.

Acceptance of Interracial Marriage

The treatment that interracial couples receive in society serves as a signal of greater-scale relations between racial groups. Interracial marriage functions as an “index of assimilation,” an indicator of how willing people are to enter into intimate and personal relationships with members of other races. How far have we really come since the days when interracial marriage was illegal? What challenges do today's interracial couples face from White society and from minority communities? How do these challenges differ along racial and gender lines?

The largest factor in the low rates of Black-White intermarriage may simply be the historical relationship between Blacks and Whites. As a result of the long legal separation of the two groups which continued well into the last century, interactions between Black and Whites remain much different than the interactions between Whites and other minorities (Rosenblatt 1999). Even today, many Whites report that they consider relationships with Blacks “less acceptable” than relationships with Latinos or Asians (Childs 2005). While slavery has been abolished for nearly 150 years, there is lingering guilt, resentment, and racial tension that make the relationship between Blacks and Whites extremely complicated. Old stereotypes that paint relationships between Blacks and Whites as “immoral,” “vulgar,” or purely sexual, still linger (Childs 2005). Another commonly held stereotype, in both the Black and White communities, is that Blacks marry Whites to gain a higher social status (Foreman and Nance 1999).

Since the 1970's, public opinion polls have consistently reported rising rates of approval for interracial unions. These increasingly favorable opinions can be observed for all races and ages and in both sexes. In 1968, 17 percent of U.S. Whites approved of interracial marriage; by 1997, 61 percent of Whites approved. As for African-Americans, 48 percent approved of interracial marriage in 1968, and that number reached 77 percent in 1997. These rising rates of approval are attributed to higher levels of education, income, and that individuals are increasingly likely to live in large communities (Root 2001).

However, some public opinion polls may mask respondents' true feelings by simply not asking the right questions. For example, according to the National Opinion Research Center, 38 percent of White Americans in 1972 reported opposing laws against interracial marriage. Three years later, in 1975, a Virginia Slims survey found that only 14 percent of White women would both accept and approve of their daughters' marrying Black men (Spickard 1989). In other words, opposition to legal restrictions is not the same as acceptance.

Female out-marriage is higher than male out-marriage in every racial group—with the exception of African-Americans. Black women have been found to disapprove of interracial marriage at higher rates than do Black men, and Black women are less likely to date Whites than are Black men (Romano 2003); in a 1982 survey, only 37 percent of Black women reported that they would consider “an intimate relationship” with a White man (Spickard 1989). Currently, out-marriage of Black women occurs at about a quarter of the rate for Black men (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1990).

Today, many interracial couples report the harshest disapproval coming from Black women (Romano 2003; Rosenblatt 1995). One Black man, married to his White wife since the 1970's, reported that the looks he gets on the street now are similar to “the looks I used to get from White men. Now it's looks of hostility from Black women” (Romano 2003). Recent research supports the hypothesis that White women are significantly more accepting of men marrying interracially than Black women are (Zebroski 1999; Pabset and Taylor 1991). One White woman reports a sentiment that seems to characterize the general attitude of many Black women:

The most negativity toward me because I was dating, and am now married to, a black man, comes from black women. There seems to me to be this kind of thing of like, “Well, you've taken one out of circulation, and that means there's one less good one for me”.
(Rosenblatt 1999)

This trend in public opinion stems from several demographic factors. For the last

50 years, there have been more single Black women in the United States than single Black men, which nurtures the feeling that there “aren’t enough” marriageable Black men (Romano 2003). Low sex ratios can result in changes in social patterns, such as devaluation of marriage, greater marriage instability, higher rates of singlehood, and greater female independence, all of which have been observed in the Black community (Tucker and Taylor 1989). Furthermore, many Black women regard out-marriage of Black men as a betrayal to the Black community, and as a rejection of Black women (Romano 2003; Root 2001). Interracial couples may make Black women feel like they have little value in a culture where White women are so valued sexually and European looks provide the standards of beauty (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995).

Education and Interracial Marriage

The marriage market for Black women has shrunk over the past few decades, due to several factors: high mortality among Black males, high rates of incarceration for Black males, and institutionalized racism which prevents Black males from being economically viable partners (Root 2001; Zebroski 1999). Between 1970 and 1990, the percentage of Black women who were married declined from 62 percent to 43 percent (Crowder and Tolnay 2000). In the 1990’s, it was estimated that there were 150,000 more Black women than Black men enrolled in college (Root 2001).

In addition to those previously mentioned factors, Black men marrying out of their race has further diminished the marriage market, particularly for well-educated Black women (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1990). Because their pool of potential mates has been reduced, well-educated Black women must expand their marriage market. African-American women are more likely to marry men—of any race—with a lower level of education than they have than they are to marry men with an equal or greater level of education. This shortage of mates is also reflected in several other trends for Black women. When compared to Whites, Black women marry men who are often significantly older and men who are more likely to have been previously married (Tucker and Taylor 1989).

In his 1997 work, Zhenchao Qian found that White women were equally likely to marry a White man with a higher level of education than they were to marry a White man with less education. This indicates a shift to educational homogamy among partners: as women move into more of a bread-winning role, the emphasis shifts from the economic status of the male to the mutual economic potential of the couple. However, Qian did not find that this trend extended to

mixed-race couples. In 1980, a White woman was 109 percent more likely to marry an African-American man with more education than herself than she was to marry an African-American man with less education. The trend was similar for Hispanic women who marry African-American men—both White and Hispanic women tend to marry more-educated Black men.

White men who marry interracially are more likely to have a college education than those who marry other Whites (Fu 2001). How can we explain this trend? Many possible hypotheses have been suggested. Some propose that a higher level of education makes one less attached to racial identity (Gordon 1964); others argue that more education makes one more tolerant of others (Schuman 1997)—in other words, that education changes attitudes about race. Does this trend extend to all races and both genders?

Regional Variance in Interracial Marriage

I nterracial marriage is often studied on the national level, which masks the dramatic regional variance that exists in marriage patterns (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1990). Variance in regional racial history, proportions of racial groups relative to one another, and sex ratios all affect rates of interracial marriages (Root 2001). Southern states were the last to overturn anti-miscegenation laws, and the legacy of those laws continues to persist. Between 1960 and 1970, marriages between Blacks and Whites increased 26 percent nationally. The number of Black-White couples in the North and West increased by 66 percent; in the South, the number of Black-White couples *decreased* by 34.6 percent (Heer 1974). In 1970, 4.5 percent of married Black males in the West had a White wife; only 0.4 percent of married Black males in the South had a White wife. By 1980, those numbers had risen to 12.3 percent in the West and 1.6 percent in the South (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1990). Heer (1974) also found that the number of marriages consisting of a Black husband and a White wife were rapidly increasing, and that the number of marriages composed of a White husband and a Black wife were decreasing—resulting in a tightening marriage market for Black women.

Support for interracial marriage varies by geographic region as well. This geographic variance is reflective of regional differences in attitudes and norms. Research done in the 1980's found a 25 percentage-point difference in opinion between those in the South and those in other regions (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985). Approval for interracial unions is highest in the West (60 percent of respondents in 1991), followed by the East (54 percent) and the Midwest (50

percent). The lowest rates of support for interracial unions have consistently come from the South (a mere 33 percent approved in 1991) (Root 2001). As of 1990, one in four interracial couples in the U.S. resides in California (Root 2001).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The trends detailed above have led to several hypotheses that guide this research. The central hypothesis is that the increase in tolerance for Black-White intermarriage over the past few decades has been greater for White females than for Black females. This is expected because White women are more likely to be in interracial relationships than are Black women. Second, controlling for all other factors, urban-dwelling women are hypothesized to be more tolerant of interracial marriage than rural-dwelling women. Third, women living outside of the South are expected to have a higher tolerance for interracial unions than southern women. Fourth, because racial tolerance has been shown to increase with education, I hypothesize that the increase in tolerance for interracial marriage over the past decades has been greater for more-educated women than it has been for less-educated women. Lastly, because of the squeeze in the marriage market that intermarriage has created, I predict that the increase in tolerance for interracial marriage has been greater for well-educated White women than for well-educated Black women.

Data/Variables/Method

The data for this project come from the General Social Survey. The GSS is a public opinion survey that dates back to 1972, with data from as recently as 2006. The survey was given every year between 1973-1978 and 1983-1993, and conducted biannually in the periods between and from 1994 to the present.

The data are collected primarily from face-to-face interviews, with a small number of interviews conducted over the phone. The interviews last an average of ninety minutes each. For this project, the sample will be restricted to African-American and Caucasian women, as they provide the comparison for examination. Until recent years, the race of the respondent was decided by the interviewer, using the racial categories “White”, “Black” and “other”. If the interviewer was uncertain about the respondent’s race, the interviewer was instructed to ask what race they considered themselves to be. Beginning in 2002, interviewers asked all respondents to self-report racial identity, thus eliminating this potential source of human error. The interviewer now records a maximum of three racial categories claimed by the respondent.

For the purposes of this project, the data sample will be limited to Black and White women only—men, and women who are racially defined as “other,” will be eliminated. With these filters, the sample becomes much smaller, and it is composed of 14,927 women. Of these women, 13,101 (87.8 percent) are White and 1,826 (12.2 percent) are Black.

The dependent variable for this project is support for laws preventing interracial marriage. This variable comes from the GSS question, “Do you think there should be laws against marriages between (Negroes/ Blacks/ African-Americans) and Whites?” This question was asked of 14,927 women during the span of the GSS; it was asked to White women every year that the GSS was administered from 1972 to 2002 and to Black women every year between 1980 and 2002.

Several other questions also indicate the level of tolerance for interracial marriage. These are questions such as “How would you feel if a family member married someone of a different race (Black or White)?” and “Do you believe that there are special problems in marriages between Blacks and Whites?” These questions will not be used as the dependent variable in this study, as they are limited either by sample size (as is the case with the former question, which was asked only in 1980) or scope (believing that there are special problems between Blacks and Whites does not necessarily indicate a lack of support or disapproval for such unions). Because of these limitations, these questions are considered only briefly in the data discussion section.

Previous research has highlighted many of the variables that serve as correlates to the level of tolerance for interracial marriage. These are the independent variables of this project, and include race, age, education, “urbanicity,” and geographic region. Race is limited to Black and White. Age is broken into 15-year cohorts (18-30, 31-45, 46-60, etc). Education is disseminated into three categories: less than a high school education, high school education, and more than a high school education. “Urbanicity” has been broken in to three categories as well: suburban, urban, and rural. Geographic region has been broken into two regions, “South” or “non-South,” as identified in the GSS codebook.

To analyze the data, I will begin by constructing a series of cross-tabulations, in order to give a complete picture of the data set and the differences in the dependent variable for each independent variable. The first set of cross-tabulations will assess all women (Black and White) in a pooled sample. Next, to see the differences between Black and White women for each of the independent variables, separate tables will be created for Black women and White women.

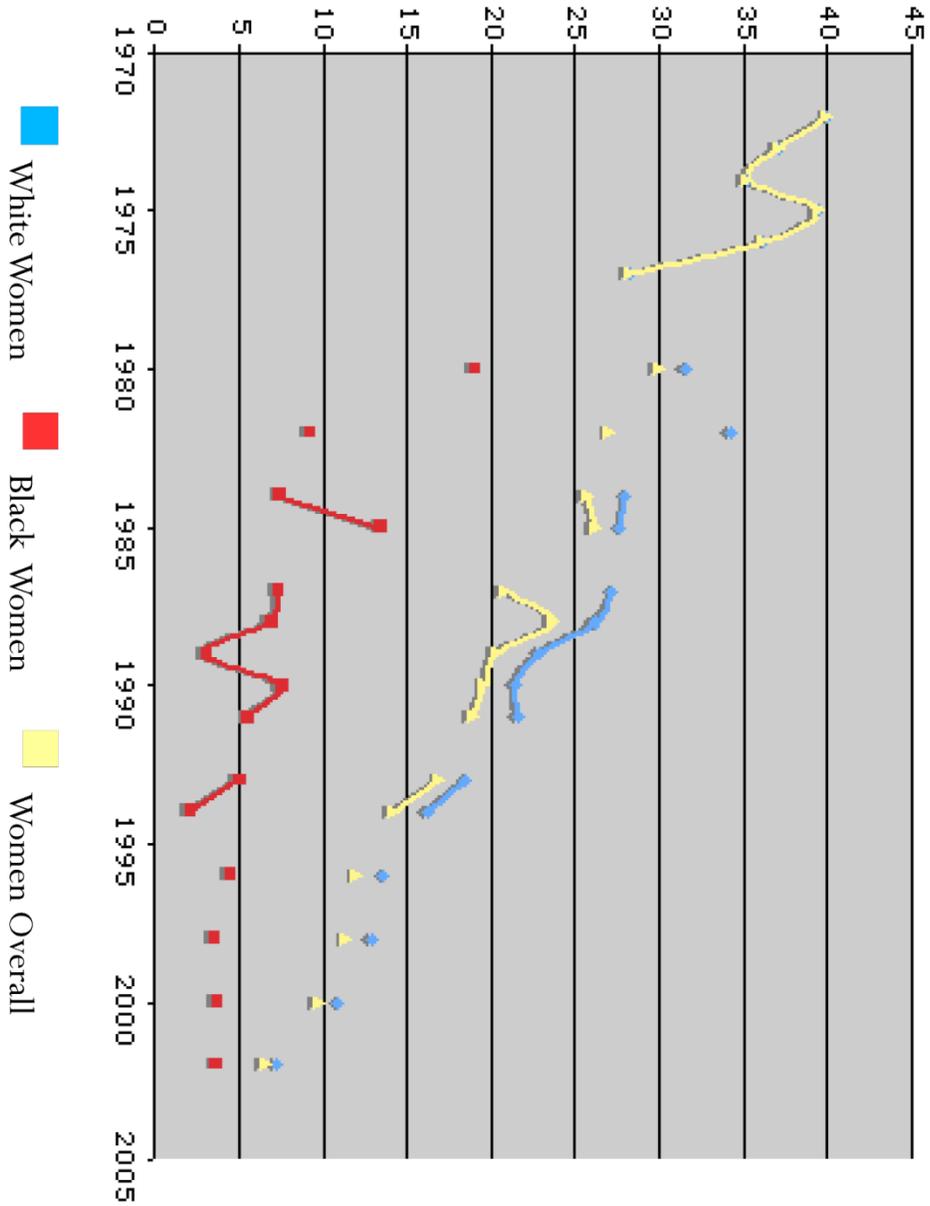


Figure 1: Percentage of Women Who Believe There Should Be Laws Preventing Interracial Marriage

Finally, the data will be analyzed through multivariate logistic regression. This will enable me to assess the level of tolerance of an individual as a function of a set of predictor variables which are both categorical and continuous in nature. Through multivariate analysis, the effect of a given variable can be measured while controlling for all other variables.

Data Discussion

Looking at Figure 1 [previous page], it is obvious that Black and White women's opinions are very different on this issue, but their opinions become more similar as time progresses. The central hypothesis for this paper is that the increase in tolerance for interracial marriage over the past few decades has been greater for White females than for Black females, a pattern that was not observed from the data. The increase in tolerance has been much greater for White women overall—40 percent of White women in 1972 supported laws restricting interracial marriage, compared to only 7.2 percent in 2002. As Figure one illustrates the support among Black women fell from 18.9 percent to 3.5 percent.

In 1972, 40 percent of White women responded that they would favor laws restricting interracial marriage. Black women weren't asked for their opinion on this issue until 1980, at which time 18.9 percent responded in favor of such laws. By that time, the number of White women had fallen to 31.6 percent, still much higher than their Black counterparts. By 2002, the number of women of both races who supported laws restricting interracial relationships had fallen into the single digits.

Black and White women are strikingly different in opinion about interracial unions, regardless of other factors. For every variable, and in every category, Black women reported less support for restricting interracial marriage than did their White counterparts. But while their overall numbers were different, Black and White women showed almost identical patterns: for both races, the lowest rates of support for laws restricting interracial unions were women with more education, younger women, and women living outside of the South and rural areas.

White and Black women have different opinions about laws regarding interracial marriage, and they report far differently on several other, "less extreme" measures as well, as detailed in Table 1 (below). For instance, in 1977, there was a question included in the GSS that asked respondents how they would feel if a

member of their family married someone of a different race (Black or White). 81.4 percent of White women reported that they would be very or somewhat uneasy, while only 46.8 percent of Black women replied the same way.

Similarly, when asked whether they believed that there are special problems in marriages involving interracial couples, almost all White women (93.9 percent) believe that there are. In comparison, 64.4 percent of Black women feel the same way.

Table 1: Women’s Responses to GSS Questions Regarding Interracial Marriage

Would you be very or somewhat uneasy if a family member married someone of a different race (Black or White)?

Category	Yes	No	(n)
All Women	77.3%	22.7%	794
White Women	81.4%	18.6%	700
Black Women	46.8%	53.2%	94

Do you believe that there are special problems in marriages between Blacks and Whites?

Category	Yes	No	(n)
All Women	88.7%	11.3%	795
White Women	93.9%	6.1%	705
Black Women	64.4%	35.6%	90

Should there be laws preventing intermarriage?

Category	Yes	No	(n)
All Women	23.5%	76.5%	14,927
White Women	25.9%	74.1%	13,101
Black Women	6.7%	93.3%	1,826

While this isn’t a measure for support of interracial marriage per se (one can believe that there are special problems between Black and White couples, and that does not necessarily mean that one does not support the right of such a couple to exist), the differences in opinion between Black and White women that is seen in other questions exist for this question as well. White women are more

likely to regard interracial relationships negatively than are Black women. Tables 3 and 4 clearly demonstrate that while the overall percentages are often markedly different, there are many common patterns in opinion for Black and

Table 2: Should There Be Laws Preventing Interracial Marriage? Responses of Black and White Women, 1972-2002

Characteristic	Yes	No	(n)
Age			
18-30 years	11.5%	88.5%	3,927
31-45 years	16.5%	83.5%	4,493
46-60 years	28.9%	71.1%	3,539
61-75 years	41.8%	58.2%	2,163
76+ years	50.6%	49.4%	749
Education			
0-11 years	46.0%	54.0%	3,727
12 years	23.6%	76.4%	5,341
13+ years	8.9%	91.1%	5,823
Region			
South	33.9%	66.1%	5,043
Non-South	18.3%	81.7%	9,885
Urbanicity			
Urban	16.8%	83.2%	4,343
Suburban	20.2%	79.8%	6,364
Rural	35.5%	64.4%	4,219

White women. For instance, the percentage favoring laws preventing interracial marriage increases with age in both groups. Regardless of race, the youngest respondents (those aged 18-30) are the least likely to support these restrictions, and the oldest (those age 76 and above) are the most likely to support restrictions. For Black women, the percentage supporting laws roughly doubles in each successive age group, until for the last two categories, which are separated by a closer margin of about 10 percent. Black women, particularly those under 30, overwhelmingly oppose restrictions on interracial relationships; the percentage supporting such restrictions does not reach double-digits until we consider women aged 61 and above. For White women, the percentage that

Table 3: Should There be Laws Preventing Interracial Marriage? Responses of White Women, 1972-2002

Characteristic	Yes	No	(n)
Age			
18-30 years	13.0%	87.0%	3,365
31-45 years	18.2%	81.8%	3,932
46-60 years	31.6%	68.4%	3,133
61-75 years	44.6%	55.4%	1,951
76+ years	53.2%	46.8%	681
Education			
0-11 years	52.4%	47.6%	3,128
12 years	25.7%	74.3%	4,795
13+ years	9.8%	90.2%	5,144
Region			
South	39.5%	60.5%	4,091
Non-South	19.7%	80.3%	9,009
Urbanicity			
Urban	20.5%	79.5%	3,290
Suburban	21.4%	78.6%	5,911
Rural	37.2%	62.8%	3,901

support laws restricting interracial relationships is much higher across all age categories. While only 13 percent of White women age 18-30 support laws restricting interracial marriage, White women age 61-75 are almost as likely (44.6 percent) to favor these laws as they are to oppose. While the margin is narrow, White women over 76 are actually more likely to support restrictions on interracial marriage (53.2 percent) than they are to oppose them. For both Black and White women, support for laws against interracial marriage is inversely related to educational attainment. 13.8 percent of Black women with less than a high school education support marriage restrictions, compared to 5.0 percent of Black women with a high school education and 2.2 percent with more than a high school education. Similarly, 52.4 percent of White women with less than a high school education, 25.7 percent of those with a high school education, and 9.8 percent of those with more than a high school education support laws

Table 4: Should There Be Laws Preventing Interracial Marriage Responses of Black Women, 1980-2002

Characteristic	Yes	No	(n)
Age			
18-30 years	2.3%	97.7%	562
31-45 years	4.3%	95.7%	561
46-60 years	8.9%	92.1%	406
61-75 years	15.6%	84.4%	212
76+ years	25%	75%	68
Education			
0-11 years	13.8%	82.6%	595
12 years	5.0%	95.0%	545
13+ years	2.2%	97.8%	679
Region			
South	9.6%	90.4%	952
Non-South	3.7%	96.3%	875
Urbanicity			
Urban	5.4%	94.6%	1,054
Suburban	4.4%	95.6%	454
Rural	14.7%	85.3%	319

limiting interracial marriage. White women with less than a high school education are more likely to support laws restricting interracial marriage than they are to oppose them.

Regardless of race, those living in rural areas are the most likely to support laws restricting interracial marriage. 37.2 percent of rural White women, and 14.7 percent of their Black counterparts, support such restrictions. While the numbers are close, a higher percentage of suburban White women (21.4 percent) than urban White women (20.5 percent) reported favoring laws preventing interracial marriage; the pattern is reversed for Black women, with 5.4 percent of urban Black women, compared to 4.4 percent of suburban Black women, supporting such laws.

Striking patterns are also observed in regard to region. Both Black and White

women living in the South are more likely to support laws preventing interracial marriage than are those who reside in other regions. For White women, this difference is quite large. 39.5 percent of White southern women report support for laws restricting interracial marriage. In the non-South, 19.7 percent of White women support such laws. While the percentage of Black women supporting such laws is much lower, the same pattern holds, with 9.6 percent of southern Black women supporting such laws, compared with 3.7 percent of non-southern Black women.

Table 5 describes the logistic regression model. I found that all of the independent variables affect the dependent variable at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. Additionally, all of the independent variables had a directional effect consistent with the hypotheses. As predicted, higher education attainment makes a respondent increasingly less likely to support laws against interracial marriage. Age has the opposite effect, as each additional year makes a respondent more likely to support such laws. A Black respondent is less likely to support laws against interracial marriage than is a White respondent, and each successive year makes respondents less likely to answer affirmatively to this question. Rural dwellers are more likely to support laws against interracial marriage than are their suburban counterparts, and urban residents are the least likely of all. Lastly, those living outside of the South are less likely to support the laws than those who reside in the South.

Potential Problems

One possible flaw in the data is the way that racial identity is reported. Both methods employed by the GSS leave room for possible error. For most of the survey's duration, the racial identity of the respondent has been assigned by the interviewer. Since 2002, individual racial identity has been defined by the respondent themselves. By limiting the vast continuum of races and ethnicities to three fairly ambiguous categories ("White", "Black", and "other"), an unknown level of error is introduced in the data.

However, it is possible that this flaw has little effect. Because the concept of race is itself a social construction, using a researcher's reporting of a respondent's race may be less problematic than it seems. If you are perceived as Black, and treated as such, won't you form opinions in line with the general Black community?

Table 5: Logistic Regression Model

VARIABLE	BETA	S.E. (B)
Urban residence	-.604*	.060
Suburban residence	-.461*	.052
Region: non-South	-1.053*	.047
Education: 12 years	-.748*	.052
Education: 13-20 years	-1.762*	.062
Race: Black	-1.881*	.107
Age: 18-30	-2.046*	.101
Age: 31-45	-1.537*	.096
Age: 46-60	-.919*	.094
Age: 61-75	-.443*	.097
Year	-.055*	.003
Constant	111.958	5.324

Log Likelihood: -6,087.903	Pseudo R-Squared: 0.248
LR Chi-Squared(11): 4,142.452	p: 0.00

There is a second issue with this data set in regards to race: the issue of Hispanicity. Non- White Hispanics have only been identified as a separate GSS category from Whites for a few years; while the “other” racial category has been provided, Hispanics’ inclusion as “other” or “White” (or “ Black,” for that matter) may have been arbitrarily decided, either by self-reporting or by physical appearance (such as skin color or hair texture). The demographic numbers are reflective of this effect; in the GSS sample, 80.9 percent of respondents are classified as White, and only 4.7 percent are classified as “other.” Whites compose a larger number in the sample, and “other” a smaller number, than is reflective of actual percentage of Americans classified in these categories.

Another possible issue arises from the method of conducting face-to-face

interviews. When asking questions about a socially sensitive topic like race, how much of what people report is truly what they believe, and how much is simply a reflection of what they think they should say? I don't know the answer to that troubling question, but at the very least this data can be used to indicate trends—even if people don't truly approve of interracial marriage more or less than they would have in previous years, just knowing what people *think they should say* is in itself a good indicator of social attitudes and norms.

Conclusion

Black and White women are strikingly different in their opinions about interracial unions, even when controlling for other factors. For every variable, and in every category, Black women reported more support for interracial marriage than did their White counterparts, often by margins in the double-digits. If Black women are more supportive of interracial unions, why are they much less likely to be in interracial relationships than are White women? Perhaps that question can be explained by the survey question itself. Earlier in this paper, the point was raised that an absence of support for laws against interracial relationships is not the same as support for such relationships. Could it be that cultural differences, guided by historical relationships, make Blacks less likely to favor restrictions of civil rights than their White counterparts?

While their overall numbers were different, Black and White women showed very similar overall patterns: for both races, those most likely to support laws restricting interracial unions were women with less education, older women, and women living in the South and in rural areas. Urban and suburban women were found to be more tolerant of interracial marriage than women living in rural areas, which was consistent with the hypothesis. The data showed that Black women are far more tolerant of interracial relationships than are White women. Women living outside of the South were found to have a much higher tolerance for interracial unions than southern women, regardless of race. The more education women possess, the more likely they are to not support laws limiting interracial relationships.

If interracial relationships were socially acceptable, there would be no paper to write, because they would not be a notable cultural phenomenon. But in today's society, these relationships often uncover deep-set beliefs and racist sentiments that simmer under the surface. It is one thing to support diversity in public schools and in the workplace; it is quite another to invite a member of a different race to enter one's home and family tree. Interracial marriage should not be seen

as the solution to the myriad of problems surrounding race in this country. Rather, interracial marriages serve as an indicator of social distance between groups. Because of the unique history of relations between the Black and White community, and the social segregation that endured well into the last century, relationships between Blacks and Whites provide an exceptionally interesting subject for study and analysis. The feelings these relationships stir up reveal much about the underlying values and structure of American society.

Suggestions for Further Research

Some emerging research suggests that while marriage rates have fallen, Romantic *involvement* has not. This indicates that the very nature of marriage is changing. Recent research suggests that other kinds of relationships, specifically dating and cohabitating couples are more likely than marriages to be interracial (Tucker and Taylor 1989). Will these behaviors lead to higher rates of interracial marriage, or are these alternate unions now substituting marriage altogether? What effect will these new types of interracial couples have on the structure of the American family and on race relations?

Additional research needs to be conducted concerning more subtle indicators of approval of interracial relationships. For this paper, trends were observed by looking at support for legal restrictions of interracial marriage. However, this question is inherently limiting; just because an individual does not support laws restricting interracial marriage, does not necessarily mean that the individual supports such unions. In the GSS, questions about respondents' comfort with interracial relationships, or about the possibility of the introduction of another race into their family, were asked in only a few years. These small samples provide a snapshot of race relations in a given year, but cannot tell us how these trends change over time. It is questions such as these that get to the core of public opinion on this issue, and their inclusion in future surveys is crucial to our understanding of these trends.

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