Black-white marital matching: race, anthropometrics and socioeconomics

Discussion

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Summary:

- Starting observation: few interracial marriages (in US) and also asymmetry in prevalence 'white wife - black husband' (more) vs. 'black wife - white husband' (less).

- Objective is to explain who (interracially) marries whom in terms of socioeconomic status (= education for females and wage for males) and physical appearance (= BMI).

- The authors find that these characteristics effectively do correlate systematically with the black-white matching patterns that are observed.

- The authors investigate robustness of their findings by considering whether results change when (1) considering cohabitants instead of married people, (2) controlling for observed heterogeneity (health status, smoking, children, recent pregnancy, height, immigrants), (3) excluding BMI as an indicator of physical appearance, and (4) including height as an additional indicator of physical appearance.

Contributions/merits of the paper:

- The paper touches on a very important issue: interracial marriages are an important indicator of the health of race relations.
- The authors use a rich (PSID) data set to investigate the issue. They describe (black/white) female/male characteristics as a function of (1) spouse's characteristics (controlling for age), (2) race (controlling for spouse's characteristics) and (3) single, intermarried or intramarried.
- It is interesting to see that observables (socioeconomic status and BMI) effectively do correlate with the interracial matching patterns that are observed. The authors also check robustness of their conclusions in a number of additional exerices, which gives reasonable confidence in the conclusions that are drawn.
- More generally, this is well executed empirical exercise that provides a necessary step towards more fully understanding the interracial matching patterns as we observe them.

Comments/suggestions/questions - general:

- It seems interesting to consider a theoretical/structural model that tries to explain interracial matching patterns. The testable implications of such a model can be confronted with the matching patterns the authors describe.

- It seems useful to discuss how the characteristics of interracial couples (described by the authors) impact on the couples' economic behavior (e.g. consumption, labor market, education, reproduction).

- More generally, the authors could provide a more profound discussion of the policy conclusions that can be drawn from their descriptive analysis.

Comments/suggestions/questions - application:

- Can we expect that socioeconomic status (as summarized by wage (for males) and education (for females)) and physical appearence (as summarized by BMI) are the most relevant determinants of interracial marriages?
  For example, it may be argued that mainly the presence of cultural barriers (e.g. related to religion/language/...) is crucial to the presence of interracial marriages. Can the authors shed light on this?

- Related to this, there is lots of unobserved variation/heterogeneity across 'blacks' and 'whites'. It may be that some of these factors (captured by the error term) correlate systematically with variables that are taken up (i.e. wages, educational achievement and BMI). Is this a problem?

Comments/suggestions/questions - application:

- Is it an option to consider interracial marriages involving other races (asians, hispanics, ...)? If yes, it can be interesting to see whether different patterns emerge.

- Can the authors provide insight into the 'success' of interracial matchings (e.g. measured by the duration of a relationship) and the matching characteristics that determine this success?