Ethnic Variations in First Union Characteristics among Asian American Young Adults

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Family research in the U.S. has documented a range of racial/ethnic variations in union formation and family processes. Although the Asian American population is the fastest growing minority in the U.S., relatively little is known about their family behaviors, such as cohabitation and non-marital fertility. A key explanation could be due to lack of data (i.e., sufficiently big sample size) for Asian Americans in major national family and social surveys. The sample size issue further adds to the difficulty of exploring subgroup variations in union formation patterns. Given the wide differences in culture and economic development between the immigrant-sending Asian countries, scholars have long suggested that broad ethnic variations could exist within the larger pan-ethnic category of "Asian Americans." However, very limited empirical studies have attempted to describe and explain how different Asian subgroups may have diverse family formation patterns in the U.S.

The investigation of ethnic differences in Asian American union patterns is important for a couple of reasons. First, there is scant research on the pattern of cohabitation among Asian Americans in the U.S. The prevalence of premarital cohabitation is rising in some East Asian regions while remaining relatively uncommon in South Asia, potentially due to different culture and levels of Second Demographic Transition. Does the prevalence of cohabitation among Asian Americans vary by country of origin as well? If cohabiting unions are more fragile, we need to know which subgroup is exposed to this union instability more than the others. Moreover, are cohabiting unions formed by a certain subgroup more likely to end in marriage than others? Answers to these questions can have policy implications for both adults and children that are involved in these unions. Second, it has been documented that Asian Americans, along with Hispanics and American Indians, are much more likely to marry a white partner than blacks. Is this pattern uniform across all ethnic subgroups? If not, what can be the potential explanations for it? This is critical in understanding the level of social integration into the mainstream society between Asian subgroups, since interracial marriage is indicative of social distance between minority groups and the host society.

This study seeks to contribute to the literature by investigating the characteristics of first cohabitation and first marriage formed by Asian American young adults, focusing specifically on ethnic variations. The fourth wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) that collects complete union histories of all respondents when they reached the ages of 25 to

30 in year 2007-2008 offers a unique opportunity to study first unions formed by recent young immigrants. This paper will answer the following three questions: (1) Are there ethnic variations in the proportions of young adults who have experienced at least a cohabiting or marital union by Wave 4 among Asian Americans? (2) Are there also ethnic variations in the outcomes of first cohabitation and how prevalent a first marriage is preceded by cohabitation? (3) Do the patterns of interracial partnering for cohabitation and marriage vary by Asian subgroup as well? If so, which group is more likely to pair with Whites vs. with Asians? Is interracial partnering more common for cohabitation than for marriage?

Research design

Data

The data for this study come from the fourth wave of the Add Health that was collected in year 2007-2008. In the Wave 4 data, all respondents were asked to provide a retrospective report on all cohabiting and marital unions formed by the time of interview. Within each union, five possible types of relationship segments were also specified (i.e., marriage (28%), cohabitation (43%), pregnancy (12%), dating (11%), or most recent (5%)). For example, if a marriage is preceded by cohabitation, the first segment of this relationship would be coded as cohabitation and the second as marriage. Within each relationship with a specific partner, age and race of partner and start and end dates of each relationship segment are also reported. This relationship history data allows researchers to study premarital cohabitation, unions that went through "relationship transitions" with the same partner, and also partner characteristics.

Sample

The respondents included in this study are those who participated in the Wave 4 interview and those who have valid sampling weights. About a thousand respondents (n=1,041) who belong to the "other race" category (i.e., American Indians and Pacific islanders or those whose self-identified race is "other.") were dropped from the qualifying 15,701 adults, resulting in a final sample size of 14,660. There are 8148 whites, 3168 blacks, 2302 Hispanics and 1042 Asian Americans. Using the self reports on Asian background, three Asian subgroups are created: East Asians (n=369, including Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), Filipinos (n=411), and other Asians (n=257, including Indians, Vietnamese, and other Asians). Five cases lack a valid report on this question and are thus dropped from analyses related to ethnic variations.

Statistical analyses

Descriptive statistics are first presented to offer an overview of the study population and to point out general patterns of differences in union characteristics in each racial/ethnic groups. Statistics are shown for all race/ethnicity groups as well as for all Asian subgroups. Next, logistic regression models were fit to explore the differences revealed by the descriptive statistics, such as the likelihood

of forming a union by Wave 4, the outcome of a first cohabitation and whether a first marriage is preceded by cohabitation, and the race of cohabiting/married partners by ethnic group. Regression models were first fit for all respondents and then for Asian Americans only to reveal subgroup differences as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Preliminary findings

1. Descriptive Results

As shown in the first larger panel in Table 1, East Asian and Filipino Americans tend to have better sociodemographic profiles than the other Asians. As for union experiences in the next panel, Asian Americans (41.30%) are much more likely than other racial/ethnic groups (27% for Filipinos and 34% for other Asians) to have never cohabited by Wave 4, but there are no significant differences between the three Asian subgroups. The likelihood that a first cohabitation formed by Asian Americans (44.73%) would end in marriage is lower than that of whites (54.19%). Asian Americans of East Asian origin (37.13%) are particularly less likely the other two subgroups to make the transition to marriage after first cohabitation. As for the characteristics of first cohabiting partner, Asian Americans are less likely to cohabit with a partner of similar racial/ethnic background than the other groups. Only about half of the Asian Americans reported having a first cohabiting partner that is also an Asian. In particular, the tendency to have a white cohabiting partner is much more pronounced among East Asians than the other two subgroups. Nearly two fifth of East Asians reported a first cohabitation with a white partner.

In the bottom panel of Table 1, a larger proportion of Asian Americans (56%) have never been married by Wave 4 than whites (46%). When broken down by subgroup, East Asians (65%) are much more likely to remain unmarried than the other two groups (58% for Filipinos and 46% for other Asians). For married respondents, a smaller share of the Asian American married individuals (52%) had premarital cohabitation than the other racial/ethnic groups. This is particularly true for other Asians (43%), while Filipino Americans are more likely to have premarital cohabitation prior to their first marriage (62%). In the last panel, Asian Americans again are least likely to marry someone with the same racial background than the other groups. However, while 57% of first-time Asian American cohabitors have white partners, only 25% of all married Asian Americans marry a white partner. The likelihood of marrying a white partner is again the strongest among East Asians (49%) than the other two Asian subgroups (13% for Filipinos and 19% for other Asians).

2.1 Who remained never cohabited by Wave 4?

The next set of analyses presented in Table 2c further explores why certain groups are less likely to cohabit than others. As shown in the left-hand side of Table 2c, the reason why Asian Americans are more likely to never cohabited by Wave 4 than whites is mostly driven by generational status. First

generation young adults are especially more at risk of never experiencing any cohabitation (OR=1.75). Among all Asian Americans, there are no significant subgroup differences when most covariates are taken into account in the models shown in the right-hand side of Table 2c. The effect of generation is much stronger for Asian Americans—first generation young adults are three times more likely to never experience cohabitation than the third generation.

2.2 Who stayed unmarried by Wave 4?

For first marriages (shown in Table 2m), East Asian and Filipino Americans are significantly more likely than whites to stay unmarried, even after generational status and other sociodemographic covariates are taken into account. Both groups are two times more likely (OR=2.25 for East Asians and OR=1.92 for Filipinos) to be single than whites by the time Wave 4 interview was conducted. When the focus is on all Asian Americans, other Asians in particular are significantly less likely to be still single than East Asians, net of all the sociodemographic controls and generational status.

3.1 The outcome of first cohabitation

In Table 3c, East Asian Americans are less likely to end their first cohabitation in marriage, even after generational status is considered (see Model 3). This statistical significance becomes a trend when the race of partner is added to Model 4. On the right side of Table 3c, other Asians are more likely (OR=1.71, p<.10) to turn a first cohabitation into a marriage in the baseline model, but the effect disappeared when different covariates are added in Models 2 and 3. When the race of partner is taken into account, Filipino Americans become more likely (OR=1.69, p<.10) to marry their first cohabiting partner. One interesting finding to be noted is that Asian Americans who cohabit with a white partner (OR=2.82) or an Asian partner (OR=1.91, p<10) are both more likely to end up in marriage, compared to when the partner belongs to other racial groups.

3.2 Premarital cohabitation before first marriage

As presented in Table 3m, other Asians are significantly less likely than whites to have a first marriage preceded by cohabitation, but this variation reduced to non-significant when generational status is considered in Model 3. However, once the race of married partner is added to Model 4, Filipino Americans are more than two times more likely than whites to cohabit with their partner prior to the first marriage. When the sample is narrowed down to only Asian Americans, as shown in the right-hand-side models, Filipino Americans are significantly more likely than East Asian Americans to experience premarital cohabitation prior to their first marriages. In particular, the likelihood of premarital cohabitation is much higher when the partner is white American.

4.1 Race of cohabiting partner

The next set of models examines the variations in interracial partnering between Asian subgroups. As can be seen in Table 4c, Filipino Americans are much more likely than East Asians to cohabit

with an Asian partner (OR=4.61) or partners from other groups (OR=3.13) than with a white partner. This pattern persists till Model 3 and becomes even more pronounced, holding all sociodemographic controls and generational status constant.

4.2 Race of married partner

For first marital event, both Filipinos and other Asian Americans are significantly more likely than East Asians to marry an Asian partner or a partner of other racial/ethnic group than marrying a white partner. Similar to the models presented previously for first cohabitation, this ethnic variations in partner's race/ethnicity remain robust when sociodemographic covariates are added to the model and become even stronger in the final Model 3.

Discussion and planned future investigations

This study explores the understudied issue of ethnic variations in union formation among Asian Americans. The preliminary findings show that the level of cohabitation is very similar across all Asian subgroups when sociodemographic covariates are considered. The fact that East Asians delay marriage longer than the other two groups and that they are somewhat less likely to turn a first cohabitation into a marriage than Filipinos indicate that they spend longer time in informal unions. In addition, Filipino Americans are significantly more likely than the other subgroups to have a first marriage preceded by cohabitation, showing that cohabitation functions more like a "trial marriage" for them. Finally, if interracial partnering with whites is an indicator of social distance between minority groups and the mainstream society, East Asian Americans appear to be the most integrated group among all Asian Americans. Given the significant influence of American culture on the Philippine society during the first half of the twentieth century and the longer history of Filipino immigration to the U.S., one would think that Filipino Americans should have higher union formation rates with white Americans than the other two Asian subgroups. An earlier study that used 1990 Census data showed that Filipino Americans have the largest share of the interracial marriages with whites among Asian Americans (Qian, Blair, and Ruf 2001). The much higher rate of having white cohabiting and married partners among East Asian Americans for this younger cohort of adults in the current study may signal a new trend and is an intriguing issue for further research.

As this is still a study in progress, the next steps will be to examine why Filipino Americans are more likely to experience premarital cohabitation. Is it due to different family values? Or is it mostly based on economic and other concerns during the family formation processes? Finally, the reasons behind the relatively high rate of partnering with whites among East Asians will also be examined. Respondents' socioeconomic attainment and preference for racially homogamous committed relationships reported in early adulthood will be investigated as potential explanations for this unique pattern.

Table 1. Sociodemographic and union characteristics of study sample by racial/ethnic group

	White	Black	Hispanics	Asian	East Asian	Filipino	Other Asian
unweighted N	8148	3168	2302	1042	369	411	257
					(5 cases	missing on Asia	n subgroup report
Educational Attainment at W4							
less than high school	8	13.33	13.93	2.58	1.91	0.81	4.68
high school	16.74	21.55	21.76	11.09	10.36	9.06	13.62
some college	42.34	44.03	46.05	38.24	26.90	52.31	36.97
college and more	33.14	21.09	18.26	48.09	60.83	37.82	44.73
Family Status							
Two-parent family	60.86	25.65	55.02	69.73	72.17	63.67	72.37
Single-parent family	18.05	44.59	23.41	11.72	15.40	14.03	21.07
Stepfamily	17.02	13.92	15.72	8.84	8.25	15.77	3.86
Other family	4.07	12.85	5.85	4.31	4.18	6.54	2.69
Maternal Education		.2.00	0.00			0.01	2.00
Less than HS	11.49	19.13	47.17	23.56	14.20	10.49	40.95
HS	45.67	47.17	30.70	25.52	32.65	19.45	23.38
Some College	18.87	15.48	12.97	12.07	9.13	17.03	9.98
College and more	23.97	18.22	9.16	38.85	44.03	53.03	25.70
Generational Status	23.97	10.22	9.10	30.05	44.05	55.05	25.70
	1.17	1.72	23.16	43.36	32.03	52.66	46.23
1st generation							
2nd generation	4.89	4.13	39.24	4.36	38.83	40.00	43.16
3rd generation	93.94	94.15	37.59	15.29	29.14	7.34	10.60
Number of cohabitation by W4							
Never cohabited	26.64	27.05	33.72	41.30	41.41	39.68	42.69
one	40.40	38.62	41.82	38.40	37.61	44.51	33.31
two	20.33	21.78	15.04	13.73	12.37	11.14	17.35
three	7.84	7.57	5.84	3.98	6.06	2.78	3.23
four or more	4.79	4.98	3.58	2.59	2.55	1.89	3.42
Number of marriage by W4							
Never married	45.57	69.22	51.04	55.81	64.61	57.97	46.30
one	49.35	29.04	45.68	41.86	35.27	40.02	49.10
two or more	5.07	1.74	3.29	2.33	0.11	2.01	4.60
unweighted N for cohabitors	5986	2262	1513	620	208	259	150
	0000	2202	1010	020			n subgroup report
% end in marriage	54.19	32.20	46.89	44.73	37.13	48.37	49.49
Race of first cohabiting partner	54.15	32.20	40.09	44.75	57.15	40.57	49.45
White	86.83	8.05	29.89	57.43	42.13	13.73	26.84
Black	2.76	82.16	6.36	7.40	6.46	4.24	11.16
Hispanics	6.45	5.69	57.67	11.07	7.24	15.82	8.98
Asian	1.81	1.20	2.78	49.00	36.81	60.01	50.77
Other race	2.15	2.89	3.31	5.10	7.36	6.19	2.25
upwoighted N for merical-	4642	1022	1211	444	114	203	124
unweighted N for marrieds	4642	1022	1211	444			n subgroup report
						-	
% preceded by cohabitation Race of first married partner	66.25	59.87	55.05	51.93	57.12	62.22	43.24
White	90.10	8.61	23.87	24.74	49.17	13.04	18.61
Black	1.64	81.51	3.16	6.20	3.19	6.11	8.12
Hispanics	5.24	6.37	68.29	7.69	6.96	7.17	7.69
Asian	1.14	0.95	1.66	55.60	40.61	67.31	56.81
Other race	1.87	2.55	3.02	5.77	0.07	6.38	8.77

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
White (ref.)				East Asian (ref.)			
Black	1.03	1.30**	1.29**	Filipinos	0.96	1.00	0.81
Hispanic	1.41**	1.61***	1.28+	Other Asians	1.13	1.14	1.04
East Asian	1.95*	1.73+	1.34				
Filipinos	1.85*	1.66+	1.13				
Other Asians	2.09*	2.02**	1.45				
Male	1.08	1.10*	1.10+	Male	1.75**	1.75**	1.73*
Age at Wave 4	0.96*	0.97+	0.97	Age at Wave 4	0.95	0.96	0.92
Family Status				Family Status			
Two-parent family (ref.)				Two-parent family (ref.)			
Single-parent family		0.57***	0.57***	Single-parent family		0.71	0.74
Stepfamily		0.52***	0.52***	Stepfamily		0.89	0.90
Other family		0.47***	0.42***	Other family		0.29**	0.29**
Maternal Education				Maternal Education			
Less than HS (ref.)				Less than HS (ref.)			
HS		1.06	1.11	HS		0.99	1.31
Some College		1.17	1.23+	Some College		0.69	0.91
College and more		1.58***	1.64***	College and more		1.11	1.31
Generational Status				Generational Status			
1st generation			1.75***	1st generation			2.99*
2nd generation			1.34*	2nd generation			1.97+
3rd generation (ref.)				3rd generation (ref.)			

Table 2c. The odds of never been cohabited by Wave 4 by racial/ethnic group (weighted data)

Table 2m. The odds of never been married by Wave 4 by racial/ethnic group (weighted data)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
White (ref.)				East Asian (ref.)			
Black	3.01***	2.94***	2.94***	Filipinos	0.85	0.79	0.93
Hispanic	1.30*	1.33**	1.35*	Other Asians	0.51**	0.54*	0.57*
East Asian	2.25***	2.19***	2.25***				
Filipinos	1.88**	1.81**	1.92**				
Other Asians	1.14	1.13	1.18				
Male	1.49***	1.49***	1.48***	Male	2.00	2.02***	2.04***
Age at Wave 4	0.79***	0.79***	0.80***	Age at Wave 4	0.73	0.73***	0.75***
Family Status				Family Status			
Two-parent family (ref.)				Two-parent family (ref.)			
Single-parent family		1.22**	1.22**	Single-parent family		0.71	0.69
Stepfamily		0.93	0.94	Stepfamily		1.01	1.02
Other family		0.87	0.85	Other family		0.77	0.77
Maternal Education				Maternal Education			
Less than HS (ref.)				Less than HS (ref.)			
HS		1.02	1.01	HS		0.92	0.69
Some College		1.06	1.05	Some College		1.52	1.16
College and more		1.23*	1.22+	College and more		1.40	1.2
Generational Status				Generational Status			
1st generation			0.81	1st generation			0.36***
2nd generation			1.09	2nd generation			0.62+
3rd generation (ref.)				3rd generation (ref.)			

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
White (ref.)					East Asian (ref.)				
Black	0.37***	0.38***	0.38***	0.49***	Filipinos	1.51	1.55	1.38	1.69+
Hispanic	0.74**	0.73**	0.82	0.91	Other Asians	1.71+	1.44	1.34	1.41
East Asian	0.47**	0.47**	0.54*	0.60+					
Filipinos	0.68*	0.68*	0.81	1.00					
Other Asians	0.77	0.77	0.92	1.08					
Male	0.72***	0.72***	0.73***	0.72***	Male	0.47**	0.45***	0.44**	0.42***
Age at Wave 4	1.24***	1.23***	1.23***	1.23***	Age at Wave 4	1.30**	1.35**	1.32**	1.36**
Family Status					Family Status				
Two-parent family (ref.)					Two-parent family (ref.)				
Single-parent family		0.82**	0.81**	0.82**	Single-parent family		2.79+	2.91+	3.07+
Stepfamily		0.98	0.97	0.97	Stepfamily		1.61+	1.55+	1.63+
Other family		1.15	1.16	1.17	Other family		1.41	1.4	1.58
Maternal Education					Maternal Education				
Less than HS (ref.)					Less than HS (ref.)				
HS		0.97	0.95	0.94	HS		0.75	0.91	0.8
Some College		0.96	0.94	0.93	Some College		0.43+	0.49	0.40+
College and more		0.90	0.89	0.87	College and more		0.48	0.5	0.42
Generational Status					Generational Status				
1st generation			0.84	0.86	1st generation			1.94+	1.80+
2nd generation			0.77*	0.78*	2nd generation			1.66	1.52
3rd generation (ref.)					3rd generation (ref.)				
Partner's Race					Partner's Race				
White				1.40**	White				2.82*
Asian				1.02	Asian				1.91+
Other (ref.)					Other (ref.)				

Table 3c. The odds of marriage as an outcome of first cohabitation by racial/ethnic group (weighted data)

Table 3m. The odds of first marriage being preceded by cohabitation by racial/ethnic group (weighted data)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
White (ref.)					East Asian (ref.)				
Black	0.76*	0.67***	0.67**	0.66**	Filipinos	1.36	1.37	2.06+	3.18***
Hispanic	0.62***	0.58***	0.85	0.84	Other Asians	0.61	0.61	0.66	0.85
East Asian	0.69	0.69	1.14	1.39					
Filipinos	0.85	0.87	1.73	2.35**					
Other Asians	0.39**	0.40**	0.71	0.90					
Male	1.11	1.11	1.12	1.13	Male	0.51*	0.47**	0.44**	0.48*
Age at Wave 4	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.98	Age at Wave 4	0.98	1.00	1.06	1.10
Family Status					Family Status				
Two-parent family (ref.)					Two-parent family (ref.)				
Single-parent family		1.41***	1.40***	1.40***	Single-parent family		3.31*	3.44*	4.02**
Stepfamily		1.46***	1.46***	1.45***	Stepfamily		1.49	1.52	1.22
Other family		1.93***	2.06***	2.05***	Other family		5.34*	4.95**	6.38**
Maternal Education					Maternal Education				
Less than HS (ref.)					Less than HS (ref.)				
HS		0.89	0.81+	0.82+	HS		1.00	0.66	0.69
Some College		0.86	0.78+	0.79+	Some College		1.08	0.72	0.76
College and more		0.83	0.77*	0.77*	College and more		0.88	0.64	0.53
Generational Status					Generational Status				
1st generation			0.40***	0.41***	1st generation			0.23**	0.28*
2nd generation			0.65**	0.65**	2nd generation			0.79	0.87
3rd generation (ref.)					3rd generation (ref.)				
Partner's Race					Partner's Race				
White				0.98	White				2.91*
Asian				0.62+	Asian				0.74
Other (ref.)					Other (ref.)				

Table 4c. Multinomial logistic regression models predicting the race of first cohabiting partner (weighted data)

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3
(ref: white partner)	Other	Asian	Other	Asian	Other	Asian
East Asian (ref.)						
Filipinos	3.13**	4.61**	3.10*	5.01**	3.55**	5.08**
Other Asians	1.57	2.19	1.13	1.66	1.24	1.81
Male	1.59	1.72	1.55	1.75	1.5	1.82+
Age at Wave 4	1.34**	1.17	1.37*	1.19	1.40**	1.20
Family Status						
Two-parent family (ref.)						
Single-parent family			1.23	1.09	1.20	1.07
Stepfamily			0.95	0.40	1.05	0.37+
Other family			4.03	2.28	4.11	2.41
Maternal Education						
Less than HS (ref.)						
HS			0.30+	0.47	0.25*	0.51
Some College			0.24+	0.54	0.21*	0.60
College and more			0.21*	0.23*	0.20**	0.24*
Generational Status						
1st generation					0.54	0.92
2nd generation					0.88	0.55
3rd generation (ref.)						

The "other" category in the outcome variable refers to partners who are black, Hispanic, or other race.

Table 4m. Multinomial logistic regression models predicting the race of first married partner (weighted data)

	Ν	/lodel 1	Ν	Nodel 2	Ν	Iodel 3
(ref: white partner)	Other	Asian	Other	Asian	Other	Asian
East Asian (ref.)						
Filipinos	6.04**	5.83***	7.32**	8.06***	7.08**	6.54**
Other Asians	5.48***	3.54**	5.80***	3.77**	6.27***	3.69**
Male	1.06	1.62	0.98	1.65	1.07	1.86
Age at Wave 4	1.14	1.18	1.21	1.22	1.23	1.17
Family Status						
Two-parent family (ref.)						
Single-parent family			2.21	1.39	2.52	1.68
Stepfamily			1.70	0.35*	1.75	0.31*
Other family			4.90	2.19	5.52+	2.71
Maternal Education						
Less than HS (ref.)						
HS			0.96	1.64	1.07	2.78
Some College			1.03	1.80	1.39	3.38
College and more			0.43	0.68	0.45	0.91
Generational Status						
1st generation					1.37	6.05+
2nd generation					1.07	1.83
3rd generation (ref.)						

The "other" category in the outcome variable refers to partners who are black, Hispanic, or other race.