

Religious Inter marriage in the United States: Determinants and Trends

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This article uses data from the 1987–1988 National Survey of Families and Households to study the determinants of religious inter marriage in the United States as well as changes over time in its prevalence. Separate logit regressions are estimated for exclusivist Protestant, ecumenical Protestant, and Catholic respondents. Variables identified as playing a role in the inter marriage decision include the proportion of coreligionists in the relevant marriage market, various proxies for religiosity and for commitment to the parental faith, education, a premarital pregnancy, and gender. The estimated effects are generally consistent with hypotheses derived from a model of religious inter marriage. The results also show that the prevalence of religious heterogamy has increased significantly over the past decades for Catholics and ecumenical Protestants. In sharp contrast, there has been no perceptible change in the probability of marrying outside the religion for exclusivist Protestants, a group which continues to display distinctive patterns of economic and demographic behavior. © 1998 Academic Press

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research points to the far-reaching economic and demographic implications of religious inter marriage. Several studies find that interfaith marriages are at a higher risk of divorce than intrafaith unions. Lehrer and Chiswick (1993, p. 398) report that depending on the specific religious group involved, the probability that a homogamous couple would see their union dissolved before their 5th anniversary “ranges between 0.13 and 0.27; for heterogamous couples, the probability ranges from 0.24 for the most stable inter marriages to 0.42 for the least stable. With the exception of age at marriage, changes in none of the other variables considered here produce such a large variation in the probability of marital dissolution.” Using different data sets and cruder measures of the religious composition of unions, other research also finds

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relatively large destabilizing effects associated with religious heterogamy (Burchinal and Chancellor, 1963; Bumpass and Sweet, 1972; Michael, 1979; Heaton and Pratt, 1990; Chiswick, 1993; Lehrer, 1996a).

Because of its impact on the likelihood of marital breakup, religious intermarriage may also be expected to influence patterns of investment in human capital. A *marital stability effect* predicts that insofar as interfaith couples recognize the relative instability of their unions, they have incentives to make fewer investments in spouse-specific human capital—children in particular. Similarly, this effect implies that women in religious intermarriages face increased incentives to work in the labor market and invest in on-the-job training, as insurance against the possibility of divorce. At the same time, a *bargaining effect* suggests that if husband and wife are affiliated to religions that embody different norms regarding fertility and the appropriate intrafamily division of labor, they may need to negotiate and possibly arrive at some compromise in these areas. Empirically, several studies find that marrying outside the faith has an important impact on fertility and on female labor supply, and that both the marital stability and bargaining effects play a role in explaining the observed relationships (Lehrer, 1995, 1996b, 1996c; see also Becker, Landes, and Michael, 1977).

While the *consequences* of marrying outside the religion for the stability of unions, fertility, and women's employment have received considerable attention, relatively little is known about the *determinants* and *trends* of religious intermarriage. With the exception of recent studies which focus on the case of Catholics (Sander, 1993, 1995) and Jews (Waite and Sheps, 1994), most previous empirical studies on the factors that influence intermarriage are based on simple cross-tabulation analyses which examine one factor at a time. In addition, research on intermarriage trends has focused generally on unions between Protestants and Catholics (Bumpass, 1970; Kalmijn, 1991), without making a distinction between the main groups within Protestantism.

Using data from the 1987–1988 National Survey of Families and Households, this study presents a multivariate analysis of the determinants and trends of religious intermarriage for the three main religious groups in the United States: exclusivist Protestants, ecumenical Protestants, and Catholics.¹ The article is organized as follows. The first section presents a theoretical framework for understanding how various factors influence the likelihood of interfaith marriage. The data and methods are described next, followed by the empirical analysis. The final section closes with a summary of the main findings and conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK²

Religious intermarriage is a dichotomous variable: for a given definition of religious categories, a marriage is either intra- or interfaith depending on whether

¹ This terminology follows Kelley (1972), who classifies religious groups along an ecumenical–exclusivist gradient depending on the clarity with which membership boundaries are drawn.

² This section builds on the model of intermarriage developed by Chiswick and Lehrer (1991).

or not the spouses belong to the same group. Conceptually, however, intermarriage comes in varying shades and degrees. For example, while differences in religious beliefs would be pronounced in a union between a Mormon and a Jehovah's Witness, they would be relatively minor in a marriage between a Presbyterian and an Episcopalian. Thus in understanding the determinants of religious intermarriage, Chiswick and Lehrer (1991) suggest that it is useful to think about an underlying continuous variable: religious compatibility (r), a measure of the degree of similarity between the husband's and wife's religious beliefs and practices. Although the correspondence need not be perfect, the low and high ends of this continuum may be thought of as representing, respectively, inter- and intrafaith unions.

Both economists and sociologists have advanced reasons why a high level of religious compatibility between the spouses should have a favorable effect on marital stability. Within the context of marriage, religion is a complementary trait for which the mating of likes is optimal (Becker, 1974). As Chiswick and Lehrer (1991) elaborate, religion influences many activities that husband and wife perform jointly. Such activities include not only those related directly to religious observance, but also the upbringing of children, the allocation of time and money, the cultivation of friendships, the development of business and professional networks, the choice of place of residence, and numerous other aspects of everyday life. Greater efficiency and less conflict are thus expected to characterize those households in which the spouses share the same religious affiliation. Similar ideas are developed in the sociological literature. For example, Bumpass and Sweet's (1972) analysis emphasizes the importance for marital harmony of similarity between the spouses in religious beliefs and related values, priorities, and expectations.³

Although a high degree of religious compatibility between the spouses is desirable for the reasons suggested above, religion is only one among many traits that are important in the marriage market. The multidimensional nature of the optimal match implies that individuals are often faced with the need to consider trade-offs between religious compatibility and other desirable characteristics. Thus if a potentially attractive partner belonging to a different religion has been identified, the individual must weigh the benefits of continuing the search in the marriage market against the costs. The benefits include the possibility of finding someone with a higher degree of religious compatibility; the costs involve the foregone gains from marriage with that partner plus any out-of-pocket and psychological costs associated with continuing the search process.

Chiswick and Lehrer (1991) develop a model which views the optimal level of religious compatibility with the spouse for a given individual as that value which equates the marginal benefit (MB) and marginal cost (MC) of search. The shape of

³ For a different theoretical perspective, which views religious heterogamy as a positive marital trait under special circumstances, see Grossbard-Shechtman (1993).

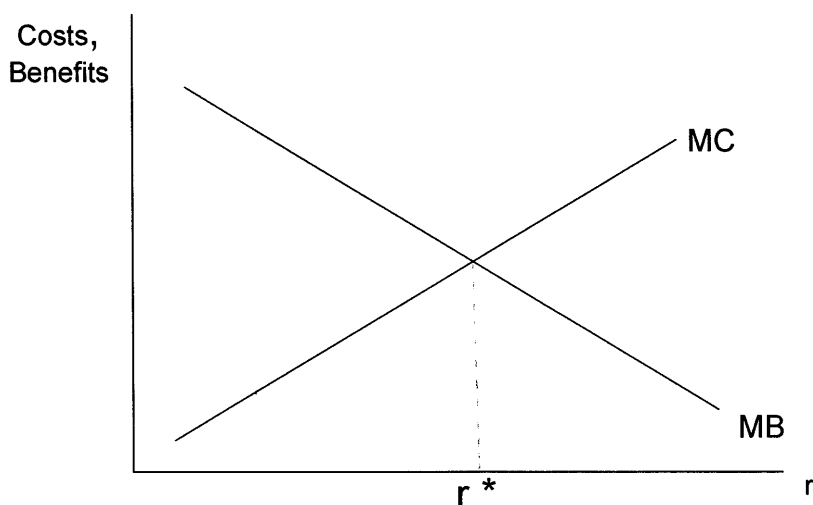


FIG. 1. The optimal level of religious compatibility with the spouse is that which equates at the margin the benefits and costs of search for a same-faith partner.

these curves, illustrated in Figure 1, is as typical in economic applications.⁴ Differences across individuals in the propensity to intermarry can be understood in terms of variations in the circumstances which influence the position of the curves. Figure 2a illustrates that, other factors held constant, persons who face a high marginal cost of search for a same-faith partner are likely to stop searching at a relatively low level of r , i.e., they are likely to intermarry. Similarly, Figure 2b shows that individuals who have high marginal benefits of search for a same-faith spouse are likely to continue the search process until they reach a relatively high level of r , i.e., they are prone to marry within their religion.

Factors Which Primarily Influence MC

A key determinant of the marginal cost of search for a same-faith partner is the availability of coreligionists in the relevant marriage market. It is clearly less costly to identify a potential partner with a high degree of religious compatibility if the pool of such individuals in the place of residence is large. Indeed, the most robust result in the literature on intermarriage is that the size of this pool has a negative impact on the probability of marrying outside the faith (Burchinal and Chancellor, 1962; Rosenthal, 1972; Thomas, 1972; Grossbard-Shechtman, 1993; Sander, 1995).

⁴ The MC curve slopes upward, reflecting the fact that if a partner with a very low r has been identified, it is relatively easy (inexpensive) to improve on that dimension; once a partner with a high r has been found, further improvements in this aspect become very costly. Similarly, the downward slope of the MB curve reflects the notion that the benefits of further increases in r vary inversely with the level of compatibility with the partner who has already been identified.

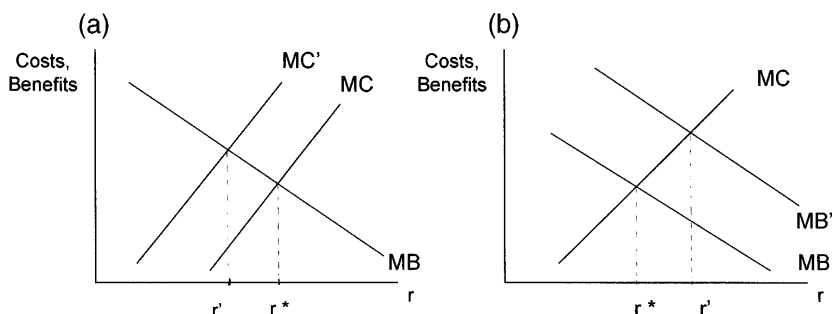


FIG. 2. Factors which influence the likelihood of intermarriage. (a) Individuals who face a relatively high MC of search for a same-faith partner are more likely to intermarry; (b) Individuals who face a relatively high MB of search for a same-faith partner are less likely to intermarry.

A different type of factor which would also influence the costs of additional search for a same-faith partner is a premarital conception. An unplanned pregnancy during the course of dating or cohabitation would substantially raise the costs of continuing search—such costs would now include the possibility of an abortion or an out-of-wedlock birth. Given that religious compatibility with the partner appears to be less important in the context of dating or cohabitation than within marriage (Burchinal, 1960; Schoen and Weinick, 1993), a premarital pregnancy is expected to be positively associated with the probability of intermarriage. An early cross-tabulation analysis by Christensen and Barber (1967) lends support to this hypothesis. The effect should be more pronounced among the more conservative religious groups, for whom the costs of an abortion or a birth outside of marriage would be perceived to be higher.

Factors Which Influence MC and MB

Educational attainment affects both the marginal benefits and the marginal costs of search, having an ambiguous impact on the probability of intermarriage. Individuals who possess the attractive trait of a high level of schooling generate marriage offers more easily and thus have lower costs of search for a marital partner; this effect implies that they have a lower probability of intermarriage. At the same time, greater educational attainment implies wider intellectual horizons as well as higher levels of socioeconomic achievement—additional dimensions of compatibility which may be traded off against religious compatibility. In this sense, higher education may reduce the marginal benefits of search for a same-faith partner and increase the probability of intermarriage. The net effect is ambiguous a priori and may vary across religious groups.

Factors Which Primarily Influence MB

Several factors influence the benefits of additional search for a same-faith partner. In the trade-off between religious compatibility and other desirable traits, individuals who have higher levels of religiosity would be expected to place more priority on the former. Several studies confirm that an increased salience of religion

is indeed associated with a lower probability of intermarriage (Heiss, 1960; Rosenthal, 1963; Waite and Sheps, 1994). The benefits of additional search for a same-faith partner also vary with the degree of commitment the individual has to the religion in which he or she was raised. Such commitment, in turn, has been found to be a function of the level of harmony experienced in the family of origin: it is lower among people who report dissatisfaction with their early child-parent relationships or strife-filled family interactions during childhood (Heiss, 1960).

It has been suggested that gender may also influence the benefits of continuing search for a same-faith partner, insofar as the ability to control the religious socialization of children differs between men and women (Glenn, 1982). This issue has not received much attention. Early studies report that among Catholics and Protestants, the probability of entering an interfaith union is lower for men (see Salisbury, 1964, p. 420) for a review of this literature). The opposite pattern has been found for Jews, at least until recently (Lazerwitz, 1971; Waite and Sheps, 1994).

Over the past decades, two factors may have affected the perceived benefits of continuing search for a coreligionist: possible changes over time in the overall importance attached to religion in society and variations in the socioeconomic and cultural distance among groups. With regard to the first issue, the prevailing view until recently was that the process of modernization—with the accompanying increases in standards of living, the progress of science and technology, and universal education—should lead to a decline in the role of religion in society (e.g., Wilson, 1976). This secularization thesis has been challenged by a growing body of empirical research which documents that the observed patterns of religious beliefs and practices in the United States are inconsistent with its predictions (e.g., Greeley, 1972, 1989; Hout and Greeley, 1987). More recently, rational choice theory has led to the formulation of an alternative thesis—the view that in the highly pluralistic religious market of the American society, the expected condition of religion is one of vitality and vibrancy rather than decline (e.g., see Iannaccone, 1991, 1997; Finke and Stark, 1992; Warner, 1993).

This debate over general trends in the salience of religious belief and practice in the United States is likely to continue in the years ahead. However, there is less controversy regarding changes in a specific aspect of religion which is particularly relevant for its role in marriage decisions: the socioeconomic and cultural distance between religious groups. Several scholars have noted that the behavior of Catholics in the United States has become considerably less distinct over this century in such areas as educational attainment and occupational composition (Bumpass, 1970; Greeley, 1976; Mueller, 1971), fertility (Mosher, Williams, and Johnson, 1992; Lehrer, 1996b), child rearing (Alwin, 1984), separation and divorce (Thornton, 1985a; Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993), gender roles (Brinkerhoff and MacKie, 1984, 1988), female employment (Lehrer, 1995), and other dimensions of family life (D'Antonio and Cavanaugh, 1983). These transformations have effectively decreased the socioeconomic and cultural boundaries between Catholics and Protestants, reducing the relative benefits of a continued search for a same-faith partner. Indeed several studies report that the prevalence of intermar-

riage for members of these faiths has increased over the past decades, suggesting a trend towards secularization in the institution of marriage (Bumpass, 1970; Johnson, 1980; Glenn, 1982; Kalmijn, 1991; Sander, 1993).

At the same time, however, Thornton (1985b, p. 386) observes that a group within Protestantism has become more distinct: "During the last two decades—when there were important trends toward more egalitarian sex role attitudes, more acceptance of divorce, more acceptance of childlessness, and a desire for smaller families—fundamentalist Protestants changed along with the rest of the American population, but the extent of their change was smaller. The result is that they are now generally more traditional than other Americans on many aspects of family life. . . . This group of Protestants also continues to have somewhat higher fertility than others. . . ." In addition, the average socioeconomic status of many of the exclusivist Protestant groups continues to be comparatively low (Roof and McKinney, 1987), and their patterns of maternal employment during the child-rearing years also remain distinct (Lehrer, 1995, 1997). Furthermore, the very nature of exclusivist religious practices and beliefs implies sharp boundaries separating them from other groups. Overall, these observations suggest that the declining role of religion in marriage decisions and the increased prevalence of interfaith marriage documented in earlier studies may not apply to members of exclusivist Protestant denominations.

DATA AND METHODS

The 1987–1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) was addressed to a main sample of 9643 male and female respondents, representative of the U.S. population ages 19 and over.⁵ The survey is rich in economic and demographic variables and includes the religious affiliation of the respondents and their first spouses (where applicable), both before and after the marriage.⁶ An important feature of the data is that information is available on all first unions, whether or not they were still intact at the time of the interview.⁷ The study is restricted to the first marriages of white, non-Hispanic respondents who resided in

⁵ This survey was designed at the Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin—Madison under the direction of Larry Bumpass and James Sweet. The field work was done by the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University.

⁶ Respondents were asked "What is your religious preference?" Where changes took place, there were further questions, including "Did you change your religion in connection with your (first) marriage?," "What was your religious preference before you changed at that time?," and "What religion did you change to at that time?" Similar information was obtained about the respondent's first spouse in the case of unions which had been dissolved by the time of the survey. For respondents whose first marriages were still intact, the survey documents the spouse's religious affiliation at the time of the interview and just before the change if conversion took place in connection with the marriage.

⁷ Earlier analyses of trends in religious intermarriage by Bumpass (1970) and Glenn (1982) are based on samples of unions that were still intact at the interview date. As Bumpass (1970) discusses in detail, this limitation of the data creates problems of selective sample attrition because interfaith marriages have a higher probability of dissolution.

the United States at age 16. Even though African-Americans and Hispanics were oversampled, the number of observations available for ever-married respondents in these groups is not sufficient to permit separate analyses; similarly, the number of respondents born and raised in foreign countries is relatively small.⁸ The sample is further limited to individuals born in 1960 or earlier, as some of the younger respondents had not yet married by the interview date and this relationship may vary systematically with the propensity to eventually intermarry.

Separate analyses are conducted for the first marriages of respondents belonging to three main religious groups: exclusivist Protestant, ecumenical Protestant, and Catholic. The classification of Protestants into these two categories follows that employed earlier by Lehrer and Chiswick (1993, p. 390) for the NSFH data. The exclusivist group includes Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, and a large number of other fundamentalist denominations.⁹ Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Unitarians, and several other mainline Protestant bodies are classified in the ecumenical group. The sample sizes are 1311, 1952, and 1204 for exclusivist Protestants, ecumenical Protestants, and Catholics, respectively.

As suggested in the previous section, the underlying concept of religious compatibility between the spouses corresponds to a continuous variable. The operational definition of religious intermarriage used here is that it occurs when a Protestant marries a Catholic, and in the case of interdenominational unions involving Protestants, when at least one of the spouses is affiliated to an exclusivist group. Unions involving members of two ecumenical Protestant denominations are treated as homogamous. Thus, for example, a marriage between a Christian Scientist and a Jehovah's Witness would be coded as interfaith, as would a marriage between a Seventh-Day Adventist and a Unitarian; a union between a Presbyterian and an Episcopalian would be considered intrafaith. This approach is based on the notion that the distinguishing feature of ecumenical denominations is a loose definition of the boundaries that separate groups. Indeed, interdenominational marriages involving ecumenical Protestants have been found to be virtually as stable as unions in which both spouses have the identical affiliation (Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993).

Because the objective of this study is to understand the factors that influence individuals' decisions of whether to marry within or outside the religion in which they were raised, the analysis focuses primarily on affiliation measured before the marriage (for both the respondent and the spouse). For the stability of unions, however, there is evidence that homogamy in terms of current religious affiliation is the more important concept (Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993). Thus the sensitivity

⁸ It would be inappropriate to lump all respondents together and simply include dummy variables for race-ethnicity and country of birth, because the determinants of intermarriage are likely to differ across groups.

⁹ The NSFH does not make a distinction among the various Baptist denominations. Also, although it would have been desirable to use separate categories for Baptists and the smaller exclusivist denominations, sample size limitations do not permit this refinement.

TABLE 1
Percentage of Marriages That Are Interfaith by Respondent's Affiliation

| | Religion measured before marriage (%) | Religion measured after marriage (%) |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Respondent's religion | | |
| Exclusivist Protestant | 51 | 37 |
| Ecumenical Protestant | 42 | 31 |
| Catholic | 44 | 25 |

of the results to measuring religion after marriage is also explored. Table 1 shows the percentage of unions in the sample that are interfaith by the respondent's affiliation for the two ways of measuring religion.

Table 2 presents definitions and means for the explanatory variables used in the analysis. Information in the NSFH on the state where each respondent lived at age 16 is used to construct a variable representing the percentage of coreligionists in the respondent's region of residence. This variable measures the size of the pool of same-faith partners, a key determinant of the position of the MC curve. The dummy for premarital pregnancy captures another factor which influences the marginal cost of search. Next in the table is the respondent's educational level, a variable which affects both the costs and benefits of additional search for a coreligionist.

The remaining variables influence primarily the marginal benefits of search. The NSFH unfortunately does not document the level of religious participation in the respondents' families of origin, nor does it contain direct measures of the level of harmony in such families. Rough indicators are available, however. For Catholics and to a lesser extent for exclusivist Protestants, the size of the family of origin may be used as a proxy, albeit imperfect, of religiosity. Evidence that exclusivist Protestant theologies favor the traditional division of labor within the household, especially when young children are present (McMurry, 1978; Brinkerhoff and MacKie, 1984; Lehrer, 1995, 1997), suggests that a dummy for maternal employment may also capture variations in religiosity for this group. In addition, a variable for dissolution of the family of origin through separation or divorce is included. A broken-family background is likely to be associated with the strife-filled family interactions that have been linked to lessened commitment to the parental religion. Given the strong anti-divorce position of the Catholic Church, the dummy for marriage dissolution is also likely to capture an aspect of religiosity for this group: Catholic respondents who grew up in nonintact families come disproportionately from families with a relatively weak adherence to the tenets of the Church. The table also includes a variable for gender¹⁰ as well as a series of dummies for marriage cohort to capture possible changes over time.

¹⁰ Male and female respondents were pooled due to limitations of sample size. It is worth noting, however, that in preliminary analyses the null hypothesis that the structures are the same for the two genders could not be rejected at the 0.05 or 0.10 levels for any of the religious groups.

TABLE 2
Definitions and Means of Explanatory Variables

| | Exclusivist Protestant | Ecumenical Protestant | Catholic |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Percentage of coreligionists | | | |
| For the region where respondent lived at age 16, percentage of respondents in the sample who resided there at age 16 and had the same religious affiliation ^a | 25.48 | 39.66 | 34.54 |
| Premarital pregnancy | | | |
| 1 if there was a birth within 7 months of marriage | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.07 |
| Education | | | |
| 1 if respondent's years of schooling at date of marriage is in category indicated | | | |
| < 12 years | 0.43 | 0.23 | 0.22 |
| 12 years (benchmark) | (0.35) | (0.36) | (0.40) |
| 13–15 years | 0.15 | 0.26 | 0.25 |
| ≥ 16 years | 0.07 | 0.15 | 0.13 |
| Size of family of origin | | | |
| Number of siblings in respondent's family | 3.55 | 2.94 | 3.52 |
| Mother's employment | | | |
| 1 if respondent's mother held a paid job for 12 months or more when he/she was 5 years old or younger | 0.20 | 0.18 | 0.20 |
| Non-intact family of origin | | | |
| 1 if parents were separated or divorced when respondent was 14 years old | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.11 |
| Male | | | |
| 1 if respondent is male | 0.37 | 0.40 | 0.40 |
| Marriage cohort | | | |
| 1 if date of respondent's first marriage is in cat- egory indicated | | | |
| Before 1950 | 0.36 | 0.34 | 0.26 |
| 1950–1959 | 0.16 | 0.14 | 0.12 |
| 1960–1969 | 0.20 | 0.19 | 0.19 |
| 1970–1979 (benchmark) | (0.22) | (0.24) | (0.30) |
| 1980–1988 | 0.06 | 0.09 | 0.13 |
| Sample size | 1311 | 1952 | 1204 |

^a For exclusivist Protestants, “same religious affiliation” means a denomination identical to that of the respondent. For ecumenical Protestants, “same religious affiliation” means any ecumenical Protestant denomination. The following regions are considered: New England, Middle Atlantic, East-Northcentral, West-Northcentral, South Atlantic, East Southcentral, West Southcentral, Mountain, and Pacific.

Finally, it is worth noting that the various characteristics of the spouse do *not* appear in Table 2. These variables are determined jointly with the religious nature of the match as individuals make tradeoffs in the process of selecting a spouse. Controlling for these traits in the regressions would thus introduce simultaneous equations biases. Similarly, age at marriage is excluded because the duration of

TABLE 3

Logit Intermarriage Regressions by Respondent's Affiliation (Religion Measured before Marriage)^a

| | Exclusivist Protestant | Ecumenical Protestant | Catholic |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Percentage of coreligionists | -0.032 (0.003)** | -0.027 (0.006)** | -0.021 (0.004)** |
| Premarital pregnancy | 0.672 (0.238)** | 0.035 (0.185) | -0.161 (0.230) |
| Education | | | |
| <12 years | -0.229 (0.142) | 0.164 (0.131) | 0.021 (0.170) |
| 13-15 years | 0.153 (0.182) | -0.123 (0.123) | -0.049 (0.155) |
| ≥16 years | 0.737 (0.257)** | 0.057 (0.149) | 0.0004 (0.199) |
| Size of family of origin | -0.003 (0.021) | -0.021 (0.021) | -0.044 (0.024)* |
| Mother's employment | 0.323 (0.161)** | 0.067 (0.127) | 0.113 (0.153) |
| Non-intact family of origin | 0.058 (0.192) | 0.262 (0.154)* | 0.509 (0.202)** |
| Male | -0.393 (0.125)** | -0.244 (0.097)** | 0.142 (0.124) |
| Marriage Cohort | | | |
| Before 1950 | 0.027 (0.175) | -0.675 (0.138)** | -0.843 (0.178)** |
| 1950-1959 | 0.293 (0.200) | -0.478 (0.159)** | -0.424 (0.206)** |
| 1960-1969 | -0.040 (0.186) | -0.173 (0.142) | -0.148 (0.174) |
| 1980-1988 | -0.022 (0.273) | 0.438 (0.185)** | -0.010 (0.200) |
| Constant | 0.870 (0.193)** | 1.165 (0.286)** | 0.824 (0.237)** |
| Log-likelihood | -821.971 | -1286.295 | -786.145 |
| Sample size | 1311 | 1952 | 1204 |

^a Standard errors in parentheses.** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$.

search is also determined jointly with the characteristics of the partner. For example, individuals who are pessimistic about their marital prospects may end the search process at an early stage, settling for a spouse whose religious and other characteristics represent a match far from the optimal. The models discussed below are reduced-form equations that provide estimates of the total effect of each explanatory variable on the probability of intermarriage.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Table 3 presents maximum-likelihood estimates of logit equations, with the dichotomous intermarriage variable regressed on the explanatory factors described in the previous section. Separate equations are reported for the first marriages of respondents whose religion before marriage is exclusivist Protestant, ecumenical Protestant, and Catholic. This table provides information on the direction and statistical significance of each influence. The magnitude and importance of the various effects can be assessed more easily by turning to Table 4, which displays predicted probabilities of religious intermarriage for selected values of the covariates.

The availability of same-faith partners has the expected negative influence on the likelihood of interfaith marriage for the three religious groups. The effect is pronounced in each case: as the percentage of coreligionists in the area where the

TABLE 4
Estimated Probabilities of Religious Inter marriage (Religion Measured before Marriage)

| | Exclusivist Protestant | Ecumenical Protestant | Catholic |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| Reference person ^a | .51 | .51 | .49 |
| Selected characteristics ^b | | | |
| Percentage of coreligionists | | | |
| 10 | .63 | .70 | .62 |
| 25 | .51 | .60 | .54 |
| 50 | .32 | .44 | .41 |
| Premarital pregnancy | .67 | (.52) ^c | (.45) |
| Education | | | |
| <12 years | (.45) | (.55) | (.49) |
| 13–15 years | (.55) | (.48) | (.48) |
| ≥16 years | .68 | (.49) | (.49) |
| Size of family of origin | | | |
| 1 | (.51) | (.52) | .51 |
| 4 | (.51) | (.50) | .48 |
| Mother employed | .59 | (.52) | (.52) |
| Non-intact family of origin | (.52) | .57 | .61 |
| Male | .41 | .45 | (.52) |
| Marriage cohort | | | |
| Before 1950 | (.52) | .34 | .29 |
| 1950–1959 | (.58) | .39 | .38 |
| 1960–1969 | (.50) | (.46) | (.45) |
| 1980–1988 | (.50) | .61 | (.49) |

^a The reference person has the following characteristics. The percentage of coreligionists is equal to the mean value for the sample (25.48, 39.66, and 34.54 for exclusivist Protestants, ecumenical Protestants, and Catholics, respectively). The size of the family of origin is 3; the mother was not employed during the respondent's early childhood, the parents were not divorced or separated when the respondent was 14 years of age. The respondent's years of schooling at the time of marriage is 12, there is no premarital pregnancy, the respondent is female, and the marriage took place in the period 1970–1979.

^b All characteristics are identical to those of the reference person, except as indicated in the stub.

^c Figures shown in parentheses correspond to coefficients that are not significant at the 0.10 level.

respondent lived at age 16 increases from 10 to 50%, the probability of intermarriage falls from 0.63 to 0.32 for exclusivist Protestants, from 0.70 to 0.44 for ecumenical Protestants, and from 0.62 to 0.41 for Catholics. To the extent that there is interregional mobility for some respondents after age 16, the variable used to indicate the size of the pool of coreligionists is measured with some error. The true effects are thus even larger in absolute magnitude than suggested by the estimates reported here. The relative abundance of same-faith partners clearly plays a major role as a determinant of the likelihood of marrying within the religion.

A premarital pregnancy is found to have a significant positive effect on the probability of religious intermarriage for exclusivist Protestants, the group that is most traditional and for whom the costs of an out-of-wedlock birth or abortion

would presumably be highest. The magnitude of the effect is sizable: a premarital pregnancy increases the probability of interfaith marriage from 0.51 to 0.67. Although a positive influence was anticipated for Catholics also, no significant effect can be discerned for this group.

As noted earlier, the impact of education on intermarriage is ambiguous *a priori*: higher levels of schooling decrease the costs of additional search for a same-faith partner, but also may reduce the marginal benefits of search. For ecumenical Protestants and Catholics, the opposing influences appear to cancel each other out as the probability of outmarriage is found not to vary with education.

The second effect dominates for exclusivist Protestants. The likelihood of marrying outside the faith is greater, by a wide margin, among those with the highest schooling levels: the probability of intermarriage is 0.51 for a high school graduate compared to 0.68 for a college graduate. As Table 2 shows, the schooling level of exclusivist Protestants in the sample is substantially lower than that of the other religious groups. While only 7% of exclusivist Protestants have 16 years of schooling or more, the corresponding percentages are about double for ecumenical Protestants and Catholics: 15 and 13%, respectively. Among the most highly educated exclusivist Protestants, the more elevated levels of intellectual development and socioeconomic achievement associated with greater schooling—which may be found more easily in a partner outside the religion—appear to represent an important aspect of compatibility which is traded off against religious homogeneity. This result is consistent with evidence in the literature that one reason for religious switching (which frequently accompanies marriage to a partner raised in a different faith) is the desire to move to a more compatible socioeconomic membership (Newport, 1979).

This finding is also consistent with research that emphasizes the importance of assortative mating by education in the marriage market (Mare, 1991; Kalmijn, 1991). Because of the comparatively low average schooling level of exclusivist Protestants, the most highly educated members of this group face a more acute trade-off between religious compatibility with the spouse and assortative mating by education than do their ecumenical Protestant and Catholic counterparts. The pronounced effect of a college education on the probability of intermarriage for exclusivist Protestants suggests that in this trade-off, the desire for a partner with a similar schooling level often dominates.

The size of the family of origin has a significant negative coefficient in the Catholic sample, the group for which this variable is expected to proxy most closely for religiosity. However, the magnitude of the effect is small: as family size increases from 1 to 4, the probability of intermarriage falls only slightly, from 0.51 to 0.48. At the same time, the maternal employment variable, which is expected to capture the salience of religion for exclusivist Protestants, attains significance for this group and the direction of the effect is as predicted. The size of the influence is modest: the mother's employment is associated with an

increase in the probability of intermarriage, from 0.51 to 0.59. The coefficients on the nonintact family of origin variable are positive as anticipated, but attain significance only for ecumenical Protestants and Catholics. For the former, a broken-family background increases the probability of intermarriage from 0.51 to 0.57. As anticipated, the increase is more pronounced for the latter, from 0.49 to 0.61.

The coefficients on male respondents are negative for the two groups of Protestants, consistent with results from previous analyses; the coefficient is insignificant for Catholics. If this pattern by gender is confirmed by subsequent studies, it would be useful to explore further whether interfaith marriages involving a Protestant husband display a greater tendency than other types of heterogamous unions for the wife to control the religious upbringing of the children.

The marriage cohort coefficients provide information on changes in the prevalence of intermarriage over time for the various religious groups. The results show that the probability of interfaith marriage has increased substantially over the past decades for ecumenical Protestants and Catholics. The changes over time follow somewhat different trajectories for the two groups. In the case of ecumenical Protestants, the probability of intermarriage is 0.34 and 0.39, respectively, for the pre-1950 and 1950s marriage cohorts; it increases to the 0.46–0.51 range for the 1960s and 1970s cohorts, rising further to 0.61 for the 1980s cohort. In the case of Catholics, most of the increase occurred earlier: from 0.29 for the pre-1950 cohort to 0.38 for the 1950s cohort, stabilizing at the 0.45–0.49 level thereafter.

In sharp contrast, the marriage cohort coefficients are insignificant in the exclusivist Protestant sample: the prevalence of intermarriage has not changed significantly for this group over the past decades. This remarkable stability is consistent with the observation made earlier that the gap between exclusivist Protestants and other groups of society remains large and that the boundaries which separate them continue to be sharp.

Finally, Table 5 reports results of the logit regressions reestimated with religion measured *after* marriage. The interpretation of the coefficients in this table is less straightforward than that in the previous specification, as intrafaith unions in this context include not only those in which both spouses were raised in the same religion but also those in which either the respondent or the spouse converted to achieve homogamy. Thus, while most effects remain similar in the new regressions, it is not surprising to observe some changes. Notably, the strong effect of a college education for exclusivist Protestants found in Table 3 is not detected in Table 5. This result reflects the fact that those highly educated exclusivist Protestants who switch religious affiliations at the time of marriage are classified here as homogamously married. It is also worth noting that intermarriage trends under both specifications are similar, showing stability over the period for exclusivist Protestants but significant increases for the other two groups.

TABLE 5

Logit Intermarriage Regressions by Respondent's Affiliation (Religion Measured after Marriage)^a

| | Exclusivist Protestant | Ecumenical Protestant | Catholic |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Percentage of coreligionists | -0.017 (0.003)** | -0.013 (0.004)** | -0.010 (0.005)** |
| Premarital pregnancy | 0.806 (0.219)** | 0.190 (0.195) | -0.062 (0.266) |
| Education | | | |
| <12 years | -0.211 (0.142) | 0.238 (0.141)* | 0.140 (0.204) |
| 13-15 years | -0.253 (0.185) | -0.071 (0.132) | -0.163 (0.187) |
| ≥16 years | 0.323 (0.250) | -0.215 (0.164) | -0.127 (0.237) |
| Size of family of origin | 0.025 (0.022) | -0.037 (0.023) | -0.018 (0.029) |
| Mother's employment | 0.212 (0.162) | 0.168 (0.132) | 0.244 (0.174) |
| Non-intact family | -0.040 (0.187) | 0.350 (0.164)** | 0.547 (0.229)** |
| Male | -0.244 (0.125)** | -0.341 (0.107)** | 0.020 (0.149) |
| Marriage cohort | | | |
| Before 1950 | -0.078 (0.175) | -0.640 (0.147)** | -1.146 (0.223)** |
| 1950-1959 | 0.213 (0.198) | -0.336 (0.168)** | -0.432 (0.240)* |
| 1960-1969 | -0.061 (0.182) | -0.148 (0.155) | -0.455 (0.208)** |
| 1980-1988 | 0.136 (0.257) | 0.592 (0.193)** | 0.330 (0.224) |
| Constant | -0.068 (0.192) | 0.079 (0.223) | -0.416 (0.273) |
| Log-likelihood | -818.151 | -1,141.378 | -591.573 |
| Sample size | 1,287 | 1,914 | 1,107 |

^a Standard errors in parentheses.** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A growing literature documents that religious intermarriage has important effects on the economic and demographic behavior of families. Yet few empirical studies have examined the determinants of this phenomenon for the main religious groups in the United States within the context of a multivariate framework. The present study has attempted to fill this gap in the literature.

The analysis is based on a model that views religious compatibility with the spouse as a desirable marital trait, but one which may have to be traded-off against other attractive characteristics in the marriage market. In this framework, the optimal level of religious compatibility with the spouse is a function of the benefits and costs associated with additional search for a same-faith partner. Several hypotheses derived from this model are tested with data on exclusivist Protestant, ecumenical Protestant, and Catholic respondents in the 1987-1988 National Survey of Families and Households.

The main determinant of the costs of finding a same-faith spouse is the proportion of individuals with the same religious affiliation in the relevant marriage market. The results strongly support the hypothesis that the greater such proportion, the lower the probability of marrying outside the religion. A different type of factor that influences the costs of continued search for a same-faith partner is the occurrence of pregnancy in the course of dating or cohabitation.

Such event is found to increase the probability of interfaith marriage by a substantial amount, but only for exclusivist Protestants—a group for which the costs of an abortion or an out-of-wedlock child are relatively high.

Educational attainment has an ambiguous effect on the probability of intermarriage, as higher levels of schooling decrease the marginal costs of search for a same-faith partner and may also reduce the marginal benefits of such a search. For ecumenical Protestants and Catholics, education is found to have no effect on the likelihood of intermarriage, suggesting that the countervailing forces are offsetting each other. The second effect dominates for exclusivist Protestants: in this group, those with the highest levels of schooling are most likely to marry outside the religion. Because positive assortative mating by education within the religion is relatively difficult for exclusivist Protestants who have college degrees, this finding is suggestive of the relative strength and importance of educational homogamy.

Those who are more religious and more committed to the faith in which they were raised are predicted to have a lower probability of intermarriage. Only imperfect proxies for these factors are available in these data, and their coefficients are not always significant; however, the results are generally supportive of this hypothesis. The estimates also uncover an asymmetry by gender in the probability of intermarriage for ecumenical and exclusivist Protestants, possibly reflecting a corresponding asymmetry in the ability to control the religious socialization and education of the children.

Overall, the results on the determinants of religious intermarriage are generally consistent with the hypotheses derived from the theoretical model. Based on an assessment of the benefits and costs of search for a same-faith partner at the margin, the model provides a cohesive structure for understanding how various factors influence the likelihood of marrying outside the religion and avoids the ad-hoc explanations for one variable at a time that are often found in earlier studies.

With regard to long-run trends, an important finding of this research is that the past decades have witnessed a significant increase in the rate of intermarriage for Catholics and ecumenical Protestants; at the same time, the pattern has been one of notable stability in the case of exclusivist Protestants. For the dimension of religion considered in this study—the salience of religious factors in marriage decisions—this result may be interpreted as a confirmation of secularizing trends among ecumenical Protestants and Catholics and an indication of a resistance to secularization among exclusivist Protestants.

The conclusion that barriers to interfaith marriage remain unchanged for exclusivist Protestants is consistent with evidence that this group continues to display distinctive patterns of economic and demographic behavior. Several researchers have studied and documented the relative strength of exclusivist Protestant denominations (Kelley, 1972; Roof and McKinney, 1987; Iannaccone, 1992, 1994). An intriguing topic for future investigation is the extent to which

their stable intermarriage patterns, documented here, have contributed to such strength.

Recent research suggests that the theoretical framework that has been found useful for analyzing the demographic consequences of interfaith marriage may be applied, with some modification, to understanding the demographic implications of other types of intermarriages. Berg and Pullum (1996) find that the marital stability and bargaining effects described in the introduction help explain the observed effects of interethnic and interracial marriage on fertility behavior. Along similar lines, extension of the analysis presented in this article may shed additional light on the determinants of racial and ethnic heterogamy in the marriage market.

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