INTERMARRIAGE PATTERNS AND SOCIAL COHESION AMONG FIRST, SECOND AND LATER GENERATION AUSTRALIANS

Dimitria Giorgas,† The Australian National University
F.L. Jones, The University of Queensland

Studies of ethnic intermarriage in Australia have found that group size, residential segregation, and religious homogeneity, as well as social distance from the dominant (Anglo) cultural group, are important factors determining the likelihood of ethnic intermarriage. However, studies to date have predominantly focused on the first generation, and have less to say about interethnic marriages among members of the second and later generations. This paper analyses marriage patterns across immigrant generations, focusing on specific European ancestries: German, Dutch, Greek, Italian, Polish and Hungarian, contrasted with members of the dominant group. The results reveal strong effects of ancestry, immigrant generation, cross-generational preferences, and intergroup exchanges, as well as a few disjunctions reflecting discontinuities in the history of settlement among different immigrant groups. The results also show that social distance is important in determining the likelihood of intermarriage, as well as the cohesiveness of ethnic groups across generations.

A mixed marriage often involves the crossing of multiple social boundaries, for example, religious and cultural as well as class ones. The choice of a marriage partner not only means entering another family and another set of life-histories but it also involves adopting, or at least adapting to, elements of a different culture (Penny and Khoo 1996: 20). Whether or not a person marries across such boundaries depends upon a range of psychological and social factors. As in all marriages, the psychological factors include mutual attraction and romantic love but can, of course, include repulsion. The social factors comprise such matters as perceived social and cultural distance, residential propinquity and even such apparently innocent characteristics as group size. These factors restrict or expand the choices available to individuals in marriage markets.

Social factors have been of particular interest to sociologists. Social distance, for example, reflects, among other things, cultural tolerance and a group’s difference from the majority ethnic group. Such differences may be structurally conditioned, involving differences in religion, education, income, residence and language. All these factors affect the likelihood of two people meeting, and subsequently enter-

† Address for correspondence: Australian Centre for Population Research, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia. Email: dimi.giorgas@anu.edu.au.
This study explores such general issues and their effect on the chances of intermarriage among first, second and later generation Australians from different European ancestries. Specifically, it examines how the migration process affects the social cohesion of a particular ethnic group over time, as indicated by its propensity to practise in-marriage\(^1\) rather than intermarriage. The next section reviews Price and Zubrzycki’s pioneering Australian work into the intermixture of immigrants. This review raises issues about ethnic exclusiveness and the migration process, and their implications for second-generation marriage behaviour.

**Intermarriage: the case in Australia**

In immigrant countries like Australia, studies of intermarriage have been used to assess the rate of ethnic assimilation and to identify how groups differ in their propensity to contract marriages inside and outside their group of origin. Price (1982: 100), for example, maintains that ‘... intermarriage is still the best measure of ethnic intermixture because it breaks down ethnic exclusiveness and mixes the various ethnic populations more effectively than any other social process’. From this perspective, intermarriage serves to break down intergroup barriers. As immigrants widen their contacts with those from different ethnic groups, assimilation occurs (Price and Zubrzycki 1962b: 132). Such a perspective is consistent with the concept of a single *melting pot* (or even multiple ones),\(^2\) a view in which intermarriage is seen as a crucial mechanism for absorbing immigrant populations. However, in making their argument, Price and Zubrzycki (1962a, b) seem to adopt the prevailing orthodoxy of the period in which they wrote, namely, the idea of ‘Anglo-conformity’ rather than that of a ‘melting pot’ that produced a novel social and cultural amalgam. They also seem to neglect the possibility that the non-Anglo partner may have an equal or even greater influence on the cultural or ethnic identity of the family produced by the process of intermarriage.\(^3\) Even so, cultural maintenance and the production of new ethnic identities are complex and variable processes. Ethnic intermarriage may lead to either the dilution or the expansion of a specific ethnic group. The Irish in America and the Australian Aboriginal population are cases in point (Hout and Goldstein 1994: 71; Khoo and Price 1996: 12).\(^4\)

In fairness to Price and Zubrzycki, they did observe that some groups, southern Europeans in particular, did not easily assimilate, in that their in-marriage rates remained higher than those of other non-British groups. In later work, Price (1989) produced further evidence that Greeks and Italians were two groups rather likely to marry into their own group, followed by the Poles. On the other hand, German and Dutch settlers were the most likely to marry out. These patterns were consistent for both males and females, although there was a greater tendency for females than males to marry within their own ethnic group. Moreover, these patterns of in-marriage were also consistent over time (Price distinguished the three periods 1945–64; 1965–79; 1981–87), although there was some decline in the most recent period as the flow of new settlers from Europe declined.\(^5\)

This last trend illustrates the importance of the migration process, and of family migration in particular, in providing potential marriage partners from the same country of origin, as Price and Zubrzycki (1962b) observe. This point is amplified in