

GENDER-GAPS IN INTERMARRIAGE: THE CASE OF SPAIN

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Short abstract

During the last decade, international immigration flows have undergone a dramatic growth in Spain. Because of the remarkable weight of foreign population intermarriage is of increasing interest in the study of contemporary union formation patterns. Previous research has reported significant and increasing levels of intermarriage, which represented 75.6% of the total marriages involving at least one foreign spouse in 2005. Nevertheless, intermarriages levels show marked disparities by national origin and gender.

In this context, the main purpose of this article is to explore how gender shapes intermarriage in Spain. The analysis focuses on the dissimilarities in the assortative mating between men and women and Spanish and foreigners, answering two central questions: first, are partners that intermarry significantly different from those who do not? Furthermore, do their socio-demographic characteristics vary according to sex and national origin? Second, in a context of transformation of gender roles and gender relations within the couple, in which extend are mixed unions more or less homogamous in terms of age and educational attainment than other couples? Does it make a difference whether the native partner is a male or a female?

We use microdata from a 5% sample of the Spanish 2001 Census and, alternatively, the Spanish Labor Force Survey, considering the stock of individuals in both legal and consensual unions. A sample of the main representative foreign national origins is considered. Multi-level models are applied separately for men and women to predict the odds of being in a union with a foreigner or a native taking into account relevant individual and partner characteristics. Such models characterize males and females involved in in- and out-marriages, distinguishing how preferences operate in the assortative mating by national origin and gender.

Extended abstract

Background

During the last decade, the international immigration flows in Spain have undergone a dramatic growth. Data from the Spanish Population Register indicates that in 2005, 8.5% of the population's country was foreign born. Until this noticeable arrival of the foreigners, there had not been enough statistical support for the quantitative analysis of their influence in the Spanish demographic dynamics', but now they are subjects of a growing interest within the academic agenda.

In this context, intermarriages have become a potentially important aspect of contemporary union formation patterns in Spain. Marriage Records show that the percentage of marriages in which at least one of the spouses is foreign has risen from 4.5% in 1995 to 14.2% in 2005, an increase that almost reach ten points in ten years. Among them, 75.6% are mixed (referred to Spanish-foreigners unions').

Previous research has examined marriage patterns of the foreign population in Spain, by looking at the age at marriage, the order of marriage and the degree of intermarriage (Cortina, Esteve & Domingo, 2006). Results have reported marked disparities in the out-marriage rates regarding to national origin and gender in Spain. These are consistent with the findings obtained by scholars interested in intermarriage trends in other countries (McCaa, 1993; Muñoz-Pérez & Tribalat, 1996; Kalmijn, 1998; Lievens, 1999).

The percentages of in and out-marriage (including marriages and cohabitations) according to the partner's nationality presented in Table 1 indicate the existence of differences by sex in intermarry that become wider when the most representative nationalities are examined. In fact, Latin-American men show a lower propensity to have a Spanish female partner than Latin-American women to have a Spanish male partner; these discrepancies are due to the unbalanced sex ratio that characterizes Latin-American inflows.

Therefore, the unions formed by Spanish men and foreign women are more common than the ones represented by those native women involved with their male counterparts: 57.2% of the mixed couples correspond to the first of those combinations.

Table 1. Percentages of in and out-marriages by sex and partner's nationality. Spain 2001.

	Partner's nationality			TOTAL
	SAME NATIONALITY	DIFFERENT NATIONALITY		
		Spain	Others	
MALES				
Natives	99,0		1,0	100,0
Foreigners	68,0	25,3	6,6	100,0
Great Britain	71,7	22,0	6,3	100,0
Rumania	90,9	7,3	1,7	100,0
Morocco	77,0	20,7	2,3	100,0
Colombia	87,5	8,7	3,9	100,0
Ecuador	93,3	4,2	2,5	100,0
FEMALES				
Natives	99,3		0,7	100,0
Foreigners	62,7	31,2	6,1	100,0
Great Britain	72,3	23,4	4,3	100,0
Rumania	92,4	6,3	1,4	100,0
Morocco	79,3	18,8	1,8	100,0
Colombia	61,8	32,4	5,8	100,0
Ecuador	87,1	10,0	2,8	100,0

Source: 5% sample of 2001 Census microdata.

Hypotheses

Our purpose is to complete the analysis of the gender gaps in intermarriage in Spain by studying the differences in assortative mating between men and women. In first place, we explore the nature of the assortative mating based on the socio-demographic profile of both spouses of mixed couples. The aim is to answer: Who and how are the foreigners that are chosen by the natives as partners? Do Spanish men and women who intermarriage have similar attributes? What about their counterparts? Are these attributes (age, nationality and socio-economical status) different from those that their partners would have had if they would have chosen instead a Spanish men or women? How the partnership selection differs for males and females and among immigrant groups?

In second place, we inquire about the definition of gender relations in mixed unions: In which extend are these unions more or less homogamous than other couples? Are unions with conventional age and educational attainment combinations less likely to be intermarriages? Do this patterns vary for those natives males and females involved with foreigners?

The transformation of the “traditional” women’s roles into new ones, built on the base of women’s economic emancipation, has resulted in corresponding changes in living arrangements and, specifically, in family and partnership. Less differentiated gender roles will foster a reduction in sex gaps (Becker, 1981; Oppenheimer, 1988; Solsona, 1998). The male bread-winner model associated to a trading (complementary) couple is being replaced by a dual-earner model, in which the sense of the partnership has a more egalitarian approach (Luxán, Miret & Treviño, 2000). The tendency to form heterogamous unions, in which men delay the age at marriage and form unions with younger and less-educated women, fits into the trading couple’s framework and has been traditionally addressed in Spain (Cortina, Esteve & Domingo, 2006). Meanwhile, from an equity perspective, males and females mate selection will change in order to search for certain attributes in their possible matches that would guarantee a less asymmetrical gender relationship.

The homogamy levels of the resulting couple depend on: a) the gender differentials in partner selection; b) the national origin of the spouses who are marry to a native; and c) the socio-demographic profile of both partners. In this respect, we expect that the arrival of the foreign population to the Spanish marriage market and the differences between the mating preferences of men and women, would lead to a less homogamous type of union in Spanish men- foreign women intermarriages, and a more homogamous one in the native women-foreign men combination.

Data and methods

To assess how gender shapes intermarriage we use microdata from a 5% sample of the Spanish 2001 Census. This source allows the identification of the immigrant groups according to both birthplace country and nationality and, at the same time, the distinction between marriages and consensual unions. We complete the study with the data drawn from the Spanish Labor Force Survey, to obtain more recent and proper information related to this process of constant changing.

We estimate multi-level models separately for Spanish men and women to predict the odds of forming a union with a foreigner or a native. Relevant factors such as age, educational attainment, national origin and employment status of both partners, are taken into account. The above-mentioned enables to characterize males and females involved in unions, distinguishing how preferences operate in the assortative mating by gender. The likelihood

of intermarriage is also replied for the foreigners. In a first approximation, the foreign population is treated as a whole, but in a deeper analysis each group is considered, specially the most representative national origins in Spain (Africans and Latin-Americans).

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