STUDIES IN POPULATION

The Demography of Racial and Ethnic Groups

EDITED BY
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Preface

This volume is an outgrowth of a conference organized under the auspices of The University of Texas Population Research Center and held in Austin during the summer of 1977, in conjunction with the sixth annual meeting of directors of program projects and population research centers supported by the Center for Population Research of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The theme chosen for the conference was "the demography of racial and ethnic groups." As the following chapters make clear, the demographic behavior of racial and ethnic groups raises issues that have significance in both theoretical and public policy areas. The demography of racial and ethnic groups is theoretically important because the understanding of subpopulation characteristics and processes is basic to any understanding of phenomena pertaining to larger populations. It has policy implications because racial and ethnic groups are often the targets of special social and economic programs, the implementation of which is

difficult without demographic knowledge of the particular groups at which the programs are aimed.

When organizing the conference, we did not specify that each author or set of authors concentrate on a single racial or ethnic group. To have done so would have been to forgo at the outset the insights that only comparative analysis of two or more subpopulations can provide. Nor did we insist that all the topics of interest to demographers be covered (although most of these were, in fact, addressed in one or more of the works included). Rather, our intent and expectation was that the analyses be representative (but not necessarily all-inclusive) of current substantive, methodological, and theoretical investigations involving one or more racial–ethnic groups in the United States. We hope we have succeeded with respect to this criterion, although that judgment must ultimately be left to the reader.

A number of persons deserve special thanks for their efforts in bringing about the conference, this book, or both. Dr. William A. Sadler of the Center for Population Research at NICHD provided enthusiastic support for the conference at every opportunity. Harley Browning, at that time the director of the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin, was a constant source of encouragement. Hal Winsborough of the University of Wisconsin has been extremely helpful in preparing the manuscript for publication. Shirley Agee helped arrange the conference, and Jeannie Taylor and Peggy Kelley typed portions of the manuscript. Without the assistance of all of these persons, as well as that of others who contributed in smaller but no less important ways, this book would not have been possible.

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Some Issues in the Demographic Study of Racial and Ethnic Populations

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The study of demography is in many instances closely connected to the investigation of racial and ethnic populations. Our general comprehension of demographic characteristics and processes is enhanced by comparative investigations of particular subpopulations variously designated as racial, ethnic, and/or minority groups. Benefits of such analyses are not difficult to enumerate. Obviously, global demographic profiles and trends are composites that obscure the sometimes similar, but often divergent, structures and processes of subpopulations comprising the whole. To illustrate, only a short time ago a great deal of concern was manifested regarding rapid population growth in the United States in general and over the expansion of metropolitan populations in particular. With fertility now hovering near replacement level and with the surprising (to most) reversal of net migration trends in favor of nonmetropolitan areas, increasing attention is being given to the possible effects of a stable population, to the "graying of America," and to the

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"nonmetropolitanization" resulting from the recent shift in the direction of population redistribution.

However, not all segments of the American population have contributed proportionately to these changes. Completed fertility (i.e., children ever born per 1000 women aged 35–44) among blacks and the Spanish-surname population continues to be substantially above that of Anglos, although all three groups have experienced declining fertility since the peak attained in the late 1950s (Bradshaw and Bean, 1972, 1973). On the other hand, the completed fertility of other groups, such as Cubans and Japanese Americans, stands at a level considerably lower than that of the white (or Anglo) population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1971, 1973). Likewise, at least one large minority group, blacks, has apparently not shared in the nonmetropolitan net migration reversal (Zuiches and Brown, 1975). Thus, the initial and most clear-cut advantage of the comparative demographic study of racial and ethnic groups is the greater descriptive richness and precision that such analyses bring to demographic studies.

CULTURAL VERSUS STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES AMONG SUBPOPULATIONS

The uncovering of differences across subpopulations leads directly to investigations of the causes and consequences of the observed variation. By *subpopulations* we mean groups more commonly referred to as racial, ethnic, or minority groups. In this chapter, a distinction is drawn between racial and ethnic groups on the one hand and minorities on the other. To be meaningful, research into the determinants of demographic variation by race, ethnicity, or minority group status must involve, at a minimum, some reasonable delimitation of the universe of variables that may be expected to afford some degree of explanatory power. Inevitably, it would seem, the decision as to where to look for explanation will be premised on some notion, however vague, of the nature of the subpopulations to be studied. In general, research in this area seems to have adopted one or both of two approaches, though one would be hard pressed to find a comprehensive theoretical statement of either.

One approach searches for determinants of demographic variation in the history and cultural traditions of different subpopulations. Underlying (usually implicitly) this perspective is a conceptualization of subpopulations that parallels rather closely Schermerhorn's (1970) definition of an ethnic group: "A collectivity within a larger society having real or

putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of peoplehood [p. 12]." Examples of symbolic elements include kinship patterns, nationality, language, phenotypical features, and religious affiliation. Let us refer to the analytical strategy that relies primarily on explanations of this sort as the "cultural approach," since demographic differences among groups are attributed to cultural differences, or, in some cases, to varying degrees of cultural assimilation (acculturation).

A second approach seeks an explanation in the extent to which subpopulations have obtained access to and have been assimilated into the economic and political structures of the larger society. Taking some liberties with an already overworked term, we shall call research in this vein the "structural approach" because of its focus on structural assimilation. In this instance, our use of the term *assimilation* is not in any sense intended to be judgmental. It makes no assumption that distinctive racial or ethnic groups should or will lose their identity through amalgamation with some dominant group. By *structural assimilation,* we refer simply to the degree to which subpopulations have acquired the political and economic characteristics of the general population. Gordon (1964) has identified seven dimensions of assimilation and gives a meaning to the term structural assimilation quite different from the one offered here. With the possible exception of marital assimilation, all of Gordon's dimensions seem to be derivatives of cultural and structural assimilation, as just defined. Our own perspective is somewhat more closely akin (but is not identical) to van den Berghe's (1967) view of cultural versus social (structural) pluralism.

At times, the structural approach has seemed atheoretical in the sense that it appears to lack interest in the sources of structural differences (or inequalities) and, therefore, might better be seen as merely "compositional" in character. Yet by and large the underlying assumption (again, often implicit) is that the subpopulations constitute *minorities,* that is, groups "whose members experience a wide range of discriminatory behavior and frequently are relegated to positions low in the status hierarchy [Gittler, 1956:vii; quoted in Yetman and Steele, 1975:1–2]." [1]

[1] Definitions of a minority (e.g., Robin Williams, 1964) that emphasize hereditary membership and/or a high degree of endogamy seem much too restrictive (Yetman and Steele, 1975:1). For example, Mexican Americans and blacks who intermarry with Anglos may still be relegated to inferior positions in the status hierarchy and may perhaps be subjected to even more virulent forms of discrimination than those who marry endogamously. Furthermore, certain religious groups (e.g., Baptists in the Soviet Union) may be appropriately considered as minorities, yet their position is neither hereditary nor the result of endogamy.

To the extent that this emphasis predominates, the focus gains precision as the search for explanation is concentrated specifically on differentials in power and control of resources. The two approaches are necessarily not mutually exclusive and certainly are not contradictory, since in the United States, at least, cultural pluralism tends to parallel structural separation (Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1969:361; for a somewhat similar perspective, see van den Berghe, 1967:34–37). On the other hand, it is quite true that the "degree of acculturation and the desire for acculturation do not necessarily imply structural integration [Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1969:370]."

Although several of the subpopulations that have received attention from demographers are often described as racial groups, the concept of *race* per se does not play a definitive role in the two analytical approaches delineated in the preceding discussion. One conventional definition of race is "a human group that defines itself or is defined by others as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable characteristics [van den Berghe, 1967:9]." In other words, it is not the physical characteristics themselves but the *social definition* that is of relevance. If the social distinction is made in terms of differences in historical traditions, language, nationality, etc., the approach is cultural. If the emphasis is on compositional differences with little or no attention to the sources of the differences, the distinction can be viewed as the compositional variant of the structural approach. If physical differences are used as a rationale for discriminatory behavior and for limiting a group's power and control of resources, the minorities dimension of the structural approach comes into play.

An argument could perhaps be made that if, in addition to being an ethnic subpopulation as defined in the preceding discussion, a group also defines itself or is defined by others as being different by virtue of innate characteristics (however ill-founded the assumption), that ethnic group is also a racial group. However, the purpose here is not to derive and defend a given set of definitions but rather to distinguish and describe what appear to be the two principal approaches in research designed to account for differences observed in various subpopulations. It seems clear that even where the term race might be applied, both of the approaches depend basically on social definitions. Of course, it would be foolish to assert that biology plays no role in explaining demographic differences. One obvious example is the effect on mortality of certain diseases (such as sickle-cell anemia) that appear in some groups but rarely, or not at all, in others. Such phenomena are essentially outside the purview of this chapter (and of this volume).

An ethnic group may or may not be a minority. That is, maintenance

of historic cultural distinctions does not mean that a group will necessarily exercise only a minimal degree of power and resource control. Furthermore, an ethnic group may be a minority at one point in time but not at another. At one stage of American history, for example, the Irish were clearly both an ethnic group and a minority, but currently they would not seem to constitute a minority as defined herein. To a large extent, much the same might be said of Japanese Americans who, after suffering severe restrictions on their ability to control resources from the early stages of immigration (e.g., proscriptive alien land laws) up to and including the World War II incarceration and the aftermath, have come to surpass the general population in areas such as educational achievement (Uhlenberg, 1972) and life expectancy (Kitagawa and Hauser, 1973:99–101). Although it is possible to quibble over the appropriateness of these illustrations, the general points should be clear.

The difference between the two approaches and the difficulties that beset them, separately and in combination, are illustrated in studies of the effects of minority group status on fertility. Examinations of the effects of minority group status on fertility (Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1969; Kennedy, 1973; Rindfuss and Sweet, 1977; Roberts and Lee, 1974; Sly, 1970) come closer than other types of research to making explicit the thrust of the two approaches. In general, two alternative explanations are juxtaposed: The "characteristics" or "assimilationist" hypothesis attributes fertility differentials to dissimilarities between groups in regard to various social, demographic, and economic characteristics. When such differences disappear, or are controlled statistically, "differences in fertility should be eliminated" or at least should converge to the point of insignificance (Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1969:361). The alternative proposition indicates that "even when groups are similar socially, demographically, and economically, minority group membership will continue to exert an effect on fertility [Rindfuss and Sweet, 1977:113]." Still another hypothesis is indicated by Goldscheider and Uhlenberg's (1969) finding that the fertility of high socioeconomic status members of some groups is lower than that of their majority counterparts, even though fertility for the group as a whole exceeds that of the majority group. Goldscheider and Uhlenberg explain this result in terms of the "insecurity" that accompanies minority group status (see Bean and Marcum, Chapter 8 of this volume). Whatever the adequacy of their explanation, the observed pattern suggests the possibility that group membership and social and economic characteristics interact in their effects on fertility.

Such interaction effects complicate the interpretation of fertility differentials in terms of the two approaches already discussed. To the