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Inter-ethnic partnerships: remaking urban ethnic diversity

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Abstract

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Keywords

diversity, ethnic, urban, inter, remaking, partnerships

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INTER-ETHNIC PARTNERSHIPS: REMAKING URBAN ETHNIC DIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Inter-ethnic couples are a growing population with unique and understudied residential geographies. Using customised 2006 Census data for the Greater Sydney region, we investigate the prevalence and geographic distribution of a socially significant subset of co-habiting inter-ethnic couples: ethnic majority-minority couples. These couples are comprised of an Anglo/European or ('white') Australian partner and a partner from a 'visible' ethnic minority group. We find that ethnic majority-minority couples are most concentrated in inner city areas of moderate ethnic diversity and high socio-economic status; and are more residentially dispersed than their respective ethnic minority groups. Inter-ethnic partnership appears to alter the residential geographies of ethnic minority groups. By shifting the scale of analysis from the individual to the household, our findings complicate established understandings of the ethnic geographies of Australian cities.

Keywords: ethnicity, race, inter-ethnic, mixed-race, segregation, diversity

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of partnerships between people of different ethnicities is a powerful indicator of the social and cultural distance between ethnic groups across space and over time (Bogardus, 1933; Kalmijn, 1998). In Australia, and other immigrant societies, inter-ethnic couples constitute a sizeable and growing population (Khoo *et al.*, 2009; Smith *et al.*, 2011; Wright *et al.*, 2011). The rising incidence of inter-ethnic

partnerships¹ has occurred parallel to persistent prejudice (Dunn *et al.*, 2012). Inter-ethnic partnerships have long been a ‘highly charged, emotional issue’ because they challenge ethnic hierarchies and boundaries, and undermine exclusive national identities (Owen, 2002: 2). These partnerships have shifted the ethnic composition of Australian society over time and, we argue, across *space*. This paper presents the first fine-grained geographical analysis of inter-ethnic partnerships in Australia. Our focus is on the unique residential geographies of co-residing inter-ethnic couples in Sydney Statistical Division (SD), which encompasses the Greater Sydney metropolitan area.

We begin by outlining the prevalence and socio-cultural significance of inter-ethnic partnerships in contemporary Australia. This is followed by a theoretical discussion of the residential decision-making processes of inter-ethnic couples, and international research explicating their unique geographies. Our methods section details the customised Census data request that framed our investigation of co-habiting inter-ethnic couples throughout Sydney. We find evidence of a clear *geography* to inter-ethnic partnerships in this city, which is linked to the socio-economic attributes of particular locales and, in complex ways, to broader spatial patterns of ethnic diversity.

The prevalence of inter-ethnic partnerships in Australia

Demographic data in western countries of high immigration reveal consistently rising rates of inter-ethnic partnership. In the United States, the national ‘mixed-race’ marriage rate² has doubled in every decade since 1960 (Wright & Ellis, 2006); while in the United Kingdom, the proportion of individuals in mixed-ethnicity partnerships

¹Throughout this paper the term ‘partnership’ denotes co-resident partners, including those who are formally married or in a de facto relationship; whether heterosexual or same-sex.

²We use the terms ethnic/ethnicity unless referring to international studies in which broad racial categories are commonly deployed. We use the term ‘marriage’ only when referring to studies that used data based on formal marriage rates.

increased by 65 per cent between 1991 and 2001 (Feng *et al.*, 2010). In Australia, the proportion of marriages registered between overseas-born and Australian-born persons increased from 13 per cent in 1990 to 23 per cent in 2006 (Khoo, 2011).

Rates of inter-ethnic partnering vary widely by ethnic group. In Australia, post-war immigrants from Northern and Western Europe married the Australian-born at substantially higher rates than Southern and Eastern Europeans (Price & Zubrzycki, 1962). Subsequent research has revealed high rates of inter-ethnic marriage/partnering between Anglo-Australians and a wide range of European immigrants (including Southern and Eastern Europeans), highlighting the mutability of perceived ethnic boundaries over time (Giorgas & Jones, 2002; Khoo *et al.*, 2009). For all ethnic groups, the propensity to marry across ethnic boundaries increases sharply across immigrant generations (Giorgas & Jones, 2002; Khoo *et al.*, 2009). At the 2006 Census, six and 13 per cent of partnered first generation immigrant Chinese males and females had partners of a different ancestry. These proportions grew to 69 and 73 per cent among third generation Chinese immigrants (Khoo *et al.*, 2009). Also at the 2006 Census, more than half of all partnered Indigenous Australians had non-Indigenous partners (Heard *et al.*, 2009); and one-third of *all* co-resident couples in Australia were inter-ethnic (Khoo, 2011). A comparatively small proportion of all co-resident couples (around 4% in 2001), involved one partner who was of Anglo-Celtic Australian or European ancestry and one who was not; or a combination of two different non-European ancestries (Khoo, 2004). The bulk of inter-ethnic partnerships in Australia still involve an Anglo-Australian partner and a European one.

Reconfiguring ethnic boundaries: inter-ethnic partnerships, identity and prejudice

Discrepancies in the propensity for inter-ethnic partnering are attributable to group-specific immigration histories and residential settlement patterns; as well as socio-economic, linguistic and cultural attributes (Giorgas & Jones 2002; Khoo *et al.*, 2009). Perceived ethnic boundaries have shifted over time, but undoubtedly still impede some partnerships. Inter-ethnic partnering is an established indicator of the extent to which ethnicity remains a significant social barrier between groups (Song, 2009). However, it is ‘not just reflective of the boundaries that currently separate groups in society, it also bears the potential of cultural and socioeconomic change’ (Kalmijn, 1998, p. 397). Inter-ethnic partnerships foster opportunities for interaction and understanding between groups, potentially extending beyond spouses to other family members, social networks and wider communities (Kalmijn, 1998). They also have significant implications for the ethnic composition and identities of present and future generations, specifically through the growing presence of mixed-ethnicity populations (Khoo, 2011). Mixed race/ethnicity groups are among the fastest-growing ethnic/racial categories in the US (Shih & Sanchez, 2009) and the UK (Rees *et al.*, 2012). In 2011, one-third of Australians reported mixed ancestries (ABS, 2012).

For some people, inter-ethnic partnerships evoke fear and discomfort, as they reconfigure ethnic hierarchies, blur group boundaries, and undermine cherished notions of familial, ethnic and national identities (Owen, 2002; Wright *et al.*, 2003). In the past, racist regulatory mechanisms inhibited inter-ethnic/racial marriages. Anti-miscegenation laws operated in some US states until 1967 (Wright *et al.*, 2003). In Australia, prior to Federation in 1901, marriages between Indigenous people and

white settlers could not occur without written permission from the Chief Protector of the Aboriginal people of a given state/territory (Probyn, 2003). Prejudice against these partnerships was also powerfully embodied in the experiences of the ‘Stolen Generations’. Between 1910 and 1970 thousands of children of mixed (Indigenous/white) ethnicity were forcibly removed from their families as part of government attempts to enforce rigid ethnic boundaries (Ellinghaus, 2003; Probyn, 2003). Systematic opposition to inter-ethnic marriage also extended to other groups under the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act (the ‘White Australia Policy’). Prior to the 1948 Nationality and Citizenship Act, Australian women who married non-Europeans lost their citizenship (at that time British subjecthood, see Owen, 2002). And, under the 1949 War-time Refugee Removal Act, non-European refugees were regularly repatriated to their countries of origin even if they had married an Australian citizen (Owen, 2002).

Although legal barriers have eroded in recent decades, prejudice against inter-ethnic partnerships has endured. In a 2001 survey of New South Wales and Queensland residents, 13 per cent were opposed to marriage between people of different races (Dunn *et al.*, 2004). Prejudice was contingent upon the respective ethnic groups involved. The vast majority of survey respondents indicated that they would be comfortable if a close relative married a person of European background, but many expressed discomfort with the prospect of close relative marrying an Indigenous person (29%), a person of Asian background (28%) or Muslim faith (56%) (Dunn *et al.*, 2004). This evidence of an ‘uneven allocation of intolerance’ (Dunn *et al.*, 2004, p. 415) shaped the Census data request on which this paper is based, as described in

our methods. Below, we describe international research into the residential geographies of inter-ethnic/racial couples.

Remaking ethnic geographies: the spatial distribution of inter-ethnic households

Inter-ethnic couples challenge existing understandings of ethnic diversity and segregation across cities and regions, by shifting the unit of analysis from individuals to households (Holloway *et al.*, 2005; Smith *et al.*, 2011). Households are positioned between the scale of individual bodies and broad national, regional and neighbourhood patterns, and are increasingly recognised as important agents of urban transformation (Wong, 1998; Wright & Ellis, 2006; Wulff & Lobo, 2009). A household-level approach offers a unique insight into the extent and nature of ‘mixing’ between ethnic groups (Wright & Ellis, 2006), readily overlooked by broader analyses. For instance, neighbourhoods with high individual-level ethnic diversity are not necessarily those with the most *within-household* diversity (Wright & Ellis, 2006). Knowledge of where inter-ethnic couples live also facilitates a spatially contingent understanding of the everyday experiences of these couples and their (mixed-ethnicity) children. This is important as racism varies geographically (Dunn *et al.*, 2004).

Geographers have generally adopted one of two approaches to the spatial dimensions of inter-ethnic partnering. . The first focuses on the propensity for inter-ethnic couples to *form in particular places* (Peach, 1980; Lievens, 1998; Feng *et al.*, 2010); the second considers the attributes of places in which inter-ethnic couples *choose to live* (White & Sassler, 2000; Holloway *et al.*, 2005; Ellis *et al.*, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2011; Wright *et al.*, 2011). The first approach holds that inter-ethnic partnerships result from

the spatial assimilation and improved socio-economic position of immigrants over time (Gordon, 1964). Greater contact within neighbourhoods affords opportunities for inter-ethnic couples to form (Feng *et al.*, 2010). These opportunities are additionally contingent upon population characteristics within a given locale including: relative group size³, levels of community heterogeneity/diversity, ethnic groups' respective socio-economic status; and spatial proximity within the neighbourhood itself (Blau, 1977).

The second approach recognises that inter-ethnic partnering has unique residential *outcomes* and implications for the geographies of ethnic diversity. The local neighbourhood is declining as a meeting place for future partners, so cross-sectional Census data on place of residence cannot reliably predict inter-ethnic partnering (Houston *et al.*, 2005). These data are more instructive about the places where these couples *choose* to live (Lievens, 1998). Of course, place of residence is a function of choice and constraint (Holloway *et al.*, 2005; Stillwell & Phillips, 2006). While inter-ethnic couples likely choose neighbourhoods where they can enact their unique ethnic identities (Wright *et al.*, 2003); they will also be influenced by available socio-economic resources and other factors (such as proximity to workplace and extended family, and fear of racism). Perceived local-level attitudes towards diversity constrain the residential choices of ethnic minority persons (Wright *et al.*, 2003; Stillwell & Phillips, 2006). Fears of racism may entrench patterns of ethnic residential segregation in situations of intra-household ethnic homogeneity (Clark, 2002). But inter-ethnic couples bring multiple ethnic identities into their residential decision-

³An ethnic group's relative size in a given area is inversely related to the proportion of its members who are out-married (Blau 1977). Partnership across ethnic boundaries is less likely when there are more potential partners available from one's own ethnic group.

making, troubling established patterns towards ‘own-group preference’ in neighbourhood selection.

Recent studies in the US and UK have found that inter-ethnic/racial couples are drawn to ethnically/racially diverse neighbourhoods (Holloway *et al.*, 2005; Smith *et al.*, 2011; Wright *et al.*, 2011), which are perceived to provide safety from racism (Dalmage, 2000; Wright *et al.*, 2011). Those with children often prefer communities where mixed-ethnicity/race individuals are not ‘hyper-visible’ (Twine, 1999, p. 737). However the relationship between neighbourhood diversity and the prevalence of inter-ethnic partnerships is not linear. Holloway *et al.* (2005) observed an ‘in-between’ pattern to the distribution of households headed by white/non-white couples in 12 large US metropolitan areas. These couples resided in more diverse neighbourhoods than white/white households, but less diverse neighbourhoods than non-white/non-white households (Holloway *et al.*, 2005). Thus inter-ethnic couples are ‘not found exclusively in the neighbourhood terrain of one group or the other’ (Holloway *et al.*, 2005, p. 321). In this paper, we outline the first attempt to map the residential geographies of inter-ethnic couples in Australia, where different findings may be expected due to lower overall rates of ethnic residential segregation compared to the US and UK (Johnston *et al.*, 2007).

Existing research on the geographies of inter-ethnic partnerships in Australia has neglected fine-scaled analyses, focusing instead on aggregated state or national-level data (Giorgas & Jones, 2002; Khoo *et al.*, 2009). One exception is a study by Roy and Hamilton (1994), which used 1986 Census data to examine regional variations in inter-marriage by birthplace. Marriage between the Australian-born and overseas-born

was higher in metropolitan Melbourne than rural North East Victoria. Another is Heard *et al.*'s (2009) paper which reported that the bulk of partnered Indigenous Australians living in capital cities had non-Indigenous partners. In Sydney, 82 and 83 per cent of partnered Indigenous men and women respectively, had non-Indigenous partners. The comparable rates for non-metropolitan NSW were 63 and 65 per cent. The authors concluded that geography was a more important determinant of Indigenous/non-Indigenous partnerships than education or income (Heard *et al.*, 2009). These broad-scale findings underscore the need for more spatially disaggregated analyses of inter-ethnic couples in Australia. The findings presented in this paper are the first component of a broader project mapping and analysing the geographies of inter-ethnic couples across Australia.

METHODS

Deciding which couples to count: inclusion criteria

Customised data from the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing were used to map the residential geographies of co-habiting inter-ethnic couples (both de facto and formal marriages) across Sydney, using the ancestry variable⁴. But not all combinations of ethnicities have equal socio-cultural significance. When there is a 'visible difference' between two partners, couples are more likely to face discrimination in everyday lives (Luke & Carrington 2000, p. 9), and as a barrier in their residential decision-making processes (Wright *et al.*, 2003). Accordingly, we focused on a sub-set of the total array of inter-ethnic couples: those households in which a member of the numerically and culturally dominant (white) Anglo/European-Australian ethnic majority was partnered with an individual from a 'visible' ethnic

⁴Respondents could nominate up to two ancestries on the Census form, and were advised to consider the origins of their parents and grandparents.

minority group. In the remainder of this paper, we refer to these as ethnic majority-minority (or majority-minority) couples (see also Song, 2009). While this approach problematically positions the (white) ethnic majority as the referent against which all other ethnic groups are analysed (Lobo, 2010), no other ancestry group is present in Australia in sufficiently large numbers to form the starting point for comparison.

We included the following ancestry groups in the (white) Anglo/European-Australian ethnic majority: Australian, New Zealander (excluding Maori), north-west European and Caucasian. This group accounted for 51.3 per cent of Sydney's population in 2006. The selected ethnic minority groups (Figure 1) were based on regional-level ancestry groupings adopted in the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG) (ABS, 2005). Data were only requested for groups with a sizeable presence in Australia. Additional data were requested for ethnic majority-minority couples incorporating a Vietnamese, Filipino, Chinese, Indian or Lebanese partner, as these national-level groups each have a sizeable presence in Sydney.

Figure 1. Regional ancestry group classifications for customised data request.

The Census ancestry variable does not reliably account for Indigenous status, as many Indigenous persons nominate ‘Australian’ ancestry⁵. We thus requested additional data for Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples based on the Indigenous status variable.

Our analysis was complicated by the fact that 28 per cent of all persons recorded in the 2006 Census nominated two ancestries (Khoo *et al.*, 2009). Previous studies (in Australia and internationally) have not incorporated dual ancestry individuals in analyses of inter-ethnic partnerships, but this group was too large to omit. The inclusion of dual ancestry individuals complicated the process of determining what constituted an ethnic majority-minority couple, particularly when an individual stated a combination of a majority and minority ancestries (e.g. Anglo-Australian and

⁵At the 2006 Census, only 6.1% of Indigenous persons identified their ancestry as ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Torres Strait Islander’, or a combination of the two.

Chinese). To facilitate our analysis, we only incorporated dual ancestry persons who nominated two ancestries *within* the same broad regional category. This allowed us to capture the bulk of partnered dual ancestry individuals, as 82 per cent stated ancestries within the same regional category at the 2006 Census (e.g. Filipino-Vietnamese in the East Asian category, or Australian-English in the Anglo/European-Australian category).

Spatial analysis: mapping the geographies of ethnic majority-minority couples

Census data on ethnic majority-minority couples were requested for Statistical Subdivisions (SSDs) and State Suburbs. Data at the SSD-level distinguished between the different combinations of ethnic majority-minority couples specified in Figure 1, plus Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples. Data for State Suburbs only included total counts of ethnic majority-minority couples to reduce the likelihood of small cell values, which are disproportionately affected by ‘Introduced Random Error’ – the slight adjustment of all cells to avoid the release of identifiable Census data.

Our results express the residential geographies of co-resident ethnic majority-minority couples through location quotients (LQs). LQs indicate whether an area has an above- or below-average concentration of a certain group, relative to the concentration present in the wider geographical area of which it is part (Gorman-Murray & Brennan-Horley, 2010). For each SSD, the LQ was calculated as the percentage of total couples in that SSD who were classified as ethnic majority-minority couples, divided by the comparable percentage for the entire study area (Greater Sydney, where 3.5% of total couples were ethnic majority-minority). A LQ of 1 indicates that a particular SSD has a concentration of ethnic majority-minority couples identical to

that of the entire Greater Sydney region (3.5%). Values above 1 indicate above-average concentrations, and vice versa. Spatial patterns of ethnic majority-minority couples based on LQs were mapped using ESRI ArcGIS software, and compared to the residential patterns of their respective ethnic minority groups, and to two neighbourhood attributes: ethnic diversity and socio-economic status. The methods used are described below.

Ethnic diversity: The relative degree of ethnic diversity within each SSD was measured using the entropy index:

$$E = - \sum_{i=1}^n P_i \log P_i$$

where P is the proportion of the local population for each group (1 through n) (Wong, 1998). The index allows multiple groups to be considered in a single-figure measurement of diversity. We classified the population of each SSD into 11 ancestry groups based on ASCCEG regional ancestry categories. The index was standardised so that potential values ranged from 0 to 1. Values close to 1 indicate that the 11 groups were present in an area in similar proportions (i.e. high diversity), while low values indicate that one group dominates (i.e. low diversity). SSDs were ranked according to entropy values and classified as ‘very high’, ‘high’, ‘moderate’, ‘low’ and ‘very low’ based on observed natural breaks in values.

Socio-economic status: Data on suburb-level socio-economic status were obtained from the ABS product ‘Socio-Economic Indexes For Areas’ (SEIFA), a suite of indexes derived from Census variables pertaining to socio-economic conditions (ABS, 2009). We ranked all Sydney suburbs according to the Index of Relative Socio-

economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD), and divided them into quintiles. The percentage distribution of majority-minority couples across suburb-level IRSAD scores was compared against distributions of the broader ethnic minority and ethnic majority populations (aged 15 and over).

THE RESIDENTIAL GEOGRAPHIES OF ETHNIC MAJORITY-MINORITY COUPLES IN SYDNEY

The 2006 Census recorded 31,002 co-resident ethnic majority-minority couples in the Sydney SD, accounting for 3.5 per cent of all couples – a sizeable minority population. In addition, there were 7,426 Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples, representing 0.8 per cent of all couples. Both majority-minority couples and Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples demonstrated uneven geographical distributions, revealing distinctions between inner city and suburban areas (Figure 2, Table 1).

Table 1. Sydney SSDs, ranked by concentration of ethnic majority-minority couples.

Statistical Subdivision	Total majority-minority couples	% of all couples	Location quotient	% share of Sydney total
Inner Sydney	3,224	6.0	1.69	10.4
Lower Northern Sydney	3,158	5.1	1.43	10.2
Eastern Suburbs	1,926	4.4	1.24	6.2
Inner Western Sydney	1,525	4.3	1.21	4.9
Central Western Sydney	2,346	3.8	1.07	7.6
Central Northern Sydney	3,639	3.6	1.03	11.7
Blacktown	1,965	3.5	0.98	6.3
Northern Beaches	3,262	3.4	0.96	10.5
St George-Sutherland	1,756	3.4	0.95	5.7
Outer South Western Sydney	1,578	3.2	0.89	5.1
Canterbury-Bankstown	1,939	3.1	0.88	6.3
Outer Western Sydney	1,685	2.5	0.71	5.4

Fairfield-Liverpool	1,603	2.3	0.64	5.2
Gosford-Wyong	1,396	2.2	0.61	4.5

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Figure 2. Distribution of ethnic majority-minority couples by location quotient, Sydney SSDs, 2006.

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

The highest concentrations of ethnic majority-minority couples were clustered in four inner city SSDs: Inner Sydney, Lower Northern Sydney, Eastern Suburbs and Inner Western Sydney. Ethnic majority-minority couples comprised 5.0 per cent of all couples across this residential area. Collectively, this ‘hub’ was home to almost one-third (31.6%) of all ethnic majority-minority couples in Sydney, a considerable over-representation given its 22.4 per cent share of total co-resident couples. Inner Sydney had the highest concentration of ethnic majority-minority couples at 6.0 per cent, with a location quotient of 1.69 (i.e. 69 per cent above the citywide average). Figure 3 disaggregates these data further, by State Suburb, revealing nuanced patterns within SSDs. Ten of the 15 suburbs with LQ values of 2.50 or higher were located in Inner Sydney. Six suburbs formed a notable cluster to the south-west of the CBD: Pyrmont, Ultimo, Chippendale, Surry Hills, Darlington and Camperdown (see inset, Figure 3). Ethnic majority-minority couples comprised 9.8 per cent of all couples across these suburbs, with a peak of 12.1 per cent in Darlington. The inner-city ‘hub’ of ethnic majority-minority partnerships in Sydney is also home to Australia’s highest concentrations of same-sex couples (Gorman-Murray & Brennan-Horley, 2010). Both same-sex and ethnic majority-minority couples (and indeed ethnic majority-minority couples who are in same sex relationships) appear to be drawn to the same areas of the city, which have a reputation for progressive social attitudes and diversity. Gorman-Murray and Brennan-Horley (2010) suggested that the anonymity and higher population density of inner cities provided more favourable conditions for the enactment of sexual minority identities. Such conditions may also be a drawing point for ethnic majority-minority couples.

Figure 3. Distribution of ethnic majority-minority couples by location quotient, Sydney State Suburbs, 2006.

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Notwithstanding their concentration in inner city locales, ethnic majority-minority couples were widely dispersed, with the majority (68.4%) residing in SSDs outside the inner city. Although most of these SSDs had below-average proportions of ethnic

majority-minority couples, all except one (Gosford-Wyong) had higher *total counts* of these couples than some inner city SSDs (Table 1). The two highest total counts of ethnic majority-minority couples were recorded in Central Northern Sydney (3,639) and St George-Sutherland (3,262). A few suburb-level anomalies were also apparent, including Englorie Park (LQ = 2.74) and Long Point (Campbelltown) (LQ = 2.70), with concentrations far higher than those observed for their broader geographical context of Outer South Western Sydney (LQ = 0.89). Spatial outliers such as these indicate that high concentrations of ethnic majority-minority couples do exist outside the inner city. Specific local-level processes shaping these patterns require further exploration using ethnographic methods.

Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples demonstrated a distinctly different residential geography to those of ethnic majority-minority couples, residing in their highest concentrations in outer suburban areas: Gosford-Wyong, Outer Western Sydney, Outer South Western Sydney and Blacktown (Figure 4). Concentrations of Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples in these areas stood out substantially from the rest of the city, with LQs ranging from 1.95 (Blacktown) to 2.25 (Gosford-Wyong). The next highest LQ was 0.98 in Inner Sydney. Socio-economic variables and broader patterns of ethnic diversity potentially explain the unique geographies of Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples, as discussed in later sections of this paper. Below, we explore the differential propensity for inter-ethnic partnering for a range of ethnic minority groups, and disaggregate the residential geographies of ethnic majority-minority couples by ancestry.

Figure 4. Distribution of Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples by location quotient, Sydney SSDs, 2006.

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Group-specific variations in ethnic majority-minority partnering

The prevalence of co-resident ethnic majority-minority couples in Sydney varied according to the ancestry of the ethnic minority partner. Couples involving an Anglo/European-Australian and East Asian partner were the most numerous, accounting for over half of all ethnic majority-minority couples (Table 2). This is attributable to East Asians' large numerical presence (11.3% of Sydney's population).

Table 2. Ethnic majority-minority partnerships by regional ancestry groups, Sydney SD, 2006.

Ancestry of ethnic minority partner	No. with ethnic majority ^b partner	Share of Sydney majority-minority couples (%)	Rate of partnership with majority ^a (%)
Pacific Islander	2,991	9.6	19.5
North African/Middle Eastern	5,293	17.1	5.8
East Asian	18,027	58.1	8.6
Southern and Central Asian	3,709	12.0	5.0
Sub-Saharan African	982	3.2	20.9
Total	31,002	100.0	7.8
Filipino	4,251	13.7	15.8
Lebanese	2,723	8.8	5.7
Chinese	6,948	22.4	5.8
Indian	2,208	7.1	5.3
Vietnamese	692	2.2	3.1
Indigenous ^c	7,426	-	83.3

^a Calculated as percentage of all partnered persons in minority group who have a majority partner.

^b Refers to non-Indigenous persons for 'Indigenous' group.

^c Based on Indigenous status variable

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Table 2 also quantifies the propensity for persons in each regional-level ethnic minority group to partner with an Anglo/European-Australian. Smaller-sized groups – such as Pacific Islanders and Sub-Saharan Africans – were most likely to partner with Anglo/European-Australians, doing so in around one-fifth of partnerships (Table 2). The numerically large ethnic minority groups (e.g. East Asian, North African/Middle Eastern and Southern and Central Asian) were less than *half* as likely to partner with Anglo/European-Australians. These trends support Blau’s (1977) assertion that a large pool of potential same-group partners reduces the likelihood of inter-marriage. This tendency holds true for the (numerically large) ethnic majority group as well: only 3.3 per cent of partnered Anglo/European-Australians had an ethnic minority spouse in 2006.

Amongst the national-level ancestry groups, Filipinos/as were around three times more likely to partner with Anglo/European-Australians (15.8%) than Lebanese, Chinese and Indian persons (rates between 5 and 6%). Vietnamese persons – the numerically smallest of the national-level ancestry groups analysed – were least likely to have an Anglo/European-Australian partner (3.1%, Table 2). Rates of inter-ethnic partnering were not inversely related to group size in this case, and contrasted strikingly with the propensity for Filipinos/as to have an ethnic majority partner. As both groups had similar population sizes in 2006 (total partnered Filipino/a and Vietnamese persons in Sydney were 26,890 and 22,416 respectively), factors other than population size must be at play, including unique migration and settlement histories. During the 1990s, one-third of women from both the Philippines and Vietnam who migrated to Australia did so to join husbands (Kelaher *et al.*, 2001). However, Vietnamese women predominantly joined Vietnamese husbands, while

many Filipinas joined Anglo/European-Australian partners (Kelaher *et al.*, 2001; Khoo, 2001). These trends in marriage migration at least partly account for the divergent propensities for ethnic majority-minority partnering in these two groups; and also shape their residential geographies. For instance, Sydney's Vietnamese population was highly clustered in 2006, with around 75 per cent residing in just two SSDs – Fairfield-Liverpool and Canterbury-Bankstown. The geographic distribution of Filipino/as was far more dispersed, likely because many Filipinas settled in their Anglo/European-Australian husbands' established places of residence. Ethnographic research will be required to draw more definitive conclusions about these discrepant experiences.

Do inter-ethnic partnerships alter ethnic residential geographies?

Our analyses revealed that the residential geographies of ethnic minority persons vary substantially based on whether or not they have an Anglo/European partner. Figures 5-7 compare the proportional distribution, across Sydney SSDs, of ethnic minority persons with Anglo/European partners and the rest of their respective ethnic minority groups (aged 15 years and over). In line with international research (Stillwell & Phillips, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2011), we found that ethnic minority persons with ethnic majority partners were more residentially dispersed, with a more even distribution across Greater Sydney, than the remainder of their respective ethnic minority groups (Figure 5). Ethnic minority persons with Anglo/European partners were two to three times less likely to live in the three central western SSDs that were home to the highest proportions of Sydney's broader ethnic minority population (Fairfield-Liverpool, Central Western Sydney, Canterbury-Bankstown). Conversely, they had a far greater likelihood of residing in the five SSDs with the lowest shares of the city's

ethnic minority population. Those with an Anglo/European partner were eight times more likely to live in Gosford-Wyong and around four times more likely to live in Northern Beaches.

Figure 5. Percentage distribution of ethnic minority persons with Anglo-European partners, and the broader ethnic minority population, across Sydney SSDs, 2006.

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Geographic dispersal associated with having an ethnic majority partner held true for almost all regional and national-level ethnic minority groups. To further illustrate these trends, we identified the top two residential ‘hubs’ for each ethnic minority group: those SSDs in which persons in that group (aged 15 and over without an Anglo/European partner) were most likely to live. We then calculated the percentage of ethnic majority-partnered ethnic minority persons who resided in these ‘hubs’, which demonstrates how such partnerships may decrease the propensity for ethnic

minority persons to reside in areas with large co-ethnic populations (Table 3). For those of Chinese and Indigenous Australian ethnicity, having an Anglo/European partner did not appear to be associated with any considerable change in residential concentration. However, for all other groups, those with an Anglo/European partner were approximately two to three times less likely to live in one of their group's residential 'hubs'. Histogram graphs (Figures 6 and 7) visualise these geographic shifts for those of North African/Middle Eastern and Vietnamese ancestry, the regional and national-level groups whose broader populations exhibited the heaviest level of clustering in residential 'hubs'. As in Figure 5, these graphs show how those with an Anglo/European partner are much more evenly spread across Sydney's SSDs than their broader respective ethnic groups. Vietnamese persons' primary residential hub shifts from Fairfield-Liverpool to Inner Sydney when they are partnered with an Anglo/European, a considerable geographic change considering Fairfield-Liverpool was home to over 75 per cent of the broader Vietnamese population in Sydney in 2006.

Table 3. Percentage of Sydney total residing in top two ethnic minority 'hubs'

Minority ethnicity	Percentage residing in top two ethnic minority 'hubs'	
	Those with Anglo-European partners	Rest of minority group aged 15 and over
Pacific Islander	16.3	31.0
North African/Middle Eastern	22.3	44.2
East Asian	9.5	26.7
Southern and Central Asian	14.4	33.4
Sub-Saharan African	15.6	31.8
Filipino	19.9	45.2

Lebanese	29.1	58.8
Chinese	27.5	27.6
Indian	14.4	33.2
Vietnamese	26.3	75.4
Indigenous ^b	29.1 ^a	28.4

^a Refers to those with non-Indigenous partners.

^b Based on Indigenous status variable

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Figure 6. Percentage distribution of North African/Middle Eastern persons with Anglo-European partners, and the broader North African/Middle Eastern population, across Sydney SSDs, 2006.

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Figure 7. Percentage distribution of Vietnamese persons with Anglo-European partners, and the broader Vietnamese population, across Sydney SSDs, 2006.

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Our results indicate that partnership with an ethnic majority person decreases the propensity for ethnic minority persons to reside in ethnically clustered neighbourhoods (Ellis *et al.*, 2006; Macpherson & Strömberg, 2012). Rising rates of inter-ethnic intimacy will thus reconfigure the ethnic geographies of Australian cities over the coming decades. In the following section, we describe some of the key characteristics of Sydney neighbourhoods with high concentrations of ethnic majority-minority couples.

In what types of neighbourhoods do Sydney's ethnic majority-minority couples live?

Neighbourhood ethnic diversity and socio-economic status influence the settlement patterns of inter-ethnic couples, either through increased opportunities for partnership formation (Blau, 1977; Feng *et al.*, 2010); or through residential choices made by inter-ethnic couples (White & Sassler, 2000; Holloway *et al.*, 2005; Wright *et al.*, 2011). Studies from the US and UK have shown that inter-ethnic/racial couples are more prevalent in ethnically/racially diverse localities (Holloway *et al.*, 2005; Smith *et al.*, 2011, Wright *et al.*, 2011). Diverse neighbourhoods appear to offer an accepting environment for population diversity and cultural mixing (Twine, 1999; Dalmage, 2000). Ethnic diversity across Sydney's SSDs, based on the standardised entropy index, is depicted in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Ethnic diversity, Sydney SSDs, 2006.
Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

In 2006, Sydney's ethnic diversity was centred in a cluster of three SSDs located immediately west of the inner city area, in the central western suburbs (Fairfield-Liverpool, Central Western Sydney, Canterbury-Bankstown, Figure 8). These spatial

patterns differed considerably from those of ethnic majority-minority couples, who were concentrated in the inner city (Figures 2 and 3). The highest concentrations of ethnic majority-minority couples existed in those SSDs classified as ‘moderately diverse’ based on counts of individuals (e.g. Inner Sydney, Eastern Suburbs and Lower Northern Sydney, where 16,836 majority-minority couples lived, constituting 4.1% of all couples in those localities). This pattern reflects evidence from the US, where black/white couples were most likely to live in ‘moderately diverse’ white neighbourhoods (Wright *et al.*, 2011). Our findings also echo Holloway *et al.*’s (2005) notion of an ‘in-between’ pattern to the residential geographies of mixed-race couples involving a white partner in the US. Those couples tended to reside in neighbourhoods characterised by diversity levels higher than same-race white households but lower than same-race black households. The geographical patterns uncovered in our study indicate that areas of Sydney high in traditional measures of diversity (based on counts of individuals) are not those with high rates of within-household diversity (Figures 2 and 8).

The Sydney SSDs that fell into the ‘very high’ diversity category (based on counts of individuals) were home to *below average* concentrations of ethnic majority-minority couples. Sydney’s most diverse SSD (Fairfield-Liverpool; entropy score = 0.72) had a location quotient of 0.64, indicating a concentration of ethnic majority-minority couples 36 per cent below the citywide average. The only SSD with a lower concentration of majority-minority couples was Gosford-Wyong (LQ = 0.61), Sydney’s least diverse SSD. This pair of SSDs is notable because they have similar concentrations of ethnic majority-minority couples but dramatically different ethnic compositions. These findings suggest that both high and low levels of ethnic diversity

in an area are not conducive to ethnic majority-minority partnership formation and/or residential settlement. Highly diverse locations may experience negative and competitive relations between ethnic groups, providing an unfavourable environment for mixed-ethnicity couples (Guest *et al.*, 2008). A 2001 survey of racist attitudes across Sydney, found that above-average proportions of respondents from Fairfield-Liverpool expressed opposition to multiculturalism, ethnic diversity and inter-marriage (Dunn *et al.*, 2012). Individuals in ethnic majority-minority partnerships may be cognisant of racial tensions in these neighbourhoods and choose (within their financial means) to live elsewhere as a result. Furthermore, high levels of ethnic diversity may inhibit inter-ethnic partnering because the pool of potential partners from one's own ethnic group is large enough to readily enable co-ethnic partnering (Blau, 1977; White & Sassler, 2000). Conversely, the low prevalence of ethnic majority-minority couples in 'low' diversity Sydney SSDs (Gosford-Wyong and Outer Western Sydney) may arise because there are few opportunities for inter-ethnic contact and partnership formation (Blau, 1977). In addition, Dunn *et al.*'s (2012) survey results indicated that above-average proportions of residents in Gosford-Wyong expressed opposition to inter-marriage, multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, suggesting that fear of racism may also deter majority-minority couples from forming or settling in such low diversity contexts.

The geographies of Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples exhibited a substantially different relationship to ethnic diversity. These couples were clearly concentrated in 'low' and 'very low' diversity areas, where on average they comprised 1.5 per cent of all couples, recording a location quotient of 1.73. This parallels the distribution of the broader Indigenous population aged 15 and over, who were also most highly

concentrated in low and very low diversity areas, albeit to a lesser extent ($LQ = 1.37$). These findings highlight the importance of understanding group specific processes and preferences rather than assuming similar patterns for all inter-ethnic couples.

We used the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (as described in the methods section), to map the geographies of ethnic majority-minority couples in terms of suburb-level socio-economic status (Figure 9). Ethnic majority-minority couples tended to live in suburbs characterised by levels of socio-economic status considerably higher than the broader ethnic minority population, but slightly lower than the broader ethnic majority population. These patterns again reflect Holloway *et al.*'s (2005) notion of an 'in-betweenness' to the geographies of mixed-race couples in the US. In Sydney, ethnic minority persons with Anglo/European partners were less than half as likely than other ethnic minority persons to live in the lowest (first/lower quintile) socio-economic status suburbs. These suburbs were home to 36.3 per cent of Sydney's broader ethnic minority population, but only 17.3 per cent of ethnic majority-minority couples. Conversely, ethnic minority persons with Anglo/European partners were almost twice as likely as the broader ethnic minority population to live in the highest (fifth/upper quintile) socio-economic status suburbs of Sydney (16.5% compared to 8.5%). It is unclear whether this is because socio-economically advantaged ethnic minority persons are more likely to form inter-ethnic relationships in the first place; or whether inter-ethnic partnering fosters upward socio-economic mobility. This is a question for future qualitative research, or more detailed quantitative analyses, to address.

Figure 9. Percentage distribution across suburbs of varying socio-economic status (SES), Sydney, 2006.

Source: Generated using data supplied by the ABS.

Again, we found distinctly different trends among Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples, who did not appear to gravitate towards higher socio-economic status areas. While the broader non-Indigenous population was quite evenly spread across the five categories of socio-economic status, Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples were concentrated in areas characterised by relative socio-economic disadvantage, with 61 per cent residing in suburbs in the lower two IRSAD quintiles. Contrary to patterns among ethnic majority-minority couples, these geographical distributions more closely followed those of the broader Indigenous population.

CONCLUSIONS

The local-scale residential geographies of ethnic majority-minority couples in Australia have been understudied, despite recognition of their increasing prevalence and demographic and cultural significance. In this paper we have shown that ethnic majority-minority couples in Sydney have unique residential geographies. At fine spatial scales, ethnic minority persons with Anglo/European-Australian partners were generally more residentially dispersed than their respective ethnic minority group populations. They appeared to avoid settling in places with high concentrations of their own ethnic groups, possibly due to concerns about prejudice, or perhaps because their Anglo/European-Australian partners were not willing to live in those neighbourhoods. But most ethnic majority-minority couples also did not settle in the least diverse neighbourhoods. Instead, the greatest concentrations of ethnic majority-minority couples were found in moderately diverse, high socio-economic status neighbourhoods of inner Sydney – areas with a reputation for progressive political and social attitudes. Indigenous/non-Indigenous couples constituted an important exception to this trend. The highest geographical concentrations of these couples were found in low diversity outer-suburban areas, highlighting the need to be attentive to group-specific preferences and processes.

Of course, Census data on residential location is limited in what it can reveal about the settlement processes of ethnic majority-minority couples, which may be powerfully shaped by a range of factors that cannot be ascertained via the Census such as workplace location, or proximity to extended family. Group-specific migration histories, place-based experiences (or expectations) of racism, and (potentially gendered) power-dynamics within ethnic majority-minority partnerships

are all likely to shape intra-household negotiations over residential location. An additional shortcoming of Census data, from a geographical perspective, is that it positions residential location as an end-point, rather than a starting point from which diverse groups make use of the wider spaces of suburbs and cities in their daily lives. Explorations of inter-ethnic couples' everyday experiences and practices in local places may deepen understandings of how ethnic difference is negotiated across the city. The findings we have presented here are preliminary and exploratory, and provide a foundation for our own ongoing quantitative and qualitative investigations into the everyday local-level experiences of ethnic majority-minority couples in Australia.

Neighbourhood level studies (of segregation or integration) based on counts of individuals only provide a partial insight into the extent of ethnic 'mixing' in an area (Wong, 1998). Existing research on ethnic segregation in Australia has largely missed the significance of the inter-ethnic household as a unit of analysis. In this paper we have shown that ethnic majority-minority couples challenge common understandings of diversity and integration across urban space in Sydney, Australia. This is because the geographical areas highest in overall ethnic diversity (based on counts of individuals) are not those with the highest levels of *within* household diversity. By concentrating in neighbourhoods characterised by moderate diversity, Sydney's ethnic majority-minority couples avoid 'fitting into and thus reinforcing the existing racialised urban spatial structure' (Holloway *et al.*, 2005, p. 299). Our findings provide powerful evidence of social and spatial 'mixing' between ethnic majority and minority persons in contemporary Australia. This is important as perceptions that immigrants cluster in 'ethnic enclaves' foster strong anti-immigration sentiments.

Our findings signal that the ethnic geographies of Australia's major immigrant cities are likely to experience profound shifts with the increasing prevalence of ethnic majority-minority partnerships over time. An increasingly diverse array of inter-ethnic couples will become a feature of Australian life in the coming decades, challenging existing understandings of ethnic difference, integration and segregation. Our findings thus have political and social significance for debates over ethnic diversity and social cohesion. In this paper, we have drawn attention to the complexity of Sydney's ethnic geographies. In doing to, we hope to complicate taken-for-granted ways of understanding Australia's ethnic diversity over time and space; and to foreground the role that inter-ethnic couples are already playing (whether consciously or not) in shifting, challenging and reconfiguring urban morphologies.

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