I'll Marry You If You Get Me a Job: Marital Assimilation and Immigrant Employment Rates

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ABSTRACT

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Marriage to a native has a theoretically ambiguous impact on immigrant employment rates. Utilizing 2000 U.S. Census data, this paper empirically tests whether and how marriage choice affects the probability that an immigrant is employed. Results from an ordinary least squares model controlling for the usual measures of human capital and immigrant assimilation suggest that marriage to a native increases an immigrant's employment probability by approximately four percentage points. The estimated impact of marriage to a native increases to 11 percentage points in models which take into account the endogeneity of the intermarriage decision.

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1   Introduction

Does marital assimilation, as defined by marriage to a native, affect the employment probability of immigrants? In this paper, we aim to address this question paying particular attention to whether the relationship is in fact causal. Because employment aids in the assimilation process to the U.S., increases earnings, decreases public transfers, and improves public attitudes toward immigrants (Chiswick *et al.,* 1997; Hanson *et al,.* 2005), understanding the processes determining immigrant employment can be seen as one of the key issues in the economics of immigration.

From a theoretical perspective, marriage to a native may increase or decrease employment rates of immigrants. Native-born spouses can improve immigrants' language and job search skills thus making them more attractive to potential employers. Moreover, friends and family members of native-born spouses, who are most likely also native-born, may have useful information about job openings. In contrast, networks of immigrant spouses, comprised most likely of other immigrants, may provide more information about jobs that are better matches for immigrants. Furthermore, because it is unclear whether foreign or native networks know more about eligibility requirements for public assistance, marriage to a native has an ambiguous effect on employment probabilities.

Most closely related to our work are papers examining the effect of intermarriage on earnings assimilation. Using Australian data, Meng and Gregory (2005) find that an immigrant's marriage to a native has a positive effect on earnings even after controlling for the endogeneity of the marriage decision. In contrast, using U.S. data, Kantarevic (2004) finds that when taking into account selection issues, the positive effect of marriage to a native on earnings assimilation disappears. Ours is the first paper to examine the effect of marriage to a native on employment.

Because marriage to a native and employment may be jointly determined by unobserved characteristics, intermarriage should be viewed as an endogenous variable. For example, the foreign born that are more assimilated, in ways not captured by observable measures of assimilation, may be both more likely to marry a native and be employed, thus biasing an ordinary least squares (OLS) coefficient on intermarriage upward. Alternatively, it may be that the most hardworking immigrants are more likely to marry immigrants implying that the intermarriage coefficient is biased downward. To deal with endogeneity concerns such as these, we adopt a two stage estimation strategy using local marriage market conditions as an identifying instrument for intermarriage. More specifically, we

use the percentage of women in the foreign born male's age group and metropolitan statistical area (MSA) that is foreign born as an instrument for his marriage to a native.

Drawing on 2000 U.S. Census data on foreign born males, we find that even after controlling for a number of variables such as education, English language fluency, years in the U.S., size of the immigrant group and country of birth, an immigrant's marriage to a native increases the probability that he is employed by about four percentage points. After instrumenting, the effect of marriage to a native not only remains positive and statistically significant, but increases in magnitude to approximately 11 percentage points. This suggests that the immigrants that marry natives have unobservable characteristics that tend to decrease employment probabilities.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 details the mechanisms through which marriage to a native may affect employment probabilities and describes our empirical approach. Section 3 presents the data. We discuss the results in Section 4. Section 5 concludes and suggests policy implications.

2   Theoretical Background and Empirical Approach

There are various ways through which marriage to native could affect an immigrant's probability of being employed. As suggested by Meng and Gregory (2005), the native-born spouses of immigrants could enhance immigrants' language acquisition as well as their knowledge of local customs and labor market conditions. Because the foreign born typically have less information about local labor markets, they may be forced to experiment with more jobs and this could result in more unemployment spells (Chiswick *et al,*. 1997). If the native born and their networks have and share more information about the availability of different types of jobs, then their immigrant spouses may be better able to find good employment matches.

There are also many reasons why marriage to a native may decrease employment rates of immigrants. First, even if the native born have more information about high skill jobs, these jobs may be out of reach to low skilled immigrants. For many of the immigrants at the margin between employment and unemployment, immigrant networks may in fact prove more useful than native networks in finding low skill jobs. Moreover, because migrant communities tend to be more socially cohesive (Munshi, 2003), marriage to an immigrant may bring with it more contacts than marriage to a native. Thus, marriage to another immigrant may increase the employment probabilities of immigrants. Also, if foreign-born spouses are less likely to work and conditional on working, have lower

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earnings, then they may not be able to finance their immigrant spouse's job search thereby shortening unemployment spells.

Networks acquired through marriage can also be sources of information about the existence of government transfer programs as well as the conditions necessary to qualify for them. These government transfers have been shown to increase the duration of unemployment spells (Moffitt, 1985) and increase the probability that people exit the labor force (Moffitt, 2002). Depending on whether native or foreign born networks have greater knowledge of government programs, marriage to a native may increase or decrease the probability of being employed.[1]

It is difficult to empirically decipher whether marriage to a native increases or decreases employment rates of immigrants. Estimates obtained from a simple least squares approach should be interpreted with caution because marriage to a native is not exogenous. Many of the skills that are valued in the U.S. labor market are also valued in the marriage market for native born spouses. Examples include language ability, knowledge of American customs, and even physical beauty as suggested by Kantarevic (2004). Also, if the more ambitious immigrants know that native networks are important for finding good jobs, they may surround themselves with natives and thus increase the probability of both finding a native spouse and a job. All of these possibilities suggest that an OLS estimate of the effect of marriage to a native on employment overestimates its true effect.

In contrast, it may be that even though immigrants with observable characteristics such as education and English fluency are more likely to marry natives and be employed, it is the immigrants with unobservable characteristics such as ambition and diligence that are both more likely to marry other immigrants and be employed. Thus, the OLS estimate of the effect of marriage to a native on employment could be biased downward. It is also plausible that the most unsuccessful immigrant-immigrant couples return to their home countries (see, for example, Borjas and Bratsberg, 1996) while unemployed immigrants married to natives remain in the U.S. Again, this would bias the OLS estimate downward.

We take two main approaches to addressing these biases. First, to take into account the possibility that certain ethnic groups may, for unobservable reasons, be more (or less) likely to both marry a native and be employed, we include country of birth fixed effects in the empirical specification. Second, as is common in the literature (Meng and Gregory, 2005; Kantarevic, 2004; and Angrist, 2001), we use marriage market conditions as an instrument for

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[1] Using U.S. data, Bertrand et al. (2000) find that residence in a city with a large population of people who speak the same (non-English) language increases welfare use more for those belonging to high welfare-using language groups.

marriage decisions. Specifically, we instrument for an immigrant male's marriage to a native using the percentage of women in his age group living in his metropolitan statistical area that is foreign born.

3   The Data

The paper uses the 5 percent Public Use Sample of the 2000 U.S. Census as reported by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS).[2]   Because of the difficulties in interpreting labor market outcomes of females, we consider a sample of married (spouse present) foreign born males who are between the ages of 18 and 64. We drop immigrants who are enrolled in school. In order to restrict our analysis to immigrants that were actually exposed to the U.S. marriage market, we exclude those immigrants that arrived in the U.S. after the age of 18. We also drop from the sample immigrants from English speaking countries. Lastly, because our instrumental variable is based on cross-metropolitan variation, we keep only the immigrants that reside in identifiable metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs).

An immigrant is defined as a person who was born outside of the U.S. while a native is a person who was born in one of the 50 U.S. states. For the purposes of this study, people born in outlying areas of U.S. such as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are considered immigrants. Approximately 34 percent of the immigrant men in our sample are married to native females.[3]   Our dependent variable takes the value of one if an immigrant is employed, either in paid- or in self-employment. Workers who are absent from their jobs due to a labor dispute are considered employed. The baseline set of controls used in the analysis are age and its square to capture the effect of experience, educational achievement, presence of children in the household, whether the person is a veteran, region dummies, residence in the central city or outside of the central city, and a dummy variable equal to one if the immigrant has a disability which prevents, limits, or causes difficulty in working.

We also have specifications which control for measures of assimilation such as English language fluency and years since migration. The English fluency dummy variable is equal to one if the immigrant speaks only English,

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[2] The data set is publicly available at http://usa.ipums.org/usa/. Details on how the variables were constructed are available upon request.
[3] Many of the natives that immigrants marry may be native-born children of immigrants and because the 2000 U.S. Census does not contain information on parents' countries of birth, it is not possible to know how many. However, of the immigrants who marry natives that list an ancestry in the Census, only about a third of them have spouses with the same ancestry. Since many Census-respondents leave the ancestry question blank and native-born children of immigrants may be more likely to respond to the question than the general population, we suspect that a relatively small number of the native-born spouses of immigrants are native-born children of immigrants. It is also noteworthy that 14 percent of the foreign born that marry immigrants, marry immigrants with a different country of birth (Statistics based on authors' own calculations).

speaks English very well, or speaks English well. The variable equals zero if the immigrant either does not speak English well or does not speak English at all. In some specifications, we also control for the size of the immigrant group which is measured as the percentage of people living in the immigrant's MSA born in the same country as the immigrant.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of all of the variables used in the analysis separately by marriage type. Immigrant males married to natives have employment rates 11.5 percentage points higher than immigrants married to other immigrants. This could be explained by the fact that intermarried males are 2.8 years older, are more educated, and have higher English fluency rates. Immigrants married to natives have been in the U.S. 7.8 years more than immigrants married to other immigrants. Immigrants that marry natives are also more likely to have been in the army, less likely to have children, and are more likely to live outside of central cities.

4   Empirical Specification and Results

4.1   Ordinary Least Squares Model

The primary empirical specification in the analysis takes the form

$$Emp_{ijk} = \beta_1 Native_{ijk} + \beta_2 X_{ijk} + \gamma_j + \varepsilon_{ijk}$$

where Emp_{ijk} is equal to one if immigrant i with country of birth j living in city k is employed and zero otherwise. The regressor of interest, $Native$, is a dummy variable for marriage to a native, while X is a vector of the individual-level controls that we outlined in Section 3. We capture country of birth fixed effects using γ.

Table 2 presents estimates of the effects of marriage to a native on employment rates of immigrants using several different models. The first column contains results from a baseline specification with the usual controls used in the employment literature. Coefficients on the control variables are generally consistent with those in the existing literature.[4] Immigrants with more education are more likely to be employed; higher educational qualifications are associated with higher employment rates. Immigrants with a disability are less likely to be employed as are veterans and immigrants living in central cities. Overall, the results from this model suggest that an immigrant's marriage to a native increases the probability that he is employed by six percentage points.

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[4] Inconsistent with the literature is the finding that immigrant males with children are less likely to be employed than those without children. However, this effect seems to be driven by selection issues as it disappears in models which control for country of birth.

This relationship between marriage to a native and employment could be driven by differences in assimilation rates of immigrants. Immigrants that are more assimilated may be both more likely to marry a native and find a good job match. To control for immigrant assimilation, we add in column 2, the English fluency variable as well as years since migration to the U.S. These two variables decrease the effect of cross-nativity marriage by 1.2 percentage points, but the coefficient remains positive and statistically significant. This is especially noteworthy given that improvement in English language skills is one of the mechanisms through which marriage to native could improve labor market outcomes of immigrants. The fact that the coefficient on marriage to a native remains positive and statistically significant suggests that whether or not natives improve fluency rates of their immigrant spouses, they also provide other benefits in the labor market.

Even when including the standard measures of human capital and assimilation in the specification, the coefficient on intermarriage may be biased if immigrants residing in ethnic enclaves are less likely to marry natives and have unobservable characteristics which decrease the probability of being employed.[5] Moreover, immigrants in ethnic groups with more substantial cultural differences with Americans may be less likely to both marry natives and fare well in the labor market. To deal with both of these concerns, column 3 adds the size of the immigrant group and its non-linear term to the specification along with country of birth fixed effects. As expected, immigrants residing around many other immigrants with the same country of birth are less likely to be employed. However, the coefficient on intermarriage decreases by only a half of a percentage point and remains positive and statistically significant in models which account for residence in ethnic enclaves and country of birth fixed effects.

Interpretation of the intermarriage coefficient is problematic because marriage to a native is not a random event. Even when controlling for education, years in the U.S., language ability, size of ethnic group and country of birth, immigrants that choose to marry natives may have unobservable characteristics which increase or decrease employment rates. We address this endogeneity issue in the following section.

4.2 Instrumental variables

Identification of the causal effect of intermarriage on employment requires a variable which is correlated with marriage to a native but related to the probability of employment only through marriage. The variable we use is the

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[5] For a discussion of the causal mechanisms through which residence in an ethnic enclave affects labor market outcomes, see Cutler *et al.* (2008).

ratio of immigrant women over all women in MSA-age group cells. We construct the MSA-age group cells from 283 MSAs and the following nine age groups: 18-22, 23-27, 28-32, 33-37, 38-42, 43-47, 48-52, 53-57 and 58-64. According to Becker (1981), the greater the availability of spouses of a certain type, the more likely a person is to marry someone of that type. First stage regression results are shown in column 4 of Table 2. As predicted by the theory, an increase in the percent of females that are foreign born in a man's marriage market decreases the probability that he marries a native and the effect is statistically significant.

Second stage results are shown in column 5 of Table 2. The coefficients suggest that when the endogeneity of the cross-nativity marriage decision is taken into account, marriage to a native increases the probability of employment by 11.3 percentage points. The instrumental variables estimate is greater than the least squares estimate. This is consistent with the explanation that holding constant variables such education, language ability, and country of birth, immigrants that marry other immigrants have more favorable unobservable characteristics than immigrants that marry natives. Since the least squares estimate does not take into account any unobserved ambition and diligence among the immigrants that tend to marry other immigrants, marriage to a native appears to be less beneficial than it really is. Also, as discussed in Section 2, the OLS estimate may be biased downward if immigrants that are married to other immigrants are more likely than immigrants married to natives to return to their home countries when hit with negative shocks to employment. The downward bias of OLS estimates found in this paper is consistent with the literature on the effects of intermarriage. In their study of Australian immigrants, Meng and Gregory (2005) find that in specifications which treat intermarriage as endogenous, the effect of marriage to a native on earnings is larger than in specifications which treat intermarriage as exogenous. Also, Meng and Meurs (2006) reach a similar conclusion using French data.

One potential explanation for why marriage to a native increases employment rates of immigrants is that immigrants learn skills from their native-born spouses which are useful in the labor market. To examine this possibility, we re-estimated our regressions using a sample of all immigrants, including those from English-speaking countries. We found that the coefficient on marriage to a native was marginally lower. Also, when we restricted the analysis only to immigrants from English-speaking countries, we found no intermarriage premium. Since we control for English language fluency in the regressions, we do not feel comfortable in interpreting this as evidence that language acquisition is the only reason there is a premium to marrying a native. However, as suggested by Meng and Gregory (2005), immigrants from English-speaking countries share many cultural traits with natives. Also, labor

markets operate in very similar ways in English-speaking countries and so there is little to learn from marriage to a native spouse. Thus, we conclude that one potential reason for the positive return to marriage to a native is that natives and their networks teach their immigrant spouses skills which are useful in the labor market.

5   Conclusions

Drawing on U.S. Census data, this paper shows that a foreign born male's marriage to a native increases the probability that he is employed. Various techniques were used to address the potential omitted variable bias resulting from immigrant characteristics which affect both employment and marriage choice. First, measures of immigrant human capital and assimilation such as education, language ability and years in the U.S. were included in the baseline specification. Since residing in an ethnic enclave could either hinder employment opportunities by slowing assimilation or increase the number of job offers through ethnic networks, size of immigrant group was also included in the specification. Also, to control for the possibility that unobserved ethnic attributes affect success in both the marriage and labor markets, country of birth fixed effects were added to the specification. Lastly, to correct for any remaining endogeneity bias, marriage to a native was instrumented with the percent of all immigrant females in MSA-age group cells that is foreign born. In all specifications, marriage to a native had a positive and significant effect on the probability of being employed.

There are many possible explanations for this positive relationship between marriage to a native and employment probability. When immigrants marry a native, they marry a teacher of U.S. customs and traditions. They also acquire a network most likely composed of many natives that are able to provide information about local labor market conditions and job opportunities. If the reason it is beneficial for immigrants to marry natives, lies in the information native-born spouses along with their networks share about U.S. culture and local job market opportunities, then policies can be made to substitute for these types of services. For example, English classes and job search strategies may be offered to new immigrants. Although clear policy recommendations cannot be made without knowing the mechanisms through which marriage to a native affects labor market outcomes, our results do point to ways in which policies could potentially aid in the immigrant assimilation process. A more careful disentangling of the specific mechanisms through which marriage to a native improves labor market outcomes is beyond the scope of this paper, but is an area ripe for future research.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Married to Native		Married to Immigrant		All	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Employment	0.868	0.338	0.753	0.431	0.792	0.406
Age	39.205	10.315	36.430	9.449	37.368	9.838
No school completed	0.013	0.113	0.053	0.225	0.040	0.195
Less than or up to 12th grade, no diploma	0.205	0.404	0.429	0.494	0.353	0.478
High school, or GED	0.209	0.407	0.193	0.395	0.199	0.399
Some college, no degree (Associates degree)	0.277	0.448	0.173	0.378	0.208	0.406
Bachelors Degree and above (Masters, Professional, PhD)	0.295	0.456	0.152	0.359	0.200	0.400
English fluency	0.950	0.217	0.768	0.422	0.830	0.376
Years in the U.S.	30.826	12.126	23.051	10.673	25.680	11.775
Own children in the household	0.743	0.437	0.822	0.382	0.795	0.403
Disability	0.114	0.317	0.235	0.424	0.194	0.395
Veteran	0.191	0.393	0.079	0.270	0.117	0.322
Size of immigrant group in MSA	0.025	0.040	0.046	0.044	0.039	0.044
In metro area, central city	0.203	0.402	0.282	0.450	0.255	0.436
In metro area, outside central city	0.441	0.496	0.393	0.488	0.409	0.492
Immigrant women/all women	0.241	0.149	0.317	0.149	0.291	0.153

Notes: The sample consists of married, foreign born males between the ages of 18 and 64 who immigrated to the U.S before the age of 18, are not currently enrolled in school, and reside in an identifiable metropolitan statistical area. The English fluency variable is equal to one if the immigrant speaks only English, speaks English very well or well. It is equal to zero if the immigrant either does not speak English well or does not speak English at all. The variable, "disability" is a dummy which takes the value one if the immigrant has a disability which prevents, limits, or causes difficulty in working. Size of immigrant group in the MSA refers to the share of the MSA population born in the same country as the immigrant. Number of observations: 89,394.

Table 2. Employment Regression Results for Foreign Born Males

	OLS	OLS	OLS	IV (2SLS)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Employment	Employment	Employment	Marriage to a Native	Employment
Marriage to a Native	0.060	0.048	0.043	No	0.113
	(0.003)**	(0.003)**	(0.004)**		(0.040)**
Age	0.018	0.015	0.014	-0.026	0.016
	(0.002)**	(0.002)**	(0.002)**	(0.001)**	(0.002)**
Age square/100	-0.025	-0.024	-0.023	0.008	-0.024
	(0.002)**	(0.002)**	(0.002)**	(0.001)**	(0.002)**
Less than or up to 12th grade, no diploma	0.148	0.137	0.136	0.026	0.135
	(0.010)**	(0.010)**	(0.010)**	(0.007)**	(0.010)**
High school graduate, or GED	0.222	0.195	0.188	0.068	0.184
	(0.011)**	(0.011)**	(0.011)**	(0.008)**	(0.011)**
Some college, no degree (associate degree)	0.282	0.250	0.238	0.110	0.230
	(0.010)**	(0.010)**	(0.010)**	(0.008)**	(0.011)**
Bachelors Degree and above (Masters, Professional, PhD)	0.335	0.303	0.280	0.131	0.272
	(0.010)**	(0.010)**	(0.010)**	(0.008)**	(0.012)**
Own children in the household	-0.009	-0.009	-0.005	-0.025	-0.003
	(0.004)*	(0.004)*	(0.004)	(0.004)**	(0.004)
Disability	-0.063	-0.061	-0.060	-0.073	-0.055
	(0.004)**	(0.004)**	(0.004)**	(0.003)**	(0.005)**
Veteran	-0.003	-0.007	-0.005	0.028	-0.008
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)**	(0.005)
In metro area, central city	-0.027	-0.026	-0.023	-0.022	-0.021
	(0.005)**	(0.005)**	(0.004)**	(0.004)**	(0.004)**
In metro area, outside central city	0.009	0.009	0.008	0.010	0.008
	(0.004)*	(0.004)*	(0.004)*	(0.003)*	(0.004)*
Region dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
English fluency	No	0.060	0.057	0.101	0.051
		(0.005)**	(0.005)**	(0.004)**	(0.007)**
Years in the U.S.	No	0.002	0.002	0.020	0.000
		(0.000)**	(0.000)**	(0.000)**	(0.001)
Size of the immigrant group	No	No	-0.397	-2.588	-0.105
			(0.180)*	(0.154)**	(0.228)
Square of size of immigrant group	No	No	0.308	18.981	-1.268
			(1.111)	(0.910)**	(1.362)
Country of birth dummies	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.293	0.314	0.335	0.860	0.279
	(0.029)**	(0.030)**	(0.051)**	(0.049)**	(0.060)**
IV: Proportion of immigrant women in the appropriate age group and MSA	No	No	No	-0.440	No
				(0.013)**	
Observations	89,394	89,394	89,394	89,394	89,394

*Notes. The sample consists of married, foreign born males between the ages of 18 and 64 who immigrated to the U.S before the age of 18, are not currently enrolled in school, and reside in an identifiable metropolitan statistical area. The English fluency variable is equal to one if the immigrant speaks only English, speaks English very well or well. It is equal to zero if the immigrant either does not speak English well or does not speak English at all. The variable, "disability" is a dummy which takes the value one if the immigrant has a disability which prevents, limits, or causes difficulty in working. Size of immigrant group in the MSA refers to the share of the MSA population born in the same country as the immigrant. The identifying instrument is the number of foreign born women in the immigrant's age group and MSA divided by the total number of women in the immigrant's age group and MSA. Statistics are weighted using the appropriate person-level weights provided by the 2000 U.S. Census. Robust standard errors which are clustered on MSA × age group cells are in parentheses. Significance levels are noted by the following: + significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%.*