Contraceptive Sterilization among U.S. Couples:  
Patterns of Use by Education and Racial and Ethnic Background

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on data from the 2006–13 National Surveys of Family Growth, this study examines use of contraceptive sterilization by education and race/ethnicity among couples who have completed childbearing. I first show that previous research has commonly failed to account for the couple composition, accordingly underestimating the true differentials in sterilization by education and—to a lesser extent—race/ethnicity. I next confirm that the racial/ethnic composition—though not the educational composition—of couples matters for sterilization. Couples in which the man is non-Hispanic white and the woman is of minority background are four to five times more likely to rely on male versus female sterilization, as compared to racially/ethnically homogamous couples. This finding supports the ‘doing gender’ perspective, as it shows the male partner to be most willing to participate in feminine tasks, such as ‘contraceptive work,’ when he is a member of the dominant racial/ethnic group and his partner is of minority background.