The Influence of Perceived Marital Benefits and Expectations on Marital Outcomes by Race

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Background/Conceptual Framework

- Family entry is increasingly marked by a birth instead of a marriage. Forty percent of first births occur outside of a marital union (Hamilton, Martin, and Ventura 2016). Changes in family formation differ by race; Seventy-nine percent for Marital expectations have been found to differ by race with change overtime (Tucker and Mitchel-Kiernan 1995; Crissey 2005)
- Marital expectations have been found to be useful for predicting marriage among unmarried parents (Waller and McLanahan 2005)
- Marital benefits also differ by race (Sassler and Schoen 1999), but no work has identified if this is true among unmarried parents.
- Other factors have been found to be useful for understanding marriage among unmarried parents including economic stability, relationship status and quality.
- The present work contends that perceptions and expectations may be potentially more beneficial in predicting behavior than attitudes.

Research Questions

1. Does the way in which survey questions are asked about family formation behavior influence respondent's answers?
2. Do Black and White young women differ in their desired timing of marriage and childbearing?
3. Do Black women desire childbearing relative to marriage more often than White women?

Data

Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, representing 20 major U.S. cities. I utilized the mother baseline, 1 year and five-year follow up interview. The full Sample included 4,898 respondents

Analytic Sample:
- Nonmissing on race and lived with mother
- (N=3653 unmarried mothers)
- Multiple imputations were run to deal with missing values on my covariates.

Methods

1. Ordered Logistic regression was used to delineate the influence independent variables have on marital expectations.
   - What are the chances that you will marry the baby's father in the future? Answer: 1 = little to no chance; 2 = 50/50 chance; 3 = pretty good chance to almost certain.
2. OLS regression was used to examine the relationship between perceived marital benefits and all IVs.
   - How do you think your life would be different if you were married the baby's father right now "how financially secure," "overall happiness," "freedom to do what you want," "your sex life," and "your relations with your parents" with answers ranging from (1) "much worse" to (5) "much better" (alpha = .76).
3. Logistic regression to determine how independent variables influence subsequent marriage.
   - Whether or not mother married the baby's father five years after a nonmarital birth

Results

Sample Characteristics of Unmarried Mothers by Race

	Blacks	Whites
AGE (mean):	23.90	24.16
Lived with Parents at age 15	29.0	42.0
Self-reported Health(mean)	3.77	3.97
EDUCATION (%):		
< High School Degree	24.1	23.9
High School Degree	49.7	44.3
Some College or More	26.1	31.8
Father employed	63.9	84.1
Religious service attendance (1-5)	2.95	2.66
Ever incarcerated	42.0	41.2
Substance abuse problem	2.9	9.3
Relationship status (ref=Friends)	8.3	6.2
Visiting	43.1	30.1
Cohabiting	40.7	54.4
Father has children w/ another woman	52.4	43.9

Racial Differences in Marriage Formation

Bivariate and Multivariate Results

Marital expectations by race

	Marital Expectations Odds Ratios	Marital Expectations Odds Ratios (full model)
RACE		
Blacks (reference)		
Whites	1.85***	1.98***
Hispanics	1.39***	1.17***
Other	1.33***	1.42***
EDUCATION (%):		
< High School Degree (reference)		
High School Degree		.82***
Some College or More		1.00
Father's employment status		1.11**
Relationship status (ref=Friends)		
Visiting		2.33***
Cohabiting		7.59***

Perceived Marital Benefits by race

	Perceived Benefits β	Perceived Benefits β(full model)
RACE		
Blacks (reference)		
Whites	-.27***	-.20***
Hispanics	-.07***	-.05***
Other	-.10***	-.05*
EDUCATION (%):		
< High School Degree (reference)		
High School Degree		.02†
Some College or More		-.04***
Father's Employment status		-.01
Relationship status (ref=Friends)		
Visiting		.34***
Cohabiting		.21***

Influence that marital expectations and perceived marital benefits have on later marriage

	MarriedBF Odds Ratios	Married BF Odds Ratios	Married BF Odds Ratios (full model)
RACE			
Blacks (reference)			
Whites	2.60***	1.98**	2.12***
Hispanics	2.70***	2.41***	2.10***
Other	2.37***	2.18***	1.65**
Marital Expectations		.80***	.82***
Perceived Marital Benefits		2.00***	1.69***

Findings

- Both marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage differed significantly by race. This finding is consistent with recent studies that find that African Americans are generally less optimistic about their chances of establishing a marital union than whites and Hispanics.
- Including subjective evaluations about one's chances of developing a marital union and their perceptions of the benefits marriage will provide did in fact depress racial differences by race.
- The present study demonstrates that noneconomic factors can be very useful for understanding marital behavior

Next Steps/Limitations

The present work provides encouragement for future researchers to further examine how noneconomic factors can be useful in studying marital behavior.

- Findings cannot be generalized to women who are not parents; the sample cannot be generalized to well-educated, high earning mothers.

- Other variables not included may influence how race impact the variables I examined.

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