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.

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 IV's.
   - 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE (mean)</td>
<td>23.90</td>
<td>24.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived with Parents at age 15</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported Health</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EDUCATION (in years):<br>
- High School Degree | 24.1 | 23.9 |
- College Degree | 49.7 | 44.3 |
- Some College or More | 26.1 | 31.8 |
- Father's employment status | 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 | 8.3 | 6.2 |
- Visiting | 43.1 | 30.1 |
- Cohabiting | 40.7 | 54.4 |
- Father has children with another woman | 52.4 | 43.9 |

Racial Differences in Marriage Formation

Bivariate and Multivariate Results

Marital expectations by race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Expectations</td>
<td>1.85***</td>
<td>1.98***</td>
<td>1.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds Ratios (full model)</td>
<td>1.17***</td>
<td>1.42***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marital Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Marital Benefits</td>
<td>2.00***</td>
<td>1.69***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 nonfamilial factors can be very useful for understanding marital behavior.

Next Steps/Limitations
- This present work provides encouragement for future researchers to further examine how nonfamilial 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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