

This article uses new data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study to examine the reasons why white, Mexican American, and other Hispanic parents are approximately 2.5 times more likely than African American parents to marry within the 30 months after a nonmarital birth. Combining Fragile Families microdata with 2000 U.S. Census data shows that marriage market conditions exert a large influence on marriage decisions, even among couples that already have formed a romantic relationship and had a child together. The findings also show that an undersupply of employed African American men can explain a large portion of the racial and ethnic differences in marriage after a nonmarital birth. The current findings support the theory that marriage markets are influential not only during the search for romantic partners but also in determining whether romantic relationships, once formed, will lead to marriage.

Racial disparities in marriage and family formation have long been of interest to sociologists (Frazier 1939; McAdoo 1997; Morgan et al. 1993; Patterson 1998; Wilson 1987, 1996). Because African Americans have higher rates of nonmarital childbearing and divorce than the general population, African American children spend substantially more time in single-parent households than white or Hispanic children (Cherlin 1992; DaVanzo and Rahman 1993; Ruggles 1994; Spain and Bianchi 1996; Sweeney 2002). These different family patterns are of interest to sociologists not only because marriage is an important institution for raising children in nearly all societies, but also because in the United States, single parenthood is associated with high rates of poverty and economic insecurity, and with the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality (Bianchi 1999; McLanahan 1985; McLanahan and Casper 1995; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Spain and Bianchi 1996).

This article focuses on racial and ethnic differences at one stage in the family formation process: the transition to marriage after a nonmarital birth. Our focus on the decision to marry after a nonmarital birth allows us to test theories about how male shortages influence relationships that have already been formed. Understanding this transition is important also because nonmarital births constitute almost one third of all births in the United States. Most unmarried parents are romantically involved and intending to marry when their babies are born, and these unmarried parents are the main target group for emerging marriage promotion policies (Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004; Garfinkel and McLanahan 2003; McLanahan 2003; Martin et al. 2002). By understanding why racial and ethnic groups differ in marriage rates after a nonmarital birth, we can gain insight into one source of the racial and ethnic differences in marriage behavior and the family settings in which children are raised.

Past research suggests that one reason for the relatively low marriage rates among African Americans is a shortage of African American men. Marriage opportunities for women will obviously be constrained if there simply are not enough eligible men. Social theory predicts that shortages of men will have effects on marriage beyond making it harder for some women to find partners. In particular, shortages of men are expected to result in less relationship commitment on the part of men and to have a negative impact

on relationship quality. Prior research has typically focused on how the supply of men relative to women affects rates of ever marrying. The influence of marriage markets on relationships already formed has been largely untested in quantitative research.

In this article, we examine the extent to which a shortage of men continues to influence marriage decisions after a couple has already formed a relationship and had a child together. We analyze data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, which is a longitudinal study of parents who have recently had a child. This study follows a cohort of approximately 4,900 children and their parents in 20 U.S. cities (including 3,700 children born to unmarried parents) and collects detailed information on parents' economic resources, relationship quality, and attitudes toward marriage. The geographic variation of the 20 cities provides an opportunity to analyze marriage market influences. The data are representative of new, unmarried parents in large U.S. cities (population greater than 200,000).

Previewing the findings in this article, we find that a shortage of men diminishes the chances that new, unmarried parents get married in the 30-month period after the birth of a child, and that an undersupply of African American men explains most of the racial and ethnic difference in marriage among new, unmarried parents. Furthermore, we find that weak marriage markets are associated with lower quality fathers, less favorable attitudes toward marriage, and lower relationship quality.

Our study extends prior research by examining marriage market influences on romantic relationships that have already formed, by including Mexican American and other Hispanic groups alongside African American and white parents, and by linking marriage market characteristics to the mechanisms (for example, relationship quality and marriage attitudes) through which marriage markets theoretically have their influence.

THEORY AND PRIOR RESEARCH

MARRIAGE MARKETS

Theoretically, an individual's decision to marry involves finding a sexual partner and deciding that marrying this partner is better than remaining single or continuing to search for a better partner. Both finding a partner and deciding whether to marry him or her are contingent on the supply of potential partners. As in prior research, we use the term "marriage market" in reference to the supply of potential heterosexual marriage partners and define marriage markets in terms of race-ethnicity, age, and geographic location.

Because of the chronic shortage of African American men relative to women and early and influential correlational studies, marriage market conditions are considered one likely explanation for low marriage rates among African Americans. A combination of social conditions, including imbalanced sex ratios at birth as well as excess mortality and high rates of incarceration among young African American men, has led to shortages of African American men in most U.S. cities. Early research documented a bivariate correlation between African American sex ratio imbalances and low rates of marriage,

and theorized a causal relationship between marriage markets and African American family structure (Cox 1940; Guttentag and Secord 1983).

Building on these earlier studies, Wilson (1987) further argued that high rates of unemployment and underemployment exacerbate the shortage of African American men who can be considered marriageable. Subsequent research has largely supported the Wilson hypothesis that a shortage of marriageable men is part of the explanation for low African American marriage rates. However, prior studies have differed widely in the estimated magnitude of the effects from marriage markets. The disparate findings on the importance of marriage markets occur because studies have asked different questions, have varied in their operationalization of marriage markets, and have analyzed different dependent variables.

According to the findings of longitudinal studies, changes in marriage markets have played a small role in the retreat from marriage since the 1960s, and only a partial role in explaining black-white differences in marriage trends (Cherlin 1992; Mare and Winship 1991). Area level studies have found that variations in marriage market conditions across localities are strongly linked to African American family structure and can explain a modest portion of black-white differences in marriage (Fossett and Kiecolt 1993; Lichter, LeClere, and McLaughlin 1991). A third type of study linking marriage market data with microdata has found a relationship between marriage markets and individual level marriage outcomes that ranges from small to large depending on the study (Kiecolt and Fossett 1995; Lichter et al. 1992; Raley 1996; South and Lloyd 1992).

Schoen (1995) and Schoen and Kluegel (1988) developed a novel approach to analyzing marriage markets, in which they disaggregated sex ratio effects from what they called propensities to marry. Their studies found that black-white differences in marriage have much more to do with differences in propensities to marry than with imbalanced sex ratios. In general, studies of all types have found stronger support for Wilson's (1987) marriageable men hypothesis, which combines demographic and economic conditions, than for the sex ratio imbalances that do not take into account male unemployment.

The variation in the magnitude of marriage market effects is not surprising given the many methodological differences in prior studies. However, the important point for the purposes of our research is that many studies have found a relationship between marriage market conditions, especially the supply of employed men, and marriage, but as far as we know, prior quantitative research has not addressed the question of how marriage market conditions influence the fate of romantic relationships between new parents.

Theoretically, marriage markets may affect the trajectory of relationships already formed, but empirical research on this topic is limited. Prior research has found a positive relationship between the supply of alternative partners and the divorce rate (South and Lloyd 1992; South, Trent, and Shen 2001). Secord and Ghee (1986) suggested that sex ratio imbalances destabilize African American relationships. Wilson (1996) provided qualitative evidence that African American men feel little pressure to marry their partners

because of their perception that many alternative dating opportunities are available to them.

INDIVIDUAL AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Although we expect marriage markets to influence the search for a partner and to set the standard against which one can judge his or her current partner, we also expect the characteristics of one's own partner and relationship to affect marriage decisions. In particular, recent research using the Fragile Families study found that economic capacities, attitudes toward marriage, and relationship quality influence marriage decisions among new parents (Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004). We expect that these characteristics also may contribute to the racial and ethnic differences in marriage among new parents.

As discussed, theory and research on marriage markets predict a relationship between male employment and marriage at the aggregate level. We can expect this relationship to hold at the individual level as well. Qualitative research suggests a strong relationship between a man's economic prospects and his marriage prospects. Edin (2000) found that single mothers are reluctant to marry men who are unemployed or unstably employed. Other qualitative research based on a Fragile Families subsample has reached consistent conclusions about the importance of economic stability as a prerequisite for marriage (Gibson, Edin, and McLanahan 2003).

Although important, the poor employment prospects of low-skilled African American men cannot entirely explain racial differences in marriage because African Americans are less likely to marry than whites at all socioeconomic levels (Cherlin 1992; Lichter et al. 1992). Similarly, the economic position of men cannot explain differences between African American and Hispanic marriage behavior. Prior research has found that Mexican American marriage behavior is much more similar to that of whites than that of African Americans despite the fact that Mexican Americans have relatively low levels of education and earnings (Oropesa, Lichter, and Anderson 1994; Rosenfeld 2002).

Looking beyond demographic and economic explanations, some researchers have suggested that marital norms and the stigma surrounding single parenthood are especially weak in urban minority communities. Wilson (1996) presented ethnographic evidence that African Americans receive less pressure from family and friends to marry and contrasted the weak support for the husband-wife relationship among African Americans with the strong support for marriage among Mexican Americans. South (1993) also reported that African American men are less desiring of marriage than white or Hispanic men. Recent research has found that Mexican Americans have the strongest pro-marriage attitudes, that whites have the weakest pro-marriage attitudes, and that African Americans are in the middle (Tucker 2000; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995).

Whereas some research has suggested an erosion of marital values among African Americans, other research has qualified this claim. Researchers have found that African Americans place a heavy emphasis on the economic prerequisites for marriage and the

economic benefits of marriage (Edin 2000; Tucker 2000; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995). Bulcroft and Bulcroft (1993) have suggested that the economic problems faced by African American men combined with the high economic expectations of African American women may reduce marriage and increase divorce.

Attitudes toward gender role specialization in marriage also may contribute to racial and ethnic differences in marriage. We would expect parents with less traditional attitudes about marriage and gender roles to experience a weaker imperative to marry insofar as a high value is placed on finding the "right" partner and being single is not stigmatized. African American women have historically had higher employment rates than women of other race-ethnicities, and may therefore have less traditional gender role attitudes (Browne 1999). Hatchett et al. (1995) reported that gender conflict over decision-making power is a key factor affecting marital stability for recently married African American couples. They have argued that perhaps to compensate for insecurities about their status as economic providers, African American men expect to have a strong say in making household decisions. Yet many African American wives make significant contributions to household income and are reluctant to defer to male authority. Mexican Americans tend to be more traditional in their expectations of husbands' and wives' roles, and therefore may feel more compelled to marry (Oropesa 1996; Williams 1990; Wilson 1996).

Some scholars have attributed low marriage rates among African Americans to adversarial relationships between African American men and women (Patterson 1998; Wilson 1996). Using ethnographic data, both Wilson (1996) and Anderson (1990) reported a lack of trust between African American men and women. Anderson (1990) and Patterson (1998) portrayed African American gender relations as ridden with conflict and exploitation. They described men and women as out to take advantage of one another, distrustful, and unfaithful. Research on domestic violence and infidelity also suggests that relationship quality may be lower and conflict higher among African American couples than among couples of other racial and ethnic groups (McLoyd et al. 2000; Patterson 1998; Treas and Giesen 2000).

Less attention has been paid to potential differences across racial and ethnic groups in terms of "positive" relationship characteristics such as affection, perceptions of fairness, and time spent engaging in leisure activities together. One exception, a study by South (1992), found evidence that white men and women anticipate more emotional benefits from marriage than African American men and women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In their seminal work on marriage markets, Guttentag and Secord (1983) developed a theoretical framework predicting that when men are in short supply relative to women, relationship quality and commitment will suffer, men will not treat women as well in relationships, and marriage will be less likely. Guttentag and Secord's theoretical framework suggests that women's bargaining power in relationships is undermined when men are in short supply, affecting in turn both partner and relationship quality.

Research by Guttentag and Secord (1983) and others has shown that male shortages are associated with lower marriage rates. However, this research has not disentangled the extent to which male shortages constrain marriage because of the numeric shortage of men relative to women, or because of the effects that male shortages have on relationship quality, commitment, and sexual fidelity. Although numerous studies have documented racial and ethnic differences in partner and relationship quality, as far as we know, no quantitative studies have linked these differences to marriage market conditions.

Figure 1 displays a conceptual diagram of the relationships among micro- and macro-level predictors of marriage after a nonmarital birth. Our analysis examines the relationships depicted in Figure 1 by the solid arrows. The figure shows that marriage markets may have an influence on parents' decision whether to get married after a nonmarital birth via several different causal pathways.

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Figure 1. Theoretical Mechanisms through which Marriage Markets Affect Marriage after a Nonmarital Birth

First, the characteristics of the marriage markets may already have influenced household structure by the time of the nonmarital birth, which in turn may affect future marriage decisions. In particular, parents may be more likely to cohabit in a "strong" marriage market with a relative abundance of men because, in theory, men are more willing to commit to a co-residential relationship in these contexts. Parents may be more likely to have children with multiple partners in a marriage market with imbalanced ratios of men and women, and this "multipartnered fertility" may impede marriage.

Second, the characteristics of marriage markets may influence marriage by affecting parental characteristics. A shortage of men may lead mothers to partner with lower quality fathers in terms of education and earnings potential. A shortage of men also may influence the attitudes of mother and father about marriage, for example, weakening norms about the necessity of two parents for raising children.

Third, a shortage of men may reduce the quality of parents' relationships, for instance, by weakening a father's commitment to the mother and increasing infidelity and relationship conflict.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study come from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study. Fragile Families is a longitudinal study that follows a birth cohort of approximately 3,700 children born to unmarried parents. The sample is representative of births to unmarried parents in cities with populations of 200,000 or more. Baseline interviews with mothers

were completed in the hospital shortly after the birth. Fathers also were interviewed soon after the birth, either at the hospital or as soon as possible thereafter.

This article uses data from the mothers' and fathers' baseline surveys and the mothers' 30-month follow-up survey. Follow-up interviews were completed with 88 percent of mothers who met the other criteria for inclusion in our analysis sample.

We limit our analysis sample to racial and ethnic groups large enough to provide reliable estimates: African Americans, whites, Mexican Americans, and other Hispanics. Mixed race-ethnic couples are excluded from our analysis with one exception: couples that consisted of one Mexican American and one other Hispanic parent are included in the other Hispanic group. Our decision to exclude mixed race-ethnic couples is based on theory and research suggesting that individuals assess their marital opportunities largely within their own racial and ethnic group, and also on the fact that theoretical expectations about how marriage markets affect marriage among mixed race-ethnic couples are ambiguous. Nevertheless, patterns of intermarriage in local areas are likely to affect the composition of the pool of eligible partners. Furthermore, partnering with someone of a different race-ethnicity may itself be a consequence of marriage market conditions. An analysis of these intermarriage effects is beyond the scope of this article, but suggests an interesting direction for future research.

We limit our sample to couples "at risk" of marrying after the nonmarital birth, namely unmarried couples who were romantically involved when their baby was born. The large majority of unmarried parents were romantically involved at the time their babies were born: 84 percent of African American, 81 percent of white, 94 percent of Mexican American, and 94 percent of other Hispanic unmarried parents.

After sample restrictions are applied, our sample consists of 2,205 unmarried, romantically involved couples. A small percentage of cases had missing data for particular variables because of item nonresponse. Typically, item nonresponse rates were 2 percent or less for a given variable. We impute missing values for independent variables using a regression-based approach that predicted missing values using non-missing data. Cases are dropped from the analysis if the dependent variable or self-reported race-ethnicity was missing.¹

Our sample of parents is selective in two respects: the parents had conceived a child outside of marriage and had decided not to marry before the birth of their child. We expect the process of selection to dilute the effects of various explanations for racial and ethnic differences in marriage. Null findings may therefore indicate either that a particular explanation is not important for racial/ethnic differences in marriage or that it is important only earlier or later in the family formation process. Because of differential selection into the nonmarital childbearing category across racial and ethnic groups, we do not claim that our findings are generalizable to the overall racial differences in marriage among the broader population. However, they should be generalizable to new, unmarried parents in U.S. cities, a subpopulation of particular policy relevance.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependent variable in our analysis is a dichotomous measure of marriage to the baby's other parent at the time of the 30-month follow-up interview. Only 30 mothers, or 1.4 percent of the sample, married a partner who was not the baby's father during the follow-up period. These mothers are categorized as not married to the baby's father, or as a zero in terms of the dichotomous dependent variable.

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Figure 2. Parents' Relationship 15 and 30 Months after a Nonmarital Birth, by Racial and Ethnic Group Note: N = 1441, 247, 307, and 210 for African American, White, Mexican American, and other Hispanic parents, respectively

Figure 2 displays the racial and ethnic differences in marriage and other relationship types that emerge over the first 15 and 30 months after the birth of a child. Although all parents in our analysis sample were romantically involved at the time of the birth, far fewer African American parents had married by the 15- or 30-month follow-up interviews than parents in the other groups. Six percent of African American parents were married at 15 months, and 10 percent were married 30 months after their babies were born. The rates of marriage are about 2 1/2 times higher for the other groups. Among white, Mexican American, and other Hispanic parents, approximately 16 or 17 percent were married at 15 months, and between 23 and 27 percent were married at the 30-month follow-up interview.

Figure 2 also shows that African American parents are the most likely to have broken up by the 15- and 30-month follow-up interviews, as compared with parents in the other three groups. Fewer than half of African American parents were still together as a couple 30 months after a birth, as compared with about two-thirds of white, Mexican American, and other Hispanic parents. In terms of most relationship outcomes, white, Mexican American, and other Hispanic groups are statistically indistinguishable.

Figure 2 shows that some parents who had not married by 15 months went on to marry by the 30-month follow-up interview. However, among parents who remained unmarried 30 months after a birth, a shrinking proportion was cohabiting or romantically involved. Long-term romantic involvement after a birth seems particularly uncommon. Parents who are romantically involved tend to move into a more formal relationship or to a breakup after a birth. The high proportion of parents who had broken up by 30 months suggests that new marriages between unmarried parents become increasingly unlikely as more time elapses after a birth.

Table 1 also presents the parental relationship status at 15- and 30-month follow-up. The remainder of the article focuses on one relationship outcome: parents' marriage at the 30-month follow-up point.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race and ethnicity were self-reported by parents in the baseline survey. Parents were asked: "Which of these categories best describes your race?" followed by, "Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent?" For the initial question, respondents were permitted to mark only one category. Parents who indicated that they were Hispanic or Latino were asked a follow-up question: "Are you Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or other Hispanic?" Parents were categorized as African American, Mexican American, other Hispanic, or white nonHispanic on the basis of their responses.² The white non-Hispanic group is referenced as "white" throughout the text.

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Table 1. Parents' Relationship Status at 15 and 30 Months after a Nonmarital Birth, by Race or Ethnicity

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The independent variables in our analysis are those we expect to be correlated with both race-ethnicity and marriage. We include control variables to account for differences between groups in household structure that existed at the time of the baby's birth. Other independent variables could be grouped under macro or micro domains. Marriage market measures represent the macro-level explanations for racial differences in marriage. Measures of the parents' economic capacities, attitudes, and relationship characteristics represent the microlevel explanations for racial differences in marriage.

Table 2 shows baseline differences in household structure. African American parents are much more likely to have had a child with another partner ("multipartnered fertility") than Mexican American, other Hispanic, or white parents, a circumstance found to be associated negatively with marriage (Carlson and Furstenberg 2003; Mincy 2002). The presence of children from another partner poses complications for the parents' relationship, given that one parent may have ongoing responsibilities to another family or may be caring for a child from a previous partner.

African American parents were much less likely to be cohabiting at birth than Mexican American, other Hispanic, or white parents. The lower rate of cohabitation at birth may indicate that the relationship quality and commitment of African American parents is relatively weaker than that of other parents at the time of the baby's birth. Because we are interested in marital transitions after the nonmarital birth, we control for cohabitation at birth. We also control for whether mothers and children were living with other adults, because prior research has found racial and ethnic differences in living with extended families (Goldscheider and Bures 2003; Tienda and Angel 1982).

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Table 2. Means of Independent Variables by Race or Ethnicity

We measured marriage market characteristics using data from the 2000 U.S. Census for African American, white, and Hispanic groups at the city level.³ Our marriage market measures combined Mexican Americans and other Hispanics because of our expectation that the marriage markets of Mexican American and other Hispanics overlap. In our sample, 93 percent of mothers and 86 percent of fathers were younger than 35 years when their babies were born. Therefore, we use sex ratio measures for groups younger than 35 years.

Our first marriage market measure is the ratio of men to women (20- to 34-year-old) by city and racial-ethnic group. The ratio of African American men to women is low (0.82) compared with a ratio exceeding 1 for Hispanics and whites. This ratio technically includes men who are incarcerated. However, ours was an urban sample, and most prisons are located outside urban areas. For this reason, taking incarceration into account in our second marriage market measure does not have as large an effect on sex ratios as it would in a national sample.

Our second marriage market measure is an estimate of the ratio of men to women that omits the male incarcerated population. A few cities had high proportions of African American men in prison (e.g., 11.5% in Pittsburgh and approximately 7% in Austin, Nashville, and Newark). Excluding these men reduces the average African American men-to-women ratio from 0.82 to 0.79.⁴

Our final marriage market measure is the ratio of employed men to women (20- to 34-year-old) by city and racial or ethnic group. For this measure, the racial and ethnic differences are even larger than for the other two sex ratio measures. On average, there are only 46 employed African American men per 100 women. In comparison, there are about 70 to 80 employed men per 100 women in the Hispanic and white groups.⁵

Returning to the Fragile Families survey data, we examine three types of micro-level variables: economic, attitudinal, and relationship characteristics. On the basis of theory and prior research, we expect that fathers' capacity to be a breadwinner will be related positively to marriage. Table 2 shows that African American fathers are less likely to have any college education than white fathers, and much less likely to have worked during the week before their baby's birth than white, Mexican American, or other Hispanic fathers. African American fathers also have lower hourly wages than white fathers. African American mothers have the highest hourly wages relative to fathers among the four race-ethnic groups.

The attitudinal explanations include three sets of measures: pro-marriage attitudes, gender distrust, and traditional attitudes about marriage. We expect mothers with pro-

marriage and traditional attitudes about marriage to be more likely to marry, and we expect mothers with high levels of gender distrust to be less likely to marry.

Our measures of pro-marriage attitudes are based on questions that asked mothers whether marriage is better for children and whether marriage is different from and better than cohabitation. African American mothers are significantly more likely than other mothers to think that marriage is different from and better than cohabitation. On the other hand, Mexican American mothers are the most likely to think marriage is better for children.

Gender distrust is measured by whether mothers agreed with the statements that "men cannot be trusted to be faithful," and "in a dating relationship, a man is largely out to take advantage of a woman." Mexican American and other Hispanic mothers are the most distrustful of men. White mothers are the least distrustful, and African American mothers are in-between.

To measure traditional attitudes toward marriage, mothers were asked whether they believed (1) the male breadwinner model is best, (2) the wife's having a steady job is important for a successful marriage, and (3) a single mother can raise a child as well as married parents can. Mothers who agreed that the male breadwinner model was best, thought a wife's job was not important, and felt that married parents could raise a child better than a single mother were considered traditional in their attitudes toward marriage. Table 2 shows that African American mothers are the least traditional.

The relationship explanations also include three sets of measures: the mother's views of the father and their relationship, the activities the parents engaged in together, and whether the parents had frequent disagreements about certain topics. Mother's views about the father and relationship are based on mother reports of how often the father was fair and willing to compromise, expressed affection, encouraged or helped, insulted or criticized, or hit or slapped her. African American mothers are the least likely to report that their partner is affectionate or fair and willing to compromise. Mothers in all racial/ethnic groups report similar levels of helping and criticizing. White mothers report less hitting on the part of fathers than mothers in the other groups.

The measures of parents' activities together indicate whether the mother spent time with the father in the 3 months before their baby's birth, eating out; seeing friends; going out to a movie, a sporting event, or other entertainment; or solving a problem. The measures of areas of frequent disagreement are based on a set of questions that asked mothers how often they argued with fathers about spending time together, sex, the pregnancy, being faithful, money, and drug or alcohol use in the 3 months before the birth. African American mothers report engaging in fewer activities together and report the same or higher levels of frequent disagreements than Mexican American, other Hispanic, or white mothers.

ANALYTIC APPROACH

Our analysis consists of three parts. First, we examine whether marriage market characteristics can account for racial and ethnic differences in marriage after a nonmarital birth. Second, we examine whether individual and relationship characteristics can account for racial and ethnic differences in marriage. Third, we test the face validity of theoretical marriage market mechanisms by examining whether strong marriage markets are associated with better fathers, better relationships, and favorable attitudes toward marriage.

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We are interested in the effects of marriage markets as well as individual and relationship characteristics on marriage after a nonmarital birth. However, as shown in Figure 1, we expect marriage markets as well as individual and relationship characteristics to have affected household structure at birth. We take a conservative approach by estimating marriage market as well as individual and relationship effects after holding constant household structure at birth.

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The strategy of comparing $\beta^{\text{sub } 1^{\wedge}}$, $\beta^{\text{sub } 2^{\wedge}}$, and $\beta^{\text{sub } 3^{\wedge}}$ coefficients in equations 1 and 2 is based on the assumption that explanatory variables have similar effects on marriage across racial and ethnic groups.⁶ This analytic approach hinges on the mean differences in the explanatory variables across racial and ethnic groups as potential explanations of racial and ethnic differences in marriage. For example, if male breadwinning capacity is associated with marriage for all race-ethnic groups, and African American fathers tend to have lower breadwinner capacity than Mexican American, other Hispanic, or white fathers, then controlling for group differences in the level of breadwinning capacity will narrow the estimated racial and ethnic difference in marriage. We pursue a similar strategy for all sets of explanatory variables.

The third part of our analysis relates macro and micro-level explanations of racial differences in marriage to one another. We use logistic and ordinary least squares (OLS)

regressions to identify relationships between marriage market characteristics and the individual and relationship characteristics posited to be the mechanisms through which marriage markets operate. We regress each individual or relationship characteristic on a measure of the marriage market, controlling for race and ethnic group. These regressions provide evidence as to whether strong marriage markets are associated with better quality partners, better quality relationships, and more favorable attitudes toward marriage as theory predicts.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE CONTROLLING FOR HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE AT BIRTH

Table 1 shows the differences in the percentage of Mexican American, other Hispanic, white, and African American parents who marry in the 30 months after a nonmarital birth. Table 3 expresses these differences in terms of relative odds of marriage. In the simplest model, controlling only for parents' age, the odds of marriage for white, Mexican American, and other Hispanic parents were 2.9 to 3.5 times that for African American parents.

Subsequent analyses estimate marriage market as well as individual and relationship effects on racial differences in marriage after controlling for household structure at birth. Table 3 shows what portion of racial and ethnic differences in marriage can be accounted for by different measures of household structure at birth. Taking into account multipartnered fertility explains a small portion of racial and ethnic differences in marriage after a nonmarital birth. The odds of marriage relative to African American parents are reduced from 3.48 to 3.19 for white parents, from 3.40 to 3.10 for Mexican American parents, and from 2.89 to 2.73 for other Hispanic parents by taking into account multipartnered fertility in Model 2. Model 3 shows that taking into account living with other adults slightly decreases racial and ethnic differences in marriage.

The last model in Table 3 shows that the relatively lower rate of cohabitation at birth among African American parents compared with parents in other race-ethnic groups contributes to the racial differences in marriage after the nonmarital birth. The odds of marriage are almost twice as high among parents who were cohabiting at baseline as among parents living apart, and African American parents were significantly less likely to be cohabiting at baseline. Taking differences in cohabitation at baseline into account reduces the relative odds of marriage from 3.09 to 2.63 for white parents, from 3.02 to 2.59 for Mexican American parents, and from 2.71 to 2.34 for other Hispanic parents, as compared with the odds for African American parents.

The last model in Table 3 is labeled "baseline model" because it is used as a benchmark against which to assess the importance of macro-level (marriage market) and micro-level (economic, attitudinal, and relationship characteristics) explanations for racial and ethnic differences in marriage in subsequent tables. It should be noted that cohabitation is likely to be affected by marriage market conditions as well as individual and relationship

characteristics such as economic capacities, attitudes, and relationship quality. Thus, our subsequent analysis of the effects that these variables have on marriage after a nonmarital birth is conservative insofar as we are controlling for cohabitation at birth.

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Table 3. Control Variable Effects on Racial and Ethnic Differences in Marriage 30 Months after a Birth

THE INFLUENCE OF MARRIAGE MARKETS ON RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE

To what extent are the racial and ethnic differences in marriage after a nonmarital birth the result of marriage market conditions? A higher ratio of men to women is associated with significantly higher odds of marriage, and sex ratio imbalances explain a large portion of the race-ethnic difference in marriage (Table 4, Model 2). After sex ratios are taken into account, the relative odds of marriage decrease from 2.63 to 1.76 for whites, from 2.59 to 1.38 for Mexican Americans, and from 2.34 to 1.50 for other Hispanics, and are no longer statistically significant for the Mexican American group. Model 2 supports the theory that a shortage of African American men contributes substantially to lower rates of marriage among new, unmarried African American parents than among parents belonging to other race or ethnic groups.

A higher ratio of nonincarcerated men to women is also strongly related to marriage and explains slightly more of the racial-ethnic differences in marriage than overall sex ratios. After non-incarcerated sex ratios are taken into account, the relative odds of marriage decrease from 2.63 to 1.68 for whites, from 2.59 to 1.31 for Mexican Americans, and from 2.34 to 1.45 for other Hispanics (Model 3). The evidence is consistent with the theory that the high incarceration rate for African American men contributes to low African American marriage rates after a nonmarital birth.

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Table 4. Marriage Market Explanations of Racial and Ethnic Differences in Marriage 30 Months after a Birth

A shortage of employed African American men explains a large portion of the racial and ethnic difference in marriage especially relative to white parents. The ratio of employed men to women is associated with higher odds of marriage. Taking into account the relatively low ratio of employed African American men to women reduces the relative odds of marriage for white, Mexican American, and other Hispanic mothers to 1.34, 1.27, and 1.51, respectively (Table 4, Model 4). The ratio of employed men to women by city

and race-ethnic group omits incarcerated men who are inactive on the marriage market as well as men who are not employed and therefore less desirable partners. This evidence supports the theory that both the supply and the quality (in terms of breadwinner potential) of alternative male partners in the marriage market affect the decision to marry one's current partner and co-parent after a nonmarital birth.

The importance of marriage markets in influencing marriage transitions is particularly striking given that we are analyzing pairs of new parents who are romantically involved with one another. By conditioning our sample on recent parenthood and romantic involvement, we minimize one of the mechanisms by which marriage markets matter, namely, their influence on finding a sexual partner. Nevertheless, an increase of .1 in the sex ratio (or an extra 10 men per 100 women) is associated with a 16 percent increase in the predicted probability of marriage after a nonmarital birth (from .151 to .174). An increase of .1 in the nonincarcerated men-to-women ratio or in the employed men-to-women ratio also is associated with a 16 percent increase in the probability of marriage. The strong relationship between marriage markets and the transition to marriage after a nonmarital birth suggests that the perceived availability of alternative partners plays an important role in marriage decisions.

THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS ON RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE

Next, we consider whether micro-level explanations can also explain race and ethnic differences in marriage. We hypothesize that marriage is more likely when fathers' breadwinning capacity is greater, when mothers' attitudes toward marriage are positive, when women are more trusting of men and more traditional in their marriage attitudes, and when relationship quality is better, and that racial differences across these areas will help to explain racial differences in marriage. These hypotheses, with a few qualifications, are supported by our findings presented in Table 5.

Fathers' capacity to fulfill the male breadwinner role helps to explain differences in marriage between whites and African Americans, but not between Mexican Americans or other Hispanics and African Americans. Fathers' breadwinning capacity is associated with transitions to marriage after a nonmarital birth, and this capacity is relatively lower for African American fathers than for white fathers. Controlling for fathers' breadwinner capacity reduces the relative odds of marriage from 2.63 to 1.92 for white parents, but does not reduce the odds of marriage for Mexican American and other Hispanic mothers relative to African American mothers.

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Table 5. Economic, Attitudinal, and Relationship Explanations of Racial and Ethnic Differences in Marriage 30 Months after a Birth

In the interest of parsimony, Table 5 shows the odds ratios only for the race and ethnic variables and summarizes the effects of the other independent variables by showing the p value from tests of joint significance. The joint significance test for Model 2 shows that the four measures of fathers' breadwinning capacity are jointly significant predictors of marriage, as indicated by the p value in the table. In other words, parents are more likely to marry when fathers can fulfill the male breadwinner role.

Pro-marriage attitudes are associated with transitions to marriage, and taking these attitudes into account increases the magnitude of the racial and ethnic differences in marriage. Mothers who believe that marriage is different from and better than cohabitation are more likely to marry. Because African American mothers have the strongest pro-marriage attitudes, taking these attitudes into account increases the magnitude of the racial and ethnic differences in marriage. The relative odds increase from 2.63 to 2.94 for white parents, from 2.59 to 2.84 for Mexican American parents, and from 2.34 to 2.66 for other Hispanic parents when pro-marriage attitudes are added in Model 3. Thus, racial and ethnic differences in marriage cannot be explained by differential value placed on the importance of marriage across groups. On the contrary, the high value placed on marriage by African American parents adds to the puzzle of low African American marriage rates.

Gender distrust increases the relative odds of marriage for the Mexican American and other Hispanic parents, because these mothers are somewhat more distrustful of men than the African American mothers. Mothers who think men are out to take advantage of women or that men cannot be trusted to be faithful are less likely to marry. Taking gender distrust into account slightly decreases the white/African American difference in marriage, but increases the relative odds of marriage for Mexican Americans or other Hispanics, as compared with African Americans (Model 4).

Our findings related to pro-marriage attitudes and gender distrust depart from prior research and from theoretical explanations of racial differences in marriage. Prior research has suggested a devaluing of the institution of marriage in poor, urban, African American neighborhoods. However, we find no evidence that marriage is devalued among unmarried, African American parents relative to Mexican American, other Hispanic, or white unmarried parents. Likewise, our evidence does not support the theory that distrust between African American men and women contributes to their low marriage rates relative to other groups.

Although pro-marriage attitudes and gender distrust do not help to explain marriage differences, measures of traditional attitudes toward marriage contribute slightly to racial and ethnic differences in marriage. When we take into account perceptions that a single mother can raise a child as well as married parents, the emphasis placed on the wife having a steady job, and the low rates of endorsement of the male breadwinner model among African American parents in Model 5, the relative odds of marriage are reduced from 2.63 to 2.39 for white parents, from 2.59 to 2.43 for Mexican American parents, and from 2.34 to 2.20 for other Hispanic parents.

Models 6 through 8 examine parental relationship quality, activities together, and areas of frequent disagreements as potential explanations for the racial and ethnic differences in marriage. African American parents report lower relationship quality, fewer activities together, and more frequent disagreements than parents in the other groups, and taking these relationship characteristics into account explains a small portion of the racial and ethnic differences in marriage. Measures of relationship quality (included in Model 6) reduce the relative odds of marriage from 2.63 to 2.46 for white parents and decrease the relative odds for Mexican American and other Hispanic parents only slightly. Activities together and frequent disagreements explain little or none of the racial difference in marriage.

Measures of relationship quality, activities, and conflict have only a small effect on the racial and ethnic differences in marriage, partly because some effects of these relationship characteristics are indirectly taken into account by controlling for cohabiting status at birth. In separate analyses (not shown), we found that relationship quality, activities, and conflict have larger effects on the racial and ethnic difference in marriage when cohabitation at birth is omitted from the model.

Model 9 combines all the individual and relationship-level explanatory variables and shows that individual and relationship characteristics reduce the relative odds of marriage from 2.63 to 1.82 for white parents, but increase the relative odds of marriage for Mexican American parents and other Hispanic parents. The reason why African American rates of marriage are not higher given their pro-marriage attitudes and their lower levels of gender distrust, as compared with Mexican American parents, is an open question.

LINKING MARRIAGE MARKETS TO INDIVIDUAL AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

The last step in our analysis is to examine whether marriage market conditions affect individual-level characteristics such as fathers' economic capacity, parents' attitudes, and relationship quality. Earlier in this article, we noted Guttentag and Secord's (1983) prediction that marriage markets affect not only marriage, but also other aspects of relationships, including partner quality and relationship quality. The evidence presented in Table 6 shows whether marriage markets are in fact related to these hypothesized mechanisms.

In theory, we expect that in strong marriage markets (those in which men are relatively plentiful), women will have children with better quality fathers in terms of education and earnings potential. Alternatively, women may have rigid standards for fathers of their children (e.g., he must be employed) and may forego childbearing if they cannot find a partner who meets their criteria.

Consistent with the former theory, we find that stronger marriage markets are strongly associated with fathers' employment. Table 6 shows that when men or employed men are

more plentiful relative to women in a city and race-ethnic group, women are much more likely to have children with men who are employed.

Next, we examine the relationship between marriage markets and attitudes. We focus only on those attitudes found to contribute to racial and ethnic differences in marriage, namely, traditional attitudes about marriage. We find that marriage market conditions are strongly associated with mothers' attitudes about whether married parents are better than a single mother for raising children. In contexts of relatively plentiful men and employed men, mothers are more likely to think that married parents are necessary for raising a child. In contexts with a short supply of men, mothers are more likely to think that a single mother can raise a child just as well as married parents can. The coefficients for the other attitudinal variables are not statistically significant, but usually are in the expected direction.

We also examine whether marriage market conditions are associated with relationship quality. The results indicate that favorable sex ratios for women are associated with better relationship quality, especially perceptions that their partner is often fair and willing to compromise. We also find that favorable sex ratios for women are associated with less reported domestic violence. The signs of the other coefficients are in the expected direction, but not statistically significant.

We expect that marriage markets not only influence whether parents marry after a nonmarital birth, but also influence their prior family formation decisions. The last portion of Table 6 considers whether marriage markets are related to cohabitation at the time of a nonmarital birth and to multipartnered fertility. We hypothesize that in strong marriage markets (in which men are relatively numerous), men are more likely to commit to a cohabiting relationship because their alternative dating opportunities are relatively limited. On the other hand, when men are in short supply, we expect multipartnered fertility to be more common. We find empirical support for these theoretical expectations. According to the findings, higher men-to-women ratios are associated with cohabitation at the time of the nonmarital birth and with less multipartnered fertility.

Although the analysis presented in Table 6 is only correlational, overall, the relationships between marriage markets and partner quality, attitudes, relationship quality, and household structure at birth are consistent with theoretical expectations. As far as we know, ours is the first quantitative study to confirm the face validity of these mechanisms through which marriage markets are assumed to influence individual decisions to marry.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This article has addressed the question of why Mexican American, other Hispanic, and white parents are approximately 2.5 times more likely to marry in the year after a nonmarital birth than African American parents. We used data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, focusing on the marital transitions of new parents who were unmarried but involved in a cohabiting or romantic relationship when their babies were born. These parents are an important group because a large proportion of children are

born into these family structures, and because these unmarried parents are the target group for emerging federal and state marriage promotion policies.

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Table 6. Regressing Parents' Individual and Relationship Characteristics on Marriage Market Characteristics

Our most striking finding is that the supply of alternative partners within the same geographic area, age, and race-ethnic group has a large influence on parents' decision whether to marry after a nonmarital birth or not. Furthermore, the supply of alternative partners explains a large portion of marriage differences between African American and white, Mexican American, and other Hispanic parents. Theory predicts that when alternative female partners are plentiful, men are less likely to commit, and relationship quality suffers. Our research finds that new parents who are romantically involved and even those living together are not immune to these marriage market influences. On the contrary, the decision whether to marry or not among new parents appears to be heavily influenced by the supply of alternative partners.

Also striking is the importance of the supply of alternative partners in explaining marriage differences between African American and Mexican American or other Hispanic parents. Whereas African American men, especially employed men, are chronically in short supply, Hispanic men tend to outnumber Hispanic women in U.S. urban areas. The shortage of African American men and the surplus of Hispanic men relative to women go a long way toward explaining the lower marriage rates of African American parents, as compared with Mexican American or other Hispanic parents after a nonmarital birth.

We also find some support for theories that fathers' economic capacities, parents' attitudes toward marriage, and parents' relationship characteristics contribute to racial and ethnic differences in marriage. Fathers' capacity to fulfill the male breadwinner role plays a large part in differences between whites and African Americans, but does not explain why Mexican American and other Hispanic parents marry more frequently than African American parents do. Mexican American and other Hispanic fathers are limited in their ability to fulfill the role of breadwinner, but they nevertheless marry their baby's mother much more often than African American fathers do.

Parents' attitudes about gender roles in marriage and about the importance of two parents for the raising of children contribute to racial-ethnic differences in marriage. African American parents are more likely to think that a single mother can raise a child as well as two parents. This attitudinal difference may represent an adaptation to marriage market constraints. Because African American nonmarital births are twice as common as marital births, and because single parenthood is prevalent among African Americans, the attitudes of the mothers may have been adjusted accordingly.

We found evidence against explanations related to a devaluing of the institution of marriage. On the contrary, African American parents seemed to place a high value on marriage, seeing it as distinct from and better than cohabitation. Qualitative research from the Fragile Families study found that unmarried parents place a very high value on marriage, perhaps setting higher standards for marriage than they and their partners are able to meet (Gibson, Edin, and McLanahan 2003). It is possible, then, that valuing marriage contributes to a reluctance to marry if parents are not fully satisfied with their relationship or their economic situation. This scenario represents a departure from theories that the institution of marriage is not valued in urban minority communities. Our evidence is consistent with a "blocked opportunities" theory of low African American marriage rates positing that economic circumstances interfere with marital aspirations.

Prior research has suggested that relationships between African American men and women are characterized by conflict, power struggles, and distrust. In contrast to prior research, we did not find prevalent distrust or conflict between African American mothers and fathers. In general, levels of distrust between men and women and relationship conflict between mothers and fathers were low among all groups of unmarried parents. Further research is needed to reconcile the qualitative research findings that gender conflict is central to an understanding of low African American marriage rates and our quantitative findings that conflict is relatively unimportant.

Because of our focus on new, unmarried parents, differential selection into the nonmarital parenthood category across the racial and ethnic groups is important in interpreting our pattern of results. In particular, marriage attitudes and gender distrust may help to explain racial differences in other stages of the family formation process (e.g., nonmarital parenthood or divorce) although these factors do not contribute to racial differences in marriage after a nonmarital birth.

Following prior theoretical work on marriage markets, we expected that a shortage of men would have pervasive influences on relationship quality and attitudes. We also expected that marriage markets would influence partner quality: for example, women would settle for lower quality partners when the pool of available men was more limited. Because our study included a range of marriage market environments and direct measures of economic capacities, attitudes, and relationship quality, we were able to test the face validity of theories about marriage market mechanisms. We found that when men are in short supply, partner quality and relationship quality tend to be worse, and parents place less emphasis on the two-parent, male breadwinner norm.

Importantly, before parents entered our sample, they had already conceived a child outside of marriage and had chosen not to marry during the pregnancy. Current policy proposals earmark up to 1.5 billion dollars to promote marriage over the next 5 years, and policymakers have identified new, unmarried parents as a primary target group for these marriage initiatives. Although our research did not address the decisions to conceive outside of marriage, to not marry during the pregnancy, and to cohabit (or not) before the child's birth, we were able to marshal considerable evidence on the divergence in marriage across racial and ethnic groups after a nonmarital birth.

Not surprisingly, many of the explanations that researchers have found to explain nonmarital births and divorce are also important explanations of transitions to marriage after a nonmarital birth. However, the large influence of marriage markets on the relationships of romantically involved parents is striking. Marriage market characteristics are more powerful predictors of marriage behavior than a range of detailed individual and relationship characteristics. Our research underscores the importance of the social context in influencing even the most personal, individual decisions.

[Footnote]

1 Allison (2001) recommends case-wise deletion for missing data in logistic regression as long as having missing data is not correlated with both the dependent and independent variables. Our results are consistent with the results using case-wise deletion.

2 The other Hispanic group included 56 percent who did not specify their ethnicity beyond "Hispanic," 30 percent Puerto Ricans, 12 percent Caribbeans or Central or South Americans, and 1 percent Cubans. Ethnic subgroups within the other Hispanic category were too small to analyze.

3 An analysis of alternative marriage market measures, including measures covering larger geographic areas, yielded results consistent with those presented here (see our online supplement on the American Sociological Review Web site, www.asanet.org/journals/asr/2004/toc042.html).

4 To estimate nonincarcerated sex ratios, we used the percentage of 18 to 64 men incarcerated as a proxy for the incarceration rate for 20- to 34-year-olds. Although incarceration rates for younger and older men within city and race-ethnic group are likely to be highly correlated, our nonincarcerated sex ratios probably overestimate the availability of men.

5 Men enrolled in college are included in the numerator of the first two sex ratio measures, but men in school and not working are not counted in the employed men-to-women ratio. College enrollment may decrease men's marriageability in the short term if men postpone their marriage plans while in school, but ultimately we expect college to enhance marriageability. Therefore, it is ambiguous how the supply of college-enrolled men will affect perceptions of the availability of marriageable men.

6 In our separate analyses, the relationship between explanatory variables and marriage did not vary across the racial and ethnic groups.

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