

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study changed its name to The Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). Due to the issue date of this document, FFCWS will be referenced by its former name. Any further reference to FFCWS should kindly observe this name change.

Racial Differences in Marital Outcomes among Unmarried Mothers: The Influence of Perceived Marital Benefits and Expectations

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“Racial Differences in Marital Outcomes among Unmarried Mothers: The Influence of Perceived Marital Benefits and Expectations”

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Abstract

Family formation in American society increasingly begins with a birth. Given the important benefits that married, biological parents have for children it is important to examine marriage formation among unmarried parents. The present study investigates the influence that perceived marital benefits and marital expectations have on marriage formation among unmarried mothers with an examination of racial/ethnic differences. Large racial differences in perceived marital benefits and marital expectations were present. Black mothers perceived that marriage would be more beneficial than white mothers, but they did not expect that they would develop a marital relationship with their baby's father as often as white mothers. Perceptions and expectations were strong predictors of marriage among black, white and Hispanic mothers and were useful for explaining racial differences in marital outcomes. Positive expectations to marry increased the odds of marriage while positive perceptions of benefits decreased the likelihood of marriage.

Racial Differences in Marital Outcomes among Unmarried Mothers: The Influence of Perceived Marital Benefits and Expectations

Introduction

General trends in family formation behavior highlight stark differences by race. In 2015, fully 40% of all births in the U.S. were nonmarital, with much higher fractions among major race/ethnic minority groups—72% for Blacks and 54% for Hispanics (Hamilton, Martin and Osterman 2016). The percentage for African American children is close to three-fourths of all births compared to less than a third of births among Whites. Given the large growth in nonmarital childbearing, more research is needed to understand family formation behavior among unmarried parents. Differences by race in family formation behavior are not limited to childbearing behavior but extend to marital behavior. Among currently married adults between the ages of 15 to 44 only 26 percent of black women were married, 45 percent of Hispanic women were married and 51 percent of white women were married (Goodwin, Mosher, and Chandra 2010). Over the life course, Blacks are the least likely of all racial groups to ever marry (Parker and Wang 2014). While research has been clear in demonstrating that large racial differences in marriage rates exist, research has been less successful at fully explaining this gap. The present work contributes to the literature by examining marital behavior among unmarried mothers.

Studying marital behavior is particularly important in light of the economic, mental and social benefits marriage provides for both adults and children (Waite 1995). The limitations African American men face in their economic opportunities compared to White males have been studied extensively and identified as an important source for differences in marriage rates by race (Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, and Landry 1992; Sassler and Schoen 1999; Wilson 2003;

Harknett and McLanahan 2004). However, the dearth of marriageable men in the black community generally accounts for only some of the differences in rates of marriage by race. Other factors that could potentially help explain this relationship have been studied less often and could be instrumental in further explaining differences.

Previous research has examined the influence that attitudes has on subsequent marriage and find that attitudes cannot explain racial differences in marriage outcomes and may even increase differences (Harknett and McLanahan 2004). Using the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing survey, the present study looks at the influence that individual views can have on marital behavior by analyzing how perceptions and expectations influence marriage outcomes among unmarried mothers. In other words, attitudes may not explain racial differences in marriage, but perceptions and expectations may have more explanatory power. Attitudes can be described as the evaluation of an object or phenomenon (Fazio and Williams 1986). Attitudes is a limited measure since individuals may be more willing to place a similar value on marriage regardless of race given the strong social pressure to do so instead of truly tapping into behavioral preferences. This evaluation may be less central to understanding marital behavior than perceptions and expectations. Perceptions refer to a person's interpretation of external stimuli into something meaningful to them based on their prior experiences (Lindsey and Norman 1977). Expectations are defined as the strong belief that something will happen in the future. I contend that perceptions and expectations may be more useful for understanding racial differences in marital behavior than attitudes. Both perceptions and expectations are much more concrete concepts with regard to understanding how personal views about marriage can influence behavior.

Given the important benefits that two-parent biological families have for children (Waite and Gallagher 2000) and the growing gap between nonmarital births and marriage (Gibson-Davis 2011), I examine marriage formation among unmarried mothers with the baby's father. This study has 3 main questions; 1) Do racial differences in marital expectations exist among unmarried mothers? 2) Do racial differences in the perceived benefits of marriage exist among unmarried mothers? 3) Do racial differences in marital expectations and the perceptions of benefits help explain subsequent marital behavior?

The present work fills a gap in the literature in several ways. The research examining expectations and perceptions is very limited and at this point outdated. No studies that I am aware of has examined these variables together to examine how they can predict behavior particularly in marriage research.

Theory and empirical analysis

In an effort to demonstrate how marital perceptions may differ by race and draw a connection between these perceptions and later marriage I will address three main areas of study. First, expectations and perceived benefits about marriage stem from primary and secondary experiences with *marital quality and marriage formation*. Marital quality refers to a subjective evaluation of a couple's relationship. Specifically, individuals and couples assess how well their relationship works. A marriage is of high quality if there is good communication, flexibility, and partners report high levels of happiness and satisfaction. Marital quality has also been identified as the single greatest predictor of marital dissolution (Lewis and Spanier 1979).

Primary experiences with marital quality are the experiences that individuals have had themselves with marriage. If racial differences in marital quality exist, we can expect that racial differences in perceptions of marriage will be present. The literature does in fact reveal stark

differences in marital quality by race. Blackman et al. (2005) point out that African Americans tend to characterize their marriages as being “very happy” significantly less often than Whites. Their work suggests that happy marriages are less attainable for African Americans than for Whites; this revelation may provide some insight into why African Americans may perceive marriage to be less beneficial than whites. Broman (2005), using American’s Changing Lives survey data, took his analysis a step further and identified specifically what behaviors within marriage varied by race. Behaviors such as abuse, infidelity, and money mismanagement were found to have a direct effect on marital quality. Furthermore, the distribution of these behaviors varied greatly by race. Blacks were significantly more likely than Whites and Hispanics to report abuse, infidelity and the mismanagement of money in their marriages. Surprisingly no gender differences were present; therefore, Black men and women were similarly less satisfied than White men and women. Even down to the most basic aspect of marriage racial differences were found; Blacks reported that their spouses did not make them feel loved as often as Whites (Broman 2005).

Since primary experiences in marriage occur after a marriage has developed, they are less instrumental in understanding how perceptions develop before marriage, therefore less pertinent to the present work. Secondary experiences with marital quality can be more instrumental in understanding the development of views and perceptions about marriage among unmarried populations. It is reasonable to argue that marital quality has a cyclical effect on marriage especially in the Black community. If African American children with married parents are more likely than White children with married parents to grow up in homes where marriage is not associated with happiness and positive well-being, those children will be more likely to perceive that marriage will not be beneficial for them. Even if children do not overtly make this

connection, they will likely develop assumptions about marriage that will affect their behavior. Thus, for some African Americans the question may be, “why get married if I’m not going to be happy?”

Research on divorce helps to identify how experiences with and observations of one’s parent’s marriage during childhood directly impacts how children will later interact in and perceive their own relationships. Using longitudinal data, Amato (1996) found that children of divorce were more likely to develop pro-divorce attitudes and exhibit behaviors with their partners that were detrimental to maintaining a positive, stable relationship than children from intact families. Also, children who experienced a parental divorce were significantly more likely than children from intact families to divorce themselves. Although not a direct test of marital expectations, this study demonstrated how secondary experiences with marriage can directly affect how one perceives a given phenomenon and how one behaves.

Alternately, these secondary experiences could encourage individuals to raise their expectations of what marriage should provide. Although observing negative marital outcomes during childhood can negatively affect how individuals perceive marriage, it may also serve to encourage a rejection of less than perfect marriage mates. Marriage in general has been transformed into an institution with high symbolic value. Individuals increasingly expect that marriage will provide exceptionally high emotional returns and fulfillment from partners. Marriage is viewed by many to be most viable in circumstances where the financial and relationship quality requirements are able to be met by both partners (Cherlin 2004).

This ideal of marriage has been observed in various studies with apparent racial and socioeconomic status differences. African American women have been found to have higher standards for marriage mates than their White counterparts. Examining marriage markets and

marital choice, Lichter et al. (1992) found that African American women were less willing to marry men who did not match them economically than were White women. Similarly, an investigation of low-income unmarried mothers revealed that these women did not view marriage negatively, but held marriage to such a high standard that it was more difficult to accomplish. These women most often were unwilling to marry their baby's father since he often did not live up to their ideal of a marriageable mate (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan 2005). Therefore, the less than positive experiences of African Americans and poor populations may serve to increase their perceptions of what marriage should provide than Whites and Hispanics.

The second factor that influences expectations and perceptions about marriage is past experiences with non-marital romantic relationships. The experiences an individual has in her/his own relationships helps form views of how personally viable marriage is and what benefits marriage will provide. Relationship experiences help individuals develop their own relationship patterns, establish their role identities as spouse/companion, and identify their standards of intimacy. An analysis of how adolescent romantic relationships affect expectations to marry by race demonstrated that White adolescents tend to have positive experiences with romantic relationships more often than Black adolescents (Crissey 2005). Furthermore, White adolescents had higher expectations for marrying by the age of 25 than Black adolescents. However, she did not find that these differences were particularly useful in accounting for racial differences in the expectation of establishing a marital union. One main limitation of this study is the examination of attitudes about marriage during adolescence. Although variability in experiences and attitudes were present, the sample was young (7th -11th graders) and therefore were just delving into

relationships and developing their own relationship ideals. At this point in the life course, many of the respondent's ideas about marriage and love come from behavior modeled by their parents.

It is expected that adult relationships will have a greater impact on expectations since adults have more experiences and decisions about marriage and family are more pertinent to their identity. Although limited, research on adult relationships highlights how interactions in these relationships can have an impact on perceptions and marital outcomes. Black cohabitators (unmarried individuals who are romantically involved and reside in the same household) have been found to rate their relationships more negatively than White cohabitators, indicating that they experience less positive romantic relationships than Whites (Brown 2000). Subsequently, Blacks were found to be less likely to transition their cohabiting unions to marriages. Since both married and cohabiting blacks report having lower quality relationships than whites, I expect that blacks will have less positive expectations about marriage formation and its benefits.

A third factor important to identifying how perceptions about marriage develop is the proximate experiences individuals have with marriage formation and outcomes observed in marriage. Individuals develop views about their opportunities through the proximate experiences of others. According to learning theorists, learning occurs through observation, and therefore, observing the environment around us provides us with important information that we can use to gain knowledge and inform our views and decisions (Hill 2002). Specific to marriage, an African American woman may view her marriage opportunities as limited if most of her friends are not married or if she has knowledge of the fact that African American men have high rates of incarceration making them unavailable. As of 2012, only 64 percent of African Americans will ever marry while over 86 percent of Whites will ever marry (Parker and Wang 2014) it is highly probable that a Black woman will observe fewer marriages among others who share her race. It

is likely that the high rates of incarceration (Pettit and Western 2004) and low rates of employment (Wilson 2003) among black men directly affect perceptions about marriage among African American women.

Research on the racial differences in the perceived likelihood of marriage is readily available while research on racial differences in the perceived benefits of marriage predicting later outcomes is hard to find. To date no study that I am aware of has examined the predictive value of marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage by race on subsequent marriage among unmarried parents. Research has examined differences by race in the perceived likelihood of marriage, although expectations have changed over time. Using data collected in 1989, Tucker and Mitchel-Kiernan (1995) found few differences in marital expectations by race. On a ten-point scale, black men had a mean expectation of 6.6 and white men had a mean expectation of 6.7. Surprisingly, black women expected to marry slightly more than white women, 6.3 and 5.7 respectively. More recent studies found significantly different expectations for marriage by race. African American adolescents reported that they expected to be married by age 25 less often than white adolescents for both male and female respondents (Crissey 2005).

Some studies have examined how marital expectations affect subsequent marriage. Marital expectations have been found to help inform individuals' intentions for their own relationships and are useful in explaining marriage outcomes (Brown 2000; Waller and McLanahan 2005). Waller and McLanahan (2005) used Fragile Families data to examine marital expectations among unmarried parents. Couples' expectations about both union formation and separation are strong predictors of behavior. When at least one partner expected to marry, marriage was more likely than if neither held such expectations. Similarly, couples who were less optimistic about their future together were more likely to separate.

Among cohabitators, expectations and relationship evaluations were strong predictors of behavior (Brown 2000). Similar to the Waller and McLanahan study, expectations had a large impact on actions. The relationships of women who espoused negative views towards their partners and their relationship were more likely to end than those of women who had positive evaluations. Generally, cohabitators who had expectations to marry were significantly more likely to marry than those who were less certain about the future of their relationship; this was truer among whites than among blacks. Although blacks and whites were equally as likely to report marriage plans, blacks were 85 percent less likely to carry out their plans. This research suggests that attitudes and perceptions may operate differently by race.

With regard to the perceived benefits of marriage even fewer studies are available. Work by Sassler and Schoen (1999) examined how attitudes and economic activity affected development of a marital relationship by race using the National Survey of Families and Households. Their findings discussed how differences in perceived benefits of marriage affected outcomes. Black women were more optimistic about how marriage would improve their lives than white women, yet fewer black women married in comparison to white women. Therefore, having positive perceptions of the benefits of marriage did not improve marriage rates among black women and could not explain racial differences in marriage.

Other factors have been found to be important predictors of later marriage. They include family background, economic stability (Sassler and Schoen 1999), education (Goldstein and Kenney 2001), relationship quality (Waller and McLanahan 2005) and incarceration (Pettit and Western 2004). It will be important for me to control for these factors in an effort to avoid spurious results.

Perceptions and expectations can be powerful tools for predicting later behavior. In this study, I contend that understanding the expectations and perceptions of an unmarried population can be useful for predicting subsequent marital behavior. In other words, how an individual perceives and understands a phenomenon before experiencing it will likely predict how that individual behaves with regard to that phenomenon. On the contrary, this model would be less useful in a population where the behavior has already occurred since direct experiences influence expectations, attitudes and perceptions. For example, a woman who is divorced may be less hopeful about marriage given her experiences. On the other hand, if a woman has never married and holds negative views towards marriage, these views are likely to influence whether or not she decides to develop a marital relationship.

The present research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, by examining responses to direct questions about marital expectations and perceived benefits of marriage I can be more confident that the views espoused are consistent with one's personal views instead of an acknowledgement of what may be generally true. Second, I can better isolate the impact that expectations have on racial differences in marriage by examining individuals before a marriage takes place and then examining what predictors accounted for later marriage. Last, this research will serve to further inform theory about race and marriage.

Consistent with the previous literature, I expect that African American mothers will expect to marry less often than their white and Hispanic counterparts. Since African American women tend to have a higher stated marriage bar, I expect that black mothers will perceive that if they get married they will acquire greater benefits than will be perceived by white and Hispanic mothers. I predict that these expectations and perceptions will be useful in predicting later marriage and helping to explain differences by race.

Method

Data

Data for this research comes from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a survey carried out in twenty large American cities, using a longitudinal study design. Data were collected about unmarried mothers and fathers, their relationships and the effect that policies and environmental conditions have on these families. Respondents only qualified for participation upon the birth of a child. 4,898 unmarried mothers were interviewed at time of birth in twenty major cities. Three follow up interviews were carried out at years one, three and five after baseline interview. Response rates for the baseline interview and the five year follow up were both 87 percent for unmarried mothers.

This paper uses data from the mothers' baseline survey and the mothers' five year follow up survey, in all twenty cities surveyed in the Fragile Families study. Although later surveys are available, analyses not present here indicate that little to no new marriages to the baby's father occurred. Since the event of interest is marriage, I further limit my analysis to unmarried mothers at the time of the baby's birth. Dropping married mothers reduced my sample to 3,710.

Sample

The sample was limited to children who were born outside of marriage, who resided with the biological mother, and mother's race were not missing. The full analytic sample for this paper consisted of 3,653 cases at baseline. Missing values on covariates within the analytic sample were minimal, and I used multiple imputation techniques (Royston 2004) to impute missing covariates; the imputation model included variables related to our independent variables of interest, our dependent variables, and the likelihood of being missing (Allison 2002). Imputations were only used to help fill in missing values for my covariates but were not used for

the dependent variables so that outcomes could be based on the real data. The imputations yielded means that were almost identical to the real data for all control variables. Therefore, the outcomes discussed can be identified as a true estimate of the data sample.

It is important to keep the analytic sample in mind when interpreting the findings, since outcomes represent women who have had a nonmarital birth, live with their child and have identified their racial category. Therefore, findings cannot be generalizable to all populations.

Variables

Marital status is denoted by whether or not respondents married their baby's father prior to the five year interview. I did not include those who married men other than the baby's father because I am conceptually more interested in the relationship between two biological parents given the overall positive outcomes found for children of these relationships. Furthermore, a minimal number of marriages took place *outside* of the parental relationship and separate analyses including these marriages did not alter the outcomes found.

All independent variables are from the baseline mother interview at time-of-birth unless otherwise specified. Marital expectations and perceptions were comprised of two measures. The first measure was expectations of marrying baby's father, 1 represented "Little to no chance," 2 represented "a 50-50 chance" and 3 represented "a pretty good chance and almost certain." The second measure was the expectations of benefits of marrying the baby's father. This measure was an index comprised of 5 questions, including questions that asked how do you think your life would be different if you were married to 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). Race/ethnicity was specified as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black and Hispanic. I also

included demographic characteristics as well as sociobehavioral variables as covariates such as relationship status, family background, imprisonment of father at birth of child, other biological children, self-reported health status at birth of child, employment status, religious attendance, and relationship quality.

Respondents were asked about their relationship to the baby's father at the time of the birth. I created 3 dummy variables to denote this relationship, variables for "nonresident friends" or not, "romantic visiting" or not and "cohabiting" or not. Family background is a dummy variable for whether or not the mother lived with both of her parents at age fifteen. Religious service attendance was included as a continuous variable ranging from 1 "never" attend to 5 "one time or more per week."

Controlling for variables that are related to economic standing, specifically employment status, educational attainment and earnings, of respondents was equally important, since research has been clear in showing that an individual's economic standing is often predictive of their chances for developing a marital union (Schwartz and Mare 2005; Fossett and Kiecolt 1993; Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Sassler and Schoen 1999). Economic standing for mothers is measured by an income-to-poverty variable that uses household size and income to determine the level of poverty present, categories include (1) "poor," (2) "near poor," and (3) "not poor." I included a measure for father's employment status since previous work has identified father's employment as important to marriage prospects for this population (Harknett and McLanahan 2004). Father's employment was represented by whether or not fathers worked for pay last week, based on father's report. Education is specified as less than high school (reference category), high school diploma or equivalent and some college or higher.

Whether or not mothers had other biological children with the father was assessed. Self-reported health status at birth of child is a continuous variable ranging from 1 “poor” to 5 “great.” Imprisonment of father at time of baseline interview is a constructed, dichotomous variable with mother and father report of whether or not father was in jail at baseline interview where father’s report was used and filled in by mother’s reports were missing.

All combined measures created for the purpose of analysis were averaged across multiple questions to produce a numerical average. If respondents were missing on one or more variables in the created index, they were not included in the measure, which excluded very few respondents given the high response rates at the time these questions were asked. I used several questions to reflect supportiveness in the relationship based on the mother’s report of how the baby’s father treats her. Four questions were combined to constitute this measure including how often was baby’s father “fair and willing to compromise,” “expressed affection or love to you,” “criticized you or your ideas (coding reversed),” and “encourage you do things that were important to you.” Responses included 1 “often,” 2 “sometimes,” 3 “never;” higher scores represent a better perceived quality of mother’s relationship with baby’s father ($\alpha=.66$; 77 respondents were missing).

Table 1 shows descriptives for the full analytic sample of unmarried mothers subsequent to a nonmarital birth (3,653 mothers) by race. The average unmarried mother in the sample was 24 years old at the time of first interview and is of minority race/ethnicity: Fifty-four percent of mothers are non-Hispanic black and 31 percent are Hispanic. Only 29 percent of black mothers lived with both parents at age 15 while 42 of white and 47 percent of Hispanic mothers lived with both parents at age 15. Mothers of all races have at least a high school diploma, although Hispanic mothers have the least education with more than forty percent having less than a high

school diploma. Eighty-five percent of white and Hispanic fathers report employment in the past week and 67 percent of black fathers were employed. Almost half of black mothers were classified as poor, 31 percent of white mothers and 36 of Hispanic mothers were classified as poor. On average, mothers have about 1.5 children with the baby's fathers. Most mothers attend church infrequently. Most mothers report good health. At least 41 percent of Black and White fathers and 25 percent of Hispanic fathers have been incarcerated, according to mothers. Most parents are romantically involved at the time of the birth and report having supportive, nonconflictual relationships more often than not.

Analytic Plan

In an effort to estimate the relationship between my explanatory variables and my dependent variable, I used three main analytic techniques. First, I used ordered logistic regression to examine if marital expectations differed by race since the variable had responses that were ordered categories. Second, I examined how the perceived benefits of marriage differed by race. Ordinary least square regression was employed because the perceived benefits of marriage variable was a continuous variable that combined various questions which created many points on a 1 to 5 scale. I first ran bivariate analyses then included controls to examine how my covariates influence the relationships found. Last, I used logistic regression in order to determine if expectations and perceptions helped to account for racial differences in marriage; then included all controls including individual characteristics, economic, and relationship factors to examine how much each variable influenced marriage to the baby's father.

Results

The present work set out to answer three main questions in an effort to help explain racial differences in marital behavior among unmarried mothers. The first question assessed racial

differences in marital expectations exists among unmarried mothers. I begin by presenting some bivariate results then discuss the full model. Table 3 demonstrates that racial differences in marital expectations are present. White unmarried mothers expect to marry 1.85 times more often than African American mothers while Hispanic mothers expect to marry 1.39 times more often than Black mothers. Therefore, findings are consistent with the racial differences in marital expectations found most recently in the general populations (Crissey 2005). Multivariate results demonstrate that racial differences in marital expectations continue to be significantly different and therefore further confirm my expectations. Marital expectations were also significantly higher if mothers lived with their biological parents at age 15 and if mothers had a high school diploma compared to those who did not live with their parents at 15 or were not high school graduates. Father's employment had a positive effect on marital expectation while father's having been previously incarcerated lowered mother's expectations. Attending religious services also increased the odds of holding high marital expectations. Relationship status and quality at the baseline interview had a large impact on marital expectations. Mothers who were cohabiting and visiting with the baby's father expected to marry 2.23 and 7.12 times more often than mothers who reported just being friends with the baby's father. Mothers who reported that the baby's father was supportive in their relationship had higher expectations than those who had less supportive relationships. Mother's age, health and the number of children she had with the baby's father did not influence their marital expectations.

Bivariate ordinary least squares regression results (Table 4) provided a preliminary answer to the second question posed in this paper; are racial differences in the perceived benefits of marriage present? Consistent with my expectations differences were found, White and Hispanic mothers perceived that marriage would produce fewer overall benefits than Black

mothers. Therefore, Black mothers likely subscribe to a higher marriage bar which in turn influences the returns they expect from marriage. Multivariate results demonstrate that racial differences continued to persist after covariates were introduced into the model. My hypothesis is confirmed that unmarried African American mothers perceives that marriage would provide more benefits than White or Hispanic mothers.

Other variables influenced how mothers perceived marriage. As mother's age increases the more benefits, she perceived marriage would provide. Mothers who reported attending college or more perceived that marriage will be less beneficial than mothers with less than a high school diploma. Therefore, education served to depress perceptions of marriage as beneficial. As mother's health increased the benefits she perceived that marriage would provide increased as well. Relationship status and quality at the initial interview affected perceived marital benefits. Mothers who were cohabiting or visiting with the baby's father perceived that marriage would provide greater overall benefits than mothers who were only friends with the baby's father. The more supportive mothers report their baby's father were at the baseline interview the more benefits mothers perceive marriage will provide. Father's incarceration history, family background, religious service attendance and father's employment did not significantly influence perceived marital benefits.

Bivariate analyses also confirmed my third hypothesis that marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage will have an effect on marital behavior and potentially help explain racial differences in marital behavior. Table 5 demonstrates that White and Hispanic mothers were 2.6 and 2.7 times more likely to marry their baby's father after a non-marital birth than African American mothers. Racial differences in marriage decline significantly when marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage are introduced. I first added marital

expectations and perceived marital benefits in separate bivariate models in order to determine how each variable affected marriage individually, I then added them together. Adding only marital expectations decreased the odds of marriage between Black and White mothers from 2.6 to 2.09 and between Black and Hispanic mothers the odds of marriage declined from 2.70 to 2.46 (Table 5, Model 2). Adding only perceived marital benefits slightly increased differences between Black and White mothers from 2.60 to 2.71 while the odds of marrying the baby's father did not change between Black and Hispanic mothers (Table 5, Model 3). Adding both marital expectations and perceived marital benefits also depressed racial differences by race. Differences decreased from 2.60 to 1.98 between Black and White mothers and from 2.70 to 2.42 between Black and Hispanic mothers.

The full analytic model (Table 5, Model 5) which included race, marital expectations, perceived marital benefits and all covariates demonstrates that both marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage continue to have a significant impact on marital behavior. Mothers who expected that they at least had a 50/50 chance of marrying the baby's father were significantly more likely to marry than those who did not believe that they would marry the baby's father. Mothers who perceived that marriage would be highly beneficial had a decreased odds of marrying their baby's father ($p < .05$). My control variables also served to be useful for predicting marital behavior as could be expected from the literature. College educated mothers were 1.40 times more likely to marry than mothers with less than a high school diploma ($p < .01$). Father's employment also increased marriage by 1.57 times among unmarried mothers ($p < .001$). Religious service attendance increased the odds of marriage by 1.19 times among unmarried mothers ($p < .001$). Father's incarceration history decreased the mother's odds of marriage to the baby's father by 30 percent ($p < .001$). Overall, the findings support my

supposition that perceptions and expectations would be useful tools for understanding marital behavior. Racial differences in both marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage are present among unmarried mothers and are important factors for explaining racial differences in marital behavior.

Discussion

In this paper, I have examined how marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage differ by race and can be useful for explaining racial differences in the marital behavior found among unmarried mothers. I used a recent cohort of unmarried mothers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. This paper adds to the literature by looking at variables beyond economics (Harknett and McLanahan 2004; Sassler and Schoen 1999) by identifying how noneconomic factors can be similarly useful in explaining marital behavior.

Overall, my hypotheses were confirmed by the analyses. Both marital expectations and the perceived benefits of marriage differed significantly by race. My findings were 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 (Crissey 2005; Waller and McLanahan 2005). With regard to marital benefits, few studies have ventured to examine this outcome by race especially among unmarried parents (none that I am aware of). Views among unmarried mothers are consistent with the general finding that African American women tend to be more optimistic about the benefits marriage will provide than White or Hispanic (Sassler and Schoen 1999). My findings are consistent with recent research that suggest that Black and low-income mothers view marriage as an ideal state thus maintaining positive views about what marriage should consist of. Blacks likely place high standards on what their marriage mates should bring to the marriage therefore contributing to their views that marriage will be highly

beneficial once achieved but are not confident that they will attain these relationships. While these findings are important the present study was primarily interested in identifying how these factors would be useful for helping to explain racial differences in marital behavior.

Subjective evaluations about one's chances of developing a marital union and their perceptions of the benefits of marriage did in fact depress racial differences by race. Marital expectations decreased the odds of marriage from 2.6 greater odds for white mothers compared to black mothers to 2.09. Among Hispanic mothers, the odds decreased from 2.71 greater odds of marriage compared to Black mothers to 2.46. Specifically, White and Hispanic mothers continued to have higher odds of getting married to the baby's father, but differences in marital expectations by race helped explain some of the initial racial differences found by race in the likelihood of getting married. The perceived benefits of marriage served to increase differences between Black and White mothers from 2.6 greater odds to 2.71 greater odds of marriage but had no effect on differences between Black and Hispanic mothers. In other words, Black mother's optimism about the benefits that marriage would provide if they married the baby's father served to hamper their marriage outcomes.

When both marital expectations and perceived benefits of marriage were included in the model, racial differences in marriage between Black and White mothers decreased from 2.60 to 1.98. Racial differences between black and Hispanic mothers decreased from 2.70 to 2.42. Therefore the variables of interests helped explain some of the initial racial differences found by race in the likelihood of getting married.

Given the inherently difficult nature of studying how individual perceptions, views, attitudes and expectations influence behavior, research has been limited in this area. The present work provides encouragement to future studies to investigate how these factors could provide

meaningful information about marital behavior. The variables I included in my analyses yielded useful factors for analyzing individual perceptions and expectations. The present work also demonstrated a connection between the personal and the institutional. For example, father's employment increased marital expectations and marriage overall but did not influence perceived marital benefits. Future research should further explore how subjective factors could provide insight into racial differences in marital behavior. Other variables that assess how individuals understand marriage or the utility of marriage in their everyday lives could also be useful subjects for future research. By examining the expectations and perceptions unmarried mothers hold we gain insight into a growing segment of the population. These findings can be useful for understanding racial differences in marital behavior in the general population since this study minimizes differences in the populations of interest (i.e. low-income unmarried mothers). It may be less useful to discuss differences by race among populations who do not share similar fertility histories, economic resources or educational attainment. By minimizing these differences with the present study, I can be more confident that the findings are the result of real differences in the views and expectations espoused.

While I believe in the contributions this paper makes to the literature, there are some limitations that warrant discussion. First, the urban, hospital-based study design of the survey allowed for very high response rates among mothers, but does not allow me to generalize my findings to women who have not born a child nor can findings be generalized to women who do not reside in major cities. Second, other variables not available in this data may be responsible for some of the differences found. Other institutional factors can influence individual characteristics. For example, the views espoused in this paper and the differences found may be explained if more in-depth economic factors were included in the model.

In general, research on the racial differences in marital behavior has been primarily focused on examining structural factors that may be simply easier to measure than other less tangible factors. The present work takes a step towards studying how personal expectations and perceptions can be very useful in understanding differences in behavior. Among unmarried mothers, racial groups differ greatly in how they perceive marriage and these perceptions help explain why differences in marriage vary so greatly among this population. Future work should further explore how individual perceptions and expectations affect marriage.

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Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Unmarried Mothers by Race

	<i>Blacks</i>		<i>Whites</i>		<i>Hispanics</i>	
	<i>M</i> or %	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> or %	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> or %	<i>SD</i>
Unmarried Mother's Characteristics						
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>						
Age at baby's birth (range=15-67)	23.50	6.07	24.38	5.59	24.95	6.01
Lived with both parents at 15	27.3		45.5		46.1	
Mother's self-reported health (1-5)	3.77	1.03	3.99	.87	3.80	.94
Mother is Foreign Born	5.8		1.7		38.8	
High school degree	49.2		43.6		35.2	
Some college or more	25.8		33.1		26.0	
Father Employed	65.9		84.7		85.7	
Mother's poverty category (ref=not poor)						
Poor	47.5		32.7		38.1	
<i>Social characteristics</i>						
Religious attendance (1-5)	2.94	1.33	2.57	1.16	2.94	1.34
Ever incarcerated	40.4		39.3		25.4	
<i>Relationship Status characteristics</i>						
Relationship status (ref=Friends)	8.5		6.4		6.1	
Visiting	46.4		29.2		22.5	
Cohabiting	38.1		56.6		63.1	
Supportiveness (1-3)	2.56	.42	2.60	.44	2.59	.43
Number of children with baby's father	1.44	.85	1.41	.62	1.53	.79
<i>Dependent Variables</i>						
Perceived Marital Benefits (1-5)	3.33	.57	3.16	.47	3.28	.53
Marital Expectations (1-3)	2.26	.84	2.45	.86	2.25	.87
Number of cases (<i>n</i>)	1,754		427		831	

All figures are weighted by sampling weights that adjust for the over-sample of nonmarital births in the Fragile Families Study. M = mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2. Married the Baby's Father Five-years after a Nonmarital Birth

Race of Mother	<i>Did not marry baby's father</i>	<i>Married baby's father</i>	Number of cases (<i>n</i>)
Black Mothers	90.4	9.6	1,754
White Mothers	78.2	21.8	427
Hispanic Mothers	77.7	22.3	831
Number of cases (<i>n</i>)	2,565	447	3,012

Note: All figures are weighted by city sampling weights. Regression analyses demonstrated that racial differences were found to be significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Table 3. Ordered Logistic Regression Models for Marital Expectations by Race

	Model 1		Model 2	
Race (ref=Black, non-Hispanic)				
White, non-Hispanic	1.96 ***	(0.20)	1.89 ***	(0.23)
Hispanic	1.40 ***	(0.11)	1.06	(0.10)
Age at baby's birth			.99 **	(0.01)
Lived with both parents at 15			1.08 *	(0.08)
Mother's self-reported health (1-5)			1.01	(0.04)
Mother is Foreign Born			.78 †	(0.10)
Education (ref=Less than high school)				
High school degree			1.11	(0.10)
Some college or higher			1.01	(0.11)
<i>Economic Factors</i>				
Father Employed			1.01	(0.26)
Mother's poverty category (ref=not poor)			0.72 ***	(0.06)
<i>Social characteristics</i>				
Religious attendance (1-5)			1.11 ***	(0.03)
Father ever incarcerated			.87	(0.08)
<i>Family formation/fertility variables</i>				
Relationship status (ref=Friends)				
Visiting			2.02 ***	(0.73)
Cohabiting			6.25 ***	(0.09)
Supportiveness (1-3)			8.45 ***	(0.90)
Number of children with baby's father			1.03	(0.04)
Number of cases (<i>n</i>)	2,997		2,997	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. OLS Regression Analysis for the Perceived Benefits of Marriage by Race

	Model 1		Model 2	
Race (ref=Black, non-Hispanic)				
White, non-Hispanic	-.26 ***	(0.03)	-.22 ***	(0.03)
Hispanic	-.06 **	(0.02)	-.06 *	(0.03)
Age at baby's birth			.01 ***	(0.00)
Lived with both parents at 15			-.01	(0.02)
Mother's self-reported health (1-5)			.01	(0.01)
Mother is Foreign Born			.02	(0.04)
Education (ref=Less than high school)				
High school degree			.01	(0.02)
Some college or higher			-.03	(0.03)
<i>Economic Factors</i>				
Father Employed			-.01	(0.03)
Mother's poverty category (ref=not poor)			.06 **	(0.02)
<i>Social characteristics</i>				
Religious attendance (1-5)			.01	(0.01)
Father ever incarcerated			-.01	(0.02)
<i>Family formation/fertility variables</i>				
Relationship status (ref=Friends)				
Visiting			.31 ***	(0.03)
Cohabiting			.20 ***	(0.03)
Supportiveness (1-3)			.33 ***	(0.03)
Number of children with baby's father			-.02 †	(0.01)
Number of cases (<i>n</i>)	3,003		3,003	

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Logistic Regression Results for Marriage to the Baby's Father by the Five-year Interview

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>						
Race (ref=Black, non-Hispanic)						
White, non-Hispanic	2.61 ***	2.14 ***	2.68 ***	2.03 ***	1.82 ***	1.88 ***
Hispanic	2.69 ***	1.99 ***	2.16 ***	1.95 ***	1.90 ***	1.83 ***
Age at baby's birth		1.02	1.01	1.02	1.01	1.00
Lived with both parents at 15		1.01	1.11	1.01	.99	.97
Mother's self-reported health (1-5)		1.05	1.10 †	1.05	1.03	1.02
Mother is Foreign Born		2.00 ***	1.88 ***	2.02 ***	2.00 ***	1.66 **
Marital Expectations (1-3)		1.93 ***		1.96 ***	1.90 ***	1.72 ***
Perceived Marital Benefits (1-5)			1.13	.79 *	.81 †	.83
<i>Socioeconomic factors</i>						
Education (ref=Less than high school)						
High school degree					1.01	1.00
Some college or higher					1.45 *	1.37
Father Employed					1.71 **	1.55 *
Mother's poverty category (ref=not poor)					.88	0.91
<i>Social characteristics</i>						
Religious service attendance (1-5)						1.19 ***
Ever incarcerated						.65 **
<i>Relationship Status characteristics</i>						
Relationship status (ref=Friends)						
Visiting						.83
Cohabiting						1.36
Supportiveness (1-3)						1.18
Number of children with baby's father						1.04
Number of cases (n)	3,012	3,003	2,997	2,988	2,988	2,988

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.