

Race/Ethnic Differences in the Role of Cohabitation

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Abstract

We use a sample of mothers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to look at race/ethnic/nativity differences in the role of cohabitation. Similarities between U.S. born Mexican American and Black women may reflect a shared minority status in the U.S. while similarities between Mexican born and U.S. born Mexican American women may reflect a shared ethnic heritage purported to be more pro-nuptial and familistic. Analyses show that while the majority of births to Mexican American and Black women occur out-of-wedlock, Mexican American and Mexican born unmarried mothers are equally likely to be in a cohabiting union. Subsequent to the birth, Mexican born women in cohabiting unions are actually less likely to marry than those not in cohabiting unions. However, this is not true for Mexican American women, though they are less likely to marry than White or Black women in cohabiting unions.

Introduction

Given the subsequent disadvantages associated with non-marital childbearing for women and their children, research has begun to focus on the trajectories of unmarried women after they have a non-marital birth (Graefe and Lichter 2002; Wilcox and Wolfinger 2004; Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2004; Waller and McLanahan 2004; Osborne 2004). Of particular interest is the subsequent likelihood of marriage among unmarried mothers as well as the stability of unions among those who do not marry (Wu, Bumpass, and Musick 2001). As Carlson et al. (2004) state, “relationship trajectories of fragile families are of considerable interest to those concerned about the long term well being of children.”

Important determinants of subsequent behavior include the relationship status of the mother and biological father at the time of birth (e.g. whether they are cohabiting). Mothers in cohabiting unions with the biological father have a greater likelihood of marriage than do mothers who are dating or are just friends with the biological father (Carlson et al. 2004). However, research documents that cohabitation may have a different meaning for Mexican American women compared to Black and White women. High levels of fertility within cohabiting unions account for a large part of the difference in non-marital fertility rates between White and Mexican American women, particularly among those of lower socioeconomic status (Wildsmith 2004). While some research examining the relationship between cohabitation and marriage has looked specifically at Hispanics, very little has looked at Mexican origin women and none has looked at the U.S. born and foreign born Mexican origin populations separately.

In this paper we use a sample of mothers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study in order to look more closely at race/ethnic/nativity differences in the meaning of cohabitation and the role of this family status in race/ethnic variation in marriage. We do this in

two ways. First we look at race/ethnic differences in the relationship status between the mother and the biological father at the birth of their child among all women and at race/ethnic differences in attitudes surrounding cohabitation among unmarried women. Secondly, we look at the effect of cohabitation and cohabitation related attitudes on the likelihood of marriage 1 year after the birth of the child. We then determine whether there are race/ethnic specific effects of cohabitation on the likelihood of marriage. In addition to answering questions regarding the meaning of cohabitation, these analyses can offer insight into how well the Mexican origin population does in the context of the U.S. Similarities between U.S. born Mexican American and Black women may reflect a shared minority status in the U.S. while similarities between Mexican born and U.S. born Mexican American women may reflect a shared ethnic heritage purported to be more pro-nuptial and familistic.

Background

Non-marital childbearing reduces the chances of marriage for women and is generally associated with increased family instability for children, though this varies by race/ethnicity. Graefe and Lichter (2002) find that 82% of White women, 62% of Hispanic women, and 59% of Black women who had a non-marital birth were married by age 40 compared to 89%, 93% and 76% of White, Hispanic, and Black women who did not have a non-marital birth. Hispanic women seem particularly hard hit. However, there is much variation in the relationship status among these unmarried mothers (Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan 2002).

A large portion of the increase in non-marital fertility is due to increased fertility within cohabiting unions (Bumpass and Lu 2000). This has occurred at the same time that the rate of pre-marital cohabitation has increased among all women (Raley 2000; Bumpass and Lu 2000). Overall, roughly 12% of all births occur to cohabitators and by the late 1990's roughly 40% of all

non-marital births occurred to cohabitators, though this percent was closer to 50% for Hispanics and Whites (Smock 2000; Bumpass and Lu 2000). Slightly more recent estimates using the Fragile Families data find that roughly 50% of all urban unmarried mothers are cohabiting at the time of their child's birth and roughly 1/3rd are romantically involved with the biological father though not currently living with him (Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan 2002).

This has raised questions regarding the stability of relationships, in particular cohabiting relationships, for children born into them. In general cohabiting unions are less stable than marriages and have been becoming less stable over time (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Manning, Smock and Majumdar 2002). However, unmarried parents in cohabiting relationships are more likely to marry than other unmarried parents, including those in dating relationships (Carlson et al. 2004).

There has been quite a bit of research that looks at where cohabitation fits into the family system (Smock 2000; Rindfuss and Vandenhoevel 1990; Manning 1993; Raley 2001). In general, cohabitation has been variously viewed as a stage in the process to marriage, an alternative to being single, or as an alternative to being married (that is, it works as a relatively permanent arrangement in and of itself), and where it fits seems to vary across age and race/ethnicity (Smock 2000). Research has found that while lower SES Mexican American women are somewhat less likely to cohabit than Whites, they have higher fertility within cohabiting unions. This ultimately results in a similar proportion of Mexican American and White children being born in cohabiting unions, but suggests that Mexican American cohabitators with children may be very different than White cohabitators with children (Wildsmith 2004). Lending support to this, Manning (2001) finds that births to Hispanic cohabitators are 70% more likely to be intended than are births to Whites.

Given these differences, it is likely that among unmarried mothers the effect of cohabitation on the likelihood of marriage may operate differently for Mexican origin women relative to White and Black women. Research looking at attitudes among Mexican origin or Hispanic women has generally found that they value marriage more highly than White women (Tucker 2000; Oropesa and Gorman 2000; Oropesa 1996). Part of this is due to the higher pro-nuptial values of foreign born Latinas, though native born Latinas are also more pro-nuptial than White women (Oropesa and Gorman 2000). Additionally, Oropesa (1994) found that Mexican origin women have a higher approval of cohabitation if the cohabitators have intentions to marry. Given this, cohabitation may be seen more as a stage, or stepping-stone, in the marriage process for Mexican origin cohabitators. If this is the case then Mexican origin women may be more likely to marry the father of their children than White women. However, other research suggests an alternative perspective.

As Graefe and Lichter's (2002) research demonstrates, Hispanics (the majority of whom are of Mexican origin) who have had a non-marital birth are less likely to marry by age 40 than are Whites who had a non-marital birth or Hispanics who did not have a non-marital birth. This may reflect the possibility that cohabiting unions among Mexican origin women with children tend to serve as a substitute to marriage, and again this may be particularly true for the foreign born. In contrast to much of the developed world, informal/consensual unions in Mexico are best described as surrogate marriages (Castro Martin 2002). Far from representing a new cultural arrangement, as they have been characterized in the U.S., consensual unions in Mexico have been around for centuries and represent a traditional analog to formal marriages (Del Castillo 1984). Interestingly, in her research which looked at multiple marriage related attitudes, Tucker (2000) found that despite having highly pro-nuptial views ("how important is being married to

you?") compared to other race/ethnic groups, Mexican origin women felt that it was the least important to get married someday. As Tucker suggests, this may reflect increasing conflict between gender roles and the increasing economic power of women. However, if cohabiting unions are considered analogous to marriage, then this may also reflect a decreased need to formalize consensual unions. If this is the case, then Mexican origin cohabitators with children may be less likely to formalize their union through marriage.

This paper looks at race/ethnic differences in the cohabitation and relationship status of the mother and biological father at the birth of the child, at differences in attitudes surrounding the meaning of cohabitation, and at the relationship between cohabitation and cohabitation related attitudes and the subsequent likelihood of marriage. However, race/ethnic/nativity differences in these factors and relationships can additionally offer insight into whether Mexican American women are affected in similar ways as Black women by their minority status within the United States, or whether a distinct ethnic heritage and/or ethnic experience independently shapes their family formation.

Forste and Tienda (1996) suggest that for Blacks, and to a lesser extent Hispanics, higher levels of non-marital fertility signal a weakening of the link between marriage and childbearing, more so than for Whites. They argue that in addition to economic explanations, the greater separation of marriage and childbearing among minority women implies a normative change in the meaning and value of marriage relative to childbearing. If this is the case, we might expect that cohabitation holds a similar meaning among all minority women as reflected in the prevalence of cohabitation, the attitudes surrounding cohabitation, and the relationship between cohabitation and marriage. On the other hand, to the extent that cohabitation is perceived as an acceptable alternative to marriage among Mexican origin women, stemming from an ethnic

heritage more supportive of informal unions, we might expect stronger similarities between Mexican born and U.S. born Mexican American women in the meaning of cohabitation. Certainly both factors may be shaping the meaning of cohabitation among Mexican origin women, though the relative importance of each may vary by nativity. It may be the case that, net of other socioeconomic and background characteristics, a particular ethnic heritage is more relevant for the Mexican born population while minority status is for the U.S. born Mexican American population.

Data and Methods

We use data from the first and second waves of the Fragile Families and Wellbeing Study (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, and McLanahan 2001). This study follows roughly 3,700 children born to unmarried parents and 1,200 children born to married parents in 20 major cities in the United States. When the sample weight is applied, the data are representative of unmarried births in cities with populations over 200,000. It is important to note only 16 of the 20 cities have sample weights to make analyses representative of the national population. Consequently our weighted analyses use only 3/4ths of the sample.

Baseline interviews were conducted with the mothers (and fathers when possible) between 1998 and 2000 and follow-up interviews were conducted when the child was 1 year of age, between 1999 and 2002. We use data from the baseline and 1-year interviews with the mothers. We focus on Non-Hispanic Black, Non-Hispanic White, U.S. born Mexican American, and foreign born Mexican origin women who were also interviewed at year 1 and included in the national sample (16 cities with sample weights). This sample consists of 2,632 mothers of which

1,997 are unmarried.¹ Throughout the rest of the paper, we refer to U.S. born Mexican American women as Mexican American, the foreign born as Mexican born, and to both groups together as Mexican origin.

The dependent variable for the regression analyses is the marital status of the mother and biological father roughly one year after the child's birth. This is a dichotomous measure coded 1 if the mother and biological father are married at year 1 and 0 if not. The two primary sets of independent variables are explored, the relationship status of the mother and biological father at time 1 and attitudes regarding cohabitation. The Fragile Families' data set combines several questions on marital status, cohabitation, and type of relationship in order to create a mutually exclusive and exhaustive variable that measures the relationship status of the mother and biological father at the time of birth. These categories are: married, cohabiting, visiting (romantically involved but living apart), friends, hardly talk, never talk, and father unknown. For the regression analyses we focus on unmarried women only and create two dummy variables that indicate whether they were in a cohabiting or visiting relationship at the birth of the child. Attitudes about cohabitation are assessed by the mother's agreement to two statements: 1) "It is better for a couple to get married than to live together" and 2) "Living together is just the same as being married." Responses to these statements range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Two dummy variables are created that take on a value of 1 if the woman expresses any agreement (3 or 4) with each statement².

Based on previous research, we control for a series of other sociodemographic, economic, and background characteristics of mothers and the fathers that may affect the associations

¹ 4,105 Black, White, and Mexican American women were interviewed at wave 1. Of these, only 2,923 were part of the national sample. Of these, 2,632 were interviewed at wave 2.

² The possibility of creating a scale was explored. However, the correlation coefficient was very low suggesting that each question measures a unique aspect of cohabitation related attitudes.

between both relationship status and attitudes on the likelihood of marriage. Mother's age is specified as a continuous measure. Measures of both the mother's and father's employment and educational attainment are included. Employment for mothers is a dummy variable that indicates whether she earned income from work in the year previous to the birth. Fathers' employment is measured by a dummy variable that indicates whether the father was working for wages in the week prior to the birth of the child. Mothers' education is measured by a dummy variable that indicates whether the mother has at least some college education. A similar measure is created for fathers. To measure family background, a dummy variable indicating whether the mother was living with both biological parents at the age of 15 is constructed. We include a set of dummy variables that measure religious denomination. Included are measures for Catholic, Fundamentalist Protestant, Mainstream Protestant, No Religion, and Other Religion. Additionally, one measure of frequent attendance at religious services is included. This variable takes on a value of 1 when the mother indicates that she attends services "several times a month" or "once a week or more" (Wilcox and Wolfinger 2004). Lastly, because these are not just first births, we include several dummy variables which indicate whether the couple has more than one child together as well as whether each parent has other biological children with different partners. To deal with missing data we employ the same strategy used by Carlson et al. (2004). In the case where a variable has more than 10 missing cases, the missing cases are flagged with a dummy variable.

We first use descriptive tables to look at race/ethnic/nativity differences in the relationship status of married and unmarried mothers at wave 1 as well as differences in attitudes surrounding cohabitation among unmarried mothers. All of these variables are measured at the time of the child's birth. We then use logistic regression (estimated with PROC LOGISTIC in

SAS) to look at the association between these variables and the transition to marriage of unmarried mothers to the biological fathers by year 1. The first model looks at the baseline relationship between race/ethnicity and the likelihood of marriage. We then adjust this model to control for socioeconomic, demographic, and background characteristics of the unmarried mothers and their partners known to be associated with the likelihood of marriage. We next look at the main effects of cohabitation and then attitudes controlling for these other background characteristics. This is particularly important as cohabitation and attitudes are also shaped by these same background characteristics. Lastly, we determine whether there are any race/ethnic specific effects of cohabitation on marriage.

Results

Table 1 looks at the romantic relationship status of mothers and the biological fathers at the time of the child's birth by race/ethnicity. The top panel looks at all mothers while the bottom panel focuses specifically on unmarried mothers. It is important to keep in mind that these are not just first births, but are representative of all births in urban areas with populations over 200,000. There are interesting race/ethnic differences in both panels. Looking first at all mothers, we see that the majority of births to Black and U.S. born Mexican American women occur to unmarried women while the reverse is true for White and Mexican born women. This certainly suggests that childbearing and marriage are the most separated for Black and Mexican American women. The proportion of births to unmarried mothers for both Mexican American and Mexican born women fall in between that of Black and White women, though the difference by nativity is quite substantial. Overall, Mexican American women are most likely to have a birth in a cohabiting union (31%) and Black women are the most likely to have a birth while in a visiting relationship with the biological father (33%). Because we know that Mexican American women

are less likely to cohabit than White women, this table indirectly confirms that the fertility rate within cohabiting unions is much higher for Mexican American women.

Looking specifically at unmarried mothers we see that the majority of unmarried births to all but Black women occur in cohabiting unions. In this, Mexican American and Mexican born women are virtually identical. Though this proportion falls in between that for Black and White women, it is closer to that for White women. As documented in previous research, we see that the majority of births to Black women actually occur in visiting relationships. Interestingly, Mexican American women have a relatively high proportion of births born in this state compared to White and Mexican born women. However, roughly 27% of births to unmarried Mexican born women occur in non-romantic relationships compared to between 16 and 19% for the other groups of women. All together, this table demonstrates that while Mexican American mothers are more similar to Black women in the likelihood of being unmarried, among unmarried mothers Mexican American and Mexican born mothers are relatively similar to each other, particularly in the likelihood of being in a cohabiting union, and are generally more similar to White women. To the extent that cohabitation increases the odds of marriage, White women should be the most likely and Black women the least likely to be married within a year, with Mexican origin women falling in between. However, this assumes that cohabitation has the same impact for all groups, a questionable assumption given the discussion above.

Table 2 depicts differences among unmarried mothers in cohabitation related attitudes, by race/ethnicity/nativity. Black women are the least supportive of cohabitation. They are the most likely to think that it is better for a couple to marry than to live together and the least likely to view cohabitation as the same as marriage. The story is somewhat mixed for Mexican born women. While 59% of Mexican born women agree that it is better to marry than to live together,

perhaps reflecting a cultural heritage that is more pro-nuptial, roughly the same percent agree that living together is the same as being married. This may come from a history that views cohabiting unions as surrogate marriages. Interestingly, White women are the least likely to agree with the statement that it is better for a couple to marry than to live together. They are also among the least likely (after Black women) to view living together the same as being married. Mexican American women appear to be the most supportive of cohabitation. They are the most likely to view living together the same as being married and are among the least likely (after White women) to think that it is better for a couple to marry than to live together.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics on the measures that will be used in the multivariate analyses. Looking at the top row, we see that Mexican born women are the most likely of unmarried parents to be married within a year of the birth of their child (22.2%). Black women are the least likely (6.6%), with Mexican American and White women falling in between (11.0 and 13.8%, respectively). To the extent that relationship status and attitudes are related to the likelihood of marriage, race/ethnic differences in these factors may explain differences (and similarities) in the likelihood of marriage among unmarried parents.

The rest of Table 3 focuses on background variables that are controlled in the analyses. Mexican origin women are the least likely to have worked at all in the past year and have the lowest levels of educational attainment. White women are the most advantaged on both these measures. Mexican born women are the most likely to have grown up in intact families, while Black women are the least likely. Mexican origin women are disproportionately Catholic, while the vast majority of Black women identify themselves as Fundamentalist Protestant. White women are most likely to be Fundamentalist Protestant followed by Catholic. Black women and Mexican born women attend religious services the most often with 41 and 49% attending at least

several times a month or more, respectively. Turning to the biological fathers (from mother's reports), we see that Black women's partners are the least likely to be employed followed by Mexican American women and then both White and Mexican born women. Mexican origin women's partners have the lowest levels of educational attainment. Lastly, we see that Black mothers and fathers are the most likely to have previous children with other partners while all Mexican origin women are the most likely to have previous children with the same partner.

Table 4 presents the odds ratios from the logistic regression analyses. Model 1 depicts the baseline relationship between race/ethnicity and the odds of marriage. This confirms results seen in Table 3. Black women are less likely and Mexican born women more likely to marry than are White women. Though Mexican American women are somewhat less likely to marry than White women, this is not statistically significant.

Model 2 adds background characteristics, including terms for race/ethnic specific effects of family structure at age 15.³ Of mothers' characteristics, employment, religious denomination, and frequency of religious service attendance are statistically associated with the likelihood of marriage for all women. Having been employed in the last year is associated with an increased likelihood of marriage as is increased religious service attendance. Interestingly, given the stronger pro-marriage norms of Catholicism and Fundamentalist Protestantism, women of these two denominations are less than half as likely to be married one year after their child's birth relative to Mainstream Protestants. Increased church attendance increases the likelihood of marriage. The effect of family structure at age 15 depends on race/ethnicity. Living with two biological parents is not significantly associated with the likelihood of marriage for any group of

³ The interaction between race/ethnicity and family structure significantly improved the fit of the model as well as helps clarify the relationship between cohabitation and marriage.

women except Mexican Americans, for whom the likelihood is substantially increased.⁴ Father's employment and increased education both significantly increase the odds of marriage. These results confirm previous research, which suggests that male employment and earnings are particularly important factors in the likelihood of marriage (Manning and Smock 2002). Having previous children is associated with likelihood of marriage, though only when the couple shares a previous child. Having had a previous child together increases the odds of marriage by over 60%. Once we control for background characteristics, and in particular, the strong effect of living in a two parent family on the likelihood of marriage among Mexican American women, we see that Mexican American women are now substantially and significantly less likely to marry than are White women and are more similar to Black women. Mexican Born women continue to have over twice the likelihood of marrying than do White women.

Model 3 adds the main effects of cohabitation related attitudes and relationship status. Though descriptive analysis provides insight into race/ethnic differences regarding the meaning of cohabitation relative to marriage, there may be some question as to why cohabitation related attitudes would be expected to impact the likelihood of marriage. However, there is reason to think they may. Answers to these questions may reflect a certain tolerance of non-traditional family forms (at least as defined within the United States). Additionally, previous research has documented that more positive marriage attitudes and expectations are linked to a higher likelihood of marriage even among women who already have children (Axinn and Thornton 1992; Carlson et al. 2004; Waller and McLanahan 2004). This is true, net of relationship status and other background characteristics. Therefore, we might expect that those who think it is better to get married than to live together be more likely to marry. In the same vein, those who agree

⁴ This is known from adding the main (-.49) and interactive effects (1.79) of family structure for Mexican American women.

that living together is the same as being married may be less likely to marry. However, in Model 3 we see that attitudes are not significantly related to the likelihood of marriage.⁵ Additional analyses (not shown) also indicate that attitudes do not mediate the relationship between relationship status and marriage. Though there are group differences in cohabitation related attitudes, these do nothing to explain any of the group differences in the likelihood of marriage 1 year after the birth of the child.

Not surprisingly, we see that women in cohabiting and visiting relationships at the birth of the baby are over 3 times and over 2 times more likely to get married, respectively, than those not in romantic relationships. Controlling for these factors leaves race/ethnic differences in the likelihood of marriage virtually unchanged. However, the effect of being in a cohabiting relationship varies significantly by race/ethnicity as seen in Model 4.⁶ The positive effect of being in a cohabiting relationship is much less for Mexican origin women than for other women, though this interaction term is only marginally significant for Mexican American women. In fact, Mexican born women in cohabiting unions are *less likely* to get married than those outside of cohabiting unions.⁷ Among Mexican American women, the positive effect of cohabitation on the likelihood of marriage is only 30% that of the effect for White women. Cohabitation has the same effect for Black and White unmarried mothers. This model lends support to the hypothesis that cohabitation, when it concerns children, is more of an alternative to marriage for all Mexican origin women compared to other women, particularly for Mexican Born women, while is perhaps more a stage in the process of marriage for White and Black women.

⁵ This is true even when entered into a model without measures of relationship status.

⁶ The effect of being in a visiting relationship did not vary by race/ethnicity.

⁷ This is known from adding the main effect of cohabitation (2.02) and the Mexican born effect of cohabitation (-2.40).

Discussion

This chapter looked at the role that cohabitation and cohabitation related attitudes played in the likelihood of marriage. Of particular interest, is the meaning of cohabitation for Mexican American women. Is the relationship between cohabitation (or relationship status), attitudes, and marriage among unmarried Mexican American mothers similar to that of unmarried Black mothers, reflecting the influence of an overarching minority status within the U.S.? Or, do Mexican born and Mexican American women engage in similar behaviors and hold similar beliefs, perhaps resulting from a shared ethnic heritage (familism)? The comparisons raised in these questions make the assumption that marriage related behavior and attitudes among Black women are not shaped by familism and that the marriage related behavior and attitudes of Mexican born women are not a response to disadvantage in the U.S. Nonetheless, given these somewhat limiting assumptions, the answers to these questions can offer insight into the future well being of Mexican American women and their children.

What do the differences and similarities between groups tell us? Certainly it is the case, as mentioned earlier, that childbearing and marriage have become separated for Black and Mexican American women more than for White and Mexican born women. The *majority* of births to Mexican American and Black women occur out-of-wedlock. However, this said, among unmarried mothers, Mexican American and Mexican born women were virtually identical in the proportion of women who were in cohabiting unions and both tended to be more similar to White women than Black women in the distribution of relationship status.

Two hypotheses regarding the role of cohabitation among Mexican origin women were put forth. First, that a more pro-nuptial orientation may mean that cohabitation serves more as a stepping-stone on the way to marriage than it does for other groups. Second, that cohabitation,

based on a history of informal unions in Mexico, may actually serve as a surrogate marriage more than for other groups. The results certainly suggest that cohabitation serves as a surrogate marriage for Mexican born women, as those in cohabiting unions are actually less likely to marry than those not in cohabiting unions. However, this is less the case for Mexican American women, though they were also substantially less likely to marry than White or Black women. Taken together, the main and interactive effects of relationship status on marriage indicate that though Mexican American women share some similarities with Mexican born women as well as with Black and White women, their behavior is distinct from that of other groups.

The differential importance of cohabitation suggests that other factors, net of background characteristics, may in part be shaping the beliefs and behaviors of women. These may come from a shared ethnic heritage or they may emerge in response to minority status. However, the distinct pattern of behavior among Mexican American women supports other research which argues that the experience of Mexican Americans within the context of the U.S. has led to the emergence of a culture specific to Mexican Americans, one that is unique from both Mexican and mainstream U.S. cultures (Keefe and Padilla 1987). The findings here suggest that at the least it is important to look at Mexican born women and Mexican American women separately.

At the same, one can not rule out the possibility that a particular ethnic heritage is in part shaping Mexican American family formation and may be protecting them from the disadvantageous outcomes associated with lower socioeconomic status. However, we must be careful about our assumptions regarding Mexican ethnic heritage, or ‘familism’ and how it is measured. Mexican origin, Black, and White women variously behave or hold attitudes predicted by ‘familism’. To assume that these behaviors or attitudes should fall disproportionately in the domain of Mexican origin women is somewhat naïve (Hunt, Schneider, and Comer 2004).

Additionally, as Hunt et al. (2004) discuss in their work on the misuse of “acculturation” as a variable, familism or culture as it is generally used is poorly defined, which makes generating meaningful hypotheses somewhat difficult. In these analyses, this difficulty is evident as seen by the fact that increased marriage and increased cohabitation could both be ‘predicted’ by familism.

In the end, cohabitation potentially plays a much more substantive role for U.S. born Mexican American women and their children than for other groups. The fact that such a large percentage of births to Mexican American women occur in cohabiting unions (31%) coupled with the fact that these cohabiting mothers have a lower likelihood of marriage than cohabiting Black and White mothers means that children have a much greater risk of spending time in a union that is subject to instability. If cohabitation serves as a surrogate for marriage for Mexican American women, then these relationships may actually be relatively more stable than they are for White and Black women. The lower rates of marriage among Mexican American cohabitators coupled with attitudes generally more suggestive of cohabitation being a surrogate marriage (relative to other women) lends support to this possibility.

However, other research has documented that all children born to cohabiting parents experience similarly greater instability than those in married unions (Manning, Smock and Majumdar 2002). Additionally, Black and Hispanic children whose cohabiting parents marry still have a higher risk of seeing the union end than those whose parents did not cohabit. However, in this work Mexican Americans were not looked at independent of other Hispanics and nativity was not taken into account. Phillips and Sweeney (2003) find that Mexican origin women who have had a pre-marital birth have a much higher risk of marital disruption compared to those who do not, however women who cohabited prior to marriage were not at an increased risk. Though

nativity was controlled, the role of these factors was not looked at separately for native and foreign born Mexican origin women. I believe my research suggests that the nativity differences are sufficient to warrant looking at Mexican American and Mexican born women separately and that we may miss important parts of the story of if this is not done.

There are some important limitations that must be kept in mind. First, this paper only looked at the likelihood of marriage to the biological father within 1 year of a child's birth. Thus, we do not know what happens in the longer term or whether the mother ultimately marries another man. However, research indicates that the risk of marriage declines the longer it has been since the birth of a child. Additionally, there is evidence that remarriage to another man is not as beneficial to children as is the marriage to the biological father. Second, this analysis looks at all unmarried births, rather than just first births. While it may have been preferable to focus specifically on first births, limited sample size precluded this. Third, this analysis was based on a sample of unmarried mothers. Thus, any hypotheses regarding the role of cohabitation and attitudes in marriage behavior only refers to unmarried mothers.

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Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Romantic Relationship of Parents at Birth, Married and Unmarried, by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity

<i>All Mothers</i>	White	Black	U.S. Born	Foreign Born
			Mexican American	Mexican American
Married	77.0	27.2	46.1	65.8
Cohabiting	15.8	26.0	30.8	19.1
Visiting	3.3	33.1	14.0	5.8
Friends	1.3	8.3	1.9	3.9
Other	2.6	3.4	7.3	5.5
Unweighted N	782	1313	334	203

<i>Unmarried Mothers</i>	White	Black	U.S. Born	Foreign Born
			Mexican American	Mexican American
Cohabiting	68.7	35.7	57.1	55.7
Visiting	14.2	45.5	25.9	16.9
Friends	5.8	11.4	3.5	11.4
Other	11.4	7.4	13.5	16.0
Unweighted N	420	1148	279	150

* Weighted Percentages

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Cohabitation Related Attitudes among Unmarried Mothers, by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity

Percent that agree or strongly agree with following	White	Black	U.S. Born	Foreign Born
			Mexican American	Mexican American
Better for couple to marry than to live together	36.8	59.4	45.5	58.6
Living together is same as being married	43.1	36.3	63.4	58.4

* Weighted Percentages

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Background Characteristics among Unmarried Mothers, by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity

	White	Black	U.S. Born Mexican American	Foreign Born Mexican American
<i>Dependent Variable</i>				
Married by Year 1	13.8	6.6	11.0	22.2
<i>Background Characteristics</i>				
Mother's Age - Mean	23.4	23.6	22.8	25.1
% Mothers employed - at all, year before child's birth	83.1	80.3	71.3	59.6
% Mothers - at least some college	27.8	23.2	15.2	3.8
% Mothers - lived with two biological parents at age 15	44.0	24.0	42.8	62.3
<i>Mother's Religion</i>				
% Catholic	25.8	3.8	63.5	84.1
% Fundamentalist Protestant	39.6	71.6	20.5	9.3
% Mainstream Protestant	14.6	3.9	1.5	0.0
% None	15.7	13.2	11.3	5.1
% Other Religion	3.5	6.5	2.9	1.1
% Mothers - attend religious services a few times a month or more	22.3	40.9	23.5	49.3
% Fathers employed - in week before child's birth	80.1	63.8	70.0	78.2
% Fathers - at least some college	32.5	18.7	12.4	6.7
<i>Other Children</i>				
% Mothers - with other father	32.7	50.5	30.7	34.5
% Fathers - with other mother	30.7	48.6	36.3	23.3
% Couples - together	19.0	26.1	34.4	38.8

Table 4: Odds Ratios from the Logistic Regression Analysis Modeling the Entry into Marriage 1 Year After Birth of Child

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Odds Ratio	B/s.e.	p	Odds Ratio	B/s.e.	p
Intercept	-1.84			-3.15		
Race/Ethnicity (White)						
Black	0.44	-4.23 ***		0.46	-3.09 **	
Mexican American	0.77	-1.15		0.43	-2.25 *	
Mexican Born	1.79	2.65 **		2.11	1.88 ^	
Relationship Status at Time 1 (Non Romantic)						
Cohabiting						
Cohabiting*Black						
Cohabiting*Mexican American						
Cohabiting*Mexican Born						
Visiting						
Cohabitation Related Attitudes						
Better for couple to marry than to live together						
Living together is same as being married						
Mother Characteristics						
Age				1.01	0.81	
Employed (not employed)				1.75	2.52 *	
At least some college (hs or less)				0.92	-0.36	
Lived with 2 biolocal parents (other)				0.61	-1.50	
2 Bio*Black				1.17	0.35	
2 Bio*Mexican American				6.00	3.57 ***	
2 Bio*Mexican Born				1.46	0.77	
Religion (Mainstream Protestant)						
Catholic				0.43	-2.45 *	
Fundamentalist Protestant				0.43	-2.73 **	
None				1.03	0.09	
Other Religion				0.65	-1.00	
Frequent Religious Attendance (none or little attendance)				1.89	3.78 ***	
Father Characteristics						
Employed (not employed)				2.67	3.50 ***	
At least some college (hs or less)				1.78	2.78 **	
Other Children						
Mother's children with other father				1.23	1.13	
Father's children with other mother				0.79	-1.36	
Couple's other children together				1.66	2.92 **	
-2 Log Likelihood	1294.3			1158.7		
DF	3			25		

Table 4 (continued): Odds Ratios from the Logistic Regression Analysis Modeling the Entry into Marriage 1 Year After Birth of Child

	Model 3			Model 4		
	Odds Ratio	B/s.e.	p	Odds Ratio	B/s.e.	p
Intercept	-4.15			-4.84		
Race/Ethnicity (White)						
Black	0.46	-2.99	**	0.48	-1.43	
Mexican American	0.40	-2.43	*	0.87	-0.22	
Mexican Born	2.09	1.83	^	8.77	3.66	***
Relationship Status at Time 1 (Non Romantic)						
Cohabiting	3.25	3.45	***	7.45	3.74	***
Cohabiting*Black				1.10	0.18	
Cohabiting*Mexican American				0.33	-1.82	^
Cohabiting*Mexican Born				0.09	-3.97	***
Visiting	2.22	2.22	*	2.89	2.67	**
Cohabitation Related Attitudes						
Better for couple to marry than to live together	1.25	1.29		1.25	1.28	
Living together is same as being married	1.10	0.54		1.08	0.46	
Mother Characteristics						
Age	1.01	0.69		1.01	0.55	
Employed (not employed)	1.68	2.32	*	1.69	2.30	*
At least some college (hs or less)	0.95	-0.16		0.97	-0.13	
Lived with 2 biolocal parents (other)	0.55	-1.77	^	0.49	-2.07	*
2 Bio*Black	1.29	0.55		1.42	0.75	
2 Bio*Mexican American	6.75	3.76	***	7.89	4.02	***
2 Bio*Mexican Born	1.52	0.85		2.53	1.79	^
Religion (Mainstream Protestant)						
Catholic	0.43	-2.47	*	0.40	-2.66	**
Fundamentalist Protestant	0.42	-2.72	**	0.37	-3.04	**
None	1.03	0.09		0.91	-0.26	
Other Religion	0.63	-1.05		0.55	-1.33	
Frequent Religious Attendance (none or little attendance)	1.88	3.65	***	1.86	3.54	***
Father Characteristics						
Employed (not employed)	2.46	3.17	**	2.80	3.53	***
At least some college (hs or less)	1.96	3.21	**	2.03	3.37	***
Other Children						
Mother's children with other father	1.24	1.15		1.27	1.27	
Father's children with other mother	0.80	-1.23		0.79	-1.31	
Couple's other children together	1.54	2.43	*	1.71	2.95	**
-2 Log Likelihood	1140.2			1109.7		
DF	29			32		

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, ^p<.10