

Although single parenthood among African American women is not a recent phenomenon (Ruggles, 1994), the importance of examining this issue is in no way diminished. Because of the high proportions of African American children born to single mothers, the cumulative population of children at risk for negative outcomes associated with single motherhood continues to increase. I contend that single, low-income African American mothers may tend to perceive that there are fewer gains to marriage than there are losses to remaining single. Of course, the idea that mothers and children would be better off if the mother were married can be considered a controversial assessment, given the large proportion of women to whom this is aimed. Nonmarital fertility is usually defined as some form of pathology or epidemiology when low marriage rates among single mothers are based on the choices that mothers make to remain single, even amidst evidence supporting marital births as the most favorable options for child rearing and development (Lundberg, 2001). While there is opposition to the concept of marriage as security against negative outcomes for mothers and children, the foundations of this opposition are unclear.

In general, proponents of marriage and its favorable outcomes for women and children tout its association with reduction in the proportions of children living at or below poverty. Assuming a dual earner scenario, more income would be available in order to insure that the child's living conditions were conducive to favorable and healthy outcomes, but that depends on the underlying socioeconomic factors attached to the parents. There are also decreased incidences of deviant childhood behaviors such as substance abuse, early sexual debut, sexual promiscuity, teen pregnancy, and truancy or dropping out of school altogether; that names but a few of the outcomes that have been shown to be associated with children being reared in single parent homes, particularly female-headed families (Cherlin, 1999; Waite, 1995; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993). The children are not the only ones to "suffer" in fragile families. Single mothers, particularly those with low income, have higher levels of stress and anxiety than married mothers, and they have fewer pecuniary resources available regardless of their participation and receipt of government transfers (Jackson, 2000). Many of these studies do not, however, parcel out instances of nonmarital births and childrearing versus female headed families formed as a result of divorce or widowhood. The structures of most of these outcomes differ based in part on how [and why] female headed families are formed.

Is avoidance of marriage by some single mothers, especially in the early developmental stages of the child's life, based on these dismal portraits of mother and child outcomes? Stier and Tienda (1997) found that the economic detriment of nonmarital childbearing persisted regardless of subsequent family formation. So, whether the mother remained single or got married, her economic situation did not generally improve. Assuming rational behavior, can we expect single mothers to marry if they do not expect any gains to marriage, or especially, if they suspect that there will be some losses associated with marriage? While there has been no focus on how specific human capital factors influence the perceptions that single mothers have about marriage, Kathryn Edin (2000) did investigate the perceptions of low-income single mothers about certain conditional considerations for marriage. For example, low-income single mothers agree that marriage would only be beneficial if their [perspective] spouses had stable jobs and earning at least 60% above the minimum wage. This study also indicated that African American women felt as though their control over household decisions would be negatively impacted by marriage, though the level of respectability would increase with marriage.

African American women are less likely than either Hispanic women or Anglo women to marry, and are even less likely to remain married if they do marry (Murry, 1997). The latter comment may be a moot point, however, given the status of first marriage rates for African American women. Garfinkel and McLanahan (1986) found that divorce was more of an issue for single, previously married Anglo mothers, but that childbearing among never married mothers was more prevalent for African American women. As the marriage rates for African American women decreased, childbearing was not delayed, so we have witnessed an increase in the numbers and proportion of never married African American mothers (Franklin et al., 1995).

These findings support the notion that African American women are at particular risk not only for non-marital childbearing, but for never-married childbearing. The question of why this occurs, particularly for this group, arises. There are varying theories, many of which are inconsistent, that attempt to explain why women, particularly African American women, either chose not to marry, or are somehow "forced" to remain unmarried.

The data for this study are taken from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being study, a recent collection of data on a new birth cohort of children. I use ordered logistic regression to measure the impact

of specified variables on the perceptions of African American women about three different aspects of marriage. I also use binary logistic regression to measure and examine the relationship between family formation and family formation outlook at one year (whether or not the mothers in the study married by the one year follow-up, or, whether they expected that they might ever marry) and the perceptive measures about marriage that are analyzed in the ordinal models, coupled with other control variables that are essential to the analyses.

Results indicate that increases in maternal earnings decrease the odds of being in a higher category for improved financial security by 2%. Mothers who cohabited with fathers were 43% more likely to believe that they would be better off financially if they married. Cohabiting mothers were still more likely to feel that their financial situation would get better if they married. When the combined effects of maternal and paternal factors are analyzed, maternal earnings were negatively associated with perceptions of changes in financial security resulting from marriage. Specifically, increasing maternal earnings decrease the odds of being in a category of higher perceived gain in financial security by 3%, and cohabiting mothers were 57% more likely to be in a higher category of perceived financial security.

The odds of being in a higher category of agreement that financial security is the main advantage to marriage increase by 3% as maternal age increases. As expected, the odds of agreement about the main advantage of marriage being financial security decrease as maternal educational attainment increases. Paternal age has a positive effect on the odds of agreement that financial security is the main advantage to marriage. Oddly, increases in paternal earnings decrease the odds of agreement by 6%. When combining maternal and paternal factors to predict the odds of agreement, the only significant findings were for maternal age, education, and earnings.

Maternal education and earnings are both positively related to agreement with the assertion that a single mother can raise a child just as well as a married mother. The odds of being in a higher category of agreement increase by 56% and 22%, respectively. Cohabiting mothers are 98% more likely than non-cohabiters to agree that single mothers can raise children just as well as married mothers. Examination of the combined effects yielded significant positive results for the relationship between levels of agreement and maternal age, maternal education, number of children for the mother, and cohabitation. The odds of

being in higher categories of agreement relative to these significant findings increase by 9%, 26%, 7%, and 62%, for each of the respective significant factors.

Results measuring the odds of agreement that marriage is better for children show very few significant relationships. The odds of agreeing that marriage is better for children decreases by 3% as maternal earnings increase. Cohabiting was also negatively related to the odds of agreement; cohabiting mothers are 21% less likely to agree that marriage is better for children.

Results from the binary logistic model predicting the odds of marriage and positive marriage outlook indicate that the odds of getting married after nonmarital birth increase by over 39% as mothers increase their level of agreement with the assertion that the main advantage to marriage is financial security. Findings also indicate that increasing levels of agreement that single mothers can raise children just as well as married mothers decrease the odds of marriage for mothers by 29%. Mothers who had children with other men were 81% more likely to marry the focal father than those who did not have children outside the focal relationship. Other findings suggest a positive relationship between the odds of marriage and maternal age, paternal earnings, and paternal education, but a negative relationship with maternal education. The odds of marriage after nonmarital birth decrease by over 18% with increases in maternal education. As maternal age increases, the odds of marriage increase by 51%. As paternal earnings and education increase, the odds of marriage increase by 53% and 21%, respectively. Analysis of combined effects yielded positive significant relationships between the odds of marriage and the incidence of a mother having other children with other men, father's earnings, and father's education. The odds of marriage increase by 89.2%, 15.3%, and 12.2%, for each of these respective measures. Increasing levels of agreement that a single mother can raise a child just as well as a married mother decrease the odds of marriage by 25%. Increases in maternal education decrease the odds of marriage by 17.3%, and by 45.3% for mothers who receive government transfers.