Contextual Influences on Young Men's Transition to First Marriage*

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Abstract

Competing theories of marriage formation are evaluated by merging several contextual variables, primarily marriage market characteristics from the 1980 census, with men's marital histories observed between 1979 and 1984 in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Discrete-time event history models reveal that, net of conventional individual-level predictors, a shortage of prospective partners in the local marriage market impedes white men's transition to first marriage. Women's aggregate economic independence, measured in terms of the proportion of females in the local marriage market who are employed and in terms of the size of average AFDC payments, also diminishes men's marriage propensities. Although earnings and home ownership facilitate men's marital transitions, racial differences in socioeconomic and marriage market characteristics account for relatively little of the substantial racial difference in marriage rates.

Patterns of family formation in the U.S. are undergoing substantial change. The latter half of this century has witnessed an overall retreat from marriage, with both the age at first marriage and the number of persons choosing to forgo marriage altogether increasing dramatically (Cherlin 1992). Although pervasive declines have occurred among all races, the retreat from marriage has been especially pronounced among African Americans. For example, in 1970 roughly the same proportion of black and white males had married by the age of 24 — 44% and 45%, respectively. However, by 1990, the proportion of black males who had married by age 24 had plummeted to 13%, compared to 22% of white males (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991, 1993). Similar declines in marriage are found among white and African American females (Cherlin 1992).

Past research has not yet clearly identified whether increasing age at first marriage and increasing nonmarriage are caused by men's, women's, or both sexes' reluctance to form marital unions (South 1993). While the mutual nature of any marital decision is both obvious and straightforward, most discussions

and empirical investigations of racial differentials and recent declines in marriage emphasize changes in *women's* perceptions and behaviors (e.g., Becker 1981; Espenshade 1985; Marini 1978; Schoen & Owens 1992). For example, ecological observations of marriage incidence (South & Lloyd 1992b) and prevalence (Preston & Richards 1975), individual-level longitudinal analyses of marital timing (Waite & Spitze 1981), and even contextual analyses of marital transitions (Lichter et al. 1992; McLaughlin, Lichter & Johnson 1993; Oropesa, Lichter & Anderson 1994) have, with few exceptions (Goldscheider & Waite 1986; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987), focused exclusively on women's marital behaviors, thereby implicitly assuming that men's nuptial aspirations are less central to recent declines.

The present analysis makes three contributions to research in this area. First, by examining the determinants of men's marital transitions we provide a needed balance to previous studies that emphasize women's marital behavior. Second, we examine directly, and for the first time, the impact of marriage market characteristics and other contextual variables on men's transitions to first marriage while simultaneously controlling for conventional, individual-level predictors. This strategy allows us to evaluate competing models of the effects of the quantity and "quality" of females in men's marriage markets on their transition to first marriage. And third, we examine the extent to which racial differences in men's marital timing can be attributed to racial differences in demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, as well as to differences in marriage markets.

Factors Influencing Men's Transition to First Marriage

Marriage is one of the most important transitions that young men (and women) make as they enter adulthood (Goldscheider & Waite 1986). Marriage provides a clear indication of the passage from childhood to adulthood and is therefore a pivotal point in the life course. Theoretical explanations of marital transitions focus on both the marriage market conditions under which individuals search for a suitable spouse and individuals' own characteristics that make them either a desirable or an undesirable marriage partner.

MARRIAGE MARKET CHARACTERISTICS

Although few analyses have directly examined the impact of male marriage opportunities on men's marital behavior, theories of marriage timing are not completely silent on this issue. Theories of both marital search behavior and imbalanced sex ratios stress the numerical availability of potential partners but predict very different marital dynamics for men. Discussions of marital search behavior suggest that several aspects of the marriage market influence marriage propensities. Foremost among these is the numerical availability of potential partners. Local marriage markets that are characterized by discontinuity between the supply and demand for conjugal mates lead some prospective spouses either to remain unmarried or to delay the transition to marriage (Becker 1981; Oppenheimer 1988). It is important to note that theories of marital search behavior do not differentiate between males and females who face

unfavorable marriage market conditions. Therefore, a deficit in the quantity of potential wives should depress the first marriage transitions of males, just as a deficit of desirable potential husbands inhibits women's marriage (Lichter, LeClere & McLaughlin 1991; Lichter et al. 1992; South & Lloyd 1992b).

In contrast, theories of imbalanced sex ratios assert that when men are subjected to unfavorable marriage opportunities — that is, when there are more marriageable males than females in the local marriage market — men are *more* likely to marry (Guttentag & Secord 1983). Under these circumstances, women are in short supply and therefore men are motivated to commit to marriage in order to maintain a relationship with an opposite sex partner. Conversely, when men enjoy a favorable ratio of potential mates — that is, when there are more marriageable females than males in the local marriage market — men will be *less* likely to marry. Instead, it is argued, when there is an abundant supply of women, men utilize the increased number of female alternatives to avert or delay marriage (Fossett & Kiecolt 1990, 1993; Guttentag & Secord 1983). The relative surfeit of women available to men makes it unnecessary for men to commit to a single partner.

An interesting paradox exists when attempting to assess the relative merits of these competing theories. The overwhelming majority of research done on marital transitions, and virtually all studies of marriage market effects, have examined only women's marital timing. However, theories of marital search behavior and imbalanced sex ratios predict identical behaviors for *women* under similar marriage market conditions, and thus these studies cannot adjudicate between these competing theories. Both theories predict that women encountering numerous men in the local marriage market will have high marriage rates. Empirical investigations of women's marital behavior demonstrate that female marriage rates *are* positively related to the numerical supply of potential spouses, i.e., single men (Lichter et al. 1992; McLaughlin, Lichter & Johnson 1993; South & Lloyd 1992b). But these theoretical perspectives do predict a different relationship between mate availability and men's marriage propensities. Because there have been few empirical investigations of the impact of marriage opportunities and men's transition to marriage, however, it is not certain whether a surfeit of eligible women increases men's propensity to marry, as the marital search model would predict, or decreases the probability that men will form conjugal unions, as theories of imbalanced sex ratios assume.[1] This apparent conflict between competing theories justifies a focus on the influence of marriage market characteristics on men's marital transitions (Lichter et al. 1992).

Empirical investigations of *women's* marital timing demonstrate the importance of considering the "quality" of available mates, as well as their sheer quantity (Fossett & Kiecolt 1991; Lichter et al. 1992; South & Lloyd 1992b; Wilson 1987). Of particular importance for hastening *women's* entry into marriage is the employment and educational status of potential husbands. There are also reasons to anticipate that the characteristics of potential wives in the local marriage market will affect men's marital transitions, although contradictory expectations can be derived from the literature. On the one hand, South (1991) demonstrates that recent cohorts of unmarried men express a verbal preference for employed over unemployed wives. Mare and Winship (1991) find

that African American women who have good labor market prospects, as indicated by a high level of educational attainment and high weekly earnings, are more attractive to potential husbands. Thus, greater female labor force participation and higher levels of female educational attainment may increase *men's* gains from marriage, making employed and highly educated women more attractive marital prospects. This line of argument implies that male marriage propensities will be higher in marriage markets that contain a higher proportion of women who are employed or who have relatively high levels of completed schooling.

On the other hand, research focusing on *female* marriage transitions stresses the opposite dynamic by focusing on the role of women's economic independence as a deterrent to marriage formation. Theoretically, women will be less inclined to marry if they have attractive alternatives to the traditional role of wife and mother (Goldscheider & Waite 1986; Preston & Richards 1975; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987; cf. Lichter et al. 1992). For example, women who are active in the labor force have greater financial security and therefore fewer economic incentives to marry. Additional support for this view is provided from theories of marital search behavior that suggest that favorable labor market status on the part of females should also depress male marriage rates because employment and education extend a woman's marital search process while simultaneously raising the "reservation quality" of her potential partner (Oppenheimer 1988). Presumably, the end result is that women who are employed or obtain high levels of education will be less likely to marry or will postpone their first marriage transitions.[2] If this is the case, areas with a high proportion of employed females, relative to areas with low levels of female labor force participation, should have lower rates of male marriage. Work by Fossett and Kiecolt (1993) support this position. They find an inverse relationship between black women's aggregate socioeconomic status and employment rate and the percentage of black men who are married across U.S. metropolitan areas. High levels of women's educational attainment should have a similar effect by increasing women's long-term labor market prospects, which thus reduces their anticipated gains from early marriage.

Three other characteristics of the local marriage market — the proportion of females enrolled in school full-time, average size of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments, and population size — are hypothesized to diminish the probability that a man will marry. Women who are enrolled in school are less active in the marriage market primarily because marriage tends to threaten school completion. Past research consistently demonstrates that school enrollment inhibits marriage formation among both men and women (Goldscheider & Waite 1986; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987). Second, discussions of declining marriage rates often identify the facilitating nature of welfare programs, asserting that they provide females with economic alternatives to male partnerships (Becker 1981; Murray 1984). Therefore, AFDC payments may be an important factor in establishing women's economic independence from traditional family formation. Consistent with this hypothesis is Fossett and Kiecolt's (1993) finding of an inverse effect of AFDC payments on black men's aggregate marriage prevalence across U.S. metropolitan areas. As does the proportion of women in the local marriage market who are currently

employed, who have a high level of education, or who are enrolled in school, AFDC payments serve as an explanatory variable that simultaneously reflects the probability that a male respondent will encounter an attractive and willing marriage partner and the degree to which women, in the aggregate, experience attractive alternatives to marriage. Finally, past studies suggest that urban community norms place less emphasis on traditional family values than do their rural counterparts, resulting in lower probabilities of marriage in densely populated areas (McLaughlin, Lichter & Johnson 1993; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987).

MEN'S INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS

Prior research suggests that the most important individual-level characteristics facilitating men's transition to marriage are economic status, educational attainment, family background, and value orientation. Given men's traditional role as the family's primary financial provider, past analyses emphasize men's economic circumstances — specifically their labor market participation, job stability, and earnings — as pivotal determinants of marriage (Lerman 1989; Mare & Winship 1991; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lew 1993; Wilson 1987). Economic characteristics are hypothesized to affect not only men's own current marital ambitions but also their attractiveness to potential wives (Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lew 1993; Wilson 1987). Men who establish a stable employment history and who earn high income are capable of providing and sustaining an independent household for themselves and their families. These attributes make men more attractive marriage prospects.

Other indicators of men's current and future wealth should also positively influence their marriage propensities. One signal of current financial stability is home ownership, while high levels of educational attainment may reflect future labor market potential and provide clues to long-term economic success (Oppenheimer 1988). Men who own their own homes and have high levels of educational attainment should therefore be more confident that they can provide for a family if they choose to marry. Furthermore, because of their increased socioeconomic status, these men should also find it easier to locate a willing marriage partner (Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lew 1993). School enrollment should negatively affect the probability of marriage for several reasons. Past research finds that, as with women, academic involvement inhibits marriage formation primarily because marriage tends to threaten school completion, which in turn may jeopardize a man's future career trajectory (Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lew 1993). The financial and time constraints of education probably operate to produce additional delays to marriage (Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987).

In addition to economic and educational characteristics, men's family background and value orientation also influence marital timing. Prior discussions of family formation suggest that individuals raised in disrupted family households or with single parents are more likely to delay first marriage (Avery, Goldscheider & Speare 1992), although contrary evidence can be found (Axinn & Thornton 1992; Goldscheider & Waite 1986). Finally, prior research also suggests that there are regional differences in family formation, with

southerners placing a greater emphasis on marriage and the family than do individuals residing in other regions of the country (Goldscheider & Waite 1986).

RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN MEN'S TRANSITION TO FIRST MARRIAGE

While numerous studies have explored levels of, and possible reasons for, the substantial difference in marriage rates between black and white females, the equally pronounced racial difference in men's marital timing has received comparatively little attention.[3] Explanations for the racial difference in female marriage rates have tended to emphasize the relative shortage of desirable black men to serve as husbands for black women (Lichter, LeClere & McLaughlin 1991; Lichter et al. 1992; South & Lloyd 1992b; Spanier & Glick 1980; Wilson 1987; cf. Schoen & Kluegel 1988). It seems unlikely, however, that racial differences in men's propensity to marry could be explained by racial differences in marriage market characteristics. Differences in mate availability between whites and African Americans imply that black men, relative to their white counterparts, enjoy a relative abundance of potential partners; if marital search theory is correct, this should lead to higher marriage rates for black than for white men.

It is possible, however, that racial differences in social and economic characteristics could account for some of the difference in the marriage rates of black and white men. Given the racial gap in such dimensions of socioeconomic status as income, employment, and home ownership, together with the tendency for these variables to increase men's propensity to marry, it is conceivable that some of the racial difference in men's marriage rates could be attributed to differences in these endowments. This view is consistent with Wilson's (1987; Wilson & Neckerman 1986) argument that African Americans' retreat from marriage is largely a consequence of black men's deteriorating labor market position. To examine this issue, we analyze the racial difference in men's timing of marriage both with and without controlling for an array of social and economic characteristics.

Data and Methods

The data for this study come from three sources: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the PUMS-D file of the 1980 census, and aggregate county-level data from the *U.S. County and City Data Book* (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983). The NLSY is a national probability sample of 12,686 non-institutionalized individuals (of whom 6,403 are male), 14 to 22 years old at the time of their initial interview in January 1979. Respondents have been interviewed annually since then, although, for reasons discussed below, the present analysis will be confined to the 1979 through 1984 calendar years. The NLSY has many advantages over competing data sets for investigating young men's transition to marriage. First, the retention rate of the NLSY is high, with more than 90% of respondents remaining in the sample through 1984. Second, the NLSY contains extensive and detailed information on individual marital histories, labor market experiences, and socioeconomic characteristics. Third, the

survey covers the age categories in which most first marriages take place, i.e., 18 through 27. The primary advantage to using the NLSY to examine males' marital transitions, however, is the supplementary geocode files that identify the state and county in which each respondent resides at each annual interview, thereby allowing aggregated census data to be merged with each respondent's individual record.

This analysis restricts the NLSY sample in the following ways. First, following other recent analyses of marital transitions, we exclude individuals who married before age 18 (cf. Lichter et al. 1992; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987). Marriages occurring to males below the age of 18 are quite rare and generally considered nonnormative. Moreover, data on many labor force and human capital characteristics are unavailable for males younger than age 18. Second, we focus on the marital experiences of non-Hispanic whites (hereafter referred to simply as whites) and African Americans. Hispanics display high rates of exogamy, marrying both non-Hispanic whites and African Americans at relatively high frequencies, thus making it difficult to delineate clearly their field of potential mates (Bean & Tienda 1987; Oropesa, Lichter & Anderson 1994). Third, in order to match geocode data from each annual interview, we include only respondents who are eligible for their first marriage between 1979 and 1984. Individuals who were already married before the initial 1979 interview are excluded from the analysis because we lack geocode information on the marriage market in which these marriages were initiated. Marriages that occurred after 1984 are also excluded because of the decreasing temporal accuracy of 1980 census data as measures of post-1980 marriage market conditions (Lichter et al. 1992). And fourth, because so few of the respondents in the early waves of the NLSY experience a second marriage, we focus solely on first marriage transitions. These selection criteria result in an effective sample of 3,907 young men — 2,712 non-Hispanic whites and 1,195 blacks.

DEFINING MEN'S MARRIAGE MARKETS

Most analyses exploring the effects of mate availability on family formation processes recognize that marriage markets are geographically circumscribed. Men (as well as women) search for, and select, marital partners from within local areas. Past research, however, is equivocal on what level of geography is the most appropriate, with various studies utilizing Metropolitan Statistical Areas (South & Lloyd 1992a; White 1981), urban areas (White 1979), counties (Fossett & Kiecolt 1990), and states (Schoen & Kluegel 1988; South & Lloyd 1992b). Following other recent analyses of marriage market effects (Lichter et al. 1992; McLaughlin, Lichter & Johnson 1993), we use data from the 1% PUMS-D file of the 1980 census (Tolbert & Killian 1987) to calculate mate availability measures across the 382 U.S. Labor Market Areas (LMAs). As others have noted (Lichter et al. 1992, South & Lloyd 1995), LMAs have several important advantages over rival operationalizations of marriage markets. First, LMAs are constructed around journey-to-work patterns and represent the spatial bound-aries within which daily social action occurs. This quality makes LMAs a clearly superior representation of marriage markets than larger geographical areas such as states or nations. Second, unlike counties, LMAs can intersect state bound-

aries and, unlike Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), they encompass the entire U.S. population. Moreover, the microlevel PUMS-D file provides the necessary detail with which to compute appropriate measures of the quantity and quality of spousal options.

In addition to concerns about the proper level of geography used to define the local marriage market, issues of the appropriate measurement of prospective spouses must also be addressed. Clearly, not all individuals participate in the same marriage market. Two of the primary characteristics that segment marriage markets in the U.S. are age and race. Although significant differences in spousal ages may occur, they represent only a small minority of all marriages, with the overwhelming majority of people marrying individuals who are of roughly the same age. This is particularly true among younger cohorts of men marrying for the first time (Schoen & Weinick 1993). The modal pattern is for men to marry women approximately 2 years younger than themselves. And the vast bulk of marriages involve husbands and wives of the same race. Accordingly, when calculating the number of potential wives available to each male respondent, we require that "suitable" partners be single, of roughly the same age (see below), of the same race, and part of the noninstitutionalized population. Specifically, the ratio of potential spouses in each respondent's local marriage market is calculated as

$$RPS_i = \frac{\sum_{i-5}^{i+1} F_i}{\sum_{i-3}^{i+3} M_i} * 100 \qquad (1)$$

where RPS_i is the race-specific ratio of potential spouses for each male respondent age i, F_i is the number of unmarried females age i available to each respondent in his local marriage market, and M_i is the number of unmarried males age i in the respondent's local marriage market with whom he must "compete" for the females in the numerator. Because this article is concerned with the marital behaviors of men, we define the number of potential mates as the number of available females divided by the number of available males, multiplied by 100. This is simply the reciprocal of the traditional sex ratio. Thus, the relevant sex ratio for each male NLSY respondent is based on 7-year age groups in which men choose potential wives who are, on average, two years younger. For example, the relevant ratio of potential spouses for a 25-year-old white respondent is the number of single white females 20 to 26 years of age divided by the number of single white males 22 to 28 years of age. These ratios are calculated separately for each NLSY respondent across each of the six years covered in the analysis and are therefore sensitive to changes in respondents' ages as well as changes in their geographical location. Because these ratios are also based on broad seven-year age intervals, they are preferable to measures based on narrower age ranges (Fossett & Kiecolt 1991). And, while undercount of African American males in the 1980 census was not trivial, Fossett and Kiecolt (1991) demonstrate that such an underreporting will not distort spatial differentials or bias the observed effects of marriage market characteristics on processes of family formation.

We make two modifications to this sex ratio. First, so as not to treat very young females as eligible for marriage, the ratios are truncated slightly at the youngest ages. Specifically, the ratios of potential spouses for men age 18 and 19, respectively, are the number of females 16 to 19 divided by the number of males 18 to 21, and the number of females 16 to 20 divided by the number of males 18 to 22. Second, values of the ratio of potential spouses below the 5th and above the 95th percentile are recoded to those points in the age-race-specific distributions in order to reduce the impact of extreme observations, which most likely occur because of sampling error in smaller LMAs. In our sample, the "average" observed black marriage market, which is simultaneously delimited by LMA and age group, contains 274 unmarried black women and 215 unmarried black men. The corresponding counts for the typical white NLSY respondent in our sample are 689 unmarried white women and 690 unmarried white men. In the present analysis, 170 LMAs contain at least one black male NLSY respondent, while 332 LMAs contain at least one white NLSY respondent.

Two features of the research design may militate against finding significant effects of contextual explanatory variables for blacks. First, the comparatively small number of LMAs containing a black male respondent means that the full range of marriage market conditions experienced by the black population will not be captured in these data. If measures of mate availability vary by the likelihood that an LMA is represented in the analysis — e.g., if LMAs with small black populations (and thus no NLSY respondent) have unusual values on the sex ratio measures — then the variation in these variables will be truncated. Second, estimates of the values of the contextual variables may be less reliable for blacks than for whites because of the smaller sample sizes used to compute the former. Therefore, the observed contextual effects on black men's marital timing should be interpreted cautiously.

As noted earlier, it seems likely that, in addition to their relative supply, the social and demographic characteristics of potential wives might also influence young men's transition to first marriage. Particularly important are the numbers of women who are employed, have high educational attainments, and are enrolled in school. Accordingly, we compute from the PUMS-D file the percentage of unmarried women in each respondent's marriage market who are currently employed, have at least some college education, and are enrolled full-time in school. That is, these three indicators of the "quality" of potential wives are the percentages of women in the numerator of each respondents' sex ratio who have these characteristics. These time-varying covariates are measured in 1980 and are attached to each record by the respondent's residence at each annual interview in the same manner as the ratio of potential mates described above.

Two additional characteristics of the local marriage market are merged with the individual NLSY records. These are the population size of the LMA in which the respondent resides and the average value of state AFDC payments. Each is allowed to vary as the respondent changes residence from year to year. LMA population size is obtained from the PUMS-D file and included in the analysis because past research suggests that individuals who reside in heavily populated areas experience lower probabilities of marriage (McLaughlin, Lichter & Johnson 1993). Average AFDC payments are obtained from the *County and*

City Data Book (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983). If AFDC payments provide women with alternatives to marriage, as the literature suggests, then men should find it harder to locate a desirable and willing marriage partner in geographical areas with higher average AFDC payments.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL COVARIATES

The remaining explanatory variables reflect economic, social, and demographic characteristics of the male respondents. Most of these variables also appear in prior analyses of men's marital timing (Goldscheider & Waite 1986; Mare & Winship 1991; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn & Lew 1993; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987). Indicators of socioeconomic status are respondent's total annual income (in thousands of dollars), number of weeks worked in the year preceding the interview, whether the respondent owns his own home, and years of completed schooling. Full-time school enrollment and whether the respondent resided with both biological parents at age 14 are both measured by dummy variables. Finally, to examine possible regional differences in the propensity to marry, we include a dummy variable for southern residence. With the exception of respondent's childhood family structure, each of these explanatory variables is treated as a time-varying covariate, measured at each annual interview.

METHODS

The analysis employs a discrete-time event history approach (Allison 1984). A discrete-time, rather than a continuous-time, model is preferred largely for the ease with which time-varying covariates can be incorporated. We constructed a person-year file containing 17,094 records, based on the marital experiences of the 3,907 men. Each observation corresponds to a calendar year. Time-varying covariates are defined at the beginning of each annual interval. Only observations at risk of experiencing a first marriage are included in the analysis. The dependent variable is a binary variable indicating whether the respondent marries during each annual interval. Logistic regression models are used to assess the impact of marriage market characteristics and other explanatory variables on the probability of men's first marriage transitions (Yamaguchi 1991).

Results

Figure 1 presents life-table estimates of the cumulative percentage of respondents marrying by a given age, separately for white and black men. As anticipated, there are substantial differences in marriage propensities between white and African American men. Roughly 73% of white males are expected to marry by age 28, compared to only 48% of black males. These estimates are generally consistent with cross-sectional census data indicating sharp racial differences in men's marital status (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1985) and are also similar to previously observed racial differences in marital timing among young cohorts of females (Lichter et al. 1992). The racial difference in the transition to first marriage is further demonstrated by Table 1, which displays the means and

standard deviations, by race, for all variables included in the event-history analysis of men's transition to first marriage. These person-year observations demonstrate that, among those in a position to marry, white men are nearly three times as likely as African American men to marry during any given year.

Table 1 also demonstrates that black and white men search for prospective partners in very different marriage markets. As indicated by the difference in the mean ratio of potential spouses, black men enjoy a marriage market that contains a larger number of potential wives. The pool of eligible black women is, on average, 30% greater than the pool of eligible black men, while the ratio for whites approximates parity. White men, however, hold a relative advantage in the economic "quality" of single women in their local marriage market, measured here as the percentage of females who are employed or who have some postsecondary schooling. More of the women in white men's than in black men's marriage pool are employed and have at least some college education.

Consistent with prior research, white men also hold a decided advantage on the indicators of socioeconomic status (Mare & Winship 1991). Not surprisingly, white males tend to have higher annual incomes, have steadier employment, have more education, and have a greater probability of owning their own homes — although this latter endowment is relatively rare for both white and black respondents, most likely reflecting the relative youth of the sample. Such characteristics should reflect favorably on both the probability that men will choose to marry and, concomitantly, that they will find a willing partner.

Table 2 presents event-history models of white men's transition to first marriage. Model 1 is typical of previous individual-level analyses of men's marital entry that do not include measures of marriage market characteristics (e.g., Goldscheider & Waite 1986; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987). Of the sociodemographic characteristics, school enrollment significantly impedes the transition to first marriage, while residence in the South enhances the likelihood of marriage. Growing up in an intact family is not significantly related to the timing of white men's first marriage. All four indicators of socioeconomic status significantly influence the annual probability of marriage: income, weeks worked, and home ownership significantly hasten the entry into marriage, while high levels of educational attainment delay it.

Model 2 in Table 2 adds the local marriage market characteristics and other contextual variables to the previous model. The addition of these variables significantly improves the model's ability to predict white men's transition to first marriage. Two of the marriage market characteristics — the ratio of potential spouses and the percentage of women who are employed — have significant effects. The relative number of eligible women in the local marriage market increases white men's annual probability of marriage. This effect is contrary to Guttentag and Secord's (1983) theory of imbalanced sex ratios but is consistent with a marital search model of mate selection. The larger the pool of eligible women, the greater the likelihood that men will marry.[4]

Despite recent evidence suggesting that men prefer wives who are active in the labor force (Mare & Winship 1991; South 1991), model 2 of Table 2 suggests that men are significantly less likely to marry when there is a relatively high percentage of single females in their local marriage market who are employed. As argued above, the financial independence that employment affords females

FIGURE 1: Life Tables Estimates of the Cumulative Percent Married by Age:
Non-Hispanic White and Black Males Ages 18-27, 1979-1984
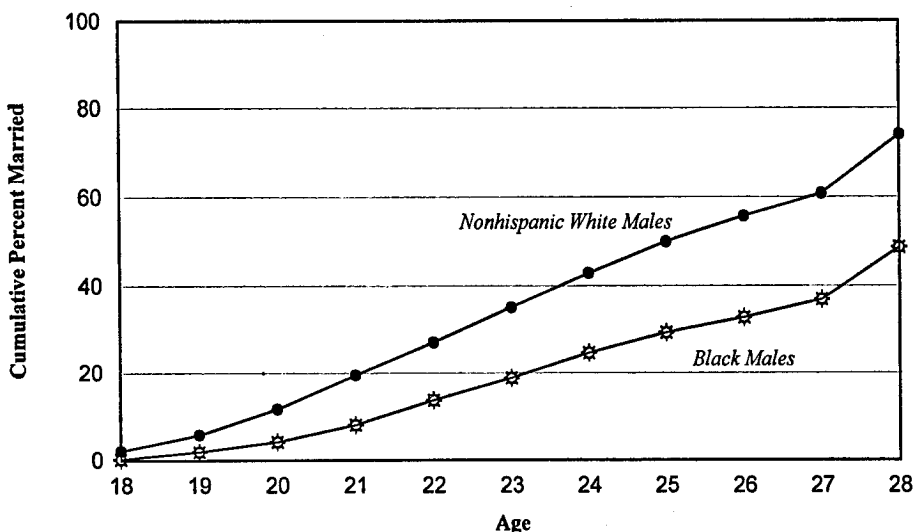
likely reduces women's incentive to marry and thus diminishes the probability
that a young man will find a mate amenable to marriage (Goldscheider & Waite
1986; Preston & Richards 1975; Teachman, Polonko & Leigh 1987). The negative
coefficient for average AFDC payments provides further support for this
"independence effect." Men's likelihood of marriage is lower in counties with
relatively generous welfare payments. However, neither the percentage of
unmarried females with high education in the local marriage market nor the
percentage enrolled in school significantly affects white men's marital timing.
Finally, the effect of the remaining contextual variable, population size, is also
significant and in the expected direction. The size of the LMA in which the
respondent resides is inversely associated with the annual probability of
marriage among white men.

Table 3 presents parallel analyses for the African American men in the
sample. Again, model 1 is typical of previous studies that focus on individual-
level determinants of the transition to marriage. As is the case for white men,
school enrollment increases, while southern residence decreases, the likelihood
of marriage. Socioeconomic characteristics appear to be important predictors of
black men's marital timing. High income and home ownership both enhance
significantly black men's probability of marriage. Unlike their white counter-
parts, however, educational attainment does not significantly affect black men's
risk of marriage.

Model 2 in Table 3 adds the local marriage market characteristics and other
contextual variables to the previous model of black men's transition to first
marriage. Marriage market characteristics fail to emerge as significant determi-

TABLE 1:   Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables Included in the Analysis of Men's Transition to First Marriage: Non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks, Ages 18-27, 1979-1984

	Whites		Blacks	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Variable				
Marriage (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.08	.27	.03	.18
Social/demographic characteristics				
Age	20.86	2.13	20.80	2.11
In school (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.35	.48	.28	.45
Intact family (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.78	.41	.53	.50
South (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.28	.45	.54	.50
Socioeconomic characteristics				
Annual income (in thousands)	6.06	6.34	4.05	5.28
Weeks worked	30.01	19.58	23.42	19.97
Home ownership				
(0 = no; 1 = yes)	.04	.19	.02	.15
Education	12.32	1.91	11.68	1.73
Local marriage market				
Ratio of potential spouses	100.74	14.38	131.10	34.62
Percentage of single females				
employed	55.67	12.70	32.57	12.68
Percentage of single females				
with post-high school				
education	36.49	15.31	26.85	11.69
Percentage of single females				
in school	60.80	16.55	55.14	17.49
Other contextual variables				
LMA population size				
(in 100,000s)	22.21	29.53	28.22	34.71
Average AFDC payments	264.85	87.84	218.81	101.14
Number of person-years	11,696		5,398	

TABLE 2: Logistic Coefficients for Regression of Men's Transition to First Marriage on Selected Independent Variables: Non-Hispanic Whites, Ages 18-27, 1979-84

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Social/demographic characteristics				
Age[a]				
19	.20	.17	.23	.18
20	.56**	.16	.61**	.19
21	.77**	.16	.85**	.21
22	.87**	.17	1.03**	.29
23	.95**	.17	1.15**	.39
24	.77**	.19	.99*	.46
25	1.00**	.21	1.23*	.50
26	.78**	.26	1.03	.56
27	.61	.64	.90	.82
In school (0 = no; 1 = yes)	-.79**	.11	-.76**	.11
Intact family (0 = no; 1 = yes)	-.10	.08	-.10	.08
South (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.38**	.07	.02	.11
Socioeconomic characteristics				
Annual income	.03**	.00	.03**	.00
Weeks worked[b]	.40*	.20	.45*	.21
Home ownership (0 = no; 1 = yes)	1.48**	.11	1.44**	.11
Education	-.08**	.02	-.07**	.02
Local marriage market				
Ratio of potential spouses[b]			.53*	.24
Percentage of single females employed[b]			-1.33*	.56
Percentage of single females with post-high school education[b]			-.20	.53
Percentage of single females in school[b]			-.49	.73
Other contextual variables				
LMA population size			-.04*	.02
Average AFDC payments[b]			-.17**	.06
-2 Log likelihood	6,018.68		5,978.88	
Change in χ^2			39.81**	
Number of person-years	11,696		11,696	

[a] The omitted category is age 18.
[b] Coefficient and standard error multiplied by 100.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

TABLE 3: Logistic Coefficients for Regression of Men's Transition to First Marriage on Selected Independent Variables: Blacks, Ages 18-27, 1979-84.

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Social/demographic characteristics				
Age[a]				
19	1.09	.56	1.13*	.57
20	1.34*	.55	1.42*	.58
21	1.46**	.55	1.55**	.60
22	1.90**	.54	2.06**	.70
23	2.02**	.55	2.23**	.84
24	1.61**	.58	1.89*	.96
25	1.74**	.60	2.06*	1.01
26	1.33	.71	1.72	1.10
27	1.83	1.19	2.20	1.50
In school (0 = no; 1 = yes)	-.56*	.25	-.54*	.25
Intact family (0 = no; 1 = yes)	-.10	.16	-.13	.16
South (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.33*	.16	-.08	.25
Socioeconomic characteristics				
Annual income	.04**	.01	.05**	.01
Weeks worked[b]	.82	.44	.82	.44
Home ownership (0 = no; 1 = yes)	1.31**	.27	1.34**	.28
Education	.04	.05	.03	.05
Local marriage market				
Ratio of potential spouses[b]			.18	.26
Percentage of single females employed[b]			-.74	.95
Percentage of single females with post-high school education[b]			1.14	1.25
Percentage of single females in school[b]			.86	1.31
Other contextual variables				
LMA population size			.02	.03
Average AFDC payments[b]			-.33*	.15
-2 Log likelihood	1,483.92		1,474.73	
Change in χ^2			9.19	
Number of person-years	5,398		5,398	

[a] The omitted category is age 18.
[b] Coefficient and standard error multiplied by 100.

* p ≤ .05   ** p ≤ .01

nants of young black men's entry into marriage. As was the case among white men, however, the coefficient for the ratio of potential spouses is positive, and the coefficient for the percentage of single females in the local marriage market who are employed is negative. And, while these coefficients are not significantly different from zero, they are also not significantly different from the analogous coefficients for white men. One other contextual variable in model 2 — average AFDC payments — exhibits significant effects. As in the effects among white males, the size of average AFDC payments decreases black men's marriage probabilities, supporting a "female independence" model. LMA population size, in contrast, does not significantly influence the likelihood that black men will marry.

The analyses presented in Table 4 assess the degree to which racial (i.e., black versus non-Hispanic white) differences in young men's marital timing can be explained by racial differences in the independent variables. These equations are based on a pooled sample of person-year observations for both black and white respondents. The first equation in Table 4 includes as explanatory variables only the dummy variables for age and race. Exponentiating the coefficient for race in this equation implies that the risk of marriage among black males is only 41% ($e^{-.90}$) of the risk for white males. This difference is quite similar to the racial difference in young *women's* marriage probabilities observed by Lichter et al. (1992). The second equation in Table 4 adds the individual-level explanatory variables to the first equation. Controlling for these variables increases slightly the racial difference in the risk of marriage such that, net of these effects, black men are 37% ($e^{-.99}$) as likely as white men to marry in a given year. The third equation incorporates all the explanatory variables as predictors and, again, the racial difference in the risk of marriage tends to increase. In the face of all controls, the net risk of marriage for blacks is only 25% ($e^{-1.37}$) of the risk for whites. As a whole, then, racial differences in the explanatory variables tend to suppress, rather than to explain, racial differences in young men's marital timing.

Of course, the explanatory variables include both factors that might explain the racial difference in marriage probabilities and also factors that might suppress this difference. Variables that act to suppress the difference are education, school enrollment, average amount of AFDC payments, and percentage of females employed. Specifically, relative to white men, black men have lower levels of education and school enrollment and fewer employed women in their marriage markets, and they tend to live in areas with lower AFDC payments. In turn, each of these variables tends to reduce the likelihood of marriage. Hence, once these variables are controlled, the (standardized) racial difference in marriage probabilities grows larger. To a lesser extent, the racial difference in mate availability also "suppresses" the racial difference in marriage; black men have greater marriage opportunities and, in the sample as a whole, these opportunities tend, albeit modestly, to increase the likelihood of marriage.

However, three variables included in the model — income, weeks worked, and home ownership — could conceivably account for some of the racial difference in marriage, given that black men have lower means than white men on these variables and that all three variables hasten entry into marriage. But

TABLE 4: Logistic Coefficients for Regression of Men's Transition to First Marriage on Selected Independent Variables: Non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks, Ages 18-27, 1979-84

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Black	-.90**	.08	-.99**	.09	-1.37**	.16
Social/demographic characteristics						
Age[a]						
19	.48**	.16	.28	.16	.32	.17
20	.89**	.15	.61**	.15	.69**	.18
21	1.14**	.15	.80**	.15	.92**	.19
22	1.33**	.15	.97**	.16	1.18**	.25
23	1.49**	.15	1.06**	.16	1.34**	.34
24	1.39**	.16	.82**	.18	1.14**	.40
25	1.61**	.17	1.03**	.19	1.38**	.43
26	1.49**	.22	.77**	.24	1.16*	.48
27	1.25*	.54	.74	.56	1.17	.71
In school (0 = no; 1 = yes)			-.76**	.10	-.74**	.10
Intact family (0 = no; 1 = yes)			-.10	.07	-.11	.07
South (0 = no; 1 = yes)			.37**	.07	.01	.10
Socioeconomic characteristics						
Annual income			.03**	.00	.03**	.00
Weeks worked[b]			.50**	.18	.53**	.19
Home ownership (0 = no; 1 = yes)			1.46**	.10	1.42**	.10
Education			-.07**	.02	-.06**	.02
Local marriage market						
Ratio of potential spouses[b]					.32	.16
Percentage of single females employed[b]					-1.24**	.47
Percentage of single females with post-high school education[b]					-.16	.48
Percentage of single females in school[b]					-.14	.63
Other contextual variables						
LMA population size					-.03*	.01
Average AFDC payments[b]					-.18**	.06
-2 Log likelihood	995.84		7,526.77		7,485.41	
Change in χ^2			469.08**		41.36**	
Number of person-years	17,094		17,094		17,094	

[a] The omitted category is age 18.
[b] Coefficient and standard error multiplied by 100.

* p ≤ .05   ** p ≤ .01

racial differences in these three variables do little to explain the racial difference in marital entry. Adding only these three variables to the first equation of Table 4 reduces the coefficient for race from -.90 to -.76 (equation not shown), the latter figure implying that, even net of racial differences in income, weeks worked, and home ownership, black men experience a risk of marriage less than half that of whites (.47 = $e^{-.76}$). In short, it appears that very little of the racial difference in the propensity to marry can be attributed to racial differences in demographic, socioeconomic, or marriage market characteristics.

Conclusion

Patterns of U.S. family formation are changing as many individuals delay their first marriage or remain permanently single. Most theoretical and empirical investigations of marriage, however, emphasize only factors that affect women's decision to form conjugal unions. Consequently, the determinants of men's marital timing have received little attention. This neglect of factors influencing men's entry into marriage is especially problematic given evidence that young men express a greater reluctance to marry than do young women (South 1991). This analysis begins to bridge this gap in the literature by investigating the social context in which men make marital decisions. The primary focus has been on both the quantity and quality of the pool of eligible women in a man's local marriage market as determinants of men's transition to marriage. The results suggest that, at least for non-Hispanic white males, the probability of marriage increases as the number of single females increases. Such findings support a marital search model of mate selection that predicts that individuals will be more likely to marry when they encounter relatively numerous spousal options. A surplus in the quantity of females facilitates men's marital transitions by enhancing their assortative mating process. No support was found for theories of imbalanced sex ratios (e.g., Fossett & Kiecolt 1993; Guttentag & Secord 1983) that argue for the opposite dynamic, namely, that a surfeit of eligible women increases men's desire to avert marriage, thereby delaying such transitions.

The results also suggest that women's economic independence may serve as a deterrent to men's marriage formation. In general, marriage markets that are characterized by a high percentage of women who are employed and markets that have high average AFDC payments significantly decrease men's annual probability of marriage. Both these variables may represent factors that enable women to establish their economic independence from men and provide them with alternatives to the traditional roles of wife and mother. Within such marriage markets men may find it increasingly difficult to find a partner amenable to marriage. Women's labor market prospects may, however, have two offsetting effects. They may increase a woman's attractiveness as a potential wife (South 1991), while simultaneously reducing her economic incentives to marry. If these conflicting effects exist, it appears that the latter outweighs the former within the non-Hispanic white population. These effects may, however, counteract each other within the black population, thus leading to nonsignificant effects of female employment on the probability that black men will marry (Mare & Winship 1991). Further support for a female independence effect is

provided by the negative effect of AFDC payments on marriage probabilities. Both white and black men are less likely to marry in marriage markets that are characterized by high average AFDC payments.

This study also reveals significant effects of men's own economic and demographic characteristics on the timing of marriage. In general, economic resources such as income, employment stability, and home ownership accelerate the transition to first marriage, while school enrollment and high levels of educational attainment delay marital entry. The impact of men's economic resources suggests a partial reinterpretation of studies demonstrating a positive effect of the supply of eligible men in the local marriage market with desirable economic attributes on *women's* marital timing (Fossett & Kiecolt 1993; Lichter, LeClere & McLaughlin 1991; Lichter et al. 1992; South & Lloyd 1992b; Wilson 1987). These studies assume, either implicitly or explicitly, that the areal supply of men with valued economic resources increases women's propensity to marry because women prefer these characteristics in a husband, an assumption buttressed by survey data on women's mate selection preferences (South 1991). But this effect may also occur because economic resources increase *men's* propensity to marry, and thus the probability that a young woman will find in the local marriage market a man amenable to marriage. That is, in local marriage markets that contain a relatively high percentage of economically advantaged men, the marital preferences of both sexes reinforce each other, thereby increasing women's (and men's) marriage rates. This is in contrast to the situation described above, in which men's preference to marry employed women may be overridden by employed women's desire to delay marriage.

Finally, although several of the explanatory variables considered here exhibit significant effects on the timing of young men's transition to first marriage, very little of the pronounced racial difference in men's marriage propensities can be attributed to racial differences in socioeconomic or marriage market characteristics. In fact, standardizing for *all* the characteristics considered here increases, rather than diminishes, the racial difference in young men's likelihood of marriage. As with racial differences in female marriage rates (Bennett, Bloom & Craig 1989) and other dimensions of family structure (Morgan et al. 1993; Ruggles 1994), the racial difference in men's marriage propensities admits no simple explanation. While racial differences in economic factors account for some of the current difference and recent divergence (Mare & Winship 1991) in black and white men's marriage rates, they still leave most of the difference unexplained. Consequently, recent explanations have attempted to situate these broad racial differences within the unique culture and history of African Americans. Cherlin (1992), for example, suggests that blacks responded to a society-wide weakening of the institution of marriage and shifts in labor demand by drawing on the extended kinship networks that have historically been a significant component of the African American cultural repertoire. The reliance on extended kin provided resources that allowed blacks, more than whites, to delay or avert marriage in the face of societal changes inimical to the formation of nuclear families. However, this cultural explanation seems most relevant to explaining the retreat from marriage among black women; it is less clear how the availability of extended kinship ties would affect black men's marital propensities.

An alternative, but not incompatible, cultural explanation for racial differences in marriage emphasizes black men's attachment to peer groups whose values depreciate marriage. According to Anderson (1990), industrial restructuring has sharply curtailed the financial prospects and, consequently, marital prospects for inner-city black men. In turn, these limited marital prospects generate subcultural values that reject middle-class norms of marriage. While these values are initially developed and promulgated among lower-income groups, it seems reasonable to suggest that the strong attachment to peer groups among black men in general may transmit these values to black men having greater resources for marriage. Moreover, black men's low marriage rates, coupled with the tendency for friendship patterns to be homogamous with respect to marital status, imply that marriage will deteriorate peer group ties more among black than among white men. In short, we suggest that deteriorating economic prospects generate a rejection of marriage and that, because of strong peer group ties, these values diffuse throughout the population of young black men, even to those with sufficient resources for marriage. In contrast, peer group values of white men appear to be less averse to marriage (South 1993). Thus, among young men with similar resources for marriage, black men will be less motivated than white men to marry, as our results imply. If this explanation is correct, then studies of the impact of peer group attachment and the marital attitudes of significant others may prove useful in explaining the racial difference in the timing of young men's transition to marriage. In any event, it seems likely that a comprehensive explanation for the racial difference in young men's marital timing must look beyond demographic and economic differences to encompass social-psychological and cultural differences in how black and white men view the institution of marriage.

Notes

1. In one of the few investigations of this issue, Fossett and Kiecolt examine the effects of mate availability on marriage prevalence among African American men across nonmetropolitan Louisiana parishes (Fossett & Kiecolt 1990) and U.S. metropolitan areas (Fossett & Kiecolt 1993). In the former study, under the assumption of a linear relationship, they find positive associations between the sex ratio (men per 100 women) and the percentage of black men who are currently married, a finding consistent with Guttentag and Secord's (1983) theory of imbalanced sex ratios. Across metropolitan areas, however, they find that the sex ratio is inversely associated with black men's marriage prevalence, a finding more consistent with marital search theory. An important finding in both studies is the suggestive evidence that the association between mate availability and men's marriage prevalence is curvilinear, with the highest prevalence occurring where the numbers of men and women approach parity, and lower prevalences occurring in marriage markets where one sex outnumbers the other. Neither study, however, examines the effects of mate availability on the marital behavior of white men.

2. Prior studies have generated somewhat equivocal findings on the impact of female employment and education on women's marriage. Aggregate studies, using data on U.S. metropolitan areas or marriage markets, generally report *inverse* effects of women's labor force participation rate and mean years of school completed on the female marriage rate (Fossett & Kiecolt 1993; Freiden 1974; Lichter, LeClere & McLaughlin 1991; Preston & Richards 1975), while individual-level studies tend to find modest but *positive* effects of women's employment and educational attainment on their likelihood of marriage (Goldscheider & Waite 1986; Lichter et al. 1992; Waite & Spitze 1981). Whatever the reason for this incongruity, the aggregate analyses appear to be more relevant for the present analysis, and our hypothesis of inverse

effects of women's levels of employment and education on men's marital timing is consistent with this research.

3. The racial difference in marriage rates does not appear to be a consequence of higher nonmarital cohabitation rates among blacks than among whites. In fact, net of other factors, the likelihood of cohabitation is lower among African Americans (Bumpass & Sweet 1989).

4. Some interpretations of the sex ratio thesis imply a curvilinear relationship between the supply of potential wives and men's propensity to marry, with both a deficit and a surplus of mates inhibiting men's desire to marry and men's marital propensity peaking when the sex ratio approaches parity (Fossett & Kiecolt 1993). In additional analyses, we tested for this hypothesized nonlinearity with a polynomial response function, including as independent variables (in the equations in Tables 2 and 3) both the ratio of potential spouses in its original metric and its square. The coefficient for the square of the sex ratio was consistently nonsignificant, providing no support for the hypothesized curvilinear relationship.

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