Published in final edited form as:

Soc Sci Q. 2012 June 1; 93(2): 506–520. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2012.00853.x.

Relationship Characteristics and the Relationship Context of Nonmarital First Births Among Young Adult Women

Jennifer Manlove, Elizabeth Wildsmith, Kate Welti, Mindy E. Scott, and Erum Ikramullah
Child Trends

Abstract

Objectives—The objectives of this study were to examine whether and how characteristics of the relationship dyad are linked to nonmarital childbearing among young adult women, additionally distinguishing between cohabiting and nonunion births.

Methods—We used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 Cohort and discrete-time event history methods to examine these objectives.

Results—Our analyses found that similarities and differences between women and their most recent sexual partner in educational attainment, disengagement from work or school, race/ethnicity, and age were linked to the risk and context of nonmarital childbearing. For example, partner disengagement (from school and work) was associated with increased odds of a nonmarital birth regardless of whether the woman herself was disengaged. Additionally, having a partner of a different race/ethnicity was associated with nonmarital childbearing for whites, but not for blacks and Hispanics.

Conclusions—We conclude that relationship characteristics are an important dimension of the lives of young adults that influence their odds of having a birth outside of marriage.

Rates of nonmarital childbearing in the U.S. are high, particularly among teen and young adults. In 2009, 87 percent of births to teens and 62 percent of births to young adults aged 20 to 24 occurred to unmarried women (Martin et al., 2011). Concern about nonmarital childbearing, in both the public and policy arenas, also remains high. This is because the costs of nonmarital childbearing for women, their children, and society are generally believed to be substantial (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Mincy, & Donahue, 2010). Additionally, nonmarital childbearing has become increasingly concentrated among the disadvantaged and may help to exacerbate race/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities among future generations (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Mincy, & Donahue, 2010).

While some unmarried mothers are truly single, cohabitation is increasingly a context for childbearing; recent data suggest that half of nonmarital births occur within cohabiting unions (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008; Manlove, Ryan, Wildsmith, & Franzetta, 2010). Although children born to cohabiting couples have the advantages associated with two residential parents, they are also more likely than children born to married parents to be poor and to see their parents' union end (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). Identifying factors associated with the relationship status of unmarried parents is central to understanding the context into which an increasing proportion of children are born.

A large number of economic, demographic, and cultural explanations have been linked to the ongoing decoupling of marriage and childbearing, particularly among the disadvantaged (Ellwood & Jencks, 2004; Smock & Greenland, 2010). One domain that remains much less examined, however, is relationship context. Limited research has examined how characteristics of romantic or sexual relationships are linked to the transition to nonmarital childbearing (Manlove, Ryan, Wildsmith, & Franzetta, 2010; Zavodny, 2001). This is an important oversight because the relationship dyad is one of the most proximate, if not the most proximate, social contexts in which a birth takes place. Additionally, qualitative research on unmarried couples and vulnerable groups of women often identifies relationship-level characteristics—the financial stability or economic uncertainty of the couple, relationship quality, and fear of relationship instability or divorce—as barriers to marriage, although not to childbearing (Burton & Tucker, 2009; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005; Smock & Greenland, 2010).

To address this gap, data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 Cohort (NLSY97) are used to examine the association between characteristics of young women's sexual relationships and the transition to a nonmarital first birth, additionally distinguishing cohabiting births from births outside a union. Specifically, we measure similarities and differences between young women and their most recent partners in socioeconomic resources (level of education and engagement in school and/or work), age, and race/ethnicity—characteristics linked to other important dimensions of relationships, such as relationship quality, the availability of parental support, shared values, and stability (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008).

Relationship Characteristics

Socioeconomic resources

Research has firmly linked increased economic resources to a lower individual risk of nonmarital childbearing, particularly outside of a cohabiting union, for women and for men (Ellwood & Jencks, 2004; Kirby, Lepore, & Ryan, 2005; Smock & Greenland, 2010). At the same time, a growing body of research finds that women, particularly disadvantaged women, identify economic instability as a primary barrier to marriage with their (often cohabiting) partners, even if they already have children or plan to have children (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005; Smock & Greenland, 2010). This suggests that it is the resources of the couple, and not just of each individual, that may be central to decisions about the timing and context of births. Yet, little quantitative research has explored this.

Although some research has linked socioeconomic characteristics of male and female partners, particularly educational attainment, to the relationship status of unmarried parents (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002) and to relationship status at birth among all women, including married women (Manlove, Ryan, Wildsmith, & Franzetta, 2010), we are aware of no research linking the educational attainment and employment status of both males and females to the risk and context of a nonmarital birth. Human capital theories suggest that increased resources allow youth to follow more normative pathways to adulthood—i.e., finishing school and finding employment that allows for economic stability prior to marriage and childbearing—and may increase the social, psychological, and economic costs of having a nonmarital birth (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). So we expect that increased resources among women and their partners will lower the risk of a nonmarital birth, particularly one that occurs outside of a cohabiting union. However, we expect that the *combination* of male and female characteristics will matter as well. For example, women with few resources coupled with partners who also have few resources may be at an especially high risk of a

nonmarital birth, particularly one that occurs outside cohabitation, compared to women in relationships where at least one partner has access to resources.

Age heterogeneity

After a certain age, the risk of a nonmarital birth generally declines for men and women (Manlove, Ryan, Wildsmith, & Franzetta, 2010; Upchurch, Lillard, & Panis, 2002), in part because older individuals are more likely to be married and to have more resources than younger individuals. The *age difference* between partners, however, provides additional information about the context in which relationship and fertility decisions are made. For example, women (particularly teenage women) in relationships with a much older partner are more likely to be in coercive relationships with unequal power dynamics (Darroch, Landry, & Oslak, 1999). Large age differences, in turn, have been linked to lower levels of abortion (Darroch, Landry, & Oslak, 1999) and increased nonmarital fertility among teenaged women (Manlove, Terry-Humen, & Ikramullah, 2006). We expect to see similar patterns among women in their early twenties. However, given the potentially countervailing effects of men's age (older age may reflect more resources, but may also be characteristic of a more controlling relationship), it is unclear how age differences will be associated with the relationship status of an unmarried birth.

Race/ethnic heterogeneity

Race/ethnicity is strongly linked to nonmarital childbearing; nearly three-quarters of births to black women and half of births to Hispanic women occur outside of marriage compared with 29 percent among white women (Martin et al., 2011). These patterns have been attributed, in part, to race/ethnic differences across a variety of social, cultural, and economic factors (Smock & Greenland, 2010). Thus, we expect that the risk of a nonmarital birth among young adult women will vary by their race/ethnicity.

However, we also hypothesize that the race/ethnicity of both partners will be associated with nonmarital fertility. Race/ethnicity is the dominant socio-demographic characteristic along which individuals sort into relationships, with racial and ethnic homogamy increasing from dating to cohabiting to married relationships (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). This suggests that homogamy is associated with union formation, likely because inter-racial and inter-ethnic couples face greater social and psychological barriers to marriage than other relationship types (Joyner and Kao, 2005). Consistent with this, prior research has found that inter-ethnic and inter-racial unions (both cohabiting and married unions) have lower levels of relationship quality than do homogamous unions—in part, due to lower levels of parental support and fewer shared values (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). Additionally, prior research has linked racial/ethnic homogamy in the relationships of pregnant teenage women to an increased likelihood of a marital birth rather than a nonmarital birth (Zavodny, 2001). Thus, we expect that race/ethnic heterogamy between partners will be associated with an increased risk of a nonmarital birth, particularly one occurring outside of a cohabiting union. Because the social distance between each race/ethnic group combination varies, we also expect that the specific race/ethnic pairing will be associated with nonmarital childbearing. In related research, Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan (2002) found that, among unmarried mothers, partnering with a father of a different race/ethnicity was associated with reduced odds of cohabiting at a child's birth for whites, but with greater odds of cohabitation for black women. Additionally, using the same data, Goldstein and Harknett (2006) found that white and Hispanic parents were less likely to marry after a birth if one partner was black, while Hispanic-Hispanic couples (married, cohabiting, and dating) were less likely than couples in which only one partner was Hispanic to split up.

Data

We used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 Cohort (NLSY97), sponsored and directed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008), to model the transition to a nonmarital birth. The NLSY97 is a nationally representative sample of 8,984 youth aged 12–16 at the baseline interview in 1997. Since then, they have been interviewed annually. At each wave of the survey, information on the respondents' sexual experiences, family background, and demographic characteristics is collected, as is information on respondents' most recent sexual, dating, and/or cohabiting partners. Because the survey did not begin collecting information on partner characteristics until Round 4 (2000), we only included data from Rounds 4–9, which were collected between 2000 (when respondents were ages 15–21) and 2005 (when respondents were ages 20–26).

Sample

The analytic sample was restricted to 3,747 female respondents who had ever had sexual intercourse by Round 8, and thus were at risk of a nonmarital birth by Round 9. For the analyses, we constructed a person-year file consisting of a separate observation for each year in which a respondent was at risk of having a nonmarital first birth. Respondents began contributing to the analysis file at the round in which they first had sex (or Round 4 if the respondent had sex prior to Round 4) and stopped contributing when they had a birth, were married, or reached Round 9 without either event occurring. This sample provided 9,040 person-years of information.¹ We then removed 312 person-years in which all partner characteristics were missing for two or more rounds in a row.² We also removed 71 person-years with missing data on the dependent variable, 76 person-years belonging to respondents who were not white, black, or Hispanic, and 248 person-years in which respondents were under the age of 17.³ Our final sample consisted of 8,333 person-years contributed by 2,684 respondents.

Measures

Dependent variables

We created two dependent variables. First, for each person-year included in the sample, a dichotomous variable indicated whether the respondent experienced a nonmarital conception (resulting in a birth) in that year.⁴ For ease, we refer to these as nonmarital births throughout the rest of the paper. Second, a three-level variable indicated whether the birth (resulting from the nonmarital conception) occurred in a cohabiting union or outside a union, with the third category being no nonmarital birth. We focus exclusively on *first* nonmarital births because the relationship context of a first birth influences subsequent marriage and childbearing (Upchurch, Lillard, & Panis, 2002).

¹Because respondents could participate in more than one sexual relationship during the time period of the study, we transformed the sample into person years (13,750) before removing years in which they were married (972) or had a birth (3,738).

²Additionally, about six percent of the remaining sample was missing on all partner characteristics in the round of interest. For those person-years, partner-related variables are imputed with individual-level data from the previous round. We include a flag to indicate that imputation was done.

³Excluded person-years were slightly more disadvantaged than full sample (less likely to have lived with 2 biological/adoptive parents and less likely to have a parent who completed some college or more). Additionally, they had a lower age at first sex and slightly more sex partners in the past year.

⁴We subtracted nine months from the date of birth to approximate the date of conception. Identifying births at conception ensured that our measures of relationship context were measured prior to the outcome.

Independent variables

All independent variables were measured one round prior to the round in which conception was measured. For each person year, we measure respondent and most recent sexual partner characteristics at the beginning of the year and a nonmarital birth at the end of the year.

Relationship characteristics—We included two combined measures of the respondent's and most recent sexual partner's socioeconomic status—disengagement (neither enrolled in school nor employed) and educational attainment (Hipp, 2009). The combined measure of disengagement from work and school had four categories: neither the respondent nor most recent sexual partner was disengaged, the partner only was disengaged, the respondent only was disengaged, and both were disengaged. The combined measure of educational attainment had three categories: neither the respondent nor her most recent sexual partner finished some college, only one partner had finished some college,⁵ and both had finished some college or more.⁶ A three-category measure identified age differences: women who were the same age as their partner (or the partner was younger), women whose partner was 1–2 years older, and women whose partner was three or more years older. A six-category variable identified white-white, black-black, Hispanic-Hispanic, white-black, white-Hispanic, and black-Hispanic couples. Finally, one last measure identified respondents who were cohabiting with their most recent sexual partner, and was included as a control. This variable was only included in models estimating any nonmarital birth, and not those that distinguished between cohabiting births and those that occurred outside of a coresidential union.

Controls—We also included an array of individual and family background measures as controls. Time-varying controls included a continuous measure of respondent's age as well as a squared term, to capture the curvilinear association between age and the risk of a nonmarital birth, and her number of sex partners in the past year. Time-invariant controls, which were drawn from the baseline survey, included whether the respondent was born in the U.S., age at first sex, family structure growing up (two biological parents or not), and parental education (had completed some college or more).

Analytic Methods

Discrete-time event history analyses using logistic regression and multinomial logistic regression were used to model the transition to a first nonmarital birth, and the relationship context of that birth, among young adult women. All analyses were weighted and adjusted for survey design (household clustering) by using survey estimation procedures in Stata 11.

Results

Although we focus our discussion on the primary variables of interest, Table 1 presents descriptive characteristics of the dependent and all independent variables used in the analyses. Time-invariant measures are reported at the respondent level, while time-varying measures are reported at age 19 (the median age in person-years in the analytic file). Overall, 14% of the young women in this sample had a nonmarital birth by Round 9; almost half of these (6% overall and 46% of nonmarital births) occurred in a cohabiting union.

⁵Exploratory analyses determined that a four-category variable—identifying *which* partner had completed some college—provided no better fit and no more information.

⁶Partner characteristics are reported at the beginning of the respondent's relationship. If the relationship began in a prior round, partner's educational attainment was scaled up to estimate educational attainment in the round of interest. Whether the partner was disengaged was based on his/ her status at the beginning of the relationship.

Based on relationship characteristics at age 19 (among those who were not censored prior to that time), over three-quarters (79%) of women and their partners were either enrolled in school or working (not disengaged). Only 3% of the young adult women and their partners were both disengaged from school and work. Roughly 11% of the women had partners who were disengaged when they were not, while 8% of women were disengaged when their partner was not. Differences between partners in educational attainment were more common. At age 19, 42 percent of women and their most recent sex partner had both completed at least some college. In one-third of the cases, one partner had completed at least some college while the other had not.

Race/ethnic homogamy was predominant in these relationships. At age 19, two-thirds (67%) of the women and their most recent sexual partner were both white, 12% were both black, and 5% were both Hispanic. In 10% of the cases, one partner was white and the other Hispanic. In 5% of the cases, one partner was white and one was black. Hispanic-black couples were the least common combination (2%). Differences across age were much more common. Roughly two-thirds (64%) of the women were in sexual relationships with older partners and 38% of the women had partners at least three years older than themselves. One in five were cohabiting with their partner at age 19.

Multivariate Results

Table 2 presents results from the multivariate analyses: the first column shows odds ratios from logistic regression models predicting whether respondents had a nonmarital birth and the remaining columns show risk ratios from multinomial regression models predicting whether a nonmarital birth occurred inside or outside of a cohabitation union.

Looking first at socioeconomic status, having a disengaged partner—a partner who was neither enrolled in school nor working—increased the odds of a nonmarital birth net of controls. This was true regardless of whether the woman herself was disengaged or not (OR = 1.38 for women's whose partner was disengaged and OR = 1.98 for women who were also disengaged). Women who were disengaged, but with partners who were engaged, had no higher risk of a nonmarital birth than women in relationships where both partners were engaged. Interestingly, results from the multinomial analyses indicate that disengagement was only significant for births that occurred outside of coresidential unions (vs. not having a birth) and not for births in cohabiting unions (vs. none).

Turning to educational attainment, not surprisingly, women in relationships in which one or both partners had completed at least some college had much lower odds of having a nonmarital birth. However, couples in which both partners had at least some college had the lowest odds of all (OR = .26). Results from the multinomial analyses find that this reduced risk was much more pronounced for births occurring in cohabiting unions (vs. no union). Among women who had a nonmarital birth, those in relationships where one or both partners had at least some college had a much lower relative risk of being in a cohabiting union than those women in relationships where neither partner had completed some college.

Notable differences in the risk, and context, of a nonmarital birth occurred across race/ethnic pairings. Any combination of partners other than white-white had higher odds of a nonmarital birth, in particular a birth outside of a cohabiting union (vs. no birth). Additionally, black-black couples were significantly more likely than white-Hispanic couples and marginally more than Hispanic-Hispanic couples to have a nonmarital birth, although they were no different from couples in which at least one partner was black (analyses not shown). Results from the multinomial analyses find that women in relationships where at least one partner is Hispanic had a higher risk than all other women of transitioning to a birth in a cohabiting union. At the same time, among women who had a

nonmarital birth, those in relationships with black-black and black-white pairings had a lower relative risk of a birth in a cohabiting union. Age differences within relationships mattered as well; having a partner at least 3 years older increased the odds of a nonmarital birth. Having an older partner (1 or more years older) increased the risk that a nonmarital birth occurred within versus outside a cohabiting birth.

Several control variables were associated with nonmarital childbearing, in the expected ways. Not surprisingly, women in cohabiting relationships had higher odds of a nonmarital birth. Age was positively associated with the risk of a nonmarital birth, although this association was weaker at older ages (negative square term). Age, however, did not distinguish between those births that occurred inside or outside of a cohabiting union. Women who were older when they first had sex had reduced odds of a nonmarital birth, particularly those that occurred outside of a coresidential union. Similarly, women with a parent who had completed some college or more had reduced odds of a nonmarital birth, particularly a birth outside a coresidential union.

Discussion

Overall, fourteen percent of our sample of young adult women had a nonmarital birth within the 5-year time period of the study and almost half of these (46%) occurred in cohabiting unions. Although an extensive body of research has examined the correlates of nonmarital childbearing, and to a lesser extent the relationship context of nonmarital births, limited research has examined the role of partner and relationship characteristics in these transitions among women, although they are central to explanations of family change over time. The central finding of this paper is that relationships provide an important context for the transition to a nonmarital birth. More specifically, the *combined* characteristics of young adult women and their most recent sexual partners--across engagement in school and work, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and age--are all linked to the risk and context of nonmarital childbearing.

Clearly the socioeconomic characteristics of women and their partners matter, although engagement in school and work and educational attainment are associated with nonmarital childbearing in somewhat different ways. Having a sexual partner who was disengaged (neither in school nor the workforce) was associated with greater odds of a nonmarital birth, especially one that occurred outside of a cohabiting union. This finding builds on prior research linking individual disengagement to nonmarital childbearing among men and women (Wildsmith & Raley, 2006; Zavodny, 1999). However, we also found that partner disengagement was associated with increased odds of a nonmarital birth, *regardless* of whether the woman herself was disengaged. The particularly significant association with births outside of marriage is consistent with interpretations that while some women do not want to reside with (or marry) partners who have high levels of economic uncertainty, they will still have children with them (Burton & Tucker, 2009; Edin & Kefalas, 2005).

Women in relationships where at least one partner had completed some college had reduced odds of nonmarital childbearing, with especially low odds when they both had completed some college. This finding highlights the potential opportunity costs associated with having a nonmarital birth at a young age for those who are pursuing higher education, or whose partners are more educated (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Smock & Greenland, 2010). At the same time, however, we found that if a woman had a nonmarital birth, higher educational attainment was linked to a reduced risk of occurring within a cohabiting union. This finding was counter to expectations, as prior research has linked increased educational attainment to an increased risk of cohabitation as well as marriage (Clarkberg, 1999). However, we are likely seeing another process at work. Prior research finds that women

with increased educational attainment are more likely to view cohabitation as a stepping-stone to marriage and less as an alternative or substitute (Smock & Greenland, 2010). Thus, women in our study (or their partners) with higher educational attainment may be especially likely to either transition to marriage (and be censored from our study) or to end a union at the time of the birth.

Partners' race/ethnicity was also associated with the transition to a nonmarital birth. Our findings add to research suggesting that the specific race/ethnic pairing of partners is important to family formation (Goldstein & Harknett, 2006). Couples in which both partners are black or Hispanic have greater odds of a nonmarital birth than white-white couples. This is consistent with overall childbearing patterns among women (Smock & Greenland, 2010) and with previous research showing that racial and ethnic minority women are less likely to think that it is important to be married before having a child (East, 1998). Having a partner of a different race/ethnicity was associated with increased odds of a nonmarital birth for whites, particularly a birth outside of a cohabiting union; perhaps because social barriers to coresidential relationships among interracial partners are large (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004; Joyner & Kao, 2005). Interestingly, however, couples in which one partner was Hispanic, and the other was either white or Hispanic, faced an increased relative risk of a cohabiting birth (compared to none), consistent with prior research suggesting that cohabiting unions may be seen as an acceptable venue in which to have children among Hispanics, in particular (Wildsmith & Raley, 2006). Conversely, nonmarital births to couples in which a black respondent was partnered with a black or white partner were more likely to occur outside vs. within a coresidential union, consistent with research finding much lower levels of marital or cohabiting births among African Americans relative to other race/ethnic groups (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008; Manlove, Ryan, Wildsmith, & Franzetta, 2010). Also, births to two black partners were more likely to occur outside a union than births to two Hispanic partners. Thus, our findings indicate that while having a partner of a different race/ethnicity influenced the likelihood and context of a nonmarital birth for whites, having a partner of a different race/ethnicity was not associated with different odds for blacks and Hispanics. This finding may be due, in part, to the smaller samples of black and Hispanic women in our study. We recognize that our findings may also obscure gender differences. For example, Goldstein and Harknett (2006) found that the father's race/ethnicity seemed to be more important than the mother's in determining the living arrangements of new parents at birth. However, our sample size was too limited to examine differences by race/ethnicity and gender combined.

Finally, a greater age difference between respondents and their most recent partner was associated with greater odds of a nonmarital birth, as hypothesized. A greater age difference was particularly associated with a birth within a cohabitating relationship. This finding is less consistent with research suggesting that women with older partners are more likely to be in coercive relationships with unequal power dynamics, and is more consistent with qualitative research finding that some women choose relationships with older partners because they perceive these relationships to be more serious and older men to be better fathers (Higginson, 1999).

There are some important limitations to be noted in these analyses. Most importantly, we cannot be certain that the most recent sexual partner described in one round is the father of the conception (resulting in a birth) in the next round, so we conducted supplementary analyses to assess how problematic this issue is. First, descriptive analyses (not shown) found that, at the round of conception, 2/3 of the women who had a nonmarital birth had only one sexual partner in the past year, making it almost certain in these cases that the partner in the previous round was the father. Of the remaining 1/3 of women with a nonmarital birth, 41% conceived within six months of the prior round, suggesting there is a

good chance that the partner in the prior round was the father. As a robustness check, we ran the same multivariate analyses presented above, but measuring father characteristics in the *same* round as conception (results not shown), with remarkably similar findings, making us feel confident in our overall associations. Ultimately, this limitation is counter-balanced by the longitudinal data that allow us to examine how relationship factors are associated with a subsequent transition to a nonmarital birth, and by the fact that we can include more partner variables—which are strongly linked to the risk of a nonmarital birth—than are available in other data sets.

Other limitations exist as well. For example, we would expect different predictors of intended versus unintended nonmarital births, but the NLSY97 does not collect this information. Additionally, our findings are limited to first nonmarital births that occur in the late teen and young adult years, which show some of the highest rates of nonmarital childbearing. However, findings may not reflect the influence of relationship influences on nonmarital births among young teens, older individuals, or women with previous marriages and births.

Despite these limitations, this study is unique in its ability to link the combined characteristics of women and their partners to nonmarital childbearing. These findings suggest that models of the transition to nonmarital fertility that focus only on individual, family or community characteristics may be missing a critical dimension of the lives of teens and young adults that influence their odds of having a birth outside of marriage, and the context of that birth.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge research support from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development through Grant No. R01 HD044761-03 and Grant No. P01 HD045610-01A1

References

- Blackwell D, Lichter DT. Homogamy among dating, cohabiting, and married couples. *The Sociological Quarterly*. 2004; 45(4):719–737.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth 1997 Cohort. 2008 from <http://www.nlsinfo.org/nlsy97/nlsdocs/nlsy97/maintoc.html>.
- Burton LM, Tucker MB. Romantic unions in an era of uncertainty: A post-Moynihan perspective on African American women and marriage. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 2009; 621:132–148.
- Clarkberg M. The price of partnering: The role of economic well-being in young adults' first union experiences. *Social Forces*. 1999; 77(3):945–964.
- Darroch JE, Landry DJ, Oslak S. Age differences between sexual partners in the United States. *Family Planning Perspectives*. 1999; 31(4):160–167. [PubMed: 10435214]
- East PL. Racial and ethnic differences in girls' sexual, marital, and birth expectations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1998; 60(1):150–162.
- Edin, K.; Kefalas, M. *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; 2005.
- Ellwood, D.; Jencks, C. The uneven spread of single parent families: What do we know? Where do we look for answers?. In: Neckerman, K., editor. *Social Inequality*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; 2004. p. 3-77.
- Gibson-Davis CM, Edin K, McLanahan S. High hopes but even higher expectations: The retreat from marriage among low-income couples. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2005; 67(5):1301–1312.
- Goldstein JR, Harknett K. Parenting across racial and class lines: Assortative mating patterns of new parents who are married, cohabiting, dating or no longer romantically involved. *Social Forces*. 2006; 85(1):121–143.

- Higginson JG. Defining, excusing, and justifying deviance: Teen mothers' accounts for statutory rape. *Symbolic Interaction*. 1999; 22(1):25–44.
- Hipp J. Specifying the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction: A robust assessment in metropolitan areas. *Social Forces*. 2009; 88(1):395–424.
- Hohmann-Marriott B, Amato P. Relationship quality in interethnic marriages and cohabitations. *Social Forces*. 2008; 87(2):825–855.
- Joyner K, Kao G. Interracial relationships and the transition to adulthood. *American Sociological Review*. 2005; 70(4):563–582.
- Kennedy S, Bumpass L. Cohabitation and children's living arrangements: New estimates from the United States. *Demographic Research*. 2008; 19(47):1663–1692. [PubMed: 19119426]
- Kirby, D.; Lepore, G.; Ryan, J. Sexual risk and protective factors: Factors affecting teen sexual behavior, pregnancy, childbearing, and sexually transmitted disease. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy; 2005.
- Manlove J, Ryan S, Wildsmith E, Franzetta K. The relationship context of nonmarital childbearing in the U.S. *Demographic Research*. 2010; 23(22):615–654.
- Manlove J, Terry-Humen E, Ikramullah E. Young teens and older sexual partners: Correlates and consequences for males and females. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 2006; 38(4):197–207. [PubMed: 17162312]
- Martin, JA.; Hamilton, BE.; Ventura, SJ.; Osterman, MJK.; Kirmeyer, S.; Mathews, TJ., et al. National Vital Statistics Reports. Vol. 60. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2011. Births: Final data for 2009.
- McLanahan S, Garfinkel I, Mincy R, Donahue E. Introducing the Issue. *The Future of Children*. 2010; 20(2):3–16.
- McLanahan S, Percheski C. Family structure and the reproduction of inequalities. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 2008; 34:257–276.
- Sigle-Rushton W, McLanahan S. The living arrangements of new unmarried mothers. *Demography*. 2002; 39(3):415–433. [PubMed: 12205750]
- Smock PJ, Greenland FR. Diversity in pathways to parenthood: Patterns, implications, and emerging research directions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2010; 72(3):576–593.
- Upchurch DM, Lillard LA, Panis CWS. Nonmarital childbearing: Influences of education, marriage, and fertility. *Demography*. 2002; 39(2):311–329. [PubMed: 12048954]
- Wildsmith E, Raley RK. Race-ethnic differences in nonmarital fertility: A focus on Mexican American women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2006; 68:491–508.
- Zavadny M. Do men's characteristics affect whether a nonmarital pregnancy results in marriage? *Journal of Marriage & the Family*. 1999; 61:764–773.
- Zavadny M. The effect of partners' characteristics on teenage pregnancy and its resolution. *Family Planning Perspectives*. 2001; 33(5):192–199. 205. [PubMed: 11589539]

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of full sample

Nonmarital birth distribution	
No nonmarital birth	86.0%
Birth in a cohabiting union	6.4%
Birth outside cohabiting union	7.6%
Percentage of nonmarital births in a cohabiting union	45.5%
Relationship characteristics, at age 19	
Disengagement (not in school, not working)	
Neither partner is disengaged	78.8%
Partner only is disengaged	11.2%
Respondent only is disengaged	7.6%
Both partners are disengaged	2.5%
Educational attainment	
Neither partner completed some college or more	41.9%
One partner completed some college or more	33.4%
Both partners completed some college or more	24.8%
Race/Ethnicity	
Both partners are white	66.7%
Both partners are black	11.6%
Both partners are Hispanic	5.0%
Partners are white and black	4.5%
Partners are white and Hispanic	10.3%
Partners are black and Hispanic	1.9%
Age difference	
Same age/younger (ref)	33.8%
1–2 older	28.7%
3+ older	37.5%
Cohabiting	19.9%
Individual and family background characteristics	
Foreign born	4.7%
Mean age at first sex	16.4
Mean number of sexual partners in the past year	1.9
Lived with 2 bio/adoptive parents	53.6%
Parent completed some college or more	60.7%
Respondent level N =	2,684

Note: Descriptive statistics for time-varying measures are assessed at age 19 (n=1,524). Time invariant measure, including age at first sex, foreign-born status, family structure, parental educational attainment are assessed for all respondents as is the percentage of respondents who had a nonmarital birth.

Table 2

Odds ratios and relative risk ratios from logistic and multinomial logistic regression models predicting any nonmarital first birth and marital/cohabiting status at first birth

	Any nonmarital	Cohabiting versus None	Outside a Union versus none	Cohabiting versus Outside a union
Relationship characteristics				
Disengagement (not in school, not working)				
Neither partner is disengaged (ref)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)
Partner only is disengaged	1.38 *	1.18	1.74 **	0.68
Respondent only is disengaged	1.07	1.02	1.15	0.89
Both partners are disengaged	1.98 **	1.42	2.80 ***	0.51
Educational attainment				
Neither partner completed some college or more (ref)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)
One partner completed some college or more	0.61 ***	0.38 ***	0.80	0.48 **
Both partners completed some college or more	0.26 ***	0.15 ***	0.41 ***	0.38 *
Race/Ethnicity				
Both partners are white (ref)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)
Both partners are black	2.44 ***	0.91	4.30 ***	0.21 ***
Both partners are Hispanic	2.24 ***	1.72 *	2.83 ***	0.61
Partners are white and black	1.69 *	0.70	2.71 ***	0.26 *
Partners are white and Hispanic	1.84 ***	1.64 *	1.83 *	0.90
Partners are black and Hispanic	1.98 *	1.55	2.43 *	0.64
Partner age difference				
Same age/younger (ref)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.00)
1–2 older	1.26	1.94 **	0.95	2.04 *
3+ older	1.39 *	2.31 ***	1.02	2.26 **
Cohabiting	1.32 *	--	--	--
Individual and family background characteristics				
Age	6.82 *	10.89 *	4.43	2.46
Age squared	0.95 **	0.94 *	0.96	0.98
Foreign born	0.74	0.62	0.87	0.72
Age at first sex	0.92 **	0.95	0.90 **	1.05
Number of sexual partners in the past year	1.05	1.01	1.08	0.94
Lived with 2 bio/adoptive parents	0.93	0.91	0.90	1.01
Parent completed some college or more	0.75 *	0.81	0.67 **	1.20
person years (N) =	8,333	8,333	8,333	8,333
<i>F</i>	15.00 ***	10.35 ***	10.35 ***	10.35 ***
<i>df</i>	23	44	44	44

***
p<0.001,

**
p<0.01,

*
p<0.05