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Towards Improving Surveys of Living Arrangements among Poor African Americans¹

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Introduction

This paper examines a mismatch between the surveys used to study U.S. household composition and the dynamics of living arrangements prevailing among many low-income African Americans. Recent changes in surveys by the U.S. Census Bureau described below are partially responsive to this need, but not nearly sufficient. Historically, U.S. survey instruments have been organized around measuring the number of households that include a married heterosexual couple with their children and the proportion of households or families that deviate from this common pattern. In this manner, these questionnaires have presumed that the married nuclear family is the focal point of social organization in the U.S. (Edgell & Docka, 2007; Gring-Pemble, 2003; Smith, 1993). We refer to this perspective as the *marriage paradigm*. This framework is proving increasingly insufficient for understanding prevailing household living arrangements, especially among minority populations (Seltzer et al., 2005). Marriage among African Americans, especially low-income African Americans, has been in decline for decades (Ruggles, 1994; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). Additionally, low-income African American youths are less likely to report that they expect to get married suggesting this pattern may be deeply entrenched (Crissey, 2005; Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2007).

Improving survey questions involves operationalizing our growing understanding of the prevailing paradigms for household and family formation to measure a wider range of relationship statuses. Based on a synthesis of the literature, we contend that many low-income African Americans are involved with a paradigm for family formation that needs to be understood on its own terms. Many low-income African Americans (perhaps especially those living in the inner city) engage in a series of short-lived cohabitations leading to children with a succession of partners (Furstenberg, 1995a; Lichter & Qian, 2008; Manning & Smock, 2000). Among low-income African Americans, cohabitation relationships are much less likely to result in marriage and are often short lived (Brown, 2000; Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004; Smock & Manning, 2004). This results in multiple-partner fertility in which a female has children with more than one biological father or a male has biological children by more than one female (Carlson & Furstenberg, 2006; Golub &

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Dunlap, 2010; Guzzo & Furstenberg, 2007a, 2007b; Manlove, Logan, Ikramullah, & Holcombe, 2008). Typically, the female partner retains custody of any children when a relationship ends. These single mothers are then in a strong position to obtain government subsidized housing. When a relationship ends, males often move back in with their mother or another relative, start a new relationship, or live on the street. Females tend to have more established living arrangements than their male counterparts. Hence, when a new relationship forms it is typically the male that is invited to move in with a female and her children from any prior relationships. When a new partner moves in, he becomes integrated into the household and typically serves as a social father to any children present for as long as he remains (Dunlap, Golub, & Benoit, 2010; Furstenberg, 1995b; Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002; Jayakody & Kalil, 2002; Roy & Burton, 2007).

As yet, the literature has not settled upon a term for this living arrangement paradigm. There are a variety of terms used to refer to specific aspects of this experience. Serial cohabitation emphasizes having multiple successive partners. Multiple-partner fertility emphasizes having children with more than one partner. Fragile families emphasizes that cohabiting partners of young children are unlikely to stay together. At this time, we use the term *transient domesticity* to emphasize the tenuous nature of the relationships involved.

To date, most of our work on transient domesticity has been ethnographic and focused on urban residents. In this paper, we attempt to estimate the prevalence of transient domesticity among low-income African Americans nationwide. This measurement is necessarily imperfect given the limitations of existing census instruments. However, the analysis does provide some insight into the possible prevalence of transient domesticity among low-income African Americans as well as other populations that differ by race/ethnicity, income, and urbanicity. Moreover, the results of the study indicate directions for further improvement to the census questionnaires and to our conceptualization of transient domesticity. The remainder of this section describes recent changes to the Census instruments and reviews the prior literature that offers possible explanations for transient domesticity.

Recent Changes to Census Questions

The U.S. Census Bureau maintains several survey programs to monitor the demographic composition of the U.S. including the Decennial Census, the Current Population Survey (CPS), the American Community Survey (ACS), and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). In the past, data was not explicitly collected on cohabiting partners precluding the possibility of accurately tracking cohabitation and more complex patterns such as those prevailing under transient domesticity (Baughman, Dickert-Conlin, & Houser, 2002; Casper & Cohen, 2000). This changed in 1990 when the Decennial Census added the option of specifying that a person was the unmarried partner of the *householder*, the person (or one of the persons) in whose name the home is owned or rented. The CPS added this option in 1995 and the SIPP in 1996. However, this change was still not sufficient for tracking patterns associated with transient domesticity because it only tracked partnerships in which one of the members was the householder. For example, if a young unmarried couple was living in a parent's home, the revised question would not identify the cohabiting relationship. In 1996, the SIPP added an unmarried partner category to its relationship matrix that specifies how every member of the household is related to every other member of the household. This change facilitates identification of cohabiting partnerships that do not involve a householder. Using the SIPP 2004 data, Kreider (2008) estimated that 5.5 million American adults were cohabiting.

Another issue in studying transient domesticity is nomenclature and cultural sensitivity. What should you call a cohabiting partner? Who qualifies? Does this definition match the

experiences of low-income African Americans? At this time, the most inclusive questions are included in the CPS. Beginning in 2007, the CPS started to ask whether each unmarried adult was living with a boyfriend, girlfriend or unmarried partner (Kreider, 2008). Using these data, Kreider estimated that 6.3 million Americans were cohabiting in 2007. Most of these relationships (83%) could be identified using the unmarried partner of the householder question. An additional 6% of partnerships were identified as not involving a householder. The remaining 11% were relationships in which the householder identified a household member as a boyfriend or girlfriend but not their unmarried partner.

This study uses data collected from the 2001 panel of the SIPP. This dataset was chosen because the SIPP allows the authors to prospectively track how long relationships last, which is the topic of another paper that is currently under review. Using SIPP data represents a limitation to this study in that the SIPP only detects an estimated 90% of the cohabiting couples identified by the CPS (Kreider, 2008). This limitation is revisited in the discussion. The SIPP relationship matrix allows for the identification of two phenomena that should be common when transient domesticity is widespread within a subpopulation: cohabitation and children from prior relationships (hereafter referred to as prior children). These phenomena would be less common in populations wherein the marriage paradigm is more common. Thus, the analysis provides a rough estimate of the extent that transient domesticity or some other similar paradigm could be prevailing within a population in contrast to the marriage paradigm. Our primary hypothesis is that living arrangements consistent with transient domesticity will be much more common among low-income African Americans than among other subpopulations that differ by race/ethnicity, income and perhaps urbanicity.

Potential Explanations for Transient Domesticity among Low-Income African American

The family literature provides three major explanations for transient domesticity: the African American experience, poverty, and broader changes in living arrangements. These explanations intersect and overlap at many points. Accordingly, transient domesticity may be especially pronounced and perhaps unique to the subpopulation at the intersection of these factors: low-income, urban African Americans.

Race is ultimately a proxy for the numerous other experiences associated with race. Many scholars describe how the African American family has developed a distinctive family culture focused around a strong female figure (Dodson, 1997; Hill, 2006; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004; Stevenson, 1995). There is an emotionally-charged debate as to whether this arrangement has preserved or held back the African American family. Some scholars contend that the female-headed African American family reflects the best of African tribal traditions that are often matrilineal and involve communal living arrangements (Johnson & Staples, 2005; Sudarkasa, 1997). From this perspective, this paradigm has allowed the African American family to survive in the face of hardships, including deaths during the middle passage, the selling of slaves without regard to families, and subsequent racism (Billingsley, 1992; Gutman, 1976). On the other side, scholars have argued that the female-headed household is more disorganized which compounds social and economic disadvantages with each subsequent generation (Moynihan, 1965; Patterson, 1998). This literature further contends that programs designed to reduce poverty actually hurt family solidarity (Jewell, 1988; Murray, 1994). For example, many single mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) during the 1950s and 1960s lost their benefits when a home inspection found that a man was present. In this manner, the “man-in-the-house” policy had the unintended consequence of serving as a disincentive to maintaining a relationship. This literature on perverse incentives provided the intellectual foundation for welfare reform and its emphasis on marriage promotion in the 1990s (Fagan, 2001; Katz, 1989; Lichter, Graefe, & Brown, 2003).

Another race-related explanation is an unbalanced sex ratio. The theory of marriage markets holds that the chronic shortage of African American males gives them power in relationships (Guzzo, 2006; Harknett & McLanahan, 2004; Pouget, Kershaw, Niccolai, Ickovics, & Blankenship, 2010). African American males may use this power to decide not to commit to any one women, or to cohabit instead of marry. This theory is consistent with the view that the female-headed household is problematic. Unlike the subcultural explanation, this perspective contends that the cultural behavior is rooted in structural factors.

Much literature contends that low rates of marriage for many African Americans is primarily the consequence of poverty (see Furstenberg, 2007, for an excellent review). Some studies have suggested that low-income African Americans prize the same mainstream dream of a life partner, but that this ideal remains beyond their reach (Anderson, 1999; Dunlap, Stürzenhofecker, & Johnson, 2006; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Lichter, Batson, & Brown, 2004). This perspective argues that the association between race and the decline in marriage is driven by high poverty rates among African Americans, rather than race per se. Adults with limited income living in high poverty neighborhoods face numerous and interconnected social problems: substandard housing, educational failure, inadequate medical and dental care, hunger, poor nutrition, drug abuse, crime, family stress, violence, and despair (Dunlap, Golub, & Johnson, 2006; Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Johnson, Williams, Dei, & Sanabria, 1990; Kasarda, 1992; Kozol, 1996; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987). These conditions limit males' opportunities to accumulate the human capital necessary to contribute to families (Wilson, 1996). Males' efforts are further encumbered by imprisonment and its impact on subsequent employability (Goffman, 2009; Lopoo & Western, 2005). Several studies seriously question whether government efforts to promote marriage can raise women with limited income out of poverty given the lack of prospects of the available males (Edin, 2000; Lichter, et al., 2003). Manning and Smock (1995, p. 518) further suggest that economics is the primary reason low-income African American cohabitators tend to break up when faced with a shared pregnancy: "For white cohabiting women, pregnancy serves as a strong impetus to marriage, but this is not the case for black women.... In precarious economic conditions, governmental assistance or extended-family members may be more reliable sources of social and/or economic support than a partner." Several ethnographic studies provide further support for this structural explanation by showing that cohabitation is common among persons with limited income regardless of whether they are African American, Hispanic or white (Bourgois, 1995; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Waller, 2002). Under these conditions, females have children outside of marriage because they are unwilling to forego the experiences of motherhood even if their prospects for marriage are limited (Dunlap, Sriirzenhofecker, et al., 2006; Edin & Kefalas, 2005).

Other research suggests that there have been broad changes in living arrangements among all Americans, not just low-income urban African Americans. New living arrangements are emerging as part of an evolution in technology, social institutions and the structure of society. Coontz (2005) notes that the marriage paradigm currently common in Western societies is actually a relatively recent innovation. Prior to the nineteenth century, most Americans lived in extended families on farms. The transition from a rural agricultural society to an urban industrial society in the nineteenth century was accompanied by a decline in family size and an emphasis on the nuclear family (Coale & Watkins, 1986; Davis, 1963; Newson, Postmes, Lea, & Webley, 2005). In this regard, emerging family forms have been associated with the growth of cities and urban residents have been at the vanguard of change. Beginning in the late twentieth century, the U.S. and other Western countries experienced numerous challenges to the nuclear family as a cultural institution including increases in cohabitation, children born outside of marriage, divorce, and homosexuality, as well as a decrease in overall fertility (Buzar, Ogden, & Hall, 2005; Cherlin, 2009; Herz, 2006). Some argue that these changes are part of a second demographic

transition into a post-industrial, post-materialist, postmodern society that champions individualism and feminism (Lesthaeghe, 1995; McLanahan, 2004; Steinfuhrer & Haase, 2007; Van de Kaa, 1987). This line of research suggests that transient domesticity may actually reflect larger social trends.

Method

This paper examines living arrangements using data from the 2001 SIPP. The U.S. Census Bureau fields the SIPP primarily to track how national and personal events affect household income, employment and program participation (SIPP, 2001). However, the extensive nationally-representative longitudinal data collected has a wide range of other potential uses (Weinberg, 2003). The SIPP uses a multistage stratified sampling procedure. High poverty areas are oversampled because of their importance for policy analysis. Sampling weights are developed to account for oversampling and to compensate for the undercoverage of subpopulations such as African American males, which is endemic to virtually all representative social surveys (Raley, 2002; SIPP, 2005c). As a result, the SIPP is able to provide unbiased nationally-representative statistics for its target population, all persons not living in military barracks or an institution such as prison. The 2001 panel collected information from 35,100 households about each resident age 15 and above at baseline and interviewed them every four months for the subsequent three years (SIPP, 2005c). The program interviewed respondents in person and over the telephone, on a rotating basis. 87% of eligible households participated in the baseline survey and the attrition rate was 35% across the study period.

This paper examines relationship data for the 25,672 respondents age 20-44 at the time of the second wave of data collection, between June and September of 2001 (SIPP, 2005a, 2005b). The second wave was the only time when the 2001 SIPP obtained the relationship matrix that is central to this analysis. The focus in this paper is on heterosexual relationships. The few respondents that reported they were living with a partner of the same sex were excluded from the analysis—68 females and 53 males, less than ½% of the original sample.

Dependent Variable

This paper identified aspects of each SIPP respondent's living arrangement: partnership and parenting status. Partnership status is classified as either cohabiting (C), single (S), or married. Single is used to describe a person's living arrangement as not living with either a spouse or an unmarried partner, as opposed to the legal designation that classifies someone who is cohabiting as single. The term “partnered” is used hereafter to refer to persons who are either married or cohabiting. Parenting statuses is classified as either living with prior children (PC) or with no prior children (NPC). A person living with a partner (either married or cohabiting) is designated as living with prior children if there is a child (person under age 18) who is the biological child of either the person or the partner, but not both. All single persons with any biological children present are designated as having a prior child.

The dependent variable for living arrangement is identified by a two-part acronym that identifies partnership (C, S or M) and parenting status (PC or NPC) and includes the following six possibilities: CPC-cohabiting with a prior child present; SPC-single with a prior child present or single parenting; MPC-married with a prior child present or a blended family; CNPC-cohabiting with no prior children present; SNPC-single with no prior children present; and, MNPC-married with no prior children present. The expected distribution of this living arrangements variable differs dramatically between the transient domesticity and marriage paradigms. In a population where transient domesticity prevails, cohabitation will be common as will prior children. In this manner, CPC is most characteristic of this paradigm. SPC may also likely be quite common, especially among females, to the extent

that some respondents with prior children may be surveyed at a time when they are between relationships. Under the marriage paradigm, there should be a high prevalence of MNPC. This measure of living arrangement should be viewed as an approximate estimator for the prevalence of transient domesticity for numerous reasons including the following limitations:

- i. The distribution of living arrangements will reflect the prevalence of behavioral patterns other than transient domesticity and the marriage paradigm.
- ii. The living arrangements measure is based on status at the time of the survey. The rate of CPC will be reduced to the extent that some persons that will eventually be CPC had not yet had children or not yet changed partners. The rate of MNPC will be reduced to the extent that some persons had not yet married.
- iii. Not everyone will be able to achieve their desired status. Individual circumstances (such as death of a partner) will influence living arrangements. Hence, under the marriage paradigm SPC will still occur, although it is expected to be much less prevalent than under transient domesticity.
- iv. The measure does not account for prior cohabitations that did not result in children, or children for which the respondent did not retain custody. Accordingly, evidence of transient domesticity will be more readily available for females than males.
- v. The measure does not consider the impact of adopted or foster children brought into a relationship by one partner and not the other.

Independent Variables

The independent variables include operational measures for the three potential explanations of transient domesticity: race/ethnicity, poverty, and urbanicity. Race/ethnicity is operationally defined as including five populations. The primary focus of the analysis is on non-Hispanic African Americans. Their experiences are contrasted with the mainstream population of non-Hispanic whites. Hispanic whites also comprise a substantial portion of the U.S. population and are included as another comparison group. There are relatively fewer Hispanic African Americans. However, this group is included as a separate category to identify whether their experiences are more similar to those of non-Hispanic African American or Hispanic white populations. Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders are combined into the race/ethnicity category of other. This race/ethnicity variable is limited because it presumes that all African Americans are equally affected by the cultural and historical experiences of the African American family. This variable does not consider that transient domesticity could be less common among those of mixed ancestry or those who immigrated to the U.S. more recently.

Poverty status is operationally measured by household income as a percentage of the poverty threshold. (Note: the poverty threshold varies according to the composition of a household.)

The poverty variable identifies five successive income categories. Households earning less than the poverty threshold are defined as below poverty or low-income and include those in extreme poverty (earning 0%-50% of the poverty threshold) and those earning 50%-100%. The near poverty level includes two categories: 100%-150% and 150%-200%. Households earning above 200% are designated as higher-income. This operational measure of poverty status is limited in that it does not distinguish persons who have temporarily lost better paying jobs nor account for persons with substantial assets but limited current income.

Ideally, the study would have included a measure of whether a respondent lived in an urban high-poverty area. However, the SIPP does not provide this data in their public use file. The

single measure of urbanicity indicates whether a respondent resides within an officially designated Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) or not.

Three control variables were also included in the analysis: gender, age, and region. These variables represent structural factors that will affect a person's living arrangement at the time of the survey. Unlike the independent variables above, however, these control variables do not represent potential explanations for transient domesticity. Gender is an extremely important control variable because of social and legal norms associated with child custody. An additional complication is that females' and males' characteristics are linked in the SIPP data among those persons that are partnered. Accordingly, males and females living arrangements were analyzed separately. The analysis controlled for age and region by including these factors as covariates in the analysis described below. Statistically, age and region were treated the same as the independent variables. However, for analytic purposes we distinguish age and region as control variables because the variation associated with them does not provide an explanation for transient domesticity. For age, the variation in living arrangement identifies the extent that the characteristics associated with transient domesticity and the marriage paradigm become more evident with age as individuals have extended opportunity to cohabit, marry, have children, and break up. For region, the variation in living arrangements measures how much the lifestyle choices associated with transient domesticity may be more common in one or more of the four regions identified by the U.S. Census Bureau: Northeast, Midwest, South and West.

Multivariate Analyses

The paper examines the extent that living arrangements systematically vary with race/ethnicity, poverty, urbanicity, age and region using multinomial logistic regression. Regression analysis has the desirable property of estimating the amount of variation explained by a variable net of the variation associated with any of the other variables included in the model. Multinomial logistic regression was used because the dependent variable (living arrangement) was categorical and had more than two categories precluding the use of binary logistic regression. The complex samples procedure available in SPSS was used to provide unbiased estimates and appropriate statistical tests accounting for the design effects associated with the SIPP multi-stage sampling process and its oversampling of high poverty areas (SPSS, 2007). The Wald statistic was used to test whether the variation associated with each independent variable was statistically significant. This statistic also provides a rough indication of the relative importance of each factor, net of all other variables included in the model. In this manner, the regression model was able to approximate how much the variation in living arrangements was more associated with race/ethnicity, poverty, or urbanicity controlling for age and region. The analysis also controlled for gender by the use of separate models. A stepwise procedure was used to identify any statistically significant variation in living arrangements associated with the two- and three-way interaction terms involving poverty, race and urbanicity.

Multinomial logistic regression requires the specification of a reference category for the dependent variable. For this analysis, either CPC which is characteristic of transient domesticity or MNPC which is characteristic of the marriage paradigm would be appropriate. We chose MNPC to serve as the reference category for clarity of interpretation. The regression model produced a matrix of parameter estimates (see Table 2 below) where the columns correspond to the categories of the dependent variable (except for the reference category) and the rows are the covariates included in the model (both the independent and control variables). For example, the model estimated the odds ratio indicating the extent that CPC as compared with MNPC was more common among higher-income respondents. Other parameter estimates in this same row indicate how SPC, MPC, CNPC and SNPC as compared to MNPC varied for higher-income individuals. The remaining rows indicate the

variation with other covariates. This parameterization facilitated an analysis of the subpopulations systematically associated with CPC which was the primary goal of the multivariate analysis. Specifying CPC as the reference category would have produced comparable results. The parameter estimates for the MNPC column would have compared the prevalence of this category to CPC and would have been the reciprocal of the estimates presented in Table 2.

Results

Descriptive characteristics of the sample

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics for the population studied, SIPP 2001 Wave 2 respondents age 20-44. There were slightly more female than male respondents. The unweighted sex ratio was 1.07-to-one. However, after controlling for differential response rates the ratio was about even (1.02-to-one). Females were more likely to be living in poverty or near poverty than were males; less than 70% of females' but 75% of males' household income was in the higher-income category. African Americans comprised 13% of females but only 11% of males. The weighted sex-ratio for African Americans was 1.23-to-one. This difference reflects a combination of possible factors including higher rates of early death, military service, and incarceration among African American males than females. Low-income African Americans made up a relatively small portion of all Americans (1.8%-3.4%). There were about twice (1.9-to-one) as many females as males among low-income African Americans. This heightened sex-ratio could be the result of a greater intensity of the same phenomena prevailing among all African Americans.

Most respondents lived within an MSA (78% - 79%) which underscores the limitation of this variable as not identifying who lives in higher density or inner-city areas within MSAs. Americans were relatively evenly split across five-year age intervals from 20 through 44. About a third of respondents lived in the South (35% - 36%), the rest were fairly evenly distributed across the other three regions.

Consistent with the marriage paradigm, MNPC (44% - 49%) was by far the most common living arrangement among U.S. adults age 20-44. CPC (2%) was much less common. The majority of females (55%; 48.8% + 5.9%, MPC + MNPC) and a bare majority of males (just 50% when rounded) were married. The difference by gender was most likely due to the fact that women marry at younger ages than men, on average. Just over a tenth of all marriages were blended families (MPC; 11% = 5.9% 54.7% for females, and similarly 11 % for males). The next most common partnership status overall was single (38% and 42%, SNPC + SPC, respectively). Single females and males differed substantially regarding whether they lived with prior children; 38% of single females (14.3% 37.5%, SPC [SNPC + SPC]) had children compared to 4% of their male counterparts. The least common partnership status overall was cohabiting (8% and 9%, CNPC + CPC, respectively).

Covariates of Living Arrangements

Tables 2 and 3 examine the covariates of living arrangements among U.S. females and males age 20-44, respectively. Our interest is primarily in the first two columns of each table: the likelihood of CPC and SPC contrasted with MNPC. All three main effects (poverty, race/ethnicity and urbanicity) and both control variables (age and region) proved statistically significant for each gender.

The Wald statistics indicate that poverty (36.7 for females and 11.0 for males) accounted for the greatest amount of variation in living arrangements of the three explanations for transient domesticity explored. Race/ethnicity (Wald=30.6 and 8.1) accounted for nearly as much. As hypothesized, CPC declined with income. Persons living in poverty or near poverty (up to

200% of the poverty level) were comparably likely to be CPC, controlling for other factors. Higher-income persons (having an income above 200% of the poverty level) were much less likely to be CPC (odds ratios or ORs = .36 and .29, for females and males, respectively). SPC was even less common among higher-income persons than CPC (ORs = .08 - .20).

Race/ethnicity also had a profound association with living arrangements. CPC was much more common among African Americans than among whites (ORs = .30 - .36) as was SPC (ORs = .17 - .37), even after controlling for poverty and other potential covariates. Hispanic African Americans had rates in between those for non-Hispanic African Americans and Hispanic whites. (The difference in rates for Hispanic African Americans and non-Hispanic African Americans was not statistically significant. However, the power of this comparison was clearly limited by the relatively small number of Hispanic African Americans in the sample evidenced by the relatively large parameter estimates and their lack of statistical significance.) Only one two-way interaction term proved statistically significant and then only in the analysis of males. Low-income Hispanic males were less likely to be single (SPC and SNPC ORs = 0.25 - 0.29).

Urbanicity had a statistically significant association with living arrangements, but it was not particularly strong nor did it account for variation in CPC or SPC. In contrast to the direction predicted, persons living within an MSA were less likely than their more rural counterparts to be CPC (ORs = .76), although this difference was not statistically significant. Persons living in an MSA were significantly more likely to be SNPC (ORs = 1.31 - 1.54) and less likely to be MPC (ORs = .73 - .74). These findings are consistent with the idea that an urban lifestyle is more likely to involve greater individualism and less of an emphasis on family, either through traditional marriage or cohabitation.

Age proved to be the strongest determinant of living arrangements in each model (Wald = 52.7 - 64.2). As hypothesized, CPC declined substantially with age (ORs = .30 - .37 at age 40 - 44). SPC dropped off for females after age 25 (ORs = .39-.49) but not for males. This is likely related to the much higher prevalence of SPC among females (intercept = 15.25-to-one) than among males (intercept = 0.34-to-one). There are several factors that potentially contribute to this decline for females: marriage, children aging, and a cohort effect. As females with prior children get married with age, the rate of MPC increases and conversely the rates of CPC and SPC decline. The rate of CPC also declines with age as children reach age 18 and are no longer counted in our analysis as children. Lastly, there is the possibility of a cohort effect to the extent that CPC became more common among more recent birth cohorts which would appear in this analysis as a decline with age.

Region also proved to be a significant factor. The findings are consistent with the idea that the South embraced the marriage paradigm more strongly than other regions. In both models, southerners were less likely to be CPC (ORs = .52 - .66). In general, they were more likely to be married with or without prior children. Northeasterners were the least likely to be living in blended family (MPC ORs = 1.52 - 2.07).

Living Arrangements of Low-Income African Americans

Tables 2 and 3 indicate that low-income African Americans and higher-income whites have among the highest and lowest rates of CPC respectively. Figure 1 graphically contrasts the distribution of living arrangements between these two groups. There are separate charts for female and male respondents. The figure also includes charts for low-income whites and higher-income African Americans to illustrate how the difference in living arrangements is associated with both race/ethnicity and poverty.

Overall, the distributions of living arrangements for higher-income white females and males were consistent with the marriage paradigm. The distributions for low-income African Americans were more consistent with transient domesticity, although not in the manner hypothesized as described below. The distributions for low-income whites and higher-income African Americans showed characteristics of both paradigms suggesting that both relationship paradigms may be operating. In this manner, transient domesticity (or a similar paradigm) may be rooted both in poverty and the African American experience but is not unique to low-income African Americans.

Few low-income African American females were CPC (4%), although this was the most of any of the groups of females featured in Figure 1. The most common arrangement among low-income African American females by far was SPC (60%). Among higher-income white females, MNPC (57%) was by far the most common arrangement. The rates of CPC, SPC and MNPC for low-income white and higher-income African American females were in between those of the first two categories. The rate of SPC was higher for low-income white females (31%) than for higher-income African American females (17%) suggesting that transient domesticity may be more associated with poverty than the African American experience, which is consistent with the regression findings in Table 2.

Low-income African American males had the highest rate of CPC (8%) of any group featured, twice the rate for their female counterparts. This was the result of the highly skewed sex ratio among low-income African Americans. Low-income African American males were much less likely to be single parenting than their female counterparts (SPC = 4% versus 60%) reflecting legal and social norms regarding custody. Low-income African American males (15%) were much less likely to be MNPC than higher-income white males (49%). The rates of MNPC for low-income white and higher-income African American males were about half way between the two suggesting that poverty and the African American experience contribute about equally, at least for males.

Discussion

The results of this analysis confirm that different living arrangements tend to prevail among low-income African Americans than among higher-income persons and non-African Americans. Low-income African Americans are much more likely to be SPC and much less likely to be MNPC than other subpopulations such as higher-income whites. Only 12% of low-income African American females were married. The majority (60%) were single parenting children from prior relationships. These findings are consistent with the dynamics of transient domesticity. On the other hand, we had hypothesized according to our understanding of transient domesticity that cohabitation would be commonplace within this subpopulation. It was not. Only 6% of low-income African American females reported they were cohabiting.

One possibility is that the SIPP may seriously undercount cohabitation. There are various reasons to suspect that surveys like the SIPP undercount cohabitation. The term cohabitation covers a spectrum of possible meanings. At one extreme, cohabitation can be viewed as an alternative to marriage, a long-term commitment to a partner lacking only in legal certification. The term used in the SIPP, unmarried partner, captures this meaning. However, survey results suggest that many cohabitators would not consider their co-resident boyfriend or girlfriend to be their unmarried partner (Kreider, 2008). They appear to view the term boyfriend/girlfriend as involving less commitment than unmarried partner. Accordingly, we would suggest that the SIPP modestly revise its question to ask each adult if anyone in the household is their boyfriend, girlfriend or unmarried partner. Kreider's experience with the CPS strongly suggests that this will increase the count of cohabiting couples.

Ethnographic research suggests that there are even more ambiguous versions of cohabitation that need to be considered (Dunlap, et al., 2010; Dunlap, Golub, et al., 2006; Manning & Smock, 2005; Sassier, 2004). This analysis has focused on the inner-city, however, similar patterns may be occurring elsewhere. The census residency rules identify members of a household as everyone that lives and sleeps there most of the time. Partners may slide into a cohabitation relationship over time as opposed to making a clear decision at a single point in time (Manning & Smock, 2005). This raises questions about what constitutes the status of “boyfriend/girlfriend” and what constitutes “most of the time.” The process of moving in often starts with “staying over” for a night or several nights. In time, a boyfriend/girlfriend may bring over some personal things like clothes and toiletries. Eventually, a boyfriend/girlfriend may contribute to the rent and help with household chores, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare. During this process, a boyfriend/girlfriend may still keep their own home or keep some things elsewhere such as at their mother's home. However, this process does not necessarily always follow a prescribed order. For example, a relationship may proceed no further than staying over sometimes. In this regard, the line between dating and cohabiting is fuzzy.

Indeed, transient domesticity may be potentially better understood as part of a dating paradigm rather than a form of cohabitation. In this regard, it would be useful to ask questions about respondents' current dating status such as the following: Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? How often does your boyfriend/girlfriend stay over or vice versa? Does he/she keep things at your place or vice versa? We hypothesize that a substantial portion of the “single” low-income African Americans in Figure 1 are dating and may have ambiguous cohabiting relationships. Unfortunately, identifying likely cohabitators from dating information could prove exceedingly difficult. In particular, some people may live between multiple households keeping their personal things at more than one residence. This is not uncommon in the inner-city, especially among males (Dunlap, et al., 2010). Some people may have more than one boyfriend/girlfriend at the same time or at least regularly have sex with more than one person. Again, this practice is not uncommon in the inner-city (Singer et al., 2006). From this perspective, the basic assumptions behind demographic classifications need to be examined to determine the extent that they are relevant to the range of relationship and cohabitation behaviors occurring.

Lastly, with regard to undercounting cohabitation, there is the issue of non-disclosure. Even with more culturally-sensitive questions, the rate of cohabitation might be greatly underreported due to outright distrust. Low-income females may be particularly unwilling to report a cohabiting partner—even to survey takers—for fear of official sanctions from a variety of agencies. Rent-subsidized apartments can have requirements specifying the maximum occupancy or that occupants must be related, not use illegal drugs and not have a criminal record. The presence of a long-term partner could jeopardize everyone's housing eligibility. The presence of a partner who has an income could reduce eligibility for rent subsidies and other government benefits. A male with no reported legal income could alternatively be subjected to requirements to train and look for a job. Reporting the presence of a male could also place him at risk for detection and sanctioning by the criminal justice system for minor violations such as breaking curfew or using drugs (see Goffman, 2009). Consequently, officially maintaining the ambiguity regarding whether they live with a boyfriend can be highly functional for low-income females. This unwillingness to disclose the presence of a boyfriend could also potentially account for much of the officially unbalanced sex ratios estimated using instruments like the SIPP

The analysis of covariates presented suggests that transient domesticity is rooted in both the African American experience and poverty but not urbanicity. CPC and SPC proved to be more prevalent among those living in poverty and near poverty, even after controlling for

race/ethnicity. This is consistent with prior research that suggests cohabitation and out-of-wedlock childbearing for many is a response to the structural constraints of poverty. Of note, persons living in near poverty with incomes between 100% and 200% of the poverty level were almost as likely to be CPC as their more impoverished counterparts with incomes below the poverty line. This finding is consistent with the idea that the ability and desire to maintain a marriage is more common among adults with higher income. On the other hand, it is not possible to identify the direction of causation with the data presented. The data likely also reflects the challenges to securing an income that many single parents face.

In addition to the variation associated with poverty, transient domesticity appears to be better rooted among African Americans, even higher-income African Americans, than among whites, Hispanics, and others. This suggests that transient domesticity may be more acceptable among African Americans, even those that have a higher income. This may be potentially rooted in either African traditions or the result of numerous other unique African American experiences including brutal slavery followed by long term poverty, racism, social isolation, and unbalanced sex ratios.

Interestingly, the findings do not suggest that transient domesticity is an urban phenomenon. CPC was actually slightly lower (although the difference was not statistically significant) in MSAs than in more rural areas. SPC was the same in urban and more rural areas. This result is consistent with several possible explanations. One possibility is that our entering hypothesis regarding urbanicity has been disaffirmed; that transient domesticity is distinct from broader urban trends regarding the declining significance of marriage. Alternatively, it could suggest that the broader social trends are occurring across the U.S. and are not rooted in the urban experience. Lastly, it could be an artifact of the limitation of the SIPP measure for urbanicity. Potentially, transient domesticity may be more common within cities as opposed to suburbs, both of which are part of an MSA. In this regard, it would be useful if the SIPP public-use dataset provided more detailed information regarding urbanicity and even identified whether individuals lived in a high-poverty, urban area.

Overall, this analysis pushed demography forward by trying to measure partnership and family composition factors that reflect changes in how Americans live. In this case, ethnographic research on transient domesticity inspired a focus on the significance of cohabitation, prior children, and covariates of these living arrangements. As Americans spend less of their adult lives married, policy analysts need richer and more nuanced data, classification schemes, and sociological models to track emergent living arrangements in order to develop programs that serve American's needs.

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Figure 1. Variation in Living Arrangements by Race and Income

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of SIPP-2001 Respondents Age 20-44 (weighted)

	Females	Males
Unweighted Count	13,292	12,380
<i>Poverty^a</i>		
0 - 50%	7.0%	4.6%
50-100%	6.4%	4.6%
100-150%	8.3%	7.3%
150 - 200%	8.9%	8.5%
200+%	69.4%	75.1%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
African American	13.3%	10.8%
Hispanic-AA	0.9%	1.0%
Hispanic-white	12.9%	14.5%
White	66.7%	67.7%
Other	6.3%	6.0%
<i>Urbanicity</i>		
Lives within an MSA	78.5%	78.7%
Lives outside any MSA	21.5%	21.3%
<i>Low-income African American</i>	3.4%	1.8%
<i>Age</i>		
20-24	18.5%	18.8%
25-29	17.9%	18.2%
30-34	19.8%	19.9%
35-39	21.5%	21.1%
40-44	22.3%	22.0%
<i>Region</i>		
Northeast	19.2%	18.9%
Midwest	22.9%	22.4%
South	35.1%	35.5%
West	22.8%	23.2%
<i>Living Arrangement</i>		
CPC-Cohabiting with prior children	2.3%	2.4%
SPC-Single with children	14.3%	1.8%
MPC-Married with prior children	5.9%	5.3%
CNPC-Cohabiting with no prior children	5.5%	6.1%
SNPC-Single with no children	23.2%	40.0%
MNPC-Married with no prior children	48.8%	44.4%

Study excludes respondents that reported they were in a same-sex relationship.

^aHousehold income expressed as a percentage of the poverty level.

Table 2
Multinomial Logistic Regression of Living Arrangements, 20-44 Year-Old Females

Odds Ratio by Living Arrangement

Attribute (Wald Statistic)	Cohabiting + Prior Children (CPC)	Single + Prior Children (SPC)	Married + Prior Children (MPC)	Cohabiting + No Prior Children (CNPC)	Single + No Children (SNPC)
<i>Poverty (36.7)**</i>					
0 - 50% ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
50 - 100%	1.10	.52**	1.24	.61	.52**
100 - 150%	.77	.32**	1.23	.62	.34**
150 - 200%	.77	.26**	1.37	.67	.41**
200+%	.36**	.08**	.82	.56**	.43**
<i>Race/Ethnicity (30.6)**</i>					
African American ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Hispanic-AA	.73	.61	1.00	.85	.25**
Hispanic-White	.37**	.19**	.47**	.52**	.28**
White	.36**	.17**	.58**	.62**	.38**
Other	.26**	.11**	.24**	.47**	.36**
<i>Lives in an MSA (13.2)**</i>					
	.76	1.03	.74**	.84	1.54**
<i>Age(52.7)**</i>					
20 - 24 ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
25-29	.81	.49**	1.44*	.52**	.19**
30-34	.52**	.44**	1.48*	.16**	.09**
35-39	.47**	.46**	1.57**	.13**	.08**
40-44	.30**	.39**	.84	.13**	.10**
<i>Region (4.4)**</i>					
Northeast ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Odds Ratio by Living Arrangement

Attribute (Wald Statistic)	Cohabiting + Prior Children (CPC)	Single + Prior Children (SPC)	Married + Prior Children (MPC)	Cohabiting + No Prior Children (CNPC)	Single + No Children (SNPC)
Midwest	.93	1.02	2.07**	.91	.84
South	.66*	.89	1.96**	.66**	.74**
West	1.07	1.17	1.83**	.95	.92
Intercept	0.65:1	15.25:1	0.12:1	1.54:1	12.36:1

The reference category for the dependent variable is married with no prior children (MNPC).

No two- or three-way interaction among poverty, race/ethnicity and urbanicity were statistically significant.

^a Reference Category.

** Statistically significant at the $\alpha = .01$ level.

* Statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$ level.

Table 3
Multinomial Logistic Regression of Living Arrangements, 20-44 Year-Old Males

Odds Ratio by Living Arrangement

Attribute (Wald Statistic)	Cohabiting + Prior Children (CPC)	Single + Prior Children (SPC)	Married + Prior Children (MPC)	Cohabiting + No Prior Children (CNPC)	Single + No Children (SNPC)
<i>Poverty CI 1.0</i> **					
0 - 50% ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
50-100%	.74	.93	1.32	.74	.67*
100-150%	.56	.52	1.20	.61	.31**
150-200%	.68	.72	1.33	.61	.40**
200+%	.29**	.20**	.75	.56**	.50**
<i>Race/Ethnicity (8.1)</i> **					
African American ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Hispanic-AA	.58	.85	.37	.91	.83
Hispanic-White	.38**	.26**	.43**	.48**	.53**
White	.30**	.37**	.52**	.54**	.42**
Other	.19**	.14**	.23**	.38**	.47**
<i>Lives in an MSA (8.6)</i> **					
	.76	1.01	.73**	.86	1.31**
<i>Low-income-Hispanic (6.8)</i> **b					
	.77	.25*	.70	.71	.29**
<i>Age (64.2)</i> **					
20 - 24 ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
25-29	.79	.60	1.43	.42**	.20**
30-34	.58*	.77	1.38	.19**	.09**
35-39	.51**	1.07	1.12	.16**	.07**
40-44	.37**	.89	1.01	.10**	.06**
<i>Region (3.5)</i> **					

Odds Ratio by Living Arrangement

Attribute (Wald Statistic)	Cohabiting + Prior Children (CPC)	Single + Prior Children (SPC)	Married + Prior Children (MPC)	Cohabiting + No Prior Children (CNPC)	Single + No Children (SNPC)
Northeast ^a	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Midwest	.79	.98	1.73**	.90	.85*
South	.52**	1.03	1.64**	.64**	.86*
West	.82	1.49	1.52**	1.07	.91
<i>Intercept</i>	1.24:1	0.34:1	0.18:1	2.38:1	25.28:1

The reference category for the dependent variable is married with no prior children (MNPC).

^aReference Category.

^bNo other two- or three-way interactions among poverty, race/ethnicity and urbanicity were statistically significant.

** Statistically significant at the $\alpha = .01$ level.

* Statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$ level.