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What's Behind Racial and Ethnic Fertility Differentials?

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TO DATE, SOCIAL RESEARCH has accounted for some, but not all of the differential in birth rates between various racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1969; Uhlenberg, 1973; Bean and Marcum, 1978; Johnson, 1979; Bean and Swicegood, 1985; Barringer, Gardner, and Levin, 1993; Brewster, 1994; Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994). After controlling for socioeconomic factors and individual characteristics, past studies have often attributed the residual racial effect to "culture." Yet how, or even why belonging to a particular racial or ethnic group influences fertility behavior is still unclear. Little is known about the mechanisms through which race and ethnicity influence fertility behaviors.

The experiences of Jennifer and Angela, two young African American women who live on Chicago's South Side, illustrate the challenge to social scientists in their search for explanations of fertility behavior. Both women attended an all-black high school and lived in a predominately African American community where teenage sexual activity and premarital childbearing were commonplace. Several scholars have argued that ghetto neighborhoods are characterized by loosely defined norms conducive to early entry into nonmarital sexual relations (Hogan and Kitagawa, 1985; Mayer, 1991; Anderson, 1990, 1991; Mosher and McNalley, 1991). Along with their parents, both girls are members of a conservative church that explicitly teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage. Jennifer's family joined their church when she was a small child. Growing up, she was active in church programs and attended services regularly on Sundays with her mother, father, and siblings. Angela joined the same church with her parents and siblings at age 13. She also attended services regularly on Sundays and was active in church youth activities.

Despite these similarities, Angela's and Jennifer's early life courses differed in profound ways. Jennifer graduated from high school and en-

rolled in a church-sponsored university. Although Jennifer is now 20 years old, she is neither married nor sexually active. She was applying to law school when last interviewed, and most likely will complete her formal training before marriage and family formation. By contrast, Angela was pregnant at age 15 and gave birth when she was 16. Like many teen mothers, Angela lives with her mother, who is the baby's primary caregiver. Struggling with a small child while enrolled in school, Angela hopes to graduate from high school. She still attends church regularly, but her future socioeconomic prospects are highly uncertain.

Although of the same racial group, the sexual and reproductive behavior of these young women illustrates two prototypical extremes: Jennifer's story conforms to an ideal type of the past that proscribes births prior to marriage; Angela typifies the experience of a growing number of poor, minority, inner city girls who become adolescent mothers. Because most girls do not become teenage mothers and because most girls do not remain celibate throughout adolescence (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994), neither girl's experience is normative in either a statistical or a sociological sense. However, these case studies both invoke and defy conventional explanations of differential fertility based on individual attributes, and point instead toward the influence of social forces. These examples raise many questions about variation in reproductive behavior, such as how or why membership in an ethnic or racial group should influence fertility, and whether and how social contexts (family, church, neighborhoods, peers) influence sexual behavior. To date, a great deal has been learned about the evolution of racial and ethnic differences in fertility, but much less about the forces that sustain and modify such trends in reproductive behavior over time.

In this article we briefly review and critique "first-generation" studies of racial and ethnic differences in fertility. We argue that residual approaches to variation in sexual and reproductive behavior have been a major roadblock to creative theorizing about the forces that generate fertility differentials among people of color. Subsequently, we review recent studies of family formation to identify behavioral differences that maintain, augment, or diminish fertility differentials along racial and ethnic lines. In particular, we focus on differences in the timing of first births, the marital context of childbearing, and completed family size. Second, based on insights from qualitative data drawn from the Social Opportunity Study (see Appendix), we propose several hypotheses about the social forces that undergird racial and ethnic fertility differences. Specifically, we analyze responses from unstructured interviews with parents from Chicago's inner city to illustrate differences in attitudes about nonmarital fertility; perceptions of links between parental supervision of children and the timing of births; views about the role and value of children in family life; and the meaning of marriage—

all of which provide clues about what is behind racial and ethnic differences in fertility. Building on these insights, we conclude by proposing avenues for investigating these hypotheses and suggest strategies for future empirical analysis.

First-generation perspectives of fertility differentials

Goldscheider and Uhlenberg (1969) spawned the first generation of studies that attempted to understand the social significance of racial and ethnic differences in fertility. Their approach has been elaborated and refined, but its theoretical logic remains intact (e.g., Uhlenberg, 1973; Kennedy, 1973; Bean and Marcum, 1978; Johnson, 1979; Bean and Swicegood, 1985; Fischer and Marcum, 1984; Barringer, Gardner, and Levin, 1993). First-generation studies have been driven by three hypotheses: the social characteristics hypothesis; the minority group status hypothesis; and the cultural hypothesis. The *social characteristics hypothesis* attributes differential minority fertility to group differences in women's (or their husbands') social characteristics, but especially in women's education and family income. Early proponents of this hypothesis reasoned that racial and ethnic fertility differentials merely reflect group differences in the distribution of social and economic resources correlated with reproductive decisionmaking. That differentials in fertility were not completely eliminated with statistical controls for social and economic characteristics gave rise to the *minority group status hypothesis*. In its most common formulation, it maintains that minority group membership depresses fertility because women limit family size as a way of achieving upward social mobility. Finally, the *cultural hypothesis* posits that differential fertility reflects the influence of pronatalist values and subcultures favoring large families rather than deliberate efforts to achieve upward mobility via family size limitation.

Although these three hypotheses have been counterpoised as competing explanations for observed racial and ethnic fertility differentials, most empirical analyses based on regression techniques subordinate the minority group status and cultural hypotheses as residuals of the social characteristics hypothesis. In the absence of alternative approaches to explaining racial and ethnic fertility differentials, the social characteristics framework can attribute the residual only to fertility differentials.

Studies in this genre share several weaknesses, including (1) a failure to specify theoretically the mechanisms that link groups' relative or absolute economic status to fertility via proximate fertility behaviors, such as marriage, sexual activity, and contraceptive behavior; (2) a failure to explicate the conditions under which minority group status depresses fertility as opposed to resulting in higher fertility; and (3) a failure to differenti-

ate theoretically the cultural hypothesis from the minority group status hypothesis, which makes a definitive empirical test of either virtually impossible. The minority group status hypothesis and its derivatives cannot, for example, explain the widened generational differences in fertility among women of Mexican origin (Swicegood and Morgan, 1994), or the higher rates of childbearing of Mexican immigrants subsequent to rather than before migration to the United States (US Bureau of the Census, 1991). Thus, while first-generation studies laid a solid foundation for understanding the correlates of differential fertility, they have fallen short of explaining how and why membership in a racial or ethnic group influences reproductive behavior.

In fact, few studies have attempted to discern how cultural influences produce fertility differences (for a noteworthy exception, see Hammel, 1990). Of 25 articles about differential fertility we surveyed, only ten included a proxy measure to represent cultural differences, and all but one study was confined to comparisons between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white women (see Table 1). Research about African American, Asian, and Native American fertility generally lacks indicators of cultural differences or group-specific values. The most common indicators of cultural influences are measures of English-language proficiency and duration of residence in the United States. These proxies are most relevant to groups with a history of recent immigration (i.e., Hispanics and Asians), but are less pertinent to African Americans.

Some studies included measures of the racial or ethnic composition of the community in which women reside, so as to represent normative environments that, if not directly conducive to early childbearing out of wedlock, may indirectly encourage early childbearing by not stigmatizing or negatively sanctioning such behavior (Hogan and Kitagawa, 1985; Mayer, 1991; Brewster, 1994; Anderson, 1990, 1991). The idea that a neighborhood represents a distal social milieu to which reproductive behavior responds and adapts is compelling. Yet, in the absence of concrete theorizing about the mechanisms through which neighborhood norms influence individual behavior, inclusion of contextual variables in fertility models cannot reveal what is behind racial and ethnic variation in family formation practices (Tienda, 1991).

Not surprisingly, the study of racial and ethnic fertility differences has stagnated because most tests of the minority group status and cultural hypotheses have been indirect at best. In part this state of affairs reflects limitations of the data most accessible to and frequently used by demographers, namely census-type surveys, coupled with inadequate samples of high-fertility ethnic groups in most national surveys. Improved data, while a necessary condition for better understanding the mechanisms that produce and maintain high fertility, are no substitute for theoretical specification of the linkages between the proximate variables and more distal social and

TABLE 1 Ten articles examining racial and ethnic differentials in fertility and sexual behavior that included measures of culture

Study	Sample	Measures
Bean et al., 1984	PUMS 1970 Mexican-origin women	Length of time family lived in US (generation in US)
Fischer and Marcum, 1984	Austin Family Survey 1969 Mexican American couples	Concentration of Hispanics in neighborhood
Bean and Swicegood, 1985	1970–80 census and survey data Hispanic/white couples	Generation in US, English proficiency
Swicegood et al., 1988	PUMS 1980 Mexican-origin women	English proficiency and nativity
Sorenson, 1988	1980 census data Hispanic/white couples	Language use and English proficiency
St. John and Rowe, 1990	Convenience sample College women	Exposure to teen childbearing
Ford, 1990	1970–80 census data Women	Duration of residence in US
Abma and Krivo, 1991	PUMS 1990 Mexican American women	Size of Hispanic population in community; community index composed of three measures: percent foreign born, percent immigrating 1970–80; percent that do not speak English well
Van Oss Marin et al., 1993	Survey of 9 states Hispanic/white men and women	Language use
Brewster, 1994	NSFG 1982 Women	Aggregated neighborhood effects (social context): neighborhood SES, labor market conditions, racial concentration, idleness of youth in neighborhood

NOTE: PUMS = Public Use Microdata Samples (census data); NSFG = National Survey of Family Growth.

cultural arrangements that influence reproductive behavior. Recent findings about group differentials in marriage behavior and the timing and tempo of births provide clues about why fertility differentials persist over time along racial and ethnic lines. Accordingly, we briefly review recent studies on variation in childbearing and marriage before presenting evidence from ethnographic data.

Minority fertility: What do we know and what do we need to explain?

The US Bureau of the Census (1993) reported that the fertility of black and Hispanic women was significantly higher than that of non-Hispanic white

women, but also noted appreciable age variation in this relationship. Black total fertility rates exceeded white rates throughout recent decades, but at older ages differences in age-specific fertility rates have diminished (Swicegood and Morgan, 1994). Black–white differences in fertility rates are most pronounced for young women, but virtually nonexistent for women aged 40, indicating appreciable racial differences in timing of births.

A major reason for the sizable racial differences in the timing of first births is differences in births to unmarried women: three times as many black as white women bore children out of wedlock (67 percent compared to 17 percent) in 1992. Only 7 percent of all Asian births were to unmarried mothers, compared to 27 percent to unmarried Hispanic women and 67 percent to black unmarried mothers (US Bureau of the Census, 1993). For blacks and to a lesser extent Hispanics, these differences signal weakened linkages between nuptiality and fertility and imply normative changes in the meaning and value of marriage relative to childbearing. Because racial and ethnic differences in fertility are inextricably tied to marriage trends, we review recent studies on racial and ethnic differences in the timing, sequencing, and completion of fertility relative to marriage.

The timing and marital context of births

Blacks initiate sexual activity at younger ages than whites, hence they are also more likely to become parents at younger ages—a difference that has widened rather than narrowed in recent decades (Swicegood and Morgan, 1994). Currently, black teens have a higher pregnancy rate than either their white or Hispanic counterparts. Of women aged 15 to 19, about 19 percent of blacks become pregnant each year, compared to 13 percent of Hispanics and 8 percent of whites (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994). Differences in adolescent childbearing among the Spanish-origin groups are also apparent. Among Hispanic women aged 15 to 19, only 3 percent of young Cuban-origin women give birth each year, compared to 10–11 percent of Mexican and Puerto Rican teens (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994). These differences in adolescent pregnancy and birth rates are partly due to differences in socioeconomic status, as the first-generation studies showed. However, the presumption of common values and culture among the various Hispanic-origin groups is tenuous at best (Bean and Tienda, 1987). Gross comparisons provide little guidance about what shared understandings of sexuality and family life differentiate the experiences of Hispanic-origin groups from each other, and these from blacks or other minority groups.

The sequencing of birth and marriage differs by ethnicity and race (Stier and Tienda, 1994; Testa et al., 1989). As teenagers, Hispanics are the most likely to marry and blacks the least likely—24 percent of 19-year-old Hispanic women are married, compared to 12 percent of whites and 5 percent

of blacks. Entry into parenthood, therefore, precedes entry into marriage more often among black women than among white or Hispanic women.

Although some research has concluded that black teens have the same preferences and ideals for marriage as white teens (Farber, 1990), other studies have found appreciable differences by race. For example, studies of attitudes among adolescents show most black youth plan to marry, but do not value marriage as highly as whites. Black teen women are more likely to rate economic factors over companionship as a reason for marriage, and black youth are more likely than whites to report a younger desired age at first birth than desired age at marriage (Moore, Simms, and Betsey, 1986; Miller and Moore, 1990). These reports suggest cultural variation in the value of marriage relative to family formation.

Completed family size

Although fertility rates have declined for all groups since the 1970s, persisting differentials continue to puzzle demographers. The fertility levels of black and Hispanic women remain higher than those of non-Hispanic whites (US Bureau of the Census, 1993). A study of teen childbearing by Hotz, McElroy, and Sanders (1995) concluded that early childbearing leads to higher completed fertility as well as higher rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing, and that the age-specific fertility curves differ significantly by race. For black women the largest impact of teen childbearing is on the total number of children ever born out of wedlock. The early timing of fertility among blacks results in higher completed fertility relative to white women; however, at older ages, racial differences in fertility are negligible. Hispanic women aged 15 to 44, on the other hand, continue to have higher fertility levels than non-Hispanic women, particularly at older childbearing ages (US Bureau of the Census, 1993).

Women of Spanish origin bear more children than non-Hispanic white women, but within the Spanish-origin groups large differentials exist. In particular, Cuban fertility is well below that of non-Hispanic white women, whereas the obverse obtains for women of Mexican and Puerto Rican origin. Mexican-origin women have the highest levels of any of the Spanish-origin groups (Bean and Tienda, 1987; Bean and Swicegood, 1985; Swicegood and Morgan, 1994), averaging 50 percent more births than non-Hispanic white women. Foreign-born Mexicans account for most of the excess fertility of Mexicans relative to whites.

Large nativity differentials prompt researchers to invoke assimilation processes in theorizing about Hispanic fertility, yet the reproductive behavior of Cuban and Asian-origin women challenges the tenet that longer US residence is required before fertility is depressed. Because Cuban and Asian women are disproportionately foreign-born, selection of low-parity

women may produce the observed fertility differentials vis-à-vis native white women. Deciphering whether selection is responsible for the lower fertility of Cuban and Asian immigrant women requires evidence about family formation in the source countries. Absent this, disruption, selection, and assimilation effects remain hopelessly confounded.

Among the foreign-born, Mexican-origin women bear significantly more children than immigrant women from Asia or Europe. What is striking about this outcome is that the higher completed family sizes of Mexican immigrants result from childbearing after rather than before migration to the United States (US Bureau of the Census, 1991). This finding challenges conventional theorizing about the determinants of fertility because it defies arguments about the disruption effects of migration on fertility; because it is inconsistent with conventional reasoning about how higher relative costs of children lower incentives for large families; and because it contradicts predictions of assimilation theory, in that longer US residence does not always result in lower fertility.

That Asian fertility is well below that of white women, but especially blacks and Hispanics, also challenges the minority group status perspective because some groups are relatively advantaged educationally, while others, particularly groups who entered as refugees, are highly disadvantaged. Among Asian groups, Vietnamese have the highest average number of births per woman and the largest within-group nativity differentials, while the lowest Asian fertility rates are those of Chinese and Japanese women (Barringer, Gardner, and Levin, 1993). Asian Indians generally rank high on most socioeconomic scales, yet their fertility is much higher than that of comparably situated non-Hispanic whites.

This contrast, like the Cuban/non-Hispanic white comparison, challenges exponents of cultural explanations to spell out what it is about group membership that undergirds and structures reproductive behavior in systematic ways. To this end, we now turn to qualitative data to assist in the development of hypotheses and of research designs to investigate these hypotheses.

Insights and implications for future research

The previous overview provides several clues about what lies behind racial and ethnic fertility differences. Such group differentials have persisted over time and, thus, require consideration not only at one point in time, but also over time. To begin developing models for such consideration, we focus on three insights that are provided by responses to questions about family life among inner city residents. The first insight concerns early childbearing, a pattern that predominates in the black community. As explained by Hotz, McElroy, and Sanders (1995), early childbearing among black

women leads to higher levels of completed fertility and higher levels of nonmarital fertility relative to white women. The second insight concerns the sequencing of marriage and fertility, while the final insight concerns differences in completed fertility, particularly among immigrant women. For each insight we first present qualitative data and outline possible hypotheses; we then present an initial framework for empirically evaluating these hypotheses.

Insights about early childbearing

Existing studies show substantial racial differences in the timing of fertility, differences that have very different welfare implications for mothers, children, and society at large (National Research Council, 1989). Three hypotheses can be marshaled to explain these differences. One, suggested by the existing literature, is the functionalist hypothesis. Simply stated, pubertal development triggers early initiation into sexual activity, and adolescent fertility is the unintended consequence of satisfying sexual desires. This hypothesis differs sharply from Anderson's (1990, 1991) portrayals of inner city mothers. He argues that teens deliberately have babies to obtain status among their peers. But the functionalist hypothesis is consistent with his portrayal of men as sexual predators. A corollary of this hypothesis is that racial differences in the timing of fertility reflect contraceptive failure. But this interpretation begs the question as to why one group would have higher failure rates than another.

An alternate hypothesis is that for black teens, the link between childbearing and childrearing has weakened because the emotional costs of reproduction have been diffused among several adults (see Jarrett, 1990). In other words, the responsibilities of childrearing are neither perceived nor actualized by adolescents. Evidence that grandmothers play more active roles as child caregivers, while consistent with this hypothesis, does not establish a causal mechanism between fosterage and deliberate adolescent fertility. A third hypothesis is that adolescent fertility is the result of reduced parental supervision of adolescent women, which exposes them to the risk of conception and premarital births (Hogan and Kitagawa, 1985).

We do not propose these hypotheses as competing but rather as complementary. Open-ended interviews with respondents from Chicago's inner city overwhelmingly supported the parental supervision hypothesis, which was portrayed in various hues. For example, black respondents argued that early childbearing reproduces itself because the generational distance between parents and children is too small to foster respect for the authority of the senior generation. Other respondents claimed that parental supervision has declined because both parents have to work to make ends meet, while others claimed that supervision is weak among parents

who do not care about their kids out of selfishness and self-interest. For example, Charise, a 37-year-old never-married black mother of two who has been chronically unemployed even though she holds a college degree put it this way:

It seems as though parents doesn't raise their kids anymore. And nobody's raising the children. So you know, the mother and father's role needs to be strengthened. At least black kids, that's the way it is, 'cause that's all I see. . . . It seems that it's children raising children.

Sabrina, a 41-year-old separated black mother of two who is on welfare and resides in a very poor black neighborhood echoed these sentiments:

When the mother was at home, she had time enough to raise their kids, you know. They're at home properly, at bed properly, dress properly. I mean, she teach them. . . . And now a lot of single parents they don't have time, they got to work, and they really don't have time to stay home and teach their children like they should, some of them. Most kids nowadays, really, they're by themselves, they're raising themselves most of them. . . . I was a single parent, and even though I worked, I took the time to be with my kids, like teaching them. Because I was brought up in religion, you know, and I was brought up to be obedient.

Renee, a 38-year-old divorced black mother of two who holds a two-year associate degree and has been steadily employed since 1974 (although she was on maternity leave when interviewed), sees the generational compression between adolescents and parents as the problem:

Kids don't respect the parents like they used to. . . . The kids are different, the parents are different. The parents get high with the kids, party with the kids. Can't tell the kids anything cause the parents doing everything. I'm old fashioned. . . .

Our respondents also provided limited support for Anderson's claims that uncontrolled sexual instincts were mainly responsible for the early childbearing of black women. Several men and women identified a decline of men's responsibility for the consequences of impregnation, as Stella, a never-married black mother of two with 11 years of completed schooling explains:

Nowadays, when a man makes you pregnant, they're going off and leave you and think nothing of it.

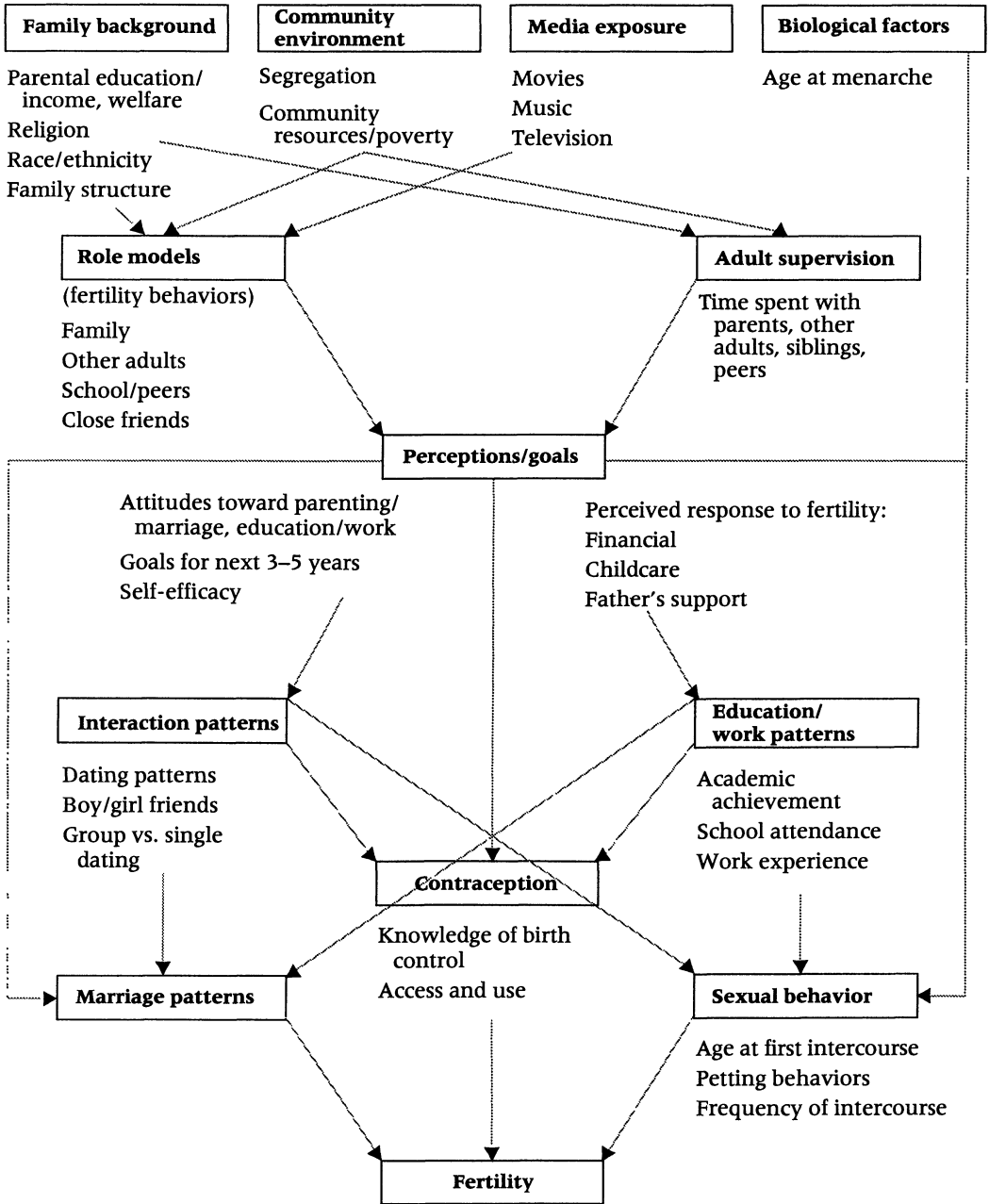
Although the unstructured conversations about changes in family life corroborate all three reasons that may lie behind the large racial differences in the timing of fertility, the adult supervision hypothesis received overwhelming support. Even among our white, Mexican, and Puerto Rican respondents, the vast majority attributed adolescent fertility—a theme most identified as a major change in family life—to the decline in parental supervision. However, there were occasional references to men's unwillingness (or inability) to recognize children fathered out of wedlock. Mexicans were the only group to mention that parental supervision has become stronger owing to the riskiness of the environments in which contemporary adolescents develop. None of the respondents raised the fosterage notion, namely that the separation of childrearing from childbearing among adolescent girls may encourage teens to bear children. In any event, all three hypotheses warrant further scrutiny.

Figure 1 outlines a framework to investigate the three major hypotheses about early childbearing—the functionalist perspective, the generational fosterage hypothesis, and the adult supervision hypothesis. In addition, previous research has underscored the influence of poverty on early childbearing (Anderson, 1990; Stier and Tienda, 1994; Wilson, 1987). Longitudinal data are essential to evaluate these hypotheses. We propose surveying both young men and women at the following age intervals: 12 to 14, 15 to 17, and 18 to 20 years. If data were collected at these three points in time, fertility outcomes prior to age 20 could be traced.

We hypothesize that determinants of fertility operate at several levels. The first level includes measures of family background, which in turn shape adolescents' role models. As our introductory vignette illustrated, no single indicator is sufficient to predict fertility. Community characteristics include the level of segregation or racial and economic homogeneity (Wilson, 1987; Massey and Denton, 1993). Measures of community resources also serve as indicators of poverty. Media exposure should gauge the messages portrayed to adolescents by young people in movies, music, and television (Axinn, 1990). In addition, indicators of biological factors, such as age at menarche for young women, provide information for testing the functionalist prediction that the early onset of puberty leads to early childbearing.

Shaped within a family and community context, young people choose and are exposed to various role models. Attempts to further understand adolescent childbearing must consider directly the fertility behaviors of the family, peer, and other adult role models that young people mimic. Measures of adult supervision, for example the average number of hours spent daily with parents, other adults, siblings, or peers, provide data needed to evaluate the adult supervision hypothesis. Our conceptual framework implies that adult supervision and role models shape the perceptions and goals of young people and, in turn, influence their familial goals and sexual activity.

FIGURE 1 Hierarchy of the determinants of early childbearing



The perceptions and goals of young people reveal their attitudes toward parenting and marriage. In particular, measures of a teen's perceived response to a birth (what would they do if they or their girlfriend had a

baby?) could provide insight into perceptions of the costs and benefits of having a baby. Such information could assist in testing the generational fosterage hypothesis. Finally, perceptions and goals influence social, educational, and work behaviors. Measures of social patterns include dating indicators such as the number of boy/girl friends, and whether teens participate in group or single dating. Education and work experience include indicators of academic achievement and employment, which have been shown to influence reproductive behavior.

At the last level, the perceptions and behaviors of young people, as shaped by their environment, operate through the proximate determinants of fertility: marriage patterns, contraceptive use, and sexual behavior. Although only a first attempt, this model outlines avenues for future research. We suggest that data collection can be enhanced by including measures of peer group influences and participation in institutions outside the home, like the churches attended by Angela and Jennifer. In addition, research should focus on the analysis of media consumed in racial and ethnic communities in order to clarify how sexual norms are portrayed and rendered in popular culture.

Insights about the sequencing of fertility and marriage

A second set of insights about racial and ethnic fertility differences concerns the rising prevalence of nonmarital fertility, particularly among blacks. The weakening link between nuptiality and fertility implies normative change, but its social underpinnings are uncertain. Early childbearing generally occurs out of wedlock, but when asked about whether they planned to marry, most black women responded affirmatively. Increasingly, this expectation is not met (US Bureau of the Census, 1992). Our suggestion that this is a normative change implies that the value of marriage as an institution has declined. Wilson's male marriageable pool hypothesis is an alternative to the value of marriage hypothesis. Specifically, owing to their deteriorating labor market position, minority men, especially blacks, have been unable to sustain their traditional support functions. In particular, the increased economic marginality of black males has reduced their attractiveness as potential mates and led to a decline in marriage (Wilson and Neckerman, 1986; Taylor et al., 1990). A study of inner city Chicago residents found that employed fathers are twice as likely to marry the mother of their first child as unemployed fathers. Nevertheless, racial and ethnic differences in the propensity to marry remain even after controls for education and employment are considered (Testa et al., 1989).

A less benevolent version is that men deliberately shirk their family support responsibilities even while enjoying many of the benefits of marriage—notably, regular access to a sexual partner. Orlando Patterson (1994)

maintains that race-specific differences in marriage behavior are not unique to the poor or the ghetto-dwellers who have commanded the lion's share of research and policy attention. He argues that contemporary racial differences in marriage and fertility behavior have their roots in the institution of slavery—a conclusion most demographers and poverty researchers find untenable. Yet, when assessed against the current backdrop of undertheorized “racial and ethnic effects,” his arguments about the destruction of men's roles as family breadwinners are compelling. At a minimum, his slavery thesis underscores the need to flesh out the social arrangements and processes (structural as well as psychological) that produce systematic differences in sexual behavior, marriage, and fertility between blacks, whites, Asians, and Hispanics. And all of these studies illustrate how the investigation of marriage behavior and of changing conceptions of family life are germane to deciphering race and ethnic differences in fertility over time.

Our respondents were articulate about the decline of marriage and rising nonmarital fertility, and their answers recognized a declining value of marriage as an institution as well as changes in the attractiveness (marriageability) of jobless men. As a general pattern, Mexican and Puerto Rican parents linked changes in marital status to declining economic opportunities and the attendant tensions for family life. For example, Carlota, a 35-year-old Mexican immigrant with six years of formal schooling (in Mexico), is employed as a sewing machine operator. Married with two children, she acknowledges that many kids are born without resident fathers, but that divorce and separation take an additional toll. Puerto Rican respondents were far more explicit in linking divorce and father abandonment to economic opportunities and men's inability to fulfill support functions. Pablo, a married Puerto Rican father of two with three years of formal schooling, worked in a factory at the time of the interview. In his words,

If you don't have a job, then you don't have anything. Sometimes, things are so difficult that you have to abandon your wife and kids because you just can't do it anymore.

Perla, a divorced Puerto Rican woman with three children, echoed this sentiment:

Well, some men sometimes can't afford to support their families so they'll walk out on them and their families will go on welfare.

Unlike the Hispanic respondents, who emphasized divorce as a reason for

family disruption, Cheryl, a white middle-aged divorced mother of three, acknowledged out-of-wedlock childbearing, but she was the exception.

That's the new thing, to have children and then not to be married. I see more common law [unions] nowadays than I ever did before.

Black men and, even more so, black women were much more open and explicit about the decline in marriage and the seemingly deliberate separation of childbearing from marriage. Responses concerning changes in family life reiterated that marriage was not an option; that men were obsolete to the enterprise of childrearing; that bearing children out of wedlock had become more socially acceptable; that marriage was a meaningless arrangement with no guarantees of support or responsibility. Consider Letoya, a 28-year-old never-married mother of two with less than high school education. Her parents were married but she felt her father was not there when needed, hence the reason she did not marry:

There was a time when men was actually the head of the household. But I don't know, men has gotten extinct, just like the dinosaur.

Other mothers, like Rowina, describe a decline in the value of marriage as an institution:

Well, everybody used to get married. They don't get married, they just stay together now and have families. . . . Why do they need a piece of paper when they gonna do the same thing anyway? And they still doing the same things, working together, having kids. You had to get married in the past, your parents pushing you to get that piece of paper so people wouldn't talk about you. Worrying about what people say. They don't worry about that any more.

Rowina, a legally separated mother of three, has been a beneficiary of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the Federal assistance program, for over 15 years. She is 41 and claimed a high school degree. Her views suggest that the value of marriage has declined and that the social acceptability of nonmarital fertility has increased.

Black men expressed views similar to those of black women, with somewhat different emphases. Shay, for example, is 27 years old, married with two children:

. . . Oh, they all get children: they don't want to get married but they all get children.

Daryl, a 35-year-old married father of two, concurred that the desire to avoid marriage was common:

A lot of people nowadays they just live together, they rather not be married.

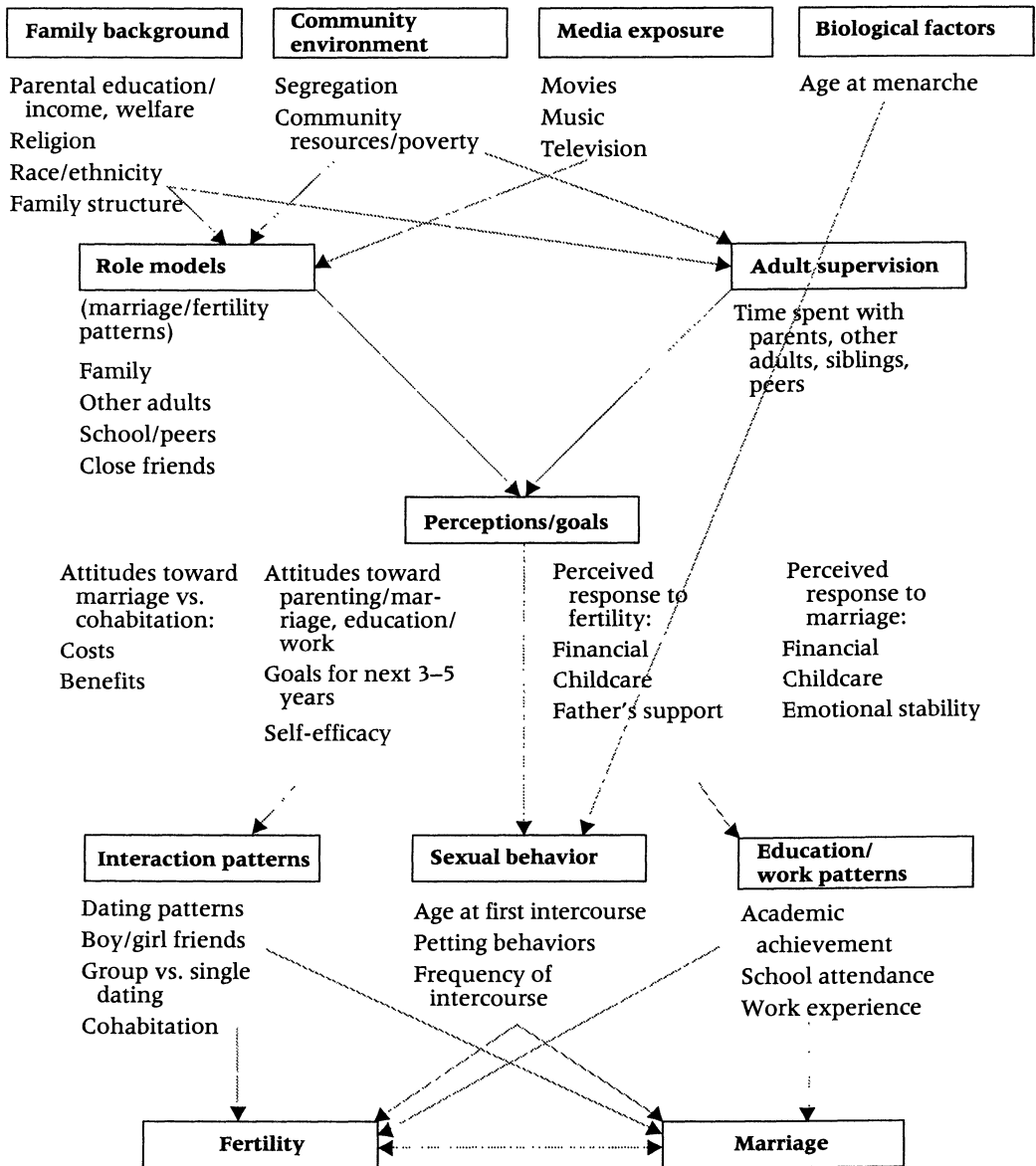
In sum, there appears to be ample support for both hypotheses, namely that (1) the value of marriage has diminished and (2) jobless men are less attractive marriage (family) partners. However, our black respondents were more likely to emphasize the declining value of marriage and their tolerance for out-of-wedlock childbearing, while Hispanic and white parents underscored the role of economic distress in male abandonment of families. In addition, a large volume of research shows that poverty increases the risk of out-of-wedlock childbearing. Past research has considered various factors to explain racial (and, to a lesser extent, ethnic) differences in the sequencing of childbearing and marriage, but poverty has received the most attention in recent academic and policy discourse.

Stier and Tienda (1994) evaluated racial, ethnic, and poverty effects on the sequencing of birth relative to marriage. They concluded that blacks were significantly more likely than whites to begin family life with a birth as opposed to a marriage, even after controlling for the effect of poverty and various family background characteristics. Similar patterns did not obtain for women of Mexican or Puerto Rican origin; hence prior conclusions about the convergence of Puerto Rican and black women's family formation patterns need further scrutiny. Stier and Tienda's results are consistent with arguments about the existence of "ghetto-specific" behavior (Anderson, 1990; Massey and Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987), but whether the observed patterns represent a racial subculture or a temporary adaptation to chronic and extreme deprivation warrants further investigation.

The primary hypotheses regarding the sequencing of marriage and fertility, therefore, center on the value of marriage as an institution, the availability of marriageable men, and poverty. To study the processes influencing the sequencing of fertility and marriage, in Figure 2 we propose an extension of the model presented previously. In particular, the study of the sequencing of fertility and marriage requires access to information for both men and women. Again, we propose the collection of longitudinal data, possibly over the age intervals 14 to 18, 19 to 23, and 24 to 28.

As shown in Figure 2, background, community, mass media, and biological measures influence the role models and the time spent (or supervision in the case of teens) interacting with influential adults. In addition, community measures can be used to determine the availability of employment and the likelihood of finding a financially viable partner. We propose collecting information about the sexual and marital behavior of respondents and members of their proximate networks, who are likely to influ-

FIGURE 2 Hierarchy of factors influencing the sequencing of marriage and fertility



ence or reinforce perceptions about family life. Perceptions about the value of marriage as an institution that provides financial, emotional, and child support must be measured to understand changes in the sequencing of fertility and marriage, including formal and cohabiting unions. Measures of peer influences and the perceptions of individuals are needed to sort atti-

tudes toward marriage as an institution from expectations about what constitutes a suitable marriage partner.

Finally, perceptions and attitudes influence interaction patterns that involve sexual behavior, as well as work and education experiences in the public domains of social life. These behaviors most likely influence the sequencing of fertility and marriage. Thus, Figures 1 and 2 present an initial framework for examining the factors influencing early and nonmarital childbearing.

Our review of the qualitative data suggests that the declining value of marriage is a predominantly black phenomenon, although nonmarital fertility is rising among other groups as well (US Bureau of the Census, 1992). What threshold of singlehood produces the value and normative change is unclear, but it appears not to have occurred among Mexican and white families. The paucity of data for other groups, notably Puerto Rican and other Caribbean-origin immigrants (e.g., Dominicans and Jamaicans), precludes investigating whether racial differences in nuptiality are confined to African Americans, or whether other African-origin populations share similar behavior. Such information is essential to evaluate Patterson's claims about the persisting imprint of slavery on family life.

The Social Opportunity Study questions were not explicitly designed to focus on fertility, yet we were struck by the unsolicited responses about adolescent fertility, nonmarital fertility, and the declining value of marriage. That over half of respondents identified the declining parental responsibility for children as a cause of family disintegration points to a powerful mechanism driving differentials in adolescent and nonmarital fertility over time. This and other mechanisms outlined in Figures 1 and 2 require further attention.

Insights about completed fertility

We focus next on the higher levels of completed fertility among Hispanic as opposed to non-Hispanic women. In particular, we consider the puzzle of Mexican immigrant fertility characterized by widening generational differences and higher fertility following migration, even after age is held constant (US Bureau of the Census, 1991). The reigning hypothesis is that Mexican-origin women adhere to pronatalist values; that they are traditional and therefore less likely to work outside the home; and that Mexican values emphasize the priority of collective (e.g., family) over individual goals (Mirande, 1977). An understanding of the delayed childbearing of foreign-born Mexican women must build from the migration disruption hypothesis, inasmuch as the initial post-migration fertility of Mexican women is slightly lower than that of natives. However, once migrant women overcome the initial disruption, they should derive their incentives to bear children from the new environment. Although high Mexican fertility may re-

sult from living with extended family and the sharing of childrearing costs, as Jarrett (1990) has argued for African Americans, Mexican immigrants bear children in accordance with their preferences shaped in Mexico coupled with the economic possibilities in the United States.

A relative income hypothesis offers ambiguous predictions about family size goals of foreign-born women. Whereas economic opportunities in the United States may make children more affordable than in Mexico, thus suggesting a positive relative income effect on fertility, over the longer term large families may seem to be a liability for getting ahead. At issue is whether recent Mexican immigrants' reference groups are in Mexico or in their destination community. No survey has pursued this line of inquiry, but responses from the Social Opportunity Study illustrate its promise. Immigrants who compared their relative economic welfare in the United States to what it was in Mexico prior to migration generally felt they were better off, even if struggling.

Ramiro, a 45-year-old married father of six, has only one year of graded schooling (in Mexico). He is employed in restaurant work and has held various unskilled jobs since immigrating to the United States six years prior to the survey. Ramiro is optimistic:

The economy has changed and families are here together and happy. All is better than before, and there is more money. It is really much better than before.

Juanita, a 40-year-old married mother of 11, echoes this view. She has three years of schooling and an intermittent history of employment. At the time of the survey she was a housewife.

There are many ways to live here, which is why we come here. I have a house here in the United States and have all my children here and they are better off. I can buy the rich person's life just like any other because what the rich person has, the poor person can have too. Not every day. But there is a refrigerator full of meat and fruit. And in Mexico no. There you couldn't afford to buy Pampers. . . . You wouldn't have enough for one child there, can you imagine for 11? . . . Here there are machines. You aren't going to do your laundry by hand. There in Mexico they carry the water in buckets from one place to another. Here are all the luxuries for the housewife.

But not all Mexican-origin parents evaluate their economic status in the United States relative to Mexico. In fact, several Mexican parents reported that the cost of living (and of childrearing) is a source of constant anxiety. For example, Guadalupe, a 40-year-old divorced mother of ten who completed only four years of graded schooling in Mexico, has very

limited income flows as a self-employed vendor. She has never received public aid, but reports difficulties making ends meet. Family size, in her judgment, constrains opportunities to get ahead:

Because if you don't have an education, you can't get work because of the economy. But if you don't work, you can't get ahead in school. Because look at our family. We are too many. So it is hard for us to help our kids get ahead.

Bernardino, a 36-year-old father of six who has lived in Chicago for ten years and supported his family working in various unskilled jobs, echoes this sentiment. Apparently he compares his current economic status not to Mexico, but to earlier times in the United States.

Economically things are more expensive than they were before. It doesn't affect families so much as long as you are working.

His wife interrupts him:

Don't you believe it. He loses hope because of this and says we should go back to Mexico.

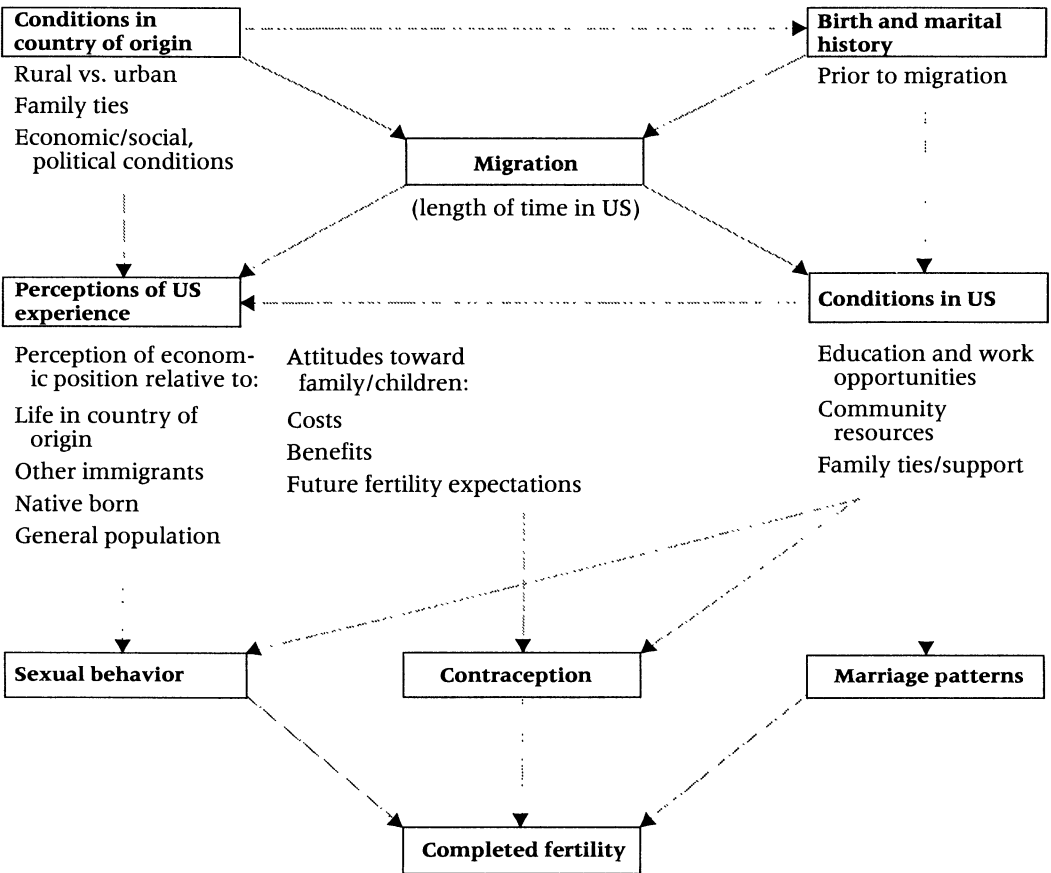
Bernardino replies:

No, we will stay here at least until all the children have completed their education.

These responses to unstructured questions about changes in family life confirm the ambiguous predictions of a relative income hypothesis for understanding the fertility differentials of Mexican-origin women, but they suggest the promise of examining how different reference groups may alter couples' perceptions of the cost and value of children. Figure 3 presents a preliminary framework for empirically testing the pronatalist and reference group hypotheses.

Previous studies of Hispanic fertility have generally included measures of length of US residence and English-speaking ability as indicators of cultural entrenchment, but virtually all studies lack measures of immigrants' point of reference. Figure 3 suggests that economic conditions in both source and destination countries must be examined. Furthermore, individuals' perceptions of economic, social, and political conditions in their country of

FIGURE 3 Source and destination factors influencing the completed fertility of immigrants



origin, as well as family ties there and whether they left an urban or rural community, provide a context for understanding the environment from which they migrated. As hinted at in the qualitative data, there may be significant differences between individuals immigrating from an impoverished rural community and those from urban communities in regard to the perceived benefits from migration (see Todaro, 1976).

In addition to measures of duration in the United States, we need indicators of immigrants' current economic conditions, as well as perceptions of their relative wellbeing in order to evaluate the relative income hypothesis for immigrant-native fertility differentials. Current conditions should include measures of education and work opportunities, commu-

nity resources, and family support in the United States. Measures of reference should include individuals' perceptions of their current economic position relative to life in their country of origin, to other immigrants in the community, and to US-born ethnic counterparts. In addition, attitudes toward family and children, in particular the perceived costs and benefits of childbearing and future fertility expectations, will help ascertain whether immigrants' family values were pronatalist before migration. The final task is to evaluate whether perceptions and current conditions influence the proximate determinants of fertility—sexual behavior, contraceptive use, and marital patterns—and to assess indirect effects on fertility via those determinants.

Longitudinal data are required to separate the effects of various factors in support of the pronatalist hypothesis and the reference group hypothesis. Linking immigrant reference groups and childbearing perceptions both before and after migration with fertility outcomes at a later date would help establish whether there is a threshold and/or a series of events that produce a temporal shift in reference group from country of origin to country of destination, and to determine whether and how reference groups influence fertility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we note one final insight—namely, that one-size-fits-all theorizing is not likely to be productive in explaining persisting racial and ethnic differences in fertility (Hirschman, 1994). Although some factors that sustain early childbearing, nonmarital fertility, and large families may be shared by all groups, the factors that influence these behaviors differ, if not in kind, certainly in salience. In addition, the influence of these factors on fertility within groups is not constant, thus requiring the study of fertility differentials over time. We hope that our conceptual frameworks will stimulate efforts to map and explore the details of such factors, as well as their changing dynamics over time.

We must acknowledge the limitations of our enterprise. Our focus on Hispanic and black fertility, to the exclusion of Native American and Asian fertility, was dictated by data availability. We have no basis for assessing whether any of the lessons and hypotheses we proposed apply to these minority groups. The paucity of fertility data on these populations warrants immediate remedies to advance the study of minority group fertility. In addition, we suggest that future data collection not be restricted to survey modalities. We hope to have generated some appreciation of the unique insights possible from qualitative data. Combining multiple methodologies is one of the many opportunities available to second-generation studies of fertility differentials.

Appendix: The Social Opportunity Study

The Social Opportunity Study was a semi-structured instrument administered to a subset of respondents to the Urban Poverty and Family Life Survey of Chicago (William Julius Wilson, principal investigator). Because the Survey largely involved closed-ended responses, a subset of 171 respondents was reinterviewed using an open-ended format in what became the Social Opportunity Study (SOS). Although the SOS respondents were not randomly selected, they represent the characteristics of the general survey (Stier and Tienda, 1994). Specifically, respondents included 63 black women and 34 black men; 5 white men and 19 white women; 14 Mexican men and 17 Mexican women; 14 Puerto Rican women and 5 Puerto Rican men.

Only one question in the SOS was relevant to family life. Respondents were asked:

19. Do you think there has been much change in family life in Chicago in the past 20 years?

19.1 What are those changes and do you think they will continue?

19.2 What do you think is the reason for that?

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