

## Race-Ethnic Differences in Nonmarital Fertility: A Focus on Mexican American Women

*We use the National Survey of Family Growth to identify race-ethnic differences in nonmarital fertility, paying particular attention to Mexican American women. On the basis of a sample of 9,054 White, Black, and Mexican American women, we use event history methods to explore the role of family background, a woman's own employment and school enrollment, and cohabitation on nonmarital fertility. We additionally determine whether these relationships vary by socioeconomic background. The above factors are all significantly related to the risk of a nonmarital birth and reduce Mexican American-White differentials. Interestingly, higher fertility within cohabiting unions among Mexican American women, despite lower levels of cohabitation, contributes to their higher nonmarital fertility relative to White women.*

Nonmarital fertility has increasingly gained attention in both the academic and public arenas primarily because of its association with the socioeconomic disadvantage of unmarried mothers and their children (Bachrach, Hindin, & Thomson, 2000; Driscoll et al., 1999; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Wu & Wolfe, 2001).

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Although numerous previous studies have documented the sociodemographic determinants of Black-White differences in nonmarital fertility in the United States (Billy & Moore, 1992; South, 1996, 1999; Wu, 1996), relatively little research investigates nonmarital fertility among Mexican-origin women, a large and rapidly growing population. This lack of research is surprising given that the little we know about Mexican-origin nonmarital fertility suggests that rates are high. In 2003, the overall fertility rate for Mexican-origin women was 105.5 births per 1,000 women aged 15 – 44 compared to 58.5 for White women and 67.1 for Black women (Martin et al., 2005). Although much of this fertility occurs within marriage, a significant portion is nonmarital; roughly 39% of all births to Mexican-origin women are to unmarried women compared to roughly 22% for White women and 69% for Black women (Ventura & Bachrach, 2000). Importantly, there are significant differences *within* the Mexican-origin population based on nativity: 46% of births to U.S.-born Mexican American women occur to unmarried women compared to only 35% among Mexican-born women (Ventura & Bachrach).

Of concern for this study is the nonmarital fertility of Mexican-origin women raised in the context of the United States, a context in which they, as is the case for Blacks, experience discrimination, have fewer material assets or resources than Whites, and generally gain fewer benefits and privileges from these resources (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001). This article uses data from the National Survey of Family

Growth (NSFG) in an attempt to better understand Mexican American–White differences in nonmarital fertility. Explanations for these differences are derived from two related areas of research: One that focuses on the experience of Mexican Americans in the United States and one that focuses on the high levels of nonmarital fertility among other disadvantaged minority women in the United States. This inquiry can offer insight into the relative importance that structural and cultural factors play in shaping the life course trajectories of women by assessing whether Mexican American women are affected in similar ways as Black women by their minority status within the United States, or whether a distinct ethnic heritage and/or ethnic experience independently affects their nonmarital fertility. Drawing from previous research, the analyses focus on race-ethnic differentials in nonmarital fertility paying particular attention to role of family background, a woman's own employment and enrollment, and cohabitation. To help disentangle the effects of socioeconomic background and race-ethnicity, we explore whether these relationships vary by socioeconomic background.

Though the nonmarital fertility behavior of immigrants is in itself interesting and offers important information about how immigrant groups adapt over time, this article focuses on U.S.-born Mexican-origin women and those identified as *1.5 generation* (those who migrated to the United States before age 12; Rumbaut, 1996). We omit those who immigrated to the United States at age 12 or later for two reasons: (a) to avoid the possibility that race-ethnic differences in nonmarital fertility arise based on the immigration experience itself and (b) because we are primarily interested in what happens to Mexican-origin women who grow up in the context of the United States. We include the 1.5 generation as previous research suggests that they are more similar to the U.S.-born population than the foreign born as they have spent a large part of their youth in the U.S. educational system and within U.S. communities (Rumbaut). The term Mexican American is often used to describe any person of Mexican origin (regardless of nativity); the analyses in this article, however, limit the use of this term to U.S.-born Mexican-origin and 1.5 generation women. There is limited research focusing specifically on the Mexican-origin population and even less than that focuses on the U.S.-born (or 1.5 generation) population. As a result, much of the following

discussion addresses prior research on the Mexican-origin population as a whole as well as on Hispanics in general, of which the majority are of Mexican origin; differences by nativity are noted when possible.

## BACKGROUND

As Vega (1990, p. 1018) highlights, “the belief that Hispanics are more family-oriented than Anglos has been a consistent theme in the social science literature for decades.” Applied to Mexican Americans, this theme suggests that certain values, norms, and ideals specific to Mexican culture will continue to exert an influence on the behavior of Mexican Americans, in part because of the continued concentration of the Mexican-origin population in the United States (Grebler, Moore, & Guzman, 1970; Keefe & Padilla, 1987). One aspect of this *familistic* perspective is the emphasis placed on traditional family roles, including those surrounding marriage and childbearing (Blea, 1992; Oropesa & Landale, 2004). Some empirical research supports this perspective, finding that Mexican-origin women do indeed hold more pronuptial orientations (Oropesa, 1996; Oropesa & Gorman, 2000) and desire more rapid transitions to marriage and motherhood (East, 1998) than White women. Another component of this perspective is the cultural expectation that girls not engage in premarital sex (Del Castillo, 1984; Dietrich, 1998; Erickson, 1998). Dietrich argues that, among the Mexican-origin girls she studied, maintaining virginity was critical to maintaining a favorable reputation in the community. Yet, rates of nonmarital fertility remain high among Mexican American women.

In her work looking at childbearing among Latina adolescents (primarily of Mexican origin) in Southern California, Erickson (1998) suggests that there exists an alternative normative ordering of life events for disadvantaged Latina teens who have grown up in the United States, one that results in a more supportive climate for nonmarital fertility. This alternative normative order still encourages a strong adherence to traditional female roles, yet proposes a timing and sequencing of life course events, such as marriage and motherhood, that is distinct from both the middle-class White culture and the middle- and upper-class Latin American culture. Erickson finds that, although many teenage mothers are married, many are not and many are in informal unions; this is

particularly true for those of lower socioeconomic status and those who are more acculturated (i.e., the U.S. born and those who have lived in the United States for a long period of time). Similar to the proposition put forth by some researchers regarding childbearing patterns in Black communities (Geronimus, 1992; Stack, 1974), Erickson suggests that this pattern of early and premarital fertility may have developed partly in response to the bleak life opportunities available to these women.

The discussion above emphasizes the role of two interrelated factors that may contribute to higher nonmarital fertility among Mexican-origin women, particularly those who have grown up in the context of the United States. First, the socioeconomic disadvantage experienced disproportionately by this group of women relative to White women may promote a nonnormative sequencing of life events that delays marriage and encourages nonmarital fertility. Second, because cohabitation in response to a premarital pregnancy is one component of this alternative sequencing of life events, informal unions between men and women of Mexican origin may account for part of the race-ethnic variation in nonmarital fertility.

#### *Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Nonmarital Fertility*

A strong relationship exists between socioeconomic status and pathways to family formation (Bachrach et al., 2000; Stier & Tienda, 1997). Research documents that poor women are less likely to marry (McLaughlin & Lichter, 1997) and are more likely to have a nonmarital birth than nonpoor women (South, 1999; Wu, 1996). At least two aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage need to be considered, however: the socioeconomic status of the woman's family of origin and the potential socioeconomic status of the woman herself based on her own characteristics (South).

The link between the lack of parental economic resources and increased nonmarital pregnancy and fertility among teenagers and older women has been well established (Crowder & Teachman, 2004; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; South, 1999). It has been argued that families with greater resources may set higher goals and may place more emphasis on achievement for their children than families with fewer resources, goals

that conflict with early sexual initiation and childbearing (Miller & Moore, 1990). Similarly, research has found that parental education is an important predictor of the human and social capital investments that children receive, which in turn impacts the children's ultimate social and cognitive development (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997). Moving beyond family dynamics, it is also the case that socioeconomically disadvantaged families tend to reside in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, these neighborhoods are characterized by a lack of opportunities and role models, which in turn may contribute to the development of an alternative sequencing of life course events (Erickson, 1998; Geronimus, 1992; Stier & Tienda, 1997; Wilson, 1987). In addition to the other family inputs they measure, measures of family structure and family change have also been used to assess various dimensions of socioeconomic disadvantage. It is well documented that single-parent households generally have fewer resources than other family types (McLanahan & Sandefur); it is also the case, however, that divorce and remarriage can significantly alter a family's financial position (Duncan et al.). Research has found that even when a woman remarries, children still seem to fare more poorly than those who live with married biological parents (Brown, 2004). Although this disadvantage may reflect differences in parenting practices between family types, it may also reflect that the children do not receive as many economic inputs from a stepparent.

The socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of women themselves are also important in the sequencing of family formation behaviors, particularly their schooling and employment experiences (South, 1999). Coverdill and Kraft (1996) found that school enrollment, higher wages, and longer periods of employment generally lower the risk of a premarital conception and increase the likelihood of having an abortion as opposed to a marital or premarital birth. Research has also shown that both full/part-time employment and being enrolled in school reduce the overall likelihood of getting pregnant (Budig, 2003). Although being enrolled in school delays marriage so that those who leave school earlier tend to transition to marriage earlier, a higher level of completed education ultimately increases the likelihood of ever marrying (Thornton, Axinn, & Teachman, 1995). Compared to other Hispanics living in the United States, Mexican-origin women have exceptionally low levels of

education (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Grogger & Trejo, 2002). Recent national estimates of educational achievement show that only 73.5% of the U.S.-born Hispanic population over the age of 25 has a high school degree. This is much lower than the figure for Whites (89.4%) and Blacks (80.0%; Stoops, 2004). This is potentially one reason why Mexican American women are at a greater risk of experiencing a nonmarital birth. As they leave school, they may be encouraged to transition to adulthood through childbirth or marriage; their poor economic opportunities, however, reduce the likelihood of marriage.

Importantly, the effect of school enrollment and employment on nonmarital fertility may vary across race-ethnic groups. Though subject to quite a bit of debate, a body of research suggests that certain minority students (particularly Black and Mexican American students), in part because of the perception of poor occupational opportunities, place a lower value on education and put forth less effort in school than do other groups (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Dietrich, 1998; Ogbu, 1991; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This is important as perceived opportunities regarding employment and education have been linked to early nonmarital childbearing (East, 1998; Luker, 1996). To the extent that minority women do expect fewer opportunities and are less engaged in school, we might expect that school enrollment, and to a lesser extent employment, do less to delay a nonmarital birth for these women than for White women. Research examining Mexican American women suggests they may have lower levels of commitment to school for cultural reasons as well. East, finding that high educational aspirations did not deter the expectation of a nonmarital birth among Mexican-origin women, suggests that Mexican-origin girls are socialized for marriage and childrearing to the exclusion of work-related or school-related roles. This perspective is corroborated by other research. Erickson (1998, p. 97) finds that, "although education was perceived as important, the maternal role took precedence even among the English speakers and U.S. born who were better schooled and had higher educational aspirations than the Spanish speakers and the foreign-born."

#### *Cohabitation Among Mexican-Origin Women*

Cohabitation increasingly accounts for a significant portion of the births to unmarried mothers.

Levels of cohabitation and the meaning of cohabitation vary across many factors but notably across socioeconomic status and race (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Smock, 2000). Bumpass and Lu report that roughly 40% of nonmarital births occur in cohabiting unions, as much as 50% for non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics. Little research has looked at the role of cohabitation in family formation among Mexican Americans specifically (for an exception, see Phillips & Sweeney). Some research suggests that cohabiting unions are quite common and socially accepted, stemming from a history of consensual unions in Mexico (Castro Martin, 2002; Del Castillo, 1984). Far from representing a new cultural arrangement, as they have been characterized in the United States, consensual unions in Mexico have been around for centuries and represent a traditional analog to formal marriages. Other research, however, is less clear about the support of cohabitation among Mexican Americans in the United States (Oropesa, 1996). Although research looking at attitudes among Mexican-origin or Hispanic women has generally found that they value marriage more highly than White women (Oropesa; Oropesa & Gorman, 2000; Tucker, 2000), Oropesa, Lichter, and Anderson (1994) also found that Mexican-origin women have a higher approval of cohabitation, if the cohabitants have intentions to marry.

Cohabitation may help explain the differences between Mexican American and White women, or it may be a factor merely associated with socioeconomic disadvantage. If, as Erickson (1998) suggests, however, cohabitation helps explain the higher levels of nonmarital fertility among Mexican American women, we would expect that controlling for this factor would narrow the gap between Mexican American and White women, taking other individual level socioeconomic controls into consideration. Additionally, to the extent that informal unions are more likely to be viewed as an acceptable alternative to marriage for Mexican Americans, childbearing within cohabiting unions may be more common than for Whites or Blacks. If this is the case, then we expect that the effect of being in a cohabiting union on the likelihood of a nonmarital birth would be stronger for Mexican American women than for other women.

*Race-Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status,  
and Nonmarital Fertility*

Much of the research looking at the high levels of adolescent and nonmarital fertility in minority populations focuses specifically on *disadvantaged* minority women (Dietrich, 1998; Erickson, 1998; Geronimus, 1992). In this research, however, it is often difficult to disentangle race-ethnic effects from poverty effects, though both likely exert independent effects on family formation (Stier & Tienda, 1997). Women of lower socioeconomic status face a set of economic and social realities that will influence the sequencing of life course events, regardless of race. There is also some evidence, however, that the effect of poverty status on family formation processes varies by race-ethnicity. For example, Stier and Tienda find that family formation patterns of urban Mexican-origin women are less variable across family income than are those for Whites and Blacks. As a result, the differences between urban Mexican-origin women and White women in the likelihood of having a premarital birth are narrower for poor compared to nonpoor women.

It is also likely that the degree to which schooling employment and cohabitation mediate race-ethnic differences in nonmarital fertility will differ by socioeconomic status. As stated above, much of the literature documenting a climate in which minority women place less value on education resulting in a greater likelihood of out-of-wedlock births, focuses specifically on disadvantaged minority women (Dietrich, 1998; Erickson, 1998; Kaplan, 1997). In fact, some researchers argue that the lower level of educational success of disadvantaged minority students is actually attributable to the material deficits associated with living in poor neighborhoods (resulting in a lack of skills, habits, and styles of learning conducive to success) than to different perceptions of opportunity (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). In either case, enrollment in school may have less of a deterrent effect on the nonmarital fertility of lower socioeconomic status minority women than on higher socioeconomic status minority women. Similarly, cohabitation is cited by Erickson as part of the alternative normative ordering of life events experienced by disadvantaged Mexican American women. As a result, cohabitation may have particularly strong positive effects on nonmarital childbearing for Mexican American women of lower socioeconomic status. If this is the case, cohabitation may be more of an

adaptation to disadvantage among Mexican American women than a cultural characteristic of all Mexican American women.

*Research Plan*

To summarize, the analyses in this article focus on the relationship between race-ethnicity and nonmarital fertility, paying particular attention to Mexican American women. First, we look at the role that family-background characteristics, a woman's own employment and enrollment status, and cohabitation status play in mediating this relationship. In addition to controlling for age and period, we include a measure of religious affiliation. Much of the discussion about family formation and sexuality among the Mexican-origin population emphasizes the role of Catholicism, particularly the pronatalist and promarital views of this faith (Del Castillo, 1984; Erickson, 1998). Controlling for these factors, we expect that the lower levels of familial socioeconomic background experienced by Mexican American women will explain some of the Mexican American-White difference in nonmarital fertility. We also expect that lower levels of school enrollment and employment and higher levels of cohabitation among Mexican American women will contribute to the reduction of these differences.

Second, we explore the possibility that the effects of cohabitation, employment, and schooling experience may vary across race-ethnic groups. We expect that the effect of school enrollment, and perhaps employment, will have less of a deterrent effect on the nonmarital fertility of Mexican American women compared to White women. This differential effect may be based on the concentration of Mexican American women in disadvantaged neighborhoods with limited resources, a lower perception of opportunity, or a cultural orientation that promotes motherhood and marriage over education. We also expect that cohabitation will have a stronger positive effect on nonmarital fertility for Mexican American women than for other women, perhaps because of the social acceptability of consensual unions among the Mexican-origin population.

Last, we explore the possibility that race-ethnic differences in the risk of a nonmarital birth, as well as the effect of other characteristics on this difference, vary for women of lower and higher socioeconomic background, as defined by

parental education. To do this, we look at women of lower and higher socioeconomic background separately. This should help disentangle race-ethnic effects from poverty effects on nonmarital fertility. Additionally, this particular analysis will help determine the relative importance of socioeconomic characteristics compared to cultural characteristics in shaping the family formation patterns of Mexican American women.

## METHOD

### *Data*

The data for this article come from the 1995 wave of the NSFG. This nationally representative survey gathered data related to fertility, family formation, and contraception from 10,847 noninstitutionalized civilian women between the ages of 15 and 44. An advantage of this survey is that it collects very detailed retrospective information on a number of critical life events and experiences, including the educational, work, marital, cohabitational, and fertility history of each woman. This detailed information allows us to determine the relative timing of each of these events. The analyses in this study focus on the nonmarital fertility of non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Mexican American women. As stated earlier, Mexican American women include both the U.S. born and the 1.5 generation. Preliminary analyses (not shown) confirm that the nonmarital fertility of these two groups is very similar. Roughly 16.5% ( $n = 1,793$ ) of the women in the full sample do not identify themselves as Black, White, or Mexican American and are excluded from the analytic sample. This restriction results in an analytic sample of 9,054 women: 6,127 White, 2,293 Black, and 634 Mexican American women.

### *Analytic Strategy*

Discrete-time event history methods are used to estimate the effects of family-background characteristics, a woman's employment and education status, and cohabitation on the likelihood of having a premarital first birth. Event history techniques are appropriate when measuring the duration of time spent in one state before transitioning to another state, in this case, from a state without a child to one with a child (Allison, 1984). We focus on first premarital births, as the characteristics that influence a first premarital

birth are likely to differ from those affecting subsequent premarital births or nonmarital births that occur after the end of a marital union. To model the timing to a first premarital birth, which can also be referred to as the risk of a first premarital birth, a person half-year file is created containing multiple observations for each woman; one for each 6-month period in her life beginning with her 10th birthday through her 44th birthday (or age at censoring). The dependent variable is a dichotomous measure that takes on a value of 1 if a *first premarital birth occurred* during each 6-month period. The retrospective nature of the NSFG allows us to determine precisely when a birth occurred relative to the timing of other events, such as marriage. As a result, a woman who marries when she is pregnant but before the birth of her child, is not identified as having a premarital birth. Once a woman has had a first premarital birth, she is no longer at risk of doing so again. Therefore, all person half-year observations after a first premarital first birth are dropped from the person half-year file or are censored. Similarly, a woman is no longer at risk of having a premarital first birth if she marries before a birth (even if she is pregnant). Again, all person half-year observations after the date of marriage are dropped. Last, because the NSFG sample includes women between the ages of 15 and 44 in 1995, not all women can contribute observations through age 44. Therefore, all observations that would occur after the age at interview are censored.

An advantage of discrete-time over continuous-time models is that they can more easily incorporate time-varying explanatory variables (South, 1999). This is important as many of the explanatory variables of interest, such as enrollment in school, employment, and cohabitation, will vary at different points in a woman's life. The nature of these models allows us to measure whether each of these events is true or not within each 6-month period in a woman's life. As a result, we can determine whether being enrolled in school (or employed or in a cohabiting union) in one half-year deters the likelihood of having a premarital birth in the same or near time frame. This gives us much more information than if we were measuring the effect of whether a woman had ever been enrolled in school. To ensure that the explanatory variables actually precede the event of interest, however, all models are set up to allow a two half-year lag between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable. Essentially, we

measure the effect of being enrolled in school, for example, in one half-year period on the likelihood of a premarital birth between 6 and 12 months later. We lag the variables by two half-years to minimize the likelihood that knowledge of the premarital birth (during the pregnancy) influences the explanatory variables. Given this time lag, the absolutely shortest length of time between the measurement of the explanatory variable and the dependent variable is 6 months. Although this does not eliminate the possibility of reverse causation, it reduces the likelihood substantially.

Discrete-time event history models can be estimated on person half-year data using logistic regression techniques (Allison, 1984). Therefore, we use SAS software to estimate logistic regression models predicting the risk of a first premarital birth. Models are estimated using the 205,718 person half-years contributed by the 9,054 women in the analytic sample. To determine whether the relationships explored in this study vary by socioeconomic background, two smaller files are created: One restricted to women of higher socioeconomic background (higher socioeconomic background,  $n = 3,538$ ), identified as those with at least one parent who went beyond high school; and one restricted to women of lower socioeconomic background (lower socioeconomic background,  $n = 5,516$ ), with parents who did not go beyond high school. Models are estimated for each of these subsamples separately; we note any significant differences between these samples.

### *Independent Variables*

The primary independent variable measures race-ethnicity. In the analyses, White is the reference category. To measure family-background characteristics, variables indicating the educational attainment of the most educated parent and household composition while growing up are constructed. Educational attainment is used as a proxy for socioeconomic background because the retrospective data in the NSFG do not include any information on family income while growing up. Additionally, research has found that although educational attainment is a less than ideal measure of composite socioeconomic background, it is one of the best indicators of well-being and of future life chances (Landale, Oropesa, & Llanes, 1998). The educational attainment variable identifies those whose most educated parent did not

finish high school, graduated from high school, had some college, or had a college degree. A dummy variable indicating missing information on parental education is included. High school is the reference category. As discussed above, parental education is used to create subsamples of women from lower and higher socioeconomic background. Even within these subsamples, however, there is variation by parental education. Therefore, for the higher socioeconomic background sample, one dummy variable indicates whether the parent has only *some college* (1) or whether they completed a *college degree* (0); for the lower socioeconomic background sample, one dummy variable indicates whether the parent has *less than a high school diploma* (1) or whether they *graduated from high school* (0). Weighted descriptive statistics on parental education and all other independent variables are shown in Table 1, by race-ethnicity, for the entire sample. Not surprisingly, the parents of Mexican American women have very low levels of education, much lower than for White and Black women. The measure of household composition has four categories indicating whether the respondent was in a two-parent, single-parent, stepparent, or other family type at age 14. A two-parent family is the reference category. Table 1 shows that White women were most likely to be in two-parent families at age 14, Black women were the least likely, with Mexican American women falling in between.

As described above, the detailed cohabitation, work, and educational history for each woman in the NSFG allows for the construction of time-varying indicators of enrollment in school, full- or part-time employment, and cohabitation. For each person half-year observation, two dummy variables indicating enrollment in high school or college are created. Women are assigned a value of 1 if *enrolled in high school* in each 6-month period and a 0 if *not*. Similarly, women are assigned 1 if *enrolled in college* and 0 if *not*. In Table 1, we see that at age 17 (measured by looking at person half-years in which each woman was 17 years of age), Mexican American women had the lowest levels of high school enrollment. At age 20, Mexican American women were also the least likely to be enrolled in college. To the extent that early school leaving increases the risk of a nonmarital birth, controlling for this factor should reduce overall Mexican American–White differences in nonmarital fertility. Two dummy variables measuring

Table 1. *Percentage Distribution of Independent Variables in Event History Models, by Race-Ethnicity: 1995 NSFG Respondents (N = 9,054)*

	White (n = 6,127)	Black (n = 2,293)	Mexican American (n = 634)
Parental education			
Less than high school	12.2	28.1	46.9
High school	42.8	40.3	28.5
Some college	16.6	13.1	13.3
College graduate	28.3	18.1	11.1
Family structure at age 14			
Two parent	73.1	48.0	65.7
One parent	13.5	32.9	17.3
Stepparent	11.4	12.1	12.7
Other family type	1.9	7.0	4.3
Enrolled in high school, age 17	93.4	91.3	87.3
Enrolled in college, age 20	54.6	43.5	40.5
Working full time, age 20	45.9	38.1	47.0
Working part time, age 20	27.4	21.3	21.9
Cohabited prior to marriage	34.6	36.0	27.3
Religion			
Mainstream protestant	30.4	12.4	6.6
Fundamentalist protestant	26.6	72.2	7.9
Catholic	32.4	9.2	78.9
None or other religion	10.6	6.2	6.7

Note: Percentages are weighted. NSFG = National Survey of Family Growth.

full-time and part-time employment are constructed. Each is coded 1 if a woman is *employed full time or part time* in each half-year period and 0 if *not*. Table 1 shows that at age 20, Mexican American women are actually the most likely to be working full time, though this does not differ much from Whites. Mexican American women are less likely than White women, however, to be employed part time. Last, a variable measuring cohabitation is coded 1 if a woman is *in a premarital cohabiting relationship* in that half-year. Although pregnancies that result in cohabitation are classified as non-marital births if the cohabiting couple has not married by the birth of the child, we are measuring whether the woman is in a cohabiting union two half-years prior to the measurement of the dependent variable. In most cases, this lag will assure that the cohabiting union actually precedes the pregnancy. Nonetheless, even if cohabitation is in response to a pregnancy, the fact that the couples cohabit rather than marry may tell us something about the role cohabitation plays relative to marriage. For descriptive purposes, Table 1 displays the proportion of women in the sample who had ever cohabited prior to marriage. We see that Mexican American

women are actually the least likely to have done so. Unless childbearing within cohabiting unions varies by race-ethnicity, it is unlikely that this variable will account for much of the Mexican American–White difference in non-marital fertility.

Several additional control variables are included in the analyses. As stated above, some research has emphasized the relationship between Catholicism and the pronuptial family orientation of the Mexican-origin population (Del Castillo, 1984; Erickson, 1998). We therefore create a four-category variable identifying whether a woman grew up as a Catholic, Mainstream Protestant, Fundamentalist Protestant, or of another or no faith. We combine people who identify themselves as having another or no faith because preliminary analysis (not shown) demonstrate that these two groups are very similar in their patterns of nonmarital fertility. Mainstream Protestant is the reference category. Table 1 confirms that Mexican Americans predominantly grew up in the Catholic faith. As the risk of a nonmarital birth varies across the life course, age is included as a time-varying variable. This variable has four categories that identify whether the person half-year was experienced

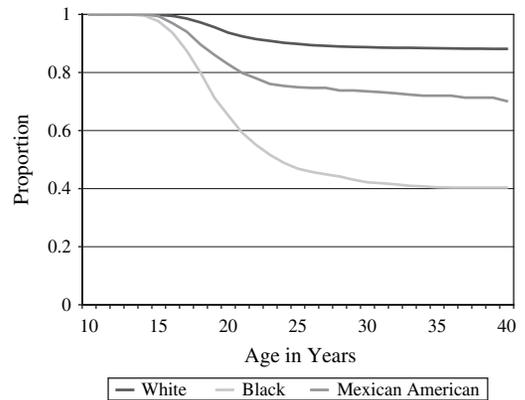
when the woman was less than 17 years of age, was between 17 and 20 years of age, between 21 and 25 years of age, or was older than 25. This particular categorization of age, as compared to other categorizations and continuous measures, provided the best model fit. Last, as the risk of a nonmarital birth has increased over time, a measure of period is included. This variable indicates whether each person half-year was experienced in 1960 – 1969, 1970 – 1979, 1980 – 1986, or 1987 – 1995. Preliminary analyses indicated that these were “natural” temporal breaking points associated with changes in the risk of a premarital first birth.

### RESULTS

To provide an overview of the race-ethnic differences in the risk of a first premarital birth, Figure 1 depicts a survival analysis of the timing of a first nonmarital birth by race-ethnicity for the entire sample. For all women, the risk is highest in late adolescence and early adulthood, as indicated by the greater steepness of the curves at these ages. Clearly, however, Mexican American women’s age-specific risk of a nonmarital birth is higher than for Whites, though not as high as for Blacks. Importantly, there are differences in the association between race-ethnicity and the risk of a nonmarital birth by socioeconomic background as seen in Table 2. Women of lower socioeconomic background have higher levels of nonmarital fertility than do women of higher socioeconomic background. Race-ethnic differences in the risk of a nonmarital birth, however, appear to be larger among women of higher socioeconomic background compared to those of lower socioeconomic background. For example, lower socioeconomic background Mexican American women have roughly twice the risk of a nonmarital birth by age 30 compared to lower socioeconomic background White women (28.3 vs. 13.8); higher socioeconomic background Mexican American women have 2.5 times the risk of higher socioeconomic background White women by age 30 (19.4 vs. 7.7).

Table 3 presents odds ratios (ORs) from analyses modeling the relationship between race-ethnicity and the nonmarital fertility rate for the entire sample of women. The independent variables are added in a stepwise fashion. Model 1 presents the baseline relationship between race-ethnicity and nonmarital fertility controlling for age and period effects. These results corroborate the survival analysis; all minority women have

FIGURE 1. PROPORTION OF WOMEN NOT EXPERIENCING A FIRST PREMARITAL BIRTH BY AGE, BY RACE-ETHNICITY



significantly higher nonmarital fertility rates than White women. Black women have greater than 6 times the odds, whereas Mexican American women have 2.7 times the odds of a nonmarital birth.

Model 2 adds the measures of family-background characteristics. Women from single-parent and stepparent households are over 50% more likely to have a nonmarital birth than those from two-parent households, and those from households without either parent are over 60% more likely. It is possible that living in an other family structure at age 14 is tapping into unmeasured aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage not picked up by parental education. For example, many young women not living with either parent are living with grandparents or other relatives, and it may be the case that women do not benefit from the resources in these families once they are older and out of the household. Not surprisingly, increased parental education is associated with significant decreases in nonmarital fertility rates, and women with at least one parent with a college degree have the lowest risk of a nonmarital birth. Although the family structure of Mexican American women at age 14 does not differ much from that of White women, they are substantially more disadvantaged as measured by parental educational attainment, and Blacks are more disadvantaged than Whites on both measures. Controlling for these factors does indeed reduce race-ethnic differences in the risk of a nonmarital birth somewhat.

The schooling and employment experiences of women are expected to have an important

Table 2. Percentage of Women With a Nonmarital First Birth by Race-Ethnicity, Age, and Socioeconomic Background: 1995 NSFG Respondents (N = 9,054)

Lower Socioeconomic Background	White (n = 3,405)	Black (n = 1,638)	Mexican American (n = 473)
By age 20	5.4	32.0	15.2
By age 25	12.1	54.8	26.9
By age 30	13.8	60.4	28.3
Higher Socioeconomic Background	White (n = 2,722)	Black (n = 655)	Mexican American (n = 161)
By age 20	3.0	20.1	10.3
By age 25	6.6	41.2	17.2
By age 30	7.7	47.6	19.4

Note: Results estimated using the LIFETEST procedure in SAS. Race-ethnic differences in nonmarital fertility are significant (Wilcoxon and log-rank tests) within groups of women from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds. NSFG = National Survey of Family Growth.

independent effect on the nonmarital fertility behavior of women, controlling for family background. This expectation is verified in Model 3. Keeping in mind that enrollment in school and being employed (full or part time) are measured prior to the birth, both these factors have a strong and significant deterrent effect on nonmarital fertility. Women enrolled in any kind of school are only 30% as likely to have a nonmarital birth as those not enrolled. Women employed full time are only 68% as likely and those employed part time are only 76% as likely to have a nonmarital birth as are women who are not currently working. Yet, despite race-ethnic differences in employment and school enrollment, these variables do relatively little to change race-ethnic differences in nonmarital fertility. It may be the case that these differences are already accounted for with family background. School enrollment and employment status do in fact partly mediate the relationship between family background and nonmarital fertility, as seen by a slight drop in the strength of parental education and family structure in Model 3 compared to Model 2.

We next look at the effect of being in a cohabiting union on the likelihood of a subsequent nonmarital birth. In addition to having an independent influence on nonmarital fertility, cohabitation is expected to mediate the relationship between socioeconomic status and nonmarital fertility. Model 4 controls for cohabitation, and we can see that being in a cohabiting union greatly increases the risk of a nonmarital birth. Differences in nonmarital fertility for Black and Mexican American women relative to White women, however, actually increase when cohabitation is controlled for, reflecting the fact that

minority women are less likely to be in a cohabiting union than White women at any one time. Additionally, cohabitation does little to mediate the relationship between family background/socioeconomic status and nonmarital fertility.

The possibility that employment, enrollment, and cohabitation work differently for minority women relative to White women is explored in Models 5 and 6. Model 5 focuses specifically on school enrollment, as interactions for employment and race-ethnicity were not significant. Enrollment in high school and college are collapsed into one category because the effects of these variables are similar. The OR of 1.58 for the interaction between school enrollment and Black tells us that school enrollment is not nearly as strong a deterrent of nonmarital fertility among Black women as it is for White women. Keeping in mind that the reference group is White women not enrolled in school (OR = 1.00), the OR of a Black woman enrolled in school having a nonmarital birth is 1.50 ( $3.66 \times 0.26 \times 1.58 = 1.50$ ), and the OR of a Black woman not enrolled in school is 3.66. The OR for a White woman enrolled in school having a nonmarital birth is 0.26. Comparing these, we see that Blacks not enrolled in school have roughly 2.4 times the risk of a nonmarital birth as Blacks enrolled in school (3.66 vs. 1.50). Meanwhile, Whites not enrolled in school have 3.8 times the risk of having a nonmarital birth as Whites enrolled in school (1.00 vs. .26). That is, 3.8 is 1.58 times greater than 2.4 (within rounding error); 1.58 is the OR of the interaction term for being Black and enrolled in school. This means we can interpret this OR to be the factor by which the *effect* of school enrollment changes by being Black instead of

Table 3. Coefficients for Logistic Regression Analyses of Timing to First Prenatal Birth, 1995 NSFG

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6				
	B	SEB	B	SEB	B	SEB	B	SEB	B	SEB	B	SEB			
Race-ethnicity (White)															
Black	1.82***	(6.16)	.05	1.46***	(4.30)	.06	1.45***	(4.28)	.06	1.51***	(4.53)	.06	1.59***	(4.93)	.06
Mexican American	.99***	(2.69)	.09	.79***	(2.21)	.10	.79***	(2.21)	.10	.85***	(2.34)	.10	.88***	(2.40)	.13
Family structure at age 14 (two parent)															
One parent				.42***	(1.53)	.06	.37***	(1.45)	.06	.33***	(1.40)	.06	.32***	(1.39)	.06
Stepparent				.42***	(1.53)	.07	.38***	(1.46)	.07	.31***	(1.37)	.07	.31***	(1.37)	.07
Other family type				.49***	(1.64)	.09	.44***	(1.55)	.09	.40***	(1.49)	.09	.38***	(1.47)	.09
Parental education (high school graduate)															
Less than high school				.20***	(1.22)	.06	.15**	(1.16)	.06	.14*	(1.15)	.06	.15**	(1.16)	.06
Some college				-.43***	(.65)	.07	-.36***	(.70)	.08	-.34***	(.71)	.08	-.34***	(.71)	.08
College graduate				-.82***	(.44)	.08	-.71***	(.49)	.08	-.68***	(.51)	.08	-.67***	(.51)	.08
Enrolled in high school															
Enrolled in college															
Employed full time															
Employed part time															
In a cohabiting union															
Enrolled in School × Black															
Enrolled in School × Mexican American															
Cohabitation × Black															
Cohabitation × Mexican American															
-2 Log likelihood (22,208.2)	20,023.5			19,669.0			19,286.0			19,064.9			19,041.8		

Note: Reference category for each variable is presented in parentheses next to variable name. All models control for age and period (not shown). Models 2 – 5 additionally control for religion and for missing information on parental education (not shown). High school enrollment and college enrollment are collapsed in Models 5 and 6. Odds ratios are shown in parentheses next to logistic regression coefficients. All analyses based on 205,718 person half-years contributed by 9,054 women. NSFG = National Survey of Family Growth.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

being White (Jaccard, 2001). Contrary to expectations, there is no difference in the effect of school enrollment on the nonmarital fertility of White and Mexican American women.

Model 6 demonstrates that the interactions between race-ethnicity and cohabitation are strong and significant. In this case, the strong positive effect of cohabitation on the risk of a nonmarital birth is significantly less for Black women and significantly more for Mexican American women compared to White women. Again keeping in mind that the reference group in Model 6 is White women not in a cohabiting union (OR = 1.00), we see that Mexican American noncohabiters have an OR of 2.08 and those in a cohabiting union have an OR of 15.21 ( $2.08 \times 3.73 \times 1.95$ ). This means that Mexican American women in cohabiting unions have 7.3 times the risk of a nonmarital birth compared to those not cohabiting (15.21 vs. 2.08). This is 1.96 times greater than 3.73, the OR for a White woman in a cohabiting union compared to a White woman not in a cohabiting union. So, the effect of cohabitation on a nonmarital birth is 1.96 times greater for Mexican American women compared to White women. Similarly, the effect of cohabitation on the risk of having a nonmarital birth for Black women is only 59% of the effect for White women.

#### *Regression Analyses by Socioeconomic Background*

The above analyses confirm that socioeconomic characteristics and cohabitation are significantly associated with nonmarital fertility and help reduce race-ethnic differences in the risk of a nonmarital birth. Much of the theoretical focus on minority nonmarital fertility, however, is on the nonmarital fertility of disadvantaged women. As a result, the next set of analyses look at the relationships above separately for women of lower and higher socioeconomic background, as indicated by parental education. This accomplishes two goals: First, it documents differences by socioeconomic background in the relationship between race-ethnicity and nonmarital fertility; second, it determines whether the relationships between a woman's schooling and/or employment status, cohabitation status, and nonmarital fertility vary by socioeconomic background.

Table 4 presents the ORs from logistic models measuring the risk of a nonmarital birth for women of lower and higher socioeconomic back-

ground separately. Model 1 in each panel presents the baseline relationship between race-ethnicity and nonmarital fertility. As found by Stier and Tienda (1997), and confirming the descriptive statistics presented in Table 2, we see that race-ethnic differences are somewhat narrower for women coming from a lower socioeconomic background relative to those from a higher socioeconomic background. Global tests of significance in the full sample indicate that these cross-group differences are significant. The Mexican American–White difference is roughly 30% greater ( $[2.94 - 2.11]/2.94$ ) among higher socioeconomic background women, whereas the Black-White difference is roughly 21% ( $[6.49 - 5.14]/6.49$ ) greater. Minority women do not appear to gain from increases in socioeconomic background to the extent that White women do.

The last two models in each panel replicate Models 5 and 6 in the last set of analyses, run separately by socioeconomic background. The effects of two sets of independent variables, family structure and employment, differed significantly by socioeconomic background. Looking first at Model 5, we see that family structure has a significantly stronger effect on the risk of a nonmarital birth for higher socioeconomic background women compared to lower socioeconomic background women, in particular being raised in a household with no parent present. This is also true in models that contain no interaction terms. We also see that both full- and part-time employment deter nonmarital fertility more for women of low socioeconomic background relative to their high socioeconomic background counterparts. Interestingly, the effect of school enrollment on nonmarital fertility does not differ significantly by socioeconomic background. Although cross-group differences in the effect of the interactions were not significant, perhaps because of small cell sizes, the interaction between race-ethnicity and school enrollment found in the full sample appears to be driven by women of lower socioeconomic background. Among those of lower socioeconomic background, school enrollment is less of a deterrent for Black women compared to White women; this is not the case among women of higher socioeconomic background. Models 6 depict a similar finding for the race-ethnicity and cohabitation interactions. Although not significant, the race-ethnicity  $\times$  cohabitation interaction in the full sample appears to be driven by women of lower socioeconomic background.

Table 4. Coefficients for Logistic Regression Analyses of Timing to First Premarital Birth, by Socioeconomic Background: 1995 NSFG

	Lower Socioeconomic Background (n = 5,516)						Higher Socioeconomic Background (n = 3,538)									
	Model 1		Model 5		Model 6		Model 1		Model 5		Model 6					
	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B				
Race-ethnicity (White)																
Black	1.64***	(5.14)	.06	1.23***	(3.43)	.09	1.54***	(4.68)	.07	1.87***	(6.49)	.10	1.70***	(5.49)	.12	
Mexican American	.75***	(2.11)	.10	.87***	(2.39)	.14	.69***	(1.99)	.13	1.08***	(2.94)	.21	.84**	(2.32)	.29	
Family structure at age 14 (two parent)																
One parent			.31***	(1.37)	.06	.30***	(1.35)	.06			.39**	(1.47)	.12	.38**	(1.47)	.12
Stepparent			.31***	(1.37)	.09	.31***	(1.37)	.09			.33**	(1.40)	.14	.33*	(1.39)	.14
Other family type			.25*	(1.29)	.11	.24*	(1.28)	.11			.96***	(2.62)	.19	.95***	(2.58)	.19
Parental education (high school graduate)																
Less than high school			.17**	(1.18)	.06	.17**	(1.19)	.06								
Parental education (college graduate)																
Some college																
Enrolled in high school or college			-1.37***	(.25)	.11	-1.06***	(.35)	.07			.31**	(1.36)	.10	.31**	(1.37)	.10
Employed full time			-.53***	(.59)	.07	-.51***	(.60)	.07			-1.23***	(.29)	.17	-1.08***	(.34)	.13
Employed part time			-.29**	(.75)	.10	-.28**	(.75)	.10			-.08	(.92)	.13	-.07	(.93)	.13
In a cohabiting union			1.10***	(3.01)	.08	1.33***	(3.78)	.12			-.18	(.84)	.16	-.18	(.84)	.16
Enrolled in School × Black			.49***	(1.64)	.12	.49***	(1.64)	.12			1.11***	(3.03)	.15	1.25***	(3.51)	.19
Enrolled in School × Mexican American			-.07	(.94)	.21	-.07	(.94)	.21			.28	(1.32)	.19	.28	(1.32)	.19
Cohabitation × Black											.07	(1.07)	.42			
Cohabitation × Mexican American																
-2 Log likelihood (16,150.7; 5,763.1)	14,595.4		14,020.3		14,008.1		5,212.9		4,993.8							

Note: Reference category for each variable is presented in parentheses next to variable name. All models control for age and period (not shown). Models 5 and 6 additionally control for religion (not shown). Odds ratios are shown in parentheses next to logistic regression coefficients. NSFG = National Survey of Family Growth.  
 \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

## DISCUSSION

Little research has looked at nonmarital fertility in the Mexican-origin population. Descriptive analysis confirms that Mexican American women have significantly higher levels of nonmarital fertility than White women. Why, in a culture that appears to place a higher premium on premarital chastity, marriage, and motherhood, is nonmarital fertility higher for Mexican American women? Building on the work of Erickson (1998), this article looked at the effect of family-background characteristics, school enrollment and employment, and cohabitation on the risk of a nonmarital birth, and at how these relationships varied by race-ethnicity and socioeconomic background.

Differences in family-background characteristics as well as school enrollment and employment clearly contribute to the higher nonmarital fertility of Mexican American and of Black women. The much lower levels of parental education, and, to a lesser extent, the greater likelihood of living in a household without two biological parents, raise the risk of a nonmarital birth for Mexican American women relative to White women. Research has suggested that children and adolescents do worse on a number of outcomes, including having more problem behavior and lower psychological well-being, when they are raised in nonintact families (Amato, 2000; Brown, 2004; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). These disadvantages result in part from the fewer parental inputs, such as time and resources, these children receive. Though impossible to parcel out the particular mechanisms here, once school enrollment and employment were controlled, the effect of family structure and parental education weakened somewhat, suggesting that these factors operate, at least in part, by shaping the respondent's opportunity for normative transitions into adulthood. The effects of family structure appear to be somewhat stronger for women from a higher socioeconomic background relative to those from a lower socioeconomic background. Part of this stronger effect may result from differences in the meaning of family structure as measured across the two subsamples. For example, being in a nonintact family for women of higher socioeconomic background is more likely to mean having experienced a divorce than it does for women of lower socioeconomic background because they are more likely to have been born to married parents. This suggests that a nonintact

family structure at age 14 may be associated with a relatively greater loss of time and resources (beyond the limited measure of parental education, which does not vary) for women of higher socioeconomic background than for those of lower socioeconomic background.

As expected, school enrollment and employment have strong independent deterrent effects on the subsequent likelihood of a nonmarital birth. Though the effect of school enrollment did not vary by socioeconomic background, employment did and was only an important deterrent for women of lower socioeconomic background, perhaps because employment and motherhood are more incompatible for this group of women. It has been suggested that minority women, including Mexican American women, may have a weaker job-school orientation than White women (Dietrich, 1998; East, 1998), which may contribute to higher levels of nonmarital fertility. To explore this idea, we looked at whether the effect of school enrollment and employment on nonmarital fertility varied by race-ethnicity. In these analyses, the effect of school enrollment did vary by race-ethnicity but only for Black women. For Black women, the negative effect of being enrolled in school on the risk of a nonmarital birth was significantly weaker than for other women, and this seemed to be particularly true for those of lower socioeconomic background. We cannot determine whether this finding results from weaker perceptions regarding future opportunities among Blacks or from the lack of skills, habits, and styles they may develop in response to material deprivation (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998). Contrary to our expectations, however, Mexican American women do not appear to have a relatively weaker school orientation compared to White women, as measured by the effect of schooling on nonmarital fertility, even among those of lower socioeconomic background. Even if Mexican American women do have lower educational and occupational expectations than Whites, as documented in some communities, this is not reflected in a weaker effect of schooling on nonmarital fertility. There was no race-ethnic variation in the relationship between employment and nonmarital fertility, consistent with research looking at the relationship between employment and overall fertility (Budig, 2003).

Last, cohabitation does play a very important role in the nonmarital fertility of Mexican American women. Although being in a cohabiting union

enhances the subsequent likelihood of a nonmarital birth for all women, fertility within cohabiting unions is much more common among Mexican American women, and this in part explains their higher nonmarital fertility compared to White women. Although the race-ethnic  $\times$  cohabitation interaction is not significantly different across socioeconomic background, it does appear to be driven by women of lower socioeconomic background.

Taken together, this article offers some insight into the role of culture and socioeconomic characteristics in the nonmarital fertility of Mexican American women. Clearly, the disproportionate familial and individual socioeconomic disadvantage experienced by Mexican American women increases their risk of a nonmarital birth as it does for Blacks. Additionally, neither Black nor Mexican American women receive as much protection against a nonmarital birth with gains in socioeconomic background, as measured by parental education, as do White women. This may be in part because of the greater likelihood of these women living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, which in turn offers fewer alternative opportunities to achieve adult status. Ethnographic research among minority and poor women in disadvantaged neighborhoods documents that having a child, most often out-of-wedlock, confers the rights and responsibilities of adulthood on women, rights and responsibilities that are less attainable through the means available to middle-class women, namely, through marriage, education, and gainful employment (Dietrich, 1998; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). This research suggests that the social value of children is high. Complementing this research, Schoen and Tufis (2003), using nationally representative data, found that women who view the social resource value of children to be high are more likely to have a nonmarital birth.

At the same time, the increased fertility in cohabiting unions of Mexican American women suggests that the role and meaning of cohabitation in this population may differ from those in other groups of women. The higher fertility in cohabiting unions suggests that these unions may be viewed more as surrogate marriages, perhaps based on the history of informal unions in Mexico. This finding complements the recent work of Phillips and Sweeney (2005) whose research looking at the relationship between cohabitation and subsequent divorce similarly suggests that cohabitation is more likely to act

as a surrogate marriage for Mexican-origin women. Although increased fertility within cohabiting unions may be interpreted as a reflection of Mexican American culture, the fact that this tends to be true among women of lower socioeconomic background suggests that it may be a functional adaptation to a difficult environment. This finding begs the question as to why the functional adaptation to a difficult environment varies by race-ethnicity.

We do not mean to downplay the role that cultural factors may play in shaping the nonmarital fertility of Mexican American women. Research has found that Mexican-origin women have a later age at first sex than do White women. At the same time, Mexican-origin women have lower rates of contraceptive use and lower rates of abortion than White women (Aneshensel, Fielder, & Becerra, 1989; Brindis, Driscoll, Biggs, & Valderrama, 2002). Together, these factors, which arguably could be linked to a Catholic tradition that discourages extramarital sexual activity and abortion, result in a much higher birth rate, particularly among teenagers. Yet, evidence suggests that the differences above are less dramatic when we look at the U.S.-born Mexican-origin population (Kaplan, Erickson, Stewart, & Crane, 2001), and the U.S. born have higher nonmarital fertility than the foreign born. This suggests that the social and economic conditions in the United States are exerting a strong influence on the marital and fertility behavior of more acculturated Mexican American women, despite the fact that they still hold strong pronuptial attitudes (Oropesa & Gorman, 2000).

There are some important concerns that must be kept in mind when reading this article. First, we have very limited measures of socioeconomic background. In addition to parental education, it would clearly be ideal to have more complete measures of socioeconomic background as well as of socioeconomic context. Better measures would allow us to more completely address cultural versus socioeconomic arguments for race-ethnic differences in nonmarital fertility. Second, although we measure the schooling and employment variables prior to a nonmarital birth, this does not rule out possible endogeneity issues. Research has found that school attachment and performance as well as school enrollment are associated with the likelihood of a nonmarital birth (Kirby, 2002a; Manlove, 1998; Moore & Sugland, 1999). Research has also found, however, that adolescents who were behind in school

(i.e., in grade level) were more likely to *expect* an adolescent birth (Trent, 1994), which suggests that fertility expectations may also shape schooling expectations and attachment. Although this possibility does not change the relationships seen in this article, it suggests that policies designed to alter fertility behavior need to focus, at least in part, on the antecedent factors associated with both schooling and fertility expectations and outcomes (Kirby, 2002b).

Last, as stated in the introduction, nonmarital fertility has gained national attention in large part because of its association with negative socioeconomic and well-being outcomes for women and their children. At the time of birth, however, there is considerable variation in the relationship status and relationship trajectories of unmarried mothers (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002). Some children born out-of-wedlock will see their biological parents marry, particularly those born in cohabiting unions; roughly 15% of children born in cohabiting unions will see their parents marry within 1 year of their birth (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004). There is some concern for retaining these children in the analyses as they clearly differ from other children born out-of-wedlock, ultimately ending up in a more stable union with two biological parents present. Technically, however, these children are classified as born out-of-wedlock, and they do still experience a higher risk of negative outcomes relative to those born to married parents. Research has documented that Black and Hispanic children whose cohabiting parents marry have a higher risk of seeing the union end than those whose parents did not cohabit before marriage (Manning, Smock, & Majumdar, 2004). Future work should look more closely at how the effects of a nonmarital birth vary depending on the relationship status of the parents at the birth.

Ultimately, both structural and cultural factors do appear to shape the fertility behavior of Mexican American women. Research has suggested that the experience of Mexican Americans within the context of the United States has led to the emergence of a culture specific to Mexican Americans, one that differs from both Mexican culture and that of other groups in the United States (Keefe & Padilla, 1987). The distinct pattern of nonmarital fertility among Mexican American women supports this idea, yet points to socioeconomic status as an important factor to be considered. In literature that looks at the assimilation of immigrant populations into the mainstream,

socioeconomic status is identified as the “key to the achievement of both cultural and structural assimilation,” including family formation norms and behaviors (Alba & Nee, 1997; Arias, 2001). Future work needs to look more closely at how socioeconomic status, measured more thoroughly than was possible here, and race-ethnicity come together to shape patterns of family formation for all women.

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