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Then Comes Marriage

Religion, Race, and Marriage
in Urban America

by W. Bradford Wilcox

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in Urban America

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There is a broad consensus among family scholars, children's advocates, and public officials that marriage typically provides important socioeconomic and psychological benefits to children. But the last three decades have witnessed a dramatic "retreat from marriage" in the United States, marked by high rates of nonmarital births, nonmarriage among young adults, and divorce. What accounts for the retreat from marriage, which has been concentrated among poor and minority populations?

Although a growing body of research on the retreat from marriage has focused on the social and economic causes of this retreat, this research has devoted little attention to the role that cultural institutions play in furthering or resisting the retreat from marriage. This report focuses on the role that religious institutions — and the normative beliefs and behaviors they promote — play in resisting this retreat among new parents in urban America. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, I find the following:

- Urban mothers who attend church several times a month or more are 100 percent more likely to be married at the time of birth, compared to urban mothers who do not attend church frequently.

- Urban mothers who have a nonmarital birth are 90 percent more likely to marry within a year of that birth if they attend church frequently, compared to urban mothers who do not attend church frequently.

- The effects of religious attendance are particularly strong for African American women.

These religious effects are mediated in part by the relationship-related beliefs and behaviors promoted by churches. Church-going urban mothers express higher levels of normative commitment to the institution of marriage. They also are more likely to benefit from higher levels of supportive behavior (e.g., affection) from the father of their children and lower levels of conflict with the father over sexual fidelity. These relationship-related beliefs and behaviors are, in turn, strongly associated with marriage:

- Urban mothers who believe that marriage is good for children and better than cohabitation are 123 percent more likely to be married at the time of birth and 97 percent more likely to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth, compared to urban mothers who do not hold these beliefs.

- Urban mothers who report supportive behavior from the father are 35 percent more likely to be married at the time of birth and 83 percent more likely to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth, compared to mothers who do not report supportive behavior.

- Urban mothers who report no conflict over sexual fidelity with the father are 162 percent more likely to be be married at the time of birth and 67 percent more likely to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth, compared to mothers who report conflict over sexual fidelity.

This report finds that religious institutions are bulwarks of marriage in urban America. By fostering values and virtues that support marriage, these institutions—especially black churches—help urban parents make the transition to marriage in communities where the practice of marriage has become increasingly infrequent. Moreover, the strong association between religious attendance and marriage in urban America suggests that secularization should be added to the list of social, economic, and cultural factors driving the retreat from marriage.

I n recent years, the institution of marriage has come to occupy a central but contested place in American public life. Family scholars and newly-formed academic organizations, from the National Marriage Project to the Council on Contemporary Families, have taken up opposing sides on a host of marriage-related issues—from the relative importance of marital stability for child well-being to the value of civic and cultural efforts to promote higher levels of marital stability (Brooks 2002; Coltrane 2001; Coontz and Folbre 2002; Wilcox 2002a).

Marriage-related issues have become particularly salient in light of the Bush Administration's plan to spend at least $300 million in federal welfare funds to promote marriage in low-income communities. This plan has engendered a great deal of controversy, and strong reactions from the political right and left. Arguing that the "collapse of marriage is the principal cause of child poverty," Robert Rector (2001: 62-63), a senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation, is an avid supporter of government efforts on behalf of marriage: "With the allocation of such funds to the restoration of marriage, society will, for the first time, begin to directly address the root cause of child poverty, welfare dependence, and underclass pathologies within the nation." Kim Gandy (2002), president of the National Organization of Women, argues that many low-income women do not have access to high-quality, marriageable men and, consequently, that the government should not waste money on marriage promotion efforts when poor families, especially single mothers, face so many material challenges: "Until education, childcare, health care, transportation and decent housing are available to all families, not a single dime should be diverted from these critical needs [to marriage policies]."

One of the reasons that the subject of marriage generates so much controversy is that marriage stands at the nexus of three of the most contentious issues in American public life: race, family structure, and poverty. This is why the Moynihan report (1965) on the African American family proved so controversial. There are important racial and ethnic differences in marriage among parents: In 1998, the percentage of births to unmarried women was 22 percent for non-Hispanic whites, 69 percent for African Americans, and 42 percent for Hispanics (Ventura *et al.* 2000). There are also important racial and ethnic differences in poverty: In 2000, eight percent of non-Hispanic whites, 22 percent of African Americans, and 21 percent of Hispanics were poor (U.S. Census 2000).

These parallel patterns in family structure and poverty suggest that racial and ethnic differences in marriage are caused, at least in part, by racial and ethnic differences in socioeconomic status, including poverty. Moreover, a growing body of research indicates that marriage is declining more among lower-class Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds (Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Sweeney 2002). Indeed, the literature suggests that socioeconomic factors—especially the effect that unemployment and underemployment has on male "marriageability"— and the indirect effect that these factors have on the structure of minority and lower-class marriage markets, where marriageable males are in short supply, play an important role in accounting for the decline in marriage

among lower-class Americans and the distinctive marriage patterns of African Americans and Hispanics (Lichter *et al.* 1992; Lloyd and South 1996; Mare and Winship 1991; Wilson 1996). There is also some evidence that welfare has played a minor role in driving down marriage rates and driving up out-of-wedlock birthrates, though it is not clear if welfare had a unique effect on African American and Hispanic family formation (Butler 2002; Garfinkel and McLanahan 1989; Lloyd and South 1996; Moffit 1998).

But explanations that focus on social structural and policy explanations for the decline in marriage, and distinctive marriage patterns among African Americans and Hispanics, only account for a portion of the decline in marriage among lower-class Americans and the distinctive racial and ethnic patterns in marriage; indeed, studies suggest that most of the racial and class variation in marriage patterns cannot be accounted for by social structural and policy factors on their own (Lichter *et al.* 1992; Lloyd and South 1996; Mare and Winship 1991). This suggests that culture—e.g., normative beliefs and patterns of behavior—has also played an important role in the retreat from marriage. Broader cultural changes in attitudes to sexuality, gender, childbearing, and marriage, along with distinctive racial and ethnic beliefs about these family-related issues, appear to have motivated this retreat (Anderson 1999; Cherlin 1992; Edin 2000; Patterson 1998; South 1993; Thornton 1989). There is also evidence that distinctive patterns of behavior regarding sex, gender, romantic relationships, and kin have played a role in driving down marriage in lower-class and minority communities (Anderson 1999; Carlson, McLanahan, and England 2001; Cherlin 1992; Furstenberg 2001; Patterson 1998).

This is not to say that culture has played an independent or necessarily determinative role in the retreat from marriage. Many of the cultural factors implicated in the retreat from marriage appear to be rooted, in part, in social structural and policy factors such as industrial restructuring, which has undercut the ideal of marriage in low-income communities by curtailing the financial prospects of lower-class men (Anderson 1999; Butler 2002; Furstenberg 2001; Mare and Winship 1991; Wilson 1996). Moreover, there seems to have been an epidemic character to family change since the 1960s, such that initial changes in sexual and marital practice, which had their origins in social structural and cultural changes associated with the 1960s and 1970s, took on a life of their own once they got started. In other words, initial changes in family-related practice prompted a "normative contagion" that undercut norms against premarital sex and out-of-wedlock childbearing (Akerlof, Yellen, and Katz 1996; Axinn and Thornton 2000; Garfinkel and McLanahan 1989; Mare and Winship 1991). Noting that initial family change influenced the normative "climate of expectations" surrounding sex and marriage, Mare and Winship (1991: 195) argue the following: "Labor market conditions are catalysts for changes in marriage and family life, but a fuller understanding of marriage trends requires attention to the way that family trends, once set in motion, may continue by their own momentum."

Although the literature on the retreat from marriage has begun to pay more attention to the cultural dimensions of the retreat from marriage, little attention has been directed to the *institutional* sources of cultural support and resistance to family change. By promoting particular beliefs and behaviors, social institutions can support or undermine the institution of marriage and the beliefs and behaviors that it depends upon. This study focuses on the role that religious institutions are playing in fostering marriage, along with the beliefs and behavior that support marriage, in urban America. Indeed, this is the first study to offer a quantitative analysis of the association between religion and marriage among urban parents. I rely on data from the Fragile Families

and Child Wellbeing Study, a new nationally-representative sample of births and parents in large U.S. cities (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, and McLanahan 2001), to examine the connections between religious attendance, relationship-related beliefs, relationship-related behaviors, and marriage among urban mothers.

This study also has an important ancillary objective: I hope to shed some light on the paradox that African American religion is unusually vibrant and the institution of marriage in the African American community is unusually weak. Data from the General Social Survey (GSS) reveal that 49 percent of African American adults attend church several times a month or more, compared to the 36 percent of Americans from other racial and ethnic backgrounds who attend religious services regularly. But as we have seen, African Americans have low marriage rates and high out-of-wedlock birth rates. This is a paradox because religious practice is generally associated with higher rates of marriage formation and stability (Bumpass 2000; Call and Heaton 1997; Thornton, Axinn, and Hill 1992). Thus, this study will also examine the links between churchgoing and marital behavior among African Americans to see if they parallel associations between churchgoing and marital behavior among whites and Hispanics.

Religion, Marriage-Related Norms, & Relationship Behavior in Urban America

The role that culture has played in driving the retreat from marriage, along with the racial differentials in marriage, is contested (Axinn and Thornton 2000; Patterson 1998; Tucker 2000; Wilson 1987). Some scholars argue that ideological support for marriage crosses socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic lines and, consequently, that changes in family-related beliefs cannot account for changes in marriage patterns. They argue that class, racial, and ethnic differences in marriage are attributable primarily to differences in socioeconomic resources and marriage markets, along with the distinctive patterns of behavior that have arisen among poor and minority groups in response to recent social-structural changes (Tucker 2000; Wilson 1987). Other scholars, however, argue that distinctive family-related beliefs also play a role in explaining distinctive marriage patterns among the poor and minorities, and that some of the racial patterns in marriage are rooted in long-standing cultural beliefs and behaviors that arise from slavery and Western African cultural traditions. They argue that a subculture has emerged in some poor and minority communities that is deeply removed from the value and practice of marriage. But they also attribute the rise of this subculture, paradoxically, to declines in mainstream support for traditional family-related beliefs, a decline that is most visible in the mass media (Axinn and Thornton 2000; Morgan *et al.* 1993; Peterson 1991; Rainwater 1970; Patterson 1998). In the words of Paul Peterson (1991: 19), "The most powerful force contributing to the formation of the urban underclass, perversely enough, may be the changing values of mainstream American society, in which the virtues of family stability, mutual support, and religiously based commitment to the marriage vow no longer command the deference they once did."

At the ideological level, most Americans indicate that the institution of marriage has high emotional and economic value to them, and that they would like to marry; moreover, this type of ideological support for the institution of marriage has not deteriorated over time (Axinn and Thornton 2000). However, normative beliefs

about premarital sex, childbearing outside of wedlock, and cohabitation have changed dramatically in the last thirty years, such that Americans are significantly less likely to disapprove of behaviors that were once viewed as only legitimate in the bonds of marriage (Axinn and Thornton 2000). Thus, changes in normative beliefs about these relationship-related behaviors, but *not* marriage *per se*, would seem to account for at least some of the retreat from marriage since the 1960s (Cherlin 1992; Garfinkel and McLanahan 1989).

Similar trends can be seen in racial differences in marriage attitudes. On one hand, support for the institution of marriage crosses racial and ethnic boundaries. African American and Hispanic respondents in recent surveys of urban residents and urban parents indicate strong support for the institution of marriage (McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Mincy 2001; Tucker 2000). Indeed, somewhat surprisingly, on many measures this support was stronger among African Americans and Mexican-Americans than it was among whites (Tucker 2000). Once again, this suggests that ideological support for the institution of marriage *per se* is fairly uniform and does not explain racial and ethnic differences in marriage. However, there are racial differences in attitudes about relationship-related behavior. For example, African American men are more supportive of premarital and extramarital sex than other men; moreover, there are greater gaps in sexual attitudes among African American men and women than among white and Hispanic men and women (Patterson 1998).

Ethnographic studies of the retreat from marriage in urban America bear out this general pattern (Anderson 1999; Edin 2000; Furstenberg 2001; Waller 1999). Most urban residents tell interviewers that they support marriage in principle, and dream of marrying themselves. But a substantial proportion of poor, urban women tell family scholars that they are scared of marriage, both because of the high level of divorce they have witnessed among friends and family who have married and because they are not convinced that the men they know have the job and relationship skills required to make a marriage work. These women also report more general concern about male irresponsibility and sexual infidelity—what they describe as "'rippin' and runnin' the streets" (Edin 2000: 30). Likewise, a substantial proportion of urban men report that women are too suspicious and controlling, and do not accord men sufficient respect. These views are indicative of a "culture of gender distrust" in these communities (Furstenberg 2001). They are also suggestive of the way in which a "code of the street" that valorizes sexual conquest and attaches no stigma to bearing a child out of wedlock has destabilized romantic relationships and undercut family formation in these communities (Anderson 1999). Thus, this ethnographic and survey research suggests that, at the attitudinal level, generic support for the institution of marriage among poor and minority groups coexists with gender distrust and a liberal attitude to premarital sex and nonmarital child-bearing. This latter set of relationship-related beliefs may help explain the retreat from marriage.

These beliefs both shape and are shaped by relationship-related behaviors not conducive to marriage that are prevalent in many low-income urban communities. Men and women in these communities often seek to main-tain control in their relationships by asserting their dominance over romantic partners (Edin 2000; Furstenberg 2001). Furthermore, men often approach relationships with a view to securing as many sexual conquests as possible (Anderson 1999; Patterson 1998). These patterns of behavior are intelligible in a world where many young people do not have access to models of successful marriage in their own families, where the peer culture valorizes self-assertion, and where good job opportunities are in short supply. But these patterns of behavior do not make for the kind of supportive and secure relational environment that is conducive to marriage (Carlson, McLanahan *et al.* 2001). Instead, they lead to fractious relationships between men and women in many poor, urban communities.

In sum, then, relationship-related beliefs—gender distrust and sexual liberalism—and patterns of behavior—poor relationship skills and sexual infidelity—should help to explain the retreat from marriage in urban America, and may also help explain distinctive class, racial, and ethnic patterns of marriage.

But there is a substantial measure of cultural heterogeneity among lower-class, African American, and Hispanic American urban residents. For instance, Elijah Anderson (1999) argues that a significant number of inner-city residents adhere to a "code of decency" marked by hard work, civility, self-reliance, and family-centered living. He also argues that these decent people "derive great support from their faith and church community" (Anderson 1999: 38). His ethnographic work suggests that religious institutions may be one of the key institutional sources of support for relationship-related beliefs and strategies of action that foster marriage in communities where the retreat from marriage is most pronounced.

Religious institutions have long endowed the marital vow with a sense of sacredness (Witte 1997). In particular, the two largest traditions in our nation's cities—Roman Catholicism and Black Protestantism—view marriage as a covenantal commitment between a man and a woman that mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church. Accordingly, the relationship between husband and wife is supposed to be marked by mutual, sacrificial service and by high levels of affection. Furthermore, marriage in these traditions is held to be the only legitimate arena for sexual intercourse and childbearing, both because sex outside marriage is viewed as sinful and because children deserve two parents who are committed to them and to one another (Browning *et al.* 1997: 219-246). For instance, Wallace Charles Smith, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., writes, "God's revelation clearly points to male-female monogamous relationships as the gift by God to humankind for the purposes of procreation and nurturing. Even for people of African descent, this concept of monogamy must be at the heart of even the extended family structure" (Smith 1985: 70).

The ethnographic literature suggests that the normative support that religious institutions lend to marriage and to relationship-related values like service and sexual fidelity helps to account for the persistence of marriage in urban communities suffering from poverty, discrimination, and a weak marriage culture. As Furstenberg (2001: 242) observes, "[C]onventional notions of marriage are often carried forward [among the urban poor] within families actively involved in religious institutions and part of a broader religious community." Other ethnographic work indicates that religious practice is tightly linked to marriage, and family-focused behavior more generally, in urban America (Anderson 1991). This ethnographic works suggests that religious institutions in urban America play a similar role to the one they play in the rest of the nation. Specifically, the empirical literature shows that religious practice is typically associated with family-related beliefs that lead to higher levels of marriage, lower rates of out-of-wedlock births, and lower rates of divorce (Bumpass 2000; Call and Heaton 1997; Thornton, Axinn, and Hill 1992).

Religious institutions also lend important support to two cultural strategies of action that are particularly important for the success of marriages: strong relationship skills and sexual fidelity (Gottman 1998; Lauman *et al.* 1994). As noted above, religious institutions foster these strategies through the normative support they place on service in marriage and on traditional sexual morality. More generally, they promote an ethic of care and consideration, described as "Golden Rule Christianity" (Ammerman 1997), among all their members that should also foster these strategies. As importantly, religious institutions embed members in family-oriented social networks

that monitor their marital and sexual behavior, offer social support for relationship problems, and reinforce family-related norms (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, and Waite 1995; Wilcox 2002b). One of the crucial functions that these networks provide is models to young people of married adults who have mastered these strategies of action in their own marriages (Furstenberg 2001). Thus, these networks may lend crucial social support to two strategies of action—an affectionate, sacrificial approach to relationships and a strong commitment to sexual fidelity in romantic relationships—that foster marriage in urban America (Carlson, McLanahan *et al.* 2001).

But it is also possible that religious institutions do not play a central role in fostering marriage in urban America. For instance, as noted earlier, one of the paradoxes of American religious life is that African Americans have the highest rate of religious practice of any racial or ethnic group and the lowest rate of marriage of any racial or ethnic group. Of course, as we have seen, many socioeconomic and cultural factors account for distinctive marriage patterns among African Americans. But the black church may have responded to the tension between its theological conservatism and high rates of out-of-wedlock birth and divorce in the African American community by downplaying pro-marriage norms. Indeed, some observers of the black church argue that this is precisely the strategy it has taken (Anderson, Browning, and Boyer 2002: 343). Moreover, as the key institutional player in many urban, African American communities, the black church is a "semi-involuntary institution" for some members (Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Pattillo-McCoy 1998). Hence, it may not exercise as much normative influence over members who view it primarily in social rather than religious terms. For these reasons, it is possible that religious practice is not associated with marriage, nor the cultural beliefs and strategies of action that foster marriage, in urban America.

Thus, this paper tests two competing hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Urban mothers who attend church regularly are more likely to bear children in marriage and are more likely to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth. Moreover, the effects of religious attendance are mediated by relationship-related beliefs and strategies of action conducive to marriage.

Hypothesis 2: Urban mothers who attend church regularly are not more likely to bear children in marriage, nor are they more likely to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth. Churchgoing is not associated with marriage in urban communities because churches do not foster beliefs and strategies of action conducive to marriage among their members.

Data and Methods

I rely on data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a new national survey designed to analyze the conditions and capabilities of new unwed parents and the well-being of their children in large U.S. cities. The study provides detailed socioeconomic information about both unwed parents, along with information about the nature of their relationship. The study follows approximately 3,700 children born to unmarried parents and 1,100 children born to married parents in 20 cities with populations over 200,000. New mothers are interviewed in the hospital within 48 hours of giving birth, and new fathers are interviewed at the hospital or at another

location shortly after birth. The survey is also tracking these parents and children 12, 30, and 48 months after birth. Finally, the survey's response rates are high—85 percent of eligible mothers and 76 percent of eligible fathers responded to the first wave of the survey. Moreover, the mothers were asked questions about the fathers that allow researchers to estimate the education, income, labor force attachment, and relationship behaviors of non-responding fathers (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, and McLanahan 2001).

This paper relies on baseline data and 12-month data drawn from all twenty cities in the Fragile Families Study.[1] My first set of analyses, which examines the association between religion, culture, and marriage at birth among urban mothers, focuses on 3,886 married and unmarried mothers who had complete information on the religious and cultural factors that are of primary interest to this study. My second set of analyses, which examines the association between religion, culture, and family formation within a year of a nonmarital birth, focuses on 3,019 unmarried mothers who completed the baseline survey and the 12-month survey. Descriptive statistics in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 are weighted to represent national averages. The regression results reported in Tables 1 and 2, as well as Figures 5 and 6, rely on unweighted data from the whole Fragile Families sample.

Marital status at the time of birth of the child is the dependent variable in the first set of analyses. About 24 percent of the mothers in this sample were married at the time of birth. *Family formation*, which is measured by mothers transitioning into marriage within twelve months of the birth of a child out-of-wedlock, is the dependent variable in the second set of analyses. Approximately seven percent of the mothers in this sample who were not married at the time of birth married within a year of birth.

I rely on one measure, *frequent attendance* at religious services, to measure the extent to which urban mothers were integrated into a religious institution (Wilcox 2002b). Specifically, I coded all women who reported attending church "several times a month" or "once a week or more" as frequent attendees. Previous research indicates that most respondents in the Fragile Families Study are black Protestants or Roman Catholics (Garfinkel and Wilcox 2001).

Five variables tap respondents' cultural beliefs and strategies of action. To measure *normative commitment to marriage*, I constructed a dichotomous measure (Cronbach's alpha = .71) based on respondents' agreement with two statements: "It is better for a couple to get married than to just live together" and "It is better for children if their parents are married." Respondents who responded "agree" or "strongly agree" to both statements were coded as normative supporters of marriage. To construct a measure of *gender trust*, I relied on respondents' disagreement with the following statement: "Men cannot be trusted to be faithful." Mothers who indicated disagreement or strong disagreement with this statement were coded as trusting men. These two measures tap family-related beliefs that may influence entry into marriage.

Respondents were also asked three questions about the father of their child: how often is he "fair and willing to compromise when you have a disagreement?"; how often does he express "affection or love for you?"; and, how often does he "encourag[e] or hel[p] you to do things that are important to you?". Mothers who responded that the father "often" manifested all three behaviors were coded as having *highly supportive* fathers with strong relationship skills. Mothers were also asked how often the father "hits or slaps you when he is angry." Mothers who responded "never" were coded as reporting *no domestic violence*. Finally, mothers were asked if they had conflict with the father in the last month over "being faithful." Mothers who responded "never" were coded as reporting *no conflict over fidelity* with the father of their child. All three of these measures serve as indirect measures

**Figure 1.** **Marital Status of Urban Mothers**
(by Race and Ethnicity)
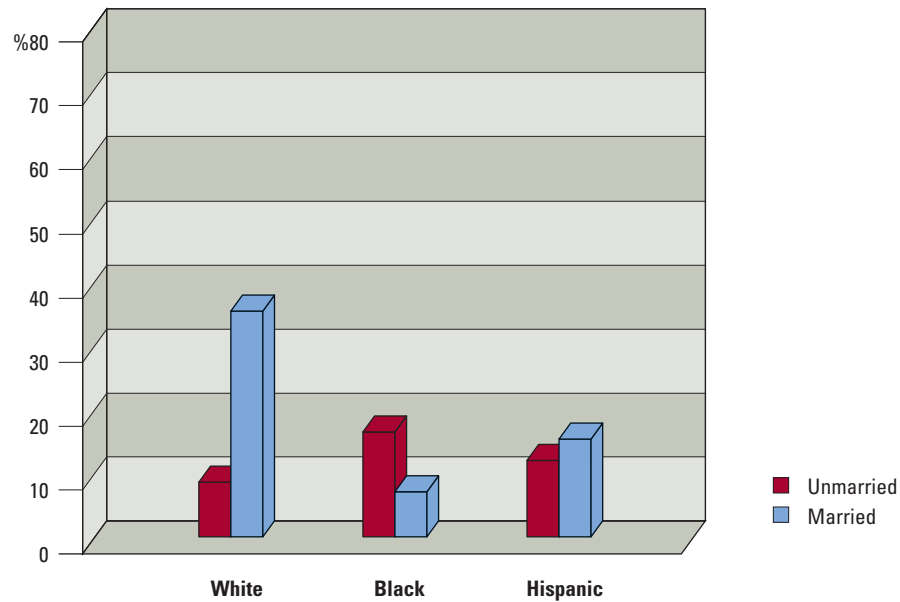
of men's family-related strategies of action regarding sexual activity and an affectionate style of relating to their romantic partner. My assumption here is that women are not going to act on their religious and/or normative commitment to marriage unless they have access to a man who is supportive, non-violent, and faithful.

Finally, I controlled for the following variables, which might otherwise confound the relationship that religious participation, marriage-related beliefs, and marriage-related strategies of action may have with marriage: *mother age* and *father age* (in years); whether the child in the survey is the mother's *first child* and whether the mother had *all her children with the father* of the child in the survey; *mother's education* and *father's education* (from less than high school to college-educated, coded from 1 to 4); *mother working* (measured by labor force participation in the last year); *father working* (measured by labor force participation in the last week); *mother's income* (from no earned income to 25,000 or more dollars in earned income, coded from 0 to 25); *father's earned income* (0 = less than $10,000, 1 = $10,000 to $34,999, 1 = $35,000 or more); and *race/ethnicity* of mother (1 = African American, 1 = Hispanic, 0 = white). Note that I exclude the approximately six percent of the sample that is not African American, Hispanic, or white. The models in Table 2, which focus on transitions into marriage within a year of a nonmarital birth, rely on baseline measures for all independent variables. They also control for the mother's *cohabitation* status (1=cohabiting) at baseline.

For statistical techniques, I rely upon nested, hierarchical logistic regression models. The first model I test in each set of regressions incorporates measures designed to test the effects of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and demographic factors on the odds of being married at the baby's birth and, for the mothers who bear a child out-of-wedlock, the odds of forming a family through marriage within a year of birth. The second model in my regressions adds a measure of religious attendance designed to assess the institutional importance of religion for marriage among urban parents, net of the sociodemographic factors that are known to influence entry into marriage. The third model adds measures of relationship-related beliefs and strategies of action to assess the

Figure 2. Frequent Religious Attendance of Urban Mothers
*(by Race, Ethnicity, and Marital Status)*
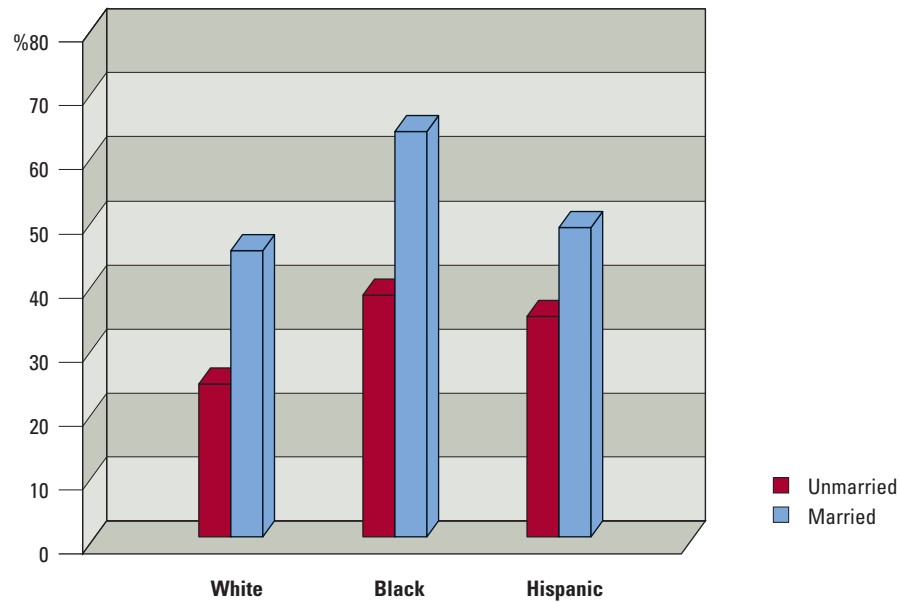
influence of culture on marriage and to see if these cultural factors mediate the influence of religious attendance. The second and third models also allow me to see if racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic influences on marriage are attenuated by religious and cultural factors.

Results

Figure 1 presents some basic descriptive information about the racial/ethnic and marital makeup of mothers who have just had a baby in American cities larger than 200,000 people. Specifically, Figure 1—which is based on data weighted to represent national trends—indicates that unmarried white women make up nine percent of mothers in urban America, that married white women make up 35 percent of this group, that unmarried African American women make up 16 percent of this group, that married African American women make up seven percent of this group, that unmarried Hispanic women make up 11 percent of this group and that 14 percent of married Hispanic women make up this group. Figure 1 also shows that nonmarital births are most prevalent among African American women, followed by Hispanic women, and then by white women. In other words, Figure 1 suggests that race and ethnicity are tied to marital status among urban mothers.

Figure 2 shows that church attendance is more prevalent among urban mothers of infants who are African American or married. More specifically, Figure 2—which is based on data weighted to represent national trends— indicates that 23 percent of unmarried white mothers in urban America attend religious services several times a month or more compared to 44 percent of married white mothers in urban America. These figures are markedly higher among African American mothers in the nation's large cities: in this group, 38 percent of unmarried African American mothers attend frequently compared to 62 percent of married African American mothers. Hispanic

Figure 3. Normative Support for Marriage among Urban Mothers

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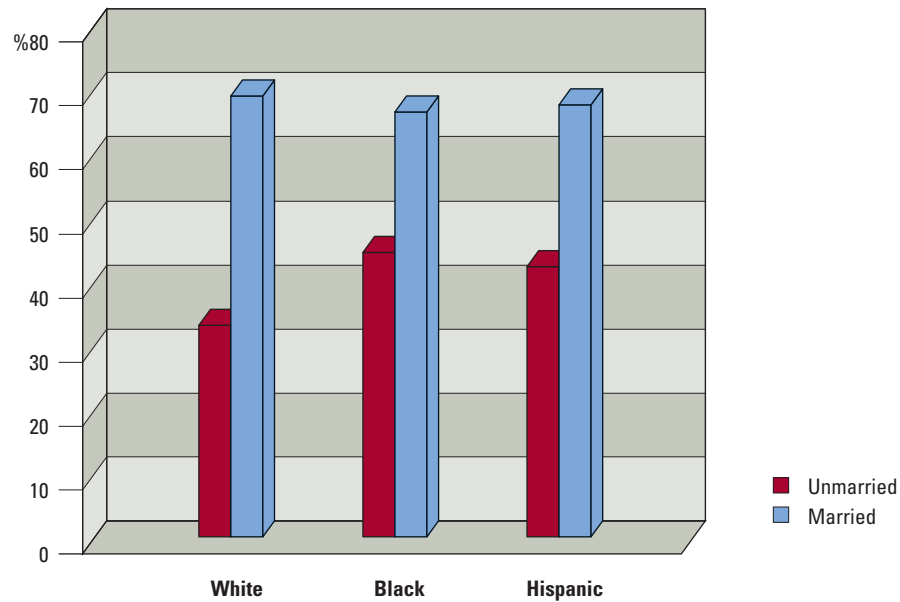
mothers in urban America fall between white and African-American mothers in their church attendance: 34 percent of unmarried Hispanic mothers attend church frequently compared to 48 percent of married Hispanic mothers. (On average, in large American cities 33 percent of new unwed mothers attend church frequently, 47 percent of married new mothers attend church frequently, and 42 percent of all new mothers attend church frequently.) Thus, Figure 2 indicates that marriage and race are both strongly associated with church attendance for mothers of infants who live in urban America.

Figure 3 shows that normative support for marriage among urban mothers is strongly associated with marital status at birth. More than 60 percent of married urban mothers believe that marriage is better than cohabitation and that it is better for children to have married parents; specifically, 69 percent of white married mothers, 66 percent of black married mothers, and 67 percent of Hispanic married mothers hold these normative beliefs. But only about 40 percent of unmarried urban mothers hold these beliefs. Somewhat surprisingly, black unmarried mothers are most pro-marriage, followed by Hispanic and white mothers: 44 percent of unmarried black mothers have a strong normative commitment to marriage, 41 percent of unmarried Hispanic mothers have a strong normative commitment to marriage, and only 32 percent of unmarried white mothers have a strong normative commitment to marriage. The fact that unmarried black and Hispanic mothers have a stronger normative commitment to marriage than unmarried white mothers suggests that differences in normative attitudes do not account for racial differences in marriage.

Figure 4 shows that married urban mothers report more supportive behavior (affection, compromise, and encouragement) from the father of their child than do unmarried urban mothers. However, marital status is only associated with a father's supportive behaviors among black and white mothers. Specifically, 55 percent of white married mothers, compared to 38 percent of white unmarried mothers, report supportive father behaviors; and, 49 percent of black married mothers, compared to 31 percent of black unmarried mothers, report supportive father behaviors. But only 39 percent of married and unmarried Hispanic mothers report

Figure 4. Father is Supportive
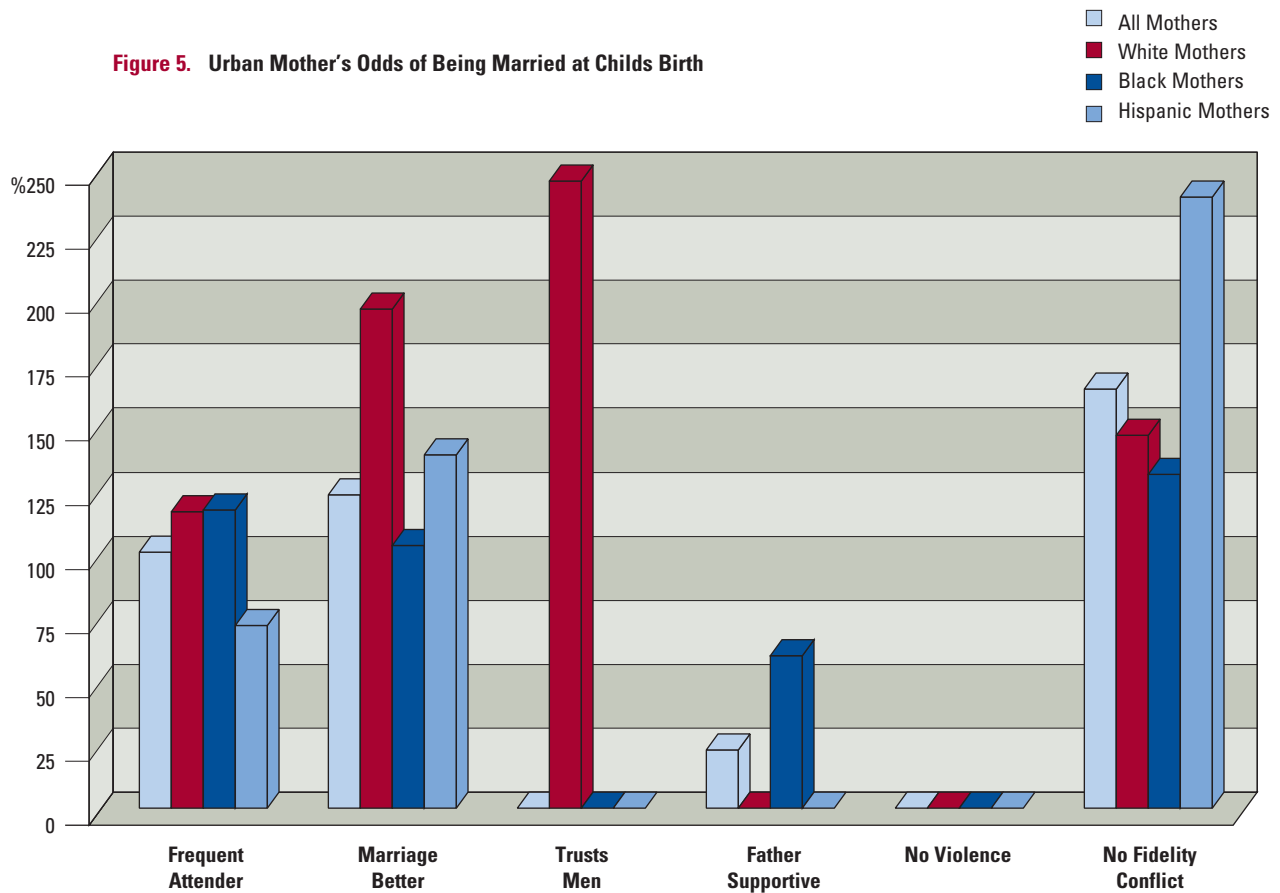
Figure 4. Father is Supportive
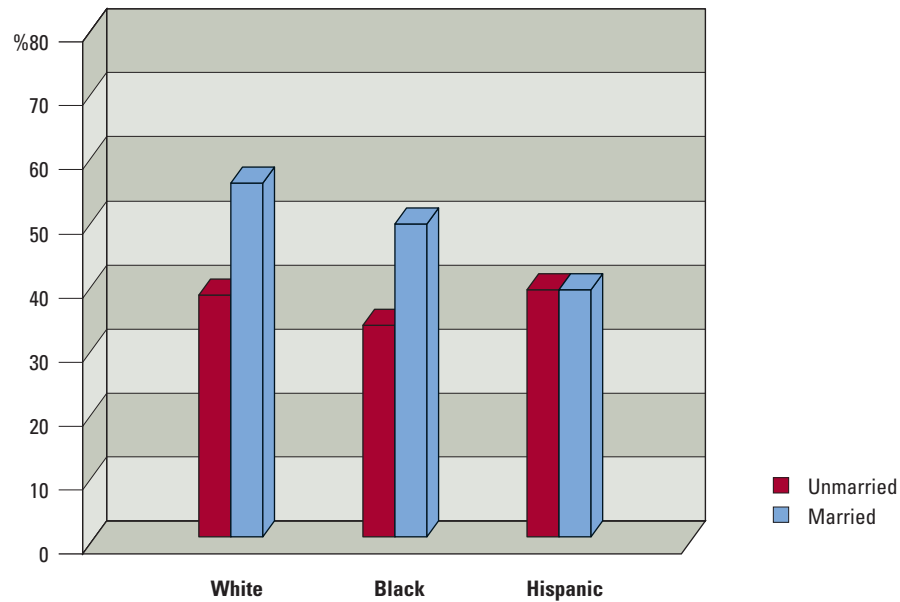
supportive behaviors. For some reason, marriage does not appear to be associated more supportive behaviors on the part of Hispanic fathers.

Table 1 reports the net effects of sociodemographic factors, religious attendance, family-related beliefs, and relationship strategies of action on the log odds of urban mothers being married at the time of birth. I rely on unweighted data to get as many cases as possible.[2] Model 1 in Table 1 indicates that the education and income of fathers and mothers, along with men's labor force participation, are strongly associated with marriage at birth among urban mothers. These findings are consistent with theoretical approaches that stress the importance of socioeconomic resources for entry into marriage (e.g., Wilson 1987). Model 1 also indicates that Hispanic and African American mothers in large American cities are less likely than whites to be married when they have children. Thus, race and ethnicity remain associated with the marital status of new mothers even after controlling for a range of socioeconomic factors.

Model 2 indicates that frequent religious attendance is strongly associated with marriage for birthmothers in urban America. This means that integration into a religious community in urban America is associated with giving birth in wedlock. But the inclusion of religious attendance in Model 2 does not reduce the effect of race and ethnicity on marital status. Indeed, the Hispanic and black coefficients increase when religious attendance is included. This suggests that Hispanic and black rates of nonmarital births would be even higher were it not for the high levels of church attendance in these groups. Religious attendance does not affect the size of socioeconomic factors.

Model 3 focuses on the association between relationship-related beliefs and behaviors and the marital status of urban mothers. Urban mothers who believe that marriage is better for adults and children are more likely to be married. But gender trust is not associated with marital status. Urban mothers with partners who are highly supportive and with whom they have had no recent conflict over sexual fidelity are also more likely to be married. However, domestic violence is not associated with marital status for urban mothers. Thus Model 3 suggests that a

Figure 5. Urban Mother's Odds of Being Married at Childs Birth

Legend:
- All Mothers
- White Mothers
- Black Mothers
- Hispanic Mothers

Categories: Frequent Attender, Marriage Better, Trusts Men, Father Supportive, No Violence, No Fidelity Conflict

woman's normative commitment to the institution of marriage and a supportive and faithful approach to relationships on the part of the child's father are strongly associated with marriage.

The inclusion of cultural beliefs and strategies of action in Model 3 also reduces the effect of religious attendance, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The religious effect declines by 28 percent, the race/ethnic effects decline by eight percent, and the father's income effects decline by 18 percent. The decline in religious effects from Model 2 to Model 3 suggests that the positive effects of religious participation on marital status are explained, in part, by marriage-friendly beliefs and strategies of action that are fostered in religious institutions.

The decline in the negative effects of race and ethnicity suggests that one of the reasons that African American and Hispanic mothers are less likely to be married when they have a child is that they are less likely to hold beliefs conducive to marriage and less likely to have partners who are supportive and faithful. The decline in the positive effect of father's income from Model 2 to Model 3 suggests that one of the reasons that mothers who are partnered to a low-income man are less likely to be married when they have a child is that they are less likely to have a normative commitment to marriage and less likely to have partners who manifest relationship behaviors conducive to marriage. Thus, Table 1 suggests that religious institutions play an important role in fostering marriage in urban America, that cultural factors account for some of the retreat from marriage, and the cultural factors also play a (small) role in accounting for the distinctive racial, ethnic, and class-based patterns of marriage in urban America.

I turn now to a more thorough consideration of the possibility that religious and cultural factors operate differently for different racial and ethnic groups of urban mothers. In Figure 5, I depict the results of separate

logistic regression models that I ran for white, black, and Hispanic mothers. Specifically, Figure 5 offers a graphical representation of the effects of religious attendance on urban mother's odds of marriage at child's birth, net of socioeconomic and demographic factors. Figure 5 also offers a graphical representation of the effects of family-related beliefs and strategies of action on urban mother's odds of marriage at child's birth, net of religious, socioeconomic, and demographic factors.

Figure 5 shows that urban mothers are 100 percent more likely to be married if they attend church frequently. White and black mothers who attend church frequently are most likely to be married: women from these groups are, respectively, 116 percent and 118 percent more likely to be married. Church attendance is less tightly bound to marriage for Hispanic mothers, who are only 71 percent more likely to be married if they attend frequently.
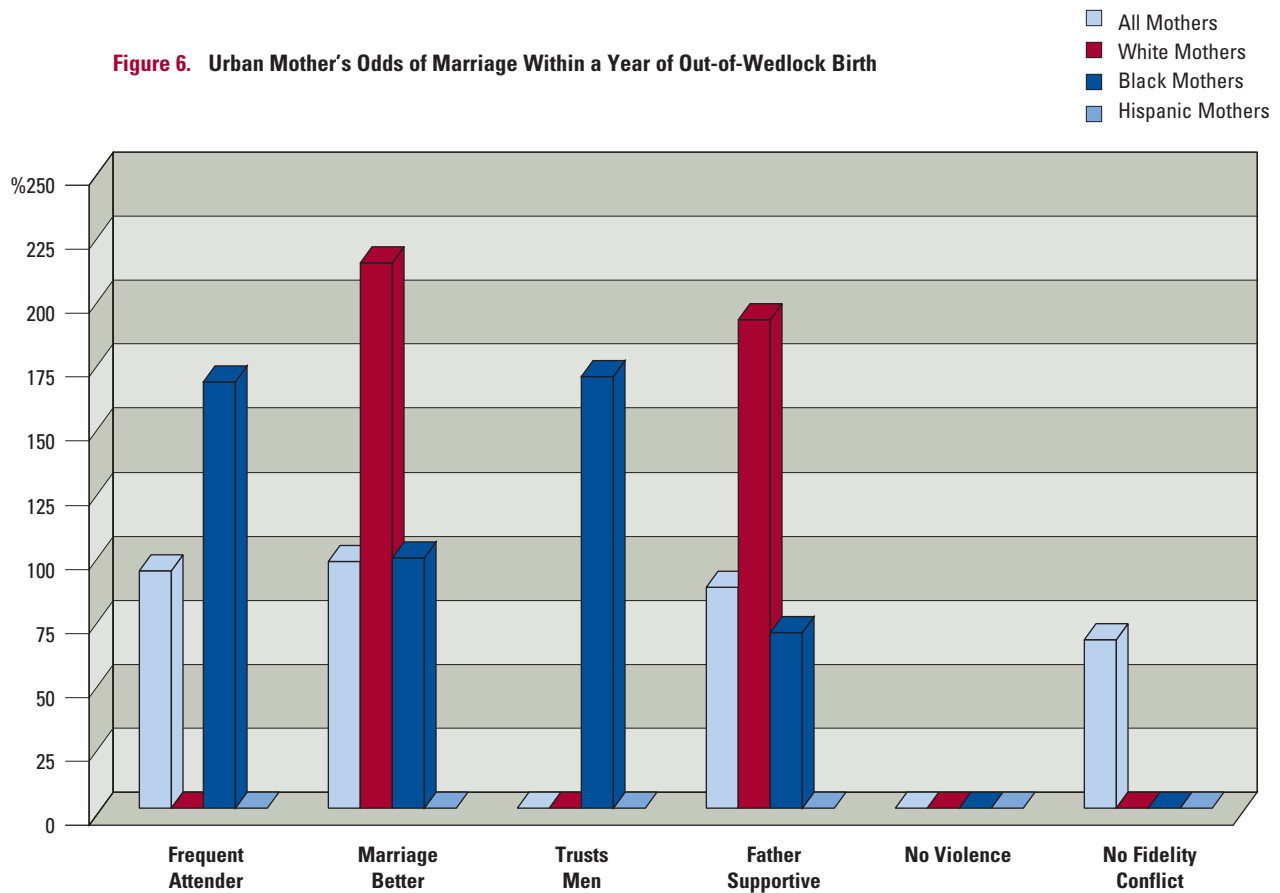
Figure 5 also graphs the effects of mother's beliefs about marriage on their odds of marriage. Urban mothers who have a high normative commitment to marriage are 123 percent more likely to be married than mothers who do not have such a commitment. The effect of normative commitment is particularly consequential for white mothers, who are 193 percent more likely to be married if they hold such a commitment. It is less consequential for black and Hispanic mothers, who are, respectively, 101 and 133 percent more likely to be married if they have a normative commitment to marriage. Figure 5 also reveals that gender trust is only associated with higher odds of marriage among white urban mothers, who are 241 percent more likely to be married if they believe that men can be trusted to be sexually faithful. Thus, Figure 5 suggests that marriage-related beliefs are associated most strongly with marital practice among whites.

Turning to urban mother's assessments of the relationship strategies of action of the fathers of their children, Figure 5 reveals that urban mothers who report that the father is highly supportive are 35 percent more likely to be married than women who do not report a high level of supportiveness for the father. It turns out that supportive-ness is particularly important for African American women, who are 57 percent more likely to be married if the father is highly supportive. Reports of domestic violence are unrelated to marital status among urban mothers. But conflict over fidelity is related to marital status. Urban mothers who report no conflict over sexual fidelity are 162 percent more likely to be married. Fidelity seems to be particularly consequential for Hispanic mothers, who are 234 percent more likely to be married if they report no conflict over sexual fidelity. Fidelity is somewhat less important for white and black mothers, who are, respectively, 146 and 128 percent more likely to be married if they report no conflict over sexual fidelity. Taken together, the three graphs tapping the relationship strategies of action of fathers suggest that such strategies of action are particularly important for explaining differences in black and Hispanic rates of marriage among urban mothers.

Thus, Figure 5 suggests that there are some racial and ethnic differences in the influence that religion, relation-ship-related beliefs, and relationship-related behaviors have upon the odds of marriage among urban mothers. Nevertheless, religious and cultural factors are large and significant predictors of marital status for all racial and ethnic groups in this sample. In other words, taken together, Table 1 and Figure 5 suggest that religious institutions are bulwarks of marriage in urban communities where marriage is struggling, partly because they seem to foster the beliefs and strategies of action that are conducive to marriage. Thus, Table 1 and Figure 5 lend support to the claims articulated in Hypothesis 1.

At the same time, because the analyses reported in Table 1 and Figure 5 are based on cross-sectional data, the direction of causality—in all probability—also goes in the opposite direction. That is, we know that marriage is associated with higher rates of church attendance, a stronger normative commitment to the institu-

Figure 6. Urban Mother's Odds of Marriage Within a Year of Out-of-Wedlock Birth

Legend:
- All Mothers
- White Mothers
- Black Mothers
- Hispanic Mothers

Categories (x-axis): Frequent Attender, Marriage Better, Trusts Men, Father Supportive, No Violence, No Fidelity Conflict

tion of marriage, better relationship behaviors, and higher earnings among men (Nock 1998a; Waite and Gallagher 2000). So, some portion of the relationship that this study documents between religion, culture, men's earnings, and marriage is probably caused by the institutional effects associated with marriage. For instance, the institution of marriage fosters relationship commitment, prosocial behavior, and work strategies that boost income among men (Gorman 1999; Nock 1998a). Nevertheless, given the dramatic nature of the relationship between urban mother's marital status and religious attendance, family-related beliefs and behaviors, and men's income effects, it is probably safe to assume that my independent variables do indeed contribute to differences in marital status among urban mothers.

Table 2, which relies on the longitudinal data derived from baseline and 12-month data, is better able to specify the causal role that religion and culture play in fostering marriage among urban mothers. Here, the focus is on predicting an urban mother's transition to marriage within a year of a nonmarital birth using independent variables from baseline data. Table 2 reveals, once again, that religious attendance, a strong normative commitment to marriage, and family-related strategies of action are related to family formation among unwed urban mothers.

Model 1 of Table 2 indicates that the father's socioeconomic status is positively related to urban mother's marriage within a year of an out-of-wedlock birth, though—somewhat surprisingly—upper-income fathers are not more likely than lower-income fathers to marry the mother of their child. Model 1 also indicates that African American mothers are less likely to marry within a year of an out-of-wedlock birth. Thus, Model 1 shows that race and men's income are associated with the transition to marriage among unwed mothers.

Model 2 indicates that frequent religious attendance is strongly associated with the transition to marriage within a year of a nonmarital birth for urban mothers. This suggests that religious institutions promote the kind of marriage-friendly beliefs and behaviors that lead to marriage. But, once again, religious attendance does not attenuate the effect of race. Indeed, the effect of race increases when religious attendance is added to the model. This means that the low rate of black marriage among urban mothers would be even higher were it not for their high level of church attendance.

Model 3 demonstrates that marriage-related beliefs and behaviors are strong predictors of marriage within the first year of a nonmarital birth for urban mothers. Unwed urban mothers who evince a strong belief in the normative value of marriage are significantly more likely to marry within the first year of a nonmarital birth. Unwed urban mothers who report that the father is highly supportive of them and that they do have conflict with him regarding sexual fidelity are significantly more likely to marry in this time period. These cultural factors also reduce the effect of religious attendance by 27 percent. This suggests that the effects of religious participation on marriage are explained in part by the beliefs and behaviors fostered by religious institutions.

But, in contrast to Table 1, these cultural factors do not diminish the effect of socioeconomic status for unwed mothers. Indeed, the father's income coefficients increase markedly from Model 2 to Model 3—especially the upper-income coefficient, which becomes large and statistically significant in Model 3. The cultural factors incorporated into Model 3 also have no influence on race effects. This means that the distinctively low levels of marriage among unwed mothers who are African American is not explained by the marriage-related beliefs and behaviors measured in this study.

Figure 6 examines the links between religion, race/ethnicity, and marriage after a nonmarital birth in greater detail. I ran separate logistic regression models for the white, black, and Hispanic unwed mothers depicted in Figure 6. The first set of graphs display the effect that frequent religious attendance has on the odds of marriage for urban mothers within a year of an out-of-wedlock birth, net of demographic and socioeconomic factors. The other graphs in Figure 6 display the effect that marriage-related beliefs and behaviors have on the odds of marriage for these mothers, net of religious, demographic, and socioeconomic factors.

Urban unwed mothers who attend church frequently are 90 percent more likely to marry within the first year of birth, according to Figure 6. This association is only statistically significant, however, for African American mothers, who are 165 percent more likely to marry if they attend church more than several times a month. This suggests that the connection between marriage and religious participation is particularly strong among blacks.

Figure 6 indicates that a normative commitment to marriage is associated with 97 percent increase in the likelihood of marriage for urban mothers within a year of having a nonmarital birth. The effect is strongest for white unwed mothers, who were 212 percent more likely to marry if they held such beliefs. African American unwed mothers in urban America were 99 percent more likely to marry if they held a normative commitment to marriage. This normative commitment did not influence Hispanic marriage rates for this sample. Figure 6 also shows that gender trust regarding sexual fidelity predicted marriage within a year of an out-of-wedlock birth for African American mothers, but not for white and Hispanic mothers.

Figure 6 also indicates that unwed mothers' assessment's of fathers relationship strategies of action are associated with higher rates of marriage. In particular, unwed mothers who report that the father is very support-ive are 83 percent more likely to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth. White mothers who reported high levels of father supportiveness were 190 percent more likely to marry and black mothers who reported high levels

of father supportiveness were 69 percent more likely to marry. Hispanic mothers odds of marriage were not affected by father supportiveness. Figure 6 also indicates that reports of father's domestic violence are not associated with marriage for any racial or ethnic group in this sample.

Figure 6 also shows that unwed urban mothers who report no conflict with the father regarding sexual fidelity are 67 percent more likely to marry within a year of a premarital birth. However, perhaps because of smaller sample sizes for each racial-ethnic group, the effect of fidelity does not register as statistically significant for any of the racial-ethnic groups in this study. Overall, then, Figure 6 demonstrates that church attendance is particularly important in fostering marriage among African American unwed mothers, and that relationship-related beliefs and behaviors are important predictors of marriage for white and African American unwed mothers, but not Hispanic mothers. This means that the religious and cultural factors seem less consequential in motivating marriage for Hispanic mothers living in large cities who have recently had a child outside of wedlock.

Taken together, Table 2 and Figure 6 provide more evidence consistent with Hypothesis 1: namely, that religious participation, and cultural beliefs and strategies of action, are strongly related to marriage among urban mothers. Urban mothers who are integrated into the life of a religious congregation are significantly more likely to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth. Relationship-related beliefs, especially a normative commitment to the institution of marriage, and relationship-related behaviors, especially the father's supportive approach to the mother, mediate the effect of church attendance and have a strong, independent association with marriage among unwed urban mothers. Figure 6 also indicates that these religious and cultural factors are particularly important for whites and blacks. Finally, the findings in Table 2 and Figure 6 largely parallel the findings reported in Table 1 and Figure 5, thereby lending additional credence to the notion that religious and cultural factors help account not only for which mothers marry within a year of a premarital birth but also for which mothers are married at birth.

Discussion

The present study shows that 42 percent of new urban mothers attend religious services several times a month or more, and that 33 percent of new urban mothers who are not married attend religious services several times a month or more. Moreover, this study indicates that church attendance is strongly associated, for urban mothers, with marriage at birth and with marriage within one year of a nonmarital birth. Urban mothers who attend church frequently are more than 90 percent more likely to be married or get married than mothers who do not attend church frequently. Moreover, the link between religious attendance and marriage is strongest among African American and white mothers. Accordingly, this study suggests that urban religious institutions, particularly the black church, serve as moral and social bulwarks of marriage in communities where the practice of marriage has grown increasingly attenuated. In other words, churches are important institutional carriers of the norms, strategies of action, and social networks that keep the belief in and practice of marriage alive in urban America. Their presence helps explain the heterogeneity in marital practice in urban America, a heterogeneity that can get lost in public and academic discussions of the urban underclass and the retreat from marriage in poor, minority communities (Edin 2000; Murray 1984; Wilson 1987).

This study suggests that one of the ways that religious institutions foster marriage is by promoting relationship-related beliefs and behaviors that are conducive to marriage. Although virtually all Americans and urban residents embrace the ideal of marriage, a large minority of Americans do not hold the beliefs and practice the relationship-related strategies of action that lead to marriage. Specifically, this study shows that urban mothers who believe that marriage is better for adults than cohabitation and better for children than alternative family forms are almost 100 percent more likely to be married or to get married than those who do not. This study also shows that urban mothers who are in a relationship with the father of a child marked by supportive behavior on his part (affection, compromise, and encouragement) and by sexual fidelity are between 35 and 80 percent more likely to be married or get married than those mothers who do not enjoy such a relationship with the father of their child (see also Carlson, McLanahan *et al.* 2001). Moreover, these cultural factors reduce the effect of religious attendance by about 25 percent, which suggests that they help explain the effect of religious attendance. In other words, an urban mother who is integrated into the life of a religious congregation is more likely to be exposed to beliefs and behaviors conducive to marriage and thereby come to hold these beliefs herself and to encounter them from her romantic partner.

In all probability, the strong relationship between religion, relationship-related beliefs and behaviors, and marriage is partly a consequence of selection effects. That is, women who believe strongly in the importance of marriage, and act accordingly, are probably more likely to seek out religious institutions that reinforce their commitment to marriage. As Elijah Anderson (1999) has argued, inner-city residents committed to the "code of decency" see the church as a source of social and moral support for their efforts to lead a decent life. Nevertheless, even if selection effects play an important role in accounting for this study's findings, the fact that religious institutions are often the most important institutional supports to this code of decency in urban America suggests that their absence would translate into less support for marriage and, eventually, even lower rates of marriage.

It is also important to note that church attendance is not a magic bullet when it comes to marriage for urban mothers. Not all urban mothers who attend church frequently are married at the time of birth or marry within a year of an unwed birth. The Fragile Families study indicates that 70 percent of frequently attending urban mothers are married at the time of birth (compared to 56 percent of infrequent or nonattending mothers). And only 10 percent of the frequent attendees who are unmarried at the time of birth go on to marry within a year (compared to the seven percent of infrequent or nonattending mothers who go on to marry within a year of a nonmarital birth). The latter finding is particularly sobering. Given the fact that the birth of a child seems to be a "magic moment" in the relationship of many unmarried couples (McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Mincy 2001), the odds of marriage probably decline dramatically more than a year out from the birth of a child. So, church attendance does not guarantee that unwed mothers in the nation's cities will find their way to the altar.

This study also examines the ways in which religious and cultural effects on marriage may vary by race and ethnicity. I find that religious and cultural factors are particularly important in fostering marriage among black and white urban mothers. For some reason, religious and cultural factors seem less salient in predicting marriage among Hispanic mothers, especially Hispanic mothers who are unmarried at the time of birth. It may be that the Catholic Church, with which Hispanic urban mothers are predominantly affiliated (Garfinkel and Wilcox 2001), is not doing much to foster marriage among its Hispanic members. But future research will have to investigate this issue in greater detail.

This study also casts further light on the African American religion-family paradox. As noted earlier, unusually high rates of church attendance and unusually low rates of marriage coexist among blacks. In view of these patterns, this study considered the possibility that religious attendance is not associated with marriage for African American urban mothers. But this study comes to precisely the opposite conclusion: the link between religious attendance and marriage is strongest among African American mothers. Indeed, adding religious effects to the statistical models in Tables 1 and 2 only increased the negative effect of the black coefficient in Tables 1 and 2. Moreover, adding the cultural factors in Tables 1 and 2 has virtually no effect on the large negative black coefficient for marriage at birth and marriage within a year of a nonmarital birth. Thus, this study is not able to offer religious or cultural explanations for the distinctively low level of marriage among urban African Americans. If anything, this study just adds to the mystery surrounding low rates of marriage among African Americans.

Conclusions

A burgeoning body of social scientific research indicates that the institution of marriage confers—on average—substantial benefits to adults and children. Adults who get and stay married have better health, better earnings, higher levels of civic engagement, and better mental health (Nock 1998a; Putnam 2000; Waite and Gallagher 2000). Likewise, children who grow up in an intact, married family tend to enjoy better educational and psychological outcomes compared to children who grow up in a non-intact family (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Amato and Booth 1997; Booth and Crouter 2002). For all these reasons, the retreat from marriage has had particularly baleful consequences in poor, minority communities in urban America, both because they suffer from higher rates of nonmarriage and because the fragility of family life in these communities is made worse by persistent poverty and racism.

Much of the literature on marriage has focused on social structural factors—from male joblessness to the structure of black and Hispanic marriage markets—to account for the recent retreat from marriage. This study indicates that this social-structural focus is justified. For instance, the income and education of unwed urban fathers is significantly lower than that of married urban fathers (see also Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan 2001). This suggests that urban mothers do not marry men who do not have good jobs. Thus, this study provides support for social structural explanations of the retreat from marriage that stress, for instance, the disappearance of good-paying low-skill jobs in urban America (Wilson 1987; Wilson 1996).

But this study also suggests that religious and cultural factors have played a role in the retreat from marriage. Indeed, this is the first study to focus on the relationship between religion and marriage in urban America. I find that religious attendance, pro-marriage beliefs, and relationship behaviors (supportiveness and sexual fidelity) are strongly related to the likelihood that urban mothers are married when they give birth to a child and to the likelihood that they will get married if they have a nonmarital birth. The importance of religious attendance in my analyses suggests that the secularization since the 1960s helps to account for the retreat from marriage (Thornton 1985). The importance of cultural factors in my analyses suggests that declines in normative support for marriage, along with changes in relationship-related behaviors such as increases in premarital sex, also help to explain declining marriage rates (Axinn and Thornton 2000).

But what might explain why these religious and cultural developments have been particularly consequential for the poor and minorities since the 1960s? Two developments, among others, may have accelerated the pace of secularization and the decline of a vital marriage culture in urban America.

First, the growth of the mass media since the 1960s has undoubtedly played an important, though understudied, role in the retreat from marriage, both by fostering secularization and by promoting beliefs and behaviors inimical to marriage. Mass media — television, video games, and popular music — are consumed at significantly higher rates by minorities, the poor, and young men (Roberts *et al.* 2001). Consumption of mass media, in turn, is associated with lower levels of religious practice and identification (Hout and Fischer 2002; Putnam 2000). The mass media has also emerged as an important guide to romantic relationships and sexual behavior among young people; but the medium and the message associated with contemporary popular culture tend to glorify self-assertion and sexual promiscuity, both of which are inimical to the formation and sustenance of marriage (Kunkel *et al.* 1999). Thus, by offering an alternative to religious life and by promoting a hedonistic ethic, the entertainment industry has undercut the institutional and cultural supports of marriage, with particularly devastating consequences for poor and minority communities who are most tuned in to the industry's products.

Second, economic restructuring since the 1960s has left many inner-city residents, especially minority men, without access to jobs that offer sufficient income to support a family. This economic development, coupled with ongoing racial discrimination and public policies that penalize marriage, has reduced the material incentives that used to undergird marriage and, more generally, a "decent" life encompassing hard work, self-reliance, civility, and church-going (Anderson 1999; Wilson 1987; Wilson 1996). Thus, in many urban communities, there are no material rewards for playing by the rules — staying out of trouble from the law, working in the legal economy, and marrying before one has children. The consequences are devastating: "when jobs disappear and people are left poor, highly concentrated, and hopeless, the way is paved for the underground economy to become a way of life, an unforgiving way of life organized around a code of violence and predatory activity" (Anderson 1999: 325). The triumph of code of the street in many urban communities, in turn, threatens the viability of marriage and the decent institutions, such as churches, that support the institution of marriage.

This study is essentially a diagnostic effort to illuminate the religious and cultural sources of the retreat from marriage in urban America, a retreat that is concentrated among the urban poor and urban minorities, especially African Americans. My primary aim is not to offer prescriptive advice about what can be done to reverse the retreat from marriage.

Nevertheless, the important role that religious, cultural, and economic factors play in accounting for the retreat from marriage suggests three conclusions about potential public and civic initiatives to strengthen the institution of marriage in urban America. First, federal and state governments need to reinforce the economic basis of marriage, and decent living more generally, by passing public policies that reduce joblessness among young men (and women) and that eliminate the marriage penalties for low-income couples built into current welfare regulations and the Earned Income Tax Credit (McLanahan, Garfinkel, and Mincy 2001; Sawhill and Thomas 2001). Second, because the federal government is not well-equipped to directly cultivate virtue among its citizens, it should not mandate specific marriage programs for the states, nor should it direct programmatic efforts on behalf of marriage. Instead, we should continue to experiment with state, religious, and other civic inititives —

including efforts funded by federal grants—that promote the beliefs and behaviors conducive to marriage. Initiatives that focus on preventing unwed childbearing and helping unmarried parents learn the virtues required for successful marriages will be particularly important (Lichter 2001; Wilcox 2002a). Finally, religious institutions should take more vigorous action to reach out to the substantial number of unmarried parents who sit in their pews on the average Sunday, and—where appropriate—offer them the moral, social, and material support they require to enter into a good marriage. None of these efforts, taken alone, are likely to turn the tide on marriage. But if a range of public, religious, and cultural initiatives are launched on behalf of marriage, the United States may yet reverse the retreat from marriage that has affected so many disadvantaged, minority communities in urban America.

Logistic Regression of Urban Mother's Marital Status

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	**Odds**	**b**	**Odds**	**b**	**Odds**
Demographic controls						
Mother age	0.10 ***	1.10	0.09 ***	1.10	0.10 ***	1.10
Father age	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
First child	-1.17 ***	0.31	-1.16 ***	0.31	-1.14 ***	0.32
All children w/ father	1.62 ***	5.05	1.59 ***	4.89	1.52 ***	4.58
Socioeconomic status						
Mother working	-0.90 ***	0.40	-0.90 ***	0.41	-0.84 ***	0.43
Father working	0.86 ***	2.37	0.86 ***	2.36	0.67 **	1.96
Mother's education	0.39 ***	1.48	0.36 ***	1.43	0.34 ***	1.41
Father's education	0.31 ***	1.36	0.31 ***	1.37	0.27 ***	1.31
Mother's income	0.09 ***	1.09	0.09 ***	1.09	0.09 ***	1.09
Father earns 10–34k	0.84 ***	2.33	0.81 ***	2.24	0.60 ***	1.83
Father earns 35k+	1.48 ***	4.39	1.47 ***	4.36	1.30 ***	3.66
Race/ethnicity						
Mother Hispanic	-0.50 ***	0.61	-0.61 ***	0.54	-0.54 ***	0.58
Mother black	-1.11 ***	0.33	-1.26 ***	0.29	-1.19 ***	0.30
Religious factor						
Frequent attendance			0.69 ***	2.00	0.50 ***	1.65
Relationship beliefs						
Marriage better					0.80 ***	2.23
Mother trusts men					0.25	1.29
Relationship behaviors						
Father highly supportive					0.30 **	1.35
No domestic violence					0.34	1.41
No conflict over fidelity					0.96 ***	2.62
Intercept	-6.92		-6.85		-8.32	
Model chi-Square	1573.66		1613.25		1699.20	
Degrees of Freedom	14		15		19	
N	3886		3877		3807	

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study

Logistic Regression of Urban Mother's Odds of Marriage Within a Year of Out-of-Wedlock Birth

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	Odds	b	Odds	b	Odds
Demographic controls						
Mother age	0.02	1.02	0.01	1.01	0.02	1.02
Father age	-0.02	0.98	-0.02	0.98	-0.03	0.97
First child	0.05	1.05	0.04	1.04	0.00	1.00
All children w/ father	-0.16	0.86	-0.18	0.84	-0.16	0.86
Mother cohabiting w/ father	0.93 ***	2.53	0.97 ***	2.63	0.81 ***	2.24
Socioeconomic status						
Mother working	-0.18	0.83	-0.18	0.83	-0.18	0.83
Father working	-0.01	0.99	-0.04	0.97	-0.07	0.93
Mother's education	0.13	1.14	0.11	1.11	0.10	1.10
Father's education	0.32 ***	1.38	0.34 ***	1.41	0.30 **	1.35
Mother's income	0.02	1.02	0.02	1.02	0.02	1.02
Father earns 10−34k	0.59 ***	1.80	0.57 **	1.77	0.74 ***	2.09
Father earns 35k+	0.50	1.65	0.54	1.72	0.80 **	2.22
Race/ethnicity						
Mother Hispanic	-0.06	0.94	-0.17	0.84	-0.14	0.87
Mother Black	-0.72 ***	0.49	-0.85 ***	0.43	-0.86 ***	0.42
Religious factor						
Frequent attendance			0.64 ***	1.90	0.47 **	1.61
Relationship beliefs						
Marriage better					0.68 ***	1.97
Mother trusts men					0.36	1.43
Relationship behaviors						
Father highly supportive					0.60 ***	1.83
No domestic violence					0.12	1.12
No conflict over fidelity					0.51 *	1.67
Intercept	-3.63		-3.56		-4.92	
Model chi-Square	163.96		180.82		225.13	
Degrees of Freedom	15		16		20	
N	3019		3010		2949	

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study

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[1] The 20 cities are: Austin, TX; Baltimore, MD; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Corpus Christi, TX; Detroit, MI; Indianapolis, IN; Jacksonville, FL; Milwaukee, WI; Nashville, TN; Newark, NJ; New York, NY; Norfolk, VA; Oakland, CA; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Richmond, VA; San Antonio, TX; San Jose, CA; and Toledo, OH.

[2] The data weighted to represent national trends do not include 1,347 respondents from Detroit, Milwaukee, Newark, and Oakland.

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