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Marriage Following the Birth of a Child Among Cohabiting and Visiting Parents

*Approximately half of nonmarital births are to mothers in cohabiting relationships, and an additional 30% are to mothers in visiting relationships. I use data (*N *= 1,945) from the Fragile Families Study to investigate whether the determinants of marriage in the year following a child's birth are similar for cohabiting and visiting parents. The results show that mothers' education is predictive of marriage for cohabiting parents, whereas mothers' earnings are predictive of marriage for visiting parents. The findings imply that visiting mothers place a greater emphasis on economic independence and sufficient resources to establish an independent household before transitioning to marriage. No differences in the association of relationship quality or attitudes and marriage are found.*

As a result of large demographic shifts in families, a significant proportion of children are born to unmarried mothers who remain romantically involved with their child's father. Approximately one third of all children are born to unmarried mothers (Hamilton, Martin, & Sutton, 2003), yet many of these mothers are not living alone. In the mid 1990s, 39% of all nonmarital births were to mothers living with their child's father (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). As cohabitation has increased, the estimates of births to unmarried cohabiting mothers are now as high as 50% in large urban areas. Moreover, an additional 30% of nonmarital births are to mothers who are dating their child's father, but living separately (McLanahan & Garfinkel, 2002).

Researchers and policymakers are particularly interested in these unmarried families because unmarried parents tend to have fewer economic resources (Manning & Brown, 2003) and are less stable (Manning, Smock, & Majumbar, 2004) than married parent families, and children living with unmarried parents are at a higher risk of poverty and poor academic and social development (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Encouraging marriage among these *fragile families* in the hopes that marriage will benefit the parents and children has become a major policy focus in the new welfare legislation. Moreover, researchers have long been interested in the determinants of marriage because of the central role that the institution of marriage plays in our society.

Despite the extensive body of literature on the determinants of marriage in general (see Fein, Burstein, Fein, & Lindberg, 2003 for a review), surprisingly little research has focused exclusively on marriage between the biological parents of a new child, or on marriage among low-income families. Among lesser educated Americans, there has been a decoupling of marriage and childbearing over the past several decades that has not occurred among higher educated adults (Ellwood & Jencks, 2002). This divergence in fertility and marital behavior indicates that low-income unmarried parents may face distinct determinants of marriage.

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A recent study that used a large birth cohort sample of predominantly low-income unmarried parents living in large urban areas examined the factors associated with marriage within a year following the birth of a child (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004). Their findings suggest that mothers' education, positive attitudes toward marriage, and stronger emotional support are all positively associated with marriage, whereas gender distrust decreases the odds of marriage. The inclusion of human capital, relational quality, and attitudinal-based factors in one analysis is a significant step forward in this field of research. A limitation is that their analysis does not interact the parents' living arrangement at their child's birth with each of these domains. Therefore, a question raised by their study is whether these factors apply similarly to mothers who are living with their child's father, as compared with mothers who are dating their child's father (referred to as *visitors*).

Parents in visiting relationships who share a biological child have been largely unidentified in prior research. Researchers generally combine visiting mothers with single mothers or focus on cohabiting couples alone. Cohabitation is generally considered a more serious relationship than visiting, and cohabiting parents are almost three times as likely as visiting parents to marry within a year following the birth of a child (Carlson et al., 2004). Moreover, visitors have a somewhat different set of options than cohabitors, insofar as they can move to either cohabitation or marriage. Thus, the obstacles and decisions for marriage are likely to differ for cohabiting and visiting parents.

This analysis builds on Carlson et al.'s (2004) research by examining the factors associated with marriage separately for parents in cohabiting and visiting relationships. I look specifically at the union transitions of cohabiting and visiting parents one year following the birth of a child. The goal is to determine whether the determinants of marriage and separation are similar for parents who live together, as compared with parents who do not coreside. The most prominent explanations regarding the determinants of marriage focus on human capital, relationship quality, and cultural norms and attitudes. Each of these factors is discussed briefly below, with attention paid to how they may apply differently to cohabitors and visitors.

Human Capital

The human capital–based explanations are somewhat ambiguous as to the effects of low-income men's and women's economic prospects and marriage. In low-income communities, men's higher economic prospects are generally considered important predictors of marriage. Men who are *good* potential marriage partners are often in short supply, however (Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992), which gives them more bargaining power in their relationships and may make them less willing to marry (England & Kilbourne, 1990). Women with greater economic resources are more attractive marriage partners. At the same time, they are more independent in that they have the ability to choose between assuming the risk of a less stable partner or leaving an undesirable relationship (Oppenheimer, 1997). In addition, their gains from marriage may be smaller relative to women who are not employed (Becker, 1991). Among low-income single mothers, however, establishing economic independence prior to marriage is often a stated goal (Edin & Kefalas, 2005).

Carlson et al.'s (2004) research found that fathers' earnings are positively linked with marriage, but this association is mediated by the parents' relationship quality and attitudes toward marriage. For mothers, higher education is predictive of marriage, yet there is no significant relationship between mothers' earnings and marriage. Their results are likely driven by the behavior of cohabiting parents, however, because of the substantially higher rates of entry into marriage for cohabiting versus visiting parents.

Mothers in visiting relationships may put more emphasis on their own and their partner's earnings than do mothers in cohabiting relationships. Visiting mothers are more likely to live with a parent rather than in an independent household (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002), an arrangement that may provide child care and sharing of economic resources. Therefore, to marry, their partner's resources must be great enough to offset the potential loss of resources provided by the mother's parent. In addition, low-income visiting mothers may have or perceive more changes to their welfare and tax eligibility as a result of marriage or cohabitation. Moreover, cohabitors may already pool their resources and have less to gain financially as a result of marriage.

Relationship Quality

Modern ideals of marriage encompass both the historic pragmatism of adequate economic resources to establish an independent household (Fitch & Ruggles, 2000) and more contemporary notions of companionship and romantic love (Lesthaeghe, 1995). This is no less true among the low-income population, who also have concerns regarding the father's drug use, criminal history, fidelity, and violence (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Thus, cohabiting and visiting relationships with higher emotional support and lower levels of conflict and risky behaviors are better suited for marriage (Brown, 2000; Carlson et al., 2004). It is not clear, however, whether the importance of these relational factors in the marriage decision differs between the groups.

Moreover, Edin and Kefalas (2005) found that among low-income families, if the father fails to show up at the hospital at the child's birth or the mother does not give the baby the father's surname, this is a strong indication of a troubled relationship. These negative behaviors are perhaps more common among visitors than cohabitors, but may have a greater effect on cohabitors because of higher expectations within a cohabiting relationship.

Marriage expectations also reflect a couple's relationship quality and are predictive of marriage behavior (Brown, 2000; Waller & McLanahan, 2005). High expectations of marriage may reflect the couple's capacity for marriage (e.g., higher human capital and better relationship quality), and they may represent a host of other unobservable characteristics about the couple. Although cohabitors have higher marriage expectations than visitors, cohabiting and visiting parents with high marriage expectations are more similar to one another in attitudes and relationship quality than to their counterparts with low marriage expectations (Osborne, 2002). Thus, it is not clear whether marriage expectations will have a different effect on the two groups.

Culture Norms and Attitudes

Individual attitudes regarding the importance of marriage, especially for childrearing, have also been posited to explain the marriage decision. Low-income mothers who do not think that marriage is necessary for childrearing, and who think that cohabitation is an acceptable alternative or substitute for marriage should be the least likely to marry, a hypothesis that is supported by empirical evidence (Carlson et al., 2004). Cohabitors may be more likely to think that cohabitation is an acceptable alternative to marriage, given their choice of living arrangement. It is not clear whether attitudes about marriage should affect cohabitors and visitors differently.

In addition, normative attitudes about gendered family roles within marriage may also contribute to the marriage decision. Many low-income unmarried mothers fear that, upon marriage, they will have to relinquish power and control over their children and household decisions (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). These fears are compounded by the fact that the husband may not be able to provide for family members, or that he may leave the relationship. Although many low-income mothers, particularly Black mothers (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993), hold traditional attitudes regarding the man as breadwinner/woman as homemaker, most low-income mothers also feel that it is imperative to be economically independent from their partner before marriage in the event that the marriage dissolves (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Mothers with more traditional attitudes regarding gendered family roles may be more willing to relinquish control to their partners, and therefore more willing to marry (Sanchez, Manning, & Smock, 1998). If the man is unable to fulfill the normative role of breadwinner, however, traditional views may be associated with lower odds of marriage, and perhaps increased separation (Oppenheimer, 1997, 2000). Cohabitors may predict fewer changes in the dynamics of their relationship upon marriage, so these attitudes may have less of an effect on this group.

Gender distrust is also a salient issue in the marriage decision, particularly among low-income, unmarried African American mothers (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Women who are less trusting of their mate or of men in general are less likely to make a long-term commitment (Carlson et al., 2004). The extent to which gender distrust affects the marriage and separation decisions of cohabitors and visitors differently is not clear.

Selection

An important caveat to the above discussion is that the unmarried parents in this study selected

their living arrangement prior to their child's birth, and therefore may have taken many of the factors discussed above into consideration in making this decision. Today, unmarried women are just as likely to transition to cohabitation (9%) as marriage (11%) in the event of a nonmarital pregnancy (Raley, 2001). Women who are White, older, more religious, do not have children from previous relationships, and who have higher human capital, however, are more likely to marry prior to their child's birth (Manning, 1993, 2001), leaving a select group of unmarried parents. For many low-income couples who become pregnant, the ultimate ideal is marriage, but the immediate goal is to establish an independent cohabiting household (Gibson, Edin, & McLanahan, 2003). Therefore, visiting couples may be the most select of all unmarried parents, given that they continue to live apart. Selection into a living arrangement prior to the child's birth limits any interpretation of causal links between given factors and marriage and separation, a fact that further justifies examining cohabiting and visiting parents' union transitions separately.

METHOD

Data

In this analysis, I use data from the Fragile Families Study. These data are unique in providing information on parents in visiting relationships in addition to a large sample of cohabiting families with two biological parents. The Fragile Families Study also provides a rich set of human capital, relationship quality, and attitude variables to better understand the factors associated with family transitions.

The Fragile Families Study collected baseline information in 16 large cities (populations of 200,000 or more) throughout the United States from 1998 to 2000. Approximately 2,700 unmarried mothers and 800 married mothers ($N =$ 3,488) were interviewed in the hospital shortly after the birth of their child, and were reinterviewed when the child was about 1 year old. Most of the fathers were interviewed in the hospital as well, or shortly following the birth. Approximately 1,200 mothers (and fathers) in four additional cities were also interviewed, but these parents are not included in the random sample. When weighted, the sample is representative of births in large urban areas.

This article uses baseline and 1-year follow-up data on 1,945 mothers who were unmarried at their child's birth (baseline). An additional 755 mothers who were married at baseline provide a basis of comparison for the descriptive statistics, but are not included in the multivariate analyses. The sample excludes 483 mothers who were not in a romantic relationship with their child's father at the child's birth, and an additional 305 mothers who were not reinterviewed at 1 year. Almost 90% of mothers from the baseline sample are included in the analysis. Sample attrition is similar for cohabiting and visiting respondents, and does not seem to bias the results. Preliminary analyses show that the baseline characteristics of the cohabiting mothers who were not reinterviewed at 1 year do not differ significantly from those who were. Visiting mothers who left the sample are similar to those who were reinterviewed, with the exception that those who left reported poorer relationship quality with their child's father at baseline as compared with those who remained in the sample. In most cases, information provided by the mother is included in this analysis because a significant number of fathers did not respond to the initial and follow-up surveys. This was especially true for visiting fathers and fathers with more tenuous relationships with the mother.

Relationship Status Variables

At baseline, a mother is considered to be cohabiting if she reports living with her child's father. The mothers were not asked how often the couple coresides. A mother is considered to be visiting if she reports that she is romantically involved with her child's father, but does not live with him.

The mother's report of her relationship status with her child's father at 1 year is the outcome measure in this analysis. A categorical dependent measure of married, cohabiting, or separated is created for mothers cohabiting at baseline. A four-term categorical dependent measure of married, cohabiting, visiting, or separated is created for mothers in visiting relationships at baseline. At 1 year, mothers are considered cohabiting if the mother reports that she is romantically involved with her child's father and lives with him most or all of the time. Mothers cohabiting at baseline are assigned to the separated category if they no longer coreside

with their child's father at 1 year, even if the mother states that she and the baby's father remain romantically involved (< 5%).

Independent Variables

Independent variables included in this analysis are the parents' background characteristics, human capital, and relationship quality, and the mother's attitudes about marriage and men. All variables are measured at baseline and based on the mother's report, unless noted.

Background characteristics include age, race, nativity, religiosity, family background, coresidence of a parent, and prior fertility. Mother's age is a continuous variable. Mother's race includes non-Hispanic White (White), non-Hispanic Black (Black), Hispanic, and other. Nativity, religiosity, family background, and coresidence of a parent are dichotomous variables indicating that the mother is foreign born, that she attends a religious service weekly, that her parents were married when she was 15 years old, and that one of the mother's parents shares her residence, respectively. Prior fertility is a set of three dichotomous variables: the couple having other children together, the mother having children from another relationship, and the father having children from another relationship. The fertility questions were asked at 1 year, but are coded to reflect their status at the child's birth.

Human capital measures include education, earnings, and personal problems that limit the ability to work. Mother's education is a set of four dummy variables, including less than high school, high school, some college or technical training, and college education or more. Father's education is a set of three dichotomous variables measured as being in an education category above, below, or similar to the mother's. Mother's earnings are measured as four dichotomous variables based on her reported annual earnings from employment in the year prior to the birth. The categories include: zero earnings, less than $10,000, between $10,000 and $25,000, and more than $25,000. Father's earnings are measured by the same four categories and are based on the father's report of his annual earnings from employment. Earnings are imputed based on the mean of the subgroup for 10.3% of cohabiting fathers and 27.9% of visiting fathers because of missing data. Personal problems include the mother's use of drugs during her pregnancy, the father's drug or alcohol abuse that limits his ability to work or have relationships, and the father being in jail at the time of the child's birth. Each variable is a dichotomous measure based on the mother's report.

To measure relationship quality, I use six variables to capture positive and negative aspects of the relationship: physical abuse, disagreement, emotional support, marriage expectations, visiting the mother in the hospital, and giving the child the father's surname. Physical abuse is a dichotomous measure indicating that the father hits or slaps the mother sometimes or often versus never. Disagreement is a scale based on the mean of six questions regarding the frequency, in the month prior to the child's birth, with which the mother disagreed with the father about money, spending time together, sex, the pregnancy, drugs/alcohol, and being faithful ($\alpha = .63$ for cohabitors and .65 for visitors). The responses range from 1 (*often*) to 3 (*never*), and are recoded such that a high value indicates high levels of disagreement. Emotional support is a scale based on three questions regarding whether the baby's father is fair and willing to compromise, expresses affection or love for the mother, and encourages or helps the mother do things that are important to her. Responses are opposite coded and range from 1 (*never*) to 3 (*often*). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale differs considerably for cohabiting and visiting mothers ($\alpha = .54$ for cohabitors and .65 for visitors). Therefore, father's emotional support may reflect something different for each group. Marriage expectations represent the chances of marriage to the baby's father in the near future. High expectations represent a response of good or almost certain. Low marriage expectations represent a mother's response of 50-50, little chance, or no chance. The father visiting the hospital at the child's birth and the child taking the father's surname are dichotomous variables.

The mother was supposed to have been alone during the baseline interview at the hospital, but the baby's father and other relatives could have been nearby. The preceding questions were also asked directly after the mother had had a child with the man she is referring to. Therefore, these responses may be underreporting actual levels of disagreement and abuse in the relationship, and may be more optimistic about hopes for marriage.

To measure the association between mothers' attitudes and union transitions, I include attitudes about the importance of marriage for the

couple and the child, traditional gendered family roles, and gender distrust. A promarriage scale is based on the mean of three questions regarding whether it is better for a couple to get married than just live together, whether living together is just the same as being married (opposite coded), and whether it is better for children if their parents are married. Responses range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), such that a high score indicates attitudes more favorable toward marriage. The alpha score for this scale is .58 for cohabitors and .55 for visitors. Traditional attitudes about gendered family roles are measured as a scale based on the mean of two questions regarding whether the important family decisions should be made by the man, and whether it is better if the husband earns the living and the woman cares for family members ($\sigma = .39$ for cohabitors and .35 for visitors). Responses range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Gender distrust is a scale based on the mean of two questions regarding whether, in dating, a man is largely out to take advantage of a woman and men cannot be trusted to be faithful ($\sigma = .41$ for cohabitors and .36 for visitors). Responses for this scale also range from 1 to 4, with 4 representing high levels of gender distrust. The scales used in this analysis are similar to those used by Carlson and her colleagues (2004).

Methodology

The goal of this analysis is to determine whether the factors associated with marriage in the year following the birth of a child are similar for cohabiting and visiting parents. I estimate separate multinomial logistic regression models for mothers who are cohabiting and visiting at their child's birth. Multinomial logistic regression models estimate relative risk ratios, which predict the odds of being in a certain category relative to the base category. Cohabitors have three choices: They can marry, separate, or remain cohabiting. Visitors have four choices because they can also move to cohabitation, so this choice is considered in the model for visitors. In each model, remaining in the same relationship throughout the year is the reference category. I estimate the association between the parents' background characteristics, human capital, relationship quality, and attitudes about marriage and gendered family roles with union transitions for each group of unmarried parents.

Preliminary analyses showed that my analysis yields similar results as Carlson et al.'s (2004) when cohabitors and visitors are pooled in one model. My results differ slightly from their results because their analysis included mothers who were not romantically involved with their child's father at baseline, and they did not use the weighted random sample in their multivariate analysis.

In addition, using the pooled sample, I ran a fully interacted model to determine whether there are significant interactions between living arrangement and each covariate. In Table 2, I underline the coefficients that differ significantly. Moreover, I conducted a Chow test to determine whether separate models are warranted for cohabitors and visitors. The results suggest that the groups should not be pooled ($p = .03$). In these preliminary analyses, I exclude mothers visiting at baseline who move from visiting to cohabitation ($N = 182$) to make the base category of the multinomial logistic regression model similar for cohabitors and visitors (the base category is no change in the relationship from the child's birth to 1 year). These mothers are included in the final analysis in the model for visitors, however.

I experimented with several ways of dealing with missing data, and found that the results are robust to several methods. For dichotomous variables, missing data are imputed based on the mean of the subgroup (e.g., cohabitor or visitor), and a dummy variable indicating the variable is missing is included in the model. The scales are based on the mean responses for which data are available. If no data are available, the missing value is imputed based on the mean of the subgroup.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the means and the frequencies of the dependent and independent variables used in this analysis. The results confirm that few unmarried mothers marry in the year following the birth of a child. Compared with cohabitors, mothers in visiting relationships are much less likely to marry and more likely to separate within the child's first year. These findings reflect the looser bond of a visiting relationship in comparison with a cohabiting relationship. Both unmarried relationships are less stable than marriages, however.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES BY RELATIONSHIP STATUS AT CHILD'S BIRTH

	Married $N = 755$	Cohabiting $N = 1,175$	Visiting $N = 770$
Union transitions			
Married between birth and 1 year	——	16.63	7.32[a]*
Separated between birth and 1 year	6.21	26.10	48.01*
Background characteristics			
Mother's age (in years)	28.93	24.12	23.51
Mother's race			
White	45.27	23.48	7.88*
Black	12.85	31.08	64.49*
Hispanic	31.62	39.38	25.87*
Other	10.26	6.05	1.75*
Father's race differs from mother's	15.74	14.29	12.45
Mother foreign born	28.55	15.59	6.95*
Mother attends religious service weekly	31.03	13.82	21.63*
Mother's parents married at 15	61.05	42.19	30.77*
Mother lives with parent(s)	8.33	16.93	44.82*
Prior fertility			
Parents share other child(ren)	58.92	35.96	19.83*
Mother has other child(ren)	13.58	39.01	46.69*
Father has other child(ren)	16.05	34.05	43.78*
Human capital and earnings			
Mother's education			
Less than high school	19.89	40.85	41.99
High school	27.32	36.61	37.69
Some college	23.68	20.41	18.86
College	29.11	2.13	1.47
Father has more education than mother	21.81	23.51	22.63
Father has less education than mother	16.68	21.63	24.26
Mother's earnings in year prior to birth			
$0	25.06	26.55	34.62*
Under $10,000	30.15	44.94	45.77
$10,000 to $24,999	20.67	24.36	16.64*
$25,000 and higher	24.13	4.16	2.97
Father's earnings in year prior to birth			
$0	2.44	1.98	4.39
Under $10,000	5.75	22.87	29.72*
$10,000 to $24,999	25.65	52.79	55.39
$25,000 and higher	66.16	22.36	10.49*
Mother used drugs during pregnancy	0.47	5.01	6.04
Father abuses alcohol/drugs	1.72	3.27	5.49
Father in jail at child's birth	0.35	0.73	5.79*
Relationship quality			
Father hits/slaps mother	1.49	1.33	2.61
Disagreement (1–3)	1.31	1.42	1.51*
Father's emotional support (1–3)	2.74	2.71	2.57*
High marriage expectations	——	83.90	50.94*
Father visited mother in hospital	——	96.18	72.75*
Child has father's surname	——	93.85	75.05*
Mother's attitudes			
Promarriage attitudes (1–4)	3.08	2.64	2.72
Traditional gender attitudes (1–4)	2.18	2.05	2.02
Gender distrust (1–4)	1.86	1.97	2.08*

Note: Figures weighted by national sampling weights for the Fragile Families Study.

[a]20.85% of visitors moved to cohabitation between birth and 1 year.

*Denotes significant difference between cohabitors and visitors ($p \leq .05$).

The results also confirm that mothers who choose to have a child in a visiting relationship are quite different from mothers who have a child while cohabiting, and that both of these groups are distinct from married mothers. Most mothers in visiting relationships are Black, whereas cohabiting mothers are somewhat evenly distributed across race and ethnic groups, and are more likely to be foreign born. Mothers in visiting relationships are also more likely than cohabiting mothers to attend a religious service frequently. Moreover, visitors are less likely than cohabitors to have lived with both parents throughout childhood. Mothers in visiting relationships are over twice as likely to currently live with a parent, however. The two groups also differ in terms of their prior fertility. Cohabiting parents are twice as likely as visitors to share another biological child, whereas visiting parents are more likely to have children from previous relationships.

Human capital differences between cohabiting and visiting parents are varied. The two groups have similar levels of education, albeit unmarried parents' education is significantly lower than married parents' education. Despite similar levels of education, parents in visiting relationships report lower earnings in the year prior to the child's birth. The earnings of both groups are very low in comparison with married mothers, however. Most of the fathers report some earnings throughout the year, but only 10% of visiting fathers report earning more than $25,000, compared with 22% of cohabiting fathers. Again, married fathers earn significantly more than unmarried fathers. The results also show that about 5% of unmarried mothers report substance abuse problems for themselves or the baby's father, but fathers in visiting relationships are much more likely than cohabiting fathers to be in jail at the time of the child's birth.

Differences between the two groups in relationship quality further confirm that visiting relationships are looser bonds than cohabiting relationships. Mothers in visiting relationships report more disagreement with the child's father in the month prior to the birth, and lower levels of emotional support. Not surprisingly, visiting mothers also report lower expectations of marriage. Further, fathers in visiting relationships are much less likely to have visited the mother in the hospital or to share a surname with the child. The attitudes about marriage and gendered family roles do not differ significantly between cohabiting and visiting mothers, but mothers in visiting relationships are much less likely to trust men. It is not clear whether the mother's attitudes about men are reflective of her current partner or of men in general.

These differences in human capital, relationship quality, and gender distrust may be the reason that the parents chose their respective living arrangement at their child's birth, or they could be a consequence of their choice. Because I do not have information on these couples before the beginning of their union, I cannot determine whether these differences are the result of living together or selection. These differences may also help explain why cohabiting parents are more likely to marry and stay together than visiting parents, assuming that the factors on which the parents differ are related to union formation for both groups.

Multivariate Analysis

The primary aim of this analysis is to test whether the determinants of marriage are similar for cohabiting and visiting parents. The results of the multivariate analyses in Table 2 show the factors associated with union transitions separately for cohabiting and visiting parents. Below, I focus mainly on the factors associated with marriage (columns 1 and 3 in Table 2) rather than separation or cohabitation.

As mentioned above, theory is somewhat mixed as to the association between low-income men's and women's economic prospects and marriage. In general, higher education and earnings make one a more attractive marriage partner, but these also give men and women more independence in their marriage decision. Moreover, parents in more committed relationships may benefit from specialization in which one partner works in the home (usually the woman) and the other earns the wages (usually the man). In this case, the woman's earnings may be negatively related to marriage. I predicted that higher earnings may be more important to visitors than cohabitors, because visitors have to establish an independent household.

The results in Table 2 show that the association between human capital and marriage differs for cohabiting and visiting parents. Mother's education is predictive of marriage for cohabiting parents, whereas mother's earnings are predictive of marriage for visiting parents. That these variables are the strongest predictors of marriage for these groups helps to explain the

TABLE 2. UNION TRANSITIONS BETWEEN CHILD'S BIRTH AND ONE YEAR, RELATIVE TO REMAINING STABLE RELATIVE RISK RATIOS[a] FOR COHABITORS AND VISITORS SEPARATELY

	Cohabitors		Visitors		
	Marriage	Separation	Marriage	Cohabitation	Separation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Background characteristics					
Mother's age	1.00	1.00	1.05	.99	.99
Mother's race (Black)					
White	.93	.79	14.43**	3.99*	1.10
Hispanic	1.07	.98	11.84**	3.57**	1.56
Partner is of different race	3.18**	.92	.83	1.23	1.06
Mother foreign born	1.55	.65	6.29	2.01	.72
Mother's parents married at 15	1.24	.78	.93	1.42	1.93†
Mother lives with her parent(s)	1.57	1.12	.71	.58	.48†
Mother attends church weekly	2.09*	1.01	2.43	.55	.54
Parents share another child	1.43	.98	1.22	1.49	.63
Mother has another child	.98	.74	1.00	.79	.52
Father has another child	.93	1.29	.41	1.38	1.13
Human capital					
Mother's education (< h.s.)					
High school	1.76	1.36	.42	.92	1.71
Some college	2.32†	1.52	.23	.36	.91
College	8.71**	2.92	.58	.53	2.23
Mother's annual earnings ($0)					
Less than $10,000	.58	.57*	.55	.73	.45*
$10,000 to $24,999	.38*	1.06	1.24	.72	.43†
More than $25,000	.72	1.12	10.19*	1.55	.22†
Father's annual earnings ($0)					
Less than $10,000	.61	2.11	1.54	.39	1.29
$10,000 to $24,999	1.41	1.97	3.89	.43	1.46
More than $25,000	1.07	1.05	2.04	.16*	1.95
Father abuses alcohol/drugs	3.29	1.30	.04*	.74	1.18
Relationship quality					
Father hits/slaps mother	.03**	.39†	NA	NA	NA
Disagreement (1–3)	.46	2.54**	1.67	.92	1.67
Emotional support (1–3)	1.46	.84	1.21	.48	.38*
High marriage expectations	1.69	.51*	3.38†	.96	.90
Father visited hospital at birth	8.69**	.29**	.82	.89	.32**
Child has father's surname	.76	.79	.20*	1.78	.46
Mother's attitudes					
Promarriage attitudes	1.33	.82	1.97	1.06	1.05
Traditional gender attitudes	.98	1.26	1.02	.87	.67
Gender distrust	.84	.81	.39	.81	1.42
N	1,175	1,175	770	770	770

Note: Reference category in parentheses. Controls excluded from table include other race, father has more education than mother, father has less education than mother, mother used drugs during pregnancy, and father in jail at birth. Father hits/slaps perfectly predicts failure for marriage for visiting mothers, and is therefore not included to preserve sample size. Underline denotes significant difference in coefficients between cohabitors and visitors ($p \leq .05$).

Source: Fragile Families Study. Figures weighted based on national sampling weights.

[a]Relative risk ratios are exponentiated betas for multinomial logistic regression models.

†$p \leq .10$. *$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$.

low rates of marriage among unmarried parents. Only 2% of cohabiting mothers have a college degree, and less than 3% of visiting mothers earn more than $25,000 per year.

Cohabiting mothers with some college or more are significantly more likely to marry shortly after the birth of a child than are cohabiting mothers with less than a high school diploma. This finding is consistent with previous literature showing class differences in childbearing and marriage within cohabiting unions (Manning, 2001) and with Carlson et al.'s (2004) findings. In contrast, education is not significantly related to marriage for visiting parents. In fact, the point estimates suggest that higher educated visiting mothers are less likely to marry than less educated visiting mothers.

Earnings are related to marriage for visiting mothers. Visiting mothers with earnings over $25,000 have over 10 times the odds of marrying than visiting mothers with no earnings. Moreover, visiting mothers with any earnings in the prior year are about half as likely to break up. Interestingly, mothers' earnings are more predictive of marriage than are fathers' earnings. This finding suggests that visiting mothers place a high value on their own economic independence. This independence among the highest earners encourages marriage, however, rather than remaining single, which is consistent with results from qualitative research (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). In contrast, cohabiting mothers with earnings are less likely than mothers with no earnings to marry, indicating that high-earning cohabiting mothers may have less to gain financially through marriage, especially if they already pool their resources.

These findings raise the question of why college education is associated with marriage for cohabitors, and high earnings are associated with marriage for visitors. For both groups, college education and earnings over $25,000 are highly correlated, yet the correlation is much higher for visitors ($\sigma = .34$ versus .19 for cohabitors). Postanalyses also show that college versus noncollege education differentiates cohabitors in terms of relationship quality, attitudes, and background characteristics, whereas for visitors, high versus low earnings differentiates the group. Moreover, college-educated cohabitors have more promarriage attitudes and are more traditional than college-educated visitors. Thus, college-educated cohabitors are different from college-educated visitors.

Higher educated cohabitors may view cohabitation as a precursor to marriage, and may be motivated to marry by the birth of a child. Given their high levels of earnings potential, these cohabiting mothers may be willing to assume the financial risks of marriage, despite their current income levels. Having zero earnings in the year prior to the child's birth may also indicate a greater willingness or ability on the part of the father to provide financially for the couple, and this may be especially true for mothers with higher levels of education.

Visitors differ from cohabitors in that they have to establish an independent household. Thus, higher earnings are required for marriage, regardless of education level. Visiting mothers also have less reliable partners and lower quality relationships than cohabiting mothers, and therefore need more financial security to fall back on in case the relationship dissolves. It is also likely that visiting fathers are more interested in marrying visiting mothers with high earnings in order to gain access to her resources. Cohabiting fathers may already have access to the resources of high-earning cohabiting mothers, and may be less motivated to marry.

Theory is less ambiguous about the association between relationship quality and marriage, and predicts that parents with better relationship quality and lower conflict should be more likely to marry and less likely to separate. The results confirm these predictions, and I find no significant differences in the effects of relationship quality on marriage or separation between cohabiting and visiting parents. For both groups, however, relationship quality is more strongly associated with keeping the parents together rather than promoting marriage within the first year following a nonmarital birth. Carlson et al. (2004) found a strong association between emotional support and marriage in their pooled analysis. Emotional support was not significantly related to marriage in my preliminary analyses, however, and is not significant in the separate models either. This finding holds regardless of whether other variables that may be representative of emotional support are included in the analysis (e.g., marriage expectations, visiting the mother in the hospital, and giving the child the father's surname). This discrepancy in findings is likely due to the inclusion in Carlson et al.'s analysis of mothers who do not have a romantic relationship with their child's father.

In contrast to the prediction and previous findings that positive attitudes about marriage and gendered family roles are associated with a higher likelihood of marriage, I find no significant relationship between attitudes and marriage. The point estimates for visiting mothers suggest that positive attitudes about marriage and gender trust are linked with more marriage and less separation, but the coefficients are not significant. The discrepancy between my findings and Carlson et al.'s (2004), who found large effects of attitudes and trust on marriage, seems to be related to the slightly different samples of unmarried mothers used in our analyses. Their analysis included unmarried mothers who were not in a romantic relationship with their child's father at the child's birth, and they did not weight their multivariate analyses. I find results that are consistent with theirs when I use their method.

A final interesting point regarding the transition to marriage for cohabiting and visiting mothers is that race is highly predictive of marriage (and cohabitation) for visiting mothers, whereas it is not predictive of marriage for cohabitors. The descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that most mothers in visiting relationships at the child's birth are Black, and that relatively few are White or Hispanic. The results in Table 2 imply that White and Hispanic mothers are also less likely to stay in a visiting relationship after their child's birth, leaving visiting relationships to be even more highly concentrated with Black mothers. The finding that race is not predictive of marriage or separation for cohabiting parents is inconsistent with prior research (Brown, 2000; Carlson et al., 2004; Manning, 2001; Manning & Smock, 1995), however. The differences between my findings and research using other data sets may be due to the focus on low-income unmarried parents and the inclusion of multiple indicators that are correlated with race in my analysis. The differences between my findings and those of Carlson et al., however, seem to be due to differences in our methods. I find that race is predictive of marriage for cohabitors if I do not weight the multivariate analysis.

Conclusion

This analysis builds on prior research that examined the determinants of marriage within a year following the birth of a child for unmarried biological parents (Carlson et al., 2004). In this analysis, I tested whether the determinants of marriage are similar for parents who are cohabiting at their child's birth, as compared with parents who are in visiting relationships. The results suggest that mothers' education is predictive of marriage for cohabitors, whereas mothers' earnings are predictive of marriage for visitors. In fact, cohabiting mothers' earnings are negatively associated with marriage. Moreover, fathers' earnings and education are not predictive of marriage for either group.

The results imply that economic independence and sufficient resources to establish an independent household are important factors in the marriage process for visiting mothers. For cohabitors, the mother having zero earnings in the year prior to the child's birth may represent a higher level of commitment and sharing of financial resources within the relationship. This may be especially true among higher educated cohabitors. I find no significant differences between cohabiting and visiting mothers in the association between marriage and relationship quality or mothers' attitudes. Better relationship quality is associated with more marriage and lower odds of separation, whereas mothers' attitudes are not significantly related to union formation or dissolution.

Throughout this analysis, I have limited the use of any causal language when discussing the link between the factors under consideration and union transitions. This is because I do not have information on these unmarried parents prior to the beginning of their romantic relationships. Moreover, I cannot measure change in human capital, relationship quality, or attitudes in these two waves of data to determine how changes in these factors affect marriage or separation.

Despite the lack of evidence of causal associations, this analysis has important implications for policies aimed at promoting healthy marriages among unmarried parents. The results highlight that not all unmarried parents are the same, and that programs designed to encourage marriage need to take the parents' living arrangement and commitment into account. Moreover, research can benefit from modeling the processes of family formation separately for parents in cohabiting relationships versus parents with a lower level of commitment.

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