

**DO UNMARRIED PARENTS'
EXPECTATIONS PREDICT MARITAL
TRANSITIONS?**

**EARLY EVIDENCE FROM THE
FRAGILE FAMILIES AND CHILD
WELL-BEING STUDY**

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**Do Unmarried Parents' Expectations Predict Marital Transitions?
Early Evidence from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study***

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Abstract

This paper uses newly available information from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Survey to investigate how unmarried mothers' and fathers' expectations about marriage, in addition to their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, are related to transitions to marriage in the year following their child's birth. It also investigates factors that are associated with unmarried parents' expectations about marriage. The results show that mothers and fathers with higher expectations about marriage at the time of their child's birth were significantly more likely to marry between the time of the baseline and follow-up interview. After taking expectations into account, African-American mothers and fathers are less likely to marry, and parents at higher educational levels were more likely to marry, than other parents. We also find that relationship, gender, and socio-economic variables are important predictors of parents' expectations about marriage. However, these variables have somewhat different effects among mothers and fathers.

Over 30 percent of births in the United States now occur outside of marriage, up from about 10 percent in 1970 and 4 percent in 1940. Despite changes in social policy over the last three decades and variations across states, the rate of births to unmarried parents has continued to rise, leveling off somewhat in recent years. This trend has led many researchers to believe that complex social forces underlie increases in non-marital childbearing that may not be sensitive to social policy.¹ While it appears that changes in marital behavior explain the rise in non-marital childbearing more than changes in fertility behavior (e.g., Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986, 54), there is still a great deal of uncertainty about why men and women are delaying marriage.² Because children born outside of marriage are the poorest demographic group in the U.S. and because they make up over half of the children receiving welfare, questions about marital behavior are particularly salient for men and women who have already had children together.

This paper uses information from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Survey (FFCW)--a unique data set of unmarried parents and their children--to investigate questions related to changing marital expectations and decisions. In particular, the paper examines how unmarried mothers' and fathers' expectations about marriage, in addition to their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, are related to whether or not they will make the transition to marriage in the year following their child's birth. It also investigates factors that are associated with unmarried parents' expectations about marriage and how these factors

¹ Research generally fails to show a strong connection between state spending for welfare and births to unmarried parents (e.g., Bane and Ellwood 1994: 109-112).

² Not only have recent cohorts of adults postponed marriage but men and women are now more likely to divorce and less likely to remarry. Therefore, men and women have a higher "risk" of having a child outside of marriage. Furthermore, fewer men and women today are deciding to marry in response to a nonmarital pregnancy (Ventura, et. al 1995).

differ for mothers and fathers. Because the study focuses only on men and women who have *already* become unmarried parents and does not examine men and women's decision to have a child outside of marriage, it addresses only a piece of this complicated puzzle involving the changing nature of American families. The paper does, however, use newly available data to shed light on early orientations toward marriage following a non-marital birth and transitions that begin soon after unmarried couples have a child together. Because unmarried parents generally have incomes at or near the poverty level, results from the FFCW speak particularly to questions about marital expectations and behavior in lower-income communities.

Marital Delays, Expectations, and Transitions

Social scientists have identified a complex set of economic and cultural factors related to declines in marriage and increases in reproduction outside of marriage. Many of these changes have occurred across social groups in the United States and in other industrialized countries. These changes include a decline of men's earnings in relation to women's,³ an increasing cultural acceptance of divorce, cohabitation, and sexuality outside of marriage, and changes in gender expectations.⁴ Births to unmarried women in the United States, however, are not evenly distributed across social groups. Women without a high school degree are three times as likely to have a child outside of marriage as women with some college. Furthermore, over two-thirds

³ For example, between 1980 and 1990, the wages of women with a high school degree declined by 2 percent while the wages of men with a high school degree declined by 13 percent (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

⁴ Survey data suggest that young men and women now perceive fewer advantages to marriage than in the past (Thornton and Freedman, 1982) and that marriage is viewed as less central to their lives (Thornton, 1995). Expectations for realizing cultural ideals, such as companionship and equality in romantic relationships also seem to be higher (Furstenberg, 1988, Luker, 1996). Changing expectations about gender have meant that women are now less willing to tolerate extremely unequal or abusive relationships (Stacey 1991; Luker 1996). Other researchers argue that men began to withdraw from marriage and to pursue autonomous lifestyles before women (Ehrenreich, 1983).

of births to African American women occur outside of marriage compared to about 40 percent of births to Hispanic women and twenty percent of births to white women (Ventura, et. al 1995). The separation of reproduction from marriage also seems to have come earlier or with more intensity to low-income communities.

Marriage in Low-Income Communities Research on low-income, unmarried parents documents economic, gender, and relationship factors that diminish expectations for, and transitions to, marriage. Some studies substantiate Wilson's (1987) argument that high levels of joblessness in poor communities have rendered men less "marriageable." This seems to be particularly true in African-American communities.⁵ For example, research on the transition to marriage in low-income communities shows a positive relationship between male employment and marriage.⁶ This research also shows that African-American fathers are less likely to marry the mother of their first child than non-Hispanic whites and Mexicans (Testa, et al, 1987). In qualitative studies, Elijah Anderson (1989) finds economic changes that dislocated young, low-income, black fathers in inner-city Philadelphia neighborhoods have made them unable to become family providers and averse to marriage. However, he notes that many young, African-American mothers initially hold the illusion that they will marry the fathers of their children. Sullivan (1989) finds that diminished economic opportunities interact with culture and social ecology to discourage marriage among low-income, African-American fathers.⁷

⁵ Exacerbating the shortage of employed men in African-American communities is an unequal sex ratio between low-income men and women due, in part, to high incarceration and mortality rates among African-American men (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

⁶Testa, et. al, (1987) also find that couples are more likely to marry when the woman is a high school graduate.

⁷ Sullivan (1989) finds that African-American fathers are, therefore, less likely to marry than white and Puerto Rican fathers.

Furstenberg (1995; 1999) also makes an interesting argument about the importance of a “culture of gender distrust” in accounting for men and women’s diminished prospects for marriage in poor communities. Furstenberg (1999, p. 10) finds that a culture of gender distrust encourages women to “monitor relationships closely and detect the early warning signs of distress” (Furstenberg, 1999, p. 12).⁸ Edin's (1999) qualitative work appears to support the idea that gender distrust is an important issue affecting poor mothers' desire to remain unmarried. Furthermore, Edin points to the fear of domestic violence as a factor discouraging single mothers from marrying.

Other research on unmarried, low-income, African-American and white parents in New Jersey also points to the importance of examining multiple factors associated with delaying marriage – including cultural beliefs, gender expectations, relationship problems, and financial instability (Waller 1999). This research indicates that most unmarried parents hope to marry. At the same time, unmarried parents perceive marriage as a risk, and they explain the decision not to marry in terms of minimizing the high likelihood of divorce. These interviews suggest that intimate relationships introduce particular concerns for single mothers who have responsibility for raising a child. Mothers cite abusive behavior and lack of fidelity as important reasons for ending their relationships with their child’s father before marriage. They also consider men unmarriageable if they were unemployed or “into the streets.” Similarly, men express reluctance about assuming financial responsibility for partners who did not have jobs or were not “trying to do anything for themselves.” In addition to the minimal requirements for marrying one’s partner, parents point to the importance cultural factors that

⁸ Furstenberg observes that men are aware that they are being watched closely for signs of failure, and they, in turn, have a lack of confidence about their own abilities and low expectations for success in their relationships. In these situations, cohabitation may be a strategy for managing uncertainty about relationships and provide an important test of a partner’s reliability

are valued by men and women of their generation, such as compatibility and equality in a relationship. To avoid potentially painful and destructive relationships and to manage economic uncertainties, parents argue that men and women should evaluate seriously whether their partner is “right” and they feel “ready” for marriage (Waller, 1999).

On the basis of these studies, we would expect parents with partners in the labor force (an indicator of marriageability), and who are themselves employed, to assess their chances of marriage more highly than other parents. Problems with drugs and alcohol, on the other hand, may render parents less marriageable, by preventing them from entering the work force or sustaining relationships. We would expect high conflict and physical violence in arguments to be associated with less optimism about marriage. Parents’ general attitudes about marriage and gender should also be important in predicting their expectations, with those who perceive more advantages giving more optimistic responses about their chances of marriage and those who report high “gender distrust” giving less hopeful responses. The effects of physical violence and gender distrust should be particularly pronounced among mothers. Finally, couples that are cohabiting should have higher expectations of marriage than couples that are not living together.

Transitions to Marriage among Cohabitators Recent research shows a strong relationship between cohabitation and marriage. Today, about half of marriages are preceded by cohabitation and the majority of cohabiting relationships, in turn, become marriages (Smock, 2000).⁹ Cohabitation seems to represent a more transitional state before marriage for whites than for other race/ethnic groups. For example, among pre-maritally pregnant women like those in the FFCW survey, Manning and Landale (1996) find that cohabitation increases the

⁹ Cohabitation does not appear to be a long-term living arrangement for couples. While about 55 percent of cohabitators transition to marriage, about 40 percent end these relationships within 5 years (Smock, 2000; Bumpass, Larry and Hsien-Hen Lu, 1999).

likelihood of marrying *before* the birth for white women, but not African-American or Puerto Rican women.¹⁰

Much of the literature on transitions to marriage examines the experiences of cohabiting couples. These studies show that most cohabiting partners expect to marry each other and that couples who hold these expectations are more likely to marry than other couples. Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin (1991: 922) report that half of cohabiting partners in the first wave of National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) said they had definite plans to marry their partner. About three-quarters either had definite plans or believed they would marry. Brown (2000) found that cohabiting couples in which both partners (or the male partner only) reported high expectations for marriage were significantly more likely to marry than couples who did not hold these expectations.¹¹ Brown suggests this is evidence that men's expectations about marriage carry more weight than women's in deciding to move from cohabitation to marriage.¹²

Researchers have found that African-American couples as just as likely as white couples to expect to marry – perhaps surprising given the racial differences in marriage rates. About 70 percent of white and African-American cohabitators expect to marry as compared to about 64 percent of Mexican-American cohabitators (Brown, 2000; Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991). However, whites are much more likely than African Americans to actually make the transition. (Brown, 2000: 21).

¹⁰ Findings from Brown (2000), Manning and Landale (1996), and Manning (1993) support the argument that cohabitation has different meanings to different race/ethnic groups.

¹¹ Lichter, et. al. (1992) also found the probability of marriage to be higher for young women who expected to be married (to anyone) within the next 5 years compared to those who did not hold this expectation.

¹² In the revised version of this paper, we plan to examine the relative effect of men's and women's expectations on the transition to marriage.

Among cohabitators, high male earnings (Brown, 2000; Sanchez, Manning & Smock, 1998; Smock and Manning, 1997), having a college degree (Smock & Manning, 1997), and full-time employment (among whites) (Manning and Smock, 1995) make it more likely that couples will marry. Women's economic characteristics are generally not associated with this transition among cohabitators; however, Manning and Smock (1995) find that African-American women with 12 or more years of schooling are significantly more likely to marry.¹³ Finally, there is evidence that presence of children in cohabiting relationships increases the likelihood of marriage (Manning and Smock, 1995).

Based on this research, we expect unmarried parents with higher expectations about marriage to be more likely to make this transition. After unmarried parents' expectations are taken into account, African-Americans should be less likely to marry than other parents. On the other hand, parents' socio-economic characteristics would be expected to affect transitions to marriage net of expectations. In particular, men's employment should make the transition to marriage more likely. Finally, having other biological children and living with the baby's parent at the time of the birth should be positively associated with the transition to marriage.

Data and Methods

This analysis draws on information from the two waves of the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Survey (FFCW), a national, birth cohort study of unmarried parents and their children. The FFCW study is unique in providing previously unavailable information about the characteristics of unmarried parents, particularly fathers. The survey also provides information

¹³ In general, research has offered only mixed support for an association between women's economic independence and marriage (see Oppenheimer 1997; Ventura, et. al, 1995). Some research has found women's education, employment, and earnings to be positively related to entry into first marriage (e.g., Lichter, et. al, 1992)

from "couple interviews" conducted independently with unmarried mothers and the fathers. Because a major purpose of this research is to learn more about the nature of the relationships in these families, it is an ideal data set for examining unmarried parents' expectations about, and transitions to, marriage.

Data for the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study is being collected in twenty U.S. cities, stratified by different labor market conditions and varying welfare and child support policy regimes. When completed, the sample will be representative of non-marital births to parents residing in cities with populations over 200,000. The total sample size will be 4700 families, including 3670 unmarried couples and a comparison group of 1125 married couples. Interviews with both parents are conducted at birth and follow-up interviews are conducted when the child is 12, 30, and 48 months old.¹⁴

This paper examines the responses of 674 mothers and fathers (337 couples) who were unmarried at the time of their child's birth and were living in Austin, Texas and Oakland, California – the first two cities surveyed.¹⁵ All of the parents analyzed in this paper participated in a baseline interview at birth and a one-year follow-up interview. Although this analysis includes responses from all fathers who participated in the two waves of the survey, it limits the sample of mothers to those whose partners were interviewed. Compared to fathers we did not interview, the fathers who participated were more likely to be in committed relationships with the mothers of their children and different in other ways as well (McLanahan, Garfinkel, &

¹⁴ To generate a random sample of births, the research team asked surveyors to interview all parents giving birth in city hospitals over a period of time. Most parents were interviewed in the hospital immediately after their child's birth. Some fathers who we could not speak to at the hospital were interviewed in the field, shortly after the birth. The response rate in the first two sites of the survey was 75 percent for unmarried fathers. Very few of the unmarried mothers (less than 10 percent) refused to participate in the study. At the one-year follow-up, the sample has retained about 85 percent of unmarried mothers and 76 percent of unmarried fathers interviewed at birth.

¹⁵ The one-year follow-up data is currently available for Oakland and Austin only. The revised version of the paper will present 2 waves of data from 7 cities in the survey.

Waller, 1999). The sample of fathers and of mothers with a father interview should therefore be more "select" than the full sample of mothers (which includes those whose partners were not interviewed).

Dependent variables The first dependent variable used in this analysis measures mothers' and fathers' expectations about marrying their child's other parent. This question was asked at the time of their child's birth and has five response categories—no chance, a little chance, a 50-50 chance, a pretty good chance, and an almost certain chance of marriage in the future. The second dependent variable is a binary measure of whether or not parents were married at the time of the one-year follow-up interview (based on mothers' reports).

Socio-economic and demographic variables Models for both outcome variables share common measures of parents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Categorical variables are included for parents' race/ethnicity. In all models, white, Hispanic, and "other race" parents are compared to African-American parents. A dummy variable is also included to indicate whether mothers and fathers are of a different race or ethnicity. All models include continuous measures of parents' age, education, and number of other biological children (i.e., in addition to the one that was just born). In addition, measures of the difference between parents' age (i.e., father's age minus mother's age) and a dummy variable indicating whether fathers' have more education than their child's mother are included.

Variables are also included to measure parents' employment status. The variable for fathers indicates whether the father was employed in the week before the baseline interview at birth. Because women were not asked whether they were working the previous week, the variable measuring women's participation in the work force is based on whether or not they had earnings in the last year. This is perhaps a more appropriate measure because mothers had just given birth at the time of the first interview. Finally, all models include a measure of

whether or not parents were cohabiting at the time of their child's birth, based on mothers' reports.

Relationship and Gender variables Equations that examine parents' expectations about marriage as the outcome variable include measures of parents' attitudes about, and experiences in, relationships. An indicator of whether or not the other parent has a problem with alcohol or drugs that interfered with work or personal relationships was included in these models. To measure relationship-specific experiences, a dummy variable is used to indicate whether the mother or father reports that the other parent has hit or slapped them in an argument. A conflict scale is also used to measure whether parents report that there is a high level of conflict between them. This scale item is constructed from a series of six questions asking if couples argue often about money, spending time together, sex, the pregnancy, drinking or drug use, and being faithful.¹⁶ To measure general attitudes about gender and marriage, a dummy variable was included to indicate whether parents believed members of the opposite sex could be trusted to be faithful and a scale consisting of five items that indicate whether parents' perceive advantages to being married in comparison to being single.¹⁷

Marriage Expectations Parents' expectations about marriage should be associated with marital behavior. Equations that examine transitions to marriage as an outcome include parents' assessment of their "chances of marriage" as an independent variable. The relationship

¹⁶ Couples who said they argue often were coded 1, while those who argue sometimes or never about these issues were coded 0.

¹⁷ The scale items include: "all in all there are more advantages to being single than being married (disagree); a single mother can bring up her child as well as a married couple (disagree); it is better for a couple to get married than to just live together (agree); it's better for children if their parents are married (agree); living together is just the same as being married (disagree)." Responses for "agree" / "strongly agree" and "disagree" / "strongly disagree" were collapsed.

and attitudinal variables are not included in these models because they are expected to be key predictors of parents' expectations about marriage.

Analysis The first part of the analysis shows the frequencies of both dependent variables: 1) parents' assessments of their chances of marrying the other parent, and 2) parents' reports of marriage between birth and the one-year follow-up interview. These frequencies are reported for sample of mothers whose partners were interviewed and for the sample of fathers.

The analysis next examines factors that predict parents' expectations about marriage and how these expectations are related to marital outcomes. The first set of models uses OLS regression to examine the factors associated with expectations about marriage. These models are run in a step-wise fashion: The first model includes only parents' demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the second adds relationship and attitudinal measures, and the third adds cohabitation. The second set of models uses logistic regression to examine factors associated with couples' transition to marriage between birth and the one-year follow-up interview. These models are also run step-wise: The first model includes socio-economic and demographic characteristics, the second model adds expectations, and the third model adds cohabitation. All models are run for mothers and fathers separately.¹⁸

Expectations and Outcomes

Descriptive Statistics Table 1 presents frequencies for the two dependent variables used in the analysis. Again, it is important to note that the analysis only considers the responses of mothers whose partners were interviewed rather than the full sample of mothers in the survey. As this table indicates, the majority of unmarried mothers (61.8 percent) and fathers (75.1 percent) report a "good" or "almost certain" chance of marrying the other parent. Over 8 out of

¹⁸ The next version of the paper will combine mothers' and father's responses in the regression equations.

10 mothers and close to 9 out of 10 fathers report a 50/50 chance or higher chance of marriage. Because the results are for matched pairs of parents, they should be comparable. However, a larger percentage of fathers are optimistic about marriage than their partners. This is consistent with previous findings about men reporting higher expectations for marriage than women (Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin, 1991).¹⁹

The second dependent variable shows that about 12 percent of couples married between the baseline and one-year follow-up interview.²⁰ This may seem low given parents' expectations about marriage. However, the question asked parents to assess their chances of marrying in the future and did not restrict the time frame for marriage to the next year. Because these relationships are in transition, it is likely that more parents will marry in the coming years. At the same time, the results do indicate a disparity between expectations and outcomes at year one.

Table 2 reports means for the independent variables used in the regression models. Again, we can see that fathers rank their chances of marriage more highly on average than mothers. Turning to the characteristics of parents in the FFCW survey, we observe that about 2 out of 5 mothers are non-Hispanic, black and about 2 out of 5 are Hispanic. Fathers are about 3 years older than the mothers of their children and about one out of three have more education than the mother. The mean education of both mothers and fathers (measured within 9 categories), indicates that parents on average have a high school degree. Although this is a sample of new parents, the typical respondent reported having one other biological child.

¹⁹ Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin (1991) also found that women in the NSFH who were living with their partners were less optimistic about marriage than men and are more likely to report "trouble" in their relationship.

²⁰ Mothers' reports were used for this variable.

About three-quarters of fathers were employed the week before the interview and about 56 percent of mothers had earnings the year prior to the birth.

In regard to the relationship and gender variables, more fathers (15 percent) than mothers (6 percent) said the other parent had ever hit or slapped them in an argument. On the other hand, about 30 percent of mothers agreed with the statement that men could not be trusted to be faithful, in comparison to 14 percent of fathers. About 11 percent of mothers and 8 percent of fathers report having frequent arguments with their child's other parent. About half of mothers and close to 2/3 of fathers perceive more benefits to marriage than being single. Only a small percentage of mothers (6-7 percent) and fathers (4 percent) reported that the other partner had a problem with drugs or alcohol that interfered with work or relationships.

Perhaps most striking is the finding that about 66 percent of mothers whose partners were interviewed said they were living with the other parent at the time of their child's birth. This percentage is higher than for the full sample of mothers, in which 53 percent were living with the father (results not shown).

Expectations about Marriage Table 3 presents regression results for mothers' expectations about marrying their child's father. The first model includes socio-economic and demographic characteristics and shows that mother's race, but not other characteristics, affects their expectations about marriage. In particular, African-American mothers perceive their chances of marriage to be significantly lower than white mothers. Surprisingly, neither parents' employment characteristics are associated with expectations about marriage.

Model 2 includes measures of mothers' experiences in, and beliefs about, relationships. This model shows that most of the relationship and gender variables included in the model are significantly related to mothers' expectations. Mothers who report that men cannot be trusted to be faithful and who report significant conflict with the father have significantly lower

expectations about marriage than other mothers. On the other hand, mothers who perceive benefits to being married over being single hold significantly higher expectations about marriage. Mothers who report their child's father has a problem with drugs or alcohol that interferes with work or relationship report lower chances of marriage (at the .10 level). After taking these relationship factors into account, African-American mothers continue to hold lower expectations about marriage than white mothers.

Model 3 adds cohabitation and indicates that mothers who are living with their child's father at the time of the birth report higher expectations about marriage than other mothers. Cohabitation seems to account for much of the race effect, indicating a selection into cohabitation among non-African American mothers. Cohabitation does not, however, diminish the effect of the relationship and gender variables. In fact, in this model, mothers who report their child's father has hit or slapped them have lower expectations than other mothers. The effect of "gender distrust" is reduced in this model but remains significant at the .10 level.

Table 4 present results from the analysis of fathers' expectations about marrying their child's mother. The first model (which includes parents' characteristics) indicates that mothers' employment is significantly associated with how fathers perceive their chances of marriage. That is, fathers whose partners had income from earnings in the year prior to the birth are more hopeful about marriage than other fathers. The second model (which adds relationship variables) shows that fathers who report frequent arguments with their child's mother have significantly lower expectations about marriage, while those who perceive benefits to marriage report significantly higher expectations than other fathers. In this model, mothers' earnings continue to be positively related to fathers reporting better chances of marrying their child's mother. This model also indicates that after taking relationship variables into account, older fathers have lower expectations about marriage than younger fathers. Model 3 indicates that

cohabitation is positively and significantly related to fathers holding higher expectations about marriage. As with mothers, cohabitation does moderate the effects of relationship variables. When cohabitation is taken into account, however, the effect of age difference between fathers and mothers appear to be positively associated with fathers' marriage expectations while the effect of mothers' earnings is slightly diminished.

For fathers and mothers, relationship variables and cohabitation status are significantly related to how fathers assess their chances of marrying. However, reporting that the other parent has hit or slapped them in an argument and reporting gender distrust have a negative effect on how mothers, but not fathers, assess their chances of marriage. Race is associated with marriage expectations exclusively among mothers, while age is related to expectations exclusively among fathers. Furthermore, mothers' employment characteristics affect fathers' expectations while employment variables are not important for mothers.

Transitions to Marriage Table 5 presents results from logistic regressions analyzing mother's odds of marrying between the baseline interview at birth and the one-year follow-up interview. The first model, which includes parents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics, indicates that African-American mothers and mothers involved in inter-racial or inter-ethnic relationships are less likely to marry than other mothers. For African-American mothers, the odds of marrying their child's father are reduced by about 88 percent, and, for mothers in mixed race/ethnic relationships, the odds are reduced by about 59 percent. Mothers' educational level is also related to their transitions to marriage: as education increases, mothers' odds of marriage also increase significantly.

Model 2 adds mothers' expectations about marriage – the key independent variable in this analysis. Results from this model indicate that mothers who perceive their chances of marriage to be higher at the time of the birth were much more likely to be married by the one

year follow-up interview. The relationship between expectations and the transition to marriage is highly significant at the .001 level. When mothers' expectations are added to the model, the effect of being Black and having higher levels of education remain significantly related to marriage. The effect of being in a mixed race/ethnic relationship, however, loses significance. Surprisingly, results from model 3 show no significant relationship between cohabitation and the transition to marriage, after expectations are taken into account. Furthermore, adding cohabitation has little effect on other variables in the model. Race and educational level remain significant, and the odds ratios for these variables are similar to those in the previous model. Because cohabitation was strongly associated with mothers' expectations about marriage, the effect of parents living together seems to be absorbed by including expectations as an independent variable.

Table 6 presents results from the logistic regression equations for fathers. Model 1 indicates that the odds of marriage among African-American fathers are about 91 percent lower than for white fathers. This model also shows a positive relationship between fathers' level of education and their transition to marriage, although this relationship is not statistically significant. Model 2, which adds fathers' expectations to the model, shows a highly significant relationship between fathers' expectations about marriage and the likelihood that they will marry the mother in the first year of their child's life (at the .001 level). In this model, the effect of fathers' race remains significant while the effect of having more education gains significance. Paralleling the results for mothers, Model 3 shows that cohabitation is not significantly related to the transition to marriage, net of fathers' expectations. The effects of other variables, however, remain significant in this model.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn on information from the first two cities surveyed in the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study to provide new information on early transitions in the relationships between unmarried mothers and fathers, how they view the future of their relationships, and the factors associated with these expectations and transitions. In particular, the paper presented findings about how unmarried mothers' and fathers' expectations and socio-economic characteristics are related to marrying their child's other parent in the first year of their child's life. It also examined factors that underlie these expectations, looking at the effects of these factors for unmarried mothers in comparison to unmarried fathers.

The results show that about 12 percent of couples that had a non-marital birth in Oakland and Austin married by the time of the one-year follow up interview. The factors associated with the transition to marriage are similar for men and women. As predicted, mothers and fathers who had higher expectations about marriage at the time of their child's birth were significantly more likely to marry the other parent between the time of the baseline and follow-up interview. After taking expectations into account, African-American mothers and fathers are less likely to marry than white parents, paralleling marital trends in the general population. The results from the FFCW study also show that neither parents' own, nor their partner's, employment characteristics were related to marital transitions in the first year. However, unmarried parents at higher educational levels have a higher likelihood of marriage. It is possible that parents' education, as a measure of their own long-term, financial prospects, affects their decisions about marriage more than current or recent employment. Contrary to expectations, whether or not parents are living together at the time of their child's birth also had no significant effect on marriage. Examining parents' assessment about marriage as an independent variable seems to moderate the effect of cohabitation.

In addition to being an indicator of relationship outcomes, unmarried parents' expectations about marriage seem to be a proxy for economic, relationship, and gender factors underlying relationships transitions. When we look at variables associated with parents' expectations about marriage, we find a strong, positive relationship between living with the other parent and assessing one's chances of marriage highly. Relationship, gender, and socioeconomic variables are also important predictors of parents' expectations, but they matter for mothers and fathers differently. We find that mothers who report the father has a drinking or drug problem, who report the father has hit and slapped them in an argument, who report frequent conflict in the relationship, and who believe men cannot be trusted to be faithful report significantly lower expectations about marriage than other mothers, while those who perceive benefits to marriage have higher expectations. For fathers, only the effects of two relationship variables – reporting frequent arguments and perceiving benefits to marriage – are important. In addition to these factors, the results show that women's employment is associated with higher expectations about marriage for men, but fathers' employment, surprisingly, does not affect mothers' outlooks on marriage. Finally, black mothers report lower expectations about marriage, while older fathers hold lower expectations.

Findings from the FFCW survey show that unmarried parents' beliefs about, and experiences in, relationships affect their expectations about marriage. These expectations, in turn, are strongly related to their relationship status at year one. Despite the fact that about 8 out of 10 mothers and 9 out of 10 fathers report at least a 50/50 chance of marriage in the future, most parents do not marry in the first year. This information provides a window into the kind of factors that may be diminishing parents' expectations about marriage. It also suggests that fragile families in which parents are African-American or have lower educational levels may

experience the greatest delays in marriage. In these cases, families may face greater obstacles to marriage or accept cohabitation and other types of relationships as alternatives to marriage.

Table 1. Frequencies for Dependent Variables

	Mothers	Fathers
Chances of Marriage		
No chance	9.0%	6.7%
A little chance	9.9%	5.2%
50/50 chance	19.4%	13.0%
Pretty good chance	20.0%	23.0%
Almost certain chance	41.8%	52.1%
Married at Year One	12.2%	12.2%

Table 2. Means for Independent Variables

Mothers	Mean	Fathers	Mean
Marriage expectations	3.76	Marriage expectations	4.09
White	.11	White	.09
Black	.42	Black	.46
Hispanic	.42	Hispanic	.41
Other race	.04	Other race	.03
Mother & father are different race/ethnicity	.17	Mother & father are different race/ethnicity	.17
Mother's age	23.88	Father's age	26.91
Age difference between mother and father	2.99	Age difference between mother and father	2.99
Mother's education	4.06	Father's education	4.23
Father has more years of education than mother	.36	Father has more years of education than mother	.36
Number of other biological children	1.21	Number of other biological children	1.03
Mother had earnings the year prior to the birth	.56	Father employed the week before the birth	.77
Father has drinking/drug problem	.06	Mother hit/slapped mother	.15
Father hit/slapped mother	.06	Mother has drinking/drug problem	.03
Men cannot be trusted to be faithful	.30	Women cannot be trusted to be faithful	.14
Frequent arguments (scale)	.11	Frequent arguments (scale)	.08
Benefits to marriage (scale)	.49	Benefits to marriage	.60
Cohabiting with father	.66	Cohabiting with mother	.66

Table 3. Results from OLS Regressions of Mothers' Perceived Chances of Marrying the Father on Selected Variables

	Odds Ratios		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Mother Black	-.562 ** (.279)	-.473* (.262)	-.340 (.244)
Mother Hispanic	-.207 (.278)	-.213 (.261)	-.226 (.243)
Mother Other race	-.412 (.437)	-.238 (.408)	-.080 (.380)
Mother & Father are different race/ethnicity	-.108 (.220)	.097 (.208)	.082 (.193)
Mother's Age	-.004 (.016)	-.003 (.015)	-.009 (.014)
Age difference between mother & father	-.001 (.014)	-.001 (.013)	.002 (.012)
Mother's education	.015 (.058)	-.069 (.056)	-.041 (.052)
Father has more education than mother	-.160 (.166)	-.229 (.155)	-.158 (.144)
Other biological children	-.066 (.067)	-.009 (.063)	-.027 (.059)
Mother had earnings in the year prior to birth	.146 (.154)	.135 (.145)	.018 (.135)
Father employed the week before the birth	.057 (.188)	-.009 (.176)	-.032 (.164)
Father has drinking/drug problem	---	-.548* (.307)	-.236 (.288)
Father hit/slapped mother	---	-.514 (.324)	-.621 ** (.301)
Men cannot be trusted to be faithful	---	-.414 *** (.164)	-.274* (.154)
Frequent arguments (scale)	---	-1.455 **** (.377)	-1.085 *** (.354)
Benefits to marriage (scale)	---	.821 ** (.280)	.673 *** (.261)
Cohabiting with father	---	---	1.012 **** (.145)
Intercept	4.199 (.512)	4.376 (.498)	3.746 (.471)

*	p <=.10	N=319	N=319	N=319
**	p <=.05	Pseudo R2 =.05	Pseudo R2 =.19	Pseudo R2 =.30
***	p <=.01			
****	p <=.001			

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

Table 4. Results from OLS Regressions of Fathers' Perceived Chances of Marrying the Mother on Selected Variables

	Odds Ratios		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Father Black	-.273 (.263)	-.050 (.249)	.120 (.225)
Father Hispanic	-.003 (.270)	.089 (.255)	.044 (.230)
Father Other race	-.033 (.442)	.210 (.419)	.304 (.379)
Mother & Father are different race/ethnicity	.015 .193	.095 (.184)	.079 (.166)
Father's Age	-.021 (.014)	-.026 ** (.013)	-.030 *** (.012)
Age difference between mother & father	.022 (.017)	.026 (.016)	.033 ** (.014)
Father's education	-.000 (.055)	.021 (.053)	.013 (.048)
Father has more education than mother	-.037 (.168)	-.082 (.159)	-.012 (.144)
Other biological children	-.049 (.053)	-.038 (.052)	-.044 (.047)
Mother had earnings in the year prior to birth	.326 ** (.140)	.316 ** (.133)	.231* (.120)
Father employed the week before the birth	.118 (.171)	-.079 (.164)	-.117 (.148)
Mother has drinking/drug problem	---	-.211 (.417)	-.085 (.377)
Mother hit/slapped father	---	-.132 (.185)	-.189 (.167)
Women cannot be trusted to be faithful	---	-.086 (.189)	-.052 (.171)
Frequent arguments (scale)	---	-1.379 *** (.431)	-1.226 *** (.390)
Benefits to marriage (scale)	---	1.213 **** (.255)	1.202 **** (.230)
Cohabiting with mother	---	---	1.038 **** (.125)
Intercept	4.490 (.480)	3.952 (.495)	3.383 (.452)

*	p <=.10	N=318	N=316	N=316
**	p <=.05	Pseudo R2 =.06	Pseudo R2 =.16	Pseudo R2 =.32
***	p <=.01			
****	p <=.001*			

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses

Table 5. Results from Logistic Regressions of Transitions to Marriage on Selected Variables: Mother Sample

	Odds Ratios		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Mother Black	.119 **** (-3.248)	.138*** (-2.876)	.139 *** (-2.852)
Mother Hispanic	.728 (-0.570)	.824 (-0.335)	.824 (-0.336)
Mother Other race	1.226 (0.243)	1.597 (0.510)	1.599 (0.511)
Mother & Father are different race/ethnicity	.407* (-1.645)	.416 (-1.543)	.417 (-1.536)
Mother's Age	.985 (-0.381)	.991 (-0.204)	.991 (-0.210)
Age difference between mother & father	.977 (-0.618)	.979 (-0.536)	.979 (-0.531)
Mother's education	1.421 *** (2.629)	1.441 *** (2.684)	1.440 *** (2.676)
Father has more education than mother	1.146 (0.318)	1.415 (0.757)	1.415 (0.758)
Other biological children	1.150 (0.811)	1.186 (0.948)	1.185 (0.945)
Mother had earnings in the year prior to birth	.601 (-1.302)	.647 (-1.072)	.645 (-1.078)
Father employed the week before the birth	1.412 (0.618)	1.191 (0.289)	1.187 (0.284)
Marriage Expectations	---	2.572 **** (3.675)	2.552 **** (3.513)
Cohabiting with father	---	---	1.061 (0.111)
	* p <=.10	N=321	N=319
	** p <= .05	Pseudo R2 =.12	Pseudo R2 =.22
	*** p <=.01		N=319
	**** p <=.001		Pseudo R2 =.22

Note: Z-scores are in parentheses.

Table 6. Results from Logistic Regressions of Transitions to Marriage on Selected Variables: Father Sample

	Odds Ratios		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Father Black	.092 **** (-3.736)	.087 **** (-3.634)	.086 **** (-3.608)
Father Hispanic	.489 (-1.312)	.461 (-1.341)	.461 (-1.341)
Father Other race	.286 (-1.061)	.248 (-1.149)	.242 (-1.160)
Mother & Father are different race/ethnicity	.697 (-0.677)	.675 (-0.710)	.672 (-0.717)
Father's Age	1.014 (0.397)	1.022 (0.555)	1.023 (0.566)
Age difference between mother & father	.973 (-0.633)	.971 (-0.632)	.970 (-0.647)
Father's education	1.222 (1.477)	1.305* (1.744)	1.308* (1.750)
Father has more education than mother	.584 (-1.139)	.473 (-1.416)	.473 (-1.419)
Other biological children	.998 (-0.015)	1.103 (0.539)	1.103 (0.544)
Mother had earnings in the year prior to birth	.731 (-0.801)	.607 (-1.227)	.605 (-1.232)
Father employed the week before the birth	1.090 (0.152)	.878 (-0.221)	.871 (-0.234)
Marriage Expectations	---	3.190 **** (3.258)	3.236 **** (3.207)
Cohabiting with mother	---	---	.915 (-0.167)
* p <=.10	N=321	N=314	N=314
** p <=.05	Pseudo R2 =.12	Pseudo R2 =.21	Pseudo R2 =.21
*** p <=.01			
**** p <=.001			

Note: Z-scores are in parentheses.

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