Kin Connection:

The Association Between Parental Kin Involvement While Growing Up

And Union Formation In Adulthood

abstract

Substantial research has explored race-ethnic variation in union formation focusing on the availability of marriageable men, earnings, and the stability of employment. Although the findings from this body of work clearly demonstrate the importance of these factors, they also suggest that other factors must contribute to this variation. Drawing on a diverse body of ethnographic and quantitative research we investigate a new, non-economic, factor that might help to explain race-ethnic variation in the formation of stable unions, the kinship group. To explore this possible connection, we examine the influence of parental kin involvement experienced during childhood and adolescence on adult union formation using the first and third waves of the National Survey of Families and Households. We find that kin involvement in the family of origin is associated with marriage patterns later in the life course and that this association varies by race.

Extended Abstract

Research establishes that large majority of unmarried American men and women want to marry someday and believe that their lives would be better if they were married. Several studies back up this belief; there is a strong positive association between economic, emotional, and physical well being and marriage. While marriage is desired by nearly all, many, particularly African Americans, delay or forego marriage. Substantial research links joblessness and low earnings to the lower marriage rates among African Americans compared to Anglos. Yet, this is not a complete explanation for the differential.

One under-explored explanation for race-ethnic variation in family formation is the possibility that African American, Latino, and Anglo families are all organized differently from each other. Ethnographic research of the 1970s argued that compared to Anglo families, African American families placed more emphasis on extended kin ties and less on affiliations based on marriage (Cherlin 1998; Stack 1974). More recent quantitative analyses suggest that Anglos and African American's kinship networks operate differently net of socioeconomic status, although it is not the case that African American kin networks are more intensive than Anglo families on all dimensions of support and exchange (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004))(Hogan, Hao, and Parish 1990; Raley 1995). Some analyses of Latino families suggest that they too have high levels of coresidence and contact among nonnuclear family members (Keefe and Padilla 1987). Yet almost no analyses have investigated whether and how kinship networks influence family formation. One reason for this lacuna may be that we often conceptualize marriage as an individual or couple-level process and nuclear families as largely independent from the broader kinship group. However, recently family sociologists are recognizing that the broader kinship network provides supports for nuclear families (Hansen 2004).

Drawing on a diverse body of ethnographic and quantitative research we investigate a new, non-economic, factor that might help to explain race-ethnic variation in the formation of stable

unions, the kinship group. To explore this possible connection, we examine the influence of kin relationships experienced during childhood and adolescence on adult union formation.

KIN CONNECTION

Kinship systems may influence marriage for multiple reasons. Building on the ethnographic research of the 1970s that suggested that African Americans prioritize ties with blood relatives over marriage, we speculate that one possibility is that relationships with kin can substitute for marriage. That is, in some kinship systems greater involvement with kin can be an indicator that blood relationships are valued more than alliances established through marriage. If so, then we might expect that those who are more involved in kinship networks are less likely to marry or even to form any type of coresidential union.

Another, potential avenue of kin influence is through shaping beliefs about and orientations towards marriage and family life. It may be that those who are in more active kinship groups are more likely to be oriented towards family life over building careers and/or socializing with friends. Those more involved with kin may be more likely to form families early in adulthood and perhaps be especially inclined towards marriage. Previous research shows that those who feel it is important to live near parents and other kin are less likely to cohabit than marry (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995).

A third potential avenue of influence is that kinship groups may shape the incentives for marriage over less formal relationships. Unlike marriage, cohabiting and other informal relationships are not strongly institutionalized, making the rules for social interaction and obligation ambiguous. For example, a father may not help his daughter's live-in boyfriend find a job even if he would be quick to recommend his son-in-law for a position. Those more tightly embedded in the kinship group may have more incentive to formalize their relationship, particularly when it has more resources. Providing some support for this conjecture, recent research shows that married adults are more likely than cohabiters to give and receive support from their parents even when

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characteristics such as the child's age and the parent's health status are controlled (Eggebeen 2005).

Finally, a fourth pathway may connect kinship groups to marriage; instrumental support from kin may facilitate marriage. For example parents often assist with wedding expenses and some may loan their children money for a down payment on a house.   Young adults from families that hold staunchly to the belief that children must stand on their own, may find it more difficult (on average) to find the resources to marry.

Often analyses of kinship groups focus on levels of exchange among kin. Our conceptualization of kinship involvement is broader, taking into account levels of contact and coresidence as well as exchange of instrumental support. This more inclusive definition helps us to better understand how kin influence family formation. For example, if kinship involvement influences marriage by encouraging a general family orientation, then contact among kin should be as important as exchange of instrumental support. Alternatively, if kinship groups shape marriage by influencing the incentives for marriage, then we should expect exchange to be more important than contact.

OTHER INFLUENCES

While the focus of this research is on the impact of kinship involvement on marriage, there are a number of other related social processes that also influence the marriage process. For example, school enrollment delays marriage, while employment and earnings accelerate it. Further, parent's marital status predicts union formation patterns. Additionally, religious attendance and affiliation shape couple formation in early adulthood. Specifically, fundamentalist Christians marry earlier and are less likely to cohabit prior to marriage.

Pulling all of these influences together, our analyses focus on the impact of patterns of kin involvement that youth experience while growing up. Prior research shows that Anglos are actually

more likely than African Americans to exchange resources with nonresident kin, but that African Americans and Latinos are more likely to live and socialize with relatives. We speculate that youth's experiences with kin shape their family orientation and beliefs, as well as their incentives for marriage once they reach adulthood, although we are not certain whether they will encourage or discourage marriage. In addition, the effects of kin involvement might vary by race-ethnicity if the kinship systems are organized differently for Anglos, African Americans, and Latinos.

DATA AND METHOD

Our analyses will examine kinship relations in the family of origin and how these impact marriage and cohabitation during the transition to adulthood. Our primary data source is the National Survey of Families and Households, a longitudinal national probability survey of family life. Primary respondents, a national sample of 13,000 adults age 19 and above, were first interviewed in 1987-1988. Some of these primary respondents were living with children at the time of this interview. By the time of the third interview (in 2001-2003), children that were age 5-18 at the time of the first interview had reached adulthood and some were over age 30. As part of the third wave of the survey, the now-adult children completed their own interviews. Our sample includes children of primary respondents, who were age 5-18 at the time of the first interview and who participated in the third wave of the survey (N=1820). Table 1 shows the distribution of our sample by race-ethnicity.

Measures. Our primary dependent variable is marriage, but because today so many couples live together prior to marriage, we also measure cohabitation. The most appropriate way to model the timing and type of first union is to employ an event history approach, in this case discrete-time Cox proportional hazard models. To do this we first create a separate observation for each person-year lived between age 18 and the year of first union or the 2001-2003 interview (whichever comes first). Then we will estimate multinomial logistic regression models in STATA predicting the three category outcome of whether the respondent married, cohabited, or remained single in that person

year. This approach is widely employed and has been shown not to violate assumptions about independence across observations (Allison 1982). The event history approach has a number of advantages over one that predicts marital-cohabitation status at the time of the last observation. First, we are not only interested in whether the respondent forms a union but the timing of this event. Because not all of the respondents have married or cohabited by the time of the last observation we can not use age at first union as an outcome. Second, we want to know whether the respondent entered first union through marriage or cohabitation. Because many who cohabit go on to marry we can not use marital-cohabitation status as our outcome measure.

Our primary independent variables indicate kinship involvement in the family of origin. To construct these, we use data from the primary respondent (parent) interview conducted in 1987-88, when the child was age 5-18. There are three general types of measures, coresidence, contact, and exchange. **Coresidence** is determined from the household roster, the list of individuals living in the respondent's household and their relationship to the respondent. From this information we determined whether the respondent was living with a parent, grandparent or sibling. We also created a variable indicating whether the household included a non-family member. This measure does not include cohabiting parnters.

Contact is measured from a series of questions about the respondent's contact (visiting and communicating by phone or letter) with their parents. Respondents are first asked about contact with their mother. Following, if the mother is not living with the respondent's father, they are asked how often they see or communicate with their father. Respondents are also asked about contact with siblings. Response categories are: 1-not at all, 2-about once a year, 3-several times a year, 4-1 to 3 times a month, 5-about once a week, 6-several times a week. Starting with contact with parents, we code the higher value of level of contact with mother or father. We add this value to the report of contact with any sibling, creating a variable that ranges from 2 to 12. Those coresiding with a parent and/or sibling are coded at the highest level of contact, and those with

missing data are coded at the mean and we include a dummy indicator for cases missing data on contact in our multivariate models.

In the 1987-88 interview respondents were also asked about **exchange** with parents, siblings, and other relatives. Exchange could involve providing assistance with repairs, housework, gifts and loans, transportation, or baby sitting. It could also involve providing advice. Separate variables identify each type of assistance and distinguish giving from receiving. We sum across all types of assistance provided to family members to create a variable that ranges from 0 to 13. We also create similar measures of giving to nonfamily members, receiving from family, and receiving from nonfamily. Cases with missing data are coded to the mean and we include dummy indicators for missing data.

In addition, following other recent work exploring race-ethnic variation in kinship networks using the same data set, we will examine the influence of variables characterizing the respondent's (parent's) orientations towards family life. These variables include responses to questions about whether (1) parents ought to provide financial help to their adult children when the children are having financial difficulty, (2) Parents ought to let their adult children live with them when the children are having problems; (3) Children ought to provide financial help to aging parents when their parents are having financial difficulty; (4) Children ought to let aging parents live with them when the parents can no longer live by themselves; (5) Parents ought to help their children with college expenses (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). This research shows that African Americans perceive greater obligations towards assisting kin in need, consistent with Stack's qualitative analyses in the 1970s. Our goal will be to see whether this orientation among parents influences their children's marriage patterns, as was also suggested by Stack (1974).

The parent interview is also our source of information on race-ethnicity, parent's marital status, as well as religious attendance and affiliation. The 2001-2003 child interview provides us with other information about the youth's transition into adulthood, specifically school enrollment,

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employment, and educational attainment. These other transitions out of school and into the full-time labor force are key factors shaping marriage and cohabitation and it is an advantage of our data source that we have this detailed information.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Table 2 displays means on the kin involvement variables for the total sample as well as for Anglos and African Americans separately. Only a small proportion of respondents with focal children age 5-18 live with nonnuclear kin and so our count of number of coresiding kin is small (.09). Clearly African Americans are much more likely than Anglo Americans to coreside with kin. Levels of contact are also higher for African Americans, while similar to other research we find that levels of exchange are higher for Anglos.

Table 3 presents results from multinomial logistic regression models predicting remaining single and cohabitation versus marriage. The first model includes only race-ethnicity variables. As many previous studies have found, African Americans are more likely than Anglos to remain single or to cohabit than to marry. The second model adds variables measuring kin involvement and parental marital status, parent's gender, as well as controls for whether the respondent had no siblings and or no living parents. We find that both respondent's coresidence and contact with nonnuclear family members while the focal child was age 5-18 is associated with the focal child's union formation patterns in adulthood. Coresidence with nonnuclear family increases marriage relative to remaining single, while contact with nonnuclear kin increases marriage relative to both remaining single and cohabitation. These effects persist throughout the series of models that add controls for parent characteristics such as education (and religious affiliation) and focal child characteristics such as employment, enrollment, and educational attainment.

The kin contact variables do little to explain race-ethnic variation in union formation, but when we run separate analyses for African- and Anglo-American respondent we see that the effects of kin involvement vary by race (See Table 4). Contact and coresidence with kin impacts

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marriage only for Anglos, while the extended kin values index is operative for African Americans. We need to conduct further analyses to see whether these differences arise because of differences in the meaning of kin involvement by marital status or because of variation in the impact of kin involvement by the level of resources available to the household.

DISCUSSION

We presented four potential reasons to expect that kin involvement in family of origin would be associated with family formation in adulthood. One of these theories suggested that kin may substitute for marriage, particularly for African Americans. We find no evidence to support this conjecture. When it is significant, kin involvement is *positively* associated with marriage and, if anything, the effects of kin involvement appear to be stronger for Anglos than African Americans. Another possibility was that kin can provide incentives for formalizing relationships. That is, kin groups that have resources and are more intensively involved in exchange may be more likely to support couples in formalized marriages than couples in informal unions. We have not yet found much support for this possibility so far. Exchange with kin in the family of origin is not associated with union formation in adulthood. Yet, we do find that among African Americans, valuing kin exchange (between parents and children) is associated with earlier marriage. This might be support for the idea that among African Americans, kin groups do provide incentives for formalizing relationships. Among Anglos we find more support for the idea that kin involvement is an indicator of orientation towards family life. Coresidence and contact increase marriage, but exchange (and valuing exchange) do not. These are only preliminary results, but they point to the importance of third party influences on family formation processes.

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Table 1. Sample of Focal
Children with 2001-2003
Interviews by Race-Ethnicity

	Number of Respondents
African American	246
Anglo	1468
Latino	90
Other	16
Total	1820

Table 2. Kin Involvement by Race-Ethnicity

	Mean				
	Total	Anglo	African American	Minimum	Maximum
# Coresident Nonnuclear Family Members	0.09	0.05	0.25	0	6
# Coresident Nonfamily Members	0.02	0.02	0.03	0	5
Contact with Parents and Siblings	5.93	5.81	6.88	0	10
Socializes with nonfamily members	2.83	2.83	2.87	0	5
Giving to Family Members	1.51	1.50	1.58	0	13
Giving to Nonfamily Members	1.25	1.29	1.03	0	6
Receiving from Family Members	2.08	2.11	1.82	0	14
Receiving from Nonfamily Members	1.76	1.84	1.37	0	6

Table 3. Estimates from a Competing Risk Model Focal Child Union Formation -- Remaining Single and Cohabiting Versus Marrying

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Single Odds Ratio	Cohabit Odds Ratio	Single Odds Ratio	Cohabit Odds Ratio	Single Odds Ratio	Cohabit Odds Ratio	Single Odds Ratio	Cohabit Odds Ratio	Single Odds Ratio	Cohabit Odds Ratio
Race-Ethnicity (Anglo)										
African American	3.14 ***	2.05 *	3.72 ***	2.16 *	3.78 ***	2.31 **	3.70 ***	2.11 *	3.79 ***	2.12 *
Hispanic	1.36	1.61	1.66	1.87	1.70	2.02	1.53	1.52	1.32	1.42
Other Race	1.20	0.56	1.20	0.52	1.26	0.62	1.24	0.71	1.24	0.66
Respondent's Kin Involvement while Focal Child Age 5-18										
Coreside Nonnuclear Family			0.72 *	0.78	0.72 *	0.79	0.70 *	0.77	0.698*	0.78
Coreside Nonfamily			2.12 *	1.82	2.13 *	1.83	2.00 *	1.62	2.11	1.66
Contact Parents & Siblings			0.92 *	0.90 **	0.92 *	0.90 **	0.93 *	0.88 **	0.92 *	0.88 ***
Contact Nonfamily			0.98	0.98	0.98	1.00	0.98	1.00	1.00	1.01
Giving to Nonnuclear Family			1.10	1.13	1.10	1.14	1.10	1.14 *	1.09	1.14
Giving to Nonfamily			1.15	1.09	1.15	1.09	1.13	1.09	1.13	1.09
Receiving from Nonnuclear Family			0.98	0.95	0.99	0.96	0.98	0.96	0.98	0.96
Receiving from Nonfamily			0.99	1.02	0.99	1.01	0.99	1.02	0.98	1.02
Respondent Cohabiting			0.72	1.26	0.72	1.22	0.71	1.09	0.64	0.94
Respondent Single			1.27	2.11 ***	1.26	2.04 ***	1.25	1.94 **	1.16	1.83 ***
Respondent Has No Siblings			0.94	1.01	0.92	0.94	0.92	0.91	0.95	0.94
Respondent's Mother is not living			0.89	0.74	0.90	0.77	0.91	0.69	0.92	0.69
Respondent's Father is not living			1.28	1.24	1.27	1.21	1.25	1.22	1.40 *	1.31
Respondent Female			1.11	1.23	1.10	1.19	1.14	1.17	1.20	1.20
Respondent's Extended Kin Values Index					1.02	1.06	1.02	1.06	1.02	1.06
Respondent Education (High School Degree)										
Less than High School							1.56	2.13 *	1.44	1.89 *
Associate Degree							1.21	1.50	1.21	1.49
Bachelors							1.14	0.67	1.17	0.71
Graduate							1.47	1.03	1.53	1.13
Focal Child's Employment (not employed)										
Full-time (time varying)									0.49 ***	0.93
Part-Time (time varying)									0.56	0.90
Focal Child's School Enrollment (time varying)									0.98	0.91
Focal Child's Educational Attainment (Less than High School)										
High School									0.59 *	0.69
Associates Degree									0.34 **	0.35 *
Bachelors Degree									0.32 ***	0.39 ***
Graduate Degree									0.33	0.56

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Table 4. Estimates from a Competing Risk Model Focal Child Union Formation -- Remaining Single and Cohabiting Versus Marrying, by Race

	African American		Anglo American	
	Single Odds Ratio	Cohabit Odds Ratio	Single Odds Ratio	Cohabit Odds Ratio
Respondent's Kin Involvement while Focal Child Age 5-18				
Coreside Nonnuclear Family	0.841	1.004	0.544 **	0.584 *
Coreside Nonfamily	0.134	0	2.069	1.758
Contact Parents & Siblings	0.917	0.865	0.905 **	0.886 **
Contact Nonfamily	1.053	1.022	1.013	1.027
Giving to Nonnuclear Family	1.095	1.07	1.088	1.128 *
Giving to Nonfamily	1.471	1.547	1.128	1.047
Receiving from Nonnuclear Family	1.365	1.375	0.981	0.953
Receiving from Nonfamily	0.901	0.901	1.017	1.053
Respondent Cohabiting	1.808	5.862	1.082	1.518
Respondent Single	0.733	0.803	1.417	2.246 *
Respondent Has No Siblings	0.46	0.236 *	0.993	1.02
Respondent's Mother is not living	1.77	1.427	0.834	0.698
Respondent's Father is not living	0.832	1.082	1.289	1.218
Respondent Female	0.305	0.5	1.167	1.244
Respondent's Extended Kin Values Index	0.781 *	0.754 *	1.011	1.055