Race Differences in Union Transitions among Cohabitors: The Role of Relationship Quality*

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ABSTRACT

The union outcomes of cohabitors vary by race with Whites more likely to marry and Blacks more likely to remain cohabiting. The current study extends this line of inquiry by incorporating relationship features. Using couple-level data from the first two waves of the NSFH, we analyze Black and White cohabiting couples at the first wave for whom a follow-up was completed at the second wave (N = 333) to determine whether socioeconomic and fertility measures and relationship features account for the race differences in union outcomes using event history analysis. Cohabiting Black couples are about 20 percent less likely than cohabiting White couples to move into marriage. Black couples are more likely to remain cohabiting. The inclusion of relationship features (i.e., relationship quality and perceived costs and benefits) does not eliminate the race difference. Plans to marry and couple happiness both increase the odds of marrying versus remaining cohabiting. In contrast, relationship instability and higher levels of perceived costs of marriage lower the odds of marriage.

Race Differences in Union Transitions among Cohabitors: The Role of Relationship Quality

There has been a large increase in the number of cohabiting couples over the last few decades. Today, there are over 5 million cohabiting couples in the United States, which is over 9 times the number of couples cohabiting in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). Cohabitation has contributed to the delay in marriage in the U.S., more so for Blacks than Whites (Manning & Smock, 1995; Raley, 1996).

Blacks and Whites often behave differently in terms of their union formation. Among those who are in unions, Blacks are more likely than Whites to cohabit whereas Whites are more likely to marry (Raley, 1996). Despite prior research on race differences in cohabitors' union transitions (e.g., Brown, 2000; Manning & Smock, 1995), the question remains why cohabiting couples marry at different rates by race. It would seem logical that couples who are already living together in a committed relationship would be the most likely to move into marriage. Furthermore, since Blacks are more likely to cohabit than Whites, it would make sense that they would move into marriage in at least a similar pace as Whites. That has not been the case as research has shown that Black cohabitors are less likely to marry than White cohabitors (Manning and Smock, 1995). We argue that the meaning attributed to cohabitation varies by race and that these different meanings can help us understand race variations in cohabitors' union outcomes.

There has been a strong focus on and concern about marriage among political leaders and policymakers. Since the modal path of entry into marriage is cohabitation, cohabitors are driving the changing state of marriage. Therefore it is important to understand what cohabitation means to them and if it means the same thing to Blacks and Whites. To date, no study has focused on

the role of relationship quality and union outcome expectations and their effect on the racial differences in union transitions among cohabitors, which is the gap that this study hopes to fill. While Manning and Smock's (1995) study on race differences in union transitions among cohabitors is informative, they used retrospective data and thus were limited in the variables they could analyze. Other studies (Brown, 2000; DeMaris, 2001; Sanchez, Manning, & Smock, 1998; Smock & Manning, 1997) that do use prospective data on union transitions among cohabitors do not focus on racial differences. Prospective couple-level data from Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH1 and NSFH2, respectively) are used to conduct the analyses.

BACKGROUND

Blacks are less likely to marry than Whites, on average, and the proportion of Black women who never marry has increased substantially across all cohorts while it has only increased modestly across cohorts of White women (Bennett, Bloom, & Craig, 1989; Lichter et. al., 2003). In fact, there has been a divergence between Blacks and Whites in terms of marriage rates in the last few decades (e.g., Bennett, Bloom, & Craig, 1989; Cherlin, 1992; Espenshade, 1985; Lichter, LeClere, & McLaughlin, 1991; Lichter et al., 1992; Mare & Winship, 1991; South & Lloyd, 1992), with Whites much more likely to move into marriage than Blacks and Blacks much more likely to remain cohabiting than Whites.

This divergence may result from race differences in the meaning of cohabitation. A growing body of work suggests that cohabitation serves as a prelude to marriage primarily among Whites, whereas among Blacks it is often a long-term substitute for marriage (Bennett, Bloom, & Craig, 1989; Lichter et. al., 2003; Raley, 1996). This topic will be revisited below but

first I will review the relevant literature on race variations in cohabitors' union transitions as well as factors that may contribute to those variations.

Race Variation in Cohabitors' Union Transitions

Manning and Smock (1995) use retrospective data on cohabiting unions formed between 1970 and 1984 from Wave 1 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH1) to examine differences in the transition to marriage among Black and White cohabitors. White cohabitors are more likely to not only get married but to move into marriage sooner than Black cohabitors. In fact, they show that White cohabitors are 129% more likely to marry than their Black counterparts, net of sociodemographic characteristics. Only one-third of Black cohabiting couples, compared to two-thirds of White cohabiting couples, marry their partners within four years of the start of their union. Life table estimates show that 60% of Whites versus 40% of Blacks exit cohabitation through marriage (Manning & Smock, 1995). Furthermore, although roughly 75% of Black and White cohabitors alike report plans to marry their partner, 60% of Whites with marriage plans versus only 20% of Blacks with marriage plans actually marry their partner within five to seven years (Brown, 2000). Notably, Black cohabitors who report plans to marry are most likely to remain cohabiting, suggesting that cohabitation is more of a long-term arrangement for Blacks than it is for Whites (Brown, 2000). Other research has found that Black women are less likely than White women to transition into marriage from cohabitation even though they are more likely than White women to cohabit and report similar expectations of marrying their partner (Bumpass et al., 1991; London, 1991; Manning & Smock, 1995; Schoen & Owens, 1992).

While research consistently shows that socioeconomic factors (Bennett, Bloom, and Craig, 1989; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; Koball, 1998; Manning & Smock, 1995; Smock,

Manning, & Porter, 2005) as well as fertility behaviors (Loomis & Landale, 1994; Manning, 1993; Manning & Landale, 1996; Manning & Smock, 1995; Osborne, 2005; Rendall, 1999) are associated with cohabitors' union transitions, they are not able to fully explain the race difference in the likelihood of marriage among cohabitors. Relationship dynamics, such as relationship quality and attitudes regarding the relationship, are also important in the decision making process (Brown, 2000; Sanchez, Manning, and Smock, 1998). Primarily following from the work of Brown (2000) and Manning and Smock (1995), we plan to extend research by focusing on the role of relationship quality dynamics for the union transitions of Black and White cohabiting couples, net of socioeconomic and fertility factors. Below, we review the literature on factors influencing union transitions among cohabitors. Then, we describe the conceptual framework that guides the present study. Finally, we discuss my data, methods, and analytic strategy, results and conclusions.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status is the factor that intuitively appears to be best suited to explain racial differences in union transitions among cohabitors as education, earnings, and occupation have been tied to decisions to cohabit and marry. As men's economic earning potential is declining, they are more likely than in the past to want to pool economic resources with their partner (Oppenheimer, 1988; Oppenheimer et. al., 1995; Oppenheimer et. al., 1997; Oppenheimer and Lew, 1995). As the culture of consumption prevails, in conjunction with the changing economy, both men and women invest more time during young adulthood to education and laying the foundation for a solid career before moving into marriage (Cherlin, 2000). Among cohabitors, men's education, earnings, or occupation positively influence the transition into marriage versus separation (Brown, 2000; Duvander, 1999; Oppenheimer, 2003; Smock and

Manning, 1997; Wu and Pollard, 2000; see Smock et al., 2005, for detailed table of this research subject).

Cherlin (2000) also argues that the rise in cohabitation and delay in marriage are due in part to women's increased bargaining power that has come from their higher economic standing. Cohabitation allows both men and women to observe their partner's home production methods as well as to evaluate their earning potential (Cherlin, 2000). Peoples' desire for a higher standard of living could be, at least in part, responsible for the shift in the marriage bargain, since it would require two incomes to obtain it (Young and Willmott, 1973).

Smock, Manning, & Porter (2005) find that among working and lower middle class cohabitors, being financially stable is an important prerequisite for marriage, hence their title, "Everything's There Except Money." The respondents in their study emphasize the importance of home ownership, getting out of debt, and being financially stable as markers of being ready to move into marriage. They also underscore the significance of being able to pay for a church wedding and a reception. The fact that being financially stable *before* getting married is an ideal that these respondents hold leads the authors to conclude that getting married is a status achievement or a capstone, which is consistent with Cherlin (2004) and Bulcroft and Bulcroft (1993).

Although some suggest cohabitors are less traditional than married couples (e.g., DeMaris & MacDonald, 1993), nonetheless Smock et. al. (2005) find that their respondents place great importance on the man's ability to be the family provider. This qualitative finding is consistent with the quantitative literature (Oppenheimer, 2003; Smock and Manning, 1997; Xie et al., 2003) and supports Cherlin's (2000) argument that while it is desirable for a woman to be financially viable (South, 1991), it is still required for men. This ideal is culturally embedded.

Since women are making more money and men's earnings are declining, and this trend is particularly pronounced among Black men, it would make sense that marriage rates among Blacks are also declining rapidly relative to Whites' (Cherlin, 2000).

It follows from this literature on the importance of economics for union transitions in general that it may explain racial differences as well. If Whites are more economically advantaged than Blacks and it takes money to get married then Whites should be more likely to move into marriage than Blacks. Among unmarrieds, poor Black women and poor White women have the same probability of marriage, even after controlling for differences in mate availability, economic independence, and family culture and living arrangements; the race difference in marriage rates occurs among the non-poor (McLaughlin & Lichter, 1997). Lichter, Graefe, and Brown (2003) find that cohabitation is a livelihood strategy employed by economically disadvantaged unwed mothers and that low income women are less likely to be married than are other women.

Manning and Smock (1995) focus particularly on economic prospects, socioeconomic background factors and childbearing to try to explain the racial difference in transitions from cohabitation to marriage. They find racial differences in the importance of these factors on the decision to marry. The effects of employment are more important for White men than White women; however, there are no gender differences in employment effects for Blacks. While Manning and Smock (1995) find that the inclusion of economic prospects and family background among cohabitors enhances the fit of their model, they do not mediate the effect of race on marriage. Financial security may increase the likelihood of marriage whereas the absence of such security can hinder it. *Not* getting married is a survival strategy used by low income Black mothers whose partner would simply be another mouth to feed (Edin, Kefalas, &

Reed, 2004). This area of literature shows that economic factors influence the decision to marry, however, economic factors alone do not explain the race difference in the propensity to marry.

Fertility

Cohabiting unions have become more complex in conjunction with the greater acceptance of childbearing outside of marriage (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Cherlin, 2004). Recent estimates show that 40% of nonmarital births occur within cohabiting unions (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Cherlin, 2004; Lichter et. al., 2003; Osborne, 2005). Researchers have tried to explain the effect those births have on union transitions among cohabitors. Using the NSFH1, Manning (1993) finds that the proportion of pregnant, unmarried women who marry before the birth of their child declined from 44% in 1970-1974 to 31% in 1980-1984. More specifically, 48% of *cohabiting* women married before the birth of their premaritally conceived child, whereas 38% of their noncohabiting single counterparts married (Manning, 1993). Conceiving a child within a cohabiting union accelerates Whites into marriage but it does not affect the union transitions of Blacks (Loomis & Landale, 1994; Manning, 1993, 2004; Manning & Landale, 1996; Manning & Smock, 1995; Osborne, 2005; Rendall, 1999). In fact, 63% of cohabiting White women and 9% of cohabiting Black women married before the birth of their child (Manning, 1993; also see Manning & Landale, 1996). In contrast, the birth of a child into cohabitation does not affect the likelihood of marriage for couples of either race (Manning, 2004). While the effect of a pregnancy on cohabitors' union transitions varies by race by propelling Whites into marriage and having no effect on the union transitions of Blacks, fertility variables alone do not explain the race difference in union transitions (e.g., Manning & Smock, 1995).

Relationship Features

Apart from socioeconomic status and fertility, relationship features, such as relationship quality and attitudes toward marriage and separation, are determinants of cohabitors' union outcomes. These relationship features may aid our understanding of race differences in cohabitors' union outcomes because prior research has shown that relationship quality and relationship expectations influence union transitions among cohabitors (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, relationship dynamics (Sanchez et al., 1998) and attitudes toward marriage and separation (McGinnis, 2003) have also been shown to be important in the relationship outcomes of cohabitors. We argue that race differences in union transitions may be a function of relationship features net of socioeconomic and fertility factors due to the notion that the meaning of cohabitation differs by race. If the purpose of cohabitation is different for Blacks and Whites, then we would argue that their relationships will also look different in terms of relationship quality and attitudes toward marriage and separation.

Relationship Quality

Relationship quality is an important aspect of any romantic relationship. Especially in the individualistic marriages of today, relationship quality is a key factor in what leads couples to marry and divorce or separate (Cherlin, 2004). It follows, then, that relationship quality and expectations would be important aspects to consider in studying union transitions (Brown, 2000).

Brown and Booth (1996) were among the first to directly compare the relationship quality of cohabitors and marrieds. They found that cohabitors in general have lower relationship quality than marrieds after controlling for duration of relationship and demographic characteristics of the respondent. Nock (1995) found similar results. Cohabiting couples' marriage plans account for the difference in relationship quality between cohabiting and married couples (Brown & Booth). In other words, cohabitors with plans to marry are not significantly

different from marrieds with regard to relationship happiness and their relationship quality is affected by potential sources of stress in much the same way as marrieds (Brown & Booth).

Brown (2003) finds that among cohabitors in general, cohabitations that are not transformed into marriages within a few years are characterized by high levels of instability and notably low levels of relationship happiness and interaction. Duration of relationship is negatively associated with relationship quality in both marriage and cohabitation; however, its effect is much stronger for cohabitors (Brown, 2003). Furthermore, the effect of plans to marry interacts with duration. For cohabitors with plans to marry, duration is positively associated with poorer relationship quality as well as increased instability. For cohabitors without plans to marry, duration does not significantly affect relationship quality (Brown, 2003). In addition, Brown (2004) finds that cohabitors who marry tend to have better relationship quality than those who remain cohabiting. Under the assumption that cohabiting unions are short-lived and simply a transitory stage in the relationship process, these conclusions regarding the duration of the relationship make sense. However, viewing the purpose of cohabitation as a step in the courtship process leading to marriage is more applicable to Whites than Blacks (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). If the purpose of cohabitation for Blacks is an alternative to marriage or singlehood (Casper & Bianchi), the duration of the relationship would probably not have a significant effect on relationship quality.

Relationship assessments and expectations have also been shown to be significant predictors of union transitions among cohabitors (Brown, 2000; Manning and Smock, 2002). Using couple-level data from cohabitors at NSFH1 to examine the effects of relationship assessments and expectations on union transitions by NSFH2, Brown finds that positive relationship assessments dissuade separation although they do not accelerate the transition into

marriage. She also finds that there are gender differences in the effects of negative relationship assessments such that women's negative assessments increase the odds of separation whereas men's negative assessments decrease the odds of marriage. In addition, cohabitors' relationship expectations are indicative of relationship outcomes. The odds of marriage are low and the odds of separation are high for couples in which both partners report an even to high chance of dissolution. Plans to marry are positively associated with entry into marriage; however, the effect is much greater for Whites than for Blacks.

Perceived Costs and Benefits

Perceived costs and benefits of marriage have been shown to influence the decision to marry among cohabitors (McGinnis, 2003). The purpose for cohabiting also affects attitudes and behaviors in that, for example, if a couple is cohabiting as a precursor to marriage, they are most likely going to have attitudes that reflect positively on their partner and on the institution of marriage (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). In a study comparing the transition into marriage by cohabitors and noncohabiting romantic daters using Waves 1 and 2 of the NSFH, McGinnis (2003) evaluates the role of perceived costs and benefits to marriage and marriage intentions and expectations. She finds cohabitors perceive fewer costs and fewer benefits to marriage than noncohabiting daters. This finding makes intuitive sense given that cohabitors are already partaking in some of the benefits of marriage (e.g. sharing living expenses) and the costs (e.g. less individual freedom). Surprisingly, cohabiting Blacks report significantly more benefits and significantly fewer costs to marriage than non-Blacks yet Blacks have a much lower hazard rate of marriage than non-Blacks (McGinnis). McGinnis also finds that perceived costs of marriage

reduce both the respondents' odds of reporting intentions to and expectations of marriage.[1] Cohabitors are both more likely to report intentions to and expectations of marrying their current partner than are noncohabiting daters. Additionally, while cohabitation is positively associated with marriage, the relationship reverses and becomes non-significant when controls for perceived costs and benefits as well as marriage intentions and expectations are introduced. McGinnis concludes that the perceived costs of marrying, marriage intentions, and marriage expectations directly predict marriage. Also, cohabitation status directly predicts perceived costs and both directly and indirectly predicts intentions and expectations (McGinnis).[2]

The research reviewed here shows that there are race differences in attitudes toward marriage and separation. Attitudes toward marriage, separation, the division of household labor, traditionalism, and egalitarianism may vary by race considering that the purpose and meaning of cohabitation are different for Blacks and Whites.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

When cohabitation first entered the public's conscience in the 1970s and then gained popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, cohabitors and researchers alike considered it to be a transitional stage in the courtship process leading to marriage (Amato, 2004; Cherlin, 2004). The increase in cohabitation in the United States has occurred in conjunction with a change in the meaning of marriage from companionate to individualistic (Cherlin, 2004). That is, people tend to focus more on the personal satisfaction they get from marriage and romantic relationships than the satisfaction they previously derived from fulfilling their roles as spouse and parent (Amato, 2004; Cherlin, 2004). It would make sense, then, to test out a partner through a

[1] McGinnis cites Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) reasoned action model in which intentions are the most proximate determinates of behavior. Expectations are not the same constructs as intentions but intentions imply an expectation.

[2] McGinnis does test for selection effects in that those who plan to marry their partner or those who see fewer costs to marriage may be more likely to cohabit, however she does not find support for this alternative hypothesis. Reverse-causation does not seem to explain the relationship between marriage intentions/expectations, perceived costs/benefits, and cohabitation.

cohabiting relationship to make sure the union with that person would result in personal happiness and satisfaction (Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin, 1991).

However, there is a weakening connection between cohabitation and marriage (Bumpass, 1990; Cherlin, 2004). In the 1970s, 60% of cohabiting unions resulted in marriage within three years (Smock & Gupta, 2002). By the 1990s, that percentage dropped to about 33% (Smock & Gupta). This trend suggests that either many cohabiting unions are not "trial marriages" but are actually replacing marriage or that a greater number of these "trial marriages" are failing (Bumpass; Cherlin). Furthermore, major life course events that were closely associated with marriage, such as childbearing, homeownership and sexual relations, have become to some extent disassociated with marriage as they are also likely to take place within cohabiting relationships (Bumpass, 1990).

In their study of partner choice in marriages and cohabitations, Schoen and Weinick (1993) conclude, "Many people might be willing to live with someone they would not marry…we would argue that while cohabitors anticipate time together, married persons anticipate a lifetime. A different kind of relationship calls for a different kind of partner" (p. 413). More recent research (e.g. Manning and Smock, 2002; Oppenheimer, 1994; Oppenheimer & Lew, 1995; Smock & Manning, 1997) shows that men's economic characteristics are more central to the decision to marry than are women's. Within cohabiting unions, this is no exception (see Smock et al., 2005). This research supports Schoen and Weinick's (1993) conclusions given that the cohabiting couples are willing to live with their partner, even though his economic standing is not considered "good" enough for them to marry.

Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel (1990) argue that cohabitation should be compared to singlehood or viewed as an alternative to singlehood rather than being compared to marriage or

viewed as an alternative to marriage. Their findings do show some support that White cohabitors look more like never-married singles than marrieds in terms of "big" commitments, such as homeownership and children; however, White cohabitors' education and employment statuses resemble both marrieds and singles. This discrepancy, even within one racial category, is evidence that cohabitation is more complex than simply being categorized as an alternative to either marriage or singlehood. As Casper and Sayer (2000) point out with their four types of cohabitation, cohabitation varies depending on the people involved and the purpose for it.

Race is one such complicating factor in studying the meaning of cohabitation and the implications for union outcomes. For Whites, cohabitation is often a short-term stepping stone in the courtship process likely to eventuate in marriage (Brown, 2005; Manning & Smock, 1995). For Blacks, however, cohabitation is typically a long-term alternative to marriage (Brown, 2005; Manning & Smock, 1995). There is also a competing hypothesis regarding Black cohabitors in that cohabitation is an alternative to singlehood due to the lack of "marriageable" partners in conjunction with the personal need for intimacy and the economic need for shared costs of living (Lichter et al., 1992). It would follow that union transitions would vary by race, with Whites more likely to marry and Blacks more likely to remain cohabiting and these are the trends that researchers have shown in the literature over the last few decades (e.g., Manning & Smock, 1995; Raley, 1996).

Blacks and Whites may view their own and their partners' characteristics differently in deciding whether to cohabit or marry. It has been demonstrated that Blacks and Whites have different prerequisites for marriage (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; South, 1991, 1993), although both groups seemingly place the same emphasis on men's socioeconomic characteristics when evaluating their intentions to marry (Manning & Smock, 2002). To the extent that Black men are

disproportionately disadvantaged, Manning and Smock (2002) suggest that cohabitation may be more of a long-term situation for Blacks than it would be for other racial groups in which men are, on average, more economically advantaged.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Cohabitation is becoming the relationship setting of choice for Blacks, as evidenced by the higher proportion of Black cohabitations to White cohabitations as well as by Black cohabitors' lower propensity to marry (Raley, 1996). The question that has not been successfully answered in the literature is why? It is likely that the meaning of cohabitation is different for Blacks than it is for Whites (Manning & Smock, 1995; Raley, 1996). Whereas for Whites, cohabitation is a stepping stone on the road to marriage, cohabitation is an alternative to marriage for Blacks (Manning & Smock, 1995; Raley, 1996). The meaning of marriage, as well as the meaning of cohabitation, are both important in the discussion of the racial difference in the likelihood of marriage. It may be the case that Blacks and Whites are more or less likely to fall into one of Casper and Sayer's (2000) categories of the meaning of cohabitation which in turn shapes their union transitions. Similarly, the racial difference could arise, not because of a difference in the meaning of marriage, but in a difference in the prerequisites for marriage (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). For example, low income cohabitors put marriage on a pedestal in that they would not get married until they felt they were financially stable enough to have a nice wedding, pay all their bills on time every month, and perhaps buy a house (Smock et al., 2005). It is also possible that because of the lack of marriageable Black men, Black women would rather live with a boyfriend that is not someone she would marry as an alternative to singlehood. The quality of these cohabiting relationships may be lower than that of cohabiting Whites. As Brown (2000) has shown, relationship quality is an important predictor of transitions into

marriage or separation. The main question that I would like to address is why the likelihood of marriage differs for Black and White couples who are already in established, cohabiting relationships.

The literature that has been presented here on the impact of socioeconomic variables on the decision to marry has shown that they are important factors that do explain some of the variance in racial differences in union transitions, although not all. In the current study, socioeconomic variables are included; however, they are not the focus.

Fertility is another factor that has been studied in the literature on racial differences in union transitions among cohabitors. Fertility includes both pregnancies and births. Much of the prior research on fertility and union transitions focuses on conception (Loomis & Landale, 1994; Manning, 1993, 2004; Manning & Landale, 1996; Manning & Smock, 1995; Osborne, 2005; Rendall, 1999); however, we will use measures of both becoming pregnant and giving birth in my analyses. Much like socioeconomic variables, fertility contributes to the fit of the model in the prior studies, however, cannot fully explain the racial difference in cohabitors' union transitions.

Relationship dynamics are the main focus of the current study. Brown (2000) found that relationship quality is a key predictor of union transitions among cohabitors. Although race was considered in her models, it was not the focus of her study. Interestingly, Brown found a considerably large discrepancy in the transition to marriage between Black and White cohabitors who reported plans to marry their partner.

Costs and benefits of marriage and separation are also variables of interest. Perceived costs and benefits toward marriage and separation may vary by race. Again, the meaning of cohabitation comes into play here. For Whites, viewing cohabitation as a stepping stone to

marriage will most likely lead them to perceive fewer costs and more benefits of marriage. If they are not happy in their relationship, however, they will be more likely to view separation as an option. For Blacks on the other hand, viewing cohabitation as an alternative to marriage may mean that they have a negative view of marriage and of separation.

Given these considerations about the meaning of cohabitation as well the findings from prior research, I would expect the union transitions of Blacks and Whites to vary. Specifically, we propose to test four main hypotheses of interest to the current study:

1. Black cohabitors are more likely to remain cohabiting whereas White cohabitors are more likely to marry.
2. Socioeconomic factors and fertility measures each reduce the magnitude of the race difference in cohabitors' union transitions but do not completely reduce the race effect to non-significance.
3. Relationship quality and cost/benefit measures each reduce the magnitude of the race difference in cohabitors' union transitions but do not completely reduce the race effect to non-significance.
4. Including relationship features (i.e., relationship quality and cost/benefit measures) in the model, controlling for all other variables, eliminates the significance of race on cohabitors' union transitions.

METHOD

To conduct our analyses, couple-level data from Wave I and Wave II of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH1 and NSFH2, respectively) is employed. Wave I of the NSFH was collected in 1987-88 and included a nationally representative probability sample of 13,007 respondents aged 19 and older. A randomly selected main respondent was selected

from each household with which a face-to-face interview was conducted. The main respondent was also given a self-administered questionnaire to complete. If the main respondent was married or living with a romantic partner, their partner or spouse was given a shorter self-administered questionnaire (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988).

The NSFH is arguably the richest data set with which to test the proposed hypotheses. It has more measures of relationship quality for cohabitors than any other survey. In addition, the NSFH includes data from both partners. Couple-level data is important to the current study. Without information from both partners, we would not have as clear a picture of the relationship dynamics that may be influencing the decision to transition out of cohabitation through separation or marriage.

The focus of this study is union transitions among Black and White cohabiting couples, and thus we limit the sample to Black and White cohabitors at NSFH1 (n = 456). In order to be included in the sample, surveys from both the main respondent and their cohabiting partner have to be completed. Interracial couples (n = 12) are not considered here. The final sample for analysis (n=333) includes 294 White cohabiting couples and 39 Black cohabiting couples.

On average, missing data accounted for about three percent of each measure. Unless otherwise specified, modal replacement is used to handle missing data.

MEASURES

Dependent Variable: Relationship Outcome

The purpose of this study is to explain racial differences in cohabitors' union transitions. Using event history analysis, there are three relationship outcomes a couple could reach which end the hazard time: the date the couple gets married, the date the couple separates, or the NSFH2 interview date if the couple is still cohabiting. The NSFH2 survey asks the main

respondent and their cohabiting partner from NSFH1 their current relationship status and if they are still with the same partner they were with at NSFH1. If they report that they got married to that partner since NSFH1, they are asked the date of the marriage. Similarly, if they report that they separated from that partner since NSFH1, they are asked the date they separated. Thus, the final dependent variable includes three categories; 1 = *separate* (n = 114), 2 = *marry* (n = 155), 3 = *remain cohabiting* (n = 64).

Independent Variables

Focus Variable: Race

Black and White couples are of interest to this study; therefore all respondents who consider themselves to be in a racial category other than Black or White were not considered here. As mentioned above, interracial couples were not considered[3]. A dummy variable has been created so that 1 = *Black couple* and 0 = *White couple*. The final sample includes 294 White cohabiting couples and 39 Black cohabiting couples.

Socioeconomic Variables:

There are six socioeconomic variables that are of importance to this study. The first is *education*. Both the primary and secondary respondent's education were measured in years completed (range 0-17 with 17 being any post graduate work). The gender variable was then used to determine the *man's education* and the *woman's education*.

The first time-varying variable indicates *if/when the respondent received a GED and/or other degree*, such as an Associates, Bachelors or vocational degree. Each month is marked with a 0 unless the respondent received a GED or other degree, in which case that month and each subsequent month is marked with a 1.

[3] Analyses were conducted which include interracial couples in the Non-White category, however, they did not differ substantially from the results shown in Table 3.

We use the constructed variable measures of *income*, which includes the man's and the woman's total income, excluding income from interest, dividends, and other investments.[4] Mean replacement is used to substitute for any missing data in the original variables. Using the variable for gender, men's income (mean = 21,712.08) and women's income (mean = 14,946.08) are determined. The two separate incomes are added together to get the total *couple income* (mean = 36,658.15).[5] There is also a dummy variable for whether or not either partner is on welfare; 1 = on *welfare* (n = 40), 0 = *not on welfare* (n = 293).

For each main respondent, there is a variable that tracks his/her *employment status* from the NSFH1 date until the date the couple is censored. For every month the respondent is employed (either full- or part-time), that month is marked with a 1. For every month they are unemployed, the month is marked with a 0.[6]

Fertility Measures

There are three dummy variables that were created to indicate if there are children in the household and to whom they are biologically related to at NSFH1. All categories are in reference to the main respondent. The first dummy variable indicates that there are *only biological children in the household*. The second indicates that there are *step-children in the household*. Finally, there is a dummy variable which indicates that there are *no children in the household*. This final dummy is the omitted variable in the analyses. Also, there are two time-varying variables indicating if/when *the woman was pregnant,* assuming an eight month

[4] This measure includes other income for each person such as disability assistance, social security, and public assistance, which are contributed to the household but are not necessarily from earnings.
[5] This may or may not be the same as the total household income, particularly if there are other adults or adult children living in the household who are contributing, nonetheless we may use the term "household income" loosely here.
[6] Unfortunately, there is no such specific variable for the partner; too many assumptions would have to be made using the measures available, therefore, we chose not to include them.

pregnancy before the birth, and if/when there was a *new child,* from the month of birth on, in between NSFH1 and the date censored.

Relationship Features:

Relationship Quality Measures

The first relationship quality measure asks each respondent about their previous cohabiting and marital relationships. A dummy variable was created to indicate that 1 = *either partner had a previous cohabiting or marital relationship* (n = 254) or 0 = *neither partner had a previous cohabiting or marital relationship* (n = 79).

Each partner is asked if they have definite plans to marry their partner and if they think they would eventually marry their partner. These are both dummy variables with 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*. If a respondent reports that they have either definite or tentative plans to marry their partner, they are considered to have marriage plans. If both partners say they have marriage plans, the couple is considered to *have plans to marry*. If only one partner reports plans to marry or neither report plans, the couple is considered as *not having marriage plans*. One hundred and ninety four couples have plans to marry each other at the NSFH1 interview and 139 couples do not have plans to marry.

Both the main respondent and his/her partner are asked "Taking all things together, how would you describe your relationship?" Responses range from 1 = *very unhappy* to 7 = *very happy*. Using the gender variable, a men's happiness score and a women's happiness score are created. The average of the man's and woman's scores is taken to get average *couple happiness*. The average is used here so that both partners' happiness is taken into account. While Brown (2000) found that there are differences between men and women in how perceived relationship quality impacts union transitions, only the couple happiness score is utilized in the current study

as the focus is not on gendered effects of relationship quality. It might be beneficial to add that dimension in future research.

Each respondent was asked "During the past month, how often did you and your partner spend time alone with each other, talking or sharing an activity?" Responses ranged from 0 = *never* to 5 = *almost everyday*. The mean of the partners' responses is used to get a *couple quality time* indicator, with a lower score indicating little quality time together and higher scores indicating a lot of quality time together.

Both partners were asked to report the number of times they had sex with their partner in the past month. Following DeMaris' (2001) coding strategy, responses greater than 31 are recoded to 31. The scores are then averaged together to get *couple sexual frequency*, indicating that lower scores mean lower frequency of sex and higher scores mean higher frequency of sex.

Respondents were asked to report how fair they think their relationship is in four different areas: household chores, working for pay, spending money, and child care. Possible responses range from 1 = *very unfair to him/her* to 5 = *very unfair to me* with 3 = *fair to both* so it is a measure of personal under-benefit.[7] To allow inclusion of couples without children, the mean of each partners' responses are multiplied by four and then summed (DeMaris, 2001). *Men's* and *women's under-benefit* are derived, with higher scores indicating under-benefit.

Each respondent was asked a series of questions regarding how often they have verbal disagreements with their partner over a range of areas: household tasks, money, spending time together, sex, having (a)nother child, in-laws, and parenting. Possible responses range from 0 = *never* to 5 = *almost everyday*. DeMaris' (2001) coding strategy was followed. To create scales

[7] While this set of responses lends itself to misreporting, considering that there is no way to respond *unfair to both* and it is a confusing scale (if it's very unfair to me does that mean it's fair to my partner?), it is nonetheless the only measure of fairness in the survey and therefore utilized in the current study. The results in reference to this variable, however, should be interpreted with caution.

that would allow for couples without children to be included, the mean of each partner's responses were multiplied by seven and then summed. The partners' sums are then averaged to get *couple verbal disagreement*, in which higher scores indicate high levels of verbal disagreement and low scores indicate low levels of disagreement.

The presence of violence in cohabiting relationships influences the transitions out of those unions (DeMaris, 2001). Respondents were asked if any verbal disagreement had become physical in the last year. This was a dichotomous variable in which 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*.[8] This strategy yields 44 couples who report *violence* in the last year and 289 couples who do not.

The final measure of relationship quality is based on the question "during the past year, have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?" Each partner responds either 1 for *yes* or 0 for *no*. We then created a variable in which, if either partner responded *yes*, they received a 1, which indicates an *unstable* relationship. If both partners responded *no*, they received a 0, which indicates a *stable* relationship.

Costs/Benefits Measures

The cost/benefit measures are the respondents' perceived costs and benefits to marriage and costs and benefits to separation.[9] The main respondent was asked how they think their life might be different in a range of areas if they were married now. The responses range from 1 = *much worse* to 5 = *much better*, with 3 = *same* in the middle. The nine areas are: standard of living, economic security, overall happiness, freedom to do what you want, economic

[8] There are two different coding strategies that could be used here, one in which both partners have to say there was physical violence and the other in which only one partner has to say there was violence, Just because only one partner said there was violence does not mean the violence did not occur. From a more scientific standpoint, however, the less conservative measure more closely resembles the 16% annual rate of violence found by Straus & Gelles (1986), which utilized the National Survey of Family Violence (a more extensive survey of violence than is the NSFH1). It is for that reason that we have chosen to use the measure in which only one partner needs to report violence to be considered as having violence occur in the past year.

[9] For respondents who did not respond to one or two of the cost-benefit areas, it is assumed that either that area did not apply to them or that they did not have strong feelings about that area, therefore, they are assigned a neutral value of 3 = *same* (McGinnis, 2003).

independence, sex life, friendships with others, relations with parents, and emotional security. Following McGinnis' (2003) coding strategy, two dichotomous variables are created to indicate (1) a cost or (0) no cost and (1) a benefit or (0) no benefit. To create the cost of marriage measure, a response of a 1 or 2 on the original variable are coded as a *cost* and the other responses are coded as *no cost*. To create the benefit of marriage measure, responses of 4 or 5 indicate a *benefit* and the other responses indicate *no benefit*. Each cost and benefit indicator is summed to create a single *cost of marriage* variable (number of costs) and a single *benefit of marriage* variable (number of benefits).

The next series of questions ask "even though it may be very unlikely, think for a moment about how various areas of your life might be different if you separated. For each of the following areas, how do you think things would change? 1 = *much worse*, 3 = *same*, 5 = *much better*." The coding is exactly the same as the costs and benefits to marriage variable. Thus, a single *cost of separation* measure and a single *benefit of separation* measure are derived.

Controls

Age at the Beginning of the Cohabiting Union

Each respondent was asked their date of birth. They were also asked the date they began cohabiting with their partner. Each of these dates was converted to century-months. The date the cohabitation began is subtracted from the respondent's date of birth to get their age (in century-months) at the beginning of the union. This figure is then multiplied by 12 to get their age in years at the start of the union. By using the variable for gender, the men's mean age at the beginning of the union is 29.71 and the women's mean age at the beginning of the union is 26.89. The overall average age is 28.3.

Duration of the Relationship

Although each couple is at risk for the event (either separation or marriage) from their first month together (i.e., month 1), they had to survive until the NSFH1 date to be included in my sample. Therefore, time at risk is considered only from the NSFH1 interview date on. This is a left-truncated sample because the couples' exposure to the risk of separating or marrying is not observed from the beginning of their relationship but from the NSFH1 interview date (Guo, 1993). The conditional likelihood approach is the appropriate method of handling left-truncated data as a couples' likelihood of the event is conditional on their relationship duration at NSFH1 (Guo). In order to further understand the effects of relationship duration, we have created six time-varying dummy variables with each of the following time intervals; 0 – 12 months, 13 – 24 months, 25 – 36 months, 37 – 48 months, 49 – 60 months, and 61+ months (61+ months is the omitted dummy in the analyses). Cohabiting unions are usually short-lived, moving quickly into either marriage or separation within five years (e.g., Bumpass, 1990); therefore, these categories reflect the short-term nature of cohabitation. These dummy variables take into account the duration of the relationship before the NSFH1 interview. For example, consider a couple who has been together for 26 months at the NSFH1 interview and marries in month 40. For the 0 – 12 months and 13 – 24 months dummies, they are given a 0, for the 25 – 36 months dummy they are given a 1 until they reach month 37. At that time, the 25 – 36 months dummy is marked 0 and the 37 – 48 months dummy is marked 1 until month 40 when they are no longer observed.

Analytic Strategy

To conduct these analyses, we use multinomial logistic regression for the discrete-time event history data using CATMOD in SAS. Event history analysis is the appropriate method to employ in the current study as the outcome variable is a time-dependent event. In addition, event

history analysis allows for the inclusion of time-varying covariates, which are important to this study.

Using discrete-time event history analysis, the unit of analysis is now the person-month rather than the individual case (i.e., the couple) being observed. For each couple, there is a line of data for each month they are observed until they are censored. Time-varying variables are like dummy variables. The month is marked 1 if the event occurred in that month and 0 if it did not. For example, if the couple became pregnant in month 36 and gave birth in month 45, months 1-35 would be given a 0 for both the pregnancy and new child variables, months 36-44 would be given a 1 for the pregnancy variable and 0 for the new child variable, and month 45 until the month they are censored would be given a 0 for the pregnancy variable and a 1 for the new child variable.

The outcome of the relationship is the dependent variable in all models. The dummy variable for race is entered in first, as it is the focus variable, along with the control variables, which include the respondents' ages at the beginning of the cohabiting union, and the dummy variables for the length of their relationship. The race variable would need to be significant and negative in the 'marry versus remain cohabiting' panel of the first model to validate the first hypothesis. The socioeconomic and fertility variables are entered in next. The magnitude of the race coefficient would need to be reduced but remain significant with the introduction of these two sets of variables to validate the second hypothesis. In the third model, the relationship quality measures are entered into the analysis without the SES and fertility variables. Similarly, in the fourth model, the cost/benefit measures are entered with only the focus and control variables. The last model is the full model that includes all the variables simultaneously. It is with the inclusion of the relationship features variables, controlling for all other variables in the

model that the race coefficient would need to become non-significant to imply that relationship features explain the race difference in union transitions, thus validating the final hypothesis.

RESULTS

Sample Description

The means and standard deviations of the independent variables for both the total sample and for each racial group can be found in Table 1. The means that are in bold are statistically different ($p<.05$) between Blacks and Whites.

Fifty percent of cohabiting White couples married after NSFH1 whereas only about 18 percent of cohabiting Black couples married. On the other hand, 38.5 percent of Black couples remained cohabiting until NSFH2. Only about 17 percent of White couples were still cohabiting at NSFH2. This shows support for the argument that cohabitation has different meanings for Black and White couples. For Blacks, cohabitation is often a long-term arrangement whereas it is typically a short-term arrangement resulting in marriage (or separation) for Whites. There is further support for this argument with the duration dummy variables. White cohabitors are more likely to be in the early stages of their relationship. In other words, White cohabitors are more likely than Black cohabitors to have been together for one, two, or three years whereas Black cohabitors are more likely than Whites to be together five years or more.

Black men and women have lower levels of education, earn less income, and are more likely to be on welfare than Whites, on average. Blacks in this sample were enrolled in school less often between NSFH1 and NSFH2. Black couples are both more likely to have children present in the household, to become pregnant and to have a child within cohabitation after NSFH1 than are Whites.

Among the relationship quality measures, Blacks and Whites are fairly similar with a few exceptions. White couples report spending more quality time together than do Black couples. Black couples are more likely than White couples to report greater frequency of verbal disagreement.

The only statistical difference between Blacks' and Whites' attitudes toward marriage and separation is that Whites have more perceived costs of separation than do Blacks. There are no racial differences in perceived costs and benefits of marriage and perceived benefits of separation.

While Black and White cohabitors do not appear to have many significant differences between them, the fact that their fertility behavior is significantly different is evidence that Black and White cohabitors do attribute different meanings to cohabitation. Cohabitation is most likely an acceptable context for childbearing and childrearing for Blacks whereas childbearing within cohabitation occurs much less often among Whites. These patterns are consistent with prior research (Manning, 1993; Manning & Smock, 1995).

Table 2 shows the average duration of the relationship for Blacks and Whites by the outcome of the relationship. Consistent with the notion that cohabitation is more of a long-term arrangement for Black couples than for White couples, Black couples in this sample tend to cohabit for longer periods of time before transitioning out through either separation or marriage than White couples. White couples tend to exit cohabitation though separation or marriage earlier in the relationship, which is consistent with the notion that cohabitation is a short-term living arrangement for Whites.

Multivariate Results

The results from the multinomial logistic regressions of the discrete-time event history data are shown in Table 3. For each model, odds ratios are shown for the risk of separating versus remaining cohabiting and marrying versus remaining cohabiting. All models are significant ($p<.001$).

Model 1 of Table 3 includes the focus variable, *Black Couple*, and the control variables. Black couples' odds of marriage are 74.4 percent lower than those of Whites'. White couples are more likely than Black couples to marry whereas Black couples are more likely than White couples to remain cohabiting, which supports Hypothesis 1. Consistent with the notion in the literature that cohabiting unions are short-lived, with the couple quickly transitioning out through either marriage or separation, the results show that couples who have been together for one year or less have 175 percent greater odds of separating and almost 289 percent greater odds of marrying than those who have been together five years of more. As expected, there is a curvilinear relationship between time and transitions out of cohabitation. Transitioning out of cohabitation is much more likely to occur within the first year and then decrease. However, in the fourth year, the likelihood of transitioning out through marriage increases again and then decreases in the fifth year.

Socioeconomic and fertility measures are entered into the analysis in Model 2. Blacks are about 71.7 percent less likely to marry than Whites. The Clogg test would be the best method to empirically test part 1 of Hypothesis 2 that the added variables reduce the gap in the *Black Couple* coefficient. However, the Clogg test is "prohibitively complex" (DeMaris, personal communication, 2006). In lieu of that, we have taken the difference between the coefficients in Model 1 and Model 2 and divided it by the standard error of the coefficent in Model 2 to examine whether there is more than a .25 standard deviation difference between

models (DeMaris, personal communication, 2006). Any difference less than a quarter of a standard deviation of difference is not sufficient enough to merit acknowledging the change, as it is very small. On the other hand, more than a .25 standard deviation of difference is large enough to merit attention. This is an unofficial method of reporting whether a change in a coefficient between models is large enough to warrant attention. The result of the calculation[10] between the race coefficients for the log odds of separating versus remaining cohabiting is .3049 and the result for the difference between the race coefficients for the log odds of marrying versus remaining cohabiting is -.2508. These results show that, while there is more than a quarter standard error of change in the coefficient for the odds of separation and a quarter standard error of change in the coefficient for the odds of marriage between Model 1 and Model 2, the change is negative for the latter. Thus, there is informal support that part 1 of Hypothesis 2 is incorrect. The inclusion of these variables does not reduce the gap in the race difference in transitions out of cohabitation through marriage and separation. Indeed, the introduction of these variables does not eliminate the significant racial difference in transitions to marriage, which is consistent with the second part of Hypothesis 2.

Couples' income significantly increases the odds of marrying as opposed to remaining cohabiting. This result is consistent with prior literature that shows as couples become more financially stable, they are more likely to move into marriage. Stated differently, couples wait until they are financially stable to get married (Smock et. al, 2005). Recall Furstenburg's (1996) comment that "marriage is a luxury consumer item" for low-income Blacks while cohabitation is seen as "the budget way" to begin a family. It is possible that couples, Black or White, wait until they have reached a level of income which they think is appropriate for marriage before they get

[10] M1-M2: Separate: [-.1306-(-.2196)]/.2922=.3049 Marry: [-1.3633-(-1.263)]/.3999= -.2508

married. Thus it would follow that it is more likely for couples with high income levels to marry.

Earning a GED, college, or vocational degree actually increases the odds of separation versus remaining cohabiting by about 150 percent. This result is interesting given that couples wait until they finish their desired amount of schooling before moving into marriage (Smock et al., 2005). However, this result could be accurate if the relative education of the partners does not match. Perhaps the partner who received the degree would rather find another partner with the same level of education if his or her current partner has fewer years of education than him or her. This cannot be tested here as we do not know what type of degree was earned by the respondent to determine if the partner does in fact have fewer years of education.

Becoming pregnant seems to propel cohabitors into marriage. During the eight months of pregnancy, the likelihood that cohabitors marry is 150 percent greater than the likelihood that they remain cohabiting. However, after the child is born, cohabitors have lower odds of marrying than those without a new child. In other words, cohabitors seem to have shotgun weddings when they become pregnant, but if they do not marry immediately, they are especially unlikely to marry after the child is born.

The relationship quality measures are introduced in Model 3. The gap in the race coefficient for the odds of marriage actually increases from Black couples having 74.4 percent lower odds of marrying in Model 1 versus 81.8 percent lower odds in Model 3; therefore, the first part of Hypothesis 3 is incorrect. The race difference in the likelihood of marriage still exists with the introduction of the relationship quality measures, thus, the second part of Hypothesis 3 is correct.

The effects of the control variables are similar to what was found in the previous two models. Plans to marry and couple happiness significantly increases the odds of marrying versus remaining cohabiting. Sexual frequency lowers the odds of separation. Lastly, being in an unstable relationship lowers the odds of marriage by about 35 percent, although it does not increase the odds of separation. All other relationship quality variables are non-significant.

The fourth model shows the effects of the perceived costs and benefits of both marriage and separation. Once again, the racial gap in union transitions among cohabitors has widened from Model 1 to Model 4 and the race difference in the likelihood of marriage is not explained. Unfortunately, there is no evidence for Hypothesis 3. As in the previous model, the effects of the control variables are the same. The perceived costs of marriage lower the likelihood of marriage by about 23 percent, which is the only significant effect in the new predictor set. Contrary to expectations, the costs of marriage do not reduce the odds of separation. Similarly, the benefits of marriage as well as the costs and benefits of separation are unrelated to the likelihood of either marriage or separation.

Model 5 includes all of the covariates. Controlling for all variables, the likelihood of marriage among Black couples is 80 percent lower than among White couples. The same procedure was used here as was above to compare Model 5 to Model 1.[11] The race coefficient for the log odds of separating versus remaining cohabiting decreased but by less than .06 standard deviations and therefore the change is very small. On the other hand, the change in the race difference coefficient for the log odds of marrying versus remaining cohabiting increased by .5390 standard deviations, which is an informally significant difference, suggesting these controls amplify the race effect. Therefore, not only is there lack of evidence to support

[11] M1-M5: Separate: [-.1306-(-.1112)]/.334= -.0581 Marry: [-1.3633-(-1.5915)]/.4234= .5390

Hypothesis 4, there is in fact evidence to support the contrary. There are no major changes in the effects of the covariates between the individual models and the full model.

In a separate analysis (results not shown), models were run additively. Nested chi-square tests were conducted between the model with the focus variable, controls, and socioeconomic and fertility variables (model 1) and the model including those and the relationship quality variables (model 2).[12] The results show that the relationship quality variables do significantly contribute to the model. Next, the cost/benefit variables were added in the next model (the full model).[13] The attitudes do not appear to add significantly to the model.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Prior research has found large differences in the likelihood of marriage among Black and White cohabitors (Brown, 2000; Manning & Smock, 1995; Raley, 1996). Research has tried to explain these differences by primarily focusing on socioeconomic factors and fertility measures (e.g., Duvander, 1999; Smock and Manning, 1997). Other studies that have focused on aspects of relationship quality (e.g., Brown, 2000; Brown & Booth, 1996) or interpersonal relations (DeMaris, 2001) have not specifically investigated racial differences. The current study intended to extend prior literature by using prospective, couple-level data to determine whether relationship quality and attitudes can explain the racial difference in transitions to marriage.

Using a sample of Black and White cohabiting couples at the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households in which both partners completed the questionnaire and were followed until Wave 2 (n=333), we have documented general trends that are consistent with the literature. There was partial support for Hypothesis 1 in that Black cohabitors are more likely to remain cohabiting whereas Whites, on the other hand, are more likely to marry. However,

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[12] $M2\chi^2 - M1\chi^2_{(\Delta df)} = 202.0487 - 151.3798_{(20)} = 50.6689$ *** p>.001

[13] $M3\chi^2 - M2\chi^2_{(\Delta df)} = 212.1959 - 202.0487_{(28)} = 10.1472$ n.s.

Whites are no more likely than Blacks to separate, which is also consistent with prior literature (Brown, 2000). There is a curvilinear relationship between relationship duration and union transitions.

Socioeconomic factors and fertility measures neither reduced the gap in the race difference in union transitions nor fully explain the difference; therefore, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. The results found here are fairly consistent with prior literature with one exception. The gap in the race difference in union transitions was not reduced. Prior literature has found that, while these variables did not explain the difference, they did reduce it. That effect was not found here.

The relationship quality and cost/benefit results are fairly straightforward. Controlling for other covariates, plans to marry and relationship happiness increase the odds of marrying and relationship instability decreases the odds of marrying. Also, perceived costs of marriage decrease the odds of marrying. The other variables were not significant.

While the current study has focused on union transitions out of cohabitation or lack thereof, it is important to consider the meaning of the result that Black couples are more likely to remain cohabiting than transition out. Furthermore, there is no race difference in the likelihood of separation. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge relationship stability. Although these couples are not legally solidifying their union by way of marriage, they may be just as stable as those couples who do get married. Perhaps relationship stability is more critical for an individual's well-being than relationship type (Brown & Booth, 1996). If that is the case then it is possible that the non-significant relationship quality results found here are due to the presence of relationship stability and not necessarily the need to transition into marriage.

It is important not to forget the time period here, five to seven years. Longitudinal research over a greater time span may be able to determine whether Black cohabitors are delaying marriage or forgoing it completely. Perhaps in future analyses, the focus should be on the differences between those who transition out through separation versus all others (i.e., those who marry and those who remain cohabiting). In addition, much could be learned from research which focuses on the stability of long-term cohabiting unions.

This study contributes to the literature in three key ways. The first is that it uses prospective data to determine the race difference in cohabitors' union transitions. Prior studies, such as Manning and Smock (1995), have used retrospective data to tackle this question. While retrospective studies contribute greatly to the literature, there are some limitations that can be overcome by using prospective data.

The second contribution is that couple-level data are used. Two people are needed to create a couple, therefore it is important to have information from both people when studying the outcome of that relationship. Many previous studies have used individual-level data. Data from only one person may give a picture as to what is going on in the relationship but only a partial picture. Having information from both partners is important so that we can more fully understand the relationship dynamics.

The third contribution of this study is that a wide range of relationship features are included. Prior studies have primarily focused on socioeconomic and/or fertility measures to explain the race difference in union transitions (e.g. Manning & Smock, 1995; Osborne, 2005). Other studies (Brown, 2000) that have focused on the role of relationship quality in union transitions did not focus exclusively on the race difference in those transitions. The goal of the current study is to incorporate socioeconomic, fertility, and relationship quality and attitudinal

features to explain the race difference in cohabitors' union transitions. Although many measures of relationship quality and perceived costs and benefits were utilized here, many of them turned out to be non-significant. Even though this was unexpected, it can inform future research about which relationship feature measures are important to include. Perhaps plans to marry, relationship happiness, and relationship instability are the main relationship quality variables that should be focused on in future research, as they were the only variables that continually remained significant predictors of transitions to marriage.

Nonetheless, there are a few limitations to this study. The first is that while the NSFH is arguably the richest data set with which to answer these questions, it is becoming slightly outdated. The first wave was collected in 1987-88 and the second in 1992-1994. Most of the covariates are measured at the first wave which is now almost 20 years old. Outdated data are particularly a problem in the study of cohabitation because of the rapid, wide-spread growth of cohabitation and its changing meaning (Brown, 2005; Bumpass & Lu, 1999; Casper & Sayer, 2000; Smock, 2000). For example, cohabitors are less likely to marry today than they were in the 1980s (Bumpass & Lu, 2000) and cohabiting unions are more complex with the increasing presence of children (e.g., Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Due to the changes that have occurred over the last 20 years, analyses conducted using data from 20 years ago may be slightly less representative of cohabitation today. It would be beneficial to replicate this study with more recent data as it becomes available.

There is a problem of selection effects with left-truncated data such as these (Guo, 1993). Since all couples had to have been cohabiting at NSFH1 to be included in the sample, couples who have already cohabited and exited through marriage or separation (i.e., at the highest risk for

transitioning out of cohabitation) have been left out. However, the coding strategy for duration employed here is the best known method to combat the problem of left-truncation (Guo).

The sample size of Black couples is small. Although it is statistically large enough, we would have liked to have more Black couples in the sample. Even though the sample size is smaller than desired, there are still statistical differences in the odds of marriage between Black and White couples.

Another limitation is that most of the covariates are measured at NSFH1. If the couple did not marry until three years after the NSFH1 interview date, for example, their relationship happiness may have changed considerably over this time period. There is no way of more accurately measuring covariates such as these given the data at hand. In addition, the covariates are being measured at different time points in a relationship between couples. For instance, some couples are being asked about their relationship quality at two months whereas other couples are being asked at two years. Relationship quality varies by duration (Brown, 2003). It would be informative if all couples were being captured at the same point in their relationship to determine how couples are similar or different and how their outcomes vary.

A final limitation is that although most of the variables are couple-level, there are a few that are only obtained from the main respondent, such as the perceived costs and benefits of marriage and separation. We would have liked to have those measures from both partners, because, as stated earlier, without information from both partners, it is hard to get a clear picture of the relationship dynamics.

This study is not the first to attempt to explain the racial difference in union transitions among cohabitors and will most likely not be the last. The question of why this difference exists remains unanswered. Relationship features are not the missing pieces to the puzzle, at least in

this study. The missing pieces are still out there. Perhaps as Casper and Sayer (2000) posit, there should be a stronger focus on the purposes people have for cohabiting. While Casper and Sayer recognize four different types of cohabitors, they do not focus on racial differences. It may be worthwhile to extend Casper and Sayer's model to determine a whether a race specific typology of the purposes of cohabitation is necessary, and if so, what it would be, which could then help us better understand how relationship quality might predict union transitions.

While a wide range of relationship quality measures were used here, there are other dimensions that were not tapped in the current study. Trust, infidelity, fear of divorce, multiple partner fertility, and lack of faith in the institution of marriage could better inform our predictions about cohabitors' union transitions than the measures that were utilized here or could work well in conjunction with the current measures (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004; Edin, Kefalas, & Reed, 2004; England, Edin, & Linnenburg (2003); Manning & Smock, 1995). Those concepts were not available in these data.

Conceivably qualitative data from Manning & Smock's (2005) interviews or the Time, Love, Cash, Caring and Children Study (TLC3), the qualitative component of the Fragile Families Study, could both help to explain the racial difference in the likelihood of marriage and inform subsequent questionnaire development. Future research needs to try to tease out other possible explanations as to why White cohabitors are much more likely to marry than Black cohabitors.

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Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Independent Variables for the Combined Sample and By Race						
	Total (n = 333)		**Whites** (n = 294)		**Blacks** (n = 39)	
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev
Dependent Variable						
Separate	0.342	0.475	0.330	0.471	0.436	0.502
Marry	0.465	0.500	**0.503**	0.501	**0.179**	0.389
Remain Cohabiting	0.192	0.395	**0.167**	0.373	**0.385**	0.493
Independent Variables						
Black Couples (1=Black 0=White)	0.117	0.322	-	-	-	-
Controls						
Male's Age at Beginning of Union*	29.707	8.741	29.710	8.785	28.513	8.505
Female's Age at Beginning of Union*	26.891	8.184	26.968	8.263	26.314	7.637
Months 0 - 12^	0.069	0.253	**0.077**	0.267	**0.029**	0.168
Months 13 - 24^	0.120	0.325	**0.127**	0.333	**0.083**	0.276
Months 25 - 36^	0.132	0.339	**0.137**	0.344	**0.108**	0.310
Months 37 - 48^	0.132	0.339	0.135	0.341	0.120	0.325
Months 49 - 60^	0.111	0.314	0.108	0.310	0.124	0.330
Months 61+^	0.333	0.471	**0.321**	0.467	**0.393**	0.488
SES and Fertility Measures						
Male's Education*	12.793	2.467	**12.956**	2.324	**11.564**	3.127
Female's Education*	12.751	2.242	**12.929**	2.112	**11.410**	2.721
Couple's income*	36658.15	42719.12	**38040.40**	4461.17	**26238.19**	21741.62
Either Partner on Welfare* (1=yes 0=no)	0.120	0.326	**0.092**	0.289	**0.333**	0.478
School Enrollment History^	0.074	0.262	**0.081**	0.272	**0.044**	0.204
Higher Degree Obtained[a]	0.048	0.214	0.044	0.206	0.077	0.270
Employment History^	0.458	0.498	0.457	0.498	0.464	0.499
R's Biological Children in Household*	0.213	0.410	**0.187**	0.391	**0.410**	0.498
R's Stepchildren in Household*	0.144	0.352	0.136	0.343	0.205	0.409
No Children in Household*	0.643	0.480	**0.677**	0.468	**0.385**	0.493
Pregnancy^	0.022	0.148	**0.020**	0.141	**0.032**	0.177
New Child Present[a]	0.078	0.267	**0.059**	0.234	**0.231**	0.427
Relationship Quality Measures						
Either Partner had Previous Relationship*	0.763	0.426	0.769	0.422	0.718	0.456
Have Plans to Marry*	0.583	0.494	0.582	0.494	0.590	0.498
Couple Happiness*	6.024	0.997	6.039	1.003	5.910	0.952
Couple Quality Time*	4.175	0.975	**4.230**	0.938	**3.760**	1.147
Couple Sexual Frequency*	11.784	7.491	11.993	7.557	10.205	6.858
Male's Perceived Underbenefit*	11.756	1.590	11.706	1.554	12.138	1.815
Female's Perceived Underbenefit*	12.480	1.688	12.419	1.676	12.936	1.729
Couple Verbal Disagreement*	6.119	4.280	**5.869**	3.909	**8.002**	6.177
Presence of Physical Violence*	0.132	0.339	0.122	0.328	0.205	0.409
Relationship Instability (1=unstable 0=stable)*	0.748	0.435	0.755	0.431	0.692	0.468
Cost/Benefit Measures						
R's Perceived Costs of Marriage*	0.799	1.573	0.738	1.427	1.256	2.381
R's Perceived Benefits of Marriage*	1.505	1.971	1.469	1.953	1.769	2.108
R's Perceived Costs of Separation*	1.979	1.432	**2.061**	1.381	**1.359**	1.662
R's Perceived Benefits of Separation*	0.742	1.232	0.680	1.121	1.205	1.824

Bolded means are statistically different between Blacks and Whites (p<.05)

* Variable measured at NSFH1

^ Time-Varying Variable between NSFH1 & date censored; proportion of person-months

[a] Time-Varying Variable between NSFH1 & date censored; recoded to get mean, proportion of sample who experienced that event

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Duration (in years) by Race and Outcome

	White Couples (n = 294)		Black Couples (n = 39)	
Outcome	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Separate	2.283	2.679	3.333	3.847
Marry	1.781	1.794	3.500	1.731
Remain Cohabiting	3.962	3.381	2.688	2.884

Table 3: Event History Analysis Estimates of the Relative Risk of Transitioning VS. Remaining Cohabiting (N=333)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Separate v. Remain Cohabiting	Marry v. Remain Cohabiting	Separate v. Remain Cohabiting	Marry v. Remain Cohabiting
Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio
Black Couple (1=Black 0=White)	0.878	0.256 ***	0.803	0.283 ***
Controls				
Male's Age at Beginning of Union	0.981	1.023 †	0.980	1.026
Female's Age at Beginning of Union	0.983	0.974 †	0.987	0.985
Months 0 - 12	2.751 ***	3.888 ***	2.950 ***	2.885 ***
Months 13 - 24	1.748 †	2.573 ***	1.891 *	1.933 *
Months 25 - 36	1.218	1.227	1.272	0.923
Months 37 - 48	1.266	2.662 ***	1.259	2.247 **
Months 49 - 60	1.323	1.297	1.306	1.166
Months 61+	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
SES and Fertility Measures				
Male's Education			1.077	1.092 †
Female's Education			0.947	0.952
Couple's income (Logged)			1.015	1.335 *
Either Partner on Welfare (1=yes 0=no)			1.071	0.947
School Enrollment History			0.789	0.941
Higher Degree Obtained			2.506 *	1.929
Employment History			0.772	0.861
R's Biological Children in Household			1.038	1.377 †
R's Stepchildren in Household			1.635	1.295
No Children in Household			1.000	1.000
Pregnancy			0.687	2.506 **
New Child Present			1.081	0.402 ***
Relationship Quality Measures				
Either Partner had Previous Relationship				
Have Plans to Marry				
Couple Happiness				
Couple Quality Time				
Couple Sexual Frequency				
Male's Perceived Underbenefit				
Female's Perceived Underbenefit				
Couple Verbal Disagreement				
Presence of Physical Violence				
Relationship Instability (1=unstable 0=stable)				
Cost/Benefit Measures				
R's Perceived Costs of Marriage				
R's Perceived Benefits of Marriage				
R's Perceived Costs of Separation				
R's Perceived Benefits of Separation				
-2lnL	2698.1841		2631.7086	
D. F.	16		38	
Model χ^2	***		***	

† p<.10 * p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 for two-tailed test

$-2\ln L_0$ = 2783.0883

Table 3 cont'd: Event History Analysis Estimates of the Relative Risk of Transitioning VS. Remaining Cohabiting (N=333)

	Model 3		Model 4	
	Separate v. Remain Cohabiting	Marry v. Remain Cohabiting	Separate v. Remain Cohabiting	Marry v. Remain Cohabiting
Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio
Black Couple (1=Black 0=White)	0.991	0.182 ***	0.775	0.244 ***
Controls				
Male's Age at Beginning of Union	0.973	1.025 †	0.984	1.021 †
Female's Age at Beginning of Union	0.976	0.980	0.979	0.976 †
Months 0 - 12	3.943 ***	3.215 ***	2.870 ***	2.372 ***
Months 13 - 24	2.197 *	2.480 **	1.747 †	2.377 ***
Months 25 - 36	1.458	1.179	1.195	1.136
Months 37 - 48	1.444	2.574 ***	1.226	2.449 ***
Months 49 - 60	1.508	1.284	1.275	1.220
Months 61+	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
SES and Fertility Measures				
Male's Education				
Female's Education				
Couple's income (Logged)				
Either Partner on Welfare (1=yes 0=no)				
School Enrollment History				
Higher Degree Obtained				
Employment History				
R's Biological Children in Household				
R's Stepchildren in Household				
No Children in Household				
Pregnancy				
New Child Present				
Relationship Quality Measures				
Either Partner had Previous Relationship	1.198	1.178		
Have Plans to Marry	0.681 †	1.962 **		
Couple Happiness	0.810 †	1.356 **		
Couple Quality Time	1.092	0.875		
Couple Sexual Frequency	0.957 **	1.000		
Male's Perceived Underbenefit	0.956	1.021		
Female's Perceived Underbenefit	0.966	1.001		
Couple Verbal Disagreement	1.007	1.033		
Presence of Physical Violence	1.526 †	0.985		
Relationship Instability (1=unstable 0=stable)	1.457	0.649 *		
Cost/Benefit Measures				
R's Perceived Costs of Marriage			0.946	0.771 **
R's Perceived Benefits of Marriage			0.994	1.019
R's Perceived Costs of Separation			0.881 †	1.046
R's Perceived Benefits of Separation			1.092	1.119
-2lnL	2637.6582		2676.9064	
D. F.	36		24	
Model χ^2	***		***	

† p<.10 * p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 for two-tailed test

$-2\ln L_0$ = 2783.0883

Table 3 cont'd: Event History Analysis Estimates of the Relative Risk of Transitioning VS. Remaining Cohabiting (N=333)

	Model 5	
	Separate v. Remain Cohabiting	Marry v. Remain Cohabiting
Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio
Black Couple (1=Black 0=White)	0.895	0.204 ***
Controls		
Male's Age at Beginning of Union	0.976	1.027 †
Female's Age at Beginning of Union	0.978	0.988
Months 0 - 12	3.976 ***	2.093 *
Months 13 - 24	2.237 *	1.769 *
Months 25 - 36	1.442	0.802
Months 37 - 48	1.383	1.972 **
Months 49 - 60	1.407	1.076
Months 61+	1.000	1.000
SES and Fertility Measures		
Male's Education	1.031	1.133 *
Female's Education	0.977	0.928
Couple's income (Logged)	1.010	1.260
Either Partner on Welfare (1=yes 0=no)	1.018	0.937
School Enrollment History	0.898	0.922
Higher Degree Obtained	2.299 †	2.204 †
Employment History	0.819	0.849
R's Biological Children in Household	0.950	1.566 †
R's Stepchildren in Household	1.456	1.224
No Children in Household	1.000	1.000
Pregnancy	0.750	2.146 *
New Child Present	1.028	0.465 **
Relationship Quality Measures		
Either Partner had Previous Relationship	1.161	1.041
Have Plans to Marry	0.711	1.620 *
Couple Happiness	0.790 †	1.364 *
Couple Quality Time	1.084	0.871
Couple Sexual Frequency	0.962 *	1.009
Male's Perceived Underbenefit	0.953	1.043
Female's Perceived Underbenefit	0.992	0.986
Couple Verbal Disagreement	1.011	1.009
Presence of Physical Violence	1.380	0.939
Relationship Instability (1=unstable 0=stable)	1.450	0.661 †
Cost/Benefit Measures		
R's Perceived Costs of Marriage	0.949	0.818 *
R's Perceived Benefits of Marriage	1.010	1.017
R's Perceived Costs of Separation	0.967	0.970
R's Perceived Benefits of Separation	0.962	1.159
-2lnL	2570.8924	
D. F.	66	
Model χ^2	***	

† p<.10 * p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 for two-tailed test

$-2\ln L_0$ = 2783.0883