EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Racial, Ethnic, and Nativity Differences in Cohabitation in the United States

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Cohabitation has become a feature of family life in the United States (Bumpass, 1990; Smock, 2000; Seltzer, 2003). Indications that cohabitation is normatively accepted come from attitude data from a wide array of studies (Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001) as well as behavioral indicators. Over 60% of first marriages since 1995 were preceded by cohabitation (Manning and Jones, 2006). Cohabitation has also become a setting for childbearing and childrearing. About 40% of cohabiting couples live with children (Casper and Bianchi, 2002), and roughly 12% of all births in the early 1990s were to cohabiting couples (Raley, 2001). These patterns suggest that cohabitation may be both a stage in courtship leading to formal marriage and an alternative to marriage.

The meaning of cohabitation may vary by racial, ethnic, and nativity statuses because of group differences in economic resources and beliefs about the importance of marriage. Casper and Sayer (2002), for example, examined cohabiting couples' attitudes about their relationship and found that African Americans were more likely to consider their relationship to be a substitute for marriage, whereas whites were more likely to think they were in a trial marriage. These racial differences are generally consistent with demographic data on union formation. About half of white women born during the 1970s had married by age 25, but only about a quarter of African American women had married by this age (Raley and Sweeney, 2006). Because African Americans are more likely to cohabit than to marry as their first union (Raley, 2000), race differences in the percentage in unions of any type (either a marriage or cohabiting relationship) are smaller. African Americans, however, are less likely than white women to marry their cohabiting partner (Bramlett and Mosher, 2002).

Hispanics are often treated as a broad group instead of distinguishing among specific groups, such as Mexican Americans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans. The specific groups differ in their experience of cohabitation and marriage. Mexican Americans are the most populous of the groups labeled "Hispanic" by the U.S. Census (Tienda and Mitchell, 2006), and for this reason they are better represented in large survey samples than other Hispanic ethnicities. Mexican Americans marry at about the same age as white women do and, for recent cohorts, have similar rates of cohabitation (Raley and Sweeney, 2006). Mexican American women are more likely to bear a child in a cohabiting relationship compared to Whites (Wildsmith and Raley, 2006), perhaps because of the broad social acceptance of consensual unions in Mexico (Castro Martin, 2002). Foreign born Mexicans are much less likely to divorce than white women, but among Mexican Americans who were born in the United States divorce rates are higher than whites' but lower than African American's. This nativity difference is consistent with Oropesa's (1996) finding that Mexican immigrants have more favorable attitudes toward marriage than U.S-born Mexican Americans.

This paper builds on past research by describing differences in cohabitation among African Americans, Whites, U.S.-born Mexican Americans, and Mexican immigrants to the United States. We investigate the process of forming a cohabiting union, the stability of the union and whether the couple eventually marries or breaks up, and the extent to which women bear children in cohabiting relationships. We treat union duration and outcome and childbearing within cohabitation as evidence of the meaning of cohabitation for the different groups. We expect Mexican immigrants to differ from U.S.-born Mexican Americans because of the selectivity of immigration policy, which favors married women (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Raley, Durden, Wildsmith, 2004) and cultural differences in the value of formal marriage. To the extent our data allow, we ask if immigrant women who have lived in the United States longer adopt cohabiting practices similar to those of U.S.-born Mexican Americans through assimilation processes. The analysis takes account of socio-economic differences among the groups, in light of the importance of economic resources for decisions about marriage and union stability (Smock, 2000; Sweeney and Phillips, 2004).

Data and Method

Our analysis uses information from two national probability samples of women, the 1995 and 2002 National Surveys of Family Growth (Bramlett and Mosher, 2002; U.S. DHHS, 2006). Both surveys are cross-sectional. Each was designed specifically to collect detailed retrospective information about the timing of cohabiting unions, marriage, union disruption, and fertility. We restrict our attention to women because only the 2002 NSFG included interviews with men and that survey alone has too few cases to enable a consideration of nativity differences in cohabitation among Mexican Americans. We compare self-identified native-born Whites, native-born African Americans, native-born Mexican Americans, and foreign born Mexicans ages 19-44. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample in 1995 (n = 8,408) and 2002 (n = 5,480). The distribution shows that even when we pool these large datasets, our analytical sample only includes a small number of foreign born Mexicans.

Table 1 here.

We conduct the analysis in two parts. First we provide descriptive statistics to give a broad overview of racial, ethnic, and nativity differences in cohabitation over the past decade. Second, we conduct multivariate analyses to examine the extent to which compositional differences explain racial, ethnic, and nativity differences in cohabitation patterns. The multivariate analysis has four dependent variables: (a) single women's entry into a first cohabitation or marriage; (b) single pregnant women's entry into cohabitation or marriage before the birth of their child; (c) whether a pregnancy occurs in a first cohabitation or first marriage; and (d) whether a cohabiting union transitions into marriage or ends with the partners breaking up.

The primary independent variable is race-ethnicity-nativity status. Our preliminary analyses also distinguish Mexican-born women who had been in the United States for 10 or fewer years from those who had been here longer.[1] As Table 1 shows, these are small percentages of the sample, but we consider time in the United States to be an important variable.

[1] Duration in the United States is at the time of the survey. We will make this a time varying characteristic in the next version of the analysis.

Control variables include the completed schooling of the women's mother, with whom the woman was living at age 14 (both biological or adoptive parents, biological mother and stepfather, single biological parent, or other)[2], whether the woman is enrolled in school, and her completed schooling. We control for survey year to take account of period differences in the acceptability of cohabitation and other unobserved temporal change. Specific analyses consider age or age at union formation as appropriate. Characteristics of the pooled sample from 1995 and 2002 are described in the Appendix Table.

Our descriptive analysis documents change and group variation in the percentages of women who are currently cohabiting and the percentages who have ever cohabited. We then estimate discrete time event history multinomial logistic models and examine the degree to which socioeconomic characteristics of women and their families contribute to racial, ethnic, and nativity differences in cohabitation. Event history methods are used because cohabitation, marriage, and fertility are time-dependent processes and this method allows us to observe the timing of entry into cohabitation, marriage, and pregnancies. We organize our data in person month files to take account of the short duration of cohabitations and include time varying variables such as women's enrollment in school in our analyses.

Preliminary Results

This extended abstract includes our initial descriptive tables and preliminary results from our analysis of single women's entry into a first cohabiting union or marriage. We do not report here results from our analyses of whether single women who become pregnant enter cohabiting unions or marry before their child is born and of fertility in cohabiting unions. We also do not report here results from our multivariate analyses of whether cohabiting unions dissolve or transition into marriage although these analyses are underway.

Between 1995 and 2002 the percentage of women who have ever cohabited increased from 47% to 56%. (See Table 2). The same period saw a small increase in the percentage of women who are currently cohabiting. This continues the trends documented by Bumpass and Lu (2000) for the period 1987-88 to 1995 and, as in the earlier period, the increases occurred for all three race-ethnic groups – Whites, African Americans, and Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans born outside the United States are somewhat less likely to have been in a cohabiting union. Those who came to the States more recently look more like U.S.-born Mexican Americans born. However, Mexican-born Mexican Americans who have been in the states for over 10 years are more likely than any other group to be cohabiting at the time of the 2002 survey. These may be unions of particularly long duration, as would be consistent with a greater acceptance of consensual unions as equivalent to marriage in Mexico.

Table 2 here.

The next two tables show trends in the percentage of women who have ever cohabited for the race-ethnic-nativity groups by age and education. Table 3 shows that with few exceptions,

[2] Categories of the family structure variable are limited by survey differences in how the variable is coded on the public-use files. The 1995 and 2002 files suppress different aspects of uncommon family configurations. We are investigating this issue.

the percentage of women who have ever cohabited has increased across all age groups. This likely reflects some cohort replacement and some increase in age-specific rates of cohabitation. Exceptions occur among both U.S.-born Mexican Americans and Mexican-born Mexican women 35 and older. In ongoing work we are exploring compositional explanations for lower percentages in 2002.

Table 3 here.

Cohabitation remains more common among women with less schooling than among more highly educated women. Nevertheless, just under half of white and African American women with at least college educations (16+ years) have ever cohabited. The percentage of U.S.-born Mexican Americans with a college education who have ever cohabited is somewhat less, and does not appear to have changed since 1995.

Table 4 here.

Whether a cohabiting couple eventually marries and, if they do marry, how quickly this happens is an important indicator of whether the cohabitation is similar to an engagement or a period of gathering information about compatibility. Table 5 shows that white women are most likely to eventually marry their first cohabiting partner; whereas, African American women are least likely to eventually marry their first cohabiting partner. Interestingly, foreign born Mexican women are almost as likely as white women to marry their first cohabiting partner during the first year of cohabitation. However, contrary to white women, the percentage of women who marry their partners declines rapidly after the first year of co-residence. The results for whites is consistent with past studies that indicate that cohabitation is similar to an engagement or a period of gathering information about compatibility for White women (Casper & Sayer, 2002). Furthermore, these results hint the possibility that some foreign born Mexican women perceive cohabitation to be an engagement or a period of gathering information while others perceive cohabitation to be a substitute to marriage.

The duration of the union may also serve as an indicator of whether cohabitation is an alternative to marriage. Table 5 shows that white cohabitations are least likely and foreign born Mexican cohabitors are most likely to remain in their union. These results indicate that cohabitation may be a more stable and permanent form of union for foreign born Mexicans.

Table 5 here.

Our findings thus far provide a broad overview of change and variation in cohabiting unions. The multivariate analysis speaks more directly to questions racial, ethnic, and nativity differences in how cohabitation fits into women's family lives. Table 6 summarizes the results of a multinomial discrete logistic regression of single women's transitions into a first cohabitation or marriage. Compared to whites, all of the other groups are less likely to cohabit, although the contrasts are only statistically significant for African Americans and Mexican-born Mexican Americans who have been in the United States a long time. These differences remain and become even more pronounced once differences in family background and educational are taken into account. This is consistent with evidence from other recent work showing that educational differences between Mexican American women born in the United States and white women suppress differences in the timing of marriage (Raley, Durden, and Wildsmith, 2005).

Table 6 here.

Summary

This paper links two important demographic phenomena in the United States – the increase in nonmarital cohabitation and Mexican American and Mexican immigrant families in the United States. We provide preliminary evidence on race-ethnic and nativity differences in cohabitation. Our analyses are still incomplete as are our interpretations of the results in light of debates about the meaning of cohabitation and Mexican American immigrant assimilation or incorporation. We are making rapid progress, however, and anticipate finishing a full draft of the paper within the next few months. We would then be able to revise it in time for the early spring deadline for presentation at the 2007 PAA meetings.

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Table 1. Percentage distribution of race, ethnicity, and nativity status: 1995 and 2002 NSFG

	1995	2002
Non-Hispanic Whites	79	74
Non-Hispanic Blacks	14	15
US Born Mexicans	4	5
Foreign Born Mexicans		
10 years or less	2	3
More than 10 years	1	3
Total	100	100
Unweighted N	(8,408)	(5,480)

Notes: Table excludes foreign born non-Hispanic Whites, foreign born non-Hispanic Blacks, Other Hispanics and Other Race. Women aged 19 to 44. Data are weighted.

Table 2. Trends by race, ethnicity, and nativity status in percentage currently cohabiting and ever cohabited: 1995 and 2002 NSFG, women 19-44 years old

	Percent currently cohabiting		Percent ever cohabited	
	1995	2002	1995	2002
Non-Hispanic Whites	8	8	47	56
Non-Hispanic Blacks	8	11	47	61
US Born Mexicans	8	13	48	55
Foreign Born Mexicans				
10 years or less	11	13	32	50
More than 10 years	10	20	32	43
Total	8	10	47	56
Unweighted N	(8,408)		(5,480)	

Notes: Table excludes foreign born non-Hispanic Whites, foreign born non-Hispanic Blacks, Other Hispanics and Other Race. Data are weighted.

Table 3. Trends by race, ethnicity, and nativity status and age in percentage ever cohabited: 1995 and 2002 NSFG, women 19-44 years old

	Non-Hispanic White		Non-Hispanic Black		US Born Mexicans		Foreign Born Mexicans: More than 10 years		Foreign Born Mexicans: 10 years of less	
Age	1995	2002	1995	2002	1995	2002	1995	2002	1995	2002
19-24	38	38	30	44	33	47	30	55	43	49
25-29	53	63	50	62	53	62	18	53	17	48
30-34	52	66	54	68	55	62	36	60	29	39
35-39	50	62	51	69	54	50	31	32	50	35
40-44	41	56	52	63	49	60	42	55	-	-
Total	47	56	47	61	48	55	32	50	32	43
Unweighted N	(5,563)	(3,363)	(2,063)	(1,199)	(431)	(408)	(213)	(203)	(138)	(204)

Notes: Table excludes foreign born non-Hispanic Whites, foreign born non-Hispanic Blacks, Other Hispanics and Other Race. Table also excludes foreign born Mexican women 40-44 years old because of the small number of observations. Data are weighted.

Table 4. Trends by race, ethnicity, and nativity status and years of schooling in percentage ever cohabited: 1995 and 2002 NSFG, women 19-44 years old

	Non-Hispanic White		Non-Hispanic Black		US Born Mexicans		Foreign Born Mexicans: More than 10 years		Foreign Born Mexicans: 10 years of less	
Years of Schooling	1995	2002	1995	2002	1995	2002	1995	2002	1995	2002
LT 12	71	77	59	65	66	69	39	52	36	50
12 HS Grad	50	67	48	70	48	57	20	43	33	43
13-15	43	54	46	60	36	51	22	49	11	18
16+	39	45	31	44	36	36	-	-	-	-
Total	47	56	47	61	48	55	32	50	32	43
Unweighted N	(5,563)	(3,363)	(2,063)	(1,199)	(431)	(408)	(213)	(203)	(138)	(204)

Notes: Table excludes foreign born non-Hispanic Whites, foreign born non-Hispanic Blacks, Other Hispanics and Other Race. Unless women with 12 years of schooling have a high school diploma they are treated as LT 12 years. There are too few Foreign born Mexicans with at least 16 years of schooling to estimate percentages. Data are weighted.

Table 5. Cumulative percentages of women in their first cohabitation exiting their union by marrying or ending their union: 1995 and 2002 NSFG, women 19-44 years old

Duration (years)	White			Black			US Born Mexicans			Foreign Born Mexicans		
	Survive	Marriage	Split	Survive	Marriage	Split	Survive	Marriage	Split	Survive	Marriage	Split
1	57	26	17	70	14	16	68	18	14	70	24	6
2	32	41	27	50	23	27	45	30	25	56	28	16
3	19	48	33	35	28	37	29	38	33	46	33	21
4	13	52	35	27	32	41	19	41	40	40	35	25
5	8	54	38	19	34	47	14	43	43	31	39	30
10	1	57	42	4	40	56	4	48	48	10	45	45

Note: There were too few foreign born Mexican cohabitors to separately estimate the percentages taking account of migration histories. Data are weighted.

Table 6. Odds Ratios for Multinomial Discrete Logistic Regression Analysis of the Transition to First Cohabitation or First Marriage for Non-cohabiting Single Women 19-44 Years Old: 1995 & 2002 NSFG

	Zero Order				Model 1			
	Cohabitation		Marriage		Cohabitation		Marriage	
	exp(B)	B/s.e.	exp(B)	B/s.e.	exp(B)	B/s.e.	exp(B)	B/s.e.
Race (Non-Hispanic White)								
Non-Hispanic Black	0.84	-3.90	0.43	-13.59	0.66	-8.43	0.42	-12.71
US Born Mexicans	0.91	-1.09	0.96	-0.46	0.79	-2.60	0.84	-1.96
Foreign Born Mexicans: More than 10 years	0.70	-2.64	1.38	3.19	0.66	-2.92	1.42	3.13
Foreign Born Mexicans: 10 years or less	0.81	-1.33	1.26	1.95	0.65	-2.70	1.21	1.50
Schooling (12)								
LT 12					0.92	-1.04	0.61	-5.42
13-15					0.97	-0.59	1.04	0.56
16+					0.70	-5.64	1.00	-0.02
Enrolled (Not enrolled)								
Enrolled					0.64	-7.36	0.38	-14.68
Age								
25-29					0.22	-29.24	0.58	-8.89
30-34					0.06	-27.60	0.50	-6.83
35-39					0.01	-17.61	0.61	-2.68
40-44					0.00	-13.52	0.83	-0.46
Mother's Education (12)								
LT 12					0.93	-1.32	0.97	-0.41
13-15					1.04	0.71	0.88	-2.01
16+					1.00	0.07	0.75	-4.25
Family Structure at 14 (two parents)								
Biological mother, step father					1.72	6.95	0.96	-0.35
Single parent					1.33	5.67	0.68	-4.26
Other					1.57	5.39	0.79	-2.41
Survey year (1995)								
2002					1.44	8.93	0.93	-1.38
Intercept								
Intercept	0.02	-41.62	0.01	-37.14	0.00	-41.11	0.02	-18.96

Notes: The analyses excluded foreign born whites, foreign born blacks, other Hispanic, and other race. Coefficients are net of time in person months.

Appendix Table. Descriptive statistics (in percentages) by race, ethnicity, and nativity status: 1995 and 2002 NSFG, women 19-44 years old

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	US Born Mexicans	Foreign Born Mexicans: More than 10 years	Foreign Born Mexicans: Less than 10 years	Total
Age						
19-24	20	23	32	9	29	21
25-29	17	19	19	19	31	18
30-34	20	20	21	21	24	20
35-39	21	20	17	24	9	21
40-44	22	19	12	26	7	21
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Schooling						
LT 12	10	18	25	64	66	14
12	26	33	29	15	17	27
13-15	32	33	34	21	17	32
16+	31	17	13	0	0	27
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Birth Cohort						
1950-1959	25	24	16	25	7	24
1960-1969	41	38	35	46	32	40
1970-1979	27	29	36	28	51	28
1980-1987	7	8	13	2	10	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Family Structure at Age 14						
Two parents: bio/adoptive	73	50	69	77	86	70
Biological mother, step father	7	7	8	4	1	7
Single Parent	16	33	19	11	9	18
Other	4	10	5	9	4	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mother's education						
LT 12	19	34	61	88	87	26
12	45	37	25	6	8	41
13-15	20	18	14	5	5	18
16+	16	11	0	2	0	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Marriage Cohort						
Never Married	49	66	52	46	46	51
1980-1984	14	9	10	13	8	13
1985-1989	15	9	13	15	14	14
1990-1994	15	10	16	18	18	14
1995-2002	8	6	8	8	14	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Unweighted N	(9,029)	(3,262)	(839)	(416)	(342)	(13,888)

Notes: Table excludes foreign born non-Hispanic Whites, foreign born non-Hispanic Blacks, Other Hispanics and Other Race. Data are weighted.