

***The Intendedness of Childbearing:
Taking a closer look at its meaning***

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Overview: Recent studies that have examined the intendedness of births suggest that the meaning of childbearing differs by family structure and race/ethnicity. Compared with Whites and Blacks, Hispanic cohabiting women are more likely to have children, to remain cohabiting after the birth of a child, and to have planned a birth (Musick 2002; Manning 2001). These findings suggest that cohabitation may resemble a marriage-like family status for Hispanics to a larger extent than other racial and ethnic groups.

The current study combines quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine how childbearing intentions differ by race/ethnicity and gender and the implications of these intentions for understanding cohabiting unions among Hispanics. First, we will construct a portrait of recent births among Hispanic, White and Black young adults, examining reports of intendedness from mothers and fathers in marital, cohabiting, and nonmarital, noncohabiting unions using recently released data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort. This nationally representative, in-depth survey of more than 9,000 births in 2001 includes a detailed measure of intendedness reported by mothers and fathers when the baby is nine months old that is very similar to the measure developed by the National Survey of Family Growth. Factors associated with the intendedness of births, including individual, partner, and family characteristics, will be explored through multivariate regression analyses.

Because research to-date suggests that the meaning and implications for childbearing in cohabiting unions differ for Hispanics, a small number of qualitative interviews will be conducted with cohabiting low-income Hispanic parents to further explore whether cohabiting unions are viewed as an appropriate context for childbearing and the degree to which cohabiting unions are seen as marriages without the legal certification, a prelude to marriage, or an alternative to marriage by Hispanics. Lastly, since concerns about the validity of measures on the intendedness and wantedness of births have been voiced for several decades, measures from the ECLS-B will be cognitively tested to assess the extent to which they are interpreted as intended by questionnaire designers and researchers, capture the underlying domain, and are appropriate for use with a low-income Hispanic population.

This study will add to existing research in several important ways. First, while studies of unintended births traditionally concentrate on women's intentions, a focus on men's fertility desires is important given evidence that male fertility intentions have as much weight as female intentions in influencing actual couple childbearing behaviors (Thomson 1997). Second, this study will shed further light on the factors associated with intendedness among males and females and how patterns may differ across union status, race/ethnicity and gender. Third, the study will combine quantitative and qualitative data to provide a fuller

picture of and greater depth to our understanding of both childbearing intentions and the meaning of cohabiting unions among low-income Hispanic parents.

Research Questions:

- 1) Do childbearing intentions differ across racial and ethnic groups within cohabitating, marital, and non-cohabiting, nonmarital, unions?
- 2) Are there gender differences in childbearing intentions across racial and ethnic groups within cohabitating, marital, and non-cohabiting, nonmarital unions?
- 3) Do the factors associated with childbearing intentions differ by race/ethnicity and union/marital status?
- 4) Are cohabiting unions viewed as marriage-like or appropriate for family building among cohabiting Hispanics parents? Is childbearing a prelude to marriage or a reflection of a marriage-like commitment?
- 5) Are available measures of childbearing intentions appropriate for and working as intended among Hispanics?

Data: Recently released data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort offer a unique opportunity to examine the context (i.e., marital, cohabiting or neither) and circumstances (intendedness) of births across racial and ethnic groups. The ECLS-B is designed to follow focal children born in 2001 and their biological parents over time, and provide information on the relationship between biological parents, including interviews of residential fathers and nonresidential fathers, who are in contact with the mother or child. The ECLS-B is nationally representative with a large sample of African American and Hispanics and includes multiple measures of intendedness, including whether the pregnancy was wanted or mistimed. For the purposes of this study a pregnancy will be considered wanted if they respondent reported having stopped taking birth control in order to get pregnant or having wanted the baby when they discovered they were pregnant. A birth will be considered mistimed if the respondent became pregnant (or their partner became pregnant) sooner or later than they wanted. In addition to self-reports of intendedness, respondents are asked to report about their perceptions of their partner's intentions (both wanted and mistimed). Accordingly, we have mother and father reports of intendedness and partners' perceptions of the other partners' intentions.

We will explore several potential outcome measures, including intendedness and its component parts (wantedness and whether the pregnancy was mistimed) for both mothers and fathers (using both respondent and partner reports), and mother-partner mismatch/match on intendedness. Critical independent variables of interest will include: age at birth; race/ethnicity; family composition growing up; education and work status; country of origin and dominant language; and marital/cohabitation status. We will analyze factors associated with intendedness separately for whites, blacks and Hispanics.

The sample for this study is drawn from 10,105 children who resided with their biological or adoptive mother, whose biological or adoptive mother responded to the parent questionnaire, and who had valid sample weights. There were 65 cases for whom we were unable to establish the status of the relationship between their biological mother and biological father at the time of birth and 1,985 cases whose mother was of "other"

race/ethnicity were excluded. Our final analytic sample consisted of 8,055 children. Of these 8,055 children, 6.5% were missing on mother's report of her intendedness and 7.2% were missing on mother's report of father's intendedness. (Note: Father's reports of intendedness have not been analyzed to-date but will be included for the conference.) For the full paper we will explore the possibility of further limiting the sample to parents aged 18-29 and those with a first birth. (Women between the ages of 18-29 have the highest rates of nonmarital childbearing and thus are an important group to study (Martin et al., 2002).)

As noted above, to explore in greater depth the meaning of intendedness for subsequent union formation among Hispanics and to assess the adequacy of current measures, semi-structured cognitive interviews will be conducted with cohabiting Latinos who had a nonmarital birth in their current union and are living in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Participants will be recruited through flyers posted in the community, local weekly papers and advertisements on Craigslist.com—a local community based website. To facilitate recruitment, prospective respondents will receive \$25 dollars at the end of a 60- to 90-minute interview. Prospective respondents will be screened to ensure that they met the study requirements. Though couples will be encouraged to participate, individual partners will be eligible to be interviewed.

Preliminary Findings From ECLS-B: Below we summarize preliminary bivariate analyses of mother reports of their and their partner's intendedness from the ECLS-B. (Note: Father's reports and couple mismatch/match will be included in the full paper.)

- 1) In general, black mothers are less likely to report that their pregnancy was intended than white and Hispanic mothers. Just under a third of black mothers report that their pregnancy was unwanted compared with 12% of Hispanic and 9% of white mothers. Whites are less likely to report that their pregnancy was mistimed than blacks and Hispanics. Some of these racial/ethnic differences are due to differences in marital and union status among black and Hispanic mothers (see below).
- 2) Among married mothers, whites are more likely to report that the pregnancy was wanted than blacks and Hispanics, and Hispanics are more likely to have a wanted pregnancy than blacks. Similar patterns in reports of mistimed pregnancies across racial/ethnic groups are observed among married women as in the general population. Close to one in five blacks married mothers report that their pregnancy was unwanted compared with 6% of white and 7% of Hispanic mothers.
- 3) Consistent with previous research, we find that over half (56%) of Hispanic cohabiting mothers report that their pregnancy was wanted compared with approximately 40% of white and black mothers. Likewise, Hispanics cohabiting mothers are less likely to report an unwanted pregnancy than whites or blacks. In contrast, white cohabiting mothers (45%) are more likely than black (33%) and Hispanic (33%) to report a mistimed pregnancy.

- 4) Although racial/ethnic differences are less pronounced, similar patterns are observed among the non-marital, non-cohabiting group as among those who are married, with one exception. Hispanic mothers in this group are more likely than white and black mothers to report that their pregnancy was wanted.
- 5) Similar gender patterns are found across racial and ethnic groups within marital and cohabitation groups when mother's reports of partner's intentions are considered.

References

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