# Race differences in Men's Nonmarital First Births in Early Adulthood

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## Introduction

This paper examines race differences in men's nonmarital first births in early adulthood. First, I provide new estimates of nonmarital fertility among young black and white men age 18 to 25. Second, I show how nonmarital fertility varies by men's socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Third, I decompose black-white differences into parts due to demographic composition and "returns" to demographic characteristics. My results show that black men between age 18 and 25 have rates of nonmarital fertility that are more than twice that of their white counterparts and that nearly a quarter off the difference is due to black-white differences in socioeconomic and demographic composition.

## Background

Early adulthood is a unique period that is characterized by key life transitions. For men without a college degree, the completion of education, labor force entry and becoming a father often occur non-sequentially with marriage serving a capstone event (Shanahan 2000; Furstenberg, Rumbaut & Settersten 2005). Fatherhood as a *package deal* remains the primary path to parenthood for college educated men: they enter the labor market at later ages with career-oriented positions that offer opportunities for advancement and then marry and later father children (Furstenberg 2010; Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Townsend 2002). As black and white men are not equally represented in these pathways to adulthood, it is important to understand the interrelatedness of these transitions and resultant inequalities. Early adulthood represents the journey towards independence and advantage/disadvantage will cumulate and magnify across the life course).

Black-white disparities in family formation behaviors and decisions are mostly attributed to economic selection and perceived race differences in norms, beliefs, and attitudes that influence behaviors. It is well documented that young black men have lower levels of educational engagement (less enrollment, lower educational attainment) and weaker labor force attachments (lower earnings, fewer hours worked, higher job turnover) relative to their white counterparts and the heightened disconnect between young men and the formal economy in the 2000s further exacerbated racial inequalities (U.S Census Bureau 2010, 2011; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010; Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin & Palma 2011). Black-white differentials in socioeconomic status suggest that the opportunity cost associated with early, nonmarital first births are comparatively less for black men than their white counterparts. Culture-based explanations contend that the transition to fatherhood becomes an expression of sexual conquest, masculinity, and the transition to adulthood rather than a commitment to care and provide for a child (Anderson 1990; Anderson 1999). Today the vast majority of black births currently occur outside of marriage, yielding a sense of normalcy that further facilitates the transition to parenthood outside of marriage among African-Americans. Black attitudes towards out-of-wedlock births are more permissive than that their white peers, and nonmarital childbearing is less stigmatized in black communities (Cherlin, Cross-Barnet, Burton, and Garrett-Peters 2008; Edin and Kefalas 2005; Pagnini and Rindfuss 1993).

Although racial group membership is a key predictor of men's nonmarital fertility, the limited prior empirical work that directly considers the relationship between men's employment conditions and fertility experiences use race as a control variable. These findings indicate that black men are twice as likely to have a teen birth, 20% more likely to have an early birth by age 24, and three to four times more likely to have a nonmarital birth (Ku, Sonenstein, and Pleck 1993; Hofferth and Goldscheider 2010; Carlson, VanOrman, and Pilkauskas 2010). These estimates represent the difference in the conditional probability of transitioning to fatherhood in the specified-context between white and black men; however, there is little evidence that selection factors are consistent across race groups. Additionally, narrow considerations of men's economic circumstances that focused on work effort proxies of the relative time spent engaged in employment-related activities were utilized in prior research. A broader conception of men's economic capacities that account for their educational experiences, labor market connectedness, and job stability as it relates to young men's risk on a nonmarital first birth would give a nuanced perspective on men's selection into fatherhood.

As nonmarital childbearing is characterized by disadvantage and less ordered path to adulthood, young men with more favorable economic and employment-related characteristics should be less likely to have a first birth that precedes marriage during the period of observation. Since race differences in men's early labor market and fertility experiences are both well-documented, racial group membership should influence the link between young men's economic capacities and their fertility behaviors; however, this relationship will be notably weaker for black men for whom nonmarital childbearing is more of a normative experience making the selection conditions less impactful.

**Data and Methods**

Designed to follow the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 cohort (NLSY97) contains rich information on the educational, employment, fertility, and relationship histories of a 1980 to 1984 birth cohort. The full analytic sample is comprised of 2,649 unmarried men ages18 to 25 – 1,798 white and 851 black – who contributed 14,537 person-year observations (10,289 and 4,248 white and black, respectively). Multiple imputation techniques are used to impute missing covariates (not the independent and dependent variables of interest) with variables related to the independent and dependent variables and the likelihood of these variables being missing to maximize the number of observations.

I employ discrete-time event history techniques to model the risk of a nonmarital first birth for white and black men ages 18 to 25 with logistic regression. I examine young men's economic and employment circumstances as antecedents of nonmarital first births relative to those who did not transition to fatherhood during the period of observation. Specifically, in this case, the discrete-hazard framework uses the conditional probability that a nonmarital birth will occur during a year (noted by age) among those who have yet to transition to fatherhood to estimate the likelihood of experiencing a nonmarital first birth during the period of observation (Allison 1984; Singer and Willet 2003). Those who do not have a first birth during the period of observation are included in the risk set. First, I jointly model the risk of a nonmarital birth for black and white men treating racial group membership as an explanatory variable. In order to

determine whether economic capacities similarly influence black and white men's transition to fatherhood, I run a fully interactive model by racial group membership and then model white and black men's first birth risks separately for easier interpretation of race group-specific coefficients. Using decomposition methods, I then estimate the proportion of the black-white disparity in nonmarital childbearing due to race differences in observed characteristics and associated returns to endowments.

**Preliminary Results**

Key findings indicate that black-white differences in the risk of nonmarital first births in early adulthood are explained by race differences in observed socioeconomic characteristics. Black men are more than twice as likely to experience nonmarital childbearing as their white counterparts in early adulthood. The risk of unmarried men having a first birth between the ages of 18 and 25 is illustrated in Figure 1. For white men, the risk of nonmarital birth is relatively constant across the period of observation; however African-American men have a greater incidence of nonmarital fertility between the ages of 18 and 25 and a distinctive peak in the hazard function at age 21.

Table 1 presents the results of young, unmarried men's economic circumstances on the risk of a nonmarital birth jointly modeled for white and black men. African-American men age 18 to 25 are more than twice as likely to transition to fatherhood outside of the context of marriage as their white American peers. Unmarried men with a college degree are 85% less likely to become a father during the period of observation when compared to men who did not finish high school. Those who are enrolled in an educational institution are also less likely to experience a birth in early adulthood. School enrollment reduces the likelihood of a nonmarital birth by 50%. Formal attachment to the labor market and the number of hours engaged in employment activities are not significantly related to the transition to fatherhood. Men with earnings in the top non-zero quartile of their respective race-groups are 39% more likely to have a birth than their same-race peers with zero earnings. Each additional job worked is associated with a 12% increase in the risk of having a nonmarital birth in early adulthood.

In the full interactive model, the likelihood of transitioning to fatherhood during the period of observation is comparable across race groups[1]. Of all the antecedents considered, racial group membership moderates only the association between school enrollment and the risk of a nonmarital birth[2]. Although enrollment is linked with a reduction in the likelihood of transitioning to fatherhood during the period of observation for both race groups, African-American men who are enrolled in an educational institution are more than twice as likely as white men enrolled to have a nonmarital birth in early adulthood. This finding likely stems from racial disparities in the type of institutions that young men are enrolled (2-year vs. 4-year institutions). Table 2 shows the results for the race group-specific models. The estimated coefficients for white men are the same as the main effects of each covariate in the fully interactive model. The black estimated coefficients are the product of the main effect of each

[1] Results not shown due to limited space.
[2] F-tests were performed on all the interaction terms. Individual tests were used for dichotomous and continuous variables. Joint tests were used for categorical variables, such as education and relative earnings. With the exceptions of the black-by-enrollment coefficient, all of the other race interaction terms were not significantly different from zero.

respective covariate and the corresponding interactions term in the fully interactive model. Additionally, the preliminary findings from the decomposition suggest that nearly a quarter of the black-white disparity in nonmarital childbearing in early adulthood can be attributed to race differences in socioeconomic and demographic composition.

**Conclusion**

This paper considers race differences in men's nonmarital childbearing in early adulthood and finds that young men's economic circumstances are associated with the risk of out of wedlock birth and that race differences in labor market connectedness account for the high prevalence of black nonmarital births. This project sheds additional light on the growing stratification in the timing and marital context of childbearing. In focusing on early adulthood, it highlights a period characterized by many major life transitions that may have bearing on inequalities across the life course.

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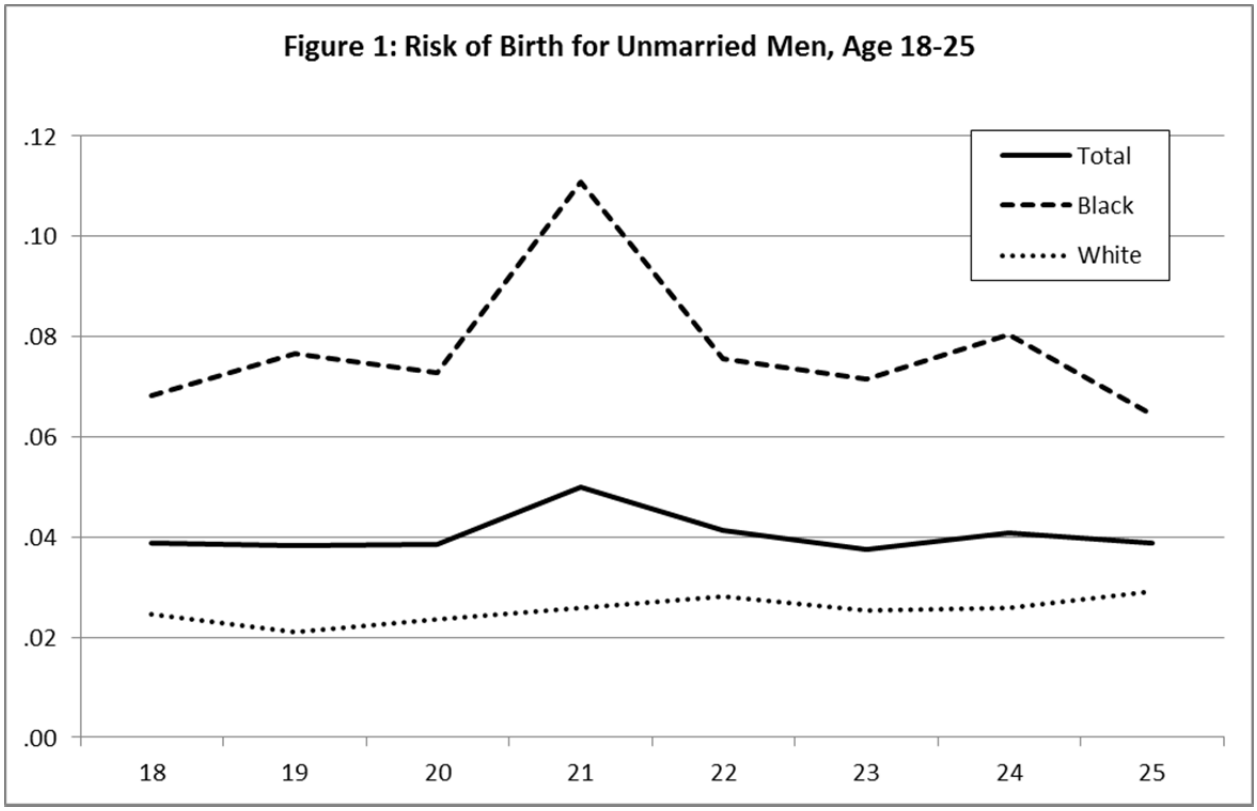
Figure 1: Risk of Birth for Unmarried Men, Age 18-25
.12
.10
.08
.06
.04
.02
.00
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
Total
Black
White

Table 1. Odd ratios from logistic regression of economic capacites on unmarried men's transition to fatherhood

| | Odds Ratio | |
|---|---|---|
| Black | 2.23 | *** |
| Educational attainment (ref = less than high school) | | |
| High school degree | .63 | *** |
| Some college | .26 | ** |
| Bachelor's degree of higher | .16 | *** |
| Enrolled | .49 | *** |
| Employed at interview | .91 | |
| Annual earnings (ref = zero earnings) | | |
| Bottom quartile | 1.04 | |
| Lower middle quartile | 1.08 | |
| Upper middle quartile | 1.18 | |
| Top quartile | 1.39 | * |
| Annual hours worked | 1.01 | |
| Number of jobs | 1.12 | * |
| Father's educational attainment (ref = less than high school) | | |
| High school degree | .83 | |
| Some college | .67 | * |
| Bachelor's degree of higher | .42 | *** |
| Mother's educational attainment greater than father's | .77 | * |
| Mother's age at first birth | .99 | |
| Intact family at age 12 | .87 | |
| Religious Service Attendance (ref= never attend) | | |
| Less than once a month | 1.22 | * |
| Once or twice a month | .91 | |
| Weekly | .94 | |
| Age at sexual debut | .93 | *** |
| Numer of sex partners | 1.02 | |
| Delinquency score | 1.06 | * |
| Incarcerated | .68 | |
| Region (ref = Northeast) | | |
| North central | 1.26 | + |
| South | 1.12 | |
| West | 1.01 | |
| Age | | |
| 19 | .96 | |
| 20 | .97 | |
| 21 | 1.38 | + |
| 22 | 1.25 | |
| 23 | 1.21 | |
| 24 | 1.29 | |
| 25 | 1.32 | |
| Unweighted person-year observations (n) | 14,537 | |

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 Cohort
+p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 2. Odd ratios from logistic regression of economic capacites on unmarried men's transition to fatherhood by racial group membership

| | Odds Ratio | |
|---|---|---|
| | White | Black |
| Educational attainment (ref = less than high school) | | |
| High school degree | .54 *** | .73 * |
| Some college | .17 ** | .39 |
| Bachelor's degree of higher | .12 *** | .22 * |
| Enrolled[1] | .30 *** | .67 ** |
| Employed at interview | 1.01 | .86 |
| Annual earnings (ref = zero earnings) | | |
| Bottom quartile | 1.12 | 1.10 |
| Lower middle quartile | 1.22 | 1.10 |
| Upper middle quartile | 1.56 + | .98 |
| Top quartile | 1.85 * | 1.10 |
| Annual hours worked | 1.02 | 1.01 |
| Number of jobs | 1.18 * | 1.05 |
| Father's educational attainment (ref = less than high school) | | |
| High school degree | .81 | .89 |
| Some college | .67 | .70 |
| Bachelor's degree of higher | .41 ** | .57 |
| Mother's educational attainment greater than father's | .80 | .74 + |
| Mother's age at first birth | .97 | 1.00 |
| Intact family at age 12 | .94 | .85 |
| Religious Service Attendance (ref= never attend) | | |
| Less than once a month | 1.11 | 1.37 * |
| Once or twice a month | .73 | 1.04 |
| Weekly | .96 | .98 |
| Age at sexual debut | .91 *** | .95 ** |
| Numer of sex partners | 1.03 | 1.01 |
| Delinquency score | 1.04 | 1.06 + |
| Incarcerated | .91 | .47 + |
| Region (ref = Northeast) | | |
| North central | 1.08 | 1.56 * |
| South | .96 | 1.32 |
| West | 1.02 | .95 |
| Age | | |
| 19 | .76 | 1.15 |
| 20 | .89 | 1.07 |
| 21 | 1.02 | 1.77 ** |
| 22 | 1.23 | 1.27 |
| 23 | 1.17 | 1.25 |
| 24 | 1.25 | 1.38 |
| 25 | 1.47 | 1.18 |
| Unweighted person-year observations (n) | 10,289 | 4,248 |

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 Cohort

[1] Racial group membership moderates the relationship between enrollment and the transition to fatherhood outside of marriage. This relationship is significant at the p<.01 level (Chow test)

+p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001