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## Religion, Race/Ethnicity, and Barriers to Marriage Among Working-Age Adults

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While a great deal of scholarly attention has been focused on correlates and predictors of obstacles to marriage, little attention has been given to the role of religion in determining self-reported reasons for non-marriage. This oversight in the literature is surprising given the recent focus among researchers on the role of religious factors in shaping intimate relationships. Further, few scholars have explored racial/ethnic variations in the influence of religion on self-reported barriers to marriage. Our study addresses this gap in the literature using data from the National Survey of Religion and Family Life (NSRFL), a 2006 telephone survey of working-age adults that contains oversamples of African Americans and Latinos. Results indicate that church attendance plays a particularly important role in reducing barriers to marriage, at least among non-Hispanic White respondents.

Policy makers, religious leaders, and other social observers remain alarmed over the current state of marriage in the United States. The stability of intimate relationships has become increasingly fragile over the last half of the century, in part because of increases in divorce, nonmarital childbearing, and cohabitation (Cherlin 2004, 2009). While scholars argue that marriage is at risk of becoming deinstitutionalized, this process has not been uniform across racial and ethnic groups. If current trends continue, only two out of three African American women will marry during their lifetimes. Of those marriages, up to 70% are projected to end in divorce, compared to 47% of marriages among non-Hispanic Whites. Despite relative socioeconomic disadvantage, Hispanics have substantially higher rates of marriage than African Americans (Cherlin 2009). However, scholars warn that exposure to U.S. culture is likely to erode marriage among Hispanic immigrants and their decedents (Oropesa & Landale 2004).

Although substantial racial and ethnic differences persist in marriage rates, relatively small differences exist in the desire to marry. The majority of adults, particularly women, would like to get married, regardless of their socioeconomic status, parental status, and race/ethnicity (Edin & Kefalas 2005; Lichter et al. 2004; South 1993). Despite the desire to marry, racial and ethnic minorities face a number of social and economic barriers to marriage. Social barriers to marriage focus on worries about the quality of a potential marital relationship, including concerns about responsibility, drug abuse, domestic violence, and infidelity (Edin & Kefalas 2005; Edin & Reed 2005; Manning et al. 2010). Economic barriers include concerns about financial stability as well as educational and employment prospects (Edin & Kefalas 2005; Edin & Reed 2005). For example, scholars have noted that employment is positively associated with marriage (Bennett et al. 1989; Lichter et al. 1992).

While a great deal of scholarly attention has been focused on correlates and predictors of obstacles to marriage, particularly economic barriers among low-income and minority populations (Edin & Kefalas 2005; Edin & Reed 2005; Lichter et al. 2004; Lichter et al. 1992), little attention has been given to the role of religion in determining marital attitudes. This oversight in the literature is surprising given the recent focus among researchers on the role of religious factors in shaping a variety of family outcomes, including romantic relationships. Although caveats exist, the general tenor of the religious effects on marital and other intimate relationships is positive (Call & Heaton 1997; Mahoney 2010; Mahoney et al. 2001; Regnerus & Burdette 2006). Further, limited evidence suggests that religiosity is positively associated with marital expectations among both adolescents (Manning et al. 2007) and college women (Ellison et al. forthcoming).

In addition to a lack of research examining how religion may prioritize marriage in the lives of single adults, few scholars have explored racial/ethnic variations in the influence of religion on self-reported barriers to marriage. This omission is noteworthy given that African American religion is unusually vibrant. Evidence consistently reveals that African Americans tend to display higher levels of religious involvement, by virtually any indicator, than non-Hispanic Whites from similar backgrounds (Taylor et al. 2004). Similarly, we are aware of no published work that examines religious variations in marital attitudes among Mexican Americans and other Latino groups. This gap in the literature is striking given the dramatic increase in the Hispanic population within the U.S. (Suro 2005; U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2003) as well as the distinctive religious culture of Latinos (Espinosa et al. 2003).

The lack of research on religion, race, and barriers to marriage is also surprising from a policy perspective given recent federal funding allocated to marriage promotion. In 2002,

President Bush supported the Healthy Marriage Initiative, which was designed to aid couples in developing skills to form and sustain a healthy marriage. In 2006, over \$500 million was appropriated towards this initiative, which largely targets low-income and minority populations (Department of Health and Human Services 2009; Manning et al. 2010). The government will continue to distribute hundreds of millions of dollars for marriage promotion programs, at least through 2010 (Cherlin 2009).

Our study seeks to augment the literature in three distinct ways. First, using data from the National Survey of Religion and Family Life (NSRFL), a nationally-representative sample of working-age (18-59) adults with oversamples of African Americans and Latinos, we focus on the potentially salutary influence of several distinct aspects of religious involvement (i.e., church attendance, personal religiosity, Biblical literalism, and prayer) on barriers to marriage (i.e., concerns about finances, sexual fidelity, responsibility, and school/career) among never-married single adults. Second, we explore racial and ethnic variations in the impact of religious involvement on self-reported reasons for not being in a marital union. Third, we discuss our findings in terms of their implications for future research on religion, race/ethnicity, and intimate relationships.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### *Religion and Attitudes toward Marriage*

Numerous scholars have noted that religion is a complex, multidimensional construct (Idler et al. 2003; Levin et al. 1995; Stark & Glock 1968). Relying on one measure of religious involvement, or combining multiple items into an index, often conceals potentially meaningful associations (and processes) among these indicators. Certain facets of religious involvement may be linked with desirable outcomes, while others may be unrelated or have a negative influence on

family outcomes. Although there are few empirical guideposts for the current study, there are a number of theoretical reasons to expect that religion may be associated with attitudes toward marriage among single adults.

To begin, church attendance provides regular exposure to moral messages about the importance of marriage and the merits of sexual restraint, regardless of the specific denomination that one attends (Hertel & Hughes 1987; Roof & McKinney 1987; Sherkat & Ellison 1997). Involvement in religious communities may reflect and enhance a traditional orientation towards family issues, including idealizing and prioritizing marriage over other forms of romantic relationships. Congregations often formally convey the importance of marriage for personal and spiritual development through sermons and Sunday school lessons (Ellison et al. 1999). Rituals within the church (e.g., weddings and infant baptisms) also highlight the privileged place of marital relationships over other forms of intimate unions (Wolfinger & Wilcox 2008). Traditional views regarding marriage and family life may also be affirmed in informal settings with other coreligionists. Casual discussions with fellow churchgoers may reinforce official church doctrine and moral messages presented by clergy (Burdette et al. 2007). These mechanisms may strengthen beliefs about the importance of marital relationships while helping to define appropriate moral conduct.

Religious service attendance also signifies embeddedness within congregational social networks, which could indicate the potential for behavioral monitoring and possible social sanctions against those suspected of nonmarital sexual relationships (Sherkat & Wilson 1995). Congregational social networks may also grant single adults access to marriage-oriented social events as well as marriage-minded dating partners. Further, regular service attendance may provide single adults contact with role models of “healthy” marriages (Wilcox & Wolfinger

2008; Wolfinger & Wilcox 2008) given that church attendance has been associated with marital quality and success (Call & Heaton 1997; Ellison et al. 1999; Ellison et al. 2010). Interactions with role models within the church may diminish barriers to marriage, in part through reducing concerns about sexual fidelity, a key indicator of lower marital expectations among single women (Manning et al. 2010). Based on the arguments presented thus far, *we expect to find that frequency of church attendance will be inversely associated with barriers to marriage (H1).*

While frequency of church attendance may indicate exposure to messages related to marriage and family life, personal religiosity may indicate the degree to which these messages have been internalized (Rohrbaugh & Jessor 1975). Personal religiosity may also indicate a strong commitment to a specific religious identity. Those for whom religion is central may place marriage as a particularly high priority, both to live out religious doctrines related to family life and to remain an active and relevant member of the religious community. Individuals for whom religion is less prominent may hold more or equally salient identities related to school, work, or non-religious social organizations and networks. These other identities may lead them to place less emphasis on marriage as a primary life goal. Therefore, *we expect to find that personal religiosity will be inversely associated with barriers to marriage (H2).*

Similarly, informal religious activities, including frequency of prayer, may indicate a dedication to religious moral principles. Prayer, the most widely recognized and practiced religious activity (Levin & Taylor 1997; Taylor et al. 2004), may also signify a special relationship with a (perceived) divine other who can be engaged when seeking personal guidance or solace (Ellison 1993; Pollner 1989). Constructing an ongoing, interactive relationship with a divine other may reinforce one's religious commitment and increase the desire to lead the traditional family life often advocated by religious institutions. Based on the above arguments,



*we expect to find that frequency of prayer will be inversely associated with barriers to marriage (H3).*

Finally, a growing body of literature links inerrantist interpretations of the Bible with more conservative views of marriage and family life. A literal interpretation of the Bible may be a marker of commitment to traditional norms regarding marriage, gender roles, and childbearing (Burdette et al. 2007; Ellison et al. 1999; Hertel & Hughes 1987; Vaaler et al. 2009). In addition, individuals who embrace inerrantists views of the Bible are likely to be familiar with scriptural passages concerning the spiritual significance of marriage as well as passages that limit physical intimacy to marital relationships (e.g., Exodus 20:14, Genesis 2:24, Hebrews 13:4). As a result, those who believe that the Bible is the literal word of God may be prone to seek marriage over other forms of intimate relationships and may prioritize marriage over other goals, such as educational or career aspirations. Therefore, *we expect to find that those respondents who hold a literalist interpretation of the Bible will report fewer barriers to marriage compared to those with other Biblical interpretations (H4).*

#### *Race/Ethnicity, Religion, and Marital Attitudes*

While little research has examined links between religious involvement and barriers to marriage, even fewer studies have explored possible race/ethnic differences in this association. This is an oversight for two primary reasons. First, there are notable racial and ethnic variations in marital expectations (Crissey 2005; Manning et al. 2007) as well as marriage rates (Cherlin 2009). Second, religious affiliation, belief, and practice differ by race/ethnicity. This gap in the present research is particularly noteworthy due to what some have called the African American religion-marriage paradox, where African Americans pair comparatively high levels of religious involvement with comparatively low levels of marriage and relationship quality (Ellison et al.

2010; Wilcox & Wolfinger 2007). It is important to note that religion in America continues to be largely racially segregated. Estimates suggest that approximately 90% of African Americans attend predominately Black congregations, while at least 95% of non-Hispanic White Americans attend predominately White churches (Emerson & Smith 2000). In addition, while there is not one monolithic “Black church,” there are similarities in doctrine and practice that extend across predominately African American congregations.

Despite a shortage of research on the subject, there are sound theoretical reasons to expect that religious involvement may play a particularly important role in reducing barriers to marriage among African Americans, as compared to non-Hispanic Whites. First, the vast majority of Black Protestant churches emphasize marriage as the most suitable venue for sexual relations and childbearing. Sex outside of marriage is viewed as sinful, and children are thought to deserve two parents who are committed both to each other and to the parental role. Marital relationships are stressed by many African American churches despite the fact that many congregations contain large numbers of single-parent families (Wilcox & Wolfinger 2007; Wolfinger & Wilcox 2008). Second, scholars have noted the importance of the African American church in sustaining traditional norms of the nuclear family and protecting urban Black men, in particular, from the lure of “the street” (Anderson 1999; Ellison et al. 2010; Wilcox & Wolfinger 2008). These traditional norms, referred to by Anderson (1999) as a “code of decency,” include hard work, honesty, and lawful behavior as opposed to substance abuse, promiscuity, and crime. Based on the above arguments, *we expect that the inverse relationship between religious involvement and barriers to marriage will be stronger for African Americans than for non-Hispanic Whites (H5a).*

While there are reasons to expect that the relationship between religion and attitudes toward marriage may be stronger among African Americans than among non-Hispanic Whites, there are also reasons to believe that this association may be weaker among African Americans than among their White counterparts. Whereas predominately non-Hispanic White conservative Protestant denominations tend to emphasize themes of sexual morality and divine punishment, Black churches tend to be more forgiving of sexual transgressions and non-marital childbearing. Issues of sexual purity may take a backseat to more salient themes of individual and community enfranchisement, civil and human rights, and social and economic justice (Burdette & Hill 2009; Lincoln & Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2004).

Further, many African American churches contain large numbers of single-parent families as well as other family structures that are alternatives to the nuclear two-parent family. There is some evidence that the Black Church has responded to the tension between its theological conservatism and high rates of nonmarital births by downplaying pro-marriage norms or by ignoring issues of sexuality altogether (Anderson et al. 2002; Wilcox & Wolfinger 2007). As a result, some scholars have suggested that African American churches place less emphasis on marriage as compared to White mainline and conservative Protestant churches (Cherlin 2009). The research presented in this section suggests the following competing hypothesis: *we expect that the inverse relationship between religious involvement and barriers to marriage will be weaker for African Americans than for non-Hispanic Whites (H5b).*

There are fewer theoretical guideposts for exploring religious differences in relation to attitudes about marriage among Latinos and non-Hispanic Whites. Approximately 70% of Latinos are Catholic, while 23% are Protestant (Espinosa et al. 2003). Both of these religious traditions lend support to a longstanding tradition of familism found in Hispanic cultures

(Wilcox & Wolfinger 2007). Familism centers on the creation and support of the nuclear family as well as valuing ties with extended family members. Familism denotes a collective orientation, rather than an individualistic orientation, toward family life (Oropesa & Landale 2004). Scholars have argued that the individualistic orientation toward marriage and family life found in the United States is a primary explanation for relatively high divorce rates found in this country (Cherlin 2009). Like many conservative religious traditions, familism socializes young women to value the role of wife and mother over other life goals (Landale & Oropesa 2007), which may explain evidence suggesting that Mexican Americans value marriage more highly than non-Latino Whites (Oropesa & Landale 2004). Based on the above arguments, *we expect that the inverse relationship between religious involvement and barriers to marriage will be stronger for Latinos than for non-Hispanic Whites (H6).*

## **METHODS**

### *Data*

We test the above hypotheses using data from the National Survey of Religion and Family Life (NSRFL), a 2006 telephone survey of working-age adults (ages 18-59) in the continental United States conducted by SRBI, a New York-based survey firm. The NSRFL contains extensive data on the religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices of individual respondents, including detailed information on family and marital attitudes. On average, the survey took 30 minutes to complete. If respondents desired, the survey was conducted in Spanish.

### *Sampling Procedures*

Households were selected to participate in the survey using random-digit dialing (RDD) techniques, and one respondent was chosen at random within each household. African

Americans and Hispanics were oversampled by dialing within area codes containing at least 10% concentrations of these race/ethnic subgroups. Notification letters, refusal conversion letters, and non-contact letters were mailed to all sampled households for which addresses were available. The overall cooperation rate (i.e., the proportion of all cases interviewed of all eligible units ever contacted) was 54%, with higher cooperation rates in the race/ethnic oversamples. The response rate (i.e., the number of complete interviews with reporting units divided by the number of eligible reporting units in the sample) for the NSRFL was 36% (33% in the cross-sectional sample and 41% and 34% in the African American and Hispanic oversamples, respectively).

Although the response rate is low by traditional standards, it compares favorably with most recent national RDD-based studies (Council on Market and Opinion Research 2003). Moreover, studies show few differences between government surveys with high response rates (e.g., the Current Population Survey) and RDD-based surveys with lower response rates (Keeter et al. 2006; Pew Center for People and the Press 2004). As a document posted on the American Association of Public Opinion Research web site titled “Do Response Rates Matter?” points out, recent evidence indicates that the relationship between response rates and data quality is weak. According to that document, “studies that have compared survey estimates to benchmark data from the U. S. Census or very large governmental sample surveys have...questioned the positive association between response rates and quality...Results that show the least bias have turned out, in some cases, to come from surveys with less than optimal response rates...” (AAPOR, 2008). Much of the relevant evidence is in a special issue of the *Public Opinion Quarterly* devoted to survey nonresponse (Singer 2006).

The full sample contains roughly equal numbers of African Americans, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic Whites. Because our analytic sample is limited to those who are currently single

and not in a relationship, it contains a larger percentage of African Americans (45%). Table 1 indicates that the majority of respondents in our subsample were women (71%), employed full time (50%), and had children (an average of 0.83 children). The average number of children was greater for African Americans and Hispanics than for non-Hispanic Whites. The average respondent was approximately 40 years of age, with at least some education beyond high school. Finally, racial/ethnic minorities tended to report lower levels of education and income than their non-Hispanic White counterparts.

### *Measures*

#### Dependent Variable: Barriers to Marriage

*Reasons for non-marriage*, commonly referred to as "barriers to marriage," are measured via a mean index based on responses to four items. Respondents were instructed, "People do not marry for a variety of reasons. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements that explain why you are not married": 1) "My job or education comes before marriage at this time in my life."; 2) "Most of the single women/men I know are not responsible enough."; 3) "I am/most of the single men I know are not earning enough to get married."; 4) "Women/men cannot be trusted to be sexually faithful." Responses for all items range from (1) "strongly agree" to (4) "strongly disagree." Items were recoded to indicate a greater number of barriers to marriage.

#### Independent Variables: Religious Involvement

We measure several distinct aspects of religious involvement. First, we include a measure of organizational religious involvement, frequency of *church attendance*. Respondents were asked, "How often do you attend religious services?" Responses range from (0) "never" to (5) "more than once a week."

*Subjective religiosity* is measured by asking respondents to what extent they consider themselves a religious person. Responses range from (1) “a great deal” to (4) “not at all.” This item was recoded so that higher values indicate a greater degree of religiosity.

Respondents were also asked how often they pray or meditate alone. Responses to this item range from (1) “more than once a day” to (8) “never.” As with the above item, responses were recoded to indicate more frequent prayer.

Finally, respondents were asked their level of (dis)agreement with the following statement: “The Bible is the literal Word of God and a true guide to faith and morality.” This item was used to construct a dichotomous variable to indicate a belief in Biblical literalism. Those respondents who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the above statement were coded as holding a literalist interpretation of the Bible. Those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement served as the reference category for our analysis.

### Socio-demographic Controls

Numerous socio-demographic characteristics have been identified as significant correlates of marital attitudes and behavior (Crissey 2005; Manning et al. 2007; Manning et al. 2010). Therefore, our analyses include controls for the following variables: race and/or ethnicity (1=*African American*, 1=*Hispanic*, 0=*non-Hispanic White*); gender (1=*male*, 0=*female*); employment status (1= *employed full-time*, 0=*other work status*); *age* (measured in single years); education (1= *less than high school*, 1= *some college*, 1=*college*, 1=*post-graduate*, 0= *high school*); household *income* (continuously imputed family income in \$10,000s), and *number of children* (actual number).

### *Analytic Procedures*

The analytic strategy for this study follows three steps. First, Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all variables included in the study as well as comparisons by race/ethnicity (n=529). Second, Table 2 presents a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models estimating the net effects of religious variables and covariates on reasons for non-marriage. Models are organized as follows: Model 1 (the baseline model) includes non-religious predictors, such as sociodemographic factors and other key variables. Model 2 adds frequency of church attendance. Model 3 replaces church attendance with our measure of subjective religiosity. Model 4 replaces subjective religiosity with frequency of prayer. Model 5 replaces frequency of prayer with our measure of Biblical literalism. Model 6, includes all four of our religion measures simultaneously. In the final stage of our analysis, we added cross-product interaction terms to the full model to evaluate whether the impact of religious involvement on marital attitudes varies as a function of race/ethnicity. Of our measures of religion, only the effect of church attendance on barriers to marriage varied by racial and ethnic group. None of the other interaction terms for religious involvement and race/ethnicity reached statistical significance at the .05 level (results not shown but available upon request). The significant interaction term for church attendance is shown in Model 7 as well as displayed in Figure 1.

## **RESULTS**

### *Unadjusted Means by Race/Ethnicity*

On average, NSRFL respondents reported a moderate number of barriers to marriage (2.54 on a 4-point scale); however, both African American and Hispanic respondents reported significantly more barriers to marriage than non-Hispanic Whites. African American respondents



reported significantly higher levels of church attendance in comparison to non-Hispanic White and Hispanic respondents. Similarly, African Americans reported higher levels of subjective religiosity and more frequent prayer than their Hispanic and non-Hispanic White counterparts. The overwhelming majority of both African American (90%) and Hispanic respondents (85%) reported believing that the Bible is the literal Word of God, a significantly higher percentage than their non-Hispanic White counterparts (63%).

### *Main Effects*

The results of the OLS regression models are displayed in Table 2. Several notable patterns involving the relationship between religious involvement, race/ethnicity, and reasons for non-marriage emerged from this analysis. First, consistent with H1, frequency of church attendance is associated with a decrease in self-reported barriers to marriage ( $b=-0.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ), an effect that remains even in the final model with the inclusion of other measures of religious involvement. Second, contrary to H2-H4, our other three indicators of religious involvement (i.e., subjective religiosity, prayer, and Biblical literalism) appear to be unrelated to marriage barriers, as seen in Models 3-6. Finally, the inclusion of predictors of religious involvement does little to alter the relationship between race/ethnicity and reasons for non-marriage. Throughout our models, African Americans report more barriers to marriage than their non-Hispanic White counterparts, whereas Hispanic respondents are not significantly different from non-Hispanic White respondents.

### *Interaction Effects*

Model 7 shows the effect of church attendance on reasons for non-marriage as a function of race/ethnicity. The results of this interaction between frequency of church attendance and race/ethnicity are also displayed in Figure 1. As noted above, none of the other interaction terms

for religious involvement and race/ethnicity reached statistical significance at the .05 level.

While church attendance appears to reduce barriers to marriage for non-Hispanic Whites, this is not the case for African Americans or Latinos. Following the method described by Jaccard and Turrisi (2003), we tested whether the partial slope for each racial/ethnic group was statistically different from zero. This analysis revealed nonsignificant partial slopes for African Americans ( $t = -0.374, p > 0.05$ ) and Latinos ( $t = -0.702, p > 0.05$ ). The above findings lend partial support to H5b, but are contrary to H5a and H6.

#### *Ancillary Analyses*

In addition to examining the relationship between religious involvement and our index of barriers to marriage, we examined the association between measures of religion and each of the four items making up the index (results not shown but available upon request). Because the individual items have four response categories, we employed ordered logistic regression. The results for the individual marriage items were generally similar to those for the index, with a few notable exceptions. First, as with the index, church attendance was associated with a decrease in the odds of: a) financial concerns, b) concerns about sexual fidelity, and c) concerns about responsibility; however, church attendance was unrelated to concerns about school/career. Second, the other measures of religious involvement were unrelated to the individual barriers to marriage items, with the exception of the relationship between frequency of prayer and concerns about infidelity. Each unit increase in prayer is associated with roughly a 10% decrease in concerns about sexual fidelity. Finally, the interaction between church attendance and race/ethnicity was strongest for financial concerns, although it was marginally significant for concerns about responsibility as well. The interaction between church attendance and

race/ethnicity was not significant for the items tapping concerns about sexual fidelity or school/career.

## **DISCUSSION**

Scholars and policy makers alike have expressed concern over the current state of marriage in the U.S., particularly the increase in nonmarital births and the decrease in marital unions among economically disadvantaged and racial/ethnic minority populations. To this end, millions of dollars in federal funding have been allocated to marriage promotion. Despite recent research noting the influence of religious involvement on a variety of family outcomes, including intimate relationships, little attention has been given to the role of religion in shaping attitudes toward marriage among single adults. Similarly, few scholars have explored racial/ethnic variations in the influence of religious involvement on reasons for non-marriage. This omission is striking given what some have noted as an interesting paradox: religious involvement tends to be higher for African Americans, yet marital expectations, quality, and stability tend to be lower for this group than for non-Hispanic Whites (Ellison et al. 2010; Wilcox & Wolfinger 2007). We have explored the relationship between religion, race/ethnicity, and barriers to marriage using data from a nationwide sample of working-age adults (18-59) that includes oversamples of African Americans and Latino Americans.

Several patterns are particularly notable. Consistent with a number of studies noting the influence of church attendance on marital and other forms of intimate relationships (Brown et al. 2008; Ellison et al. 2010; Vaaler et al. 2009; Wilcox & Wolfinger 2007), more frequent service attendance is associated with a reduction in barriers to marriage. The impact of church attendance is consistent throughout our models, net of controls for a number of sociodemographic and religious characteristics. Contrary to expectations, our other predictors of

religious involvement were unrelated to reasons for non-marriage (with the exception of the association between frequency of prayer and concerns about sexual fidelity). This finding suggests that organized religious involvement plays a more influential role in shaping marital attitudes than private religious beliefs and practices. Embeddedness within religious communities likely prioritizes marriage over other life goals (i.e., financial success) as well as reducing concerns about the opposite sex, through formal and informal social interactions. Future research in this area should seek a more complete understanding of how this process occurs, perhaps through contextual analysis of sermons and qualitative interviews with churchgoers.

Although church attendance appears to influence the marital attitudes of single non-Hispanic Whites, this does not appear to be the case for African American or Latino respondents, with the exception of reducing concerns about infidelity. Scholars have suggested that African American churches place less emphasis on marriage than do predominately White mainline and conservative Protestant churches for two reasons. First, Black religious traditions have historically defined their mission as transforming the social lives of African Americans as a group through political action and civic projects (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2004). As a result, marriage-centered messages may take a backseat to issues of social justice, community enfranchisement, and civil rights. Second, some clergy may be apprehensive about delivering a pro-marriage message due to fears of alienating members of the community who have experienced a nonmarital birth. Indeed, some evidence suggests that African American churches manifest a “conspiracy of silence” around issues like cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing (Franklin 2004; Rubin & Billingsley 1994).

Reasons why church attendance does not appear to impact marital attitudes among Latino respondents are less apparent. It may be that religious involvement does little to enhance the

already strong pro-marriage sentiment among this ethnic group. Numerous scholars have noted that Hispanics generally have a more familistic cultural orientation than Anglos, which emphasizes that importance of traditional family roles, especially for women (Landale & Oropesa 2007; Oropesa & Landale 2004). Further, our single Latino subsample may be particularly susceptible to selection effects, due to the fact that Hispanics tend to marry at younger ages than both African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites (Oropesa & Landale 2004). Therefore, those Latino respondents with high or normative levels of marital intentions are likely selected out of our subsample.

It is notable that both prayer and church attendance appear to reduce concerns about sexual fidelity consistently across racial and ethnic groups. This finding is complimentary with recent work noting the association between religious involvement and reduced odds of cheating among U.S. adults (Atkins & Kessel 2008; Burdette et al. 2007). Our findings regarding concerns about sexual fidelity suggest that while African American churches may not push a pro-marriage agenda to the degree that predominately White churches do, they may expose members to role models of “healthy” marriages. Interactions with happily married adults may reduce distrust of the opposite sex, including concerns about infidelity. Prayer may reinforce one’s religious commitment and increase the desire to marry.

Our findings could be clarified and expanded by future research. The relationship between frequency of church attendance and marital attitudes is likely explained by more proximal indicators of marital attitudes including: a) traditional orientations towards marriage and childbearing, b) contact with married couples within the church who may act as role models, or c) pro-marriage dating networks. Future research should specify the mechanisms that explain the relationship between religious service attendance and barriers to marriage. Similarly, scholars

should further explore racial/ethnic variations in the relationship between religious involvement and barriers to marriage. Although we have speculated why these variations may exist, future scholarship should provide more empirical explanations for these differences.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the data used in this study are cross-sectional, which precludes the establishment of causal order among our variables. Although theoretical reasons suggest that religion impacts attitudes toward marriage, reciprocal effects may exist. For example, those with pro-marriage inclinations may be particularly likely to be involved in religious groups in hopes of meeting a future spouse. Second, as noted above, our study is likely subject to selection effects. Those with few barriers to marriage may be selected out of the current subsample of single adults. Finally, as other scholars have noted (Vaaler et al. 2009; Wilcox 2002), religious involvement may be part of a broader complex of conventional behaviors, which likely includes traditional attitudes toward family formation. Therefore, our models may also suffer from omitted variable bias given that we include no indicators of risk aversion or similar concepts.

Despite these limitations, our study has made an original contribution to the research by examining the connections between religious involvement, race/ethnicity, and reasons for non-marriage. Our results suggest that organizational religious involvement plays a particularly important role in reducing barriers to marriage, at least among non-Hispanic Whites. Further investigation along the lines sketched above is needed to clarify the processes by which religion influences attitudes toward marriage among single adults.

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Table 1. Unadjusted Means by Race/Ethnicity on Key Variables

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	Total Sample (N = 529)	Standard Deviation	White (N = 124)	African American (N = 240)	Hispanic (N = 165)
<i>Dependent Variable</i>					
Reasons for Non-Marriage	2.54	0.83	2.26 <sup>bc</sup>	2.69 <sup>a</sup>	2.54 <sup>a</sup>
<i>Religion Variables</i>					
Church Attendance	2.39	1.77	1.98 <sup>b</sup>	2.81 <sup>ac</sup>	2.09 <sup>b</sup>
Subjective Religiosity	2.92	1.04	2.83 <sup>b</sup>	3.10 <sup>ac</sup>	2.71 <sup>b</sup>
Prayer	6.25	2.01	5.73 <sup>b</sup>	6.82 <sup>ac</sup>	5.81 <sup>b</sup>
Biblical Literalism	0.82	0.38	0.63 <sup>bc</sup>	0.90 <sup>a</sup>	0.85 <sup>a</sup>
<i>Sociodemographic/Control Variables</i>					
Male	0.29	0.46	0.35 <sup>b</sup>	0.20 <sup>ac</sup>	0.38 <sup>b</sup>
Employed Full-time	0.50	0.50	0.63 <sup>bc</sup>	0.48 <sup>a</sup>	0.45 <sup>a</sup>
Age	39.73	12.53	42.98 <sup>c</sup>	40.54 <sup>c</sup>	36.12 <sup>ab</sup>
Education	4.13	1.69	4.81 <sup>bc</sup>	4.24 <sup>ac</sup>	3.47 <sup>ab</sup>
Income	3.45	1.85	3.89 <sup>bc</sup>	3.45 <sup>a</sup>	3.12 <sup>a</sup>
Number of Children	0.83	1.14	0.33 <sup>bc</sup>	0.85 <sup>ac</sup>	1.16 <sup>ab</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Indicates significant differences from Whites ( $a = p < .05$ ).

<sup>b</sup>Indicates significant differences from African Americans ( $b = p < .05$ ).

<sup>c</sup>Indicates significant differences from Hispanics ( $c = p < .05$ ).

Table 2. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Predicting Reasons for Non-Marriage (N=529)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
<i>Religion Variables</i>							
Church Attendance	--	-0.05*	--	--	--	-0.06*	-0.17***
Subjective Religiosity	--	--	0.02	--	--	0.04	0.07
Prayer	--	--	--	-0.03	--	-0.03	-0.03
Biblical Literalism	--	--	--	--	-0.02	0.06	0.07*
<i>Sociodemographic/Control Variables</i>							
African American	0.30***	0.34***	0.29**	0.34***	0.31***	0.35***	0.35***
Hispanic	0.11	0.13	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.13	0.16
Male	-0.25**	-0.29**	-0.25**	-0.28***	-0.25**	-0.30***	-0.29***
Employed Full-time	-0.03	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02
Age	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.01	-0.01*	-0.01	-0.01
Less Than High School Education	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02
Some College Education	-0.12	-0.11	-0.13	-0.11	-0.12	-0.12	-0.12
College Education	-0.30**	-0.29*	-0.31**	-0.29*	-0.31**	-0.28*	-0.28*
Post-Graduate Education	-0.25	-0.24	-0.26	-0.24	-0.26	-0.23	-0.22
Income	-0.04	-0.01	-0.04	-0.04	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03
Number of Children	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
African American*Church Attendance							0.15**
Hispanic*Church Attendance							0.13*
Constant	2.94***	2.98***	2.89***	3.08***	2.95***	2.93 ***	2.46***
Model F	6.40***	6.43***	5.90***	6.17***	5.86***	5.46***	5.41***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.12	0.13	0.12	0.13	0.12	0.14	0.15

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Figure 1: Impact of Church Attendance on Reasons for Non-Marriage**