Should We Take the Next Step? Romantic Relationships and the Consequences for Self-concept and Health by Race, Gender, and Educational Attainment

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For James, who loved me
and
For Samantha, who cared for me

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Americans want to marry and consider marriage a symbolic success (Cherlin 2004; Manning, Longmore, and Giordano 2007). The endorsement of marriage as a life goal is found among those (e.g. impoverished, single parents) who are least likely to be married (England and Edin 2007). Despite the expectation and importance of marriage in American society, it is well documented that contemporary young adults are not marrying at the same rates as previous generations. Today young adulthood is characterized by a delay in marrying (Coontz 2004; McLanahan 2004). Further, early marriages (i.e., earlier than 23 years old) are now notorious for their relatively low survival rates (Lehrer 2008; Uecker and Stokes 2008). It was not unusual for young adults to marry before 25 years old prior to the 1960s, but the median age of first marriage is currently 29.5 years for men and 27.4 years for women (U.S. Census Bureau 2017).

Encapsulated within the general changes in marriage is a black-white marriage gap. Blacks are disproportionality less likely to be married compared to whites (see Aughinbaugh, Robles, and Sun 2013). Reasons for the general delay of marriage have been attributed to economic and cultural transitions (Arnett 2007; Silva 2012). For example, compared to a few generations ago, it takes longer for young adults to transition to economic independence from their family of origin. Additionally, culturally more egalitarian gender ideology does not mandate that women must marry to securely achieve adulthood (Silva 2012). However, while these economic and cultural explanations provide a great deal of information, they do not fully explain the general decrease in marriage among Americans or the black-white marriage gap. With respect to race, perceptions of racial discrimination or heightened racial awareness may create a lower likelihood of marriage not only because of the stress of such thoughts, but also

because of the likely connection with economic and cultural explanations. In fact, the experience of race and navigating through a racially salient society has been shown to influence notions of womanhood and manhood to shape romantic relationships (Chaney 2011).

The changes in marital rates are interesting because of the documented benefits of marriage (Cutrona 1996; Frech and Williams 2007; Liu and Umberson 2008). Marriage is commonly shown to benefit both self-concept and health. Compared to the married, the unmarried have more illnesses (Hughes and Waite 2009) and report greater psychological distress (Mirowsky and Ross 2003). Marital relationships have been found to boost positive self-perceptions, protect psychological well-being, and lead to healthy behaviors (e.g., less binge drinking) (Liu and Umberson 2008; Musick and Bumpass 2012).

While marriage is widely rewarded and produces health and well-being benefits, there has been an increase in other forms of romantic relationships. The number of cohabiting and monogamously dating unions has increased in recent decades (Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, and Mays 2009). There has also been an increase in people selecting to remain single (see Marsh, et al. 2007). Remaining single, marrying, cohabiting, or monogamously dating can each differentially impact self-concept, mental health, and physical health (Williams and Umberson 2004; Dush, Kamp, and Amato 2005).

Many studies have provided support for the notion that despite the rise in cohabiting, monogamously dating, or remaining single, marriage is the more beneficial romantic relationship. Yet, not all groups have an equal chance of experiencing the benefits of marriage. Across multiple stratifying factors, including educational attainment, black women are the least likely to be married (Raley, Sweeney, and Wondra 2015). Those at the lower end of the socioeconomic status scale (e.g., income and education) are less likely to marry compared to

those in higher strata (Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Carlson and England 2011; Edin and Kefalas 2011).

The underlying reasons that account for the lower likelihood of marriage for certain groups are important to uncover and study in order to address disparities in health and well-being. Further, whether and how the benefits of romantic unions differ by type, race, gender, and educational attainment are also important to study if marriage initiatives and family well-being policies are to be implemented with success. In what follows, I will review the research that has been done to better understand the delay and forgoing of marriage and the rise of nonmarital romantic unions. Attention is drawn to the areas in which more sociological research is needed to understand differences in marriage rates between blacks and whites as well as the varying influences of romantic relationship statuses on self-concept and health. To address the gaps in the literature, I consider the possible impact of perceived racial discrimination and racial salience (i.e. frequency of thinking about your race) on whether blacks and whites marry. I then examine the role of educational attainment coupled with race and gender in understanding the influences of four romantic relationship statuses (i.e., single, monogamously dating, cohabiting, and marriage) on self-concept and health.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation is composed of three separate but related studies. In the first study, I analyze how perceived racial discrimination and racial salience influence the odds of marriage for blacks and whites. In the second and third studies, I examine how remaining single, monogamously dating, cohabiting, or marrying differentially influence self-concept (i.e., mastery – the personal sense of control, and self-esteem – the global sense of self-worth) and health outcomes (i.e., depressive symptoms and self-rated health) for black and white young adults.

Overall, I attempt to partially explain the gap in marriage rates between blacks and whites and I investigate whether the varying forms of romantic unions young adults are a part of result in differing effects on health and well-being. I address three broad research questions:

1) How does perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience effect the probability of being married for blacks and whites?

2) How do single, monogamously dating, cohabiting, and married statuses for blacks and whites differentially impact self-esteem and mastery by race, gender, and educational attainment?

3) How do single, monogamously dating, cohabiting, and married statuses for blacks and whites differentially impact mental and physical health by race, gender, and educational attainment?

Before describing the theoretical frameworks that inform this research, it is necessary to provide a few notes about terminology. I will use several terms that are socially, politically, and emotionally charged. The word *race* is used to describe the sociopolitical system of classifying people largely based on physical features. I focus on respondents who self-identify as black or white, because the gap in marriage rates is largest between these two groups. My focus on race and not ethnicity is purposeful. Ethnicity refers to a person's cultural heritage and is not mutually exclusive across racial groups. Such an overlap would require an in-depth discussion and examination of how race and ethnicity intersect to influence romantic relationships that is beyond the scope of this project.

I use the word *marriage* to describe the public promise of a permanent heterosexual union of two people that is widely supported by law, culture, religion, and community. The exclusion of same-sex marital unions and non-black racial groups is not for lack of interest or

effort. Instead, the quantitative data I use, and quantitative data in general, often only include small subsamples of racial minorities, does not contain measures of diverse sexualities, and lack thorough inquiries about same-sex romantic unions. Lastly, I use the term *well-being* to refer to individual outcomes including self-concept (i.e., mastery and self-esteem), mental health (i.e., depressive symptoms), and physical health (i.e., self-rated health).

BACKGROUND AND THEORY

Elements of several theoretical perspectives are used to guide this research. I incorporate critical race theory (Delgado and Stefancic 2017), the life course framework (Elder 1998; Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003), and the stress process model (Pearlin et al. 1981; Turner 2010). I also incorporate an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013) by highlighting the effects of intersecting social statuses – i.e., race, gender, and educational attainment. Each of these theoretical perspectives are used to aid in understanding the black-white marriage gap, and whether romantic relationships operate the same across race, gender, and educational attainment to shape well-being.

Critical race theory positions race, racism, and racial discrimination as central components of social institutions, including families and romantic unions. Black men and women do not share the same social standing as whites, therefore it is reasonable to suggest that race, racism, and power work together to influence how blacks construct their social and familial worlds. Using the critical race lens, Chaney (2009; 2011) asserts that the desire of many blacks to enter into stable partnerships is also influenced by their perceptions of manhood and womanhood-- which, in turn, are shaped by their unequal access to education and sustainable income. That is, black men and women create slightly modified versions of manhood and womanhood that deviate from the mainstream and allow them to develop reasonable

expectations for themselves and their romantic partners. These modifications may directly influence black peoples' decision to enter into, establish, and maintain their own marriage and family.

Guided by critical race theory, I investigate the role of race-based social psychological explanations in explaining the black-white marriage gap in young adulthood and at older ages. The documented persistent experiences of racial discrimination that drive unequal access to goods and services, and shape perceptions of manhood and womanhood, likely influence entry into marriage for blacks. Perceptions of unfair treatment because of race could lead to negative outcomes for whites as well, although widespread discrimination against whites is not supported with systematic empirical evidence (e.g. Mustillo et al. 2004). Although whites are not frequently thought of in terms of race and ethnicity, critical race theorists would posit that whites do occupy a racial category, albeit a privileged one. As such, whether and how whites think of themselves in racial terms is important for sociological research. Further, given contemporary accusations by some whites of reverse discrimination, an examination of how social psychological factors due to perceived race-based discrimination differentially shape romantic relationships for blacks and whites is warranted and addressed in this research.

The intersectionality perspective highlights the junctions among systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination (Crenshaw 1989). Using the intersectionality lens, race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status are typically linked to a person's social status, and by extension, her or his access to advantages and disadvantages. An individual's romantic relationship status is also related to access to advantages and disadvantages because marriage is supported as a permanent union by law, culture, religion, and community. For example, there are special tax breaks for the married and religious communities often encourage and laud marriage as a Godly

union. Married couples are more likely to pool their financial resources (Lauer and Yodanis 2011) and benefit from the social support of their spouse (Cutrona 1996).

The influence of romantic relationships for individuals can be better understood by examining them through a prism that highlights the intersection with gender, race, and educational attainment. Gender organizes heterosexual romantic unions by placing women and men in an unequal relationship to one another (Risman 2004). The gendered schemas that create and perpetuate unequal romantic relationships are also racialized. Black women who enact the role of wife in a society organized around white advantage must perform a uniquely raced and gendered role. For example, Roxburgh (2014) found that the benefits of marriage for health are not consistent across race, gender, and class. She finds that marriage is associated with better physical health for low income whites but not blacks.

The life course perspective highlights the social expectations linked to each portion of the life course. During young adulthood, it is expected that a person completes schooling, starts a career, and engages in romantic relationships followed by the transition to marriage and parenthood (Elder 1994; Carpenter 2010). Additionally, other tasks to be completed during early adulthood include establishing a positive self-concept, identity, and overall life stability. Research shows that simply forming an emotional connection to a romantic partner provides an important social identity, contributes to positive self-conception, and is a source of social integration during young adulthood (Montgomery 2005; Meirer and Allen 2009). However, across the life course, there is the possibility of variation in the meaning and emotional significance of singlehood, marriage, cohabitation and dating.

The stress process model is comprised of the following central components: stressors, interpersonal or psychosocial resources, and outcomes (Pearlin et al. 1981; Pearlin 1999; Ida and

Christie-Mizell 2012; Dagadu and Christie-Mizell 2014). Stressors (i.e., challenges to the individual's adaptive capability) stem from a person's position in the social structure and from her or his occupation of social roles. Stressors may be discrete or chronic. Discrete strains are ongoing issues in daily life and chronic strains are more sudden but occur against a backdrop of ongoing role strains. Interpersonal resources emanate from the social psychology of the individual and serve as mediators (i.e., indirectly prevents the effects of a stressor) or moderators (i.e., through interaction lessens the detrimental impact of a stressor) in the stress process model. Outcomes serve as the third component of the stress process model. An outcome is the status of the individual on some chosen measure of well-being after accounting for the interplay between stressors and interpersonal resources.

The strength of the stress process framework lies in the attention to how structural factors impact individual well-being. A person's social status has the potential to be linked to stressors, psychosocial resources, and well-being outcomes. The stress process model links race, gender, and socioeconomic status to stressors and psychosocial resources of the individual, which then impact health and well-being outcomes. Differential exposure to stressors due to differences in romantic relationship status, race, gender, and educational attainment produce inequalities in psychosocial resources, which then leads to disparities in mental and physical health (Thoits 2010). Psychosocial mechanisms (e.g., self-esteem and mastery) could moderate the relationship between stressors and well-being or act as a mechanism through which the association works to reduce inequalities in health outcomes.

In this research, I first investigate the role of perceived racial discrimination and racial salience in influencing marriage rates for blacks and whites. I then examine how race, gender, and educational attainment are linked with various romantic unions to differentially impact self-

esteem, mastery, mental health, and physical health. I begin with an examination across age when studying how perceived racial discrimination and racial salience are related to the gap in marriage rates between black and whites. Then, I narrow my focus to the young adult period of the life course to understand the consequences of marriage, cohabiting, monogamously dating, and remaining single on self-concept and health. I include a focus on how a person's social position, related to intimate relationship type, race, gender, and educational attainment impact self-concept and health to better understand how health and well-being disparities are maintained and reinforced. Instead of working in a linear fashion – tracing the effects of a person's social position through psychosocial mediators (or as moderators) to outcomes – I examine the effect of social positions on psychosocial resources and health outcomes, separately. My goal here is to link social status to the second and third components of the stress process model before analyzing psychosocial resources as mediators or moderators in future work.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS, SELF-CONCEPT, AND HEALTH

The formation and maintenance of a positive self-concept is a key developmental task during the transition into adulthood (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, and Potter 2002; Mirowsky and Ross 2007). Self-concept refers to how individuals conceptualize herself or himself as an object (Demo 1992). Self-esteem and mastery are two evaluative dimensions of self-concept that are commonly studied in social science research. Self-esteem is a global appraisal of how positively a person feels about their self (Stets and Burke 2014). Mastery (also known as self-efficacy or personal control) is defined as the amount of control that one perceives over the immediate environment and important outcomes in life (Bandura 1977; Pearlin et al. 1981). The extant research shows that both self-esteem (Robins et al. 2002) and mastery (Mirowsky and Ross 2007) increase from adolescence to young adulthood (Robins et al. 2002;

Mirowsky and Ross 2007) Furthermore, self-esteem and mastery can level off or decline as young people face new challenges in the early part of adulthood, but soon rebounds to higher levels as individuals age into later adulthood and middle age (Lewis, Ross, and Mirowsky 1999).

Self-esteem and mastery are considered psychosocial resources in the stress process model. A positive self-concept has direct impacts on mental health as well as indirect effects by reducing the negative impact of stressors (Turner and Lloyd 2004; Pudrovska et al. 2005; Pearlin et al. 2007; Thoits 2010). The influence of a positive self-concept has also been shown to beneficially impact physical health. Christie-Mizell, Ida, and Keith (2010) show that self-esteem is negatively associated with physical health limitations and the association is mediated by happiness.

Health is the absence of illness and complete mental, physical and social well-being. Self-reports of depressive symptomatology and a rating of general health are commonly used in social science research to study health-related symptoms and well-being (Christie-Mizell, Steelman, and Stewart 2003; Christie-Mizell, Leslie, and Hearne 2017). Reported signs and symptoms of depressive affect is used to evaluate mental health and assess levels of generalized distress (Ida and Christie-Mizell 2012). Self-rated general health has been found to be correlated with emotionally and physical well-being as well as physicians' assessment of health and health behaviors like drinking and smoking (see Bombak 2013).

The study of health outcomes like depressive symptoms and self-rated general health in social science research uncovers how social phenomena shape individuals' lifelong well-being and eventual mortality. Depressive symptoms have been shown to increase as adolescents transition into young adulthood (Wickrama, Conger, Lorenz, and Jung 2008). Prolonged experiences of depressive affect have been shown to decrease the ability to cope with later life

stresses (Thoits 2013). Young adults typically exhibit good overall health and signs of less-than-good health during young adulthood is indicative of later health problems. Rapid technological changes, economic challenges, and the prolonged transition to adulthood appear to be contributing to the health problems of young adults by increasing generalized distress while also making them less likely to participate in work and family roles that could decrease risk taking behaviors (Arnett 2007).

The Contemporary Delay in Marriage

Explanations for the delay into and shift away from marriage are largely cultural and economic (see Cherlin 2005 for a review). Culturally, American marriage has undergone two broad transitions during the twentieth century. The first was a change from institutional to companionship marriage. In institutional marriage, the family was held together by the forces of law, tradition, and religious belief. Companionate marriage arose in the early decades of the twentieth century. It was founded on the importance of the emotional ties between wife and husband — i.e., their companionship, friendship, and romantic love. Beginning in the 1960s, there was a transformation from companionship to what may be called "individualized marriage." People began to evaluate how satisfied they were with their marriage in terms of their own sense of self. Being married became less of a required adult role and more of an individual achievement. When young adults transition into individualized marriage it is a symbol of successful self-development. The second transformation of marriage is also sometimes discussed as the Second Demographic Transition, in which cohabitation rates have risen, nonmarital childbearing has increased, and young adults postpone marriage (Lesthaeghe 1998).

The cultural transformations in marriage hold true for blacks and whites, although the consequences are sometimes unequal. In a survey conducted in twenty-one cities, African

Americans rated the importance of emotional benefits of marriage, such as friendship, sex life, leisure time, and a sense of security as highly as whites (Burton and Tucker 2009). Finding a compatible partner likely benefits from wide and supportive social networks, which is associated with higher levels of education (Kao and Joyner 2004; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006). Yet, the opportunity of increased educational attainment is not equally attainable across social statuses and identities (see Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008). That is, achieving the new standards of marriage –emotional satisfaction, self-development, and gender-equality – requires resources that are not equally distributed across race, gender, or socioeconomic status (McLanahan 2004; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Brashears 2006).

The unequal ability to achieve the newer standards of marriage has been referred to as the diverging destinies thesis (McLanahan 2004). The diverging destinies thesis contends that economic and other institutional forces condition the influence of ideational change, such that the socially and economically disadvantaged do not have the resources to meet these new demands of marriage. As a result of changing cultural meanings attached to marriage and diverging destinies, marriage rates are unequal across stratifying factors and young people are increasingly choosing to engage in non-martial relationships or remain single. Further, because the path to marriage requires access to resources, the advantages that come along with marriage may compound with already existing resources and advantages to confer unequal benefits for individual outcomes, like self-concept and health.

Researchers have outlined structural changes that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s – i.e., the technology revolution, the sexual revolution, the women's movement, and the youth movement (see Silva 2012 and Arnett 2007) – that have led to adjustments in how young people navigate into and through young adulthood. These structural changes are thought to be

responsible for the shift toward individualized marriage (Arnett 2007). The technology revolution refers to a wave of technological innovation that reshaped the U.S. from a manufacturing economy to a service economy. Information, skills, and technology are all critical for a service economy and as such, post-secondary education is extremely valuable. The sexual revolution has made it more acceptable to engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage (Treas 2002) and the women's movement has afforded girls and women greater opportunities to establish personal stability instead of relying primarily on marriage for security. The youth movement changed the meaning and significance of reaching adulthood and emphasized the joy of youthfulness and the avoidance of adopting adult roles early in young adulthood (Arnett 2007).

Each of these social and structural events have led to a contemporary young adulthood period that deviates markedly from the 1950s and prior. Further, the increased emphasis on completing more education in order to thrive in a service economy, to then transition into marriage, has contributed to the increase in non-marital relationships or remaining single for men and women (Silva 2012). Cohabiting and monogamously dating provides an avenue to engage in an intimate relationship while allowing for time to acquire necessary resources for marriage and family. Remaining single permits more freedom from the responsibilities of a romantic relationship and also allows for time to accomplish goals that are in line with transitioning into marriage and family.

Scholars have also emphasized the effect of women's economic independence on the choice to marry (see Risman 2004; England 2012). Major changes in women's labor force participation, educational attainment, and earnings have diminished the influence of previously valued exchanges in mate selection (see Oppenheimer 1997; Cherlin 2010 for reviews). The

receipt of public economic assistance has also been shown to be related to ever marrying for black and white women (Lichter, LeClere, and McLaughlin 1991). Further, the reduction of manufacturing jobs has meant that men without college degrees are less able to earn sufficient wages to support marriage and a family, which, in turn, makes them less attractive in the marriage market (Cherlin 2005). In addition to the overall changing structure of work, black people also face racial discrimination in the labor market making it more difficult to secure a job (Wilson 2008; 2009).

Another view regarding the widespread delay in marriage, primarily among the economically disadvantaged, is that men "do gender" in compensation for low earning power (England and Edin 2007). According to this line of thought, when men cannot live up to relational and society expectations to financially provide they display socially defined markers of masculinity. Markers of masculinity may be through violence (sometimes against women), sexual conquests (which may involve infidelity), and "hanging out with the guys" (England and Edin 2007; Edin and Kefalas 2011). These behaviors are not desirable to women looking to marry and, therefore, delay or end marriages. However, "doing gender" as compensatory is refuted in Linnenberg's (2007) work.

Race and Gender in Marriage

Research supports that race is predictive of marriage. In a review of marriage by race and ethnicity, Raley, Sweeney, and Wondra (2015) show that blacks are less likely to be married across education, age, and income. By age 40, black women are less likely to have ever been married compared to women of other races (Aughinbaugh, Robles, and Sun. 2013). Additonally, while middle-class blacks are more likely to be married than blacks of lower socioeconomic

classes, they are still less likely to be married than middle-class whites (Aughinbaugh, Robles, and Sun 2013).

Although there have been debates spanning recent decades, social scientists have not fully accounted for the gap in black-white marriage rates. The lingering negative impact of slavery on black families has been offered as a plausible explanation but is often challenged in the face of historical trends which show that black people married at similar rates as whites in the early 20th century (Wilson and Neckerman 1987; Coles 2006). A cultural lack of desirability and value placed on monogamous marriage by blacks has also been debated (South 1993). This view is largely unsupported. Instead, it has been found that structural rather than cultural reasons better explain the racial gap in marriage (Saasler and Schoen 1999). Additionally, in spite of stronger structural arguments, stereotypes and popular media often advance the view that the domineering nature of black women themselves may be largely to blame for the low marriage rates of blacks (Jones 2006; Craig-Henderson 2017).

The gendered structure of the marriage market is offered as a strong explanation for the gap in marriage rates between blacks and whites. Research suggests that there is an imbalanced gender ratio between compatible black men and women due to structural realities faced by black men and women. In other words, black women are interested in a shrinking supply of black men in the marriage market as a result of the disadvantaged educational and economic realities for black men (Wilson 2009), the disproportionate incarceration rate of black men (Farley and Allen 1987; Pettit and Western 2004; Pettit 2012), interracial marriage among black men (Crowder and Tolnay 2000), and black women's reluctance to marry non-black men (Crowder and Tolnay 2000; Banks 2011). The increased education and economic status of black women, combined with disparate economic conditions for black males, has meant that black women are more likely

to be unmarried compared to all other race-gender groups in America. In fact, it has been found that three out of ten black women never marry (Fry and Cohn 2010).

The newer economic and cultural changes around marriage are also gender-specific. For example, while it is desirable for women to contribute regular earnings in marriage, it is typically required for men. In a 2014 national survey, seventy-eight percent of never-married women versus forty-six percent of never-married men said it would be important that their spouse or partner to have a steady job (Wang and Parker 2014). Education contributes to a person's attractiveness on the marriage market in a gendered fashion. Although both men and women want to marry someone with more education than themselves, men are more willing to marry someone with less education (Raley and Bratter 2004).

Housework, or unpaid work, continues to be primarily the domain of women (England 2010). The responsibility of unpaid work at home means that occupational autonomy is important for entry into marriage. Kuo and Raley (2016) find that work autonomy facilitates entry into marriage for women and not men, which is likely related to the extra time allowed for housework. Work autonomy is more likely with increases in education, which requires the advantage of time and resources to complete more schooling. As such, women who do not have the benefit of work autonomy may take longer to marry.

Largely absent from research that focuses on the black-white marriage gap is the acknowledgement that race, gender, and class are intersecting categories that have an influential impact on romantic unions for all people. For example, white women are able to trade in on their racial status to marry more highly desirable white or black men (Gullickson 2006). Black women are likely to be excluded by white men as potential dating partners due to racialized images of femininity (Feliciano, Robnett, and Komaie 2009). Black women are the least likely to

interracially marry (Crowder and Tolnay 2000) and are more likely to marry a man with less education compared to white women because of the larger gender gap in educational attainment among blacks (Chiappori, Salanié, and Weiss 2017). Further, the rewards of earning more education creates a third axis that intersects with the axes of race and gender to pave unique roads into marriage.

Remaining Single and Non-Marital Romantic Relationships

Changing cultural norms and economic realities have decreased the aversion to being single and increased the probability of cohabitation. Not every young adult is involved in a committed romantic relationship and some people prefer to be single (DePaulo and Morris 2005). There is a rising number of single young adults who are heading their own households. After remaining near 5% for the first half of the twentieth century, the percentage of 20 to 29-year-old unmarried individuals who were heading their own households rose to 36% for women and 28% for men in 2000 (Rosenfeld 2007).

Increases in educational attainment among young people is a leading cause of longer singlehood (Musick, Brand, and Davis 2012). With a sample of college aged adults, Bay-Cheng and Goodkind (2016) found that young women were enthusiastic about being single and emphasized singlehood as being free from stressors that differed by socioeconomic class. Klinenberg (2013) argues that the rise in singles living alone is related to explanations for the increasing delay in marriage – education and income (the ability to afford to live alone) and values like individualism. Marsh and her colleagues (2007) show that black women who choose to be single and live alone are highly educated and are a rapidly increasing portion of the black middle-class.

Cohabitation today is a diverse, evolving phenomenon. While middle-class people may include cohabitation as part of their life trajectory, most do not plan to substitute cohabitation for marriage (Manning, Longmore, and Giordano 2007). Instead, cohabitation is a prelude to marriage or a trial marriage. Yet, for others, a series of cohabiting relationships may be a long-term substitute for marriage (Bumpass and Lu 2000). Manning and Smock (2005) found that when a decision is made to cohabit, the issue often has little to do with whether to marry or not, but rather it centers on whether to cohabit or remain single.

Cohabitation rates vary by socioeconomic class, race, and gender. According to data on women age 19 to 44 in the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, nearly two thirds of those with a high school degree or less had ever cohabited (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008). Among those with some college education but without a four-year degree, nearly half had cohabited, and among those with four-year degrees, 45% had cohabited (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008). While both black and whites cohabit, blacks are more likely to cohabit because of the strong correlation with class. Low-income people are more likely to cohabit (Bumpass and Lu 2000). As such, whites are less likely to cohabit compared to blacks because they are less likely to experience economic deprivation. Further, marriage offers more stability relative to cohabitation for whites and blacks (Osborne, Manning, and Smock 2007). Whites are also more likely to transition into marriage from cohabitation (Manning and Smock 2005; Smock and Greenland 2010).

Much of the research literature regarding romantic relationships focus on how singlehood and cohabiting compare to marriage. The research findings have been informative, but these studies have over looked the category of monogamously dating (for exceptions see Ross 1995; Simon and Barrett 2010). Many times, monogamously dating young adults are lumped into the single category. Combining these two statuses ignores how contemporary romantic relationships

are evolving and the impact of being a part of a romantic union. Ross (1995) finds that irrespective of cohabitation status, romantically involved adults are less depressed than their romantically uninvolved peers. The use of steady daters as a comparison group also allows for better understandings of how romantic relationships outside of cohabitation and marriage differ by race and gender.

Researchers sometimes refer to monogamously dating people who do not cohabit as "living apart together" (LAT). Strohm, Seltz, Cochran, and Mays (2009) argue that LAT is also a part of the second demographic transition, alongside rising cohabitation rates and delayed marriage. In their study, Strohm and colleagues (2009) find that women and men in LAT unions are younger than the married, are almost twice as likely to have a college degree as those in cohabiting unions (33% vs. 18% for women; 29% vs. 16% for men), and closely resemble single people who have never been married with respect to race, age, and education. The authors conclude that LAT unions are heterogeneous and like cohabiting unions, are not always a stepping stone to marriage.

CONTRIBUTION

Changes in the path to and through young adulthood for contemporary young people, and the consequent diverse romantic relationships they engage in, have been shown to effect self-concept and health. Romantic relationship patterns, self-concept, and health vary by race, gender, and educational attainment. In spite of everything that is known about romantic relationships, self-concept, and health, it is not understood whether perceptions of racial discrimination and high racial salience contributes to the black-white marriage gap. When considerinf self-concept or health as outcomes of interest, in the few studies in which monogamously dating has been included in comparison to marriage, race and gender comparisons were absent. Additionally, the

extant research has not shown how educational attainment may moderate or modify the impact of each romantic relationship status on self-concept and health for blacks and whites.

I address gaps in the literature by first examining how perceived racial discrimination and racial salience influence the odds of marriage for blacks and whites. The contribution to the literature lies in the attention to how marriage rates may also be shaped by the experience of race and discrimination. Secondly, I investigate whether self-concept – mastery and self-esteem – is differentially impacted by relationship status for blacks and whites by level of education. Lastly, I examine how the influence of romantic relationships on mental and physical health may differ along the axes of race, gender, and level of educational attainment. The inclusion of the joint impact of race, gender, and education gives a clearer picture of whether marriage confers the same benefits across these axes and how non-marital relationships and remaining single compare.

The contributions to the literature also include the use of nationally representative longitudinal data. In all three studies, I use nationally representative data. As such, I am able to generalize the results to American blacks and whites. The use of longitudinal data in the second and third studies also contributes to the research literature. Changes and differences in self-esteem, mastery, and health during the transition to adulthood is adequately considered with longitudinal data. Further, because young people are adjusting to the new expectations of adulthood, capturing changes in romantic relationships and educational attainment with longitudinal data is critical.

CHAPTER II

Racial Discrimination and Marriage: The Role of Perceived Racial Discrimination and High Racial Salience in the Black-White Marriage Gap

ABSTRACT

Many of the explanations offered for delayed marriage and the black-white marriage gap are economic and cultural. Less often considered are how race and social psychological factors influence marriage rates. In this study, critical race theory and the life course perspective are used to investigate how perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience impact the likelihood of marriage for blacks and whites. Data for the study are taken from the Portraits of American Life Survey (N=668). The results of logistic regression analyses show that among people who report perceived racial discrimination, whites have a higher probability of being married compared to blacks. Further, analyses by age clarify that the results hold true for those forty years old or older but not younger people. The findings highlight the importance of considering perceptions of racial discrimination to better understand the black-white marriage gap across age. Additionally, the findings underscore how perceptions of racial discrimination operate for whites despite their advantaged racial position.

INTRODUCTION

Research has drawn attention to the decline in marriage among blacks compared to whites. Raley, Sweeney, and Wondra (2015) show that in 2012, the percentage of black women and men, between the ages of 40 to 44, who had ever married was 62.4% and 65.3%, respectively. For whites, 87.9% of women and 81.6% of men had ever married by the same age. The racial gap in marriage shortens when controlling for socioeconomic status, including education, but remains nonetheless (see Aughinbaugh, Robles, and Sun. 2013; U.S. Census Bureau 2017).

The black-white marriage gap has captured the attention of many researchers. Yet, marriage rates have declined for blacks and whites. The rise in inequality and the consequent inaccessibility of marriage for many people has led to an overall decrease in marriage for black and white Americans (McLanahan 2004). As marriage has declined, researchers are interested in uncovering the underlying causes or correlates. For whites and blacks, explanations range from cultural (e.g., overly individualistic society) to economic (e.g., lack of access to financial stability to support marriage) (Wilson 2009). Unique structural marriage market factors among blacks are often offered for the lower likelihood of marriage for blacks compared to whites – e.g., declining employment prospects and rising incarceration rates for unskilled black men (Pettit and Western 2004; Wilson 2009).

Social psychological factors, such as perceived racial discrimination and having to thinking about your race daily (hereafter referred to as high racial salience), are not frequently offered as reasons for decreased odds of marriage for blacks compared to whites. The experience of being black or white shapes life chances and family formation (for a review see Burton et al. 2010). Researchers have investigated the many consequences of prejudice and discrimination for

racial minorities, but aside from marital quality and interracial relationships, little work has focused on interpersonal outcomes like the odds of marriage. Racial discrimination and the pressure to consistently consider one's race in daily life may be negatively related to the likelihood of marriage. A person's age may also shape the consequences of racial discrimination and racial salience on the odds of marriage. Research shows that responses to racial discrimination change and develop over time (Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams 1999; Brody et at. 2006).

In this paper, I investigate how perceptions of race-based unfair treatment influence the odds of marriage for blacks compared to whites. Additionally, I examine whether high racial salience impacts the probability of marriage. Differences by age are also considered. This study contributes to the research literature by considering the role of psychological factors for marriage and is important for understanding marriage and family for three reasons.

First, black-white variation in marriage rates is not completely explained with economic or marriage market arguments (Raley and Sweeney 2009). The unexplained difference in black-white marriage rates indicate a need to examine other reasons, like how perceived discrimination and racial salience influence the likelihood of being married for both groups. Second, marriage is an avenue of achieving financial, legal, health, and social benefits that accumulate over time. Understanding what factors contribute to the black-white marriage gap is a step toward dismantling other racial inequalities, such as wealth and health disparities.

Third, although it is uncommon for whites to report high racial salience as a part of their identity (see Bush 2004), it is important to understand how those who do differ from blacks and other whites (see Lewis 2004). Black-white health and well-being disparities, housing discrimination, and wealth differences justify the need to consistently think about race and

perceive racial discrimination among blacks. However, some white people do report perceptions of racial discrimination. Perceptions have consequences for individual outcomes. Although blacks have greater empirical justifications for perceiving race-based discrimination compared to whites, it is important to understand how perceived race-based unfair treatment shape marriage rates for both groups.

BACKGROUND AND THEORY

This study is guided by critical race theory and the life course framework. Critical race scholars posit that race is a social construction that shapes life to allow for significant disparities based on categorical understandings of race (see Yosso and Solórzano 2005; Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Scholars using the critical race lens maintain that white privilege, a system of advantage based on race, is widespread and whites benefit both materially and psychologically (Lewis 2004). Assertions of "reverse discrimination" towards whites are argued against and are thought to be based in fallacies using the critical race framework. Tatum (1997, p.8) stated that "[d]espite the current rhetoric about affirmative action and 'reverse racism,' every social indicator, from salary to life expectancy, reveals the advantages of being white." Yet, understanding how perceptions of racial discrimination and high racial salience impact life experiences for blacks and whites is of interest to race scholars. In their review of whiteness studies, McDermott and Samson (2005) posit that scholars cannot fully understand the existence of racism and racial inequality without studying the formation, maintenance, and consequences of white racial identity.

Researchers have examined the influence of perceived racial discrimination on relationship quality for blacks and find a negative relationship (Lincoln and Chae 2010; Doyle and Molix 2014). The negative effect of racial discrimination on relationship quality may suggest

that those who are unmarried and perceive racial discrimination, or frequently contemplate their race, will be less likely to transition into marriage. Also related to relationship quality, Chambers and Kravitz (2011), in their review of both structural and psychological reasons for the low marriage rates for blacks, posit that blacks are discouraged from showing vulnerability, due to a history of racism and betrayal. The avoidance of vulnerability is related to the notion that black people represent the entire racial group and to satisfy this responsibility successfully one must maintain strength and consider race across situations. The discouragement of vulnerability may operate as a psychological constraint against marrying because of poor relationship quality and the prevention of full trust in one's romantic partner (Chambers and Kravitz 2011).

The life course refers to pathways through the age-differentiated lifespan (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003). Historically, the life course has been thought of in specific sequential steps – e.g., when youth transition into adulthood they first establish economic independence followed by marriage and then parenthood. This notion of a normative sequential life course ignores the reality that people experience life differently depending on their position in the social structure. The life course framework allows for variations in the sequencing of life events by a number of social factors. By using the life course perspective, researchers are able to consider that as a result of differing social positions in society – a result of multiple intersecting identities including race, gender, and socioeconomic class – people transition through life at different paces.

People are expected to satisfy age-appropriate social roles while simultaneously adapting to handle exposures to racial bias in new social institutions (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003). Fulfilling expected social roles and responsibilities while also navigating and avoiding race-based discrimination is distressing (Gee, Walsemann, and Brondolo 2012). Adapting or coping

with unfair treatment is rarely easy but is learned over time and through experience (i.e., through racial socialization) (Feagin and Sikes 1994; Utsey et al. 2000; Shorter-Gooden 2004). Perceptions regarding race and unfair treatment and the subsequent reactions are likely to change across different ages (Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams 1999; Brody et at. 2006). Precisely how responses to perceived racial discrimination changes is not well-documented. While older adults are more likely to be married, it is conceivable that romantic relationships may suffer due to perceived discrimination and high racial salience so that people do not to transition into marriage even at older ages.

Delaying marriage

The transition into marriage is occurring at later ages for blacks compared to whites. Delayed entry into marriage is related to both economic and cultural factors. For example, black men face high levels of discrimination in educational settings and in the labor market, often making it difficult to meet the cultural demand that a husband earn more money than his wife (Wilson 2009). Black women are the least likely to marry outside of their race (Banks 2011) meaning that a greater number of black women are interested in a shrinking pool of eligible black men. The intersection of race, gender, and poverty make the prospect of marriage even more bleak for poor black women (see Carlson and England 2011; Edin, Nelson, and Reed 2011). Despite educational and economic disparities for blacks, research suggests that blacks want to marry and do marry at older ages (Aughinbaugh, Robles, and Sun 2013). Yet, even at older ages whites are more likely to be married compared to blacks (Raley Sweeney, Wondra 2015).

Marriage rates are of interest because the benefits of marriage are well-documented (Cutrona 1996; Frech and Williams 2007; Liu and Umberson 2008). As individuals adapt to

adult roles and expectations, entering into a marital union is largely considered a symbolic achievement (Cherlin 2004). Married people have better health outcomes (Waite and Gallagher 2001), experience greater social and psychological support (Cutrona 1996) and are more economically stable (Waite and Lehrer 2003). Marriages among blacks that are characterized by high satisfaction protect against the psychological distress possibly catalyzed by race-based unfair treatment (Lincoln and Chae 2010). Healthy marriage promotes the financial, social, familial, and psychological well-being of blacks even in the face of structural disadvantages within black communities (Chambers and Kravitz 2011). Lastly, although marriage is delayed by all groups, working class and poor whites are more likely to marry earlier (Uecker and Stokes 2008). Poor whites also tend to be the subgroup of whites more likely to report experiences of racial discrimination (McDermott and Samson 2005).

Perceptions of racial discrimination

Perceptions of discrimination often lead to undesirable outcomes. Researchers have found an association between perceptions of discrimination and lower mastery and higher psychological distress (Broman, Mavaddat, and Hsu 2000), neither of which are beneficial for romantic relationships (see Chambers and Kravitz 2011). Additionally, the form, frequency, and response to racial discrimination may change with age (see Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams 1999). Social expectations associated with each segment of the life course means that as black people age they encounter discrimination in a certain order – e.g., first in educational settings, afterward in their career, then in the housing market, and finally in retirement (see Pager and Shepherd 2008). Lastly, experiences and responses to racial discrimination are gendered (see Wingfield 2007). Black men report greater perceptions of racial discrimination than black

women but, Ifatunji and Harnois (2016) argue that this could be related to the measurement of discrimination.

Scholars have also examined the influence of perceived racial discrimination among whites. Researchers have included blacks' and whites' report of perceived racial discrimination to study black-white disparities in mental health (Taylor and Turner 2002), physical health (Krieger and Sidney 1996), and attachment to organization of employment (Stainback and Irvin 2012). For blacks and whites, perceptions of discrimination typically have negative consequences for individual outcomes. Across the studies that include whites' perceptions of racial discrimination, the findings show that the undesirable consequences are greater for blacks. Yet, it is not clear if blacks and whites report of perceived discrimination would operate differently to impact odds of marriage.

Racial Salience

Race is a social identity and racial salience refers to the frequency with which individuals think about their racial group membership. Racial salience along with the level of importance of race comprise the cognitive centrality of race for an individual (Sellers, Chavous, and Cook 1998). Race is likely to become more salient for a person as they become more aware of racial group differences (Cameron 2004) and the frequency of thoughts about race has been used to assess racial climate (Harris, Cormack, Stanley, and Rameka 2015). Researchers have found that racial salience is associated with increased perceptions of race-based discrimination (Hurtado, Alvarado, Guillermo-Wann 2015). Depending on how a person thinks about their race, she or he can develop negative or positive views about their chances of success or failure toward goals, like marriage (see Tatum 1997 for an educational achievement example). Yet, high racial salience could be positive for relationships if it is a characteristic of high esteem regarding one's

racial group (see Demo and Hughes 1990). While high racial salience could be both positive and negative, in line with research that suggest high racial salience is a measure of negative racial climate, I argue that the pressure to consider race constantly prevents a transition into marriage.

Black people are confronted with race daily. Frequent confrontations with racial experiences contribute to the salience of race for blacks (Demo and Hughes 1990; Feagin and Sikes 1994). Hurtado and her colleagues (2015) find that across educational institution type, like other historically underrepresented groups, blacks think about their race more than white students (see also Steck, Heckert, and Heckert 2003). Benjamin, Choi, and Strickland (2010), in an experimental study, report that when race becomes more salient for blacks they become more risk averse or exercise more patience when making decisions. In the few studies of how racial identity influence dating and marriage, racial identity is linked to skin tone to impact dating marital preferences (e.g., Rockquemore 2002). Whether racial salience is directly related to odds of marriage is unclear and furthermore there is little guidance on whether it would lessen or heighten the odds of marriage, but from the extant research, it is plausible that as racial salience increases blacks may use more patience before transitioning into marriage.

White identity tends to be the taken-for-granted racial category in sociological research because of the assumption that whites do not need to think about their race in their daily lives (see Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; McKinney 2013). Bush (2004) found that white college students think about their racial identities less than black students and the same white students did not believe that race had impacted their lives significantly. Hartmann and his colleagues (2009) found that whites were less likely to place importance on their race compared to blacks, but the researchers also posit that race is more salient for whites than many other scholars have suggested. Similarly, Lewis (2004) contends that despite the trend of color-

blindness, whites do experience race and their experiences should be examined. Lewis suggests that to better understand the role of race in shaping whites' life chances, sociological research needs to move beyond simply asking whites about their views of other racial groups and instead should begin to focus on the role of whites' own racial subjectivities. Along the same vein, McDermott and Samson (2005) propose that as the racial makeup of the U.S. continues to change, and whites become a numerical minority, examinations of white racial identity and the consequences for life experiences is becoming more important.

SUMMARY AND HYPOTHESES

Perceived racial discrimination and racial salience shape the lives of blacks and whites. Scholars tend to reveal negative outcomes for blacks and whites when considering the role of perceived racial discrimination for individual outcomes, with the negative impact being greater for blacks. It is argued that high racial salience increases the need to hide vulnerabilities among blacks and is linked to relationship quality. Further, scholars have proposed that to better understand the influence of race and discrimination in the U.S., there needs to be more work to uncover how perceptions of racial discrimination and racial salience influence the life chances and experiences of whites. In this paper, I address the following research questions:

1. How does perceived racial discrimination influence the odds of marriage for blacks compared to whites?
2. How does high racial salience impact the odds of marriage for blacks compared to whites?
3. Do the effects of perceived racial discrimination and racial salience on the odds of marriage for blacks and whites differ by age?

I use critical race theory and the life course framework to guide this research and interpret the findings. The critical race framework highlights the influence of race and racism in shaping life chances, including marriage and family formation. The life course theory is useful for considering how social positions (related to race, gender, and socioeconomic status) impact transitions through, and social expectations associated with, each age-differentiated segment of the life course. In addition to shedding light on how race-based factors influence the odds of marriage for blacks and whites, this study contributes to the research literature with the use of nationally representative data. With these data, I am able to generalize the findings to the U.S. population. Informed by the relevant research and theory, the analyses test the following hypotheses:

H1a-b: (a) Perceived racial discrimination and (b) high racial salience are negatively related to the odds of marriage.

H2: Among those who report perceived racial discrimination, the probability of being married is higher for whites compared to blacks.

H3: Among those who report high racial salience, the probability of being married is higher for whites compared to blacks.

Recall that I also proposed that age might make a difference in the relationships among perceived racial discrimination, racial salience, and the odds of marriage. I test this possibility by considering whether the findings differ for two subsamples: those younger than forty and those forty years old and older.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data

Data for this study were drawn from the Portraits of American Life Survey (PALS). The PALS is a multi-level panel study that, among a wider focus on religion, includes an emphasis on capturing ethnic and racial diversity in the United States. The target population for the study is civilian, non-institutionalized persons in the U.S. who are at least 18 years of age at wave one (2006). Ethnic and racial minorities were oversampled for the PALS survey data.

Measures

Measures for this study were drawn from the second wave (2012) of PALS when the respondents were between the ages of 24 and 80 years old. Wave two consist of 1,417 respondents, 1,314 of which were from wave one and 103 were new respondents. I narrowed the sample to include only blacks, whites, and those in their first marriage or never-married. The final subsamples used for the analyses presented here consist of 668 complete cases.

Marriage is the main dependent variable. Marriage is coded as a dummy variable (1=yes) and compared to single or cohabiting respondents. The main independent variables are perceived racial discrimination (1=yes) and high racial salience (1=yes). To measure perceived racial discrimination, respondents were asked if they could think of an occasion in the past six years in which they were treated unfairly because of their race. People who report racial discrimination are compared to those who do not. High racial salience is measured by asking how often a respondent thinks about her or his race. Those who think about their race weekly or everyday (high racial salience) are compared to those who think about their race once a month, less than monthly, or never.

In line with previous research, I control for gender, racial group identity measured as closeness to one's racial group, income, education, religiosity, and geographical residence. Examinations of gender effects show that white women are more likely to be married and black women are the least likely to be married compared to black and white men (Raley, Sweeney, and Wondra 2015). Close relationships with others from one's racial group helps to alleviate the negative impact of racial discrimination (Feagin and Sikes 1994; Stainback and Irvin 2012; Christie-Mizell, Leslie, and Hearne 2017). Higher income and education are each related to the chances and timing of marriage (Uecker and Stokes 2008; Carlson and England 2011). Religiosity and southern residence are associated with earlier marriages (Uecker and Stokes 2008).

Women (1=yes) are compared to men in the analyses. People who feel extremely or very close to their racial group (1=yes) are compared to those who do not feel at all close or only slightly close to their racial group. The data provide ordinal and dichotomous measures of income. Respondents were first asked their income as a dichotomous measure (above or below $20,000, or above or below $40,000). Then, they were then asked about their income on a more precise ordinal scale corresponding to their answer on the dichotomous scale. I used both measures to code for whether the respondent earned above $40,000 (1=yes). People who have earned an associates or vocational degree (1=yes), or who have earned a bachelor's degree or more (1 = yes), are compared to those with a high school diploma or less. Religiosity is measured as whether the respondent ever attended worship services within a year (1=yes). People who live in the south (1=yes) are compared to people who live in the West, Midwest, and Northeast.

Analytic Strategy

To test each hypothesis, I use a series of logistic regression models. Logistic regression allows me to model the odds of marriage for blacks compared to whites. To test the influence of age, I divide the sample into people between 24 and 39 years old and people 40 to 80 years old. All analyses are also weighted to correct for the oversampling of racial minorities.

In the first step of the analyses, I estimate the effects of demographic variables on the odds of marriage – i.e., race, gender, and age. Second, I estimate the effects of the independent variables – perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience – on the odds of marriage. In the third model, the impact of all demographic and independent variables are estimated. In the next model, the full model, the control variables are added. Lastly, I assess the impact of interactions between race and the independent variables. To examine differences by age, I repeat these steps after dividing the sample by those 40 years old or older and those younger than 40 years old.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the study variables. The sample consist of 668 respondents. There are 172 (25.75%) blacks and 496 (74.25%) whites. Age ranges from 24 to 80 years old with the average age being 49.10 years for the total sample. There are 223 (33.38%) people who are younger than forty years old and 445 (66.62%) people who are forty years old or older. Seventy-two percent of the sample is married. Twenty-two percent of the sample are single, and seven percent are cohabiting. Nineteen percent of respondents report perceptions of racial discrimination and twenty-five percent report high racial salience. Women are 48% of the sample.

Forty-eight percent of the sample reported feeling close to their racial group. Across the sample, 66% of people earn more than forty thousand dollars. Forty-one percent of the respondents have earned a high school diploma or less, 21% have earned an associate's degree, and 38% have earned a bachelor's or advanced degree. Seventy-three percent of the respondents attended worship services in the previous year. Finally, 34% of the sample reside in the South. There are statistically significant differences between blacks and whites across all study variables.

Table 1. Weighted Means, Percentages, and Standard Deviations for All Study Variables. Portraits of American Life Survey (2012)

	Total N=668		Blacks N=172		Whites N=496	
Variables	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Dependent Variable						
Married (1=yes)	.72	-	.49	-	.75***	-
Single (1=yes)	.22	-	.40	-	.19***	-
Cohabiting (1=yes)	.07	-	.11	-	.06***	-
Independent Variables						
Perceived Discrimination (1=yes)	.19	-	.51	-	.14***	-
High Racial Salience (1=yes)	.25	-	.50	-	.21***	-
Demographics						
Age (years)	49.10	20.16	46.00	16.61	49.60**	19.64
Female (1=yes)	.48	-	.59	-	.46***	-
Control Variables						
Close to Racial Group (1=yes)	.51	-	.72	-	.47***	-
Above $40,000 Income (1=yes)	.66	-	.43	-	.70***	-
Attends Worship Services (1=yes)	.73	-	.87	-	.71***	-
High School or Below (1=yes)	.41	-	.64	-	.37***	-
Associates or Vocational Degree (1=yes)	.21	-	.19	-	.22***	-
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (1=yes)	.38	-	.17	-	.41***	-
Southern Residence (1=yes)	.34	-	.43	-	.33***	-

Note: †p<.10; *p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 2. Odds of Marriage Regressed on Study Variables. Portraits of American Life Survey 2012 (N=668).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*
Demographics										
Black (1=yes) [a]	-1.15***	.32			-1.20***	.30	-.71†	.49	-1.06**	.35
Age (years)	.06***	1.07			.06***	1.06	.06***	1.07	.06***	1.06
Female (1=yes) [b]	-.09	.92			-.11	.90	-.09	.91	-.11	.90
Independent Variables										
Perceived Discrimination (1=yes) [c]			-.04	.96	.57†	1.76	.94*	2.56	.56†	1.75
High Racial Salience (1=yes) [d]			-.59*	.56	-.46	.63	-.52	.59	-.39	.68
Control Variables										
Close to Racial Group (1=yes) [e]					.02	1.02	.02	1.01	.01	1.01
Above $40,000 Income (1=yes) [f]					1.83***	6.25	1.92***	6.83	1.83***	6.25
Attends Worship Services (1=yes) [g]					.18	1.19	.17	1.19	.18	1.20
Associates or Vocational Degree (1=yes) [h]					-.22	.79	-.18	.83	-.23	.80
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (1=yes) [h]					-1.08**	.34	-1.08**	.34	-1.08**	.34
Southern Residence (1=yes) [i]					.37	1.45	.40†	1.49	.38	1.46
Interactions										
Black x Perceived Discrimination							-1.16†	.31		
Black x High Racial Salience									-.29	.75
Intercept	-1.78***		1.10***		-2.58***		-2.73***		-2.60***	
-2 Log Likelihood	675.49		785.62		597.88		594.16		597.61	

[a] Reference group is White
[b] Reference group is male
[c] Reference group are those who had not been treated unfairly due to their race
[d] Reference group are those who think about their race once a month, less than monthly, or never
[e] Reference group are those who feel somewhat or not at all close to others in their racial group
[f] Reference group are those who earn less than $40,000
[g] Reference group are those who never attend worship services
[h] Reference group are those with a high school diploma or less
[i] Reference group are those who reside in the Northeast, Midwest, or West
Note: †p<.10; *p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 2 shows the findings of the logistic regression models for the full sample. In the first model, the odds of marriage are lower for blacks (*O.R.*=.32), or there is a 68% lower likelihood of marriage for blacks, compared to whites. Each year increase in age is associated with a 7% greater likelihood of marriage (*O.R.*=1.07). In Model 2, people who report high racial salience have a lower chance of being married (*O.R.*=.56). In the third model, there is a lower odds of marriage for blacks (*O.R.*=.30) and each year increase in age is associated with a greater chance of marriage (*O.R.*=1.06). People who report perceived discrimination also have a higher odds of marriage (*O.R.*=1.76). Earning above $40,000 is associated with a greater chance of a marital relationship (*O.R.*=6.83) and having earned a bachelor's degree is related to lower odds of marriage (*O.R.*=.34). In the fourth model, the interaction term between black and perceived racial discrimination is statistically significant and negative. Figure 1 displays this interaction graphically. There is no relationship between high racial salience and the likelihood of marriage in the final model.

Tables 3 and 4 show the results of the analyses by age (younger and older than 40 years old). In Table 3 showing the results for younger respondents, Model 1 shows lower odds of marriage for blacks compared to whites (*O.R.*=.24). As age increases respondents have a higher chance of being married (*O.R.*=1.22). The findings in the second model do not suggest a relationship between the odds of marriage and perceived discrimination or high racial salience. In Model 3, blacks have a lower chance of being married (*O.R.*=.13) and increases in age are associate with greater odds of marriage (*O.R.*=1.25). People who earn more than $40,000 report greater odds of marriage (*O.R.*=6.77) and those with a bachelor's degree have a lower chance of marriage (*O.R.*=.20). The interaction terms in models 4 and 5 are not statistically significant.

Table 3. Odds of Marriage Regressed on Study Variables by Age for Respondents Younger than Forty Years Old. Portraits of American Life Survey 2012 (N=223).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*
Demographics										
Black (1=yes) [a]	-1.42***	.24			-2.05***	.13	-2.36**	.10	-1.99**	.14
Age (years)	.19***	1.22			.22***	1.25	.22***	1.25	.22***	1.25
Female (1=yes) [b]	.23	1.26			.26	1.29	.25	1.29	.25	1.29
Independent Variables										
Perceived Discrimination (1=yes) [c]			.16	1.18	.78	2.18	.68	1.97	.77	2.17
High Racial Salience (1=yes) [d]			-.57	.56	-.36	.70	-.33	.72	-.34	.71
Control Variables										
Close to Racial Group (1=yes) [e]					.35	1.42	.35	1.42	.35	1.42
Above $40,000 Income (1=yes) [f]					1.91***	6.77	1.88***	6.57	1.92***	6.79
Attends Worship Services (1=yes) [g]					1.35	3.88	1.36**	3.88	1.35**	3.87
Associates or Vocational Degree (1=yes) [h]					-.11	.90	-.13	.88	-.11	.90
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (1=yes) [h]					-1.61**	.20	-1.61**	.20	-1.61**	.20
Southern Residence (1=yes) [i]					-.07	.93	-.07	.94	-.07	.94
Interactions										
Black x Perceived Discrimination							.51	1.66		
Black x High Racial Salience									.12	.88
Intercept	-6.07***		.02***		-8.52***		-8.50***		-8.50***	
-2 Log Likelihood	264.89		305.17		215.42		215.23		215.41	

[a] Reference group is White
[b] Reference group is male
[c] Reference group are those who had not been treated unfairly due to their race
[d] Reference group are those who think about their race once a month, less than monthly, or never
[e] Reference group are those who feel somewhat or not at all close to others in their racial group
[f] Reference group are those who earn less than $40,000
[g] Reference group are those who never attend worship services
[h] Reference group are those with a high school diploma or less
[i] Reference group are those who reside in the Northeast, Midwest, or West
Note: $^{\dagger}p<.10$; $^{*}p<.05$; $^{**}p<.01$; $^{***}p<.001$

In Model 1 of Table 4, the results for older respondents suggest a lower odds of marriage for blacks (*O.R.*=.31). Older age is associated with increases in the odds of marriage (*O.R.*=1.03). In Model 2, high racial salience is associated with lower odds of marriage (*O.R.*=.54). In the next model, blacks have a lower odds of marriage (*O.R.*=.35) and increases in age are related to a higher chance of marriage (*O.R.*=1.04). There is a greater chance of marriage for those who have an income over $40,000 (*O.R.*=5.31), lower odds of marriage for people with a bachelor's degree (*O.R.*=.43), and residing in the southern U.S. results in a higher chance of marriage (*O.R.*=2.51). In Model 4, the interaction term between race and perceived racial discrimination is statistically significant and negative, but the interaction term between high racial salience and race is not statistically significant.

Figure 1 graphically displays the interaction between race and perceived racial discrimination for the full sample. Further examination of the differences in the probability of marriage by race depending on perceptions of racial discrimination clarifies that the substantive difference between blacks and whites is among those who report racial discrimination. Whites who report perceptions of racial discrimination have a significantly higher probability of being married compared to blacks who also report racial discrimination. The probability of marriage between blacks and whites is not significantly different among people who do not perceived racial discrimination. Further, there is no difference in odds of marriage between blacks who do or do not report racial discrimination; however, whites who report racial discrimination are significantly more likely to be married than whites who do not. Figure 2 graphically displays the interaction between race and perceived racial discrimination for people forty years old or older. The analyses described above show that the significant findings are among those who are older. As such, the findings in Figure 2 are not substantially different from the findings in Figure 1.

Table 4. Odds of Marriage Regressed on Study Variables by Age for Respondents Older than Forty Years Old. Portraits of American Life Survey 2012 (N=445).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*	*Logit*	*Odds*
Demographics										
Black (1=yes) [a]	-1.19***	.31			-1.06**	.35	-.33	.72	-.96†	.38
Age (years)	.03*	1.03			.04**	1.04	.04**	1.04	.04**	1.04
Female (1=yes) [b]	.20	.82			-.26	.77	-.22	.80	-.25	.78
Independent Variables										
Perceived Discrimination (1=yes) [c]			-.07	.93	.40	1.50	1.27†	3.55	.40	1.49
High Racial Salience (1=yes) [d]			-.61†	.54	-.53	.59	-.67	.51	-.47	.63
Control Variables										
Close to Racial Group (1=yes) [e]					-.04	.96	-.03	.97	-.34	.96
Above $40,000 Income (1=yes) [f]					1.67***	5.31	1.85***	6.38	1.67***	5.29
Attends Worship Services (1=yes) [g]					-.27	.77	-.31	.74	-.26	.77
Associates or Vocational Degree (1=yes) [h]					-.37	.69	-.29	.75	-.36	.70
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (1=yes) [h]					-.85†	.43	-.83†	.44	-.84†	.43
Southern Residence (1=yes) [i]					.92**	2.51	.97**	2.64	.92**	2.52
Interactions										
Black x Perceived Discrimination							-2.01*	.13		
Black x High Racial Salience									.23	.79
Intercept	-.10***		1.69***		-.87		-1.27		-.91	
-2 Log Likelihood	397.14		416.10		354.88		348.83		354.77	

[a] Reference group is White
[b] Reference group is male
[c] Reference group are those who had not been treated unfairly due to their race
[d] Reference group are those who think about their race once a month, less than monthly, or never
[e] Reference group are those who feel somewhat or not at all close to others in their racial group
[f] Reference group are those who earn less than $40,000
[g] Reference group are those who never attend worship services
[h] Reference group are those with a high school diploma or less
[i] Reference group are those who reside in the Northeast, Midwest, or West
Note: †p<.10; *p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

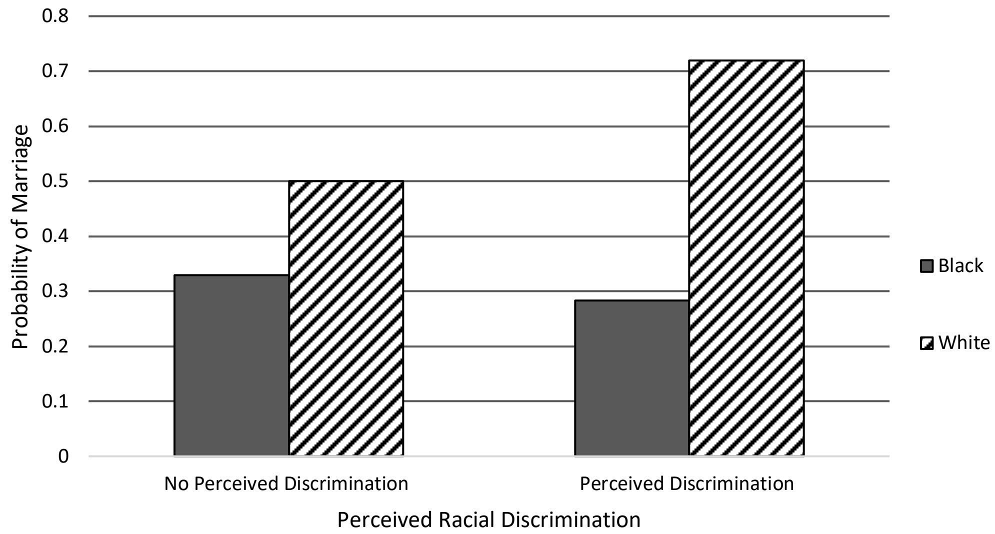
Figure 1: Probability of Marriage by Perceived Racial Discrimination for Blacks and Whites
0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
Probability of Marriage
No Perceived Discrimination
Perceived Discrimination
Perceived Racial Discrimination
Black
White

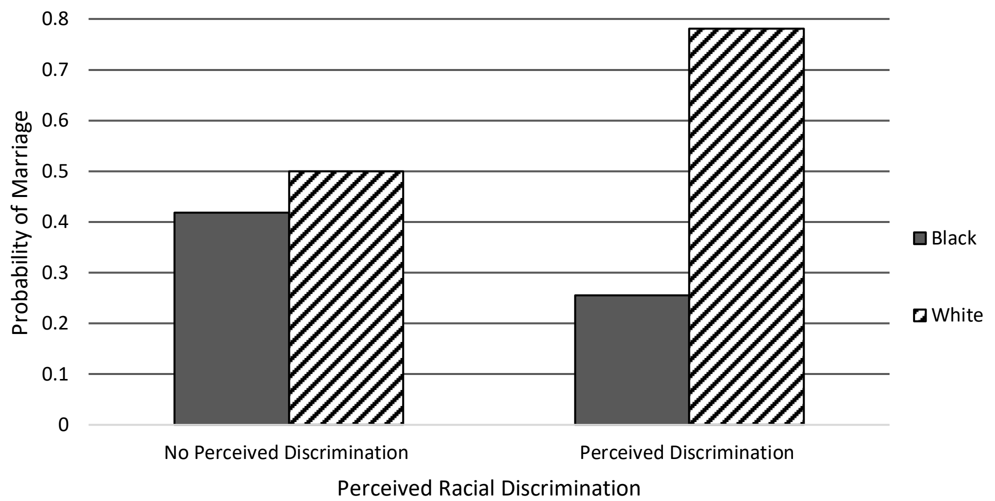
Figure 2: Probability of Marriage by Perceived Racial Discrimination for Blacks and Whites
(≥ 40 years old)
0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
Probability of Marriage
No Perceived Discrimination
Perceived Discrimination
Perceived Racial Discrimination
Black
White

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I examined the impact of perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience on the likelihood of marriage for blacks and whites. I also investigated age differences in the main relationships examined. In the full model for the total sample, contrary to hypotheses 1A and 1B, perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience are not negatively related to the likelihood of marriage. Supplemental analyses show that the significant relationship between high racial salience and marriage is no longer present after including demographic variables in the model. Or, in other words, the demographic variables more strongly explain the odds of marriage than high racial salience. Additionally, supplemental analyses show that the association between perceived racial discrimination and marriage is suppressed by the control variables.

In support of hypothesis 2, among whites and blacks who report perceived racial discrimination, whites have a higher probability of being married compared to blacks. Further, there is no significant difference in the probability of being married among blacks but there is a difference among whites depending on perceptions of racial discrimination. The effect of perceived racial discrimination results in a higher probability of being married for whites, but not a decrease in the probability of being married for blacks. This finding is in line with research that shows that whites who are more likely to report racial discrimination are also more likely to be working-class, socially conservative, and married (McDermott and Samson 2005; Uecker and Stokes 2008). The interaction of class, conservatism, and perceptions about race likely results in a closed network (e.g. segregated neighborhoods and social environments) (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006) and expectations about family formation, making marriage more accessible.

Contrary to hypothesis 3, high racial salience is not associated with a higher probability of marriage for whites compared to blacks. There was an expectation of a relationship between

racial salience and marriage because researchers have found that making race salient for an individual is associated with romantic relationship quality and risk avoidance. The supportive nature of marriage could overshadow thoughts about the risk of divorce. Additionally, some research suggests that romantic relationships offer social support that may help to alleviate the stress of having to consider race across situations (Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983), which could support a decision to marry.

The racial difference in the impact of perceived racial discrimination for only the older respondents further clarifies the effect of perceived racial discrimination and the likelihood of marriage. The social expectation that older people are married is likely playing a role in the results. Yet, the lower likelihood of marriage for the older black people points to the importance of perceived race-based discrimination for older blacks and whites. Age and perceptions of racial discrimination work together to increase the probability of marriage for whites. The lack of a racial difference in the probability of marriage for the younger people could be the result of many young adults delaying marriage. Lastly, independent effects of perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience are not present for either age group. The lack of independent effects in the subsample analyses by age suggest the need to consider racial discrimination and racial salience across the full age range.

In conclusion, race and racism shapes the lives and life chances of all people in the U.S. Race operates both individually and structurally. Research shows that blacks experience race differently, often negatively, compared to whites. Perceptions about the role of race in interpersonal experiences and the importance of race in shaping identity influences romantic relationships. However, in this study, high racial salience does not predict marital status for

blacks and whites. Perceived racial discrimination does help to explain a higher probability of marriage for whites compared to blacks, but only for people forty years old or older.

While other work has focused primarily on economic and cultural explanations, this study contributes to understanding the black-white marriage gap by considering social psychological racial factors, including perceived racial discrimination and racial salience. Further, the use of nationally representative data allows for confidence in the generalization of the findings reported here. In spite of the contributions, this study is not without limitations. With cross-sectional data, I am unable to say that perceived racial discrimination operates to influence the probability of marriage over time. While age is helpful for understanding the influence of time to a certain extent, the consequences of racism and discrimination are additive over time. As such, it will be helpful for researchers to investigate the role of racial discrimination in predicting the likelihood of marriage across time.

Another limitation of the study has to do with the wording of the perceived discrimination question. The respondents were asked about their experience with racial discrimination over the prior six years. Six years is a long period of time to recall incidents of racial discrimination. Further, it is not clear when or how the perceived racial experience occurred over those years. However, if a person is able to recall an incident of racial discrimination over a six-year period, it is probably significant for that person and does play a role in their life.

In light of the limitations, as researchers continue to investigate the black-white marriage gap, racial identity and discrimination should be taken into account. It was not fully expected that whites who perceived racial discrimination would be more likely to be married and additional research is needed to uncover the reasons underlying this finding. Further, the lack of

a marital status difference between blacks who do and do not report racial discrimination, but a difference between the white individuals suggest the need for more research into the role of race for whites. Finally, the distinct contribution of age should be further examined.

CHAPTER III

Romantic Relationships and Young Adult Self-concept: The Intersecting Influence of Race-Gender Status and Educational Attainment on Self-esteem and Mastery

ABSTRACT

Establishing and maintaining a strong personal sense of self-esteem and mastery are key developmental tasks during the transition to adulthood. In this study, I investigate the extent to which romantic relationship status (i.e., marriage, cohabitation, monogamous dating, and singlehood) shapes self-esteem and mastery for a longitudinal, nationally representative sample of 18 to 34-year-old black and white, men and women. I also take into consideration the influence of race, gender, and educational attainment in determining the association between intimate relationships and psychosocial resources. Among women, there are clear differences in self-esteem by romantic relationship status, race, and educational attainment. For men, more committed relationships result in higher self-esteem except for monogamously dating men and single black men. With respect to mastery, more committed and stable relationships (i.e., marriage and cohabitation) result in higher mastery for men and women.

INTRODUCTION

An individual's self-concept – socially informed ideas regarding the self as an object – is generally thought to be stable, but malleable, across much of the life course (Demo 1992). During young adulthood, it is expected that self-concept undergoes development in response to individuation from family of origin, the establishment of intimate relationships, and educational experiences. Two central components of self-concept that undergo solidification during young adulthood are self-esteem and mastery. Self-esteem is the global sense of worth that a person holds about self (Leary and Baumeister 2000). Mastery refers to the level of perceived control a person holds about her or his ability to affect life outcomes (Pearlin et al. 1981).

Self-esteem and mastery are constructed through reflexive interpersonal processes. Self-esteem or perceived self-worth is more responsive to interpersonal interactions, while mastery or the level of control a person believes she or he has over life is related to her or his position in the social structure (Gecas 1991; Stets and Burke 2014). In response to structural factors beginning in the 1960s (e.g., movement from a manufacturing economy to a service economy), the lives of young people transitioning to adulthood have changed dramatically (Silva 2012). Young adult romantic relationships and the effects on self-concept is of primary interest in this study. Instead of focusing only on marriage, contemporary young adults are engaging in various forms of romantic relationships, including cohabitation, monogamously dating for extended periods of time, or selecting to remain single and forgoing committed romantic relationships.

About a generation ago, young adults were likely to follow a normative trajectory of completing high school, securing employment, and then marrying. Contemporary young people are completing more schooling and delaying or forgoing marriage. Additionally, not all young people follow the same path into adulthood. McLanahan (2004) suggest that individuals take

diverging roads into young adulthood depending on their race, gender, and socioeconomic background. Differences in the transition into adult roles are important to consider because pathways through young adulthood have been shown to impact self-concept (Kerckhoff 1990). Both self-esteem (Orth, Robins, and Widaman 2012) and mastery (Tyndall and Christie-Mizell 2016) rise in response to young people's social position and success in adequately adopting appropriate adult roles. Healthy self-esteem and mastery levels contribute to an individual's overall well-being. Self-esteem is related to mental health (for a review see Orth, Robins, and Roberts 2008), physical health (Benyamini, Leventhal, and Leventhal 2004), relationship satisfaction (Orth, Robins, and Widaman 2012), and academic success (Román, Cuestas, and Fenollar 2008; Diseth, Meland, and Breidablik 2014). High levels of mastery result in myriad benefits, including better health, more supportive relationships, and a heightened ability to productively handle the demands of daily life (Thoits 2006; Christie-Mizell and Erickson 2007).

The formation and quality of romantic relationships contribute to the development and stability of self-esteem and mastery. Across the life course, marriage has consistently been shown to be the more rewarding relationship status with respect to psychosocial well-being (Gove, Hughes, and Style 1983; Frech and Williams 2007; see also Cherlin 2004). Yet, research also indicates that among young adults, compared to being married, the influence of cohabiting is quite similar in the effects on well-being (Uecker 2012). Remaining single can also be protective and provide a sense of pride in oneself during young adulthood (Bay-Cheng and Goodkind 2016). Less commonly considered is the influence of monogamously dating – romantically committing to a person but living apart from her or him – on self-esteem and mastery (for an exception see Ross 1995).

Intimate relationships are shaped by race, gender, and education. For example, people are more likely to date and marry someone of the same race, and when interracial dating occurs it is gendered (Gullickson 2006). As the need for additional educational attainment increases, more young people are selecting to monogamously date for extended periods of time (Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, Mays 2009). Yet, access to education is unequal. For example, a primary driving force in the black-white marriage gap is the gender gap in educational attainment between black men and women (Clarke 2011). Research indicates that race, gender, and educational attainment each influence intimate relationships, but whether and how the impact of romantic relationships on psychosocial resources is shaped by the intersection of all these divides is unclear.

In this study, I investigate the extent to which romantic relationships (i.e. marriage, cohabitation, monogamous dating, or remaining single) shape self-esteem and mastery during young adulthood for black and white, men and women, along a continuum of educational attainment. This research contributes to the relevant research literature in several ways. First, using longitudinal, nationally representative data for a contemporary sample of youth transitioning to adulthood, I assess how intimate relationships, including marriage, cohabitation, monogamous dating, and singlehood shape sense of mastery and self-esteem. The inclusion of dating relationships and singlehood is important because current research suggest that a delay in marriage does not necessarily mean a forgoing of intimate relationships which take on varying levels of commitment (Sassler, Addo, and Lichter 2012; Jamison and Proulx 2013). Some young adults select stable monogamous relationships, in which shared space, time spent together, and obligations are actively negotiated (Frank and DeLamater 2010; Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo 2015). For others who remain single, some have no romantic entanglements, while some engage in short-lived romantic and sexual relationships (Halpern-Meekin et al. 2013).

Second, with this research, I suggest that romantic relationships constitute a system of advantage and disadvantage with respect to psychosocial well-being (see Clarke 2011 for a similar argument). Marriage is supported as a permanent union by laws, culture, religion, and community. The married enjoy special tax breaks and religious communities often encourage and laud marriage as a Godly union. Married couples are more likely to pool their financial resources (Lauer and Yodanis 2011) and benefit from the social support of their spouse (Cutrona 1996). Yet, marriage is not easily accessible for all groups of people. For young adults who are less likely to marry, but choose other types of romantic relationships or remain single, the impact of their relationship status may exacerbate other disadvantages. For example, cohabiting does not operate the same way across race and gender. Further, the American racial hierarchy places blacks at a disadvantage both materially and psychologically before ever reaching the age to engage in a serious intimate relationship.

Third, related to systems of advantage and disadvantage, I examine whether the impact of intimate relationship status on self-esteem and mastery differs by race, gender, and educational attainment. Growing inequality has resulted in difficulty for young men and women, black and white, to transition into marriage (Arnett 2007; Silva 2012). Black women face the lowest chance of marrying across age and education level (Raley, Sweeney, and Wondra 2015), but have been shown to have better self-esteem than white women (see Molloy and Herzberger 1998). Additionally, those who pursue more education are likely to delay marriage but enjoy a better position in the marriage market towards the end of young adulthood to possibly increase the benefits of greater educational attainment for self-concept once they do marry (Mirowsky and Ross 2007).

BACKGROUND AND THEORY

Elements of three theoretical frameworks will guide this study – the stress process model, intersectionality, and life course theory. The stress process model links an individual's social position to stressors, psychosocial resources, and well-being (Pearlin 1981; 2007). The intersectionality framework allows researchers to highlight differences in social positions given interactions among multiple identities and experiences to then highlight processes of exclusion and subordination (Davis 2008; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). Lived experiences resulting from race, gender, and class serve as antecedents to psychosocial resources in the stress process model. The social location a person occupies in a hierarchical system is informed by intersecting categories of identity and status including race, gender, level of education, and romantic union. As such, interactions among identities and statuses largely determine an individual's stressors, resources, and well-being. Self-esteem and mastery are important constructs in the stress process theory because they have been shown to reduce the negative impact of stressors on well-being (Turner and Lloyd 2004; Thoits 2010). Therefore, a study that seeks to understand the correlates of these psychosocial resources is warranted.

The underlying reasons for inequalities in self-esteem and mastery are due to a hierarchy of social positions (Turner and Lloyd 2004; Turner 2010). Marrying increases status and advantage. As young people move through young adulthood and the social expectation to marry increases, especially for women, those who have married have accomplished the symbolic success of attaining a positively sanctioned societal status (Cherlin 2004). However, as the path through young adulthood has changed, remaining unmarried may not result in diminished perceived self-worth or personal control. For example, if a black woman remains single as she pursues post-secondary education, single status may not serve to greatly disadvantage her self-

esteem or mastery (see Chaney and Marsh 2008), but her status as black and woman may not lead to the same level of mastery as others. Further, research indicates that black men experience their assumed advantaged gender position uniquely compared to other men and may even be at a disadvantage in some contexts (see Wingfield 2007).

Life course theory frames each life stage as being associated with explicit developmental tasks that contribute to an individual's self-esteem and personal mastery (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003; Mirowsky and Ross 2007; Pearlin et al. 2007; Tyndall and Christie-Mizell 2016; Luciano and Orth 2017). During the transition to adulthood, the major benchmarks for achieving adult status have been the completion of post-secondary education, securing stable employment, earning a steady income, and marrying (Shanahan 2000; Johnson, Berg, and Sirotzki 2007; Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo 2015; Mortimer and Moen 2016). Successfully meeting each benchmark of adulthood in a traditionally ordered fashion represents opportunities to build and solidify self-esteem and mastery. Yet, contemporary young adults are more likely to transition into adult roles out of sequential order – e.g., cohabiting before marriage or remaining single while taking longer to complete education.

Contemporary young adults face an increasingly diverse set of pathways to adulthood and the gray area between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood is characterized as a time of prolonged educational endeavors, identity construction, and seeking new pathways to middle class status that can often last into their early 30s (Shanahan 2000; Arnett 2007; Eliason et al. 2015). The result is that young adults are marrying at later ages than in the past or forgoing marriage altogether (Silva 2012). The modern transition to adulthood is more likely to incorporate cohabitation as the first committed romantic union, whereas marriage held this distinction in earlier generations (Smock 2000; Lichter, Turner and Sassler 2010). In fact,

nonmarital cohabitation increased from about 500,000 couples in 1970 to about 7,600,000 couples in 2011 (Marquardt et al. 2012).

Contemporary young adult romantic relationships include not only cohabitation or marriage, but also monogamous dating or remaining single (Frank and DeLameter 2010; Jamison and Proulx 2013; Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo 2015). Each type of romantic union requires differing levels of commitment and intimacy. Intimate connections can boost mastery and self-esteem because of the connections to mutual social support, socioeconomic resources, and beneficial social networks (Myers and Booth 1999; Baker et al. 2016). Romantic unions have also been found to meet higher order needs that result in personal growth (Finkel et al. 2014), subjective well-being (Uecker 2012), and better mental health (Lamb, Lee, and Demaris 2003). Each of these factors are known to bolster and sustain self-esteem and mastery.

Marriage is consistently shown to the more beneficial romantic union because of greater economic resources, interpersonal social support, and better health behaviors (Williams and Umberson 2004). It has been argued that marital status is more strongly associated with men's overall well-being, but Williams (2003) show that marital status effects on psychological well-being are largely similar for men and women. Although marriage is consistently related to psychosocial benefits, marriage may not be the only relationship type for which young adults derive well-being. Musick and Bumpass (2012) found that the benefits of marriage and cohabitation were similar across an array of social and well-being outcomes. Similarly, Mernitz and Kamp Dush (2016) found marriage and cohabitation were both associated with emotional well-being. Researchers have found that transitions into monogamous dating relationships contribute to subjective well-being in much the same way as marriage and cohabitation (Kamp Dush and Amato 2005; Luciano and Orth 2017). However, the similarity of effects between

marriage and other intimate unions should not be overstated because research also suggest that moving toward marriage by taking on more stable or committed intimate relationships results in greater subjective well-being. (Kamp Dush and Amato 2005).

Achieving the new standards of adulthood requires resources that are not equally distributed across intimate relationship status, race, gender, or level of education (Kao and Joyner 2004; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006). For example, the unmarried have lower levels of psychosocial resources but increases in educational attainment has been shown to increase positive self-concept (Thoits 2010). Research suggest that compared to whites, blacks have higher self-esteem (Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000), but findings regarding mastery are mixed (Mabry and Kiecolt 2005; Williams, et al. 2012). During the transition to adulthood, gendered variations in role expectations, conflict, and strain put women at higher risk for lower mastery compared to men (Ross and Mirowsky 2002; Cassidy and Davies 2003; Christie-Mizell and Peralta 2009; Tyndall and Christie-Mizell 2016). It is also commonly reported that women have lower self-esteem (Orth, Trzesniewski, and Robins 2010), with the exception of black women. In their review of racial differences in self-esteem, Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000) posit that gender differences in self-esteem are greater for whites than for blacks, and at lower levels of socioeconomic status, blacks have a greater advantage in self-esteem compared to whites.

Attaining greater levels of education is linked to both mastery, self-esteem, and romantic relationships. Schools provide a context that nurtures a sense of control by supporting the development of problem solving skills that can then increase perceptions of self-worth (Mirowsky and Ross 2007; Simon 2014). Education distinguishes those in non-residential and co-residential unions in that monogamous daters are likely to have more schooling than those who live with their spouse or a cohabiting partner (Strohm et al. 2009). Completion of college

has been linked to a greater likelihood of marriage (McLanahan 2004), especially for people with preexisting social advantages (Raley and Bumpass 2003; Musick, Brand, and Davis 2012). As the importance of similar education and financial contributions in marriage has increase, more education is predictive of marriage for both men and women (Gibson-Davis 2009; Edin and Kafalas 2011). However, because a higher proportion of black women attend and complete college than black men, black women are more likely to marry someone with less education or not marry at all (Banks 2011; Clarke 2011). The racial difference in the effect of education on marriage formation could modify associations between romantic relationship statuses and self-concept.

Often examined separately, race, gender, education, and romantic relationships have all been found to influence self-esteem (see Orth, Trzesniewski, and Robins 2010; Musick and Bumpass 2012) and mastery (Ross and Mirowsky 2002). How race, gender, and educational attainment intersect to shape the impact of romantic relationships on self-esteem and mastery is less clear. In one of very few studies that examine the effect of these interlocking statuses, Roxburgh (2014) shows that marriage effects well-being differently for black and white, men and women, along educational divides. While her research is informative, Roxburgh (2014) does not consider cohabiting, monogamous dating, and singlehood separately compared to marriage, nor does she include psychosocial resources as outcomes of interest. The key focus of this study is to investigate the intersecting influence of relationship status, race, gender, and education on self-esteem and mastery.

SUMMARY AND HYPOTHESES

Given the contemporary delay in marriage, and the increased reliance on cohabitation and other forms of romantic coupling by young adults, examining the linkages between multiple

types of romantic relationships and self-esteem and mastery is necessary. The goal of this study is to analyze the degree to which marriage, cohabitation, monogamous dating, and singlehood, across educational attainment, impact the personal sense of mastery and self-esteem for black and white, women and men. The stress process model is used to connect individual's social position to psychosocial resources. An intersectionality lens informs where a person is placed in the hierarchical social structure based on the intersection of multiple statuses including race, gender, and educational attainment. The life course theory dictates the adoption and sequencing of appropriate roles and responsibilities linked to the young adulthood period of the life course and stipulates that completion of education and the establishment of romantic connections are important for self-esteem and mastery. The following hypotheses were derived based on elements from each theory and previous research:

H1 a-c: The married will have higher self-esteem compared to those who are (a) cohabiting, (b) monogamously dating, or (c) single.

H2 a-b: Those cohabiting will have higher self-esteem than those who are (a) monogamously dating or (b) single.

H3: Those who are monogamously dating will have higher self-esteem than the single.

H4 a-c: The married will have the higher mastery compared to those who are (a) cohabiting, (b) monogamously dating, or (c) single.

H5 a-b: Those cohabiting will have higher mastery than those who are (a) monogamously dating or (b) single.

H6: Those who are monogamously dating will have higher mastery than the single.

In light of the literature that shows that the effects of relationship status differ by social positions, all of the hypotheses are tested to assess differences by race, gender, and education.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data for this study come from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult sample (NLSY-YA). The NLSY-YA consists of young adults born to mothers who were surveyed in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79). The NLSY79 and NSLY-YA surveys are sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Defense under a grant to the Center for Human Resource Research at The Ohio State University. The NLSY79 is a nationally representative sample of Americans who were between the ages of 14-22 in 1979. African American, Hispanic, and low income white youth were oversampled. In 1994, the children aged 14 and older of NLSY79 mothers became the constituents of the NLSY-YA and were interviewed biennially thereafter. The NLSY-YA contains questions regarding family life, social psychological development, labor force participation, socioeconomic achievement, and health outcomes relevant to respondents during the young adult years. Young adults enter the survey if they will be 15 years old as of December 31 of the survey year. Therefore, the birth years of the young adults range from 1970 to 1984. As of the 2010 wave of data collection, ages ranged from 14 to 38.

I limit the scope of the sample to those respondents who were surveyed when they were between the ages 18 to 34 during any of the nine waves from 1994 to 2010. All respondents have at least one valid observation on the dependent variables and a maximum of five observations, which results in a sample size of 4,520 respondents (N = 2,282 men and N = 2,238 women) contributing 9,216 observations (N = 4,539 for men; N = 4,677 for women). A number of

respondents had missing data on covariates, so multiple imputation by chained equations was done to maintain respondents in the sample. Ten replicate datasets were imputed, analyzed, and results were pooled to arrive at the models presented (Rubin 2004). All analyses are weighted to correct for oversampling of black and low income white respondents.

The dependent variables are self-esteem and mastery. Self-esteem in measured by the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale. The scale items ask respondents to rate their level of agreement from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree) for the following prompts: 1) I am person of worth/equal to others; 2) I have number of good qualities; 3) I am a failure; 4) I do things as well as others; 5) I do not have much to be proud of; 6) I take a positive attitude toward myself; 7) I am satisfied with myself; 8) I want more self-respect; 9) I sometimes feel useless; 10) I sometimes think I am no good. When necessary, items were reverse coded to measure increases in self-esteem. The outcome is a scale that ranges from 10 (lower self-esteem) to 40 (higher self-esteem). The alpha reliabilities are above .70 for men and women across all waves.

Mastery is measured using the 7-item Pearlin Mastery Scale. Respondents were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree, with the following statements: (1) “There is really no way I can solve the problems I have”; (2) “Sometimes I feel that I’m being pushed around in life”; (3) “I have little control over the things that happen to me”; (4) “I can do just about anything I really set my mind to”; (5) “I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life;” (6) “What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me”; and (7) “There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.” Each response was coded from 1 to 4, resulting in a scale that ranges from 7 (lower mastery) to 28 (higher mastery). The alpha reliabilities are above .70 for men and women across each wave.

Relationship status and race-gender status are the key independent variables. The effects of relationship status for each race-gender group is of particular interest. All possible combinations of relationship status and race are dummy coded into eight mutually exclusive categories across gender: black married, black cohabiting, black monogamously dating, black single, white married, white cohabiting, white monogamously dating, white single. Differences in mastery and self-esteem by educational attainment are also a key focus of this study. Education is measured in years completed at each observation, ranges from 0 to 20, and is included as a moderating variable of the main associations of interest.

The length of, and conflict within, intimate relationships are constructed as conditionally relevant variables that can influence the impact of intimate unions on self-esteem and mastery. In the NLSY-YA, the conditionally relevant variables of relationship length and conflict apply to people who are married or cohabiting. Both length and conflict are time-varying and constructed utilizing all nine waves of the data. These variables were estimated as conditional deviations from the mean for all married and cohabiting people (Montazer, Wheaton and Noh 2016). See Ross and Mirowsky (1992) for the details of how to construct conditionally relevant variables.

Relationship length is measured in years and coded as: (1) less than a year; (2) l year; (3) 2 years; (4) 3-5 years; and (5) more than 5 years. Marital and cohabitating conflict is measured with a 10-item scale that assessed how often the couple argues or experiences conflict over: (1) Chores and responsibility; (2) Children; (3) Money; (4) Showing affection to each other; (5) Religion; (6) Leisure or free time; (7) Drinking; (8) Sexual affairs with other people; (9) Relatives of the respondent; and (10) Relatives of the respondent’s partner. Each item was coded from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The full scale is a sum all items divided by 10, resulting in an index

that ranges from 1 (lower conflict) to 4 (higher conflict). The alpha reliability for conflict, across marriage and cohabitation is above .82 across all waves of data.

Control Variables

The following control variables were collected at each wave of data collection. Social and psychological development are related to age, schooling, income, employment, and residence (Williams and Umberson 2004; Duke and Macmillian 2016; Tyndall and Christie-Mizell 2016). Age is measured in years and ranges from 18 to 34. Parenthood is included and measured as a dummy variable (1=yes). Enrollment in high school, college, or graduate school is assessed and current school enrollment is included in the analyses as a dummy variable (1=yes). Household income is measured in thousands of dollars and logged in the analyses. Current employment or active military duty is dummy coded (1=yes). Southern residence is coded 1 if the respondent reported living in the southern U.S. compared to all other regions. Urban residence is coded 1 if the respondent's residence was urban compared to rural residence.

Analytic Strategy

To account for the non-independence of repeated measures nested within individuals, a multilevel mixed modeling strategy with fixed coefficient estimates and random intercepts is used (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). For ease of presentation and interpretation, I group the analyses by gender (white and married is the comparison group for women and men). The model estimation proceeds in three stages. First, I regress self-esteem on the relationship status-race variables along with age. In the next model, relationship length, relationship conflict, and parenthood status are included. Then, in the next model, I include education in the analyses. In the subsequent model, I add the control variables. Finally, I estimate interaction effects between

romantic relationship-race and education. The same steps are taken with mastery as the outcome of interest. The following equation summarizes my approach to the initial models:

$$Y_{ti} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathbf{RRG}_{ti} + \beta_2 \mathbf{AGE}_{ti} + \beta_3 \mathbf{RL}_{ti}(\mathbf{RSP'}_{ti}) + \beta_4 \mathbf{EDUC}_i + \beta_5 \mathbf{RC}_{ti}(\mathbf{RSP'}_{ti}) + u_{0i} + \varepsilon_{ti}$$

In the equations for men and women, Y_{ti} is the mastery score for person *i* at time *t*. Each uppercase bold term represents a block of related independent and control variables. $\mathbf{RRG}_{ti}$ represents the complete set of variables that indicate relationship-race-gender status of the individual at each observation. $\mathbf{AGE}_{ti}$ represents the linear term centered at age 25 to allow the intercept (β_0) to be interpreted as the mean level of self-esteem or mastery at age 25. I selected age 25 because it is the mid-point of the sample's age range and allows time for respondents to complete a four-year degree and transition into more stable and committed romantic relationships. $\mathbf{EDUC}_i$ is education and is centered at 12 years.

Relationship length ($\mathbf{RL}_{ti}$) and relationship conflict ($\mathbf{RC}_{ti}$) are the conditionally relevant variables. To include these important covariates, which are not applicable to a large proportion of the sample, relationship length and conflict are multiplied by the subset of relationship categories for those who are married and cohabiting only ($\mathbf{RSP'}_{ti}$). Including these interaction terms without main effects for relationship length and conflict allows the coefficients for these interactions (i.e., β_4 and β_5) to be interpreted for those in married and cohabiting relationships and drops out of the equation those who are single or dating monogamously. All continuous variables (e.g., relationship length, conflict, education, and income) are mean centered to allow for an interpretation of the influence on self-esteem and mastery at the average of these factors. Random effects (level 2) are estimated for the intercept to account for the non-independence of repeated measures. This is represented in the equation above by the term u_{0i}. The individual (level 1) residual is specified by the term ε_{ti}.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics for Women

Table 5 displays the descriptive statistics by gender. There are 1,074 black women and 1,164 white women in the sample. Black women report higher self-esteem (mean=33.20) than white women (mean=32.26). Black women also report higher mastery (mean=22.38) than white women (mean=22.17). More white women are married (percent=23.47%) or cohabiting (percent=17.68%) than black women (percentages=8.33% and 10.43%, respectively). A higher percentage of black women are monogamously dating (percent=50.12%) or single (percent=31.12%) than white women (percentages=33.92% and 24.94%, respectively). The black women are slightly older (mean=22.81) than the white women (mean=22.33) but have less years of education (means=12.27 versus 12.76). The length of cohabiting (mean=1.94) is longer for black women than for white women (mean=1.78) and the amount of conflict in marital relationships (mean=2.08) and cohabiting relationships (mean=1.82) for black women is higher than for white women (means=1.91 and 1.73, respectively). A greater percentage of black women are parents (percent=52.43%) compared to white women (percent=34.97%), but a lower percentage are enrolled in school (percentages=32.21% versus 36.37%) and employed (percentages=80.36% versus 88.40%). Black women also have less income (mean=$13,988) than white women (mean=$24,684). More black women live in the southern region of the U.S. (percent=60.23%) and in urban areas (percent=83.51%) than white women (percentages=35.63% and 62.73%, respectively).

Table 5: Weighted Means, Percentages, and Standard Deviations (SD) for All Study Variables.
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth – Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010. Ages 18-34.

	Women (N=2,238)				Men (N=2,282)			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD
Dependent Variables								
Self-esteem	33.20***	3.27	32.26	4.32	33.04**	3.46	32.83	6.16
Mastery	22.38***	2.44	22.17	5.64	22.31**	2.58	22.48	4.62
Independent Variables								
Married (1=yes)	8.33%***	-	23.47%	-	8.25%***	-	17.97%	-
Cohabiting (1=yes)	10.43%***	-	17.68%	-	15.90%***	-	14.05%	-
Monogamously Dating (1=yes)	50.12%***	-	33.92%	-	39.91%***	-	32.30%	-
Single (1=yes)	31.12%***	-	24.94%	-	35.94%	-	35.67%	-
Age								
Age (years)	22.81***	2.81	22.33	5.03	23.23***	3.24	22.47	5.38
Educational Attainment								
Education (years)	12.27***	1.29	12.76	2.73	11.90***	1.34	12.40	2.79
Control Variables								
Length of Marriage (years)	2.35	1.03	2.31	2.10	2.35***	1.18	2.15	2.12
Length of Cohabitation (years)	1.94***	.40	1.78	.63	1.87***	.43	1.78	.66
Conflict in Marriage	2.08***	.88	1.91	.43	2.14***	1.00	1.99	1.54
Conflict in Cohabitation	1.82***	.40	1.73	.67	1.85***	.42	1.76	.69
Parent (1=yes)	52.43%***	-	34.97%	-	42.95%***	-	22.59%	-
Enrolled in School (1=yes)	32.21%***	-	36.37%	-	21.49%***	-	33.06%	-
Household Income (dollars)	13,988***	13,391	24,684	44,116	16,391***	17,387	23,352	40,621
Employed (1=yes)	80.36%***	-	88.40%	-	78.96%***	-	90.97%	-
Southern Residence (1=yes)	60.23%***	-	35.63%	-	60.57%***	-	36.81%	-
Urban Residence (1=yes)	83.51%***	-	62.73%	-	82.96%***	-	60.24%	-

Note: *N* = 2,238 women (black = 1,074, white = 1,164) and 4,677 observations (black = 2,468, white = 2,209); *N* = 2,282 men (black = 1,049, white = 1,233) and 4,539 observations (black = 2,275, white = 2,264). Asterisks denote significant differences between men and women, where *p<.05, **p<.01 and ***p<.001.

Descriptive Statistics for Men

Table 5 also displays the descriptive statistics for men. There are 1,049 black men and 1,233 white men. Black men report higher self-esteem (mean=33.04) than white men (mean=32.83) but report lower mastery (mean=22.31versus mean=22.48, respectively). More white men are married (percent=17.97%) but fewer are cohabiting (percent=14.05%) or monogamously dating (percent=32.30%) compared to black men (percentages=8.25%, 15.90% and 39.91%, respectively). The black men are older (mean=23.23 versus 22.47) but have less years of education (means=11.90 versus 12.40). The length of marriage (mean=2.35) and cohabiting (mean=1.87) is longer for black men than for white men (means=2.15 versus 1.78) and the amount of conflict in marital relationships (mean=2.14) and cohabiting relationships (mean=1.85) for black men is higher than for white men (means=1.99 and 1.76, respectively). A greater percentage of black men are parents (percentage=42.95%) compared to white men (percent=22.59%), but a lower percentage are enrolled in school (percentages=21.49% versus 33.06%) and employed (percentages=78.96% versus 90.97%). Black men also have less income (mean=$16,391) than white men (mean=$23,352). More black men live in the southern region of the U.S. (percent=60.57%) and in urban areas (percent=82.96%) than white men (percentages=36.81% and 60.24%, respectively).

Table 6. Multilevel Model Estimating Self-Esteem for Women During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*
Intercept (at age 25)	32.61***	.17	34.19***	.44	33.11***	.45	32.61***	.49	32.87***	.53
Marital Status and Race [a]										
Black Married (1=yes)	1.55***	.42	1.82***	.42	2.01***	.42	2.02***	.42	1.45**	.46
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	.75*	.38	.42	.83	1.05	.83	1.20	.83	1.05	.86
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	-.36	.22	-.89	.75	-.47	.75	-.39	.75	-.44	.78
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.59*	.24	-1.41**	.55	-.76	.55	-.64	.56	-.94	.59
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.03	.20	-2.14***	.53	-1.56**	.53	-1.58**	.53	-1.86**	.57
Black Single (1=yes)	.62*	.27	-1.40*	.56	-.76	.57	-.65	.57	-.94	.61
White Single (1=yes)	-.63**	.22	-2.73***	.54	-2.17***	.54	-2.13***	.54	-2.45***	.58
Age										
Age (years)	.02	.02	.04*	.02	-.04*	.02	-.04*	.02	-.04*	.02
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood										
Length of marriage			.13	.09	.17*	.08	.17*	.08	.17	.09
Length of cohabitation			-.02	.13	-.05	.13	-.05	.13	-.05	.13
Conflict in marriage			-1.29***	.28	-1.13***	.28	-1.16***	.28	-1.21***	.28
Conflict in cohabiting union			-.86**	.29	-.80**	.29	-.84**	.29	-.92**	.29
Parent (1=yes)			-.46**	.15	-.04	.16	.06	.16	.05	.16
Education										
Education (years)					.40***	.04	.35***	.04	.24***	.07
SES and Residence										
Enrolled in school (1=yes)							.61***	.13	.58***	.13
Household income (logged)							.08***	.02	.07**	.02
Employed (1=yes)							.12	.19	.11	.19
Southern region (1=yes)							-.09	.18	-.09	.18
Urban residence (1=yes)							.23	.14	.22	.14
Interactions										
Black Married X Education									.63**	.22
Black Cohabiting X Education									.13	.18
White Cohabiting X Education									-.02	.10
Black Monogamously dating X Education									.26*	.12
White Monogamously dating X Education									.09	.09
Black Single X Education									.18	.14
White Single X Education									.17	.10
Individual-level error variance	10.96***	.30	10.95***	.30	11.04***	.30	10.97***	.30	10.93***	.29
Between-person error variance	9.01***	.44	8.74***	.43	7.91***	.41	7.75***	.40	7.73***	.40
-2 Log Likelihood	22331.40		22295.64		22212.63		22172.16		22159.33	

Note: N = 2,238 women (black = 1,074; white = 1,164) and 4,677 observations (black = 2,468; white = 2,209); [a] White Married is the reference category.
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

Multivariate Analyses of Self-Esteem for Women and Men

Table 6 shows the self-esteem results for women. The reference category is white married women. The findings in the first model show that black married (*b*=1.55; *se*=.42), cohabiting (*b*=.75; *se*=.38), monogamously dating (*b*=.59; *se*=.24), and single (*b*=.62; *se*=.27) women each have higher self-esteem than white married women. White single women have lower self-esteem (*b*=-.63; *se*=.22) than their white married peers. With the inclusion of romantic relationship characteristics and parenthood in the next model, black cohabiting women no longer differ from white married women in their self-esteem levels, but white monogamously dating have lower self-esteem (*b*=-2.14; *se*=.53). As age increases so does self-esteem (*b*=.04; *se*=.02). Conflict in marital (*b*=-1.29; *se*=.28) and cohabiting (*b*=-.86; *se*=.29) relationships decrease self-esteem and parenthood is related to lower self-esteem (*b*=-.46; *se*=.15). In Model 3, education is introduced and is positively related to self-esteem (*b*=.40; *se*=.04). In Model 3, length of marriage becomes positively associated with self-esteem (*b*=.17; *se*=.08), black monogamously dating and single women no longer differ from married white women in self-esteem and parents no longer differ from their childless peers. In the full model with controls, all associations remain from the previous model. Black married (*b*=2.02; *se*=.42) and monogamously dating (*b*=1.58; *se*=.53) women have higher self-esteem while white single (*b*=-2.13; *se*=.54) women have lower self-esteem. Additionally, age (*b*=-.04; *se*=.02), conflict in marital (*b*=-1.16; *se*=.28) and cohabiting (*b*=-.84; *se*=.29) relationships are negatively associated with self-esteem. Length of marriage (*b*=.17; *se*=.08), educational attainment (*b*=.35; *se*=.04), school enrollment (*b*=.61; *se*=.13), and income (*b*=.08; *se*=.02) are each positively associated with self-esteem. The interaction terms by education for the black married and black monogamously dating women are significant. Figure 3 a-d displays the results of the interactions graphically.

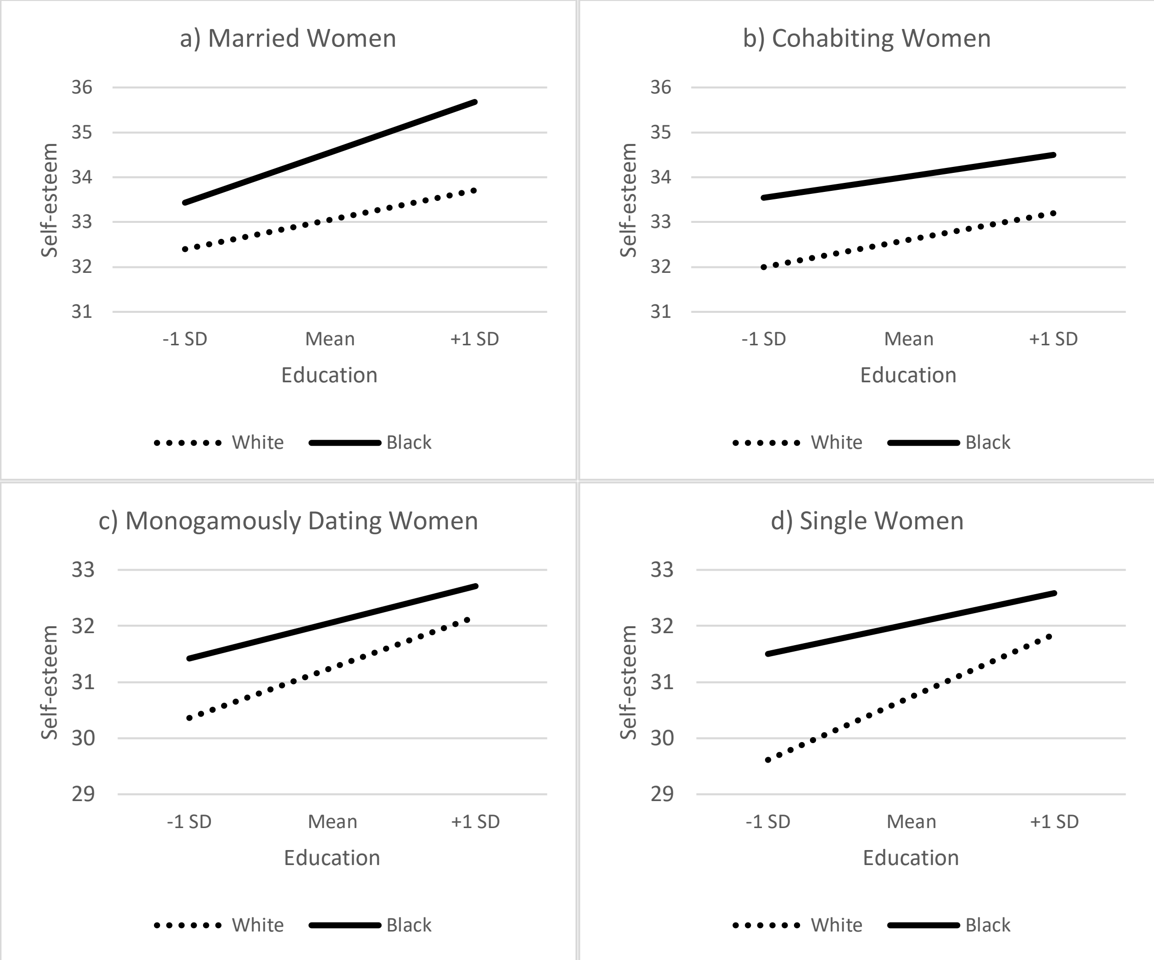

Figure 3 a-d: Self-esteem for Women by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

Figure 3 a-d shows the interaction results of self-esteem for women by romantic relationship status across educational attainment. Across educational attainment self-esteem increases for all groups. Black women report higher self-esteem across all romantic relationship statuses and levels of education. The highest self-esteem is reported by black married women with higher than average education. White single women with less than average education report the lowest self-esteem. Black married women's self-esteem increases at a steeper rate than white married women's self-esteem across educational attainment (t=2.17, $p < .05$). Black cohabiting women (t=3.35, $p < .001$) also experience a steeper increase in self-esteem as education increases compared to white married women. The increasing slopes for those cohabiting, monogamously dating, and single are not significantly different between black and white women as educational attainment increases.

Table 7. Multilevel Model Estimating Self-Esteem for Men During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*
Intercept (at age 25)	33.19***	.18	34.74***	.52	34.21***	.52	33.51***	.56	33.92***	.57
Marital Status and Race [a]										
Black Married (1=yes)	.70	.44	.84	.44	1.04*	.44	.94*	.44	.63	.46
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	.05	.35	-.64	.93	-.37	.92	-.40	.92	-.70	.93
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	-.01	.24	-.90	.87	-.80	.87	-.78	.86	-1.05	.87
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	-.12	.27	-2.05**	.66	-1.70**	.66	-1.62*	.66	-1.92**	.67
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	-.54*	.22	-2.55***	.64	-2.39***	.64	-2.31***	.64	-2.66***	.65
Black Single (1=yes)	-.64*	.28	-2.58***	.67	-2.24**	.66	-2.08**	.67	-2.41***	.67
White Single (1=yes)	-.65**	.22	-2.67***	.64	-2.49***	.64	-2.36***	.64	-2.73***	.65
Age										
Age (years)	-.02	.02	.00	.02	-.07**	.02	-.06***	.02	-.06**	.02
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood										
Length of marriage			.00	.10	.04	.10	.04	.10	-.02	.10
Length of cohabitation			.28*	.13	.27*	.13	.26*	.13	.27*	.13
Conflict in marriage			-1.05***	.32	-1.05***	.32	-1.05***	.32	-1.11***	.31
Conflict in cohabiting union			-.94**	.31	-.88**	.31	-.88**	.31	-.92**	.31
Parent (1=yes)			-.45**	.18	-.11	.18	-.06	.18	-.06	.18
Education										
Education (years)					.40***	.04	.34***	.04	.09	.08
SES and Residence										
Enrolled in school (1=yes)							.51***	.15	.49**	.15
Household income (logged)							.09***	.02	.09***	.02
Employed (1= yes)							.06	.20	-.01	.20
Southern region (1 = yes)							.37*	.16	.35*	.16
Urban residence (1 = yes)							.37**	.14	.37**	.14
Interactions										
Black Married X Education									.52*	.24
Black Cohabiting X Education									.60**	.19
White Cohabiting X Education									.10	.11
Black Monogamously dating X Education									.62***	.14
White Monogamously dating X Education									.17	.10
Black Single X Education									.50***	.14
White Single X Education									.25**	.10
Individual-level error variance	13.40***	.37	13.37***	.37	13.44***	.37	13.43***	.37	13.31***	.36
Between-person error variance	7.81***	.41	7.66***	.40	6.96***	.38	6.68***	.37	6.66***	.37
-2 Log Likelihood	18887.31		18863.86		18795.36		18759.06		18735.31	

Note: N = 2,282 men (black = 1,049, white = 1,233) and 4,539 observations (black = 2,275, white = 2,264); [a] White Married is the reference category. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

Table 7 shows the self-esteem results for men. The reference category is white married men. In Model 1, black single (*b*=-.64; *se*=.28), white monogamously dating (*b*=-.54; *se*=.22) and single (*b*=-.65; *se*=.22) men have lower self-esteem than white married men. After introducing relationship characteristics and parenthood in the next model, black monogamously dating men (*b*=-2.61; *se*=.66) also have lower self-esteem compared to white married men. Longer cohabitation status (*b*=.28; *se*=.213) is positively related to self-esteem, conflict in marital (*b*=-1.05; *se*=.32) and cohabiting (*b*=-.94; *se*=.31) relationships decrease self-esteem, and parenthood is related to lower self-esteem (*b*=-.45; *se*=.18). In Model 3, education is included and is positively related to self-esteem (*b*=.40; *se*=.04). With education in the model, black married men (*b*=1.04; *se*=.44) have higher self-esteem than white married men, but parents no longer differ from their childless peers in self-esteem. In the full model with control variables, the findings from the previous model remain. Compared to white married men, black married (*b*=.94; *se*=.44) men have higher self-esteem, but black men who are monogamously dating (*b*=-1.62; *se*=.66) or single (*b*=-2.08; *se*=.67) and white monogamously dating (*b*=-2.31; *se*=.64) and single (*b*=-2.36; *se*=.64) men have lower self-esteem. Age (*b*=-.06; *se*=.02), conflict in marriage (*b*=-1.06; *se*=.32), and conflict in cohabitation (*b*=-.88; *se*=.31) are negatively related to self-esteem. Length of cohabitation (*b*=.26; *se*=.13), educational attainment (*b*=.34; *se*=.04), school enrollment (*b*=.51; *se*=.15), income (*b*=.09; *se*=.02), southern (*b*=.37; *se*=.16) and urban (*b*=.37; *se*=.14) residence are each positively related to self-esteem for men. All relationship status-race interactions by education for black men, and the interaction for white single men, are significant and shown graphically in Figure 4 a-d.

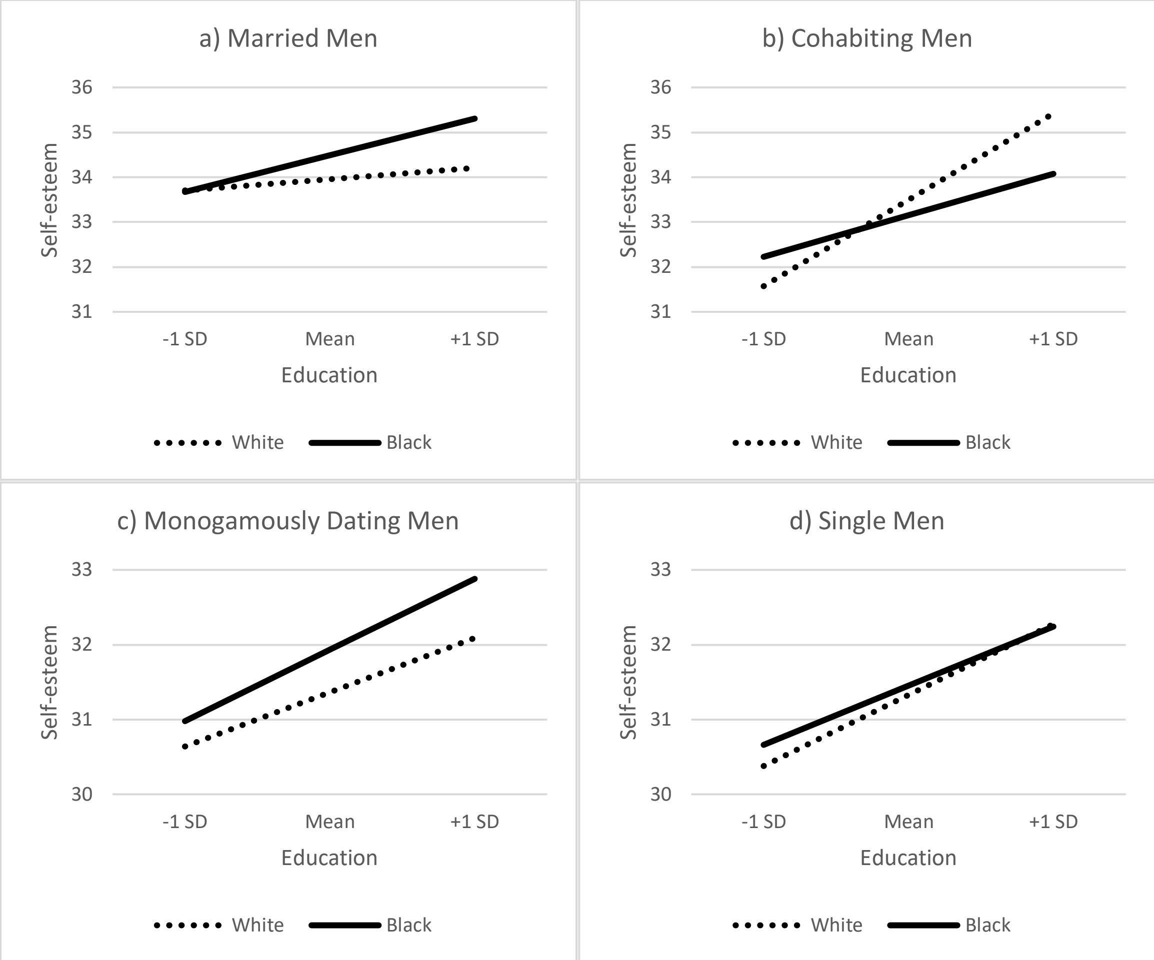

Figure 4 a-d: Self-esteem for Men by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

Figure 4 a-d displays the interaction findings of self-esteem for men. Self-esteem increases for all groups across educational attainment. Married black men and white cohabiting men with higher than average education have the highest self-esteem. Monogamously dating and single white men with less than average education have the lowest self-esteem. Married black men have lower self-esteem at less than average education and at higher than average education they have higher self-esteem than white married men. Black unmarried men with less than average levels of education have higher self-esteem than their white counterparts. Monogamously dating black men maintain their higher self-esteem across education. Cohabiting black men have lower self-esteem than cohabiting white men at higher than average education but single black and white men have similar self-esteem at high levels of education. The rate of increase in self-esteem for black married (t=2.17, $p < .01$), cohabiting (t=3.16, $p < .01$), dating (t=4.43, $p < .001$), and single (t=3.57, $p < .001$) men is steeper than the rate of increase for white married men. White single men (t=2.50, $p < .05$) also report a steeper increase in self-esteem relative to white married men with increases in educational attainment. Black cohabiting (t=2.59, $p < .01$) and monogamously dating (t=3.35, $p < .001$) men experience a steeper increase in self-esteem across educational attainment compared to white cohabiting and monogamously dating men, respectively. Changes in self-esteem across education do not differ significantly by race for single men.

Table 8. Multilevel Model Estimating Mastery for Women During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*
Intercept (at age 25)	22.45***	.12	23.99***	.32	23.17***	.33	22.90***	.36	23.14***	.39
Marital Status and Race [a]										
Black Married (1=yes)	.50	.31	.73**	.31	.86**	.31	.94**	.31	.49	.34
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	.10	.28	.05	.62	.51	.62	.70	.61	.55	.64
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	-.22	.16	-.46	.56	-.15	.55	-.06	.55	-.11	.58
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	-.09	.18	-2.02***	.41	-1.53***	.41	-1.33**	.42	-1.62***	.44
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	-.22	.15	-2.26***	.39	-1.83***	.39	-1.79***	.40	-2.07***	.43
Black Single (1=yes)	-.07	.20	-2.02***	.42	-1.54***	.42	-1.34**	.42	-1.63***	.45
White Single (1=yes)	-.48**	.16	-2.57***	.40	-2.10***	.40	-2.00***	.40	-2.24***	.43
Age										
Age (years)	.01	.01	.03*	.01	-.03*	.01	-.04*	.01	-.03*	.01
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood										
Length of marriage			-.06	.06	-.03	.06	-.03	.06	-.03	.06
Length of cohabitation			.03	.10	.01	.10	.02	.10	.02	.09
Conflict in marriage			-1.01***	.21	-.89***	.21	-.92***	.21	-.97***	.21
Conflict in cohabiting union			-1.04***	.21	-.98***	.21	-1.03***	.21	-1.10***	.21
Parent (1=yes)			-.52	.12	-.19	.12	-.11	.12	-.13	.12
Education										
Education (years)					.29***	.03	.25***	.03	.15**	.05
SES and Residence										
Enrolled in school (1=yes)							.49***	.10	.45***	.10
Household income (logged)							.09***	.02	.09***	.02
Employed (1=yes)							.03	.14	.02	.14
Southern region (1=yes)							.01	.13	.00	.13
Urban residence (1=yes)							-.04	.10	-.05	.10
Interactions										
Black Married X Education									.48**	.16
Black Cohabiting X Education									.18	.14
White Cohabiting X Education									-.02	.07
Black Monogamously dating X Education									.25**	.09
White Monogamously dating X Education									.13	.07
Black Single X Education									.20*	.10
White Single X Education									.06	.08
Individual-level error variance	6.25	.17***	6.20***	.17	6.22***	.17	6.14***	.16	6.11***	.16
Between-person error variance	4.44	.23***	4.26***	.22	3.87***	.21	3.77***	.20	3.75***	.20
-2 Log Likelihood	19998.60		19933.04		19847.40		22212.63		19765.63	

Note: N = 2,238 women (black = 1,074; white = 1,164) and 4,677 observations (black = 2,468; white = 2,209); [a] White Married is the reference category.
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

Multivariate Analyses of Mastery for Women and Men

The results for women's mastery are shown in Table 8. In the first model, white single (*b*=-.48; *se*=.16) women have lower mastery than white married women. In the second model, relationship specific variables and parenthood are included and black married women (*b*=.73; *se*=.31) report higher mastery, but monogamously dating black (*b*=-2.02; *se*=.41) and white (*b*=-2.26; *se*=.39) women and single black (*b*=-2.02; *se*=.42) and white (*b*=-2.57; *se*=.40) women have lower mastery. As age increases so does mastery (*b*=.03; *se*=.01) and greater conflict in marital (*b*=-1.01; *se*=.21) and cohabiting (*b*=-1.04; *se*=.21) relationships lead to lower mastery. In the following model, education (*b*=.29; *se*=.03) is included and is positively associated with mastery and age is negatively related to mastery (*b*=-.03 *se*=.01). The final model is largely similar to Model 3 – i.e., compared to married white women, black married women (*b*=.94; *se*=.31) have higher mastery levels, but black (*b*=-1.33; *se*=.42) and white (*b*=-1.79; *se*=.40) monogamously dating and black (*b*=-1.34; *se*=.42) and white (*b*=-2.00; *se*=.40) single women report lower levels of mastery. Age (*b*=-.04; *se*=.01), conflict in marriage (*b*=-.92; *se*=.21), and conflict in cohabitation (*b*=-1.03; *se*=.21) lead to a decrease in mastery. Educational attainment (*b*=.25; *se*=.03), school enrollment (*b*=.49; *se*=.10), and income (*b*=.09; *se*=.02) are all related to increases in mastery for women. The relationship status-race and education interactions for black married, monogamously dating, and single women are significant and Figure 5 a-d shows these findings graphically.

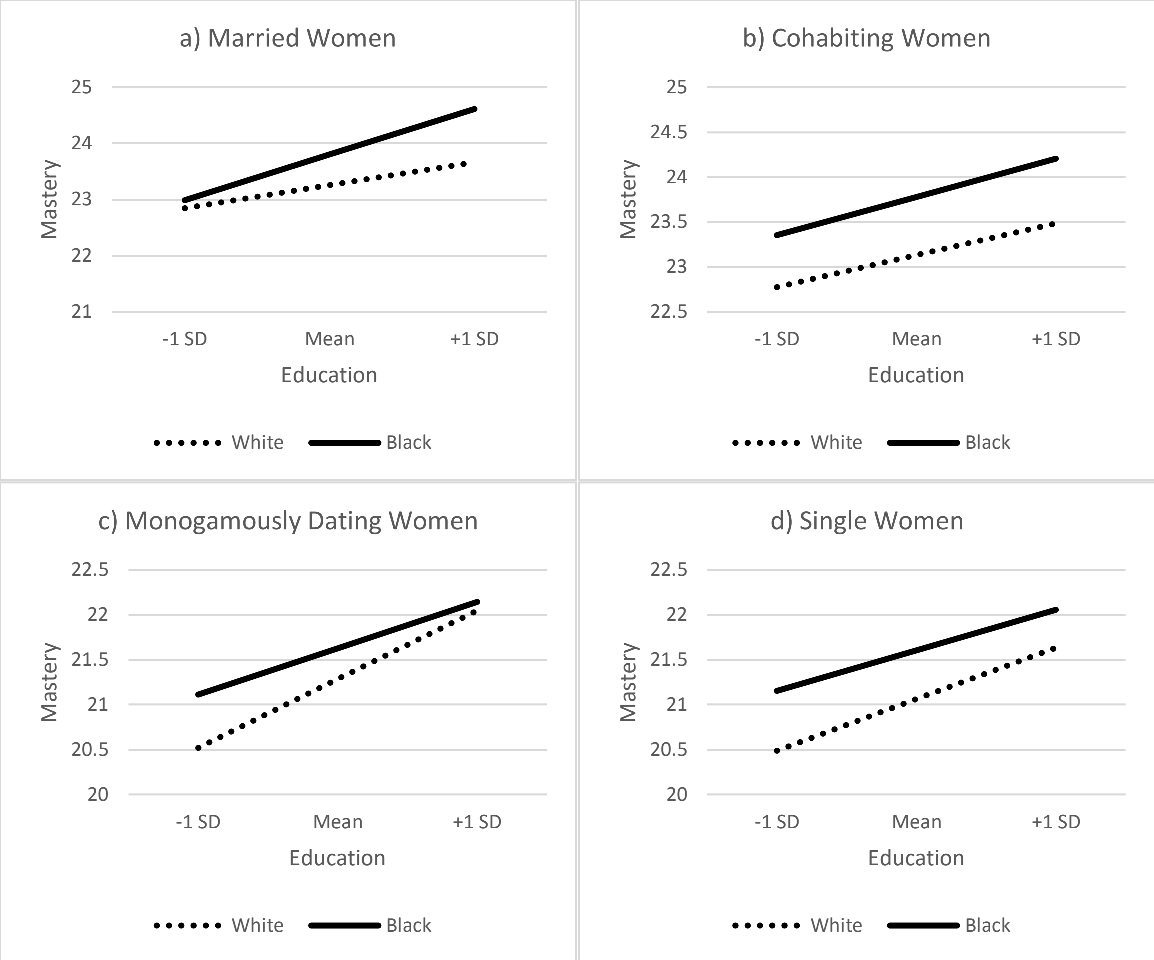

Figure 5 a-d: Mastery for Women by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

Figure 5 a-d displays the mastery interaction findings for women across romantic relationship status and educational attainment. Mastery increases for all groups across educational attainment. Black women report higher levels of personal mastery than white women in all intimate relationship statuses. Married black women with higher than average educational attainment reported the highest mastery. The lowest level of mastery is reported by monogamously dating and single white women with less than average educational attainment. Compared to white married women, black married (t=3.00, $p < .01$), dating (t=2.78, $p < .01$), and single (t=2.00, $p < .05$) women report steeper increases in mastery across educational attainment. Additionally, the increase in mastery for black married women is greater than that for white married women as educational attainment increases (t=3.04, $p < .01$). With rises in level of education, the increase in mastery for the unmarried groups of women do not differ significantly by race.

Table 9. Multilevel Model Estimating Mastery for Men During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*
Intercept (at age 25)	22.81***	.14	23.76***	.40	23.36***	.40	22.66***	.43	22.95***	.43
Marital Status and Race [a]										
Black Married (1=yes)	.33	.34	.48	.34	.62	.33	.57	.33	.37	.35
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	-.45	.26	.52	.71	.71	.70	.71	.70	.49	.71
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	-.16	.18	.52	.66	.61	.66	.62	.65	.39	.66
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	-.47*	.21	-1.80***	.50	-1.54**	.50	-1.47**	.50	-1.70***	.51
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	-.27	.17	-1.70***	.49	-1.58**	.48	-1.55**	.48	-1.80***	.49
Black Single (1=yes)	-.71***	.21	-2.06***	.51	-1.80***	.50	-1.68***	.51	-1.93***	.51
White Single (1=yes)	-.49**	.17	-1.93***	.49	-1.78***	.49	-1.71***	.49	-1.99***	.49
Age										
Age (years)	.00*	.01	.02*	.01	-.03	.01	-.02	.01	-.02	.01
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood										
Length of marriage			-.19*	.08	-.16*	.08	-.16*	.08	-.17*	.08
Length of cohabitation			-.00	.10	-.01	.10	-.02	.10	-.01	.10
Conflict in marriage			-.50*	.24	-.49*	.24	-.48*	.24	-.54*	.24
Conflict in cohabiting union			-1.18***	.24	-1.12***	.24	-1.11***	.24	-1.13***	.24
Parent (1=yes)			-.53***	.13	-.26*	.13	-.23	.13	-.22	.13
Education										
Education (years)					.29***	.03	.24***	.03	.07	.06
SES and Residence										
Enrolled in school (1=yes)							.46***	.11	.45***	.11
Household income (logged)							.05**	.02	.05**	.02
Employed (1= yes)							.25	.16	.21	.16
Southern region (1 = yes)							.13	.12	.12	.12
Urban residence (1 = yes)							.36***	.10	.36***	.10
Interactions										
Black Married X Education									.32	.18
Black Cohabiting X Education									.47**	.15
White Cohabiting X Education									.11	.08
Black Monogamously dating X Education									.39***	.10
White Monogamously dating X Education									.12	.08
Black Single X Education									.30**	.11
White Single X Education									.20**	.08
Individual-level error variance	8.00***	.22	7.93***	.21	7.92***	.21	7.89***	.21	7.84***	.21
Between-person error variance	3.95***	.22	3.86***	.21	3.56***	.20	3.44***	.20	3.43***	.20
-2 Log Likelihood	17056.62		17016.64		16947.50		16908.52		16891.27	

Note: N = 2,282 men (black = 1,049, white = 1,233) and 4,539 observations (black = 2,275, white = 2,264); [a] White Married is the reference category. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

The results of mastery for men are shown in Table 9. In Model 1, black dating (*b*=.47; *se*=.21) and single (*b*=-.71; *se*=.21) men as well as white single (*b*=-.49; *se*=.17) men have lower mastery than white married men. As age (*b*=.00; *se*=.01) increases mastery rises very little. In Model 2, white monogamously dating (*b*=-1.70; *se*=.49) men have lower mastery than the married. Length of marriage (*b*=-.19; *se*=.08), conflict in marital (*b*=-.50; *se*=.24) and cohabiting (*b*=-1.18; *se*=.24) relationships, and parenthood (*b*=-.53; *se*=.13) are related to lower mastery. When the influence of educational attainment (*b*=.29; *se*=.03) is included in the next model, age is no longer significantly related to mastery. In Model 4, black (*b*=-1.47; *se*=.50) and white (*b*=-1.68; *se*=.51) monogamously dating as well as black (*b*=-1.55; *se*=.48) and white (*b*=-1.71; *se*=.49) single men report lower mastery. Length of marriage (*b*=-.16; *se*=.08), conflict in a marital (*b*=-.48; *se*=.24) or cohabiting (*b*=-1.11; *se*=.24) relationships are associated with decreases in mastery. Education (*b*=.24; *se*=.03), school enrollment (*b*=.46; *se*=.11), income (*b*=.05; *se*=.02), and urban housing (*b*=.36; *se*=.10) are each associated with increases in mastery. The relationship status-race and education interactions for black men who are cohabiting, dating, or single and white single men are significant. The interactions results are graphed in Figure 6 a-d.

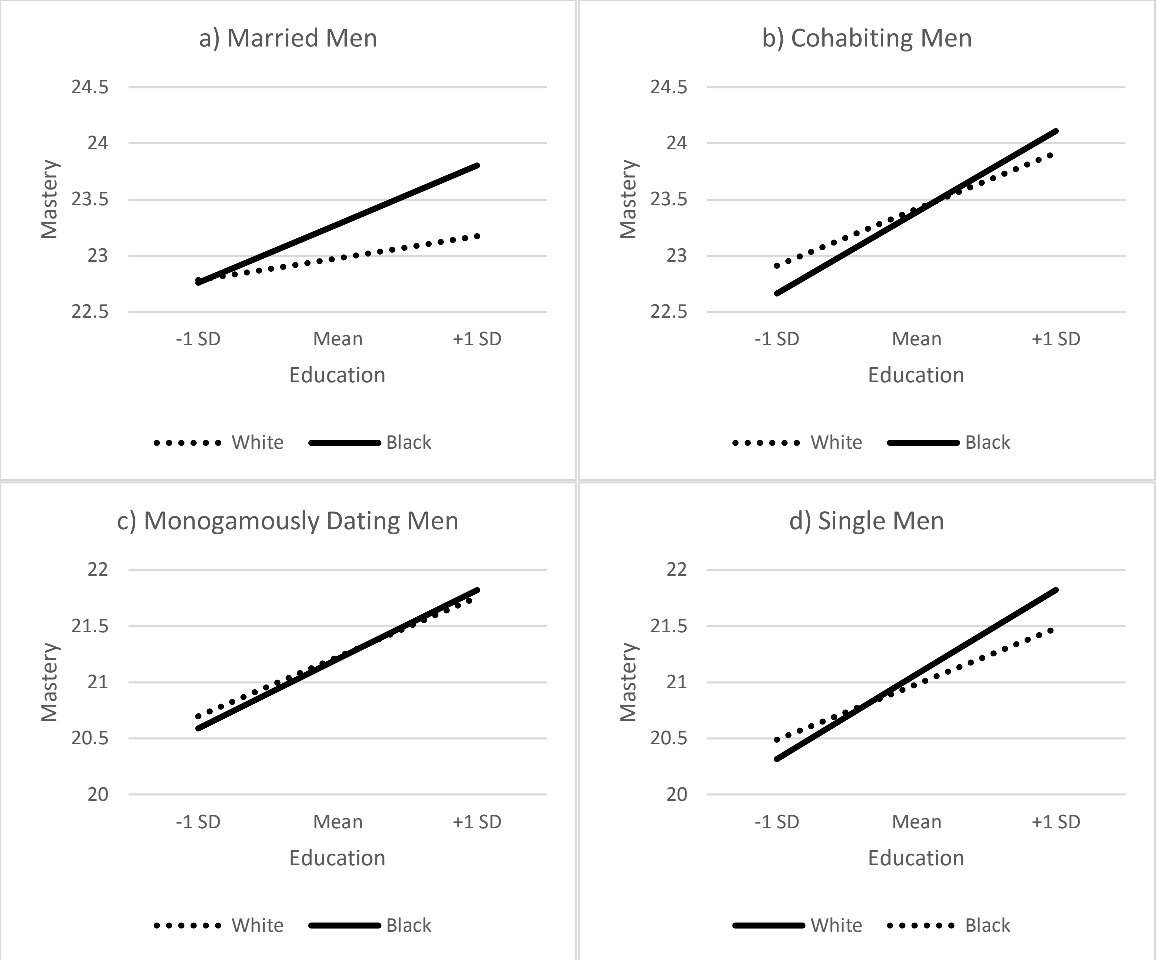

Figure 6 a-d: Mastery for Men by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

The mastery results of the interaction analyses for men are displayed in Figure 6 a-d. Mastery increases across level of education for all groups. Black men with less than average educational attainment report a lower sense of personal mastery across romantic relationship. Black single men with less than average education report the lowest mastery. With increases in education, black men gain an advantage such that at higher levels of educational attainment black men report greater mastery in all but monogamously dating intimate relationships. Black cohabiting men with higher than average education report the highest mastery. Levels of mastery for black and white monogamously dating men are largely similar across education. Compared to white married men, black cohabiting (t=3.13, $p < .01$), dating (t=3.90, $p < .001$), and single (t=2.73, $p < .01$) men experience a steeper increase in mastery. White single (t=2.50, $p < .05$) men also report a steeper increase in mastery across education compared to white married men. The increase in mastery for black cohabiting (t=2.41, $p < .05$) and monogamously dating (t=2.70, $p < .01$) men is greater than the increase for their white peers as educational attainment rises. The gains in mastery for married and single men do not significantly differ by race across educational attainment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I investigate the ways in which romantic relationships, race, gender, and educational attainment shape the self-esteem and sense of mastery of young adults. I hypothesized (H1a-c) that the married will have higher self-esteem than the a) cohabiting, b) monogamously dating, and c) single. I did not find that the married have higher self-esteem than the cohabiting for either men or women. Among men, the married have higher self-esteem than the dating and single. For women, the married only have higher self-esteem than the white dating and single. The first part of the second hypothesis – those in cohabiting relationships have higher

self-esteem than the dating – is only supported for the white dating men and women. Cohabiting men have higher self-esteem than the single, supporting hypothesis 2b. Yet, for women, only white single women have lower self-esteem than the cohabiting. Hypothesis 3, which predicted that the monogamously dating will have higher self-esteem than those who are single, is not supported for men and, among women, only white single women have lower self-esteem.

In the hypotheses specific to mastery, I began by hypothesizing (H4 a-c) that the married will have a higher sense of personal mastery than the a) cohabiting, b) monogamously dating, and c) single. Hypothesis 4a is not support for men or women. Hypotheses 4b-c are supported for both men and women. In support of hypotheses 5a-b, those in cohabiting relationships have higher mastery than the a) dating and b) single men and women. The final hypothesis – the monogamously dating have higher mastery than the single – is not supported for men or women.

The impact of marriage on self-esteem and mastery does not differ from the impact of cohabitation, which implies that for the young people analyzed here, cohabiting with a partner is similar to marriage. At older ages, differences in marriage and cohabitation may become more pronounced. The advantage of marriage or cohabiting over dating and singlehood is more evident for men's self-esteem and mastery and women's mastery. Perhaps, living with a romantic partner signifies to self and significant friends and family a greater level of commitment and support in a romantic relationship, in line with traditional ideas of adulthood, that then works to support higher perceived self-worth and mastery.

Racial differences and the importance of considering intersecting categories becomes clearer when analyzing the self-esteem of black dating and single women. Women in cohabiting relationships have higher self-esteem than white dating and single women. Black women who are monogamously dating or single do not report significantly different self-esteem than the

married or cohabiting. This pattern may be related to educational attainment (as Model 3 in Table 6 suggest). For young black women, the importance of increasing educational attainment may be more important than transitioning into a marital or cohabiting relationship. White single women may feel more pressure to transition into a romantic relationship (see Crissey 2005; Manning, Longmore, and Giordano 2007) than black single women thus placing their sense of self-worth in a vulnerable position. Additionally, these findings support qualitative work which show that ideas of young womanhood are strongly influenced by self-sufficiency and educational accomplishments in the absence of men for black women (Chaney and Marsh 2008; Chaney 2009; 2011).

A clear racial difference for men is in the level of self-esteem between those cohabiting and men who are dating monogamously. White men perceive a lower self-worth when they are monogamously dating instead of cohabiting with a partner. Black cohabiting and dating men do not differ. Young black dating men may perceive a similar level of self-worth as those cohabiting despite being in a less committed relationship for the same reasons black single women are similar to dating black women. That is, compared to white men, young adult black men's perceived self-worth may be less influenced by monogamous dating and instead black men are focused on other goals like increasing educational attainment.

Romantic involvement is particular important for white women's self-esteem. Among men and black women, the monogamously dating do not differ from the single in mastery or self-esteem. The dating and single have lower self-esteem and mastery compared to the married and cohabiting, but white single women report the lowest self-esteem. This finding could be driven by the reality that more white women are married than the other race-gender groups

examined here, so white single women may question their self-worth due to a lack of similarity with many of their close peers.

The associations of interest were also tested by educational attainment. Level of education intersects with romantic relationship status, race, and gender to shape self-esteem and mastery. The advantage of marriage is present for this young adult sample and is especially pronounced for black women with gains in education. A higher level of education is related to a greater increase in self-esteem and mastery for married black women compared to white women across romantic relationship status. Black married men also report a greater gain in self-esteem with an increased level of education compared to all white men, but do not experience the same benefit for mastery.

Black married women and men report steeper increases in self-esteem with gains in education compared to their white married peers. The steeper increase in self-esteem for married black men and women coupled with more education is possibly because in addition to academic success, they are among a small group who are married thus increasing their chances of comparison to unmarried peers. Research shows that social comparisons to others in primary or secondary social groups serve as a tie between stress and well-being (see Thoits 2011). The lack of a significant increase in mastery for married black men across education may be linked to black men's greater difficult securing the benefits of more education while facing the responsibilities of marriage. Perhaps, more education is particularly empowering for young unmarried black men, and dating and single black women's mastery, because they are free to use their educational gains in the labor market with fewer family and romantic partner obligations in.

In conclusion, contemporary young adults are delaying marriage at record rates. However, despite elevated marital challenges confronting racial minorities and less educated

people, members of such groups remain highly respectful of and optimistic about marriage (Trail and Karney 2012). Being married proved to be more advantageous for perceived self-esteem and mastery than dating or remaining single, especially for blacks, but does not significantly differ in effects from cohabitation. Race also plays a role in shaping self-concept for young adults, but more clearly for self-esteem. The effect of romantic relationships on mastery does not differ by race except that black married people have the highest mastery. However, self-esteem is more complicated by race and gender. Black women have higher self-esteem than white women across intimate relationship type, but black men do not consistently report a higher self-esteem than white men. Educational attainment also shapes mastery and self-esteem favorably for all groups, indicating that education is a worthwhile focus regardless of intimate relationship status. Yet, it is clear that marriage with more education is the most positive for self-esteem and mastery.

The findings underscore the importance of considering what factors shape both mastery and self-esteem during the young adult portion of the life course. As the stress process model and intersectionality suggest, romantic relationships, race, gender, and educational attainment each overlap to position people differently in a hierarchy of access to advantages and disadvantages with respect to psychosocial resources such as self-esteem and mastery. The effect of race, gender, and educational attainment have each been studied with respect to self-concept, but the intersecting influence of romantic relationships (in particular, monogamously dating) is less frequently included. The results have shown that intimate relationships serve to support self-concept in ways that need continuous investigation.

While this study has made important contributions, it is not without limitation. I am unable to include the salience of each identity or category considered here. For white single women, relationship status may be more salient than race or education. Despite this limitation,

this study has provided a greater understanding of inequalities in psychosocial resources that have been shown to be long-lasting and impactful for health and well-being outcomes (Pudrovska et al. 2005; Thoits 2006).

The aim of this study was to connect romantic relationships to self-esteem and mastery by examining intimate unions as sources of advantage or disadvantage that intersect with race, gender, and educational attainment. Understanding underlying reasons for differences in aspects of self-concept are important for determining dissimilarities in coping responses and health outcomes (Thoits 2011; 2013). The examination of how identities and statuses intersect to influence psychosocial resources proved worthwhile because the findings differed across romantic relationship type, race-gender status, and educational attainment. Future research should continue to use nationally representative longitudinal data to acknowledge how identities and statuses intersect to shape self-concept.

CHAPTER IV

Romantic Relationships and Young Adult Health: The Intersecting Influence of Race-Gender Status and Educational Attainment on Depressive Symptoms and Self-rated Health

ABSTRACT

It is widely assumed that young people are in good health and the social determinants of health for young adults is less frequently studied compared to other age groups. Or, young adult health outcomes are grouped with adolescent health. Yet, the sociodemographic and contextual influences that impact risky behaviors, health outcomes, and access to care differ between adolescents and young adults. Additionally, as paths of transition into adulthood have become more complex, young adults are engaging in varying forms of romantic relationships and prolonging educational attainment in ways that are racial and gendered. In this study, I investigate the extent to which romantic relationship status (i.e., marriage, cohabitation, monogamous dating, and singlehood) shapes mental and physical health utilizing longitudinal data for a sample of 18 to 34-year-old blacks and whites. The influence of race, gender, and educational attainment in determining the association between intimate relationships and health are also taken into consideration. The results indicate that compared to marriage, cohabitation is not significantly different for mental or physical health except for the self-rated health of women. Cohabitation is more advantageous for health than monogamously dating or remaining single except when considering the physical health of women. Among men, monogamously dating operates differently than remaining single in that dating men report fewer depressive symptoms than single men.

INTRODUCTION

The transition into young adulthood is a time of heightened psychological vulnerability and onset of serious mental health disorders (Kessler, et al. 2007). The World Health Organization (2008) reported that along with substance use, mental health disorders are the greatest source of disability among young adults in the United States. Mood disorders, such as major depression, are likely to present in adolescence or young adulthood and are often preceded by signs and symptoms that could warn of decreased coping abilities and other imminent mental and physical health issues (Kessler, et al. 2007). Depressive symptoms are often the result of stress from incidences like racial and gender discrimination (Williams and Sternthal 2010; Hudson et al. 2013; Simon 2014) but can be reduced with support from a romantic partner (see Simon 2014) and increased human capital as a result of greater educational attainment (see Ross and Mirowsky 2010).

Physical health outcomes among young adults are often grouped with adolescent health. While some scholars argue that contemporary adulthood is an extension of adolescence, the sociodemographic and contextual influences that impact risky behaviors, health outcomes, and access to care differ between adolescents and young adults (Christie-Mizell and Peralta 2009; Carpenter 2010). In fact, from adolescence to adulthood, substance use increases and mortality rates more than double (Park, et al. 2006). With broad transformations in the lives of young adults, like changing romantic unions, the consequences for physical health warrants more research specific to the young adult age group.

Romantic relationships impact both mental and physical health (Hughes and Waite 2009). The ability to establish and maintain stable romantic relationships is a key task during young adulthood. The findings from many research studies suggest that married people accrue the most

health and well-being benefits compared to the cohabiting and single (Cutrona 1996; Frech 2007; Musick and Bumpass 2012). Yet, among young adults, the health differences between the married and cohabiting have been found to be small or nonexistent. For example, during young adulthood, marriage has been found to be associated with similar levels of psychological distress as other romantic unions (Uecker 2012). Single people are thought to experience health disadvantages compared to the romantically involved, but how monogamously dating people fare compared to the cohabiting, married, and single is unclear. Additionally, differences in the effects of romantic relationships for health by race, gender, and educational attainment are also less clear.

In the present study, I examine the extent to which romantic relationships (i.e., marriage, cohabitation, monogamous dating, or singlehood) shape mental and physical health during young adulthood for black and white, men and women, along a continuum of educational attainment. An investigation into how romantic relationships influence young adult health contributes to the relevant research literature in several ways. First, using longitudinal data for a contemporary sample of youth transitioning to adulthood, I am able to trace the associations of interest over time and get a more complete view of how differing romantic relationships are consequential for health. The inclusion of dating relationships is important because a delay in marriage does not necessarily mean a forgoing of intimate relationships, which require varying levels of stability and commitment (Sassler, Addo, and Lichter 2012; Jamison and Proulx 2013). Some young adults select stable monogamous relationships, in which shared space, time spent together, and obligations are actively negotiated over time (Frank and DeLamater 2010; Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo 2015).

Second, I suggest that romantic relationships constitute a system of advantage and disadvantage with respect to health (see Clarke 2011 for a similar argument). Marriage is socially supported by laws, culture, religion, and community. The married enjoy special tax benefits and marriage is often encourage and spoken of as a Godly union. Married couples are more likely to pool their financial resources (Lauer and Yodanis 2011) and benefit from the social support of their spouse (Cutrona 1996). Yet, marriage is not easily accessible for all groups of people. For young adults who are less likely to marry, but choose other romantic relationship forms or remain single, the impact of their relationship status may exacerbate other disadvantages. For example, black women are the least likely to be married compared to other race-gender groups. While negative effects of singlehood across the lifespan are often ameliorated by social support from friends and family for black women (see Tucker 2003), young single black women may remain at a disadvantage compared to the married with respect to health.

Third, related to systems of advantage and disadvantage, I examine whether the impact of intimate relationship status on mental and physical health differs due to the intersections of race, gender, and educational attainment to reinforce and maintain health disparities. Growing inequality has resulted in difficulty for young men and women, black and white, to transition into marriage (Arnett 2007; Silva 2012). People who attain more education often delay marriage, but they also enjoy a better position in the marriage market towards the end of young adulthood thus increasing the benefits of greater educational attainment for health once they do marry (Mirowsky and Ross 2007). Additionally, Simon (2014) posits that while gender differences in the effects of marriage and other romantic unions are well-studied for the general population,

how race intersects with other axes of social inequality to produce disparities in health is largely unknown. The current research addresses this shortcoming in the literature.

BACKGROUND AND THEORY

Elements of the stress process model, intersectionality, and life course theory serve to guide this research. The stress process model links social categories to stressors and health outcomes. (Pearlin 1999; Turner 2010). The intersectionality framework highlights the effects of stigmatized statuses that place people on multiple axes of advantage and disadvantage (Davis 2008; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). Life course theory frames each life stage as being associated with explicit developmental tasks that contribute to an individual's health and well-being (Shanahan 2000; Mouw 2005; Carpenter 2010).

Theoretically, each status and identity – race, gender, romantic relationship status, and educational attainment – intersect to shape stressors and health uniquely in young adulthood. Adolescents form romantic relationships, but it is in young adulthood that romantic relationships become more committed and stable and offer greater social support and psychosocial resources to influence health outcomes (see Manning Longmore, and Giordano 2007; Halpern-Meekin et al. 2013). Education is gain over multiple portions of the life course and is particularly important in young adulthood when the accumulation of human capital assist young adults in making informed decisions about their mental and physical health while unsupervised by parents. Some identities are lifelong. For example, race and gender are determined and taught early in childhood and continue to have enduring and accumulating impacts across the life course.

The major benchmarks for achieving adult status have previously been the sequential completion of post-secondary education, securing stable employment, earning a steady income, and marrying (Shanahan 2000; Johnson, Berg, and Sirotzki 2007; Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo

2015; Mortimer and Moen 2016). Successfully meeting each standard of adulthood in a traditionally ordered fashion represents opportunities to cope with stress and manage mental and physical health. Contemporary young adults face an increasingly diverse set of pathways to adulthood that have become more complex and the appropriate sequencing of transitions are less clear (Shanahan 2000; Arnett 2007; Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo 2015). The result is that young adults are marrying at later ages than in the past or forgoing marriage altogether (Silva 2012). The modern transition to adulthood is more likely to incorporate cohabitation as the first committed romantic union instead of marriage (Smock 2000; Lichter, Turner and Sassler 2010). Nonmarital cohabitation has become so socially acceptable that rates have increased from about 500,000 couples in 1970 to about 7,600,000 couples in 2011 (Marquardt et al. 2012).

Contemporary young adult romantic relationships include not only cohabitation or marriage, but also monogamous dating or remaining single (Frank and DeLameter 2010; Jamison and Proulx 2013; Eliason, Mortimer, and Vuolo 2015). Monogamous daters are committed to one another but live in separate locations. For those who remain single, some have no romantic entanglements, while others engage in short-lived romantic and sexual relationships (Halpern-Meekin et al. 2013). Each type of romantic union considered here requires differing levels of sacrifice, commitment, and intimacy. The differences between each type of relationship could lead to accumulating disadvantages for those who are unable to transition into more committed relationships. For instance, the poor are less likely to marry but it may not be the simple result of choice or disregard for marriage. Instead, the poor may not have the appropriate resources to support marriage and a family which leaves them poor and without the economic benefits of marriage (see Edin and Kefalas 2011).

As young people move through young adulthood and the social expectation to marry increases, especially for women, those who have married have accomplished the symbolic success of attaining a positively sanctioned societal status (Cherlin 2004). Williams (2003) show that marital status effects on psychological well-being are largely similar for men and women. To complicate matters, Musick and Bumpass (2012) found that the benefits of marriage and cohabitation were similar across an array of social and well-being outcomes. Similarly, Mernitz and Kamp Dush (2016) found marriage and cohabitation were both associated with emotional well-being. In another complicated twist, researchers have found that transitions into monogamous dating relationships contribute to subjective well-being in much the same way as marriage and cohabitation (Kamp Dush and Amato 2005; Luciano and Orth 2017). Further, remaining unmarried may not result in diminished health. Tucker (2003) argues that the decreased stigmatization related to remaining single does not result in poor mental health for black women.

Many underlying reasons for inequalities in health are due to a hierarchy of social positions. In fact, Link and Phelan (1995) outline "fundamental causes" of health which include the social statuses of marital status, race, gender, and level of education. Fundamental causes of health have enduring associations with health despite changes in intermediate factors (Link and Phelan 1995). Being a member of more privileged categories – i.e., white, male, married, and highly educated – should lead to better health outcomes. As discussed, marriage is consistently shown to be the more beneficial romantic union for health and well-being because of greater economic resources, interpersonal social support, and better health behaviors (Williams and Umberson 2004). Research also suggest that compared to whites, blacks report similar or better mental health (see Mouzon 2013) but are more likely to report poor physical health (Duke and

Macmillan 2016). Gendered variations in role expectations, conflict, and strain put women at higher risk for diminished mental well-being (Rosenfield and Mouzon 2013) but men are more likely to engage in risky health behaviors resulting in poor physical health (Christie-Mizell and Peralta 2009). When considering the intersection of race and gender, black women report the lowest levels of self-assessed health (i.e., poor health) compared to black men, white men, and white women, but white women tend to report worse mental health (Cummings and Jackson 2008; Erving 2011).

Educational attainment is linked to health, intimate relationships, race, and gender (Ross and Mirowsky 2010; Zhang et al. 2011; Hill, Cook, and Whitfield 2014). The positive relationship between education and health is consistently supported in that people with more education report better mental and physical health (Mirowsky and Ross 2003) and live longer (Rogers, Everett, Zajacova, and Hummer 2010). Increased education is thought to positively affect health through an accumulation of human capital – skills, knowledge, and training that assists a person to make healthy decisions (Becker 2009). People who acquire more education possess greater critical thinking skills, better understandings of medical information, and the ability to navigate health care systems (Christie-Mizell et al. 2014). Education is also linked to less risky behaviors (Ross and Mirowsky 2010), fosters positive and supportive social relationships (Mirowsky and Ross 2003), and leads to more specialized and professional employment. According to the principle of homogamy, more educated people are likely to work and associate with equally educated people who then become friends and romantic partners that hold one accountable for practicing healthy behaviors (Schwartz and Mare 2005).

Education distinguishes those in non-residential and co-residential unions. Monogamous daters are likely to have more schooling than those who live with their spouse or a cohabiting

partner (Strohm et al. 2009). Completion of college has been linked to a greater likelihood of marriage (McLanahan 2004), especially for people with preexisting social advantages (Raley and Bumpass 2003; Musick, Brand, and Davis 2012). Additionally, the importance of similar education and financial contributions in marriage is predictive of relationship type for both men and women (Gibson-Davis 2009; Edin and Kafalas 2011).

Education operates differently across gender and race. The contemporary gender gap in educational attainment favors girls and women. Girls are more likely to complete high school and go on to earn a college degree (see Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008). The gender gap in education is especially pronounced between black men and women (see Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel 2008). However, even with increased education for women, gendered stereotypes and gaps in employment status and pay remain. Despite educational success, women face stronger expectations to marry and are compensated with less prestigious job positions and pay.

The unequal attainment of education across race and gender could translate into unique consequences for romantic relationships as people are attracted to others with similar education and career status. Given that a higher proportion of black women attend and complete college than black men, highly educated black women are more likely to marry someone with less education or not marry at all (Banks 2011; Clarke 2011). Additionally, even as some blacks experience upward social mobility with increased education they may experience residual effects of early disadvantage as blacks are more likely than whites to be exposed to adverse experiences in childhood (Williams 2008). In turn, such exposure may limit the opportunities for many blacks to acquire socioeconomic resources associated with education that promote health and well-being as young adults (see Brown, O'Rand, and Adkins 2012).

SUMMARY AND HYPOTHESES

The mental and physical health of young adults warrants more scholarly attention given the broad changes in how young people experience the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Previous research suggests that categories of identity and status, including intimate relationships, shape mental and physical health uniquely depending on the attached advantages and disadvantages. Elements from the stress process framework, intersectionality, and the life course theory are used to examine how romantic relationships (marriage, cohabitation, monogamously dating, and single), race, gender, and educational attainment intersect to shape the health of young adults. The following hypotheses were derived based on elements from each theory and previous research:

H1 a-c: The married have fewer depressive symptoms compared to those who are (a) cohabiting, (b) monogamously dating, or (c) single.

H2 a-b: Those cohabiting have fewer depressive symptoms than those who are (a) monogamously dating or (b) single.

H3: Those who are monogamously dating have fewer depressive symptoms than the single.

H4 a-c: The married have lower odds of poor health compared to those who are (a) cohabiting, (b) monogamously dating, or (c) single.

H5 a-b: Those cohabiting have lower odds of poor health than those who are (a) monogamously dating or (b) single.

H6: Those who are monogamously dating have lower odds of poor health than the single.

In light of the literature that shows that the effects of relationship status differ by social positions, all of the hypotheses are tested to assess for differences by race, gender, and level of education.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data for this study come from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult sample (NLSY-YA). The young adults of the NLSY-YA consist of the children born to mothers who were surveyed in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79). The U.S. Departments of Labor and Defense sponsored the NLSY79 and NSLY-YA surveys. The NLSY79 is a nationally representative sample of Americans who were between the ages of 14-22 in 1979. African American, Hispanic, and low income white youth were oversampled. In 1994, the children aged 14 and older of NLSY79 mothers became the constituents of the NLSY-YA and were interviewed biennially thereafter. The birth years of the young adults range from 1970 to 1984. As of the 2010 wave of data collection, ages ranged from 14 to 38. The respondents of the NLSY-YA were asked questions regarding family life, social psychological development, labor force participation, socioeconomic achievement, and health outcomes.

The sample is limited to respondents who were surveyed when they were between the ages 18 to 34 during any of the nine waves from 1994 to 2010. All respondents have at least one valid observation on the dependent variables and a maximum of five observations, which results in a sample size of 4,520 respondents (N = 2,282 men and N = 2,238 women) contributing 9,216 observations (N = 4,539 for men; N = 4,677 for women). A number of respondents had missing data on covariates, so multiple imputation by chained equations was done to maintain respondents in the sample. Ten replicate datasets were imputed, analyzed, and results were pooled to arrive at the models presented (Rubin 2004).

The dependent variables are depressive symptoms and self-rated health. Depressive symptoms, or generalized distress, is measured with the 7-item Center for the Epidemiologic Studies of Depression Scale (CES-D). Using a 4-point Likert scale, respondents were asked how often in the past week they (1) did not feel like eating or had poor appetite, (2) had trouble keeping their mind on what they were doing, (3) felt depressed, (4) felt that everything was an effort, (5) had restless sleep, (6) felt sad, and (7) could not get going. Across each of the nine years, the Cronbach Alpha is above .70 for women and .60 for men. The analyses of depressive symptoms are weighted to correct for oversampling of black and low income white respondents.

Self-rated health is a subjective measure of general health that reflects both physical and emotional dimensions of well-being (DeSalvo et al. 2009). Self-rated health is measured with the following question, "In general would you say your health is: 1) Excellent, 2) Very Good, 3) Good, 4) Fair, or 5) Poor." Self-rated health is dummy coded so that people who reported fair or poor health (1=yes) are compared to those who report excellent, very good, or good health. The self-rated health analyses are not weighted due to data fit issues.

Relationship status and race-gender status are the key independent variables. The effects of relationship status for each race-gender group is of particular interest. All possible combinations of relationship status and race are dummy coded into eight mutually exclusive categories across gender: black married, black cohabiting, black monogamously dating, black single, white married, white cohabiting, white monogamously dating, white single. Differences in depressive symptoms and poor health by educational attainment are also a key focus of this study. Education is measured in years completed at each observation, ranges from 0 to 20, and is included as a moderating variable of the main associations of interest.

The length of, and conflict within, intimate relationships are considered conditionally relevant variables that can influence the impact of intimate unions on depressive symptoms and self-rated poor health. In the NLSY-YA, the conditionally relevant variables of length and conflict apply to people who are married or cohabiting. Both length and conflict are time-varying and constructed utilizing all nine waves of the data. These variables, length and conflict, were estimated as conditional deviations from the mean for all married and cohabiting people (Montazer, Wheaton and Noh 2016).

Relationship length is measured in years and coded as: (1) less than a year; (2) l year; (3) 2 years; (4) 3-5 years; and (5) more than 5 years. Conflict in marital and cohabiting relationships is measured with a 10-item scale that assessed how often the couple argues or experiences conflict over: (1) Chores and responsibility; (2) Children; (3) Money; (4) Showing affection to each other; (5) Religion; (6) Leisure or free time; (7) Drinking; (8) Sexual affairs with other people; (9) Relatives of the respondent; and (10) Relatives of the respondent's partner. Each item is coded from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The full scale summed all items and divided by 10, resulting in an index that ranges from 1 (lower conflict) to 4 (higher conflict). Across each wave, the alpha reliability for conflict in marriage or cohabitation is .82 or higher.

Control Variables

The following control variables were collected at each wave of data collection. Health and well-being are related to age, schooling, income, employment, and residence (Williams and Umberson 2004; Duke and Macmillian 2016; Tyndall and Christie-Mizell 2016). Age is measured in years and ranges from 18 to 34. Parenthood is included and measured as a dummy variable (1=yes). School enrollment is included in the analyses as a dummy variable (1=yes). Household income is measured in thousands of dollars and logged in the analyses. Current

employment or active military duty is dummy coded (1=yes). Southern residence is coded 1 if the respondent reported living in the southern U.S. compared to all other regions. Urban residence is coded 1 if the respondent's residence was urban as opposed to a rural residence.

As indicated to be appropriate by the stress process model, the psychosocial resources of self-esteem and mastery are also included as controls. Self-esteem in measured by the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale and ranges from 10 to 40. Mastery is measured using the 7-item Pearlin Mastery Scale and ranges from 7 to 21. The self-esteem and mastery alpha reliabilities are above .70 for women and men.

Analytic Strategy

Multilevel models with fixed coefficient estimates and random intercepts are used to account for the non-independence of repeated measures nested within individuals (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). For ease of presentation and interpretation, I group the analyses by gender (white and married is the comparison group for women and men). The model estimation proceeds in three stages. First, I regress depressive symptoms on the relationship status-race variables along with age. In the next model, relationship length, relationship conflict, and parenthood status are included. Then, I include education in the analyses. In the subsequent model, I add the control variables. Finally, I estimate interaction effects between romantic relationship-race and education. The following equation summarizes my approach to the initial models:

$$Y_{ti} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathbf{RRG}_{ti} + \beta_2 \mathbf{AGE}_{ti} + \beta_3 \mathbf{RL}_{ti}(\mathbf{RSP'}_{ti}) + \beta_4 \mathbf{EDUC}_i + \beta_5 \mathbf{RC}_{ti}(\mathbf{RSP'}_{ti}) + u_{0i} + \varepsilon_{ti}$$

In the equations for men and women, Y_{ti} is the depressive symptoms score for person i at time t. Each uppercase bold term represents a block of related independent and control variables. $\mathbf{RRG}_{ti}$ represents the complete set of variables that indicate relationship-race-gender status of the

individual at each observation. $\mathbf{AGE}_{ti}$ represents the linear term centered at age 25 to allow the intercept (β_0) to be interpreted as the mean level of depressive symptoms at age 25. I selected age 25, because it is the mid-point of the sample's age range and allows time for respondents to complete a four-year degree and transition into more stable and committed romantic relationships. $\mathbf{EDUC}_i$ is education and is centered at 12 years.

Relationship length ($\mathbf{RL}_{ti}$) and relationship conflict ($\mathbf{RC}_{ti}$) are the conditionally relevant variables. To include these important covariates, which are not applicable to a large proportion of the sample, relationship length and conflict are multiplied by the subset of relationship categories for those who are married and cohabiting ($\mathbf{RSP'}_{ti}$). Including these interaction terms without main effects for relationship length and conflict allows the coefficients for these interactions (i.e., β_4 and β_5) to be interpreted for those in married and cohabiting relationships and drops out of the equation those who are single or dating monogamously. All continuous variables (e.g., relationship length, conflict, education, income, self-esteem, and mastery) are mean centered to allow for an interpretation of the influence on depressive symptoms at the average of these factors. Random effects (level 2) are estimated for the intercept to account for the non-independence of repeated measures. This is represented in the equation above by the term u_{0i}. The individual (level 1) residual is specified by the term ε_{ti}.

The estimation of poor health is done differently than depressive symptoms. Self-rated health is coded as a dichotomous outcome to predict the log odds of poor health. A binary outcome takes on a binomial distribution that has no error variance at level-1 (within individuals). Instead, the variance is a function of the population mean (Ene, et al. 2015). In the analyses, log odds of poor health are estimated in fewer steps then were used to estimate depressive symptoms. In the first model, romantic relationship-race status and age are used to

predict the log odds of poor health. The independent and control variables are consistent across the models for depressive symptoms and poor self-rated health and are used in the second model predicting poor health. In model 3, interactions between education and romantic relationships-race status are estimated.

For ease of interpretation, the log odds of poor health are converted into odds ratios and predicted probabilities of poor health. In this case, the odds ratio is the odds of being in poor health as opposed to being in good health. The odds ratio is calculated by using the exponential function. The odds ratio is then used to predict the probability of reporting poor health.

$$Odds\ Ratio = e^{\gamma_{ti}}$$

$$Predicted\ Probability = \emptyset_{ti} = \frac{e^{\gamma_{ti}}}{1 + e^{\gamma_{ti}}}$$

Table 10: Weighted Means, Percentages, and Standard Deviations (SD) for All Study Variables.
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth – Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010. Ages 18-34.

	Women (N=2,238)				Men (N=2,282)			
	Black		White		Black		White	
	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD
Dependent Variables								
Depressive Symptoms	5.55***	3.08	4.99	5.64	4.44**	2.85	4.35	5.32
Poor Health (1=yes)	15.79%***	.26	11.57%	.45	8.93%*	.23	8.38%	.41
Independent Variables								
Married (1=yes)	8.33%***	-	23.47%	-	8.25%***	-	17.97%	-
Cohabiting (1=yes)	10.43%***	-	17.68%	-	15.90%***	-	14.05%	-
Monogamously Dating (1=yes)	50.12%***	-	33.92%	-	39.91%***	-	32.30%	-
Single (1=yes)	31.12%***	-	24.94%	-	35.94%	-	35.67%	-
Age								
Age (years)	22.81***	2.81	22.33	5.03	23.23***	3.24	22.47	5.38
Educational Attainment								
Education (years)	12.27***	1.29	12.76	2.73	11.90***	1.34	12.40	2.79
Control Variables								
Length of Marriage (years)	2.35	1.03	2.31	2.10	2.35***	1.18	2.15	2.12
Length of Cohabitation (years)	1.94***	.40	1.78	.63	1.87***	.43	1.78	.66
Conflict in Marriage	2.08***	.88	1.91	.43	2.14***	1.00	1.99	1.54
Conflict in Cohabitation	1.82***	.40	1.73	.67	1.85***	.42	1.76	.69
Parent (1=yes)	52.43%***	-	34.97%	-	42.95%***	-	22.59%	-
Enrolled in School (1=yes)	32.21%***	-	36.37%	-	21.49%***	-	33.06%	-
Household Income (dollars)	13,988***	13,391	24,684	44,116	16,391***	17,387	23,352	40,621
Employed (1=yes)	80.36%***	-	88.40%	-	78.96%***	-	90.97%	-
Southern Residence (1=yes)	60.23%***	-	35.63%	-	60.57%***	-	36.81%	-
Urban Residence (1=yes)	83.51%***	-	62.73%	-	82.96%***	-	60.24%	-

Note: *N* = 2,238 women (black = 1,074, white = 1,164) and 4,677 observations (black = 2,468, white = 2,209); *N* = 2,282 men (black = 1,049, white = 1,233) and 4,539 observations (black = 2,275, white = 2,264). Asterisks denote significant differences between men and women, where *p<.05, **p<.01 and ***p<.001.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics for Women

Table 10 displays the descriptive statistics by gender. There are 1,074 black women and 1,164 white women in the sample. Black women report higher depressive symptoms (mean=5.55) than white women (mean=4.99). A greater percentage of black women report poor health (percent=15.79%) than white women (percent=11.57%). More white women are married (percent=23.47%) or in a cohabiting relationship (percent=17.68%) than black women (percentages=8.33% and 10.43%, respectively). A higher percentage of black women are monogamously dating (percent=50.12%) or single (percent=31.12%) than white women (percentages=33.92% and 24.94%, respectively). The black women are older (mean=22.81 versus mean=22.33) and have less years of education (means=12.27 versus 12.76). The length of cohabiting with a romantic partner is longer for black women (mean=1.94) than for white women (mean= 1.78) and the amount of conflict for black women in marital relationships (mean=2.08) and cohabiting relationships (mean=1.82) is higher than for white women (means=1.91 and 1.73, respectively). A greater percentage of black women are parents (percentages=52.43% versus 34.97%), and a lower percentage are enrolled in school (percentages=32.21% versus 36.37%) and employed (percentages=80.36% versus 88.40%). Black women also have less income (mean=$13,988) than white women (mean=$24,684). More black women live in the southern region of the U.S. (percent=60.23%) and in urban areas (percent=83.51%) than white women (percentages=35.63% and 63.73%, respectively).

Descriptive Statistics for Men

Table 10 also displays the descriptive statistics for men. There are 1,049 black men and 1,233 white men in the sample. Black men report more depressive symptoms (mean=4.44) than

white men (mean=4.35) and a greater percentage of black men report poor health (percentages=8.93% versus 8.38%). More white men are married (percent=18%) but fewer are cohabiting (percent=14%) or monogamously dating (percent=32%) compared to black men (percentages=8%, 16%, and 40%, respectively). Black men are older (mean=23.23 versus 22.47) and have less years of education (means=11.90 versus 12.40). The length of black men's marital (mean=2.35) and cohabiting relationships (mean=1.87) are longer than for white men (means=2.15 versus 1.78). The amount of conflict in black men's marital relationships (mean=2.14) and cohabiting relationships (mean=1.85) is higher than for white men (means=1.99 and 1.76, respectively). A greater percentage of black men are parents (percent=43%) compared to white men (percent=23%). A lower percentage of black men are enrolled in school (percentages=21% versus 33%) and employed (percentages=79% versus 91%). Black men also have less income (mean=$16,391) than white men (mean=$23,352). More black men live in the southern region of the U.S. (percent=61%) and in urban areas (percent=83%) than white men (percentages=37% and 60%, respectively).

Table 11. Multilevel Model Estimating Depressive Symptoms for Women During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*
Intercept (at age 25)	4.75***	.16	2.09***	.43	3.07***	.44	2.92***	.46	2.53***	.49
Marital Status and Race [a]										
Black Married (1=yes)	.75	.41	.34	.41	.18	.40	.56	.39	.65	.43
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	.38	.37	1.96**	.81	1.38	.81	1.49	.78	1.95*	.81
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	-.04	.21	1.76**	.73	1.34	.73	1.17	.70	1.67	.74
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.71**	.23	3.78***	.54	3.21***	.54	2.67***	.52	3.08***	.56
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.18	.19	3.43***	.52	2.93***	.52	2.35***	.50	2.77***	.54
Black Single (1=yes)	.89***	.26	3.99***	.55	3.42***	.55	2.91***	.53	3.34***	.57
White Single (1=yes)	.45*	.21	3.69***	.53	3.19***	.53	2.44***	.51	2.88***	.55
Age										
Age (years)	-.00	.02	-.03	.02	.04*	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood										
Length of marriage			-.13	.09	-.16*	.08	-.14	.08	-.13	.08
Length of cohabitation			-.35**	.13	-.33**	.13	-.34**	.12	-.34**	.12
Conflict in marriage			1.89***	.27	1.75***	.27	1.42***	.26	1.54***	.27
Conflict in cohabiting union			1.20***	.28	1.15***	.28	.88**	.27	.84**	.27
Parent (1=yes)			.77***	.15	.38*	.15	.32*	.15	.31*	.15
Education										
Education (years)					-.35***	.04	-.21***	.04	-.09	.07
SES and Residence										
Enrolled in school (1=yes)							-.29*	.12	-.27*	.12
Household income (logged)							-.04*	.02	-.04	.02
Employed (1=yes)							.34	.18	.36*	.18
Southern region (1=yes)							.24	.15	.24	.15
Urban residence (1=yes)							.13	.13	.13	.13
Self-Esteem							-.16***	.01	-.16***	.02
Mastery							-.18***	.02	-.18***	.02
Interactions										
Black Married X Education									-.05	.20
Black Cohabiting X Education									-.06	.17
White Cohabiting X Education									-.18*	.09
Black Monogamously dating X Education									-.12	.11
White Monogamously dating X Education									-.15	.09
Black Single X Education									-.20	.13
White Single X Education									-.19	.10
Individual-level error variance	11.15***	.29	11.12***	.29	11.15***	.29	10.49***	.28	10.46***	.28
Between-person error variance	6.76***	.35	6.22***	.34	5.72***	.33	4.84***	.29	4.87***	.29
-2 Log Likelihood	22080.38		21993.32		21922.55		21592.17		21586.79	

Note: N = 2,238 women (black = 1,074; white = 1,164) and 4,677 observations (black = 2,468; white = 2,209); [a] White Married is the reference category.
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

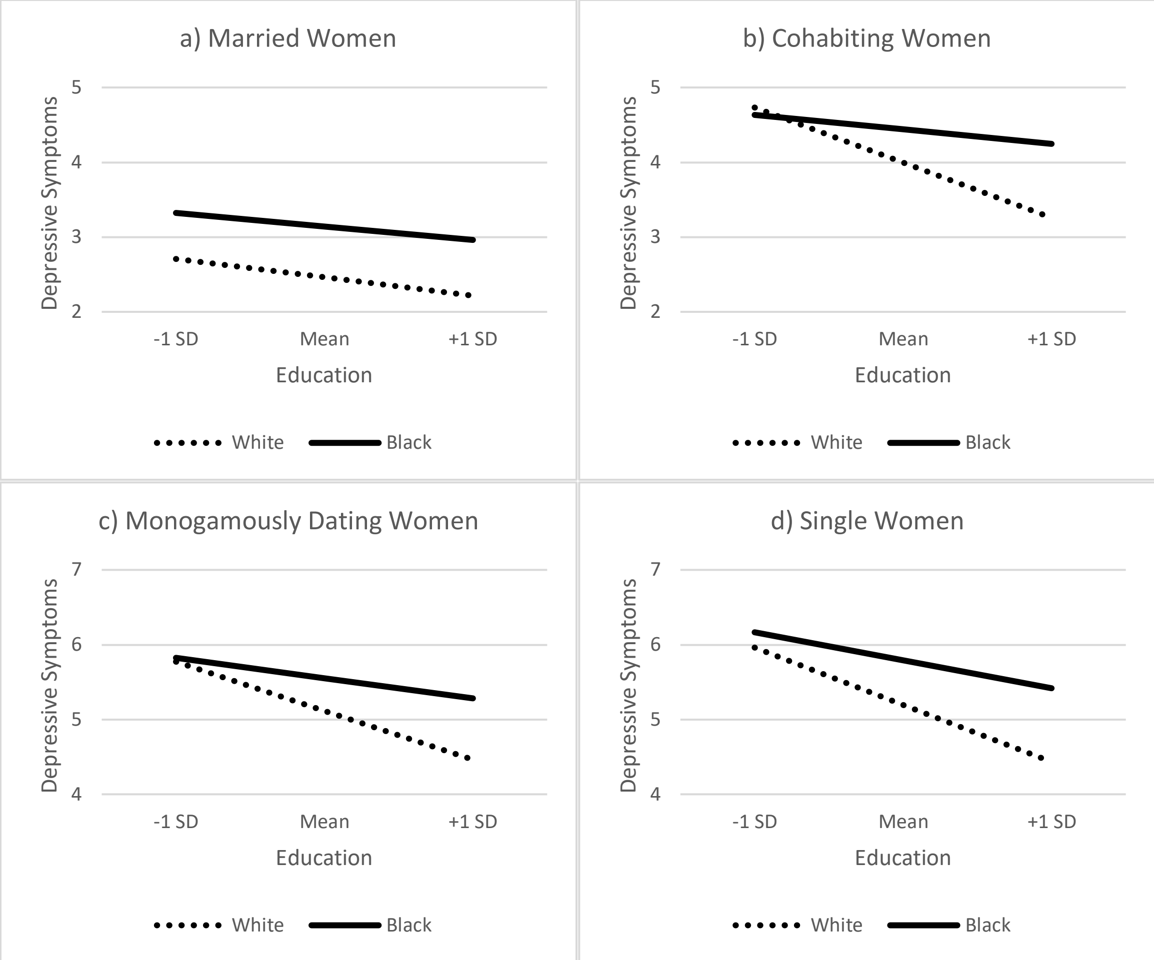

Figure 7 a-d: Depressive Symptoms for Women by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

Multivariate Analyses of Depressive Symptoms for Women and Men

Table 11 shows the depressive symptoms results for women. The reference category is white married women. The findings in the first model shows that black monogamously dating (*b*=.71; *se*=.23) and single (*b*=.89; *se*=.26) women each experience higher depressive symptoms than white married women. White single women also report more depressive symptoms (*b*=.45; *se*=.21) than their white married peers. With the inclusion of romantic relationship characteristics and parenthood in Model 2, black monogamous daters and single women as well as white single women continue to report more depressive symptoms than the white married women. White (*b*=1.76; *se*=.73) and black (*b*=1.96; *se*=.81) cohabiting women and white monogamously dating (*b*=3.43; *se*=.52) women also report worse mental health than the white married women. As the length of cohabitation increases depressive symptomatology decreases (*b*=-.35; *se*=.13). Conflict in marital (*b*=1.89; *se*=.27) and cohabiting (*b*=1.20; *se*=.28) relationships and parenthood (*b*=.77; *se*=.15) are associated with increased depressive symptomatology. In Model 3, education is introduced and is negatively related to experiencing symptoms of depression (*b*=-.35; *se*=.04). Also, in Model 3, age (*b*=.04; *se*=.02) positively related to depressive affect and length of marriage (*b*=-.16; *se*=.08) is negatively associated with depressive symptoms. Compared to Model 2, in Model 3, black and white cohabiting women no longer differ from married white women. In the full model with controls, all associations except age and length of marriage remain from the previous model. Black (*b*=2.67; *se*=.52) and white (*b*=2.35; *se*=.50) monogamous daters and black (*b*=2.91; *se*=.53) and white (*b*=2.44; *se*=.51) single women each report more symptoms of depression than their white married counterparts. The length of cohabitation (*b*=-.34; *se*=.12) and educational attainment (*b*=-.21; *se*=.04) are negatively related to generalized distress. Conflict in marital (*b*=1.42; *se*=.26) and cohabiting (*b*=.88; *se*=.27)

relationships as well as parenthood (*b*=.32; *se*=.15) are positively associated with symptoms of depression. Among the control variables, school enrollment (*b*=-.29; *se*=.12), income (*b*=-.04; *se*=.02), self-esteem (*b*=-.16; *se*=.01) and mastery (*b*=-.18; *se*=.02) are each associated with decreased depressive symptoms. In the fifth model, the interaction terms by education for the white monogamously dating women is significant. Figure 7 a-d displays the results of the interactions graphically.

Figure 7 a-d shows the interaction results of depressive symptoms for women by romantic relationship status across educational attainment. Symptoms of depression decrease for all groups across educational attainment. White married women with a higher than average level of education report the fewest depressive symptoms. Black women report higher depressive symptoms across romantic relationship statuses. Black single women with less than average educational attainment report the highest depressive affect. Among unmarried women, levels of depressive symptoms are similar across race at a lower than average level of educational attainment. As education increases, white women see a clearer advantage to mental health in the form of fewer symptoms of depression. Additionally, the depressive symptoms of white cohabiting women decrease at a steeper rate than white married women's symptoms across education (t=1.97, $p < .05$). The decreasing slopes within each romantic relationship status do not significantly differ between black and white women as educational attainment increases.

Table 12. Multilevel Model Estimating Depressive Symptoms for Men During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*	*b*	*se*
Intercept (at age 25)	4.04***	.16	1.77***	.46	2.09***	.46	2.19***	.48	2.46***	.49
Marital Status and Race [a]										
Black Married (1=yes)	.02	.39	-.15	.39	-.26	.39	-.02	.38	-.16	.39
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	.21	.30	1.16	.82	1.01	.82	1.10	.80	.81	.80
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	.09	.22	1.22	.77	1.15	.77	1.18	.74	.87	.75
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.20	.24	3.42***	.59	3.22***	.58	2.85***	.57	2.61***	.58
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.15	.19	3.39***	.57	3.30***	.56	2.85***	.55	2.62***	.56
Black Single (1=yes)	.86***	.24	4.10***	.59	3.89***	.59	3.43***	.57	3.17***	.58
White Single (1=yes)	.55**	.19	3.81***	.57	3.69***	.57	3.20***	.55	2.93***	.56
Age										
Age (years)	-.01	.01	-.00	.02	.04*	.02	-.02	.02	.02	.02
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood										
Length of marriage			.09	.09	.07	.09	.07	.09	.05	.09
Length of cohabitation			-.15	.11	-.14	.11	-.11	.11	-.10	.11
Conflict in marriage			1.70***	.28	1.69***	.28	1.50***	.27	1.44***	.27
Conflict in cohabiting union			1.39***	.28	1.34***	.28	1.07***	.27	1.09***	.27
Parent (1=yes)			.13	.15	-.09	.16	-.16	.15	-.14	.15
Education										
Education (years)					-.24***	.03	-.15***	.04	-.30***	.07
SES and Residence										
Enrolled in school (1=yes)							-.18	.12	-.18	.12
Household income (logged)							.01	.02	.01	.02
Employed (1= yes)							.15	.18	.12	.18
Southern region (1 = yes)							.14	.12	-.15	.12
Urban residence (1 = yes)							.22	.12	.23*	.11
Self-Esteem							-.11***	.02	-.12***	.01
Mastery							-.16***	.02	-.17***	.02
Interactions										
Black Married X Education									.22	.20
Black Cohabiting X Education									.51**	.16
White Cohabiting X Education									.22*	.09
Black Monogamously dating X Education									.30**	.12
White Monogamously dating X Education									.07	.08
Black Single X Education									.19	.12
White Single X Education									.18*	.08
Individual-level error variance	11.03***	.30	10.98***	.29	10.96***	.29	10.40***	.28	10.34***	.28
Between-person error variance	4.72***	.27	4.52***	.27	4.33***	.26	3.88***	.24	3.85***	.24
-2 Log Likelihood	17994.30		17948.04		17913.54		17732.96		17685.11	

Note: N = 2,282 men (black = 1,049, white = 1,233) and 4,539 observations (black = 2,275, white = 2,264); [a] White Married is the reference category. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

Table 12 displays the depressive symptoms results for men. The reference category is white married men. In Model 1, black (*b*=.86; *se*=.24) and white (*b*=.55; *se*=.19) single men report more symptoms of depression than white married men. After introducing relationship characteristics and parenthood in Model 2, black (*b*=3.42; *se*=.59) and white (*b*=3.39; *se*=.57) monogamous daters also have more depressive symptoms compared to white married men. Increased conflict in marital (*b*=1.70; *se*=.28) and cohabiting (*b*=1.39; *se*=.28) relationships is associated with increased symptoms of depression. In Model 3, education is included and is negatively related to depressive symptoms (*b*=-.24; *se*=.03). Additionally, in Model 3, age is positively related to depressive symptoms (*b*=.04; *se*=.02). In the full model with control variables, aside from age, the findings from the previous model remain. Compared to white married men, black men who are monogamously dating (*b*=2.85; *se*=.57) or single (*b*=3.43; *se*=.57) and white monogamously dating (*b*=2.85; *se*=.55) or single (*b*=3.20; *se*=.55) men experience more depressive symptoms. Increased conflict in marriage (*b*=1.50; *se*=.27) and conflict in cohabitation (*b*=1.07; *se*=.27) are positively related to depressive symptoms. Educational attainment (*b*=-.15; *se*=.04) is negatively associated with symptoms of depression. Among the controls, self-esteem (*b*=-.11; *se*=.02) and mastery (*b*=-.16; *se*=.02) are negatively related to depressive symptoms. In the fifth model, interactions for cohabiting men, black dating, and white single men are significant and are shown graphically in Figure 8 a-d.

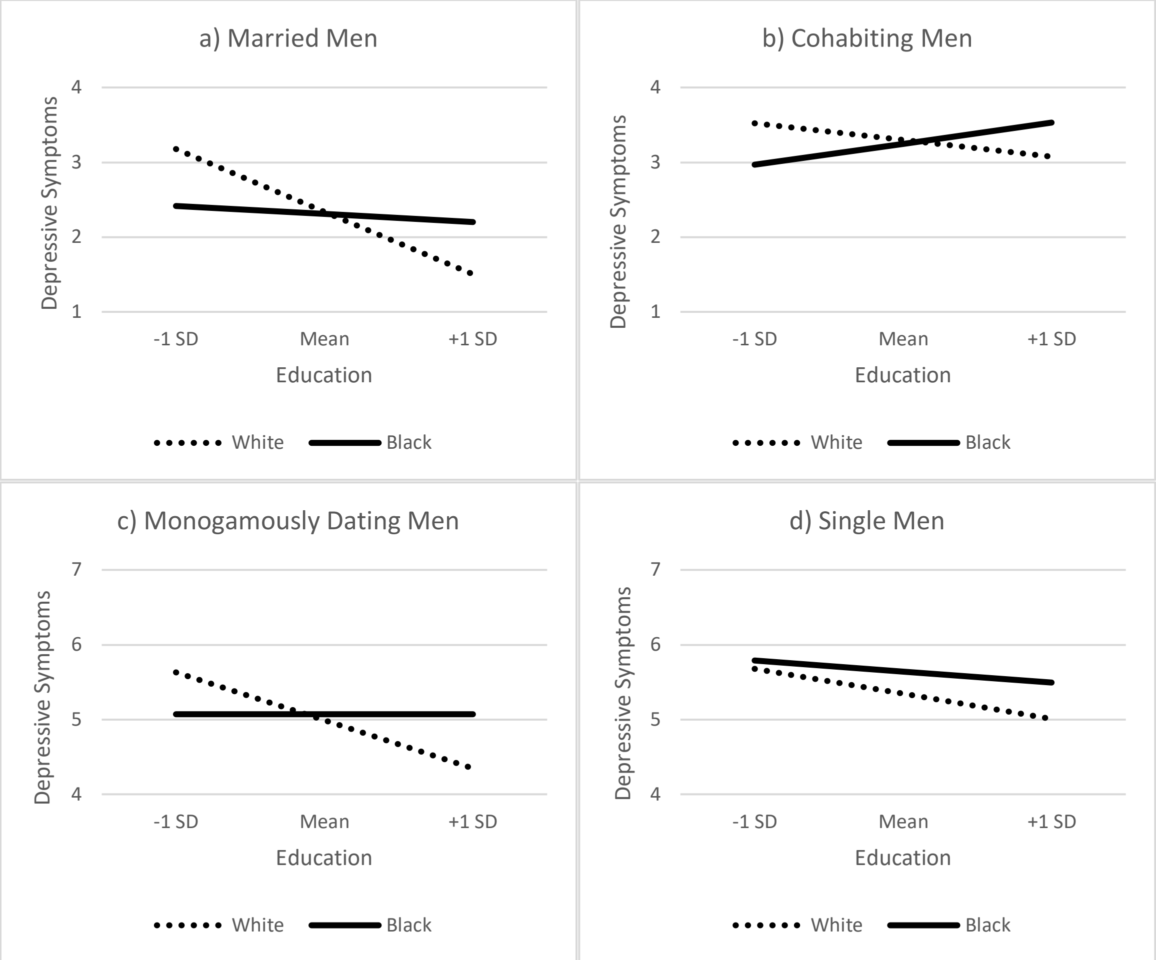

Figure 8 a-d: Depressive Symptoms for Men by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

Figure 8 a-d displays the interaction findings for depressive symptoms among men. Across educational attainment, symptoms of depression decrease among married and single black men and all white men. The depressive symptomatology of black cohabiting men increases and remains static for black dating men across education. As education increases from lower than average to higher than average levels, black coupled men transition from experiencing fewer depressive symptoms to more depressive symptoms than their white peers. Black single men consistently have more symptoms of depression across education compared to the white single men. Compared to white married men, the rate of change in the slope of depressive symptomatology for black cohabiting (t=3.14, $p < .01$) and dating (t=2.57, $p < .01$) as well as white cohabiting (t=2.41, $p < .05$) and single men (t=2.15, $p < .05$) differs significantly. Within each romantic relationship category, only black and white monogamous daters (t=2.06, $p < .05$) report significantly different slopes in depressive symptoms across education.

Table 13. Multilevel Model Estimating Poor Health for Women During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variables	*O.R.*	*C.I.*	*O.R.*	*C.I.*	*O.R.*	*C.I.*
Marital Status and Race [a]						
Black Married (1=yes)	1.70	(.92, 1.14)	1.29	(.68, 2.45)	1.22	(.64, 2.32)
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	1.89*	(1.07, 3.33)	7.41*	(1.42, 38.55)	6.20*	(1.18, 32.52)
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	1.29	(.78, 2.16)	5.32*	(1.09, 25.10)	4.46	(.91, 21.93)
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	1.55*	(1.01, 2.40)	8.00***	(2.39, 26.85)	6.91**	(2.02, 23.63)
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.87	(.54, 1.41)	5.60**	(1.65, 18.95)	4.75**	(1.37, 16.46)
Black Single (1=yes)	1.99**	(1.26, 3.13)	10.42***	(3.09, 35.13)	8.61***	(2.50, 29.68)
White Single (1=yes)		(.82, 2.20)	7.28**	(2.13, 24.81)	6.11**	(1.76, 21.29)
Age						
Age (years)	1.05***	(1.02, 1.08)	1.09	(1.05, 1.13)	1.09***	(1.06, 1.13)
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood						
Length of marriage			1.04	(.87, 1.25)	1.04	(.86, 1.25)
Length of cohabitation			.88	(.69, 1.13)	.88	(.69, 1.13)
Conflict in marriage			2.56***	(1.47, 4.47)	2.44**	(1.39, 4.27)
Conflict in cohabiting union			1.34	(.79, 2.27)	1.36	(.80, 2.29)
Parent (1=yes)			.99	(.75, 1.29)	.97	(.74, 1.27)
Education						
Education (years)			.78***	(.72, .84)	.69***	(.56, .84)
Control Variables						
Enrolled in school (1=yes)			.91	(.70, 1.18)	.92	(.71, 1.20)
Household income (logged)			.98	(.94, 1.02)	.98	(.94, 1.02)
Employed (1=yes)			.68*	(.49, .94)	.68*	(.49, .94)
Southern region (1=yes)			.91	(.70, 1.18)	.91	(.70, 1.18)
Urban residence (1=yes)			1.07	(.93, 1.40)	1.05	(.81, 1.37)
Self-Esteem			.93***	(.90, .97)	.93***	(.90, .96)
Mastery			.93***	(.88, .97)	.93***	(.88, .97)
Interactions						
Black Married X Education					1.16	(.81, 1.67)
Black Cohabiting X Education					1.25	(.92, 1.69)
White Cohabiting X Education					1.25	(.95, 1.64)
Black Monogamously dating X Education					1.28*	(1.01, 1.62)
White Monogamously dating X Education					.90	(.68, 1.20)
Black Single X Education					1.02	(.79, 1.32)
White Single X Education					1.14	(.87, 1.51)
Error Variance						
Level 2 Variance	2.45***		1.76***		1.70***	
-2 Log Likelihood	3544.05		3307.87		3293.28	

Note: N = 2,238 women (black = 1,074; white = 1,164) and 4,677 observations (black = 2,468; white = 2,209); [a] White Married is the reference category. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

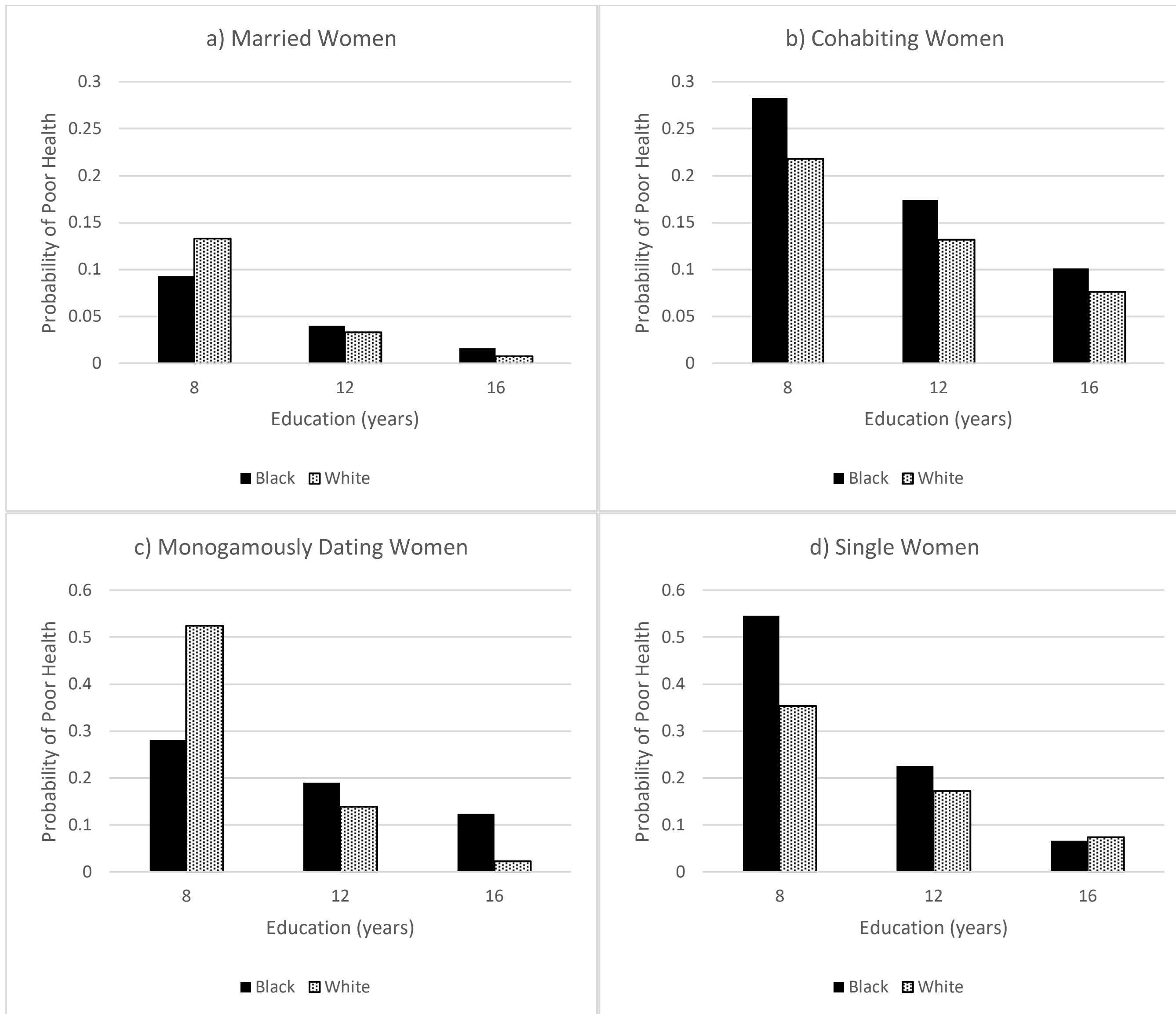

Figure 9 a-d: Probability of Poor Health for Women by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

Multivariate Analyses of Poor Health for Women and Men

The results for women's self-rated health are shown in Table 13. In the first model, black married women have a higher odds (*O.R.*=1.89), or an 89% greater likelihood, of reporting poor health compared to white married women. Black dating (*O.R.*=1.55) and single (*O.R.*=1.99) women have a higher chance of reporting poor general health than white married women. As age increases, women have a higher chance of reporting poor health (*O.R.*=1.05). In the full model, cohabiting black (*O.R.*=7.41) and white (*O.R.*=5.32), dating black (*O.R.*=8.00) and white (*O.R.*=5.60), and single black (*O.R.*=10.42) and white (*O.R.*=7.28) women have a greater chance of reporting poor health compared to the white married women. Conflict in a marital relationship is associated with a higher chance of reporting poor health (*O.R.*=2.56). Increased education is associated with a decreased chance (*O.R.*=.78) or a 22% lower likelihood of experiencing poor health. Among the control variables, increases in self-esteem (*O.R.*=.93) and mastery (*O.R.*=.93) are each related to a lower chance of reporting poor health among women. In Model 3, the education interactions for black monogamous daters, is significant and Figure 9 a-d shows these findings graphically.

Figure 9 a-d displays the probabilities of reporting poor health graphically for women across romantic relationship status and educational attainment. The probability of experiencing poor general health decreases for all groups across educational attainment. Single black women with less than twelve years of education have the highest probability of poor health. White married women with greater than twelve years of education have the lowest probability of reporting poor health. At eight years of education, the probability of poor health is higher for married and monogamously dating white women than for black women. However, among cohabiting and single women with eight years of education, it is more probable for black women

to report poor health compared to their white peers. At both twelve and sixteen years of education, the probability of poor health is higher for black women across relationship type (except among single women with sixteen years of education).

Overall, the single and dating women have higher probabilities of experiencing poor health than the cohabiting and married women. The probability of poor health among cohabiting women is greater than for the married women. Additionally, compared to the white married women, black monogamously dating women experience a significantly steeper decrease in their probability of reporting poor health with increases in education (t=2.07, $p < .05$). Within each romantic relationship category, rises in level of education does not lead to significant differences in the probability of reporting poor health by race except between monogamously dating women (t=2.88, $p < .01$).

Table 14. Multilevel Model Estimating Poor Health for Men During the Transition to Adulthood. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Young Adult Sample, 1994-2010.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variables	*O.R.*	*C.I.*	*O.R.*	*C.I.*	*O.R.*	*C.I.*
Marital Status and Race [a]						
Black Married (1=yes)	1.96*	(.94, 4.08)	1.97	(.93, 4.16)	1.88	(.88, 3.99)
Black Cohabiting (1=yes)	1.20	(.63, 2.31)	.15	(.02, 1.28)	.15	(.02, 1.29)
White Cohabiting (1=yes)	.97	(.50, 1.88)	.17	(.02, 1.33)	.15	(.02, 1.19)
Black Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.73	(.40, 1.31)	1.56	(.36, 6.78)	.87	(.20, 3.88)
White Monogamously dating (1=yes)	.85	(.47, 1.55)	.10	(.23, 4.37)	1.41	(.32, 6.24)
Black Single (1=yes)	1.36	(.77, 2.40)	1.76	(.40, 7.68)	1.69	(.38, 7.45)
White Single (1=yes)	1.02	(.57, 1.82)	1.62	(.37, 6.10)	1.46	(.33, 6.43)
Age						
Age (years)	1.05**	(1.01, 1.09)	1.03	(.99, 1.07)	1.03	(.99, 1.07)
Relationship Characteristics & Parenthood						
Length of marriage			.94	(.74, 1.20)	.94	(.74, 1.20)
Length of cohabitation			1.24	(.95, 1.62)	1.25	(.96, 1.63)
Conflict in marriage			1.40	(.71, 2.76)	1.37	(.69, 2.71)
Conflict in cohabiting union			2.52**	(1.29, 4.94)	2.47**	(1.26, 4.86)
Parent (1=yes)			1.25	(.87, 1.79)	1.24	(.86, 1.79)
Education						
Education (years)			.92	(.84, 1.01)	.75*	(.59, .95)
Control Variables						
Enrolled in school (1=yes)			.56**	(.39, .82)	.57**	(.39, .83)
Household income (logged)			.97	(.93, 1.02)	.97	(.93, 1.02)
Employed (1= yes)			.96	(.63, 1.47)	.92	(.60, 1.42)
Southern region (1 = yes)			.95	(.69, 1.30)	.96	(.70, 1.31)
Urban residence (1 = yes)			1.27	(.92, 1.75)	1.28	(.92, 1.77)
Self-Esteem			.90***	(.86, .94)	.89***	(.86, .94)
Mastery			.94**	(.89, .10)	.94*	(.89, .10)
Interactions						
Black Married X Education					1.30	(.86, 1.96)
Black Cohabiting X Education					1.77**	(1.21, 2.58)
White Cohabiting X Education					1.07	(.76, 1.51)
Black Monogamously dating X Education					1.18	(.86, 1.62)
White Monogamously dating X Education					1.09	(.80, 1.48)
Black Single X Education					1.50**	(1.12, 2.02)
White Single X Education					1.17	(.87, 1.57)
Error Variance						
Level 2 Intercept	2.94***		2.56***		2.52***	
-2 Log Likelihood	2547.02		2420.29		2403.55	

Note: N = 2,282 men (black = 1,049, white = 1,233) and 4,539 observations (black = 2,275, white = 2,264); [a] White Married is the reference category. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests).

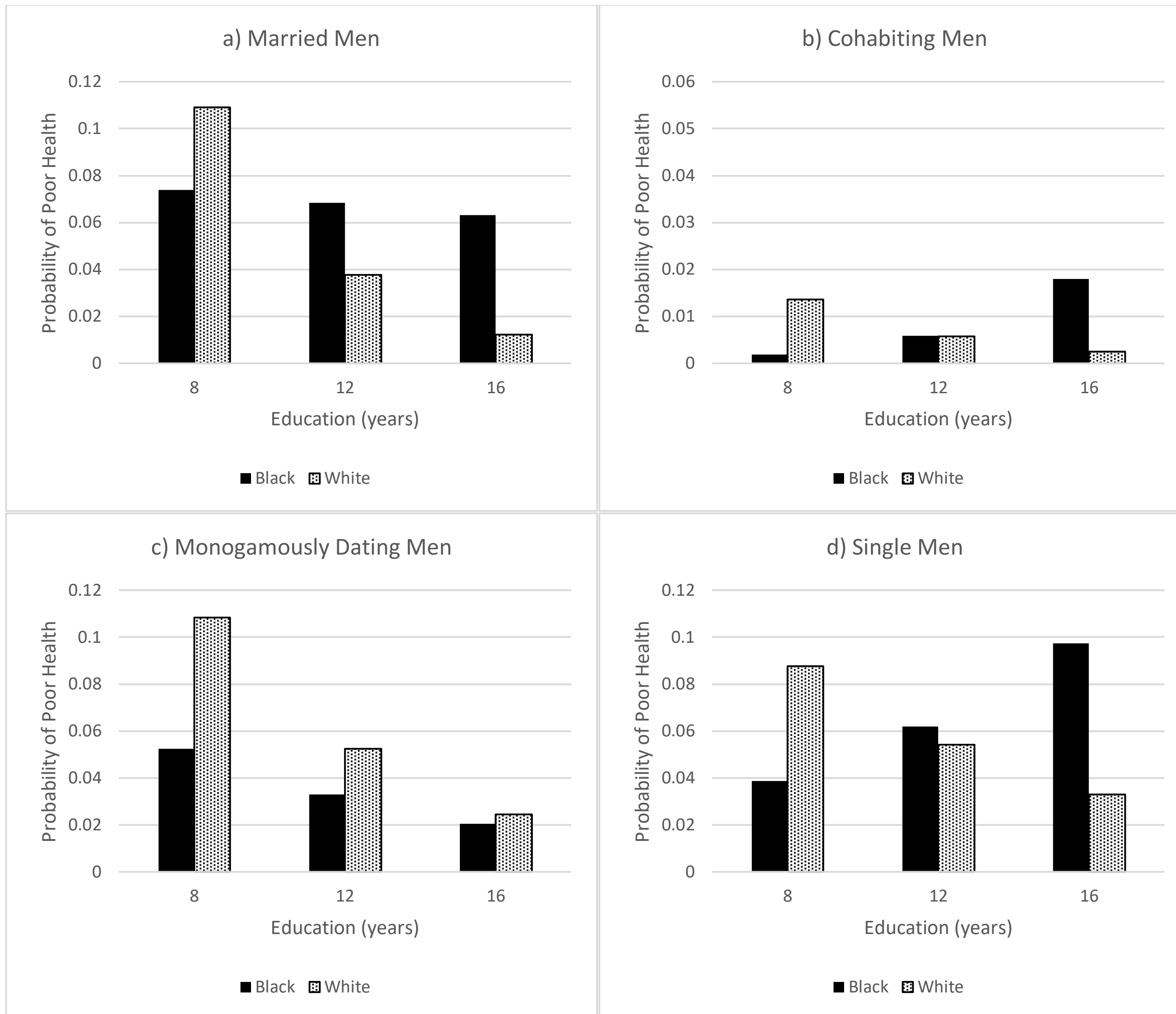

Figure 10 a-d: Probability of Poor Health for Men by Romantic Relationship Status, Race, and Educational Attainment.

The results of poor self-rated health for men are shown in Table 14. In the first model, black married (*O.R.*=1.96) men have a higher chance of reporting poor overall health than white married men. As age increases, men have an increased chance of reporting poor health (*O.R.*=1.05) In Model 2, none of the relationship-race statuses are significantly different from white married men. Conflict in cohabitation is associated with increased chances of poor health (*O.R.*=2.52). School enrollment (*O.R.*=.56), self-esteem (*O.R.*=.90), and mastery (*O.R.*=.94) are each related to a lower chance of reporting poor health among men. In the third model, the education interactions for black men who are cohabiting or single are significant. The interactions are graphed in Figure 10 a-d.

The self-rated health results for men are displayed in Figure 10 a-d. The probability of experiencing poor health decreases across level of education for all groups except among black cohabiting and single men. The highest probability of poor health is for white married men with eight years of education. Black cohabiting men with eight years of education have the lowest probability of poor health. As education increases so too does the probability of poor health for black cohabiting and single men.

Across relationship type, at low levels of educational attainment, white men have a greater probability of reporting poor health. As education increases to an average level, or about twelve years, it is more probable for black married and single men to report poor health. At sixteen years of education, black men have a higher probability of experiencing poor general health except among the monogamously dating men. Compared to the white married men, black cohabiting (t=2.95, $p < .01$) and single (t=2.73, $p < .01$) men experience a significantly different change in their probabilities of reporting poor health. Within each romantic relationship

category, increases in education does not lead to significantly different changes in the probability of reporting poor health by race except between cohabiting men (t=2.50, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I investigate the ways in which romantic relationships, race, gender, and educational attainment influence the mental and physical health of young adults. I hypothesized (H1a-c) that the married will have lower depressive symptoms than the a) cohabiting, b) monogamously dating, and c) single. I did not find that the married experience lower depressive symptoms than the cohabiting for neither men or women. The married do report fewer depressive symptoms than the monogamously dating and single. The second hypothesis – those in cohabiting relationships have fewer depressive symptoms than the a) monogamously dating and b) single is support among men and women. Hypothesis 3 – the monogamously dating will have fewer depressive symptoms than the single – is supported for men but not women.

In the hypotheses specific to poor self-rated health, I begin by hypothesizing (H4 a-c) that the married have a lower chance of reporting poor health compared to the a) cohabiting, b) monogamously dating, and c) single. Hypothesis 4a-c is supported among women but not among men. In support of hypotheses 5a-b, men in cohabiting relationships have a lower chance of reporting poor health than a) dating and b) single men. Hypothesis 5a-b is not supported among women. The final hypothesis – the monogamously dating have a lower chance of poor health than the single – is only supported by single black women and men.

The impact of marriage for symptoms of depression is not different from the impact of cohabitation, which implies that for the young people analyzed here, cohabiting with a partner is similar to marriage in effects on mental health. This finding is in line with other research that shows that young adults do not receive different returns to marriage compared to cohabitation

(Uecker 2012). The advantage of marriage over dating and singlehood is more evident for both men and women's mental health. The greater level of commitment required for marriage and cohabitation may also be provide a sense of security and support that lessens the general stress associated with the uncertainty of contemporary young adulthood. Further, with respect to mental health, having a romantic partner who has publicly committed to the relationship with marriage or cohabitation may provide a sense of security that lessens worry about successfully adopting adult roles in the near future.

Racial differences, and the importance of considering intersecting categories, becomes clearer when analyzing the mental health of black and white dating and single people. Monogamously dating women do not experience significantly fewer depressive symptoms than single women but dating men do report a mental health advantage over single men. In other words, compared to remaining single, monogamously dating men receive benefits to mental health that dating women do not receive. Assuming that the monogamous daters are sexually involved, this finding could be related to the decreased stigma of engaging in sex prior to marriage, especially for men, but not as much for women (Carpenter 2010). During young adulthood, both men and women may enjoy the companionship and commitment of a monogamous relationship, but women are pressured to marry sooner, and as such, may not experience fewer depressive symptoms by simply dating over remaining single. Yet, men benefit more than women from the social support and intimacy associated with monogamous relationships.

Self-rated health captures both physical and emotional dimensions of well-being (DeSalvo et al. 2006). Generally, the young adults examined here perceive themselves to be in good overall health (Park et al. 2006) and the findings indicate that married men are not less

likely to report poor health than other men. The lack of difference in self-rated health compared to married men indicates that marriage is not the clear advantageous status for self-rated health. Yet, black single men's greater chance of poor health compared to the dating could mean that becoming romantically involved might be a step in aiding black single men to accomplish better health.

As with the men, young women are generally in good physical health. Married women have a lower chance of reporting poor health than all other women. Married young adult women have satisfied the highly gendered expectation of marriage during the appropriate portion of the life course, thus improving their overall well-being. Further, while the stigma of cohabiting has lessened it has not disappeared and for young women's health it is evident. Cohabiting women's self-assessed health does not positively differ from the women who are dating or single. Lastly, similar to black men, single black women's greater chance of poor health compared to the dating suggest that romantic involvement would benefit the overall health of black women. Perhaps, the black single respondents might physically and emotionally feel the double burden of being black and single while also understanding their lower chances of marriage, which then results in poor self-rated health. Becoming romantically involved may dampen the distress of uncertainty about future romantic relationships.

The associations of interest were also tested by educational attainment. Level of education intersects with romantic relationship status, race, and gender to shape mental and physical health. The mental health advantage of marriage is present for this young adult sample and is especially pronounced for white men and women. Educational attainment leads to a decrease in depressive symptoms for all women, but overall black women report greater depressed mood than white women across education and relationship status. It is possible that

black women could feel more distress due to discrimination that is linked to gains in education. That is, increased education tends to result in professional careers that have an underrepresentation of blacks and women. The lack of diversity may mean more experiences of discrimination for black women than leads to higher generalized distress (see Wingfield 2007).

Education is especially advantageous for white men compared to black men with respect to mental health. At lower education levels, romantically involved black men have fewer depressive symptoms but as education increases white men report fewer symptoms of depression. The association between human capital and increased education, – e.g., increased problem-solving skills, reading and understanding health and well-being information, and the ability to evaluate complex information – should work similarly for black and white men. Nevertheless, social and economic returns to education may not operate similarly across race, such that black men do not experience the same increase in job quality and stability as other groups (Williams 2008). Further, as with black women, when highly educated black men secure more professional jobs that require high levels of education they likely experience discrimination at work that decrease their overall well-being (see Wingfield 2007). The increase in depressive symptoms for cohabiting men, and the static nature of depressive symptoms for dating men, may be related to the lower level of commitment and support provided in these relationships that leads to fewer resources to cope with stressors like discrimination.

At higher years of educational attainment, black and white women have very similar chances of poor self-rated health across romantic relationship status. For men, the probability of poor health is also low but black cohabiting and single men experience an increased probability of poor health with gains in education. As with mental health, the increased probability of poor health for cohabiting and single black men could be related to both racial discrimination and less

supportive romantic ties. In short, with respect to self-rated health, educational attainment might be the more worthwhile focus for women while a more pointed focus on the intersection of romantic involvement and education is necessary for men.

In conclusion, romantic relationships and educational attainment is different in contemporary young adulthood than in previous generations. More stable and committed intimate relationships are theoretically best for health. Romantic unions have been found to meet higher order needs that result in personal growth (Finkel et al. 2014), subjective well-being (Uecker 2012), and better mental health (Lamb, Lee, and Demaris 2003). Yet, among the young adults examined here, marriage is not more advantageous to health than cohabiting except for the self-rated health of women. The impact of other romantic relationships on health were more complex depending on race-gender status and educational attainment. For example, had the moderating effect of education been excluded, the associations among romantic relationship-race status, education, and poor health would have been overlooked among men.

The findings underscore the importance of considering what factors shape both mental and physical health during the young adult portion of the life course. As the stress process model and intersectionality suggest, romantic relationships, race, gender, and educational attainment each overlap to position people differently in a hierarchy of access to advantages and disadvantages that impact health. Romantic relationships aside from marriage should also be included as resources. For instance, the inclusion of both race and monogamously dating proved fruitful in that the results suggest that black single women and men have a greater chance of poor health compared to monogamously dating adults.

While this study has made important contributions, it is not without limitation. I am unable to include the salience of each identity or category considered here. Other research has

shown that the more salient or important an identity the more protective it is for well-being, especially for racial and ethnic minorities (Christie-Mizell, Leslie, and Hearne 2017). I also only analyze the romantic relationships of heterosexual young adults. Existing research suggest that health differences across romantic relationship status for non-heterosexual groups and non-monogamous relationships should be examined more thoroughly (see Frank and DeLamater 2010). Despite these limitation, this study has provided a greater understanding of how inequalities in health are reinforced and maintained through romantic relationships.

Variations in mental and physical health appear early in adulthood when increased responsibilities and social roles become more demanding and stressful. With greater changes in young adulthood, more attention should be given to the health and well-being of young adults and the advantages of both marriage and cohabitation. Further, monogamously dating should be considered more frequently because as the need for additional educational attainment increases, more young people are selecting to monogamously date for extended periods of time and the results here indicate differences in health between the dating and single. Future research should also continue to take an intersectional approach to understanding health disparities. As whiteness is considered an advantageous social category, so too should marriage and cohabitation be considered privileged categories that not all young adults have an equal chance of entering. Steps toward health equality should include steps toward education equality and equalizing marriage or cohabitation rates among young adults.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Marriage is lauded as a respectable union and is socially expected for adults. Yet, marriage rates are decreasing for all groups of Americans (Cherlin 2004), causing some to question the impact of varying types of romantic relationships on health and well-being. Compared to the married, the unmarried have more illnesses (Hughes and Waite 2009) and report greater psychological distress (Mirowsky and Ross 2003). Additionally, the decline in marriage is more pronounced for blacks compared to whites. However, blacks remain highly respectful of and optimistic about marriage despite lower rates of marriage and elevated marital challenges (Trail and Karney 2012). In attempts to explain the decrease in marital rates, both cultural and economic transitions have been offered (Cherlin 2005).

Along the cultural and economic vein, the unequal ability to achieve the standards of marriage has been referred to as the diverging destinies thesis (McLanahan 2004). This thesis contends that economic and other institutional forces that have taken shape over the last half century (see Silva 2012) condition the influence of ideational change. As a result, today the socially and economically disadvantaged are less likely to have the resources to meet the demands of marriage – i.e., more education, a professional career, and the ability to give more social and emotional support. Theoretically, then, those who occupy more highly regarded status categories (white, highly educated) are more likely to marry and benefit from marriage than people who occupy categories associated with a lower status (black, uneducated), thereby reinforcing inequality in not only marriage rates but in health and well-being as well.

Across three interconnected studies, I examined the associations among romantic relationships, race, gender, educational attainment, and self-concept. The purpose of this research

was to position romantic relationship statuses (i.e., single, monogamously dating, cohabitation, and marriage) as sources of advantage or disadvantage with consequences that are shaped by other intersecting categories of stratification – i.e., race, gender, and educational attainment. To marry is to achieve a symbolic success of maturity associated with adulthood. Consequently, those who achieve marriage receive a social status boost accompanied by social rewards (Cherlin 2004). Yet, marriage is not easily attained and is increasingly delayed or forgone. For example, blacks are less likely to marry compared to whites due to a host of reasons from a larger gender gap in educational attainment among blacks to disproportionate black male incarceration (Tucker 2003; Banks 2011). Also, while marriage is a highly respected and sought-after institution, some people simply want to remain single and do not wish to marry (DePaulo and Morris 2005).

While marriage is commonly reported to be the more advantageous romantic status, Uecker (2012) found that married young adults have lower psychological distress than single young adults, but they do not have a clear advantage over young adults in any other type of romantic relationship. In the same study, young adults who are engaged, and not cohabiting, have lower levels of distress than do married young adults (Uecker 2012). Young people are also selecting to monogamously date or remain single at higher rates while pursuing more education which will then increase their chances of marriage (Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, Mays 2009). Researchers have found that transitions into monogamous dating relationships contribute to subjective well-being in much the same way as marriage and cohabitation (Kamp Dush and Amato 2005; Luciano and Orth 2017). Moreover, Tucker (2003) argues that remaining single is not detrimental for the mental health of black women. In light of these opposing findings, and to build on this line of research, I studied how romantic unions impact self-concept and health.

To situate romantic relationships as sources of advantage or disadvantage for self-concept and health, I first use nationally representative, cross-sectional data to examine the role of race specific variables – i.e., perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience – in shaping the black-white marriage gap. I suggest that marriage is not equally probable between blacks and whites due to race-based unfair treatment predominately against blacks. Then, using longitudinal and nationally representative data for blacks and whites, I consider how other romantic relationship statuses compare to marriage in influencing self-concept (i.e., self-esteem and mastery) for young adults across levels of education. Self-esteem is the sense of global worth a person attaches to self (Leary and Baumeister 2000) while mastery is the level of control a person perceives to have over her or his life (Thoits 2006). Lastly, also using longitudinal data, I examine how less advantageous romantic relationships compare to marriage to impact mental and physical health for blacks and whites across educational attainment. Mental health here is considered a reflection of levels of reported generalized distress or depressive symptoms while physical health is self-rated physical and emotional well-being.

I focus on age differences in the three presented studies. In young adulthood people are expected to pursue a romantic relationship that leads to marriage. Yet, contemporary young adulthood has become more complex in that young people now have the option to take multiple paths that may include more education, employment, and varying types of intimate unions. Each path has differing consequences for self-concept and health. The romantic relationships pursued in young adulthood and the associated consequences may be unique for young adults or may reflect what is already known about the effects of romantic relationships on self-concept and health in other periods of the life course.

In addition to their influence on romantic relationship formation, race, gender, and education are each considered in these studies due to their intersecting and stratifying role for self-concept. Additionally, each of these identites or statuses is considered a “fundamental cause” of mental and physical health. In previous research it has been found that blacks have higher self-esteem than whites (Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000), but findings regarding mastery are mixed (Mabry and Kiecolt 2005; Williams, et al. 2012). Women at higher risk for lower mastery (Cassidy and Davies 2003; Christie-Mizell and Peralta 2009; Tyndall and Christie-Mizell 2016; Ross and Mirowsky 2002) and it is also commonly reported that women have lower self-esteem (Orth, Trzesniewski, and Robins 2010). In their review of racial differences in self-esteem, Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000) posit that gender differences in self-esteem are greater for whites than for blacks, and at lower levels of socioeconomic status, blacks have a greater advantage in self-esteem compared to whites. Education is associated with well-being through psychosocial resources (e.g., mastery and self-esteem) and social support networks (e.g., romantic relationships), which benefit physical and mental health (Ross and Wu 1995; Zhang et al. 2011; Hill, Cook, and Whitfield 2014). Gender and race differences in the benefits of education to physical health (Williams, Yu, Jackson and Anderson 1997; Ross and Mirowsky 2010) and mental health (Williams, Takeuchi, Adair 1992) have also been found.

Guided by the extant research literature, the studies presented in chapters 2 through 4 were driven by the following research questions:

1) How does perceived racial discrimination and racial salience shape the probability of being married for blacks and whites?

2) How do single, monogamously dating, cohabiting, and married statuses for blacks and whites differentially impact self-esteem and mastery by race, gender, and educational attainment?
3) How do single, monogamously dating, cohabiting, and married statuses for blacks and whites differentially impact mental and physical health by race, gender, and educational attainment?

To address each question, elements from critical race theory (Delgado and Stefancic 2017), intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013), the stress process model (Pearlin et al. 1981; Turner 2010), and the life course framework (Elder 1998; Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003) was used. Critical race theory places race as central in social institutions, including families. Reasoning for the greater occurrence of perceived racial discrimination and heighten racial salience among blacks compared to whites, and the consequent impact on the odds of marriage, is offered through critical race theory. For instance, Chaney (2009; 2011) asserts that the desire of many blacks to enter into stable partnerships is influenced by their unique perceptions of manhood and womanhood based on race which, in turn, are shaped by the correlated unequal access to education and sustainable income.

Intersectionality is commonly used to link race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status to advantages and disadvantages in a fashion that recognized the overlapping or intersecting effects of each category (Crenshaw 1989). A black wife in a society organized around white and male advantage must perform a uniquely raced and gendered role that may attenuate the benefits of marriage for her. For example, Roxburgh (2014) found that among affluent black women, the married are more depressed than the unmarried. Further, the stress process framework links stressors based on social positions, which are determined by intersecting identity categories, to

the psychosocial resources of self-esteem and mastery (Turner 2010). Personal psychosocial resources, or positive self-concept, then serve as moderating or mediating personal resources in the association between stressors and health outcomes (Gadalla 2009).

The life course perspective stipulates that the intersecting nature of unequal identities and statuses, stressors, and resources have accumulating effects across the life span and unique influences in each portion of the life course (Carpenter 2010; Brown, O'Rand, and Adkins 2012). There are sequential roles and expectations associated with each portion of the life course. Failing to transition into expected roles, or to do so out of sequential order, is associated with limits in the extent to which individuals feel control over their lives (Scales et al. 2016; Shanahan 2000) that could negatively impact health behaviors and outcomes. In young adulthood, it is typically expected that people complete education to secure a career to then marry.

In the study presented in chapter 2, the odds of marriage for blacks and whites was examined by age and reports of perceived racial discrimination and high racial salience. The results suggest that high racial salience is not associated with the odds of marriage for blacks or whites. Perceived racial discrimination is associated with chances of being married in that whites who report perceived racial discrimination are more likely to be married than blacks who also report racial discrimination. Further, the findings are consistent for people older than forty years old but not for those younger.

Conclusions from the first study highlight the role of perceived racial discrimination in marriage formation. Research suggest that whites who perceive racial discrimination also marry sooner which is likely a result of greater residential and social segregation among similar whites (see Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; McKinney 2013). The consistency of the results for the older respondents but not for the younger people may be related to the accumulating effects

of discrimination that prevents marriage for blacks more than for whites later in life. That is, at younger ages, both blacks and whites have lower marriage rates, but the black-white gap becomes more pronounced at older ages because whites, especially those who report racial discrimination, are more likely to eventually marry.

In the third chapter, the second research question regarding self-concept was addressed. The results suggest that marriage and cohabitation do not differ in effects on self-esteem and mastery for young adults. Across educational attainment self-esteem and mastery increased for all groups. The inclusion of monogamously dating proved productive because while black dating women do not differ from the single women, white monogamously dating women have higher self-esteem than the single women. Further, black women have higher self-esteem than white women across relationship type and education. Married black women have the highest self-esteem and unmarried black women do not have lower self-esteem than married white women. Black men do not consistently have higher self-esteem than white men across romantic union and education. At the highest level of education, white cohabiting men have higher self-esteem than their black peers. With respect to mastery, black women report higher mastery than white women, but black men do not consistently show an advantage over white men.

The results of the second study are in line with research that has found cohabitation to be similar to marriage in effects on well-being (Uecker 2012). Unmarried black women’s similar level of self-esteem as married white women is consistent with the literature which finds that despite greater exposure to stress, blacks continue to place a high value on their global self-worth (Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000). The present study adds that even across romantic relationship status, black women report higher self-esteem and mastery. For white women, being romantically involved aids in increasing perceived self-worth more than remaining single.

Education plays an interesting role in shaping the mastery of men and is a likely way to boost the protective psychosocial resources of black men to match or surpass white men. Education and cohabitation work to benefit the self-esteem of white men in ways that should be further investigated.

In the final study, the impact of romantic relationships on mental and physical health was examined. Cohabitation proved to be similar to marriage except in the results for women's self-rated poor health. For women, marriage decreased the chances of poor health compared to cohabiting, dating, or remaining single. Marriage does not operate the same way for men's self-rated health. Cohabitation is better for the health of men compared to dating or remaining single but the same does not apply to women. As a highlight to the difference between dating and singlehood, black single people have a greater chance of reporting poor health than the dating. For mental health, overall, romantic relationships operate as suspected – i.e., more committed relationships lead to fewer depressive symptoms. Monogamously dating and single women do not differ in their levels of depressive symptoms but they do differ from the married and cohabiting. Across education, black men do not receive the expected reward of lower depressive symptoms across romantic relationship type.

The examination of mental and physical health for young adults across stratifying factors unveiled sources of different health outcomes. Cohabiting black men's increase in depressive symptoms at higher levels of education suggest there is a distressing element to living with a romantic partner and being highly educated for black men. Further, although black women place a high value on their self-worth and perceive control over their lives as shown in study two, they still experience greater levels of distress and symptoms of depression. The self-rated health findings for the sample demonstrate that the health of young adults should become an agenda of

its own as Park and her colleagues (2006) suggest. While young adults overwhelmingly report good health, the probability of reporting poor health is higher for some – e.g., married white men with low levels of education.

There are several avenues for future research extending from the presented studies. Both, quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to better understand why the self-esteem of white women is conditioned by romantic relationships more than for black women. Perhaps, research about marital expectation differences across race could offer more to explain why romantic involvement is particularly important for white women (see Crissey 2005). Additionally, qualitative investigations into why married black women report the highest self-esteem could offer explanations about why despite disadvantaged statuses (black and woman) black women place high value on themselves.

Men's self-esteem and mastery is more complex along the axes of relationship status, race, and education. Black and white men's self-esteem are similar at the highest levels of education except when cohabiting. White cohabiting men's higher self-esteem at high levels of educational attainment is either the result of greater benefits of education and cohabitation for white men, fewer benefits for black men, or a combination of both. Additional research is needed to better understand why on average, cohabitation is similar to marriage for young adults, but differs across educational attainment. Further, unlike for women, racial differences in mastery across relationship type is more clearly a function of education than for men. Understanding at what point in gaining more education black men's mastery surpass the mastery levels of white men, and why, should be further analyzed.

Researchers should continue to investigate the similarities between marriage and cohabitation and the distinctions from monogamously dating and remaining single. While the

findings reported in this dissertation suggest self-concept and health differences between the married and cohabiting as well as between the dating and single, these differences were less frequent than the differences across the cohabitation and dating dividing line. Perhaps among young adults, the decision to live with a romantic partner, married or unmarried, is the distinguishing factor in who receives advantages to well-being from being romantically involved. Also, living with a partner in the absence of marriage may be more acceptable for young people than for older individuals leading to similar effects of marriage and cohabitation.

In conclusion, the black-white marriage gap continues to capture the attention of researchers and the influence of romantic relationships for young adult health and well-being is of increasing interest as young people engage in varying types of romantic relationships that do not always include the intent to marriage. Reasons for the black-white marriage gap and the differing effects of these various relationships by race, gender, and educational attainment was assessed across three interconnected research studies. The findings suggest that the intersecting nature of status categories have impacts on self-concept and health that uncover possible reasons for disparities in health and well-being. Additionally, avenues for future research were discussed. Moving forward, studies and policy efforts devoted to declining marriage rates across race should include perceived racial discrimination and educational attainment as important factors for the formation and consequences of intimate unions. Especially important is the educational attainment differences between relationship statuses that involve living together versus those that do not. As the necessity of more education continues it is likely that romantic unions among young adults will continue to shape health and well-being by race and gender.

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