

COULD WE LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD?

SOME (VERY) SPECULATIVE REMARKS ON
NONMARITAL FERTILITY

Plenary: The Rise of Nonmarital Fertility

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August 2015

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- ▶ behavioral **processes** underlying nonmarital fertility
- ▶ nonmarital fertility as trickier—involves (at least) two processes: marriage and fertility
- ▶ will argue that long acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) have the potential to level the playing field

PROCESSES UNDERLYING PREMARITAL FIRST BIRTHS

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Idea: Women begin life in an origin state in which they are never-married and childless; then the study of premarital first births will necessarily involve (at least) the following:

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Marriage process

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Fertility process

- ▶ at age t , some never-married and childless women will have a first birth, while others will remain childless

TWO THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

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Barriers to marriage

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- ▶ Cherlin (2014): second gilded age implies growing income and wealth inequality but also growing gap in who marries

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Fertility and its proximate determinants

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Fertility and its proximate determinants

- ▶ sex while never-married → pregnancy → how a pregnancy is resolved → premarital first birth
- ▶ England (2015): contraceptive behavior as important
- ▶ (older demographic literature)
- ▶ Sawhill (2014): “drifting into sex and parenthood without marriage”

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- ▶ among never-married, more than 9 of 10 are sexually active
- ▶ small differences in age at first intercourse (after background controls) between advantaged and disadvantaged groups

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Contraception and premarital first births

- ▶ premarital first births now occur in the late teens and early 20s
- ▶ vast majority of premarital first births are “unplanned”

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Working hypotheses from above

- ▶ advantaged groups put considerable effort into avoiding a birth until they decide to start trying
- ▶ less advantaged population as contracepting less effectively (yet another way in which the US differs from Europe)
- ▶ fairly good evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, consistent with the above

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- ▶ **Could we level the playing field?**
- ▶ **And if we could, what might be some consequences?**

CONTRACEPTIVE FAILURE RATES (CDC)

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Contraceptive method Unintended pregnancies
per 1000 women

Implant	0.5
IUD	2 to 8
Pill	90
Condom	180
Withdrawal	220
Rhythm	240

LARC TRENDS

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NSFG survey	15-24	25-34	35-44
2002	0.6%	2.9	1.1
2006-10	2.3	5.3	3.8
2011-13	5.0	11.1	5.3

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- ▶ LARC use still low, particularly in most relevant age groups

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Potential to level the playing field

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- ▶ trends in Colorado as a potentially serious confound
- ▶ still, suggestive evidence of declines in teen, unplanned, and nonmarital births
- ▶ in St. Louis, no increase in STI's, considerable satisfaction (and continuation rates) for IUDs

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- ▶ mismatches lead to labor market churning
- ▶ churning declines with time as workers find better matches

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- ▶ plausible that a higher bar for marriage implies a higher bar for relationships
- ▶ McLanahan and Beck (2010): characteristics of the guy she is with gets better over time

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Bottom line: potential to yield better outcomes for her, him, and the (planned) kid

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- ▶ LARCs could let young women from disadvantaged circumstances “churn” to a better relationship
- ▶ should reduce unplanned pregnancies and births
- ▶ potential for better outcomes for her, him, and (a planned) kid
- ▶ these are nevertheless disadvantaged populations, so LARCs can't and won't solve all problems

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Processes underlying nonmarital fertility

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Processes underlying nonmarital fertility

- ▶ “sex” as part of the process leading to nonmarital fertility
- ▶ barriers to marriage are almost certainly part of the problem
- ▶ but the literature sometimes takes the birth as a given
- ▶ sensible to ponder both the “sex” and “marriage” parts of nonmarital fertility

THANK YOU