

## **THE MARITAL DESIRES OF YOUNG ADULTS\***

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## **ABSTRACT**

Social scientists rarely explore the marital desires of young adults, and when they do the focus tends to be on the desire to eventually marry, rather than a desire to be married in the present.

This study uses data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (N = 11,355) to explore the prevalence of, and contexts that foster, marital desires among young adults. I further explore a cultural reason that young adults do not marry even when they want to: the belief that marriage is only appropriate following career establishment. The results suggest a significant minority of never-married young adults actually want to be married, but most of them would not marry if given the opportunity before working full time for a period. Variations in these attitudes are discussed, as are their implications for our understanding of the transition to adulthood, marriage-promotion policies, and marriage in general.

Social scientists have amassed significant literatures on marriage-related topics, such as marriage attitudes, marital expectations, and—of course—marriage itself, yet the topic of whether young adults actually want to get married has typically been overlooked. On the few occasions that marital desires have been studied directly, the focus is on an *eventual* wish to marry, not necessarily a desire to marry in the present. The desire to be married is an important aspect to the study of marriage and early adulthood, however, for at least three important reasons. First, the popular conception of contemporary American young adults is of self-focused, unstable, identity-exploring individuals (Arnett 2004)—not a particularly flattering portrait. Young men bear the brunt of the criticism and are derisively referred to as “child-men” (Hymowitz 2008) or “boy-men” (Cross 2008) who inhabit “Guyland” (Kimmel 2008), a noxious world of parties, video games, and casual sex. This climate is not conducive to developing good husbands and fathers, some argue (Hymowitz 2008). Thus, young women are left to wonder “why there are no good men left” (Whitehead 2003) and pass their early adult years as high-flying, globe-trotting careerists, even as their biological clocks continue to tick (Hymowitz 2007). For these identity-exploring, independence-seeking young adults, marriage is not only off the radar screen, it is viewed as unwise. Anything that quells individual freedom during this time is seen as anathema. But as Whitehead and Popenoe (2004) point out, these images of young adults overlook not only the nontrivial proportion of young adults who continue to marry at an early age (Uecker and Stokes 2008), but also those unmarried young adults who wish that they were married. There is some evidence to suggest that young adults who want to be married are less prone to risky behaviors, including marijuana use, binge drinking, and higher numbers of sexual partners (Carroll et al. 2007; Willoughby and Dworkin 2009), so acknowledging the existence of the

young adults and understanding the contexts that foster marital desires may yield a more complete picture of contemporary young adults.

Secondly, marital desires are important in light of policy initiatives to foster marriage among low-income women with children (Lichter, Batson, and Brown 2004). Efforts to promote marriage among these women, as well as among the general population, may be futile if individuals have little or no desire to marry at the moment, and they may be counterproductive if they encourage relationships that conflict with what people actually want—no matter how great the economic incentives may be. Although Lichter and his colleagues (2004) have made an important contribution in this regard by finding widespread marital desires among single women, their analysis is limited to older young adult women (ages 29–37) and their measure of marital desire taps the desire to marry eventually, not necessarily at present. Other notable studies indicate that some young adults—cohabitators and unwed mothers—are very desirous of marriage but face economic and cultural hurdles to reaching their goal (Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan 2005; Smock, Manning, and Porter 2005). These important contributions nevertheless cannot be generalized to the entire population of young adults. A nationally-representative analysis of marital desires among young adults is needed for that purpose.

Finally, marital desires are important to understand if we are to explain differences in marriage patterns among young adults. Marriage attitudes and intentions are good predictors of marital behavior (e.g., Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, and Waite 1995; McGinnis 2003; Lichter et al. 2004; Thornton, Axinn, and Xie 2007). To help explain racial differences in marriage rates, for example, South (1993) uncovered lower levels of marital desires among Blacks and Hispanic women than among their White counterparts, and higher levels of marital desires among Hispanic men than among White men. These data, from Wave 1 of the National Survey of

Families and Households, are now more than two decades old, and they also gauge only respondents' desire to eventually marry, rather than their desire to be married in the present. Understanding how marital desires affect marital timing and actual marriage among subgroups of the population need necessarily account for current wishes, not merely long term goals. The finding that only 20% of single women who desired marriage were married four years later (Lichter et al. 2004), for example, could be explained by obstacles to marriage among these women, or it could simply be that they envision marriage happening later in their life course.

Although mapping the prevalence of, and the environments that foster, marital desires in the young adult population is itself important, it is also important to identify the factors that impede marriage among those who wish that they were married, if any. In this study, I argue that many young adults don't marry—even though they may want to—because of a powerful cultural schema that defines a married couple as financially stable and independent. This schema prescribes a certain script for young adults that prioritizes work above marriage until one is established financially. This script is more or less influential among young adults in different social locations, with differential access to alternative scripts and various types of resources. And in some cases, these cultural scripts and resources can work together to create a desire to be married but not a willingness to do so before working for a time. I provide evidence in support of these arguments using data from Waves 1 and 3 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Before doing so, I expound upon what we know about marital desires and marriage scripts in the United States.

## **THE MARITAL DESIRES OF YOUNG ADULTS**

Social scientists know very little about who wants to marry and next to nothing about who wishes they were already married. We know, however, that marriage remains highly valued

among young adults and retains a great deal of symbolic significance in society, even as it has been deinstitutionalized (Cherlin 2004). The qualitative studies of cohabitators and unwed mothers mentioned above offer several explanations for why these women, who speak so highly of marriage and wish to get married, don't actually do it. Front and center in the explanation are economic concerns. Unmarried parents desire financial security—and even freedom from financial worry entirely—before they marry (Gibson-Davis et al. 2005). Financial security and having enough money to pay for a “proper” wedding is also important for cohabiting couples (Smock et al. 2005). Gibson-Davis and her colleagues (2005) point out that unmarried parents' high view of marriage is actually one reason they don't marry: They want to ensure that their partner is the “right” one, and they're fearful of divorce. Poor women also report a high view of marriage and echo these financial concerns, but they also seek a man who will put family first, is a good companion, and who will treat them fairly, including being faithful sexually and not abusive (Cherlin 2004; Edin and Kafalas 2005).

Nationally-representative studies of marital desires and impediments to marriage are difficult to find, so the generalizability of these findings and the desires of other young adults are difficult to assess. In 1987–1988, about 82% of 18–35-year-old women and 75% of 18–35-year-old men agreed that they “would like to get married someday,” an attitude that was more common among the younger adults in the sample, non-Black adults, those who hadn't cohabited, the more highly educated, and the childless (Sweet and Bumpass 1992). South's (1993) analysis of the same NSFH data revealed that Black men's lower desire to marry stemmed primarily from their belief that marriage would have a negative impact on their friendships and on their sex life. Black women's lower to desire to marry vis-à-vis White women, a difference that was less substantial than it was among men, was explained by differences in educational attainment

(which itself was positively associated with marital desire among both men and women).

Hispanic men were more likely to want to marry someday than White men, a finding that could not be explained away statistically, but which was speculatively explained by a cultural difference in the meaning of marriage. While these race differences are notable, South found very little variation in eventual marital desire by other factors, including earnings, employment, and socioeconomic status. Men from the North and South, however, were more likely than those from the West to desire marriage.

Lichter et al.'s (2004) study of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979) further explored single young women's eventual marriage desires. Overall, in the 1994 follow-up survey, nearly three-quarters of single women wanted to marry. The biggest differences among women were found across education levels: Only 61% of women with less than a high school degree wanted to marry, compared to 69% of high-school graduates and 79% of those with more than a high-school education. Hispanic women and rural women were less likely than their counterparts to desire marriage. Women who wanted to be married in 1994 were nearly four times as likely to be married four years later, which highlights the importance of taking desires into account.

To my knowledge, only two studies and a research brief have explored the prevalence of or factors associated with the current marital desires of young adults, or those Arnett (2004) calls "emerging adults." Carroll and his colleagues (2007) found positive bivariate correlations between the desire to be married now and age, level of relationship-involvement, religiosity, impulsivity, and extraversion among 18–26-year-olds on six college campuses. According to the 1996 and 1998 General Social Surveys (GSS), about three times as many single (i.e., not in any type of romantic relationship) 18–24-year-olds desire to be married as have no desire to marry

(Mahay and Lewin 2007). Unfortunately, the GSS does not ask respondents in a romantic or cohabiting relationship about their marital desires. Furthermore, Mahay and Lewin (2007) focus on variations across age groups and do not focus in-depth on young adults. A recent research brief from Child Trends (Scott et al. 2009) provides a cursory overview of the desire to be married among 20–24-year-olds in the Add Health data. About one quarter of young adults wish that they were married, including about one third of women, and Whites and Blacks are the most likely to want to be married, followed by Hispanics and then Asians. Given the implications of marital desires for understanding the transition to adulthood and marriage patterns, as well as for implementing good policy initiatives, further investigation into the current marital desires of this age group is certainly merited.

### **CULTURAL SCHEMAS AND SCRIPTS AS IMPEDIMENTS TO MARRIAGE**

Marital desires are not always actualized, however, for a number of reasons. Most obviously, some people are unable to find a partner that they desire to marry—or that desires to marry them. But there are other potential hurdles to marriage as well. The desire to marry has to be weighed against other desires and needs, such as educational pursuits, economic security, personal growth and development, among many other things. With this complexity in mind, Johnson-Hanks (2007) argues that demographic rates (such as marriage rates) should be understood as (a) the distribution of conjunctures, and (b) the culturally-influenced ways in which individuals navigate these conjunctures. Conjunctures, from this perspective, are the “configurations of exigencies that social actors will face at specific times” (Johnson-Hanks et al. 2006). In order to navigate through these conjunctures, individuals—whether they are conscious of it or not—draw on the cultural schemas that are available to them. According to Blair-Loy (2001:689), cultural schemas are “ordered, socially-constructed, and taken for granted framework[s] for understanding and



evaluating self and society, for thinking and for acting.” Not only do cultural schemas help individuals interpret the world, but they also provide scripts for how to act, and define that which is good and right (Johnson-Hanks et al. 2006). Theorists from Bourdieu (1977) to Giddens (1984) to Sewell (1992) have argued that social action is the result of the interplay between the cultural schemas and the resources that are available to different actors. Resources—broadly defined as anything that instantiates schemas in the physical world (e.g., media, rituals, institutions, as well as physical objects) (Johnson-Hanks et al. 2006)—are imbued with relevance for a certain conjuncture by cultural schemas that offer meaningful interpretations of the situation, and individuals’ resources and social location determine to which cultural schemas they are exposed.

Young adulthood has been described as a “demographically dense” period of the life course (Rindfuss 1991:496). Put another way, it is rife with conjunctures. Within only a few years, young adults typically complete their education, move out of their parents home, establish themselves in a career, marry, and have their first child—though the optimal ordering of these events is not always clear. Should one get married before finishing their education? Should one have a child before getting married?

These conjunctures often conjoin or juxtapose different life domains, especially work and family (Johnson-Hanks et al. 2006). Even so, the work-family literature tends to focus on conjunctures brought on by parenthood, such as the pull of work versus intensive mothering (Hays 1996), devotion to work versus devotion to family among career women (Blair-Loy 2001), and the breadwinner-versus-family-man tension among religious men (Ammons and Edgell 2007; Civettini and Glass 2008). Arguably, however, deciding to marry during young adulthood represents a work-family conjuncture. On one hand, the institution of marriage is deeply

embedded and valued in American society, as I have discussed above. Nearly 90% of Americans will eventually marry (Goldstein and Kenney 2001). Such a cultural acceptance of and emphasis on marriage may foster the desire to marry among young adults. On the other hand, because marriage is so highly valued, young adults are taught that it is only to be entered into once one is financially independent and stable. Thus, marriage is properly entered into only after one has established themselves in their career. Of course, there is nothing inherent in marriage that suggests financial independence and stability are prerequisites to marriage. This is a taken-for-granted cultural schema that conceives of a married couple as a financially independent unit. This schema was inherited from our Western European forebears, who were unique in this understanding of marriage. In most parts of the world, newly-married couples were part of a joint-family household (Hajnal 1965).

This cultural schema regarding marriage yields a script of how to navigate young adulthood: first establish yourself in your career (or at least a decent paying job), and then marry. Although there is greater diversity in the sequencing of demographic events (i.e., completion of education, labor force participation, marriage, and childbirth) during the transition to adulthood now than in the past, it is still rare for young adults to marry before finishing entering the workforce (Mouw 2005). Townsend's (2002) qualitative study of men suggests there is a specific order to how things are to be done—complete school, get a job, move out of your parents' home, live independently, date, meet your spouse, spend time together, set up a home, buy a house, and have children—and that deviations from this script have to be justified. The quantitative evidence backs up this assessment: 80% of unmarried young adults say that educational pursuits and career development take precedence over marriage, and 86% say that a person must be economically set before marriage (Whitehead and Popenoe 2001). Thus, many young adults

seem to put off marriage until a later time. What is not clear is to what extent they are delaying the gratification of their marital desires to do so.

## **SOCIAL LOCATION, MARITAL DESIRES, AND SCRIPTS**

An individual's social location exposes her or him to different cultural schemas and their scripts regarding marriage. Thus, we would expect young adults in different social positions to report varying levels of marital desires and varying levels of stated adherence to marriage scripts that prescribe work to precede marriage. I hypothesize that these things will vary by a number of factors: demographic characteristics, family background, socioeconomic circumstances, religious characteristics, and relationship characteristics. The list of factors presented here is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather a variety of factors that may theoretically shape young adults' marital desires and scripts. Before turning to the present study, I briefly explore each of these factors in turn.

*Demographic characteristics.* Marital desires and scripts may vary by a number of demographic factors, including gender, age, race, region of the country, and urbanicity. Women have always married at younger ages than men in the United States (Fitch and Ruggles 2000), suggesting their desire to be married may be stronger in young adulthood (Scott et al. 2009). Even though women's economic circumstances are growing in importance for marriage timing (Sweeney 2002), many women may also still hold a male breadwinner view of family life and feel less of a need to be financially stable prior to marrying. Among young adults, age may also be an important factor. As young adults age and marriage becomes more commonplace (Mahay and Lewin 2007), young adults' desire to marry may increase and they may be more willing to marry before working full time, especially if they feel their marriage market position is diminishing. Indeed, many young adults envision an age-30 deadline for marriage (Arnett 2004).

Race and ethnicity may also be salient predictors of marital desires and scripts. South (1993) reported a lower desire to marry among Blacks vis-à-vis Whites, and higher marital desires among Hispanic men. Scott et al. (2009) report that marital desires are highest among Whites and Blacks, somewhat lower among Hispanics, and even lower among Asians. Race may also affect adherence to a marriage script with an economic logic. Black men are more likely than white men to report that it is important to have economic supports in place before marrying (Bulcroft and Bulcroft 1993). Region and urbanicity are also known to influence marital timing and behavior: Young adults from the South and from rural areas are also more likely to marry early (McLaughlin, Lichter, and Johnston 1993; Uecker and Stokes 2008). Women and men in these areas may be less willing to postpone marriage in favor of career because they are more likely to espouse traditional family attitudes (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004).

*Family background.* The socioeconomic status of an individual's family of origin is likely important for shaping marriage desires and scripts. People whose parents have higher educational attainment and financial assets are less likely to marry young (Axinn and Thornton 1992), possibly because (a) families with more abundant economic resources can provide alternative living situations for their older children, especially daughters (Waite and Spitze 1981), (b) individuals are in less of a hurry to leave these types of homes (Thornton 1991), (c) or individuals from these homes desire a higher standard of living (South 2001). Parental modeling of marriage may also be important. Young adults whose parents married young are more likely both to marry and to cohabit at earlier ages (Thornton 1991; Uecker and Stokes 2008). Young adults from divorced families may desire marriage to escape a suboptimal home environment, or, alternatively, may be less willing to marry because their parents' divorce has left them with less

favorable opinions of marriage (Amato and Booth 1991; Axinn and Thornton 1996; Wolfinger 2003).

*Socioeconomic circumstances.* Young adults' socioeconomic situation may affect their desire to marry and their perceived necessity to postpone marriage until their career has been established. Those who are better positioned financially may be more ready to marry, as these factors are often viewed as necessary prerequisites to marriage (Townsend 2002; Whitehead and Popenoe 2002). Educational status may be especially predictive of young adults' desire to marry, as marriage may be incompatible with their role as a student (Thornton, Axinn, and Teachman 1995; Thornton, Axinn, and Xie 2007).

*Religious characteristics.* Major religious traditions in the United States promote an ideology of familism, the idea that family life is sacred and more important than other domains of life (Ammons and Edgell 2007). Young adults in religious networks and exposed to religious teachings may be more likely than others to wish that they were married. The family is especially central in more conservative religious groups, such as conservative Protestantism and Mormonism. A large number of studies have documented the distinctive approach to family life among conservative Protestants (e.g., Ellison, Bartkowski, and Segal 1996; Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Bartkowski 2001; Ellison and Bartkowski 2002; Wilcox 2004). Given this focus on the family, conservative Protestants may be especially likely to want to marry. Indeed, conservative Protestants, as well as Mormons, are more likely to marry young (Xu, Hudspeth, and Bartkowski 2005). The Mormon (or LDS) church also has an especial interest in the family. Marriage from a Mormon understanding is integral to personal happiness both in the present life and in the afterlife (Holman 2007). Interestingly, in contrast to conservative Protestantism, Mormon teaching provides a clear script for how to proceed through young adulthood. According to

former Mormon church president Ezra Taft Benson (1988:192), “God has a timetable, a sequence...[W]hen one is mature enough and has found the right companion, marriage should not be delayed for education...[T]here is a proper order to follow.” This clear-cut script from the head of the church means Mormons may be especially likely to eschew a work-before-marriage script. On the other hand, conservative Protestants and Mormons also tend to espouse traditional gender roles, so men may feel the need to establish themselves as breadwinners before marrying.

*Relationship characteristics.* Relationship experiences may alter the way young adults view marriage vis-à-vis work. Those who are dating or cohabiting may want to marry, since they have a partner. But they may also be dating or cohabiting—and not married—because they are following scripts that prescribe working full time prior to doing so (Smock et al. 2005). Young adults who are pregnant themselves, who have a pregnant partner, or who have a biological child, may also consider family schemas that place an emphasis on raising children within a marriage relationship, although Lichter and his colleagues (2004) did not find a significant difference in marital desires among single women with and without children.

## **DATA AND SAMPLE**

The data for this study come from Waves 1 and 3 of Add Health. Add Health was funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and 17 other federal agencies. It is a school-based panel study of health-related behaviors and their causes, with emphasis placed on social context and social networks. Wave 1 was conducted in 1994 and 1995 and consisted of in-depth interviews with 20,745 American youth in grades 7 – 12. Schools included in the study were chosen from a sampling frame of U.S. high schools and were nationally representative with respect to size, urbanicity, ethnicity, type (e.g., public, private, religious), and region. A total of 132 schools participated in the study, ranging in size from 100

to over 3000 students. Wave 3 was conducted in 2001 and 2002, when respondents were 18 – 27 years old, and consisted of interviews with 15,197 of the Wave 1 respondents. More information about Add Health is online at [www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth](http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth).

My sample for this study is never-married young adults. I dropped respondents who lacked a valid sample weight, those who were previously or currently married, those who identified as homosexual, and those who were still in high school. (For some of the bivariate analysis, I include the currently married respondents.) Respondents who were missing on the dependent variables were also dropped via listwise deletion. Missing values for all independent variables were imputed using indicator/dummy variable adjustment (Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken 2003). My working sample for the analysis of marital desires is 11,355. The sample for the work-before-marriage script variable, which is restricted to those who report that they want to be married now, is 2,921.

## **MEASURES**

### **Dependent Variables**

Add Health asked unmarried Wave 3 respondents about their feelings toward marriage. Among these items was the question: “How much do you agree or disagree with the statement, ‘I would like to be married now?’” Respondents were able to strongly agree, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree with the statement. Because analysis of this ordinal level variable violated the parallel regressions assumption of ordered logit regression, I dichotomize this outcome such that those who agreed somewhat or strongly agreed were coded 1, and all others were coded 0.

Add Health also posed hypothetical scenarios to unmarried respondents at Wave 3 and asked questions about how they would respond to them. These hypothetical conjunctures reveal

young adults' adherence to different marriage scripts. For this study, I use Add Health's hypothetical work-marriage conjuncture. Add Health posed the following scenarios:

- Suppose that in the next few years you were going to school full time and met someone you really wanted to marry, but the only way for you to get married was to drop out of school completely. Would you get married then or wait until you finished your education?
- What if you wanted to get married but you couldn't unless you started going to school part time? Would you get married then or wait until you finished your education?
- What about work? How important would it be for you to work full time for a year or two before you got married?

From responses to this last question I form a dichotomous variable, again because analysis of the ordinal variable violated the assumptions of ordered logit regression. This variable identifies respondents who say it would be at least somewhat important to them to work full time for a year or two before marrying the person they wanted to marry.

### **Independent Variables**

I include five sets of independent variables in the analysis: demographic characteristics, family background, socioeconomic circumstances, religious characteristics, and relationship characteristics.

*Demographic characteristics.* I include a measure of respondents' gender, age, their race and ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian), their region of the country (South, Midwest, Northeast, West), and their urbanicity (urban, suburban, rural). Age is measured continuously; all others are binary variables. All demographic variables are from the Wave 1 survey.



*Family background.* I include several measures tapping young adults' family characteristics. Parent respondents at Wave 1 were asked to report their family income, educational attainment, and age at marriage (if married). I collapsed family income into 11 categories (less than \$10,000/year, \$10,000-19,999/year, \$20,000-29,999/year and so on through \$100,000/year or more). I created a dummy variable to indicate both parents or the resident parent having a college degree; this variable comes from the Wave 1 survey. I also created a dichotomous variable for parent respondent's age at marriage, which is gleaned from the parent survey at Wave 1. Those who married at age 21 or younger are coded 1; others are coded 0. Lastly, I include a binary variable to indicate that the respondent's biological parents are still married at the Wave 1 interview.

*Socioeconomic circumstances.* Socioeconomic factors may influence young adults' desire to marry and their perceived feasibility of marrying before working full time. To measure the respondents' personal earnings, I created an eight-category earnings variable. The lowest category (coded 1) is for those earning less than \$10,000/year; the highest category (coded 8) is for those earning \$75,000/year or more at Wave 3. I also include a set of binary variables for respondents' educational attainment at Wave 3 (never went to college, went to college but did not earn degree, enrolled in two-year college, earned associate's degree, enrolled in four-year college, earned bachelor's degree or higher).

*Religious characteristics.* Following the RELTRAD method for classifying respondents in religious traditions (Steensland et al. 2000), I created a set of dummy variables for conservative Protestants, black Protestants, mainline Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, those from other religions, and the nonreligious. The measure of religious service attendance

ranges from never (coded 0) to more than once a week (coded 6). The religion variables are Wave 3 measures.

*Relationship characteristics.* Respondents' Wave 3 relationship status is measured with a set of dummy variables indicating whether they are single, in a romantic or sexual relationship, or cohabiting with a romantic partner. Binary variables are also included to indicate whether the respondent is pregnant (for women) or has a pregnant partner (for men). The household roster was used to identify respondents with a biological child living in their home; those with at least one biological child in the home were coded 1.

For descriptive statistics for all variables, see Appendix A.

## **METHODS**

For each of the outcomes—wanting to be married now and wanting to work full time before marriage—I perform both bivariate and multivariate analysis. In Table 1, I present bivariate statistics showing the percentage of never-married young adults who wish that they were married now, those who do not wish to be married (or who are neutral on the matter), and those that are already married. Because marital timing is known to vary across genders (with women marrying younger), I report these percentages separately for women and men. Also, I report the percentages for marital desires among never-married respondents. Table 2 then reports the results from logit regression models predicting the desire to be married. The first column is the full sample of young adults. The second and third columns are split by gender to reveal gendered processes in marital desires; significant interactions, obtained from full models with multiplicative interaction terms between gender and the independent variables, are noted. Finally, the fourth column presents the results for the younger respondents in the sample. Because these analyses are of never-married adults, some of the effects may be masked by

selection out of the sample into marriage. Marriage becomes more and more common as young adults age, so if selection is occurring, we would expect different results among 18–21-year-old respondents than among the full sample. That is, selection is less of an issue among 18–21-year-olds because marriage is so rare, whereas it is potentially more salient among 22–26-year-olds because marriage is more common. If the results in the fourth column of Table 2 are similar to those in the first column, this suggests that selection into marriage is not a major problem. Significant interactions, obtained from full models with multiplicative interaction terms between age groups (18–21 vs. all others) and the independent variables, are noted. This approach follows that of other studies with similar selection issues (e.g., Raley and Bratter 2004).

I repeat a similar process for the work-before-marriage variable, though this analysis is restricted to those young adults who report that they want to be married now. Table 3 reports bivariate statistics showing the percentages of young adults who say it is important for them to work fulltime before marrying. Table 4 reports the multivariate results for this outcome following the same process as Table 2.

In order to accommodate the multiple design weights that accompany Add Health data, I generate all analyses using *svy* estimators in Stata 10.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 reports the percentage of young adults—split by gender—who wish that they were married now, don't wish that they were married now (or are neutral on the subject), and are already married. Despite the common caricature of young adults as uninterested in marriage, Table 1 suggests a significant minority of young adults either wish that they were married or already are. Indeed, only 54% of young women don't want to be married, and just 68% of young men. More than three out of ten never-married young women and one out of five never-married

young men express a desire to be married. These numbers do not represent an overwhelming interest in marriage by any stretch, but neither do they suggest that marriage is completely off the radar screen of all young adults.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 also shows interesting variation in the desire to marry among this age group (mostly 18–25-year-olds). As we expected, desiring to be married becomes more common with age. The strongest desire to marry among never-married women is, surprisingly, among Black women, though many more White and Hispanic women have already married. Among men, there appears to be very little difference in marital desire across race-ethnic groups. Men and women from the Southern US are also the most likely to want to be married, followed by those in the Midwest, West, and Northeast (in that order). Desire to be married also appears strongest among young adults who grew up in rural areas and in families with lower socioeconomic status (measured by income and parents' education).

Marital desires are also highest among women who are making decent wages, as well as young adult men and women who are not currently enrolled in school, especially those who never went to college, those who went to college but did not earn a degree, and those who have already earned an associate's degree. Young adults with bachelor's degrees—who are also the older respondents in this sample—also report a slightly higher desire to marry, though not as high as these other groups. Two-year and four-year college students are the least likely to want to be married.

Religion is another factor that appears salient for marital desires. Never-married Mormon women are far and away the most likely to want to be married, followed by black, conservative, and mainline Protestants, then Jews, and then Catholics and nonreligious women. The variance is

smaller among men, though the pattern is similar to that of women with the exception of Jewish men, who are the least likely to want to be married. Young adults who are more involved in religious communities are also more likely to want to be married.

Lastly, relationship characteristics also appear very salient for marital desires. Men and women who are cohabiting are much more likely to express a desire to be married. About half of cohabiting women and more than 40% of cohabiting men say that they wish they were married. Moreover, never-married women who are pregnant and men who have pregnant partners are more likely to want to be married, as are those who already have a child living with them.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 reports odds ratios from logit regression models predicting the desire to be married among never-married adults. Given women's tendency to marry at younger ages than men, it is not surprising that they display higher odds of wanting to be married, net of all other factors. Age retains its importance for marital desires in multivariate analysis: Older young adults are more likely to want to be married. Young adults who grew up in the Northeast are less likely than those from the South to want to be married, and those whose parents had lower incomes are less likely to want to be married. Additionally, young adults whose parents were married report higher odds of marrying than those from alternative family structures. Young adults who have higher incomes are more likely to want to be married, perhaps because they have already established themselves financially. Two- and four-year college students, as well as those who have already graduated from college, are less likely than those who never went to college to want to be married. Table 2 suggests that there are tradition-specific effects of religion on marriage. Among never-married young adults, conservative Protestants, mainline Protestants, and Mormons are more likely to want to be married than Catholics. There is also a general effect

of religiosity. Young adults who attend religious services more frequently have higher odds of wanting to be married. Young adults' romantic involvement and parenthood status are also quite significant when it comes to marital desires. Those who are in a romantic or sexual relationship are 74% more likely to want to be married than those who are single; those who are cohabiting are more than three-and-a-half times more likely than those who are single to want to be married. Those who are pregnant or whose partner is pregnant also evidence higher odds of wanting to be married, as do those with a biological child living in the home.

The second and third columns of Table 2 report the odds of wanting to be married separately for each gender. This reveals any gendered patterns in the desire to be married. For the most part, these are nonexistent. There are only two significant gender interactions: black and family income. Black men are 29% less likely to want to be married than their White counterparts, while black women do not differ from white women. Men from families with higher incomes are less likely to want to be married, while women from these families are not different from one another. Although these are the only significant gender interactions, the second and third columns reveal that some effects hold for only one gender or the other (which could be attributable in part to the reduced cell sizes), and some effects appear among one gender that do not appear in the full sample. Women whose parent married at age 21 or younger, for example, are more likely than other women to want to be married, but men with a parent who married early do not differ from other men. The effect of personal earnings on marital desires only holds for women, not men, as do the effects of pregnancy and parenthood. Although the effects of men's two-year college attendance and Mormonism are not significant, and neither are the effects for either men's or women's affiliation with conservative or mainline Protestantism,

these coefficients are substantively similar to the full model and likely indicate reduced statistical power on account of smaller cell sizes.

The final column of Table 2 explores effects among the younger respondents to shed light on any selection (into marriage) processes that may be at work. For the most part, the results among the 18–21-year-olds are similar to those for the full sample of young adults. Although the effect of being a four-year college graduate disappears, this is almost certainly due to the fact that there are few 18–21-year-old college graduates, and those that do exist are simply different from other college graduates. The final column also shows no effect of mainline Protestantism on marital desire among this group. This suggests that older mainline Protestants are less likely to select into marriage but still have desires to be married. Finally, the relationship status variables have a stronger effect among 18–21-year-olds. Those who are in a relationship—be it cohabiting or not—as well as those who are currently pregnant or have a pregnant partner are even more likely to want to be married. This suggests that dating and cohabiting are treated more as precursors to marriage among younger adults, and younger adults who are expecting a child are more likely to want to marry. Older young adults who are pregnant may not view marriage as part of the package (e.g., Edin and Kafalas 2005).

[Table 3 about here]

Despite wanting to be married, many young adults do not actually get married as young adults (Lichter et al. 2004). One reason may be that marriage in the United States is widely viewed as following career establishment. Table 3 reports the percentages of young adults who want to be married who think is at least somewhat important for them to work full time before marrying, even if they met someone they wanted to marry. Table 3 suggests that more than two thirds of women who want to be married nonetheless say that it would be important for them to

work full time for a year or two before marrying, even if someone they wanted to marry came along. A majority of women in all subgroups except Jews and Mormons report that it is important to work full time before marrying. In stark contrast to other groups, just 26% of never-married Mormon women think it is important to work full time before marrying. Only 46% of Jewish women, perhaps on account of their typically higher socioeconomic class standing (Pyle 2006), think it is important for them to work before marrying. Despite majority agreement across other subgroups that working before marriage is important, there is variation in adherence to this script among women. Older women are more likely to view full time work before marriage as important, most likely because they are a more select group of women who have remained unmarried. More than 80% of black women who want to be married value working before marriage, compared to just over 70% of Hispanic women, 65% of Asian women, and 63% of white women. Women from the South and Northeast are the most likely to prioritize work over marriage, whereas women from the Midwest, and especially the West, are less likely to do so. Although there are clear regional differences here, there is little difference in women's attitudes by their urbanicity. Women's class background, however, does seem to distinguish them in this regard. Women from families that made less than \$30,000 per year report that it is important for them to work before marrying at much higher rates than those from higher-earning families. Moreover, just 61% of women with college-educated parents who want to be married agree that working full time before marrying is important. Parents' marital behavior—their timing and stability—do not make much difference in women's reported importance of working before marriage, however. Just as women's class background mattered for this outcome, so does their current socioeconomic standing. Women who are earning \$30,000 per year or more say it is important for them to work full time before marriage, most likely resulting from selection:



Women who are working full time value full time work. Women with lower educational attainment who want to be married are also the most likely to report that working full time before marriage is important (but recall also that they are the most likely to want to be married). In addition to the Mormon and Jewish distinctiveness mentioned above, black Protestants stand out as the group of women most likely—at about 81%—to say it is important for them to work full time before marrying, and just 59% of mainline Protestant women who want to be married feel this way. Conservative Protestant, Catholic, and nonreligious women do not deviate much from the overall average. Interestingly, despite religion’s role in fostering marital desire, women who attend religious services more frequently are more likely than others to say it is important to them to work full time before marrying, though the difference here is rather small. Relationship characteristics do not seem to have much effect on wanting to work full time before marrying, with the exception of pregnancy: Pregnant women are less likely to find full time work before marriage important if the right partner came along.

Finding importance in full time work before marriage is even more common among men. Nearly 80% of men who want to be married agree that it is important for them to work full time for a year or two first. The majority of *all* subgroups of men report that it’s important for them to work full time for a year or two before marrying. The patterns among men for this outcome are similar to those for women with a few exceptions. Age does not have a clear effect on reporting the importance of full time work, and Hispanic and Asian men are the most likely to report that full time work prior to marriage is important to them, followed by Blacks and then Whites. Although family income still appears important for men, it is only those from the highest-earning families who are less prone to say full time work before marriage is important. Moreover, although conservative Protestant women’s attitudes toward full time work were rather average,

conservative Protestant men are among the most likely, at 85%, to say that working full time before they marry is important to them. And though more frequent religious service attendance was associated with higher agreement about the importance of full time work among women, this difference does not exist among men.

[Table 4 about here]

Table 4 parallels Table 2, but here I restrict the sample to those who want to be married (like in Table 3) and predict those who feel working full time for a year or two before marrying is at least somewhat important to them. Most of the patterns in Table 3 remain in the multivariate analysis. Women are less likely to report working full time before marriage is important to them, while older young adults, Blacks, and Hispanics are more likely to say this. Respondents who live in the West, as well as those with college-educated parents, are less likely to say working full time prior to marriage is important to them. Young adults with higher wages are more likely to value work before marriage, while those enrolled in two- or four- year colleges, as well four-year college graduates, are less likely to say it's important to them to work full time before marriage. Mormons are also substantially less likely to say it's important to work full time before marriage, as are those who have a biological child.

The second and third columns of Table 4 suggest there are some gender differences in these effects. The effect for blacks is stronger for women, and black men are not significantly different from white men on this outcome. The reverse is true for Asians: Asian men are significantly more likely than white men—seven times as likely—to say it would be important for them to work full time before marrying, while Asian women do not differ from white women. Also, the effect of parental education is different for women and men, such that men with college-educated parents are less likely to value work before marriage, but women do not differ

by their parents' educational attainment. There are other conditional effects by gender, though the interaction terms are not significant. For instance, mainline Protestant women, but not men, are less likely than Catholics to value work before marriage, and Hispanic men, but not women, are more likely than Whites to say it's important to them to work full time before marriage. Judging by the lack of substantive differences, other conditional effects across gender (age, growing up in the West, being enrolled in a two-year college, and being Mormon) are likely the result of cell size issues.

There also three significant age interactions in Table 4. Among the younger sample, it appears that young adults who grew up in urban areas are more likely to value working full time before marriage than are older young adults from urban areas. Those from intact families, while not statistically different from others in the 18–21-year-old sample, are different from those in intact families in the older sample, as are Jewish young adults. These effects may be “real,” though selection complicates my ability to clearly identify them.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study has revealed a nontrivial amount of marital desire among young adults in the United States. Three out ten unmarried women and one out of five unmarried men wish that they were already married. When I account for those who have already married just 54% of young adult women and 68% of young adult men do not want to be married—majorities to be sure, but far from the portrait often painted of young adults as monolithically disinterested in marriage. Even though many young adults wish they were married, they encounter significant obstacles in the way of a cultural schema that prescribes career establishment prior to marriage. Almost 70% of women and 80% of men *who want to be married* report that it would be important to them to work full time for a year or two before marrying, even if they met a person they would like to

marry. Though the outcomes here are attitudes and not actual behaviors, it seems clear that marital desires are often held at bay until cultural norms about the sequencing of events in young adulthood, which prioritize financial stability and security prior to marriage, are properly followed.

The findings presented here have major implications for our understanding of young adults—or emerging adults—in the contemporary United States. All young adults are not so undesirous of marriage as we have been led to believe—many of them just put off those desires until marriage is more culturally acceptable (or in other words, until it is an economically sound decision). The popular notion of young men as “a rolling stone or a slacker drone” (Whitehead and Popenoe 2004:6) and of young women as “Bridget Jonesers” (Hymowitz 2007) needs to be balanced with the reality that many young adults—especially young women—are already married, and many more wish that they were but view it as imprudent. To be completely fair, the popular notions of young adults are not entirely misguided, just overstated. Some of this overstatement may stem from the tendency of popular writers and some academics to focus on the upper-middle-class. This study suggests that marital desires are higher among those that are perhaps overlooked in many cases: those living in the South, Midwest, and West; those from families with lower incomes; those with lower levels of educational attainment; and those who already have children or are expecting a child. Previous studies also gloss over the role of institutional religion, which plays a significant role in fostering marital desires among young adults. White Protestants (both mainline and conservative), and Mormons especially, want to be married, as do those who are more involved in a religious community.

This study has also shed light on issues surrounding marriage-promotion policy in the United States. Although I do not dispute the claims of Lichter and his colleagues (2004) that

low-income single mothers desire marriage at some point, the findings here—which explore desires to be married in the present—suggest that young single mothers, as a group, are neither averse to being married nor overwhelmingly wishing that they were. A little over half of unmarried young women who are pregnant, and just under half of those already living with their biological child(ren), wish that they were married. Among young adults, marriage-promotion policies (such as those that offer economic incentives to marry) will be most successful if they target those young women who want to be married in the present. Identifying the characteristics of these women is a worthy endeavor for future research.

Though the findings here do not really provide clear justification nor refutation for marriage-promotion efforts among young adults, they do speak fairly clearly to other debates surrounding marriage policy. Most importantly, these data do not provide any evidence that disadvantaged young adults and minority young adults are any less desirous of marriage than their counterparts. If anything, the opposite is true. Young adults from lower income families and who have less education themselves are more likely to want to be married than other young adults, though the former of these findings is only true for young men. Although women who make more money as young adults are the most likely to want to marry, this likely speaks more to the meaning of personal earnings during this stage of the life course rather than any class differences. Those who are making more money as young adults are those who are not in college, and so personal earnings may not be as important as *potential* earnings. Also, this study reveals no differences in the desire to be married among women from different race-ethnic backgrounds, but black men are less likely to want to be married than white men, and there is a gender-race interaction among black men and women. This suggests that black women seeking a same-race partner may have trouble finding a willing mate, even though their own desire may be

to marry. Marriage-promotion efforts, then, may wish to focus on minority men in addition to minority women.

While marital desires are no less common among disadvantaged young adults, and perhaps are more common among them, this study reveals that among young adults who want to be married, financial establishment seems to be an imposing (if nothing else, psychological) barrier to marriage, and this barrier is greatest for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and race-ethnic minorities. Young adults with less-educated parents and who are less educated themselves are more likely to want to work full time for a year or two, even though they are more likely to want to be married. Those who earn more money—which, among this age group, is likely those who bypassed college—are also more likely to find it important to work before marrying. Black women, and Hispanic and Asian men, are especially prone to want to work full time before marrying. Single parents, however, are more willing to forego full time work in order to marry. Taken together, these findings suggest that financial considerations are especially prominent in the minds of disadvantaged and minority young adults, and marriage programs featuring economic incentives may be fruitful in fostering marriage. The idea that people from economically disadvantaged or minority backgrounds devalue marriage, however, does not garner any support from this study.

These analyses may also speak to the relationship between marital desire and subsequent marriage itself. South (1993) argues that marital desire is an important predictor of marriage, and subsequent research has supported this claim (Lichter et al. 2004). In most cases, the findings on marital desire are consistent with recent research on marital timing using Add Health data (Uecker and Stokes 2008): women, older young adults, those with lower family income, those with lower educational trajectories, conservative Protestants, Mormons, the more religious, and

cohabitators all have higher marital desires, and they are also likely to marry earlier. In some cases, however, the findings on marital desires are inconsistent with those on marriage: Most significantly, race-ethnic minorities, with the exception of black men, do not differ on their level of marital desire, but they are less likely to marry. Some of this may be explained by race-ethnic minorities' tendency to value working full time before marriage, even when they want to marry. Certainly this is not the only explanation for why race-ethnic minorities do not realize their marital desires—mate availability being one obvious alternative explanation—but it is significant that even when mate availability is assumed, race-ethnic minorities are more likely to say it is important to work full time before marrying.

Two other findings merit further discussion here. First, religion fosters marital desires in ways that mirror its effect on marital timing. Conservative Protestants and Mormons are the most likely young adults to want to be married. (Although mainline Protestants are significantly different than Catholics in this regard, the final column of Table 2 suggests this is due to selection into the sample). This is likely a reflection of the familism emphasized within these traditions, which places family relationships near the center of these groups' moral core (Wellman and Keyes 2007; Holman 2007). Additionally, involvement in a religious community and all that that entails—exposure to religious messages, more religious networks, internalization of religious teachings, and more—fosters marital desires among young adults, even after accounting for their religious tradition. There appears to be a generic tie to marriage across religious groups. Interestingly, however, religion does not always lead to different approaches to marriage among those who want to be married. Mormons, who have a clear script about the sequencing of marriage vis-à-vis other events in the life course, do have a distinct approach to marriage: They are much more willing to marry before working full time than all other young

adults. Conservative Protestants, however, do not distinguish themselves from others when it comes to breaking from these scripts. And involvement in a religious community does not affect young adults' feelings about working full time before marriage. Moreover, the percentage of conservative Protestant young adults and religiously-involved young adults who want to be married and who value full time work suggests that few of these individuals are prioritizing marriage over career establishment.

Second, the findings in this study largely corroborate those from qualitative studies of cohabitators and unwed mothers that find a significant desire to marry among these women (Gibson-Davis et al. 2005; Smock et al. 2005). Half of cohabiting young women and 40% of cohabiting young men wish that they were married; similar proportions of unmarried parents (and even higher proportions of *expecting* parents) feel the same way. The findings presented here are a nationally-representative and quantitative affirmation of previous qualitative analysis.

### **Conclusion**

A significant minority of young adults wish that they were married. Acknowledging this desire and understanding variation in it is important for understanding the transition to adulthood, implementing marriage-promotion efforts, and making sense of patterns in marital timing. The desire to be married is not always actualized among young adults, however, and one reason appears to be that most young adults who want to be married are reticent to do so before they are financially established and secure.



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Table 1. Young Adults Classified by Marital Desires and Marital Status, in Percent (percent of never-married in parentheses)

	Women			Men		
	Wants to be married	Does not want to be married	Married	Wants to be married	Does not want to be married	Married
Overall	24.5 (31.2)	54.1 (68.8)	21.4	17.7 (20.5)	68.3 (79.5)	14.1
18–20 years old	21.3 (23.4)	69.8 (76.6)	8.9	13.9 (14.4)	82.3 (85.6)	3.9
21–23 years old	25.0 (32.9)	51.1 (67.2)	23.9	18.5 (21.5)	67.7 (78.5)	13.8
24+ years old	28.1 (42.6)	37.9 (57.4)	34.0	20.3 (27.5)	53.4 (72.5)	26.3
White	23.6 (30.9)	52.9 (69.1)	23.5	17.4 (20.4)	68.1 (79.6)	14.5
Black	32.5 (36.7)	55.9 (63.3)	11.6	19.5 (21.7)	70.5 (78.4)	10.0
Hispanic	19.7 (26.2)	55.6 (73.8)	24.7	17.7 (21.9)	63.2 (78.1)	19.1
Asian	20.2 (24.3)	62.9 (75.7)	16.9	13.7 (15.0)	77.8 (85.0)	8.4
Lives in the West, Wave 1	21.2 (26.2)	59.8 (73.8)	19.0	16.9 (19.9)	68.4 (80.2)	14.7
Lives in the Midwest, Wave 1	25.3 (31.8)	54.2 (68.2)	20.5	17.7 (20.3)	69.2 (79.7)	13.2
Lives in the South, Wave 1	25.8 (35.4)	47.2 (64.6)	27.0	19.3 (23.4)	63.1 (76.6)	17.6
Lives in the Northeast, Wave 1	23.2 (26.0)	66.0 (74.0)	10.8	13.9 (14.6)	80.8 (85.4)	5.3
Lives in urban area, Wave 1	23.7 (29.6)	56.2 (70.4)	20.1	16.9 (19.9)	68.3 (80.1)	14.8
Lives in suburban area, Wave 1	24.8 (30.9)	55.5 (69.1)	19.8	17.3 (19.7)	70.6 (80.3)	12.1
Lives in rural area, Wave 1	25.1 (35.6)	45.3 (64.4)	29.7	20.2 (25.4)	59.5 (74.6)	20.3
Family income < \$30,000, Wave 1	24.4 (32.3)	51.1 (67.7)	24.5	20.6 (24.6)	63.2 (75.4)	16.3
Family income \$30,000–59,999, Wave 1	24.8 (32.1)	52.5 (67.9)	22.7	17.8 (20.3)	69.7 (79.7)	12.5
Family income \$60,000+, Wave 1	22.5 (26.2)	63.3 (73.8)	14.2	12.0 (13.4)	77.5 (86.6)	10.5
Both (or only) parents have college degree	22.0 (25.6)	63.9 (74.4)	14.1	13.8 (15.1)	77.9 (84.9)	8.3
Parent married at 21 or younger	25.6 (34.3)	49.1 (65.7)	25.3	17.8 (21.3)	65.7 (78.7)	16.5
Biological parents still married, Wave 1	23.8 (29.8)	56.3 (70.2)	19.9	17.0 (19.7)	69.4 (80.4)	13.7



Table 1 Continued. Percent of Young Adults Classified by Marital Desires and Marital Status (percent of never-married in parentheses)

	Women			Men		
	Wants to be married	Does not want to be married	Married	Wants to be married	Does not want to be married	Married
Personal earnings < \$10,000	22.0 (27.2)	58.9 (72.9)	19.2	16.3 (17.7)	76.1 (82.4)	7.6
Personal earnings \$10,000–29,999	26.5 (34.5)	50.4 (65.5)	23.0	19.2 (23.0)	64.6 (77.1)	16.2
Personal earnings \$30,000+	32.0 (44.7)	39.6 (55.3)	28.4	16.5 (22.8)	56.1 (77.2)	27.4
Never went to college	27.2 (39.2)	42.4 (60.8)	30.5	20.4 (25.0)	61.3 (75.0)	18.3
Went to college, no degree	27.1 (37.2)	45.7 (62.8)	27.2	21.0 (25.1)	62.6 (74.9)	16.4
Currently enrolled in two-year college	22.2 (24.9)	67.0 (75.1)	10.8	15.1 (16.5)	76.3 (83.5)	8.6
Earned associate's degree	27.7 (41.3)	39.3 (58.7)	33.0	18.1 (23.5)	59.0 (76.5)	22.8
Currently enrolled in four-year college	19.3 (21.2)	72.0 (78.9)	8.7	11.7 (12.2)	83.9 (87.8)	4.4
Earned bachelor's degree or higher	25.3 (31.0)	56.4 (69.1)	18.3	15.1 (17.4)	71.7 (82.6)	13.2
Conservative Protestant	24.3 (36.4)	42.5 (63.6)	33.2	20.0 (25.7)	57.8 (74.3)	22.3
Mainline Protestant	26.1 (32.6)	54.2 (67.4)	19.6	20.8 (22.7)	70.9 (77.3)	8.3
Black Protestant	32.8 (37.7)	54.2 (62.3)	13.0	22.1 (24.4)	68.7 (75.6)	9.2
Catholic	22.8 (27.3)	60.8 (72.7)	16.5	15.6 (17.6)	73.0 (82.4)	11.4
Jewish	30.5 (31.4)	66.7 (68.6)	2.8	13.1 (14.6)	76.5 (85.4)	10.4
Mormon	30.2 (55.7)	24.1 (44.3)	45.7	29.6 (47.4)	32.8 (52.6)	37.6
No religion	21.9 (26.8)	60.0 (73.3)	18.1	15.2 (17.3)	73.0 (82.7)	11.8
Attends religious services rarely/never	23.4 (28.7)	58.1 (71.3)	18.5	16.7 (19.0)	71.1 (81.0)	12.2
Attends religious service weekly or more	26.4 (37.3)	44.5 (62.7)	29.1	22.3 (28.7)	55.6 (71.4)	22.1
Currently single	(20.9)	(79.1)	—	(15.2)	(84.8)	—
Currently in a romantic or sexual relationship	(30.9)	(69.1)	—	(18.1)	(81.9)	—
Currently in a cohabiting relationship	(49.5)	(50.5)	—	(40.3)	(59.7)	—
(Partner is) Currently pregnant	27.3 (55.2)	22.1 (44.8)	50.6	19.5 (34.2)	37.6 (65.8)	42.8
Has biological child living in home	26.7 (47.4)	29.8 (52.6)	43.5	16.3 (41.0)	23.4 (59.0)	60.3

Table 2. Odds Ratios from Logit Regression Models Predicting Wants to be Married, Never-Married Young Adults

	All young adults (N = 11,355)	Women (N = 5,771)	Men (N = 5,584)	Ages 18–21 (N = 4,937)
Female	1.69***	—	—	1.71***
Age	1.15***	1.16***	1.14***	1.17*
Black	.90	1.09 <sup>c</sup>	.71 <sup>*c</sup>	.76
Hispanic	.84	.76	.91	.77
Asian	.81	.77	.84	.61
Lives in the Midwest, Wave 1	.86	.84	.86	.81
Lives in the Northeast, Wave 1	.73**	.79	.66**	.59**
Lives in the West, Wave 1	.90	.86	.95	.76
Lives in urban area, Wave 1	.93	.90	.97	.85
Lives in rural area, Wave 1	1.06	.99	1.15	.97
Family income, Wave 1	.96**	.99 <sup>c</sup>	.91*** <sup>c</sup>	.96
Both (or only) parents have college degree	.89	.90	.88	.87
Parent married at 21 or younger	1.16	1.28*	1.04	1.19
Biological parents still married	1.17*	1.17	1.22	1.13
Personal earnings	1.06*	1.11**	1.03	1.11*
Went to college, no degree	.92	.93	.93	1.01
Enrolled in two-year college	.69**	.67**	.74	.59***
Earned associate's degree	.93	1.05	.80	1.08
Enrolled in four-year college	.57***	.61***	.54***	.55***
Earned bachelor's degree or higher	.66**	.68*	.63*	1.78 <sup>†</sup>
Conservative Protestant	1.27*	1.21	1.29	1.11
Black Protestant	1.16	1.03	1.34	1.29
Mainline Protestant	1.35*	1.30	1.37	.97 <sup>†</sup>
Jewish	1.62	1.72	1.44	1.22
Mormon	2.97**	3.26**	2.47	2.97*
No religion	.99	.95	1.00	.86
Frequency of religious service attendance	1.18***	1.17***	1.19***	1.21***
Currently in romantic or sexual relationship	1.74***	1.93***	1.56***	2.20*** <sup>†</sup>
Currently cohabiting	3.60***	3.56***	4.02***	5.19*** <sup>††</sup>
(Partner is) Currently pregnant	1.66*	2.20**	1.20	2.34*** <sup>†</sup>
Has biological child living in home	1.50***	1.62***	1.20	1.56*
-2 log likelihood	11440.01	6367.27	5175.91	4348.16

\*\*\* p < .001 \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05

<sup>a</sup> Gender interaction, p < .001 <sup>b</sup> Gender interaction, p < .01 <sup>c</sup> Gender interaction, p < .05

<sup>†††</sup> Age interaction, p < .001 <sup>††</sup> Age interaction, p < .01 <sup>†</sup> Age interaction, p < .05

Reference groups: White, South, suburban, never went to college, Catholic, currently single

Table 3. Percent of Young Adults Who Report It Is Somewhat or Very Important to Work Full Time before Marrying, Among Young Adults Who Want to Be Married

	Women	Men
Overall	68.2	79.3
18–20 years old	61.9	75.8
21–23 years old	68.4	81.1
24+ years old	74.9	78.8
White	63.1	75.6
Black	82.2	83.2
Hispanic	71.1	91.2
Asian	64.6	90.3
Lives in the West, Wave 1	57.3	71.5
Lives in the Midwest, Wave 1	65.3	74.7
Lives in the South, Wave 1	73.1	84.2
Lives in the Northeast, Wave 1	72.2	83.1
Lives in urban area, Wave 1	71.5	79.3
Lives in suburban area, Wave 1	66.3	79.8
Lives in rural area, Wave 1	70.0	77.8
Family income < \$30,000, Wave 1	76.0	82.4
Family income \$30,000–59,999, Wave 1	61.2	81.6
Family income \$60,000+, Wave 1	64.3	65.8
Both (or only) parents have college degree	61.5	65.5
Parent married at 21 or younger	66.5	79.9
Biological parents still married, Wave 1	66.6	78.7

Table 3 Continued. Percent of Young Adults Who Report It Is Somewhat or Very Important to Work Full Time before Marrying, Among Young Adults Who Want to Be Married

	Women	Men
Personal earnings < \$10,000	63.6	75.4
Personal earnings \$10,000–29,999	70.3	79.8
Personal earnings \$30,000+	74.3	87.6
Never went to college	73.0	84.4
Went to college, no degree	73.2	82.1
Currently enrolled in two-year college	66.4	71.6
Earned associate’s degree	73.7	91.7
Currently enrolled in four-year college	54.3	66.5
Earned bachelor’s degree or higher	66.1	60.7
Conservative Protestant	66.3	84.8
Mainline Protestant	59.0	77.1
Black Protestant	80.9	87.2
Catholic	72.2	77.8
Jewish	46.1	65.7
Mormon	26.1	56.6
No religion	65.9	75.1
Attends religious services rarely/never	66.5	78.9
Attends religious service weekly or more	72.8	76.3
Currently single	70.6	81.1
Currently in a romantic or sexual relationship	67.2	77.2
Currently in a cohabiting relationship	67.6	79.3
(Partner is) Currently pregnant	63.5	75.8
Has biological child living in home	69.2	75.9

Table 4. Odds Ratios from Logit Regression Models Predicting Important to Work Fulltime before Marriage, Among Never-Married Young Adults Who Want to Be Married

	All young adults (N = 2,921)	Women (N = 1,783)	Men (N = 1,138)	Ages 18–21 (N = 1,002)
Female	.68*	—	—	.53**
Age	1.11**	1.12**	1.06	1.23
Black	1.79*	2.65** <sup>c</sup>	.94 <sup>c</sup>	1.92
Hispanic	1.71*	1.27	3.52**	2.51*
Asian	2.01	1.14 <sup>b</sup>	7.05** <sup>b</sup>	.94
Lives in the Midwest, Wave 1	.82	.92	.66	.74
Lives in the Northeast, Wave 1	.96	.95	1.02	.91
Lives in the West, Wave 1	.54**	.56*	.59	.44*
Lives in urban area, Wave 1	1.05	1.24	.83	1.58 <sup>†</sup>
Lives in rural area, Wave 1	1.02	1.19	.93	1.17
Family income, Wave 1	.97	.98	.97	.98
Both (or only) parents have college degree	.64*	.81 <sup>c</sup>	.40*** <sup>c</sup>	.72
Parent married at 21 or younger	.93	.90	.90	.84
Biological parents still married	1.08	1.06	1.18	.80 <sup>†</sup>
Personal earnings	1.16***	1.16**	1.20*	1.14
Went to college, no degree	.86	.89	.83	.81
Enrolled in two-year college	.62*	.67	.39*	.62
Earned associate's degree	1.06	.83	1.78	2.70
Enrolled in four-year college	.44***	.39***	.42*	.39***
Earned bachelor's degree or higher	.42***	.51*	.22***	1.28
Conservative Protestant	.93	.72	1.39	.99
Black Protestant	1.08	.69	2.40	1.24
Mainline Protestant	.73	.57*	1.11	.66
Jewish	.64	.38	1.90	2.61 <sup>†</sup>
Mormon	.29*	.14*	.50	.14*
No religion	.82	.78	.80	.54
Frequency of religious service attendance	1.06	1.08	1.07	1.05
Currently in romantic or sexual relationship	1.01	.97	1.03	.72
Currently cohabiting	.99	.89	1.27	.75
(Partner is) Currently pregnant	.64	.63	.60	.66
Has biological child living in home	.66**	.67**	.44*	.71
-2 log likelihood	3103.04	2037.32	998.86	1067.09

\*\*\* p < .001 \*\* p < .01 \* p < .05

<sup>a</sup> Gender interaction, p < .001 <sup>b</sup> Gender interaction, p < .01 <sup>c</sup> Gender interaction, p < .05

<sup>†††</sup> Age interaction, p < .001 <sup>††</sup> Age interaction, p < .01 <sup>†</sup> Age interaction, p < .05

Reference groups: White, South, suburban, never went to college, Catholic, currently single

Appendix A. Descriptive Statistics for Full Sample and Restricted Sample\* of Young Adults

	Mean / SD, Full Sample (N = 11,355)	Mean / SD, Restricted Sample* (N = 2,921)	Range
Wants to be married now	.25	—	0, 1
Important to work full time before marriage	—	.73	
Female	.47	.57	0, 1
Age	21.61 / 1.85	22.00 / 1.82	18–28
White	.66	.66	0, 1
Black	.17	.20	0, 1
Hispanic	.10	.09	0, 1
Asian	.04	.03	0, 1
Lives in the South, Wave 1	.37	.42	0, 1
Lives in the Midwest, Wave 1	.31	.32	0, 1
Lives in the Northeast, Wave 1	.16	.12	0, 1
Lives in the West, Wave 1	.17	.15	0, 1
Lives in suburban area, Wave 1	.59	.58	0, 1
Lives in urban area, Wave 1	.27	.25	0, 1
Lives in rural area, Wave 1	.14	.17	0, 1
Family income, Wave 1	5.08 / 2.46	4.76 / 2.26	1–11
Family income missing	.21	.23	0, 1
Both (or only) parents have college degree	.30	.23	0, 1
Parent education missing	.14	.16	0, 1
Parent married at 21 or younger	.54	.58	0, 1
Parent age at marriage missing	.12	.14	0, 1
Biological parents still married	.57	.55	0, 1

Appendix A Continued. Descriptive Statistics for Full Sample and Restricted Sample\* of Young Adults

	Mean / SD, Full Sample (N = 11,355)	Mean / SD, Restricted Sample* (N = 2,921)	Range
Personal earnings	2.27 / 1.49	2.43 / 1.53	1–8
Personal earnings missing	.06	.05	0, 1
Never went to college	.38	.46	0, 1
Went to college, no degree	.11	.13	0, 1
Enrolled in two-year college	.12	.10	0, 1
Earned associate's degree	.04	.05	0, 1
Enrolled in four-year college	.24	.16	0, 1
Earned bachelor's degree or higher	.11	.10	0, 1
Conservative Protestant	.20	.24	0, 1
Black Protestant	.10	.13	0, 1
Mainline Protestant	.11	.12	0, 1
Catholic	.25	.22	0, 1
Jewish	.01	.01	0, 1
Mormon	.01	.01	0, 1
No religion	.23	.19	0, 1
Religious affiliation missing or indeterminable	.05	.04	0, 1
Frequency of religious service attendance	1.90 / 1.87	2.21 / 1.98	0–6
Currently in romantic or sexual relationship	.37	.36	0, 1
Currently in romantic or sexual relationship missing	.17	.13	0, 1
Currently cohabiting	.19	.34	0, 1
(Partner is) Currently pregnant	.02	.04	0, 1
(Partner is) Currently pregnant missing	.19	.16	0, 1
Has biological child living in home	.12	.23	0, 1

\* Restricted sample is young adults who wish that they were married now.

Notes: Indicator variables for missing values only presented for variable with more than 3% missing values. Variables are Wave 3 unless otherwise indicated.