What’s Important for a Successful Marriage? Educational Differences in Attitudes
Kristen Harknett and Arielle Kuperberg

Department of Sociology
Population Studies Center
University of Pennsylvania

Motivation
- Lower education groups leading the retreat from marriage (Miqadi and Davis 2004; McLanahan 2004)
- Lower education groups place high value on marriage and have a high bar for marriage (Miller and Lauer 2002; Ornstein 2000; Kposa et al. 2020)

Educational differences in mean of marriage and childbearing (Harknett et al. 2013)
- Can educational differences in family attitudes help to explain differences in marriage behavior?

Fragile Families Data
- N=9688 mothers who are unmarried at time of birth
- Dependent variable: married by 3 years after child is born
- Independent variable: mother’s educational attainment
- Explanatory variables: attitudes to:
  - Benefits of marriage
  - Cohabitation
  - Financial pre-requirements for marriage
  - Children and Marriage
  - Gender Roles
  - Cynicalism

Conversely: Race, Religious Attendance, Cohabitation at first wave, Number of Kids, Age, Age squared, Men lived with both biological parents at age 15

Can attitudes help explain why college educated mothers are more likely to marry?

H1: Less educated mothers perceive fewer benefits to marriage
H2: Less educated mothers are more likely to see cohabitation as equivalent to marriage
H3: Less educated mothers place more emphasis on financial stability for marriage
H4: Less educated mothers are more approving of single parenthood

Part 1: The relationship between attitudes and education: Regression-adjusted attitudes by educational group

Part 2: The relationship between education and marriage: Do attitudes mediate?

Potential Attitudinal Mediators
- Benefits of marriage
  - More advantages to be married than single
  - Living together is the same as being married
  - Financial pre-requirements for marriage
  - Husband steady job important
  - Newlyweds job important
  - Children and marriage
  - Parents should stay together for child
  - Co-parenting as a couple
  - Gender roles
  - Male breadwinner model is best
  - Important decisions should be made by man
  - More important for man to spend time with family than to work a lot
  - Compassionate
  - Good sex important
  - Same friends important
  - Honesty important
  - Same religion important
  - Same race important

Regression-Adjusted Marriage Probabilities by education with and without controls for Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjusted Probability of Marriage</th>
<th>Education + Controls</th>
<th>Education + Controlling for Attitudes</th>
<th>Education + Controlling for Fertility Attitudes</th>
<th>Education + Controlling for All Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIS</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Results

Conclusions
- Higher levels of maternal education are associated with marrying fathers after a nonmarital birth
- Some attitudes explain a modest portion of educational differences in marriage
- Less educated mothers place more emphasis on financial pre-requirements for marriage
- Some attitudes exacerbate educational differences in marriage
- Less educated mothers see more benefits to marriage
- Mediating influence of other attitudinal domains is neutral or reversed
- Children and Marriage, Gender roles, Compassionate, Honesty
- Attitudes are not a good explanation for educational differences in marriage after a nonmarital birth