

**A Bargaining Theory of Sexual Behavior  
in Women's Adolescence**

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## ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, most industrialized countries have witnessed major changes in the sexual, marital, and fertility behavior of women between the ages of puberty and adulthood. Despite intense public interest in these changes, and a large body of literature addressing them, there is little consensus on the underlying social processes. In this paper we propose a bargaining theory of sexual relationships in women's adolescence. The theory builds on economic models of utility maximization, but modifies this theory by the addition of socially- culturally, and ideologically-based constraints on women's behavior. The elements of this theory are 1) gender-specific economic opportunities; 2) sexual and family ideologies; 3) social class; and 4) race. Hypotheses are advanced to illustrate how this theory may be used to predict outcomes such as the timing of sexual debut, first cohabitation, first marriage, and the number of sexual partners.



## Introduction

Among the most important dimensions of the transition to adulthood are the initiation of sexual activity and the establishment of sexually-based primary relationships. The sexual dangers perceived to attend young women's passage from puberty to marriage (or adulthood) have been of intense concern to Americans since at least the middle of the nineteenth century (Nathanson, 1991). Increases in nonmarital sexual activity over the past two decades have intensified this concern, and have resulted in a considerable body of largely social problem oriented literature focused on the causes and consequences of these behaviors (see, e.g., Moore, et al., 1986; Hofferth and Hayes, 1987). Nevertheless, the social processes that result in nonmarital births continue to be poorly understood. Recent work has demonstrated that a major contributor to the rise of adolescent nonmarital fertility over the last two decades has been women's increased probability of sexual debut prior to marriage (Nathanson and Kim, 1989). In this paper, we focus our attention on the social processes that underly changing patterns and circumstances of nonmarital sexual intercourse in the United States. Our purposes are to make explicit and to further develop a theory of women's sexual behavior that is implicit in much anthropological as well as sociological research on sexual activity, fertility, and marriage.

To introduce and illustrate the elements of this theory, we draw on research from two very different settings: sub-Saharan Africa and

California. The former study is an analysis of "the politics of AIDS and condoms" in the African sub-continent based primarily on secondary sources (newspapers, magazines, literary works) but informed by the author's background of primary anthropological research in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Bledsoe, 1990). The second work is Kristin Luker's study of women active in the abortion movement (both pro- and anti-) in California during the 1970s (Luker, 1984). Although we believe these to be interesting and important studies, we have not selected them because we agree (or disagree) with their methods or conclusions, but because of their common theoretical perspective on the motives and meanings of women's heterosexual partnerships.

Bledsoe's aim is to examine barriers to condom use in Africa. Her argument can be summarized very briefly. Not only is fertility a paramount cultural value in African societies, but children are women's primary means of access to economic security and to social, and political power, power which is largely in the control of men. Condoms threaten relationships with men, both by denying them the children that they want, and by implying that one, or both, partners are sexually promiscuous. Stated in more abstract terms, in the African setting fertility is the principal resource available to women for achieving economic and social goals. The sexual and fertility strategies adopted by African women are a reflection of these resources and goals.

Kristin Luker compares the backgrounds and world views of pro-life and pro-choice women in California with the aim of understanding how they arrived at their positions on abortion. At issue in the abortion controversy, Luker suggests, is the place and value of motherhood in American society, a value that in African societies, as we have noted, is taken for granted. Should women's reproductive roles be socially recognized as a resource--the accepted route to economic security and social status--or as a handicap? The circumstances of pro-life women's lives, Luker argues, lead them to oppose any movement that would (as they see it) devalue women's sexuality as well as women's traditional roles of childbearing and homemaking because that is where their resources lie: the majority of pro-life women Luker interviewed were not educated beyond high school or community college, did not have "careers," were married to men with moderate incomes, and had several children. By contrast, the pro-choice women were highly educated, worked in the paid labor force, earned good salaries, and had few, if any, children. From the perspective of these women, Luker maintains, asserting the primacy of women's reproductive roles (as the pro-life movement is perceived to do) devalues their social resources by requiring women to define work outside the home as temporary and, hence, discounted.

The implicit theory underlying Luker's and Bledsoe's arguments is essentially the same, and has much in common with economic models of utility maximization. Women have goals of economic security and

social status. They have a variety of potential resources (or means) with which to attain those goals; among the most important of these resources traditionally have been women's sexuality and childbearing capacity. More recently, their "human capital," in the form of education and income potential, has begun to enter the equation as a resource as well. In addition to goals and resources, however--as these two contrasting studies make clear--is a third element: a set of cultural, social, and economic conditions which constrain the resources socially and personally available to women and limit the pathways available for them to follow. The sexual, domestic, and reproductive strategies women adopt reflect not only their goals and resources, as suggested earlier, but also the particular social, cultural, and historical settings within which these strategies are developed.

A critical dimension of variation among settings is the extent to which access to economic security and social position is controlled by men (see e.g., Collins, 1971). To the degree that women are economically dependent on men (as in the African societies described by Bledsoe and among Luker's pro-life women), women's power in the heterosexual marketplace will be a function of the value attached to their sexual and reproductive resources, and they will have a strong vested interest in seeing that that value is maintained. Acquisition of their own economic resources may or may not increase women's heterosexual bargaining power depending on other features of the social and cultural setting. How and under



what circumstances women's power is affected by their personal economic potential will be addressed with specific reference to the sexual behavior of adolescent women in the United States.

### Gender and Economic Opportunities

Several recent approaches to the issue of "adolescent pregnancy" argue that adolescent sexual behavior and fertility patterns are influenced by male and female economic opportunities (Hogan and Kitagawa, 1985; Jencks, 1988; Wilson, 1987). The work cited does not clearly spell out the mechanisms by which economic opportunities affect these patterns. However, the nature of these mechanisms is addressed in several analyses of change over time in a closely-related category of behavior, the transition to marriage (Becker, 1981; Collins, 1971; Easterlin, 1980; Oppenheimer, 1988; Lichter et al., 1991; Oppenheimer, 1992). Underlying these analyses is a bargaining model of sexual and marriage markets in which there is variation in the number and quality of resources available with which to bargain; in the gains and losses to be anticipated from entering a relationship; and in the certainty with which gains or losses may be predicted. In the traditional bargain, women's principal resources--domestic service, companionship, and sexual access--are traded for men's economic support. The driving force behind departures from tradition, and the principal source of variation in the model's dimensions (as presented in the work cited) are gender-specific economic opportunities. At some risk of oversimplification, these analyses

can be divided into two categories: those that emphasize the influence of expanding economic opportunities for women in increasing their bargaining power in sexual and marriage markets (Collins, 1971), or in decreasing the "gains to marriage" for either sex (Becker, 1981); and those that emphasize the influence of poor economic opportunities for men in decreasing their ability to sustain a marriage (Easterlin, 1980; Wilson, 1987), or the certainty with which their economic futures (and, therefore, their suitability as marriage partners) can be predicted (Oppenheimer, 1988). These analysts share a common conception of the traditional marriage bargain. Where they differ is in their conception of the conditions under which that bargain is likely to change.

Although the work described is primarily concerned with the timing of marriage, the underlying bargaining model may also be used as a framework for predicting variation in nonmarital sexual behavior, and in the rapidity of women's transition from sexual debut to marriage. For example, if women's economic opportunities are determinant (as suggested by Collins and Becker), then favorable economic opportunities for both women and men may allow women to be less concerned about marriage, more concerned about qualities in a man in addition to his economic prospects and, therefore, more choosy about their partners. Under these conditions, women might decide to delay beginning sexual activity and to shop around among a variety of potential partners. On the other hand, if men's economic opportunities dominate the transaction (as Easterlin and

Wilson maintain), then favorable opportunities for both sexes should lead women to forgo their own economic prospects in favor of sexual involvement and an earlier marriage.

The forgoing argument is based on the premise that women's sexual relationships patterns are shaped by economic opportunity effects on sexual and marriage markets, not (or not only) by how economic opportunities are perceived by individual women. Gender-specific economic opportunities structure gender-specific probabilities of being in the market at all (both directly, and indirectly through their effects on the attractiveness of alternatives to market participation) and of finding a partner (any partner, an attractive partner, a willing partner). Thus, women's relationship outcomes are the product of both men's and women's market participation.

#### Sexual and Family Ideology

Departures from the traditional marriage bargain are driven not only by gender-specific economic opportunities, but also by the relative value ascribed to women's sexual and domestic resources. As noted earlier, the value of these resources varies both historically and cross-culturally, and there is considerable evidence that their value has declined in the United States over the past two decades. Attitudes toward premarital sex and premarital childbearing have become markedly more permissive (D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; Robinson et al., 1991). The proportion of persons who live with a partner before their first

marriage has increased from 11 percent in 1970 to nearly half in recent years (Bumpass, Sweet, and Cherlin, 1991). Finally, and of equal importance, the majority of Americans no longer believe that the welfare of families and children requires a woman's full-time presence in the home (Cherlin, 1980; Thornton and Freedman, 1983; Bianchi and Spain, 1985). The fundamental nature of these changes is highlighted by recent well-publicized efforts of public figures to reverse them, in rhetoric if not in fact. Irrespective of whether they are welcomed or decried, these changes in "family values" have made it more difficult for women to trade their sexual and domestic services for better terms in sexual relationships.

#### Social Class and Race

In addition to gender-specific economic opportunities and family values, our conceptual model includes two modifying variables: social class and race. An important limitation of existing work on the sexual behavior of adolescent women has been its failure to adequately conceptualize well-known class and race variations in sexual activity. There is ample evidence of these variations. Among single women, sexual activity is more prevalent at lower than at higher social class levels, particularly among whites; and sexual intercourse is initiated earlier among black than among white young women (Moore et al., 1986; Hofferth, 1987). However, few if any attempts have been made to go beyond these empirical regularities to identify their common underlying determinants.

Social class. Independent of economic opportunities, there have been a number of reasons to expect earlier sexual debut and earlier marriage among lower-class as compared with middle-class youth. Based on field work carried out in the early 1970s, Rubin (1976) suggested that living in poor, and potentially dangerous, neighborhoods led parents to strictly control (or try to control) their children, control which (in the white working-class families she studied) they could relax only when the children got married. From the perspective of children growing up in these circumstances, marriage was the route to independence and adulthood. Komarovsky (1962) made a similar point based on her study of blue collar marriages in the late 1950s. Furthermore, she stated that the benefits of marriage as a means of "escape from home" were of particular importance to women. More recently, Oppenheimer (1988) noted that "men going into blue-collar careers..may establish themselves" relatively early in life, making early marriage a realistic option. (Availability of "early establishment" jobs to working-class women may also facilitate early marriage. Thirty years ago, this was a popular hypothesis [see, e.g., Moss, 1964]).

Among the white working-class couples described by Komarovsky and Rubin, rapid transitions from sexual debut to marriage were facilitated by highly traditional assumptions--assumptions shared by both women and men--regarding the relationship between sex, pregnancy, and marriage. Violation of these assumptions--a nonmarital pregnancy resulting from nonmarital sex--required rapid

action to restore the appearance of compliance with traditional norms. Forty-four percent of the couples interviewed by Rubin got married "because the woman became pregnant... (Confronted with a pregnancy) not one (woman or man) seriously considered not getting married"(60,67).

There are no contemporary portraits of blue-collar courtship and marriage among white Americans comparable to the work of Komarovsky and Rubin. Evidence was presented above, however, that the normative assumptions guiding the couples they interviewed no longer hold. The resources of these blue-collar women, much like those of the pro-life women interviewed by Kristin Luker, resided in the value attached to their roles as wives and mothers, and to the importance of marriage and of childbearing within marriage as symbols of status in the larger American society. The changes we have described--changes deplored by Luker's pro-life women and by the New Right and questioned even by some feminist scholars (e.g., Ehrenreich, 1984; D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988)--have reduced the value of these resources as bargaining counters in the sexual and marriage market. As a consequence, women are less able to demand, and men are less willing to promise, marriage either as the price of sexual access or as the solution to an unintended pregnancy. A decline in the privileged status of marriage and motherhood affects all women. However, its impact on bargaining power in sexual and marriage markets is likely to be felt most strongly by blue-collar women because of their greater reliance on these "traditional"

resources to attain their economic and social goals. At the same time, Schoen and Owens (1992) speculate that a combination of the declining importance of marriage with the persistence of normative commitment to traditional male-female power relationships may make cohabitation particularly attractive to blue-collar men: "The typically larger economic resources of the male can be translated into greater power more effectively within a cohabitation than within a marriage"(117). Cohabitation is, in fact, most frequent among individuals with no more than a high school education--in other words, among the working class.

Middle-class youth have been able to realize the benefits of independence and adulthood in ways other than an early marriage (e.g., through college attendance away from home). Correspondingly, the extended educational and training requirements of many middle-class jobs are a deterrent to early marriage for men and, increasingly, for women as well. They need not, however, be a deterrent to sexual activity, given the availability of effective contraception, backed up by legal abortion. Thus, social class differences in the timing of sexual debut and in number of partners may not be particularly marked. Differences in the speed of transition from sexual debut to marriage are more difficult to predict. Blue-collar transitions may be slower than in the past due to the hypothesized shift in the relative bargaining power of women and men. At higher social class levels, not only are job requirements a deterrent to early marriage, but individuals may

have access to sources of income and status that are independent of the sexual marketplace altogether, allowing them to delay marriage while they negotiate for the best available bargain.

Race. The second modifying variable we propose is race. Empirically, "race is one of the most powerful factors differentiating early from late initiators of sexual activity" (Miller and Moore, 1990). Black men and women begin sexual activity earlier than whites; however, they marry later or not at all (Jaynes and Williams, 1989). Furthermore, these differences have been shown to be independent of socioeconomic status (although the adequacy of the controls used has been questioned [e.g., Jaynes and Williams, 1989:50]). Despite these empirical regularities, how and why race exerts such a powerful independent impact on sexual and marriage patterns has yet to be satisfactorily explained. More specifically, while ad hoc interpretations of these observations have been advanced (e.g., Moore, Simms, and Betsey, 1989), these interpretations have not been integrated into a more general theory of adolescent sexual behavior.

Explanations of black-white differences in patterns of family formation fall very broadly into two categories: structural, emphasizing sex-ratio imbalances in the black population and the poor economic prospects of black males; and normative, emphasizing attitudes toward marriage and childbearing that are unique to American blacks (Wilson, 1987; Farley, 1988; Schoen and Kluegel,



1988). While these categories are conceptually distinguishable, in practice they shade into one another: what is defined as an "imbalance," for example, may have normative (i.e., the suitability of available men) as well as structural (i.e., the number of available men) dimensions. Structural explanations--the shortage of black men for black women to marry--have been popular in recent years to account for low marriage rates among both middle- and lower-class blacks (Wilson, 1987; Staples, 1988). Staples calls attention to the "two to one" ratio of single college-educated black women to comparable men and goes on to state that, "Assuming a desire for homogeneity in mate selection, it is not possible for every Black female college graduate to find a mate among her peers"(188). Wilson attributes low marriage rates (as well as nonmarital childbearing) among poor, inner-city blacks, to the "shrinking pool of marriageable, that is, employed, black males"(57). In the terms of the bargaining model we presented earlier, the sex ratio imbalance hypothesis emphasizes the role of economic (and perhaps also status-conferring) opportunities for black men in determining black marriage patterns. This hypothesis is by no means universally accepted; Farley (1988) characterizes it as "hollow," based on a variety of circumstantial evidence, and it received little or no support in a detailed analysis of marriage patterns by Schoen and Kluegel (1988).

The alternative hypothesis, stressing women's economic opportunities rather than those of men, is advanced by Farley: "the

economic incentive to marry has declined more for black women than white, not primarily because the wages of black men are falling but, rather, because the earnings of black women are rising"(489). Staples carries this argument a step further, stating that (at least among middle-class blacks) a woman's educational and income level is inversely correlated with her attractiveness to black men: "While a male's success adds to his desirability as a mate, it detracts from a woman's"(1981:50). These propositions suggest that economically successful black women will be even more likely than comparable white women to defer marriage: first, because (in common with high-income white women) their economic incentive to marry is reduced, and second because (to a larger extent than among comparable white women) in the marriage market within which successful black women operate, their economic resources are devalued by men.<sup>1</sup>

Among lower-class blacks, women's independent access to economic resources for herself and her children through AFDC and to economic as well as social support resources through kinship ties in the context of high and persistent male unemployment are held to "militate against successful marriage or long-term relationships... Women come to realize that welfare benefits and ties within kin networks provide greater security for them and their children"(Stack, 1974). This thesis continues to be supported by more recent qualitative research in low-income black communities (Anderson, 1990; Burton, 1990).

Earlier, we argued that an important dimension of variation among social settings was the degree to which access to economic security and social position was controlled by men. As a group, American black men control access to neither economic security nor social position. Commenting on feminism among black women, Staples remarks that, "If it is full political and economic equality they want, it will have to be granted by the ruling elite of this country, a group composed exclusively of white males.....black males have little control over its distribution" (1981:16). The structurally weak position of black men in American society is surely a factor in the belief among black women--a belief that cuts across social class lines--that a woman would be unwise to trust her economic future to a man. There is remarkable agreement between Alice Walker's comment that every black woman has been told, at some point in her adolescence by her mother, her aunt, or her grandmother, to get an education "either so you won't have to depend on a black man or so you can give him a hand in his struggle to survive," and the 14 year old mother quoted by Linda Burton, whose grandmother told her, "Pay your dues to your kin because they will take care of you. There ain't no reason to waste your time on a colored man."

Our argument to this point suggests that the gender-specific economic opportunities of American blacks, combined with the persistently weak position of black men in the larger American society, has structural and normative consequences likely to delay

marriage across the social class spectrum. There are, at the same time, substantial pressures toward early sexual involvement and (at least among lower-class blacks) early childbearing. The evidence for these pressures is strongest for low-income communities, where most of the relevant research has been carried out.

Ethnographic studies over the last two decades have been highly consistent in demonstrating, first, that babies are highly valued in the poor black community irrespective of their origins, and, second, that independence and adulthood are as important to black as they are to white young women. Among blacks these values are more closely associated with sexuality and childbearing than with marriage (Ladner, 1971; Stack, 1974; Anderson, 1990; Burton, 1990). Both Burton and Stack maintain, in addition, that babies play a central role in creating and sustaining the kinship networks on which low-income black families are heavily dependent for economic and social support: "The best way to make sure that you have enough able bodies to take care of the needs in the family," states a great-grandmother with whom Burton spoke, "is to start the women having children as soon as they can"(133). Anderson's work suggests that young men are subject to similar pressures toward early sexual involvement and early fatherhood:

Casual sex with as many women as possible, impregnating one or more, and getting them to 'have your baby' brings a boy the ultimate in esteem from his peers and makes him a man. 'Casual sex' is therefore fraught with social significance for the boy who has little or no hope of achieving financial stability and hence cannot see himself taking care of a family (1990:136).

In the poor black communities these investigators describe, opportunities in the mainstream economy for young men and young women are weak or nonexistent. For reasons that are in part a direct consequence of blocked economic opportunities, and in part an expression of culturally-defined pathways to adulthood, early (by American middle-class white standards) sexual activity and childbearing represent alternative strategies to the achievement of limited economic security (for young women) and social standing (for young men). Built into these strategies is a minimization of dependence on potentially "unreliable" social and economic resources (i.e., sexual partners). Given the structure of incentives we have described, we would expect both females and males in lower-class black communities to experience an early sexual debut; and we would expect males (but not females) to have a substantial number of partners.

### Sexual Transitions

Among the limitations of social problem oriented research on adolescent sexual behavior is the frequent treatment of "sexually active" as a categorical variable: intercourse on a single occasion transforms a woman from virgin to "sexually active." This is a highly questionable conceptual leap. It seems at least as plausible to categorize women who have had sex once between ages 15 and 17 (conservatively, 15-18% of "sexually active" women in this age group) with virgins as to include them with women who have had six or more partners in the same time period (conservatively, 8% of

sexually experienced 15-17 year olds) (Hofferth and Hayes, 1987). In our proposed model, sexual behavior is conceptualized as a major dimension of the transition to adulthood, consisting of a subset of transitions in which young women shift between states of sexual activity and inactivity, and between sexual activity in different types of relationships (nonresidential, cohabitation, marriage).

### Adolescent Sexual Behavior: Theory and Hypotheses

Our proposed theory of adolescent sexual behavior synthesizes the arguments presented above regarding the impact on this behavior of economic opportunities, family and sexual ideologies, social class, and race. The cornerstone of this theory is a bargaining model of sexual relationships in which the bargaining position of each partner is affected by gender-specific economic opportunities and by changes over time in the value of women's sexual and domestic resources, modified by the partners' social class and race. Alternative approaches to the specification of economic opportunities were reviewed in some detail earlier, and we have outlined recent relevant changes in "family values." However, a brief summary of the variables underlying social class and race may be helpful. Based on our preceding analysis, we conceive of social class and race as markers for: 1) Access (or lack of access) to social status and economic resources based on family background; 2) Class- and race-specific values and beliefs regarding gender roles and relationships, sexuality, and marriage; and 3) Class- and

race-specific patterns of sexual socialization (e.g., control vs permissiveness).

The first step in translating our theoretical perspective into testable hypotheses is to define a set of outcome variables. The outcomes we propose reflect our conception of sexual behavior as a process characterized by variations in the timing and context of sexual events. These outcomes are described in Table 1,

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

together with an indication of the range of variation associated with each outcome. These ranges are given in quotation marks, since what is defined as early and late, or short and long, will vary in different populations. The outcomes in Table 1 do not exhaust the possibilities: for example, time from first to second intercourse could be added to the list. In principle, the outcomes we describe are equally applicable to males and females. Our hypotheses, however, refer to the sexual behavior of females.

The independent variables in the model we propose are, as indicated above, gender-specific economic opportunities, sexual and family ideology, social class, and race. Leaving ideology aside and treating each of the three remaining characteristics as binary variables generates 16 possible combinations (e.g., high opportunity for males, high opportunity for females, white-collar, white; low opportunity for males, high opportunity for females, white-collar, black; and so on). Introducing time as a fourth

variable reflecting ideological change complicates the situation even further. Rather than attempting to predict each sexual behavior outcome for each combination, we will use examples to illustrate the types of hypotheses generated by our theoretical approach.

Our first set of predictions are for white young women, of blue-collar status, under conditions of high male and low female economic opportunity. Based on our earlier analysis, we anticipate that women in this category will begin sexual intercourse relatively early. Twenty years ago, we would have predicted with equal confidence an early age at marriage and a rapid transition from first sex to first marriage. However, given the overall decline in value of women's traditional resources, a lack of access to attractive alternatives, and the relatively greater economic opportunities of men (as specified in this scenario), the power of these young women to bargain for an early marriage, or to limit a partner's sexual access is likely to be low. They may find themselves having to settle for nonmarital sex and/or for cohabitation rather than marriage. These predictions are consistent with empirical observation: both nonmarital sexual activity and cohabitation are more frequent among lower- than among middle-class young women. Furthermore, they integrate what have been more or less isolated observations into a broader explanatory framework to account for changing sexual and family patterns in the United States.



Holding constant the variables of race (white) and male economic opportunities (high), young women from white-collar backgrounds with high economic opportunities are in a substantially better bargaining position. Their age at first intercourse may or may not be delayed (although it is likely to be later than that of blue-collar young women), but they are under much less pressure to move rapidly into either cohabitation or marriage. Indeed, they may prefer cohabitation until their careers are underway. This behavior is likely to be accentuated when male economic opportunities are poor.

It is far more difficult to make detailed predictions regarding the effects of specific variations in social class and in economic opportunities on the sexual behavior of young black women. Delayed marriage across the social class spectrum is consistent with the theoretical framework we have proposed and is, of course, a matter of empirical observation. Insofar as cohabitation responds to the same constraints as marriage, we would expect the transition from first sexual intercourse to cohabitation to be delayed as well (i.e., relative late age at first cohabitation, relatively long time from first sex to first cohabitation). Due to the weak structural position of black men in the society as a whole, we anticipate male economic opportunities to be less important as a determinant of sexual behavior patterns among black than among white young women.

The question of whether male or female economic opportunities dominate sexual bargaining transactions is an important unresolved issue among family demographers (see e.g., Lichter et al., 1991; Oppenheimer, 1992). The arguments we have presented above strongly suggest that the answer to this question will depend in part on the specific social and cultural setting. In particular, we have suggested that favorable economic opportunities for men will be relatively more influential in the lower- than in the middle-class and more influential among whites than blacks. The influence of women's economic opportunities on these transactions is further affected, we would argue, by an ideological climate which legitimizes women's extra-familial economic roles and, at the same time, devalues their sexual and domestic resources.

### Conclusion

Adolescent fertility is often treated as a social-psychological problem of individual adolescents: the focus of attention has been on teenage women's knowledge, attitudes, and practices with respect to pregnancy, contraception, and childbearing, and on psychological constructs such as self-esteem. Yet the behavior that has aroused such intense concern--nonmarital pregnancy and childbearing--is by no means limited to adolescents, nor even to the United States. These observations strongly suggest that in order to understand--and to develop appropriate health and social policies to address--these new patterns of sexual, marital, and fertility behavior, it is necessary to go beyond the individual level and to examine more

critically and more carefully the broader social and economic changes to which these behaviors respond. The proposed theoretical framework is intended as a step in this direction.

1. There is some evidence that middle-class black women are more likely than comparable white women to "marry down" (Schoen and Kluegel, 1988), although Staples maintains this was an earlier pattern that no longer describes economically-independent black women (1981). If, indeed, this pattern continues to prevail, an obvious hypothesis to account for it would be the devaluation of women's economic resources by high status black men.

TABLE 1. Dimensions of Adolescent Sexual Behavior

<u>Outcome</u>	<u>Range of Variation</u>
Age at first sexual intercourse	"Early" vs "Late"
Age at first cohabitation	"Early" vs "Late"
Time from first sex to first cohabitation	"Short" vs "Long"
Age at first marriage	"Early" vs "Late"
Time from first sex to first marriage	"Short" vs "Long"
Time from first cohabitation to first marriage	"Short" vs "Long"
Number of sexual partners before cohabitation/marriage	"Few" vs "Many"

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