DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NEGRO AND WHITE WOMEN IN MARITAL STABILITY AND FAMILY STRUCTURE: A MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

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The story line of this paper is very simple. We start with the known empirical generalization that Negroes and Whites differ with respect to marital stability and the dominance of women within the family.

Starting with Frazier, attempts have been made to explain this differential by examining Negro-White differences in social structural location and culture.[1] The implication, of course, is that these social and cultural factors are direct causes of marital instability and family structure independent of race; that is, if there were no racial differences other than skin pigmentation, marital instability would still be directly related to difference in culture and social location. In brief, race leads to different life experiences and stands as a summary of different life experiences.[2]

Very few attempts have been made to partial out these intervening factors from the relationship between race and marital stability. In general, the Frazier hypothesis that the differential rates are largely a function of the impact of slavery and subsequent emancipation in interaction with the urbanization of the Negro has been accepted.[3]

Persons in other social categories have also migrated to the cities -- although not necessarily at the same rate as Negroes -- and have also been susceptible to the impact of urbanization. Therefore, we should be able to get some maximum estimate of the current relevance of the Negro's historical situation for their greater marital instability and differential family structure, by partialing out the effects of social-ecological factors for which data are available and which affect both Negroes and Whites.

One footnote is in order here. Even if we were to find that all differences between Whites and Negroes disappear, this does not mean that there were not true differences at the time Frazier was doing his analysis, or that these differences were not indeed a function of the unique development of the family among Negroes as compared with Whites in the United States. At the time Frazier was doing his work, Negroes in large numbers were beginning to make their move from southern rural areas to the cities and to the north. The Negro family may now be going through a new historical stage, and is worth looking at for that reason alone.[4]

Recently, moreover, some systematic attempts to examine Negro-White differentials with respect to family stability and structure have been made. Bernard and Udry, both using 1960 Census data for two different population groups, arrive independently at the conclusion that controlling for socio-economic differences between non-Whites and Whites does not significantly reduce the differential in marital stability.[5,6] Udry's analysis, in fact, suggests that the differential might even increase with income.[7] A somewhat earlier unpublished paper of mine suggests that taking family income into account does significantly reduce the differential in the proportion of female-headed families except at the very lowest of income levels -- that is, under $3,000 a year.[8]

To give some idea of what is involved, take a look at Table 1. It shows the proportion of husband-wife families among Whites and non-Whites in 1960 -- by poverty status of family, and age of family head. Poverty status is measured by the Social Security Index developed by Mollie Orshansky, and corrected for 1959 price levels.[9] As can be seen, the largest difference between the races is among those families where the head is less than 25 year of age, and the family is under .7501 of the poverty line. The smallest differential is in those families where the head is aged, and the family income puts them at 25 per cent over the poverty line or better. Since poverty status is in part defined by the number of people in the household, it is possible that using the family as the unit of analysis may disguise the actual difference. As we can see in Table 2, however, the pattern of White/non-White differences remains substantially the same for the proportion of <u>persons</u> in husband-wife families as for proportion of <u>families</u>.

These tables suggest that with increasing affluence the distribution of family types among non-Whites begins to resemble that of Whites; but the differences are not obliterated. There are, however, other differences between Negroes and Whites that are also related to marital stability. Table 3 summarizes some of these differences by Whites and non-Whites for ever-married women. Non-Whites are more likely than Whites: to be

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younger, to be nearer to the time of first marriage, to have less education, and to live in the South or in urban areas. Moreover, among both Whites and non-Whites, women married more than once differ from the ever-married on the same characteristics (and presumably even more from the once-married) although not necessarily in the same direction.

Thus, we have a set of social-ecological factors which appear to be differentially distributed with respect to race as well as with marital stability.

Method. Since a multivariate analysis involving so many variables is extremely difficult to handle through cross-tabulation, multiple regression analysis has been used here to ascertain what happens to the relationship between race and marital stability when all these dimensions of the differential social-ecological position of Negroes and Whites is taken into account.

In addition to the variables already mentioned, the following variables have also been taken into account: (1) the region in which the respondent was born, (2) whether they moved at all between 1955 and 1960 and (3) the relationship of this migration to their 1955 SMSA status. (See Appendix I for the definition of all independent variables.) The 1/1000 Census tape for 1960 was used. Our sample consists of all ever-married women over the age of 14, plus those women who were heads of families but had never been married. (It is of some interest to note that 2.3 per cent of our total sample fell into this latter category.) Because our interest is in comparing Negroes with Whites, all other non-Whites were excluded from the sample.

All variables, independent and dependent, were entered as continuous or ordinal attributes except race, region (current residence or birth), 1960 residence, and migration between 1955 and 1960. These attributes were treated as dichotomous or dummy variables, and therefore either zero or one. The possible nonlinear relationship between marital stability and age, duration of time since first marriage, education, and poverty status were also taken into account in the construction of the variables. For example, age was broken into three variables so that the slopes for persons less than age 30, 30 to 50, and over 50 could be independently calculated.

The definition of the dependent variables requires somewhat more discussion. (See Appendix I.) Present marital status and whether the sample members had been married once or more than once was used to define marital stability. It is very easy to agree that persons who are currently married, with spouse present, and have been married only once are the most stable; that those persons who have been married more than once without a spouse present are the most unstable; and those married only once, but without a husband present, are in between. There is some problem, however, in assigning widows -- after all, a 65-year-old woman married to the same man for 40 years could hardly be called maritally unstable. On the other hand, what about those persons who are married with spouse present, but have been married more than once -- are they stable or unstable? To ascertain whether any differences would result from varying classifications of widows and the married-more-than-once-but-with-spouse-present, four different indices of marital stability were constructed.

Family stability was measured by dividing the sample into: the married with spouse present and both only married once; the married where either had been married more than once; and female headed-families. The first was scored as most stable and the third as least. One variation was also tried -- to divide those women with spouse present by their own frequency of marriage only.

To examine female dominance in the family, the following indices were constructed: First, women were considered to be least dominant in a husband-wife family where the wife was not the chief income recipient; and most dominant where the family was headed by a woman. The husband-wife family where the wife was the chief income recipient was scored as intermediate to the two extremes. The second index was basically the same, except that the relative earnings of husbands and wives were used to differentiate the husband-wife family -- (1) where the husband's income was greater than the wife's she was considered to be less dominant; (2) where it was equal to or less than the wife's she was considered to be more dominant -- and as before, women who were the sole heads of their families were considered to be most dominant.

I want, at this time, to interject that I completely agree with the objection that none of these definitions of stability and female dominance is adequate. We are all familiar with those households where the husband brings home all the bacon, but the woman wears the pants. What I would claim, however, is that the census data used to operationalize these concepts are the best available. It behooves us who would criticize it to produce more adequate data. In the meantime, let us see what the available data tell us.

Results. The basic strategy used in the analysis started with the relationship between race and the various indicators of marital and family stability and female dominance, and investigated what happened to that relationship as different variables were introduced into the regression. Here, the coefficient of race and partial

correlation of race with the dependent variables told our main story. Two sub-plots also were developed -- one was to ascertain the effect of poverty status by introducing it last into the regression; the second was to look at the change in R^2. Table 4 presents the results.

What are they?

1. The coefficient of race and the partial correlation of race with the dependent variables are both reduced by approximately half when fully regressed.
2. About half of that decrease is accounted for by poverty status alone.

To summarize: whatever race means in relation to marital stability and female dominance, half of that meaning is a summary statement of the relationship between location in a social-ecological system and marital stability -- with poverty status being particularly relevant. (It is of interest here that Lee Rainwater, in his comments on the Bernard Paper, states that if the battery of traditional demographic variables were taken into account, "Perhaps then the average difference between homogenized White and Negro categories could be reduced by as much as half.")[10]

3. A mean difference between Negroes and Whites with respect to the dependent variables does remain, given the included conditions. (In all the T-ratio is highly significant.) This difference could result from many factors. Urbanization may indeed have a larger impact on Negroes than on Whites. Movers are more likely than non-movers to be unstable. We are unable to tell, however, whether the differential is larger for Negroes than Whites.) Rainwater has suggested group process variables (e.g. community support of norms with respect to fidelity). Bernard has suggested culture and social psychological variables such as goal-striving and self-esteem. Who knows? Perhaps the mere fact that Negroes are less likely than Whites to be Catholic is a factor.
4. What may be a more important question is whether the mean difference in marital stability between Negroes and Whites, given the social-ecological conditions, is socially relevant. We can see in Table 4 that The R^2 is negligible when race is the only variable in the regression, and increases greatly with the introduction of the other variables. The removal of race would, therefore, have a negligible effect on the explained variance. This effect has been estimated and can be found in Table 4.

Conclusion. When all is said and done, what do we have? The social-ecological position of the races does account for half of the mean difference between the races in marital stability. Once all factors are "controlled", race still remains a statistically significant factor with respect to marital stability. By itself, race at no point helps account for much of the variance in marital stability. What is left of the relationship between race and marital stability, therefore, although statistically significant seems hardly socially relevant. To a large extent, then, race stands as a summation of social-ecological position. This is, of course, without doubt itself a function of the patterns of discrimination and prejudice with respect to the Negro in our society.

Footnotes

[1] E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

[2] See Lee Rainwater, "'Marital Stability and Patterns of Status': A Comment," Journal of Marriage and the Family, November, 1966, p.442.

[3] "The widespread and continued family disorganization among Negroes in cities . . . is one of the results of the impact of the urban environment upon the simple and loose family organization of the Negro folk." E. Franklin Frazier, "The Negro Family in Chicago," in Ernest W. Burgess and Donald J. Bogue, Contributions to Urban Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 404.

[4] See Jessie Bernard, Marriage and Family Among Negroes (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966).

[5] Jessie Bernard, "Marital Stability and Patterns of Status Variables," Journal of Marriage and the Family, November, 1966. The analysis was done on men in the 45-to-54-year age bracket.

[6] J. Richard Udry, "Marital Instability by Race, Sex, Education, and Occupation Using 1960 Census Data," The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 72, No. 2, September 1966. Data for the age group 25-34 were calculated.

[7] J. Richard Udry, "Marital Instability by Race and Income Based on 1960 Census Data," The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 72, No. 6, May, 1967.

[8] Myron J. Lefcowitz, "Poverty and Negro-White Family Structures," White House Conference "To Fulfil These Rights," November, 1965.

[9] Mollie Orshansky, Social Security Bulletin, January and July, 1965.

[10] Rainwater, op. cit., p. 444.

Table 1

Percentage of Husband-Wife Families, by Poverty Status, Race, and Age of Head

Age of Head:	Race	Poverty Status: Under .7501	.7501-1.25	Over 1.25
Under 25	White	80	93	96
	Non-White	62	85	87
	W-NW Differences	18	8	9
25 - 64	White	74	86	93
	Non-White	63	79	86
	W-NW Differences	11	7	7
65 and over	White	75	85	79
	Non-White	63	76	78
	W-NW Differences	12	9	1

Table 2

Percentage of Persons in Husband-Wife Families, by Poverty Status, Race, and Age of Head

Age of Head:	Race	Poverty Status: Under .7501	.7501-1.25	Over 1.25
Under 25	White	82	94	97
	Non-White	65	85	89
	W-NW Differences	17	9	8
25 - 64	White	80	91	95
	Non-White	67	83	87
	N-NW Differences	13	8	8
65 and over	White	75	84	78
	Non-White	64	73	76
	N-NW Differences	11	11	2

Table 3

Social Characteristics of Ever-Married Women
and Women Married More Than Once, by Race

		Women Married Ever	Women Married More Than Once
Median Age:			
	White	44.4	48.7
	Non-White	41.6	49.3
Median Years Since First Marriage:			
	White	21.2	27.6
	Non-White	18.8	28.2
Median Education:			
	White	11.3	10.0
	Non-White	8.7	7.8
Percentage in South:			
	White	27.5	28.9
	Non-White	54.6	57.3
Percentage in Urban Residence:			
	White	71.2	74.7
	Non-White	76.8	78.1

Source: U. S. Census of Population: 1960, Marital Status. PC(2)-4E, Tables 1,2, 4.

Table 4. Measure of simple and partial effects of race on marital stability, family stability and female dominance.

Dependent Variable:	For Race		R^2	
	Coefficient	Partial Correlation	With Race	Without Race
1. M_1				
a. Simple regression	-.325 (.012)*	-.119	.014	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.249 (.012)	-.088	.133	.126
c. Full regression	-.162 (.012)	-.057	.153	.15
2. M_2				
a. Simple regression	-.311 (.012)	-.114	.013	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.221 (.012)	-.076	.085	.08
c. Full regression	-.155 (.013)	-.053	.096	.093
3. M_3				
a. Simple regression	-.257 (.009)	-.126	.016	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.187 (.009)	-.089	.149	.142
c. Full regression	-.118 (.009)	-.056	.171	.168
4. M_4				
a. Simple regression	-.296 (.010)	-.130	.017	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.239 (.010)	-.106	.197	.188
c. Full regression	-.141 (.010)	-.063	.234	.231
5. F_1				
a. Simple regression	-.364 (.011)	-.156	.024	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.284 (.012)	-.115	.085	.073
c. Full regression	-.192 (.012)	-.077	.11	.105
6. F_2				
a. Simple regression	-.343 (.011)	-.15	.023	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.272 (.014)	-.112	.083	.071
c. Full regression	-.178 (.012)	-.073	.109	.104

Table 4 cont.

Dependent Variable:	For Race Coefficient	Partial Correlation	R^2 With Race	R^2 Without Race
6. Dom_1				
a. Simple regression	-.308 (.010)	-.139	.019	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.255 (.011)	-.108	.076	.066
c. Full regression	-.152 (.011)	-.064	.110	.106
7. Dom_2				
a. Simple regression	-.347 (.011)	-.152	.023	
b. Multiple regression without poverty index	-.283 (.011)	-.118	.101	.088
c. Full regression	-.148 (.011)	-.063	.161	.158

*The numbers in the parenthesis are the standard errors of the estimate of the coefficient.

APPENDIX I

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

1. Race: Negroe = 1, White = 0

2. Region: South = 1, Other = 0

3. Birthplace: South = 1, Other = 0

4. Present residence: Rural, Non-SMSA Urban, SMSA Fringe, SMSA Center City (Four dummy variables)

5. SMSA residence in 1955 and 1960: Same SMSA in 1955 and 1960, Different SMSA in 1955 and 1960, Non-SMSA in 1955, Other (Four dummy variables)

6. Residential mobility: Same house in 1955 and 1960, Not same house in 1955 and 1960, Other (Three dummy variables)

7. Age: a. Age of individual
   b. Number of years over 30 (if any)
   c. Number of years over 50 (if any)

8. Years since first marriage: a. Total number of years
   b. Number of years over 10 (if any)
   c. Number of years over 20 (if any)

9. Education: a. Total years of education
   b. Twelve years of education = 1
   c. Sixteen years of education = 1
   d. Years of education beyond high school (if any)
   e. Years of education beyond 4 years of college (if any)

10. Poverty Index: a. Ratio of total family income to poverty line for family's size and farm-nonfarm residence
    b. Excess of poverty index over .4999 (if any)
    c. Excess of poverty index over .9999 (if any)
    d. Excess of poverty index over 1.4999 (if any)

Dependent Variables

1. Marital Stability

   a. M_1 = 1 when married, spouse present, and married only once
   = 0 all others married only once
   = -1 married more than once or never-married family head

   b. M_2 = 1 when married, spouse present, or widowed and married only once
   = 0 all others married only once
   = -1 all others

   c. M_3 = 1 when married, spouse present, or widowed, and married only once
   = 0 all others married only once; or other married, spouse present; or other widowed.
   = -1 all others

   d. M_4 = 1 when married, spouse present, and married only once
   = 0 all others married only once; or other married, spouse present
   = -1 all others

2. Family Stability

   a. F_1 = 1 when in husband-wife family, husband and wife married only once
   = 0 in all other husband-wife families
   = -1 female family head

   b. F_2 = 1 in husband-wife family, wife married only once
   = 0 in all other husband-wife families
   = -1 female family head

3. Female Dominance

   a. Dom_1 = 1 when in husband-wife family, wife not chief income recipient
   = 0 all other husband-wife families
   = -1 female family head

   b. Dom_2 = 1 when in husband-wife family, husband's income is greater than wife's
   = 0 all other husband-wife families
   = -1 female family head