COULD WE LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD?

SOME (VERY) SPECULATIVE REMARKS ON NONMARITAL FERTILITY

Plenary: The Rise of Nonmarital Fertility

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New York University

August 2015
ASA 2015: Could We Level the Playing Field?

PLAN
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- almost no data/empirical results
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- behavioral processes underlying nonmarital fertility
- nonmarital fertility as trickier—Involves (at least) two processes: marriage and fertility
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- almost no data/empirical results
- behavioral **processes** underlying nonmarital fertility
- nonmarital fertility as trickier—involves (at least) two processes: marriage and fertility
- will argue that long acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) have the potential to level the playing field
PROCESSES UNDERLYING PREMARITAL FIRST BIRTHS
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To simplify, will focus on first births to never-married women ("premarital first birth")
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Why we care: high (highest) rates of poverty among these mothers and their children
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Why we care: high (highest) rates of poverty among these mothers and their children

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

- at age $t$, some never-married and childless women will enter a first marriage, while others will remain never-married
PROCESSES (cont)

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Fertility process
PROCESSES (cont)

Marriage process

- at age $t$, some never-married and childless women will enter a first marriage, while others will remain never-married

Fertility process

- at age $t$, some never-married and childless women will have a first birth, while others will remain childless
TWO THEMES IN THE LITERATURE
TWO THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

Barriers to marriage
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Barriers to marriage

- Wilson (1987): growing dearth of marriageable black males due to structural economic change
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Barriers to marriage

- Wilson (1987): growing dearth of marriageable black males due to structural economic change
- Edin and Kefalas (2005): bar for marriage has increased for both advantaged and disadvantaged groups
- Cherlin (2014): second gilded age implies growing income and wealth inequality but also growing gap in who marries
TWO THEMES (cont)
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Fertility and its proximate determinants
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- sex while never-married → pregnancy → how a pregnancy is resolved → premarital first birth
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- sex while never-married $\rightarrow$ pregnancy $\rightarrow$ how a pregnancy is resolved $\rightarrow$ premarital first birth
- England (2015): contraceptive behavior as important
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- (older demographic literature)
TWO THEMES (cont)

Fertility and its proximate determinants

- sex while never-married $\rightarrow$ pregnancy $\rightarrow$ how a pregnancy is resolved $\rightarrow$ premarital first birth
- England (2015): contraceptive behavior as important
- (older demographic literature)
- Sawhill (2014): “drifting into sex and parenthood without marriage”
SOME STYLIZED “FACTS”
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Premarital sex
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Premarital sex

- among never-married, more than 9 of 10 are sexually active
SOME STYLIZED “FACTS”

Premarital sex

- among never-married, more than 9 of 10 are sexually active
- small differences in age at first intercourse (after background controls) between advantaged and disadvantaged groups
SOME STYLIZED “FACTS” (cont)
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Relationships
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- (anecdotal) college students are not avoiding sex or relationships, nor are those who do not go on to college
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Contraception and premarital first births
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- premarital first births now occur in the late teens and early 20s
SOME STYLIZED “FACTS” (cont)

Relationships

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Contraception and premarital first births

- premarital first births now occur in the late teens and early 20s
- vast majority of premarital first births are “unplanned”
WORKING HYPOTHESES
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Working hypotheses from above
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- advantaged groups put considerable effort into avoiding a birth until they decide to start trying
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- less advantaged population as contracepting less effectively (yet another way in which the US differs from Europe)
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Working hypotheses from above

- advantaged groups put considerable effort into avoiding a birth until they decide to start trying
- less advantaged population as contracepting less effectively (yet another way in which the US differs from Europe)
- fairly good evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, consistent with the above
THREE QUESTIONS
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- Why is it that some contracept effectively and others do not?
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- Could we level the playing field?
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- Why is it that some contracept effectively and others do not?
- Could we level the playing field?
- And if we could, what might be some consequences?
CONTRACEPTIVE FAILURE RATES (CDC)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contraceptive method</th>
<th>Unintended pregnancies per 1000 women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implant</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUD</td>
<td>2 to 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pill</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condom</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>240</td>
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LARC TRENDS

NCHS (Branum et al. 2015)
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSFG survey</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–10</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–13</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TAKE-AWAY
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- LARCs are highly effective
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- LARC are highly effective
- LARC use still low, particularly in most relevant age groups
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Randomly assign young women from disadvantaged groups to a treatment group (info about LARCs) vs. a control group (no info about LARC)
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Potential to level the playing field
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NON-EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM ST. LOUIS AND COLORADO

Temporarily funded initiatives providing free access to LARCs

- neither had random assignment to treatment vs. control
- trends in Colorado as a potentially serious confound
- still, suggestive evidence of declines in teen, unplanned, and nonmarital births
- in St. Louis, no increase in STI’s, considerable satisfaction (and continuation rates) for IUDs
CHURNING IN THE SCHOOLING TO WORK TRANSITION
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Story by labor economists re churning in the schooling to work transition
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- mismatches lead to labor market churning
- churning declines with time as workers find better matches
COULD RELATIONSHIPS BE AT LEAST AS COMPLICATED AS JOBS?
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- plausible that a higher bar for marriage implies a higher bar for relationships
- McLanahan and Beck (2010): characteristics of the guy she is with gets better over time
(VERY) SPECULATIVE “WHAT IF LARCs”

- H1: could let young women churn to a better relationship
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Bottom line: potential to yield better outcomes for her, him, and the (planned) kid
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- LARCs could let young women from disadvantaged circumstances “churn” to a better relationship
- should reduce unplanned pregnancies and births
- potential for better outcomes for her, him, and (a planned) kid
- these are nevertheless disadvantaged populations, so LARCs can’t and won’t solve all problems
CONCLUSION (cont)
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Processes underlying nonmarital fertility
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- barriers to marriage are almost certainly part of the problem
- but the literature sometimes takes the birth as a given
- sensible to ponder both the “sex” and “marriage” parts of nonmarital fertility
THANK YOU