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Childhood Religious Conservatism and Adult Attainment among Black and White Women

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Abstract

The resurgence of conservative religious groups over the past several decades raises interesting questions about its effects on women's life chances. Conservative religious institutions promote a traditional understanding of gender within families. Women's beliefs about appropriate family roles, in turn, influence their preparation for market work and the timing and extent of their labor force participation. Using retrospective data from the National Survey of Households and Families, this paper examines the effect of childhood religious affiliation on American women's acquisition and use of marketable skills, focusing on women's educational investments, family formation behavior, labor force participation and wage attainment. Results show that childhood religious conservatism is associated with diminished human capital acquisition and earlier family formation for White women with more muted results for Black women.

Resurgent religious fundamentalism within the world's major religious traditions raises significant questions for scholars of gender inequality. Many conservative religious movements are centrally concerned with the reestablishment of traditional moral order involving patriarchal leadership and a strong sexual division of labor within the family (Hawley 1994). As such, the growing popularity of conservative religious groups would seem to undermine women's slow progress toward labor market equality with men around the world and here in the United States. Indeed, much of the literature on gender inequality in the labor market acknowledges that women's ideological beliefs about appropriate family roles and non-maternal child care are important determinants of their labor market behavior (Glass and Riley 1998; Greenstein 1989; Hakim 2002; Hock, Gnezda and McBride 1984). However, stratification researchers have generally sidestepped investigation of the institutional origins of these beliefs, despite their importance in producing behavioral outcomes that result in women's economic disadvantage.

Conservative religions, to a greater extent than other institutions, advocate the belief that mothers are first and foremost responsible for providing care to their children and husbands and should only secondarily be involved in market work. Paradoxically, conservative religious groups have been growing rather than declining during the period in which mothers' labor force participation has risen dramatically in the United States overall (Leibowitz and Klerman 1995; Brown 1994). As yet, their potential to impede women's economic progress has not been analyzed. In this paper, we begin such investigation by focusing on three questions (1) Do women raised in religiously conservative households exhibit lower occupational attainment in adulthood? (2) How precisely does childhood religion affect adult women's earnings? Is the effect felt through early life course decisions regarding education, marriage

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and family formation? And/or is the effect realized through later preferences for domesticity and traditional gender roles? (3) In contrast to middle-class White women, could religious conservatism in childhood actually help women growing up in families disadvantaged by class, family structure or race?

These questions relate to broader concerns in the social sciences about the autonomous role of culture and ideology in producing market behavior as well as the sources and persistence of gender inequality in the workplace.

The gender gap in earnings, while slowly narrowing, appears more stubbornly persistent among American mothers as opposed to their child-free peers (Waldfogel 1997). This is troubling considering the extent to which mothers are now expected to financially support themselves and their families. Much contemporary policy debate revolves around whether the lowered earnings of mothers are due to voluntary choices to emphasize mothering over market work or market based discrimination and structural obstacles to employment that require intervention.

After controlling for class and family background, evidence that a conservative religious upbringing impacts market attainment suggests that conservative religion plays an autonomous role in maintaining gender inequality. If so, the increasing membership in conservative religions may help explain the persistent gender wage gap in earnings despite increases in women's skills and labor market experience, as well as the concentration of the female wage deficit among mothers (Waldfogel 1997). The rise of conservative denominations would then constitute an obstacle to improvements in mothers' economic attainment even when nations prohibit gender discrimination in education and employment.

We investigate these questions using a national sample of households to determine the strength and direction of effects that childhood religious affiliation has on the early life course transitions and adult occupational achievement of American women. Prior research has examined the link between conservative religiosity and gender/family ideologies, but it has rarely tested the *behavioral* impact of conservative religion (however, see Lehrer 1995; Hall 1995). While research has demonstrated a general association between conservative religious affiliation and lower socioeconomic status (Grasmick, Wilcox and Bird 1990; Darnell and Sherkat 1997), no causal order has been firmly established.

Background

Existing literature provides no clear answer to the question of whether childhood religious conservatism affects women's subsequent labor market attainment. Individuals in conservative denominations hold more traditional attitudes about gender roles than others (Brinkerhoff and MacKie 1984; Grasmick, Wilcox and Bird 1990; Powell and Steelman 1982), and these traditional attitudes are associated among women with labor force withdrawals following childbirth (Desai and Waite 1991; Glass and Riley 1998; Greenstein 1989; Hock, Gnezda and McBride 1984) and planned domesticity in adulthood (Morgan and Scanzoni 1987; Rexroat and Shehan 1984; Rosenfeld and Trappe 1996). However, women also seem less affected by denominational doctrine than by their own personal religious beliefs (Peek, Lowe and Williams 1991), and women in conservative Protestant groups often have, at best, a shallow adherence to religious teachings about female submissiveness and domesticity (Brasher 1998; Pevey, Williams and Ellison 1996; Stacey 1990). Other research points to the significant heterogeneity of belief about gender roles among conservative Protestants (Gay, Ellison and Powers 1996) even though, *on average* they are more traditional than religious moderates. Finally, there is evidence that some conservative Protestant churches take an accommodationist stance toward the growing number of dual-earner families in

congregations (Brasher 1998; Demmit 1992). The heterogeneity in samples and measures used in these studies make it difficult to draw any conclusions about the effect size of religious conservatism on women's wage attainment.

Extant theory in the sociology of religion explains how conservative religious doctrine *might* affect women's eventual attainment. As Keysar and Kosmin (1995) state: "Religion is widely recognized as important in creating cultural communities, which in turn directly influence their adherent's attitudes and behavior toward gender roles in society" (p. 49). Smith (2000) has argued that conservative religious communities are oppositional subcultures that seek to draw symbolic boundaries between their values and a mainstream culture of excessive individualism and materialism. One of the most distinctive markers of this subculture is the championing of "traditional family values" and the primacy of homemaking and motherhood for women (Hawley 1994; Brooks 2002). While there is far more widespread condemnation of homosexuality, extramarital sex and abortion among conservative Protestants than mothers' labor force participation (Gay, Ellison and Powers 1996), the consistent theological emphasis on women's special role and responsibility for family life and child care is widely acknowledged.

The question is this: Can this symbolic embrace of gender traditionalism withstand the strong material forces (men's declining wages, the rising cost of housing, no-fault divorce) that discourage the maintenance of traditional family forms? Gallagher and Smith (1999) and Bartkowski (1999) both chronicle the tension between the symbolic traditionalism of conservative Christian couples and the more egalitarian negotiation of paid work and the domestic division of labor in practice. Demmit (1992) argues that conservative pastors have learned to accept the growing labor force activity of mothers, but couch this activity within a rhetoric that seeks to minimize the impact of paid work on the time or energy that mothers spend on their primary roles as homemakers and family caregivers. Thus, preferred strategies for mothers include working from home, limiting hours of work or working only while children are at school, and redefining material needs so that employment is not necessary. While accommodation of mothers' paid work is possible within subcultures of religious conservatism, the early and sustained career activity that generally maximizes women's occupational attainment remains problematic.

Variation by Race, Class and Family Structure

The impact of childhood religious conservatism on women's attainment may not be unequivocally negative, especially among women disadvantaged by class, race or family structure. Negative consequences can be divided into three "pathways" to lower attainment: (1) pre-market factors such as the development of human capital and early investments in marriage and childbearing, (2) productivity effects on earnings in which women lose financial compensation because they accommodate family caregiving by remaining out of the labor force as much as possible and fail to accrue work experience and training as a result, and (3) labor market matching processes in which women get matched to jobs based on the gender designation of the job or the nurturant or caregiving content of the job. Mothers may also lose compensation by limiting their work hours, location or work demands. We first describe the paths, then we discuss how race, class and family structure may alter them.

Regarding the first pathway, empirical evidence has shown diminished educational attainment among women from conservative denominations (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Keysar and Kosmin 1995; Sherkat and Darnell 1999).¹ Such denominations also encourage earlier marriage and family formation (in part by emphasizing abstinence before marriage), which can lead to higher than average fertility, particularly given religious proscriptions against

abortion and certain forms of birth control (Ellison and Goodson 1997; Mosher, Williams and Johnson 1992). These early family investments make labor force participation less attractive, particularly when combined with beliefs that women should shoulder the major responsibility for family caregiving rather than income generation. Early family formation then lowers subsequent earnings after market entry by prolonging the period in which human capital is depreciating rather than growing and by increasing the domestic labor that mothers typically must perform even after finding employment (Chandler, Kamo and Werbel 1994).

Second, conservative religious affiliation in childhood may promote enduring ideological beliefs that mothers should exit the labor force following childbirth and devote their energies to childrearing as much as possible (Smith 1999). Even if employed, the belief that mothering should take priority over other pursuits might cause women to reduce their work hours, take less demanding and less prestigious jobs, and decline training or advancement.

Finally, conservative religious affiliation in childhood may encourage traditionally feminine occupational aspirations that track women into jobs with lower wages (England, Herbert, Kilbourne, Reid and Medgal 1994). Since conservative religious theology views men and women as having essentially different personality configurations and social roles, women raised within a conservative tradition may feel that their skills and talents are appropriate only for nurturant and service-oriented occupations.

In contrast to these general pathways to lower attainment, latent pathways might link childhood religious conservatism to *increased* attainment in adulthood. Principal among these would be increased marital stability in religiously conservative families of origin and decreased early premarital births among those respondents – both factors that produce higher educational attainment, increased social capital development and greater earnings among young women (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). The strong moral and behavioral codes in conservative denominations may be an important mechanism linking young people to peer groups and organizations with conventional achievement orientations.

These positive effects of religious conservatism should be particularly salient for youth who are disadvantaged by class or family disruption. That is, conservative religious involvement might serve a protective function for lower-class families and single-parent families that it does not serve in middle-class two parent families. In middle-class environments where father absence, early sexual involvement and school leaving are less common, conservative religious affiliation may not produce the desired positive effects on women's eventual attainment. But strong church affiliation might help poor or single parents better monitor and control their daughter's activities, resulting in less truancy, substance abuse and early unwanted pregnancies. These salutary effects of conservative religion might outweigh negative effects on educational and career aspirations.

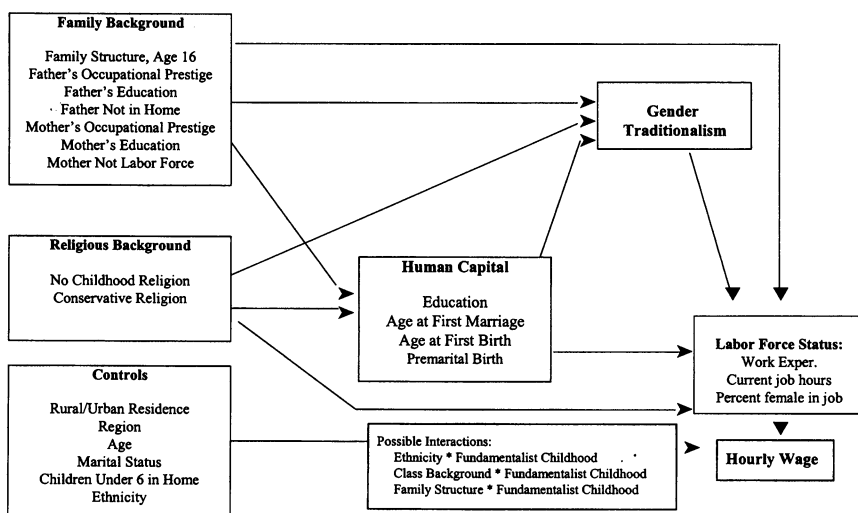
Similar reasoning suggests that the effects of conservative religion may differ by race. Given the lower odds of marrying an economically secure breadwinning spouse that Black women face, conservative religion may not have the emphasis theologically, or the space institutionally, to influence Black women's market behavior. Research documents that African-American conservative Protestant churches are less gendered in their theological emphasis and practice than White conservative Protestant churches (Woodberry and Smith 1998). African-American churches historically have served as vehicles for community organizing and individual empowerment, buffering the effects of racism and socioeconomic disadvantage for Black youth (Patillo-McCoy 1998). If African-American conservative churches encourage family stability, promote educational attainment, and discourage early and out-of-wedlock childbearing, while downplaying messages of female domesticity, a religiously conservative background may benefit rather than hinder African-American women's wage attainment in adulthood. In sum, while three pathways from childhood religious conservatism to lowered achievement can be specified, offsetting effects from increased parental stability and adult

supervision could limit or reverse these effects, especially for poor or single parents. There are strong reasons to suspect that race structures religious experience as well, with Black women facing both less gendered messages in conservative church doctrine and more material pressure to financially provide for their families.

The pathways to lower attainment structure the analyses to follow. First, we test the impact of childhood religious conservatism on educational attainment and early family formation. Next, we analyze religion's effect on gender ideology and current labor supply followed by gender composition of the current job. Finally, an earnings equation is constructed that includes variables measuring childhood religious denomination and all three pathways (human capital and family formation, gender ideology/labor supply and gender composition). Since persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have historically been more likely to express a conservative religious affiliation, as is true of residents of southern states and rural areas (Darnell and Sherkat 1997), detailed measures of respondents' background are included in all analyses to avoid misspecifying the effects of religious affiliation.

Despite these controls, the concentration of religious conservatives in southern and rural areas may still confound religious background with unmeasured local labor market conditions (higher female unemployment or lower local wages). Unfortunately, the data used here contain no information on local labor demand. Given this caveat, the causal model guiding the analyses is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model Relating Religion and Family Background to Gender Traditionalism, Human Capital Attainment and Adult Earnings



Research Plan and Methods

Sample

Our data come from the 1988 panel of the National Survey of Families and Households. The NSFH, unlike other large panel data sets, contains extensive life history information including detailed religious and family backgrounds for the respondents, information about the

respondents' own family formation behavior, and employment history for the respondents since first leaving school. Specifically, the NSFH asked about religious affiliation in the respondent's family of origin, and it oversampled African Americans, enabling a race comparison that no other representative sample can provide. The first wave of the NSFH was conducted between March 1987 and May 1988. This nationally representative sample included 13,008 main respondents who represented the U.S. population, aged 19 and over. Because several population groups were oversampled (Blacks, Hispanics, single parents, persons with stepchildren, cohabitants and newly married persons), we used individual sample weights to ensure results would be representative of the U.S. population (Sweet, Bumpass and Call 1988).

The primary sample of interest from the 1988 wave of the NSFH included all women under age 65, to avoid problems of selective morbidity/mortality among older women, as well as retired individuals. Among the 10,789 main respondents in the NSFH in 1987/88 who were under age 65, 6,268 were women. After listwise deletion of missing data on crucial variables, the final sample size was 5,901.

Measurement of Variables

The 1988 NSFH contained questions about respondents' religious background as well as a substantial work and fertility history. Religious background was ascertained by recoding answers to the question: "In what denomination were you raised?" The categorization of denominations into religiously conservative versus moderate/liberal denominations has been the subject of much debate with coding schemes developed by Roof and McKinney (1987), Smith (1990), and Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox and Woodberry (2000). After consideration of our analytic objectives, we used a slightly modified version of Roof and McKinney's (1987) coding scheme for two reasons: (1) their scheme used as its principle criteria the belief in Biblical inerrancy in the published theological statements of each denomination, and (2) the coding of all denominations, whether traditionally African-American or White, utilized the same criteria enabling us to see whether race modifies the effect of denominational fundamentalism. Biblical inerrancy refers to the belief that the Bible is literally true and can provide guidance for all of life's decisions. While this criteria does not directly address beliefs about gender, the subordinate status of women and their primary roles as mothers and helpmates are clearly spelled out in the Old and New Testaments (Keysar and Kosmin 1995). Numerous scholars note that beliefs in Biblical inerrancy underlie conservative views about gender in various religions (Hawley 1994).²

But like Steensland, et. al (2000), we combined Roof and McKinney's moderate and liberal denominations into one contrasting "mainline" category as there is little rationale for distinguishing between the two with respect to social attitudes. Those reporting no religious affiliation or preference were separated into their own category. This resulted in a three-category coding scheme. Two dummy variables represented conservative denominational preference and no religious affiliation with mainline (moderate/liberal) religious denomination as the omitted category.

Respondent's class background was measured with four indicators – highest level of education received by the respondent's mother and father as well as the mothers' and father's occupation when R was 16 (recoded into occupational prestige scores). Because not all respondents lived with their fathers and had reported values for their fathers' education and occupation and not all mothers were employed, dummy variables for father absence and mother's employment status when the respondent was age 16 were created as well. A second variable measuring family instability also indirectly captured father absence, coding all respondents who reported that their parents were separated/divorced by age 16 or had never lived together (for nonmarital births).

We measured the following demographic variables as controls because they have been shown to covary with conservative religious affiliation as well as labor market attainment – age, South/non-South residence in childhood, current rural-urban residence, current South/non-South residence of the respondent, and race (coded as Hispanic White, non-Hispanic White and African-American).

Human capital was operationalized as educational attainment, indicated in the NSFH as the number of completed years of schooling. Age at first marriage, age at first birth and premarital first birth were calculated from life history information on the year of these events in the NSFH.

Traditional gender ideology was assessed with a scale ($\alpha = .68$) created from these NSFH items: “It is better for everyone involved if the father works while the mother stays at home with the children;” “Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed;” and “How much do you approve/disapprove of mothers who work full time when their youngest child is under age 5?”

We measured the gender composition of the respondent’s current job as the percent female in an employed respondents’ three-digit occupation code in the 1990 Census. Given research that shows the female concentration of jobs is highly correlated with their nurturant or caregiving content (England, et. al 1994), we used female concentration to indicate the extent to which each respondent worked at appropriately sex-typed tasks. Unfortunately, detailed occupation codes were missing for approximately 17 percent of the employed sample. These cases were set at the mean percent female with a dummy code added to the equation to mark the allocated cases.

Job earnings in the prior year were directly measured for those respondents in the labor force. Hours worked per week and weeks worked in the previous year were used to construct an hourly wage rate for each employed respondent. Hourly wages were logged to control for their skewed distribution in all analyses. Means and standard deviations for all variables are displayed in Appendix A.

Analysis of Data

The analysis proceeded in two steps, separating models for early pre-market factors implicated in lower earnings (such as education and age at marriage) from later market factors linked to lower earnings (such as labor force participation/gender ideology and gender composition of the job). First, the four variables measuring early pre-market pathways to lower attainment (educational attainment, age at first marriage, age at first birth and premarital first birth) were regressed on the childhood religion variables alone. Then ethnicity, age, class background and family structure were added as control variables along with interactions of childhood religious conservatism and ethnicity, class background and family structure. The interactions specify any variation in the impact of childhood religion along lines of class, ethnicity or family structure.³

The same procedure was repeated with the market pathways to lower attainment – respondent’s 1988 gender ideology, labor force participation, gender composition of the job and logged hourly wages. In all of these models, controls for the prior life course transitions modeled in the first step (educational attainment, early family formation) were added to the original sociodemographic controls from the family of origin. In the models of labor supply, occupational segregation (percent female) and logged hourly wages, controls for current sociodemographic status (marital status, number and ages of children, region and rural/urban residence) and gender ideology were also added. The final wage model included additional controls for female concentration in the respondent’s job and current weekly hours of work.

A correction for sample selection bias was applied to all labor force equations since only those respondents currently employed could be included in the sample, and religious background is hypothesized to play a role in the determination of employment status.

In the models for market-based outcomes, only statistically significant interactions of religious conservatism and class or family structure are presented. Each interaction was tested in each model in isolation to minimize multicollinearity. But as the results show, very few interactions with childhood religious conservatism reached statistical significance.

While we originally pooled all race/ethnic groups for these models, preliminary analyses showed marked differences for African American women, not only in the effects of religion but in the effects of our control variables as well. The dependent variables we model here, especially age at first marriage, age at first birth, nonmarital first birth and labor force participation, are produced through fundamentally different processes for Black and White women. When we began to see the array of race differences in the NSFH, we ran a series of Chow tests for each dependent variable to see if separate race models were warranted. With the exception of two models, the Chow tests were all significant. In recognition of the fact that Black and White women face fundamentally different marriage markets and patterns of childbearing, as well as dramatic differences in the role and content of conservative church practices, we present separate analyses by race.

Results

We begin with the four early adult transitions – educational attainment, age at first marriage, age at first birth and premarital first birth. The White analyses (combining Hispanic and non-Hispanic origin women) are presented in Table 1. Columns 1 and 2 show the results of the OLS regression of completed years of education on family and religious background variables for non-Black respondents.

Column 2 indicates that growing up in a religiously conservative household significantly reduced educational attainment, even after controlling for family structure and parental social class. Growing up with no religious affiliation reduced educational attainment relative to those raised in mainline denominations as well, by about the same amount as conservative religious affiliation (a little more than a half a year of schooling).

Columns 3 and 4 report truncated dependent variable regression analyses of age at first marriage for the White sample.⁴ Again, the main effect of conservative religion is significant and negative, indicating that a conservative religious background hastens marriage by an average of about three-quarters of a year. However, column 4 shows that this negative effect of conservative religion is restricted to non-Hispanic women, actually becoming *positive* and postponing marriage by a net year and three quarters for women of Hispanic origin. The truncated regressions for age at first birth for White women are displayed in columns 5 and 6. Childhood religious conservatism consistently lowered respondents' age at first birth, by more than half a year on average, after controls are included.

Columns 7 and 8 of Table 1 displays the results for the logit analyses of experiencing a nonmarital first birth, the last early pre-market factors we considered here. Here, evidence of a protective function of childhood religious conservatism appeared in the form of a significantly lower chance of a nonmarital first birth. The exponentiated coefficient shows that women from conservative religious backgrounds were 54 percent less likely than women from mainline religious groups to experience a nonmarital first birth ($1 - e^{-.77} = .54$).

None of the analyses of early life course transitions in Table 1 showed significant interactions between childhood religious conservatism and family structure or parental education, contrary to the hypothesis of greater protection in vulnerable families. There was

no special protective function of religious conservatism among women growing up in high-risk groups except for the delay in first marriage found among conservative Hispanics.

Turning to the analyses of pre-market factors among African American women, columns 1 and 2 of Table 2 show that religious conservatism, rather than having a smaller impact on African-American women, actually had a significantly larger impact on their educational attainment, resulting in a net loss of over one year of education on average. A test of the difference in coefficients across Black and White models yielded $t = 1.91$; $p = .06$. As was the case for White women, controls for family class background and family structure accounted for only a small part of the total association between conservative religious affiliation in childhood and lower educational attainment.

Columns 3 and 4 show the truncated dependent variable models for age at first marriage, while columns 5 and 6 show models for age at first birth among Black women. Religious affiliation was not significantly related to either of these family transitions for African-American women, confirming our suspicion that the effects of religious conservatism may be more muted for Black women. Tests of the difference in coefficients across Black and White models yielded $t = 2.52$, $p < .01$ for the age at first marriage model and $t = 2.0$, $p < .05$ for age at first birth model. Nor did the models display any protective functions of conservative religion among those disadvantaged by lower parental education or family disruption. Columns 7 and 8 of Table 2 present analyses of nonmarital first births among Black women. Again, no effects of religious affiliation could be detected. Despite the size difference in coefficients across Black and White models, a test of the null hypothesis that Black and White effects of conservative religion on nonmarital childbearing are equal could not be rejected ($t = 1.74$; $p > .05$).

Similar to the White models, interactions of conservative religion and parental education or family disruption were never significant across these four dependent variables, showing no protective effect of conservative religion among those Black women raised in disadvantaged households.

The second set of analyses on market factors begin in Table 3 with the impact of childhood religious conservatism on White respondents' current gender ideology. Columns 1 and 2 show that, net of its effects on educational attainment and family formation behavior, childhood religious conservatism continued to have a strong positive influence on gender traditionalism measured on a 1-5 scale. Because gender traditionalism is measured in cross-sections in 1988, rather than in early adulthood, this measure may be endogenous with respect to adult labor market experiences. Thus, the estimate of the direct effect of childhood religious conservatism may represent a slight overestimate. However, Hakim (2002) reports marked consistency in gender role beliefs past early adulthood, suggesting that any such bias is slight.

Columns 3 and 4 of Table 3 report logistic regression models of current labor force participation for White women.⁵ The odds of employment were significantly lower for women from religiously conservative households, even after controlling for earlier life course transitions, current family status and gender ideology. Women from religiously conservative households had about 19 percent lower odds of being employed on average than women raised in mainline denominations ($1 - e^{-.20} = .19$). White women raised with no religious affiliation were even less likely to be employed with their odds decreased by 32 percent.

Moving to the type of employment obtained if in the labor force, columns 5 and 6 report models for the percent female in White respondents' occupations. Conservative childhood religion had no effect on the extent to which respondents were employed in female dominated occupations. However, gender traditionalism showed a strong positive impact on the percent female in the respondents' job, while education showed a negative impact. Both gender traditionalism and education were affected by childhood religious conservatism, netting the indirect positive effect of religious conservatism on subsequent sex-typed employment.

Table 1: Analyses of Early Life Course Transitions: Completed Education, Age at First Marriage, Age at First Birth and Nonmarital First Birth – White Women only, aged 18-64

Ind. Variable	Completed Education		Age at First Marriage		Age at First Birth		Nonmarital First Birth	
	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)
Constant	12.69** (.04)	8.54** (.21)	21.49** (.10)	14.47** (.51)	23.22** (.09)	13.90** (.57)	-3.24** (.85)	-1.02 (.57)
No Childhood Religion	-.40* (.19)	-.54** (.16)	-.09 (.40)	.34 (.38)	-.76 (.48)	-.42 (.43)	.54 (.30)	.40 (.31)
Conservative Childhood Relig	-.66** (.11)	-.51* (.26)	-1.39** (.18)	-.78** (.21)	-1.32** (.21)	-.56* (.24)	-.30 (.26)	-.77* (.32)
Hispanic		-1.60** (.13)		1.90** (.28)		1.49** (.29)		.83** (.24)
Age		.00 (.00)		.01 (.01)*		.01 (.01)		-.01 (.01)
Raised in South		.02 (.09)		-.44* (.18)		-.56** (.21)		.74** (.22)
Education	--	--		.43** (.03)		.62** (.03)		-.15** (.03)
Father's Education		.12** (.01)		-.02 (.03)		.01 (.03)		-.04 (.03)
Father's Occ		.02**		.02**		.02**		-.00

Father Absent	.73** (.14)	.27 (.28)	.24 (.31)	.18 (.28)
Mother's Education	.21** (.01)	.04 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.04 (.03)
Mother's Occ Prestige	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Mother Not Employed	.09 (.11)	.45* (.22)	.30 (.25)	-.61* (.27)
Family Disruption	-.59** (.10)	-.49* (.23)	-.91** (.24)	.40* (.21)
Hispanic* Conserv Relig	.40 (.48)	2.49* (1.06)	2.04 (1.12)	.50 (.82)
Family Disruption *Conserv Relig	-.16 (.26)	.03 (.53)	.14 (.58)	.06 (.60)
Parent Educ * Conserv Relig	.01 (.02)	-.02 ¹ (.05)	-.02 ¹ (.07)	-.02 ¹ (.07)
R ² (OLS)	.01**	.30**		
Sigma (Truncated Regression)		4.01** (.05)	4.34** (.06)	4.66** (.06)
Chisquare/df. (Logit)		3.79** (.05)		
N	4863	4704	4704	4704
			4.89/2	99.89/15
			4704	4704

*p<.05, **p<.01
¹ effect insignificant when entered; not entered in final model reported here

Table 2: Analyses of Early Life Course Transitions: Completed Education, Age at First Marriage, Age at First Birth and Nonmarital First Birth – Black Women only, aged 18–64

<i>Ind. Variable</i>	Completed Education		Age at First Marriage		Age at First Birth		Nonmarital First Birth	
	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls for Class and Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)
Constant	12.5** (.08)	10.92** (.43)	21.97** (.25)	19.66** (1.64)	21.32** (.21)	11.18** (1.35)	-1.43** (.10)	-.54 (.69)
No Childhood Religion	-1.48** (.49)	-1.35** (.45)	-3.72* (1.77)	-3.09 (1.75)	-2.08 (1.45)	-.71 (1.35)	.10 (.59)	-.01 (.60)
Conservative Childhood Relig	-.96** (.13)	-1.13** ¹ (.37)	-.33 (.38)	.73 ¹ (1.09)	-.63* (.32)	1.30 ¹ (.90)	.09 (.15)	.22 (.47)
Age		-.02** (.00)		-.01 (.02)		.04** (.01)		.02** (.01)
Raised in South		.24 (.17)		-.60 (.52)		-.44 (.41)		-.15 (.21)
Education		--		.10 (.81)		.57** (.07)		-.08* (.04)
Father's Education		.03 (.03)		.11 (.09)		.09 (.07)		.05 (.04)
Father's Occ Prestige		.02** (.01)		.05** (.02)		.05 (.15)		-.02* (.01)

Father Absent	.32 (.21)	1.53* (.68)	1.04 (.54)	-0.62* (.29)
Mother's Education	.14** (.03)	-0.08 (.08)	-0.11 (.06)	-0.03 (.03)
Mother's Occ Prestige	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.02)	-0.01 (.01)
Mother Not Employed	-.19 (.18)	-.65 (.57)	.14 (.46)	-.49* (.24)
Family Disruption	-.43** (.17)	-.78 (.56)	-.05 (.43)	.18 (.22)
Family Disruption *Conserv Relig	-.29 (.26)	.65 (.85)	.41 (.65)	-.22 (.32)
Parent Educ * Conserv Relig	.04 (.04)	-.04 (.11)	-.11 (.09)	-.01 (.00)
R ² (OLS)	.05**	.20**		
Sigma (Truncated Regression)		4.78** (.13)	4.45** (.11)	4.13** (.11)
Chi square/df				.34/2 37.68/14 **
N	1215	1215	1153	1153

*p<.05, **p<.01 Coefficients for black and white women differ at p < .05

Table 3: Analyses of Gender Traditionalism, Labor Force Participation, Occupational Gender Segregation and Hourly Wages based on Childhood Religious Affiliation, Family Background and Early Life Course Transitions – White Women aged 18-64

Ind. Variable	Gender Traditionalism		Labor Force Participation		Occ Percent Female		Ln Hourly Wage	
	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)
Constant	3.19** (.02)	3.70** (.11)	.85** (.04)	2.72** (.33)	.60** (.01)	.94** (.08)	2.01** (.03)	.02 (.21)
No Childhood Religion	-.20** (.07)	-.07 (.07)	-.08 (.16)	-.39* (.18)	-.01 (.02)	.02 (.03)	-.40** (.08)	-.17* (.08)
Conservative Childhood Relig	.23** (.04)	.19** (.04)	-.44** (.09)	-.20* (.10)	-.02 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.06 (.05)	-.33** (.12)
Hispanic		.09 (.05)		.12 (.15)		.03 (.03)		.10 (.06)
Age		.01** (.00)		-.04** (.00)		-.01* (.004)		.06** (.01)
Age Squared (in hundreds)		–		–		.01** (.003)		-.06** (.01)
Married		.18** (.04)		-.37** (.10)		.05* (.02)		.04 (.05)
Presence of Children <6		.07 (.04)		-.1.16** (.11)		.07 (.04)		.15 (.10)
Urban Residence		.05 (.03)		.02 (.09)		-.03 (.01)		.12** (.04)
Southern Residence		–		-.03 (.08)		-.00 (.01)		-.00 (.03)
Raised in South		-.10* (.04)		–		–		–
Father's Education		.00 (.01)		-.00 (.01)		.00 (.00)		-.01 (.01)
Father's Occ Prestige		-.00 (.00)		-.00 (.00)		-.00 (.00)		-.00 (.00)

For the preceding three outcomes – gender ideology, labor force participation and gender composition of the job – no significant interactions between religious conservatism and parental education, family disruption or Hispanic origin could be detected. Thus, no evidence of protective effects of religious conservatism in disadvantaged households was found.

Finally, columns 7 and 8 present models of logged hourly wages for White women to detect any direct effects of childhood religious conservatism on adult women's attainment even after controlling for the impact of pre-market and market factors. An interesting pattern emerged in this analysis. While there was no uncontrolled effect of childhood religious conservatism apparent on current adult wages, the model in column 8 with a wide range of controls for current family status, gender traditionalism, hours of work and occupational percent female showed a significant negative effect of childhood religious conservatism. This effect was offset by a positive interaction of parental education and childhood religious conservatism, meaning that adult women who had a parent with more than a high school education in a religiously conservative household suffered no direct wage loss in adulthood. Rather than a protective function, religious conservatism was particularly *negative* for White women's wage attainment if they came from lower class backgrounds.⁶

Table 4 presents models for market variables for African American women. The impact of conservative childhood religion on market outcomes appeared weaker for Black women, but the overall pattern was strikingly similar to that found for Whites. Tests for the difference in religion coefficients across Black and White models yielded no significant differences for the four market outcomes that we analyzed. No significant effect of religious conservatism on Black women's gender ideology could be found after adding controls, but the uncontrolled effect was significant and conservatizing. Childhood religious conservatism similarly had no effect on Black women's adult labor force participation after adding background controls, although the uncontrolled effect was significant and negative. There was also no detectable influence of childhood religion on current percent female in Black respondents' occupations (in fact, virtually no background variables predicted Black women's concentration in female dominated jobs). For all three outcomes (gender traditionalism, labor force participation and occupation percent female), results indicated no significant interactions of conservative childhood religion and background disadvantage.

The wage equation for African American women in columns 7 and 8 again closely paralleled the equation for White women. Religious conservatism had a significant negative effect on adult Black women's wages net of pre-market and market factors, but the effect was confined to those women whose parents had less than about 10 years of education. The significant interaction of parental education and religious conservatism showed that religious conservatism had a small net positive effect on hourly wages among Black women from more privileged backgrounds.

To summarize, all but one of the seven pre-market and market influences on adult wage attainment were influenced by childhood religious conservatism for White non-Hispanic women. Educational attainment was truncated, marriage and childbearing were hastened, conservative gender ideologies were formed and maintained into adulthood, and adult labor force participation was limited – all factors that have been shown to lower adult earnings. In contrast, nonmarital childbearing was decreased by childhood religious conservatism. Only current occupational percent female was unaffected by childhood religious affiliation. After controlling for all these pre-market and market factors, conservative religion continued to exert a negative direct effect on White women's wages for those whose parents had no higher education beyond high school.

For Hispanic women, the effects of conservative religion were identical to those of White non-Hispanic women except that age at first marriage was significantly higher among Hispanic women raised in conservative denominations.

For African American women, childhood religious conservatism reduced only educational attainment, while having little or no effect on age at first marriage, age at first birth, nonmarital childbearing, gender traditionalism and labor force participation. The religion effects on most pre-market and market factors were more muted for African American women relative to White, although only race differences on pre-market factors were statistically significant. Women of all races shared the same direct negative effect of being raised in a religiously conservative household on their current wage unless their parents had above average levels of education.

Across all ethnic groups, no protective advantages of a religious conservatism could be found for those raised in households disadvantaged by family disruption or low parental education.

Discussion

The results here confirm that childhood religious affiliation has had enduring influences on the family formation behavior and occupational attainment of American women, an impact independent of their class background and region of the country. While social class did constrain women's labor market success, the effects of childhood religious conservatism were not just an outgrowth of relative material deprivation. Rather, religious conservatism created an independent ideological framework that guided important life course decisions such as when to quit schooling, marry, and have children.

The effects of childhood religious conservatism on later gender role ideology and labor force participation indicated that religious background helped produce a familial division of labor that discouraged women's labor market attainment. The effects are especially impressive given that any direct modeling of gender relations in the family of origin was controlled. Religious ideology in childhood had an enduring impact on respondents' perceptions of appropriate family roles and responsibilities.

Important race differences in the pathways that connected conservative religion to lower adult attainment were also uncovered. For White women, growing up in a religiously conservative household had long term negative effects on adult earnings via all three hypothesized pathways – (1) pre-market factors such as human capital development and early family formation, (2) lower attachment to the labor force to accommodate family obligations, and (3) gender role orientations leading toward nurturant or traditionally female labor. Childhood religious conservatism affected adult White women's wages, in part, by reducing their educational attainment, accelerating entry into marriage and parenthood, and increasing their conservatism on familial roles and responsibilities. In turn, White women raised in religiously conservative households worked less in adulthood and worked in more stereotypically female occupations when they were employed. All these factors lowered adult women's wage attainment. After the pathways to lower attainment were controlled, childhood religious conservatism still had a negative direct effect among women from lower class backgrounds. Religious conservatism accentuated the impact of social class background, meaning stronger disadvantage for those raised at the bottom of the class spectrum and slight advantage for those women raised at the top. Theoretical conceptualizations of conservative religious groups as subcultures of opposition to materialism and individualism suggest that uptake of that message is class-based.

The impact of conservative religion on Black women's attainment revealed some race differences along with striking similarities to the White results. Overall, negative effects on pre-market and market variables tended to be weaker for Black women. Among Black women, childhood religious conservatism had no significant impact on early family formation, nonmarital childbearing, gender ideology or labor force participation. This resonates with the

Table 4: Analyses of Gender Traditionalism, Labor Force Participation, Occupational Gender Segregation and Hourly Wages based on Childhood Religious Affiliation, Family Background and Early Life Course Transitions – Black Women aged 18-64

Ind. Variable	Gender Traditionalism		Labor Force Participation		Occ Percent Female		Ln Hourly Wage	
	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)	Unadjusted Religion Effect <i>b</i> (s.e.)	With Controls and Signif. Interactions <i>b</i> (s.e.)
Constant	2.98** (.04)	3.83** (.31)	.99** (.09)	-3.94** (1.08)	.67** (.02)	1.24** (.29)	2.17** (.08)	-1.39* (.60)
No Childhood Religion	.13 (.23)	.08 (.22)	-1.10* (.48)	-.85 (.53)	.03 (.11)	.17 (.14)	.38 (.31)	.06 (.28)
Conservative Childhood Relig	.14** (.06)	.05 (.08)	-.59** (.14)	-.30 (.16)	-.02 (.02)	.01 (.04)	.03 (.08)	-.41* (.17)
Age	.01** (.00)	.01** (.00)	.17** (.04)	.17** (.04)	.02 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.08** (.02)	.08** (.02)
Age Squared (in hundreds)	—	—	—	-.22** (.05)	—	.00 (.00)	—	-.08** (.02)
Married	-.04 (.16)	-.04 (.16)	—	.32 (.19)	—	-.02 (.04)	—	.09 (.08)
Presence of Children <6	-.07 (.09)	-.02 (.07)	—	-.63** (.21)	—	.06 (.07)	—	-.06 (.12)
Urban Residence	-.09 (.08)	-.09 (.08)	—	.43* (.22)	—	-.06 (.06)	—	.19 (.11)
Southern Residence	—	—	—	.23 (.16)	—	.00 (.03)	—	-.14* (.07)
Raised in South	.02 (.08)	.02 (.08)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Father's Education	.03** (.01)	.03** (.01)	—	.11** (.03)	—	-.01 (.01)	—	-.00 (.02)
Father's Occ Prestige	-.01** (.00)	-.01** (.00)	—	-.02** (.01)	—	.00 (.00)	—	.00 (.00)
Father Absent	-.35** (.09)	-.35** (.09)	—	-.27 (.26)	—	-.09 (.06)	—	-.06 (.11)

Mother's Education	-.10** (.03)				.01 (.01)							
Mother's Occ Prestige	.02* (.01)				-.00 (.00)							
Mother Not Employed	.01 (.05)				.03 (.05)							
Family Disruption	.23** (.17)				-.05 (.04)							
Education	-.07** (.01)				.23** (.04)							
Age at First Marriage	-.00 (.01)				.00 (.01)							
Age at First Birth	-.00 (.00)				-.00 (.00)							
Nonmarital First Birth	-.00 (.08)				-.01 (.04)							
Gender	-.07 (.08)				-.01 (.04)							
Traditionalism					.03 (.02)							
Hours Worked per Week					-.06 (.05)							
Occ Percent Female					-.37** (.11)							
Missing Percent Female					-.59** (.13)							
Parent Educ *					.04* (.02)							
Conserv Relig Lambda					-.96** (.15)							
R ²	.01*	.12**			-.02 (.05)	.43* (.22)						
Chi square/df	22/2**	176.46/20**			.00	.04						
N	1153	1153	1023	1023	556	556	556	675	675	675	675	675

*p<.05, **p<.01

literature that demonstrates the role of Black churches in promoting an orientation toward achievement and conventional family formation. It is also consistent with the historically higher labor force participation of Black women (although White women have now surpassed African-American rates of labor force participation).

In contrast, childhood religious conservatism had a strong negative impact on Black women's educational attainment and produced a pattern of lower wages among those from households with below average levels of parental education, quite similar to the pattern found for Whites. Thus, Black women displayed lower attainment from only one of the three pathways mentioned earlier – weaker pre-market educational attainment – but showed the same accentuation of class effects among those raised in conservative religions that White women displayed.

The analyses presented here also tested for positive effects of a conservative religious upbringing on women disadvantaged by lower social class or family disruption. Interactions of conservative religion with family disruption consistently showed no protective function of conservative religion on those from mother-only households on any of the pre-market or market variables studied here. Nor did conservative religious affiliation ameliorate any of the disadvantages of lower class background. As mentioned above, women from households with lower parental education were singularly *disadvantaged* by conservative religion in their adult earnings.

A conservative religious upbringing did display “protective” functions in a number of other ways. Compared to having no childhood religious affiliation, those from a conservative religious background fared slightly better in their educational attainment. Among White women, those raised in a conservative religion displayed lower probabilities of a nonmarital first birth compared to those without a childhood religion and those raised in a moderate/liberal religion. Among White women of Hispanic ethnicity, conservative religious affiliation raised the average age of marriage.

Several limitations of the present analysis suggest the need for further research. The measure of childhood religious conservatism used (the denomination in which the respondent was “raised”) is a weak indicator of actual household religious practices. The salience of religious ideology, as well as the timing and degree of childhood religious participation, could not be ascertained. Although religious commitment tends to be strongly correlated with religious conservatism, questions remain about the actual processes generating the effects of childhood denomination. In addition, the intervening impact of adult conservative religious affiliation and institutional participation needs to be considered to ascertain whether childhood religious training operates independently or only through its effects on adult religious participation. Given evidence that children raised in conservative religions have low rates of disaffiliation in adulthood (Hout, et. al. 2001; Sherkat and Wilson 1995), the effects attributed here to childhood processes may in fact need to be continuously reinforced in adulthood. We isolated “apostates,” or those who switched from a conservative childhood denomination to a moderate/liberal adult affiliation, and found no change in the effects of childhood religion. But the small number of NSFH apostates to work with left little statistical power for such a test.

Second, the data here are cross-sectional, retrospective and cover only those women born between 1924 and 1969. The extent to which effects are consistent over successive cohorts of women cannot be adequately addressed without a larger sample disaggregated by age cohort. Conservative religion itself has changed over the course of the 20th century. In particular, the heavy emphasis on female domesticity in conservative theology that appeared after WWII may have diminished in the 1980s and 1990s, although those denominations still clearly view motherhood and domesticity as desirable and appropriate for young women (Bendroth 1993). More recent analyses of conservative Protestants indicate that they are

better educated and wealthier than in the past (Woodberry and Smith 1998). This may result in cohort-specific effects of a conservative religious upbringing in which younger cohorts of women experience fewer negative effects.⁷

What this analysis demonstrates most strongly is that even a relatively weak measure of conservative religious upbringing showed negative direct and indirect effects on adult women's earnings many years later. For women from lower class backgrounds, the direct effect of childhood religious conservatism persists even net of important intervening causal mechanisms (family formation behavior, educational attainment, current family status and labor market location). While these results need to be refined, they demonstrate the significance of childhood religion on adult women's occupational attainment. The pattern revealed here, if continued into the future, suggests that any large-scale growth in the number of women raised in religiously conservative households may indeed retard women's aggregate success in the labor market.

Notes

1. Darnell and Sherkat's work (1997) also reminds us that some of the same effects of conservative religion may lower men's attainment as well. The distrust of secular education, the emphasis on spiritual as opposed to material wealth, and the injunction to serve others may lead men from conservative religious backgrounds into careers that fail to maximize their attainment. However, the theological importance of male headship and family provision militate against such effects. Our preliminary analyses of the NSFH data on men show that religious effects are much less pronounced for men than women. While a comparative analysis of women and men provides a stronger test of our central hypotheses concerning women, the theoretical rationale predicting behavioral differences between religiously conservative and non-conservative women does not require demonstration that these differences do not exist for men.
2. What remains perplexing is why conservative religious denominations have prospered during precisely the period in which increases in women's education and labor force attachment have grown. One conventional explanation is that fundamentalism arises as a reaction to rapid social changes, particularly in family structure and functioning that threaten established moral orders (Hawley 1994). Such reactionary ideologies have successfully altered political regimes and constrained women's rights under conservative Islamic regimes, for example. However, the cause of growing voluntary compliance with restrictive religious codes of behavior for women has been less systematically studied. Hout, Greeley and Wilde (2001) claim that conservative denominations have not become more popular, but have grown solely from the larger family sizes of their adherents. Even they admit, however, that youth from conservative denominations are less likely to leave their faith in adulthood than those from mainline denominations. Hays (1996) proffers a more complex explanation for the appeal of ideologies of intensive mothering – a general cultural unease with the commodification of human activities and the pursuit of market success and a desire to reestablish the moral and social value of caregiving (particularly in family relationships) outside a market system.
3. For some models, however, the inclusion of the insignificant interaction of parental education and conservative religion created enough collinearity to reduce the main effect of childhood religion to a probability below .05. In these instances, the insignificant interaction was deleted.

4. Ages at first marriage and first birth required truncated dependent variable analyses (which is quite similar to Tobit regression) because these dependent variables are right-truncated. Some women may not have had children or gotten married by the survey date.
5. In these models and those to follow, region is measured as current residence in the South rather than being raised in the South since current labor force outcomes are more likely influenced by current residence than childhood residence. Multicollinearity prevents both measures from being included.
6. This wage model is imperfect. Measures of current job tenure, accumulated work experience since leaving school, and spells out of the labor force are omitted from this model because of substantial missing data (more than a third of the employed sample) in the NSFH job histories. These indicators of work experience were included in wage analyses with missing data deleted from the sample (N = 2109) and results showed no substantive change in the effects of religious background.
7. An alternative argument could be made that effects of conservative religion should be stronger in more recent cohorts. Because opportunities for women have expanded greatly over the past 25 years, the consequences of early family formation, truncated educational attainment and low aspirations could be more costly now than in earlier cohorts. We attempted to test both predictions by splitting the current sample in half by age, but found no significant differences in the pattern of results.

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Appendix A
Descriptive Statistics (Weighted) for Variables in the Analyses

Variable	Mainstream Religion	Conservative Religion	No Religion	Total
Hispanic	.09	.02	.06	.07***
Black	.09	.27	.05	.12***
Age	38.26	39.15	30.17	38.10***
Father's Education	10.38	9.19	10.95	10.19**
Father's Occ Prestige	31.68	26.14	33.29	30.76***
Father Absent	.09	.13	.10	.10**
Mother's Education	10.86	10.21	11.34	10.76***
Mother's Occ Prestige	18.14	13.99	23.01	17.60***
Mother Not Employed	.43	.45	.31	.43***
Family Disruption	.17	.19	.24	.17**
Nonmarital Birth	.07	.09	.12	.08*
Number of Children < 6	.32	.40	.39	.34**
Married	.62	.64	.49	.62***
Education	12.70	11.90	12.36	12.55***
Gender Traditionalism	3.17	3.35	2.97	3.19***
Age at First Birth	22.68	21.27	21.36	22.36***
Age at First Marriage	21.30	20.24	21.09	21.10***
Current Urban Res	1.19	1.33	1.23	1.21***
Currently in South	.27	.62	.26	.33***
Raised in South	.12	.66	.17	.21***
Employed	.70	.60	.67	.68***
Job Hours	36.70	35.89	38.49	36.64*
Occupational sex Segregation (% female)	.65	.64	.64	.64
Hourly Wage	8.67	7.59	5.47	8.38**
N	4185	956	214	5355

Note: One-way analysis of variance significant at * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < 0.001$