by investigating which women give birth while cohabiting, using information on the reported timing status of conceptions and births during cohabitation.

Understanding the context of childbearing during cohabitation will provide insight into the potential implications of cohabitation for children’s lives. This article draws on the most recently collected nationally representative fertility data, from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), and builds on previous research by explicitly examining racial and ethnic differences in childbearing among cohabiters, including controls for key mediating factors such as socioeconomic circumstances. The pattern of racial and ethnic differences in fertility during cohabitation may indicate whether and how cohabitation functions differently for each group.18

Methodology

Data
The primary data source used for this analysis is Cycle 5 of the NSFG. These data were collected in 1995 and include the birth, pregnancy, marriage, cohabitation, employment and education histories of a nationally representative sample of 10,847 women of reproductive age (15–44). In addition, the NSFG contains information about the intention and planning status of all births. The NSFG data collected in 1995 for the first time also included complete cohabitation histories. No other data source has such high-quality data on both fertility behavior and cohabitation experiences.

The analytic sample was restricted in two ways. First, the analyses were restricted to women’s fertility and cohabitation experiences prior to first marriage. Most women who cohabited (82%) did so before they had ever married, and the majority of children born in cohabiting unions (80%) were born to women who had never been married. The analyses in this article focus on first cohabitations because the vast majority of women who cohabited prior to marriage cohabited with only one partner. Second, the analytic sample was restricted to women cohabiting after 1980, who were less than age 30 when they started cohabiting. This restriction was necessary because of the upper age limit of the NSFG; women older than 35 in 1980 were not included in the 1995 interview because they were older than 44 years. The final sample included 2,716 women.

Data Analysis
The overriding hypothesis of this article is that cohabitation is a more acceptable context for childbearing for minority women than for white women. The acceptability of cohabitation for childbearing was measured in three manners: by the cohabiting women’s childbearing behavior, by the odds of remaining in cohabiting unions once a pregnancy occurs and by views about the timing status of fertility during cohabitation.

Life tables are used to estimate the proportion of women who had a child for each duration of cohabitation. Separate estimates are provided for the mother’s race and ethnicity. Event-history models are employed to determine the timing of conception and of births within cohabitation. The event-history analyses are based on person-months; individuals either have a birth (or a conception resulting in live birth) or are censored (no longer observed) at the time of interview or at the termination of the union (marriage or separation). Finally, Cox proportional hazard techniques are used to estimate the multivariate models. An advantage of this estimation technique is that it does not require specifying a particular probability distribution.19 The proportionality assumption is less problematic for unions of short duration, such as cohabitation, than for longer unions such as marriage.

Since the central focus of this study was on decisions that lead to parenthood or family building, the analyses were restricted to live births. It should be noted that women who do not have children include women who have never become pregnant, those who have had a miscarriage and those who chose to have an abortion. Given the poor quality of data on abortion, it is not appropriate to separately analyze women who have had abortions; however, including them will most likely delay the timing of motherhood and perhaps be associated with a greater likelihood of having intended or planned births.

The timing of motherhood within cohabitation was measured at two time points: conception and birth. In the NSFG, respondents were asked directly about both the date of conception and the date of birth. It is important to present findings for the timing of both conceptions and births because decisions about marriage and about union dissolution determine whether a child is born within cohabitation. Thus, models estimated here show separately who became pregnant with a child during cohabitation and who gave birth to a child during cohabitation. In addition, logistic regression was used to estimate the odds that a woman’s first child conceived during cohabitation is born into that cohabiting union. Pregnancies re-