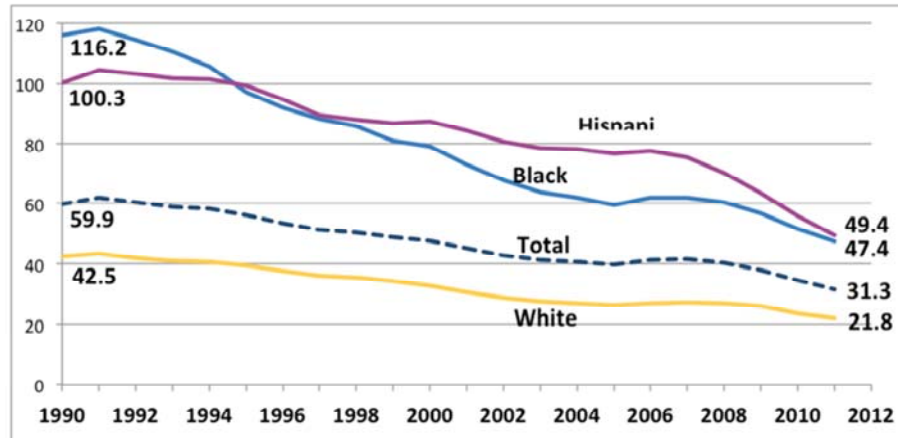


# Motherhood, Marriage, and Adult Crime

Crime and the Life Course  
SOC 401

## Birth rates per 1,000 females ages 15-19, by race/ethnicity, 1990-2011



Source: Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., & Ventura, S. J. (2012). *Births: Preliminary data for 2011*. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

## The Mating Game In Disadvantaged Neighborhoods (Elijah Anderson)

- **Inner-city Philadelphia**
  - Joblessness, extreme disadvantage
  - Bleak futures for men and women
  - Lack of jobs prevent men from attaining self-respect and forming stable family relationships
- **Perspectives of Street Males and Females (Adaptation)**
  - **Street males: gain status in the peer group by sexual conquests**
    - Devalue fatherhood and family life
    - Impregnation is evidence of sexual conquests
    - Cannot imagine fatherhood
  - **Street girls: dream of being married, mother, domestic family life**
    - Learn dream of middle class lifestyle from popular culture
    - Fall in love, become a housewife and mother

## Mating Game, Con't

- **Mating Game: Contest Between Boys and Girls; Winner and Loser**
  - **Girls :** Dream of being carried off by Prince Charming
  - **Boys:** Desire for sex without commitment; children without responsibility
  - **Boys: Getting over a young woman's sexual defenses**
    - The "rap": verbal element, telling girls what they want to hear, confirm dreams of family life (perfect rap lines over time)
    - Presentation of self: dress, grooming, looks
    - Derives from peer group: group sanctions
  - **Girls: Use sex as a bargaining tool for attention**
    - Fast crowd valuing promiscuity
    - Pregnancy may become a right of passage to adulthood (few alternatives)

## Pregnancy & Baby Clubs

- **Pregnancy**
  - Birth control viewed as woman's responsibility
  - Little to lose by becoming pregnant
  - Hopeful that pregnancy will win the male over to her dream
  - Males likely deny fatherhood
    - Support from peer group
    - "Tricked" and "Tagged"
- **Baby Club**
  - Girls hang out on the streets in peer groups
    - Often from female-headed families
    - See selves as "hip," being cool, surviving on wits, having fun
  - Some girls become pregnant; others follow
    - Girls give support to mothers, praise babies
    - Competition: good looking, well-dressed babies, compliments
    - "Looking good" offsets stigma of teen motherhood

## Why Poor Mothers Put Motherhood Before Marriage (Edin and Kefalas)

- **Eight Disadvantaged Neighborhoods in Philadelphia**
  - Interviewed 162 mothers earning less than \$16k
  - Black, white, Latino
- **Poor Mothers Revere the Institution of Marriage**
  - But it appears a pipe dream in the moment
  - Perhaps a future event
- **Girls hook up early**
  - Local boys hanging out (propinquity)
  - Pregnancy happens quickly (less than a year)
    - Less than 20 percent were carefully planned
    - Often go off birth control due to side effects
    - Sometimes deliberately want to get pregnant
      - To be loved, have intimacy
      - Have responsibility

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    - Sometimes deliberately want to get pregnant
      - To be loved, have intimacy
      - Have responsibility

## Why Poor Mothers Put Motherhood Before Marriage (Edin and Kefalas)

- **News of Pregnancy: Shock, then happiness**
  - Viewed as a gift; as inevitable
  - 25% had had an abortion in the past
    - Affluent: 67% of unplanned pregnancies result in abortion
    - Poor: 50% of unplanned pregnancies result in abortion
- **Decision to Bring Pregnancy to Term**
  - “Do the right thing,” not take the “easy way out.”
  - “I can handle it,” “I’m not a trifling teenager.”
  - Most are eager to have the child, planned or not.
  - Pregnancy offers hope for a better future; abortion ends that hope
- **Motherhood provides meaning**
  - Lower class worldview: put motherhood first
  - Affluent class worldview: twenty-somethings put education and careers first; children can wait
  - For the lower classes, careers are pipedreams; children offer tangible sources of meaning



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- **Motherhood as a turning point**
  - Mothers avoid nightlife and focus on the child
  - Change reference groups away from street youth
  - View motherhood as transforming their lives

## The Dream Dies

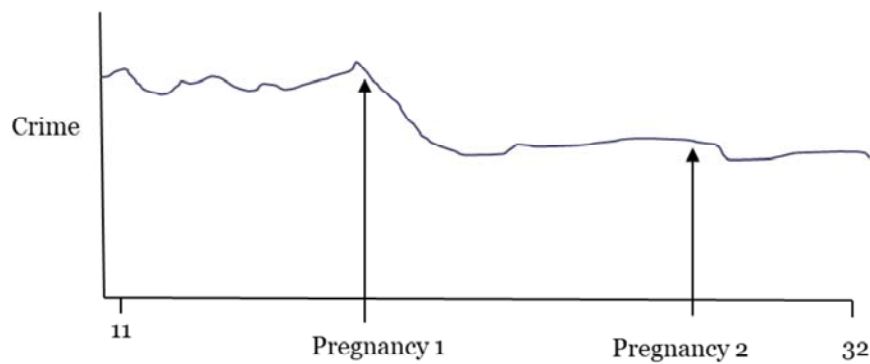
- **Men: Pregnancy often results in denial, abandonment, demand for abortion**
  - Sometimes brings the couple closer
  - Physiological changes in mother
    - Easy to stay away from drugs, alcohol and partying
    - Males: no such incentives
- **Dream Dies—Couples Split**
  - Lack of money is a factor
  - More important:
    - Father's criminal behavior
    - Spells of incarceration
    - Intimate violence
    - Chronic infidelity
    - Drugs and alcohol
- **Women still see marriage as desirable**
  - Among women who have a child out of wedlock, 70% eventually marry
  - But want to test their partners; can't find desirable partners

## Motherhood and Desistance

- **Denver Youth Survey**
  - Sample of disadvantaged neighborhoods
  - 10 year longitudinal study of 567 females
  - 10-16 years of age at wave one
- **Motherhood as a Turning Point**
  - Provides meaning in the lives of disadvantaged females
  - Transformation of self to adopt an identity of mother
  - Desist from drugs, alcohol, and delinquency

## Motherhood and Desistance

- **Problem: Selection into Motherhood**
  - Sex and pregnancy produce desistance
  - E.g., impulsivity or low self control
- **Solution: Within-Individual Change**



## Motherhood and Desistance Results

