# The Independence of Young Adults and the Rise of Interracial and Same-Sex Unions

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*Interracial unions and same-sex unions were rare and secretive in the past because U.S. society was organized to suppress such unions. The rise of same-sex and interracial unions in the past few decades suggests changes in the basic structure of U.S. society. Young adults have been marrying later, and single young adults are much less likely to live with their parents. The independence of young adults has reduced parental control over their children's choice of mate. Using microdata from the U.S. Census, this article shows that interracial couples and same-sex couples are more geographically mobile and more urban than same-race married couples. The authors view the geographic mobility of young couples as a proxy for their independence from communities of origin. The results show that nontraditional couples are more geographically mobile even after individual and community attributes are taken into account. Same-sex couples are more likely to be interracial than heterosexual couples, indicating that same-sex and interracial couples are part of a common fabric of family diversification. The article discusses related historical examples and trends.*

Change is the great constant of post-1960 scholarship on the American family. Scholars note the rise of divorce, the increasing postponement of first marriage (or complete avoidance of marriage), the rise of extramarital cohabitation, the rise of interracial marriage, and the rise of same-sex unions (Bumpass 1990; Cherlin [1981] 1992; D'Emilio 1992; Goode [1963] 1970; Rosenfeld 2002; Smith 1999). These are but several of the changes that have replaced a unitary system of racially endoga-mous heterosexual marriage with a more plural system of romantic unions.

In this paper, we examine the rise of interracial unions and same-sex unions in the United States, and we tie these emerging trends to the growing independence of young adults from their parents and communities of origin. Interracial marriage is a recently legalized union type in the United States (Spickard 1989; Moran 2001), while same-sex unions are still legally unrecognized in most of the country. We hypothesize that the rise in interracial unions and same-sex unions is in part due to a decline in the control that parents in the United States exert over the choices of their young adult children.

Since 1960, the number of black-white married couples in the United States has increased five-fold, and the number of Asian-white married couples has increased more than ten-fold. Since 1970, the number of Hispanics married to non-Hispanics has tripled. In the decade of the 1990s, the number of same-sex cohabiting couples recorded in the U.S. Census rose sharply, though technical changes in the census make exact comparisons difficult.

Of the 61.5 million married and cohabiting couples (of all ages and all national origins) in

the United States in 2000, roughly 7 percent were interracial couples and 1 percent were same-sex couples. The number of alternative unions is far higher than in the past, but alternative unions still constitute a relatively small percentage of all unions. Despite the relatively small number of alternative unions, their rise over time provides clues about broad changes in the structure of the American family. Cohabitation and divorce often represent a mere postponement or a temporary break with same-race heterosexual marriage. Interracial unions and same sex unions, on the other hand, transgress more permanently and unmistakably against the powerful social norms of race and heterosexuality.

To explain the rise of nontraditional unions, we focus on a stage of young adulthood that we call the independent life stage. The independent life stage is the time in a young adult's life when he or she has moved away from the parents' home, but has not yet started his or her own family. The independent life stage hardly existed in the United States before 1960. The rise of the independent life stage for young adults represents a change in the family life cycle (Glick 1977; Elder 1975). During this new stage young men and women leave the parental nest to go away to attend college, travel, or begin careers. Young adults experience the independent life stage as a period of social independence (Arnett 2004).

In the past when adult children lived with their parents, the parents had much more control over their children's eventual mates. Parents exercised indirect control over their children's social networks by choosing to live in segregated neighborhoods. As long as single young adults lived with their parents, their parents' segregated neighborhood was a barrier to the formation of alternative unions. Whites defended residential segregation passionately and violently in part because they did not want their children to have social and romantic access to children of other races (Hirsch 1983; Myrdal, Sterner, and Rose 1944).

Residential autonomy for people in their 20s and 30s, that is, the trend of "leaving the nest" before starting a family of one's own, has become widespread in the United States only after the baby boom. The implications of the independent life stage for the wider society have not been sufficiently studied. There is a literature on the individual and demographic causes of leaving the nest (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1993, 1999; Michael, Fuchs, and Scott 1980; Pampel 1983). Where the effects of nest leaving have been studied, the focus has been its impact on the older generation (Hareven 1996) or the new diversity in the timing of life stage transitions (Hogan 1981; Setterstein, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). We suggest that the residential and geographic independence of young adults has important implications for the *kind* of families young adults form. Specifically, we propose that the independent life stage has eroded parents' abilities to prevent their children from forming interracial and same-sex unions.

We build on recent literature in lesbian and gay studies that has emphasized the importance of independence and geographic distance from parents and families in the establishment of same-sex unions (Bérubé 1990; Chauncey 1994; Kennedy and Davis 1993; D'Emilio and Freedman 1988). World War II was a watershed for gay life in the United States because it took a whole generation of men (and many women) away from the social order created by their parents. We adapt and expand the theory of intergenerational independence and alternative unions to explain a broad diversification of types of romantic unions in the United States.

We use a century of census data to document changes in the independent life stage. The independent life stage is typified by delayed union formation, post-secondary education, urban residence, geographic mobility of young adults, and non-coresidence with parents. We note that the rise of the independent life stage in the post-1960 era corresponds temporally to the rise in alternative unions in the United States.

We present a tentative causal link between the independent life stage and nontraditional unions, by showing that nontraditional unions are much more geographically mobile than traditional ones. We use geographic mobility away from the state of one's birth as a proxy for mobility away from parents and communities of origin. In general, the more transgressive the couple, the more likely they are to be urban and to be geographically mobile. We use multivariate logistic regression to show that nontraditional couples are more geo-

graphically mobile away from their communities of origin, even after taking the diversity of destination communities into account. We show that nontraditional couples are more geographically mobile than traditional couples regardless of whether they live in cities, the suburbs, or rural areas, which reinforces our hypothesis that nontraditional couples move away from their communities of origin as well as moving to the great urban centers.

## STUDYING SAME-SEX COUPLES AND INTERRACIAL COUPLES TOGETHER

The gay rights movement in the United States took its cues from the civil rights movement, and gay rights activists have explicitly framed their legal and political claims as civil rights claims (Strasser 1991; D'Emilio 1998; Eskridge 2002; Koppelman 2002). It is natural, therefore, to view the liberalization of popular U.S. attitudes about gays as part of a broad cultural and political change that began with the civil rights movement (Brooks 2000). The majority Supreme Court decision in the 2003 case *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down state anti-sodomy laws, used the 1967 Supreme Court *Loving v. Virginia* decision (which struck down state anti-intermarriage laws) as an explicit precedent.[1]

The academic literature on racial intermarriage (Gordon 1964; Lieberson and Waters 1988; Kalmijn 1998; Qian 1997; Root 2001) and the literature on same-sex relationships in the United States (D'Emilio 1998; Bérubé 1990; Chauncey 1994) have usually been quite separate, linked only tentatively and tangentially (Kennedy and Davis 1993:117–19; Moran 2001:198n; Strasser 1991). We attempt to bridge the disparate literatures on interraciality and same-sex unions by demonstrating their shared roots in the independent life stage. We show that same-sex couples are, in fact, more likely to be interracial. We suggest that same-sex couples are more likely to be interracial because the independent life stage is one common driving force behind the rise of both interracial and same-sex unions.

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PARENTAL CONTROL FROM WORLD WAR II TO PRESENT

According to Allan Bérubé (1990), the seeds of national gay culture were born in the U.S. armed forces during World War II, in spite of the military's relentless efforts to purge homosexuals from the ranks. One key insight from the literature on gay culture in World War II is that parental control is mediated through coresidence and through the young adult's physical proximity to the community of origin. No matter how much the U.S. military tried to repress homosexuality, the large and anonymous military bureaucracy could never be as successful in surveillance and social control as the parents and the communities that the young men had left behind.

After World War II the residential geography of the United States was remade with a massive investment in new racially exclusive suburban communities (Massey and Denton 1993). Racially segregated neighborhoods ensured that young adults had minimal exposure to potential mates from other racial groups (Myrdal et al. 1944; Massey and Denton 1993; Hirsch 1983). Suburbanization had the additional effect of removing young families away from the culturally boisterous urban core, where a diversity of sexual identities was practiced with some openness (D'Emilio 1998; Chauncey 1994; Kennedy and Davis 1993). As long as young adults married soon after high school (the normative behavior of the 1950s baby boom), suburbanization and segregation effectively curtailed exposure to nontraditional partners and thereby promoted racially endogamous marriage over nontraditional unions.

The new life stage of residential independence for young adults, which began to spread around 1960 as the baby boom ended, has slowly begun to loosen the grip that residential segregation has had on the marital choices of young adults. Young people who left the neighborhoods of their youth to go to college encountered a potentially new social context within which new kinds of racial and gender socialization could take place. Racial segregation and anti-gay attitudes are by no means absent in college, the workplace, and in cities, but the independent life stage does give young adults more control over their own social environments.

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[1] *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967); *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003).

## THE ORDER OF LIFE COURSE EVENTS

Union formation is not an event but a process. It may be possible to define the exact moment when two people first meet (though often couples disagree about this). It is possible to define the date of a marriage or the date two people first moved in together. It is much more difficult, however, to define the exact moment when two people become a couple. Love affairs sometimes break up only to be reignited years later. Similarly, moving away from home is a reversible process. A young person may move away to college, then come back home to live with parents for a few years, then move away again.

Union formation can occur before or after geographic mobility. Either order of events can be consistent with the rise of the independent life stage, and both patterns clearly occur. In-depth interviews with interracial and same-sex couples, conducted for background to this project, have provided examples of both courses of events. Sometimes the geographic movers moved first and then met their future partner. Travel away from home (especially travel to and residence in cities) exposes young adults to new kinds of social situations and new kinds of potential partners. Young adults living away from home are able to nurture a relationship before they have to disclose the relationship to their parents.

Alternatively, some respondents met their future partner in their home states before moving. In this second order of events, the independent life stage is a potential outlet, a possibility that the couple may turn to if their choice of partner results in parental or familial disapproval or sanction. Even when young adults meet their partner close to home, the ability to move far away and to start a new life far from home is an important option that was previously less available. Parental authority and control is diminished because young adults know that they can move away. In premodern times, parental authority was heightened by the lack of external options; banishment from one's family and community of origin was tantamount to banishment from organized society.

Reversible processes (such as geographic mobility and union formation) are difficult to put in sensible logical order (Modell, Furstenberg, and Hershberg 1978). Cross-sectional data such as the U.S. Census are especially ill-suited for distinguishing the order of reversible events. The census contains no information about when or how couples first met. Our theory implicates the independent life stage in the rise of nontraditional unions, but the theory is not specific (and the census data do not allow us to be specific) about the precise order of events.

## TERMINOLOGY, DATA, AND DEFINITIONS

Throughout this paper the terms "family," "family of origin," and "family structure" refer to the intergenerational family, specifically the children's relationships to parents (Ruggles 1994), and more broadly to aunts, uncles, stepparents, grandparents, and so on. "Independence from family" refers to cross-generational independence, that is, the independence of adult children from their parents, from their extended families, and from the communities in which their parents are embedded. We use the term "unions" to refer to married or cohabiting couples, and we use "heterosexual" or "straight" as shorthand for couples who identify themselves as a man and a woman. Used in this way, "heterosexual" is measure of public sexual identity rather than private behavior.

In the census data, all married couples are by definition heterosexual married couples. Since the 2000 census, however, several U.S. states have issued marriage licenses to same-sex couples, and so we add the modifier "heterosexual" to married couples for clarity. We use the phrase "traditional" to describe same-race heterosexual marriages, and "nontraditional," "alternative," or "transgressive" interchangeably to describe all other kinds of unions. We recognize that the "tradition" of racially endogamous heterosexual marriage is a socially and legally constructed tradition (Cott 2000; D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Grossberg 1985; Moran 2001).

We use U.S. Census microdata files from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS, see Ruggles, Sobek, et al. 2004), which facilitates cross-census comparisons. Consistent data on family structure begins with the 1880 census. The 1900 and 1910 IPUMS census samples are roughly 0.5 percent samples of the U.S. population. The 1880, 1920, and 1940–1970 IPUMS census samples are 1 per-

cent samples of the U.S. population. There is currently no census microdata for 1930. For 1970, we used the data from the Form 1 questionnaire. For 1980, 1990, and 2000 we used the weighted 5 percent census samples.

There are two advantages of the U.S. Census: unparalleled sample size of interracial and same-sex couples, and consistent data on family structure that reaches back to the 19th century. The limitation of census data is that they are not longitudinal, and so individuals cannot be followed over time, and life-course histories cannot be discerned. The cross-sectional rather than longitudinal nature of the census means that we cannot tell whether individual young adults left their parents' home and then married, or married first and then moved away. The limitations of the census data make our results preliminary and suggestive rather than definitive.

Hispanic self-report was first introduced in the 1970 census (Bean and Tienda 1987), and so figures that include pre-1970 data follow the pre-1970 conventions of incorporating Hispanics into the various racial categories. Analysis of recent data follows the more current conventions by categorizing Hispanics separately from whites and blacks. For the post-1970 period we define interracial unions as unions across the four exclusive and exhaustive groups of non-Hispanic white, non Hispanic black, Hispanic, and a residual category of non-Hispanic Asians and others.[2]

We operationalize geographic mobility as living in a U.S. state different from the state of one's birth. Our analyses of geographic mobility include only individuals who were born in the 50 U.S. states, because all others are geographic movers by definition. Five-year mobility rates yield similar results, but we prefer mobility from the birth state because the birth

state is a proxy for the location of parents, extended family, and community of origin. Lifetime interstate mobility is a crude measure of distance from family and community of origin. Many kinds of geographic mobility may intervene between birth and union formation; families can and do make interstate moves together. Furthermore, interstate geographic mobility fails to capture mobility within states, such as mobility from suburbs or rural areas to the urban centers, a kind of mobility that nontraditional couples are especially likely to make. Because lifetime interstate mobility is a noisy proxy for mobility away from communities of origin, the effect of geographic mobility on nontraditional unions will have to be especially strong to emerge from the noise.

Following Qian (1997) and Rosenfeld (2002), we construct synthetic cohorts of respondents ages 20–29 (an age range we define as young adulthood) from each census in order to have non-overlapping samples and to reduce somewhat the potential force of union dissolution bias. The focus on young couples does not substantially influence the results (results for couples of all ages available from the first author).

Cohabiting couples, or what the census questionnaire refers to as "unmarried partners," were distinguished from ordinary roommates for the first time in the 1990 census. In the U.S. Census prior to 1990, same-sex couples were made completely invisible due to the absence of a separate category for "unmarried partners" and because the Census Bureau reallocated all same-sex "married" couples to nonromantic relationships such as siblings.

The potential value of the 1990 and 2000 censuses for exploring the social demography of same-sex cohabiting couples ("unmarried partners" in census terminology) has been largely unrealized, with few exceptions (Badgett 1995; Black et al. 2000; Klawitter and Flatt 1998; Jepsen and Jepsen 2002; Gates and Ost 2004). The Census Bureau's procedures for identifying same-sex couples changed between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001). In 1990 nearly all persons who reported themselves on the census form as "married" to a head of household of the same sex were recoded to nonromantic relationships. In the 2000 census all the same-sex "married" persons were recoded as "unmarried partners," thus increas-

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[2] The racial categories in the 2000 census are not entirely compatible with 1990 and previous censuses, because the 2000 census allowed respondents to choose more than one category. Since less than 3 percent of respondents in the 2000 census selected more than one race, the multiracial category does not have a substantive effect on our results. We have placed the multiracials in the residual "Asian and other" category, but the results are the same if the multiracials are excluded entirely, or if they are treated as a separate race.

ing the count of same-sex couples in the 2000 census relative to the 1990 census.

While it is not possible to make the 1990 and 2000 census samples of same-sex cohabiting couples perfectly comparable, we offer a partial answer to the problem of data comparability. Since the primary source of inconsistency between the 1990 and 2000 census samples of same-sex couples has to do with recodes of persons who reported themselves as "married," we drop all couples whose marital statuses were both reallocated by the Census Bureau. This process reduces the count of same-sex partners by 46.3 percent in the 2000 census but only by 0.4 percent in the 1990 census, and is described in our *ASR* online supplement (http://www.asanet.org/journals/asr/2005/toc046.html). In all of our tables and figures we report two values for same-sex couples in 2000: the value from the full sample of same-sex couples (the best estimate of the same-sex cohabiting population in 2000), and the adjusted value from the reduced sample, which excludes the dual marital status recodes (which we argue is more consistent with the 1990 data). The various tables and figures of this paper support our assumption about the adjusted data from 2000: the adjusted same-sex cohabiting couple data from 2000 is closer to the 1990 data in every case. Even though the adjusted sample of same-sex couples in 2000 is only about half as large as the full sample, both the adjusted and the unadjusted 2000 samples yield substantively consistent answers to the hypotheses we later describe.

Using other, much smaller nongovernmental data sources such as the General Social Survey, Black et al. (2000) estimate that the 1990 census captured only about one third of the actual same-sex cohabiting population. These estimates of the undercount are very rough because the other data sources have much smaller sample sizes than the U.S. Census. More important than the question of undercount of same-sex couples in the 1990 census is the question of bias. Black et al. (2000) argue that the 1990 census sample of same-sex cohabiting couples is unbiased compared to other data sources, including the geographical distribution of persons who died of AIDS in 1990 (but see also Badgett and Rogers 2003).

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### I: THE RISE OF INTERRACIAL UNIONS AND SAME-SEX UNIONS

Tables 1 and 2 show the weighted counts of black-white and Asian-white intermarried couples from 1940–2000, the number of Hispanics married to non-Hispanic whites 1970–2000, and same-sex cohabiting couples and heterosexual cohabiting couples for 1990 and 2000. The number of Hispanics married to non-Hispanic whites grew from 526,000 in 1970 to 1.5 million in 2000. For most of the 20th century, the number of black-white intermarriages was less than 50,000. The number of black-white intermarriages began to rise in the 1970s, and reached 345,000 in 2000. Because the vast majority of whites still marry whites, and the vast majority of blacks still marry blacks, the trend of increasing black-white intermarriage has not been obvious (see Moran 2001; but see also Qian 1997; Rosenfeld 2002; Lieberson and Waters 1988). The rising number of Asian-white intermarriages has garnered a good deal of attention because the Asian population in the United States is still relatively small, and nearly half of recent marriages for young U.S.-born Asian-Americans have been to white Americans. There were 579,000 Asian-white married couples in the United States in 2000, up from negligible numbers prior to 1960.

For racially intermarried couples, Tables 1 and 2 show not only the numbers of each type of couple in each census, but also the log odds ratios for intermarriage, a measure that takes the changing sizes of both populations into account (Lieberson and Waters 1988; Rosenfeld 2001, 2002).[3] Log odds ratios less than zero (corresponding to odds ratios of less than one) indicate that there were fewer intermarriages between the groups than would be expected by

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[3] The log odds ratio for intermarriage is the natural log of the cross-product of a $2 \times 2$ table (Agresti 1990) of husband's race by wife's race, ignoring other races. The intermarriage odds ratio is the off-diagonal cross-product, or the inverse of the endogamy odds ratio. We present the odds ratios in log form in Tables 1 and 2 because the odds ratios of intermarriage in the past were so small that the odds ratios would be difficult to report and compare in raw form.

**Table 1.**   Interracial Marriage 1940–1960

|  | 1940 | 1950 | 1960 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Black–White Married Couples (n) | 53,805 | 44,362 | 55,089 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage | −11.30 | −12.15 | −11.91 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage, young couples | −11.65 | −12.15 | −12.78 |
| Asian–White Married Couples (n) | 5,270 | 11,443 | 49,110 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage | −12.10 | −10.93 | −9.17 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage, young couples | — | — | −9.76 |

*Source:* Weighted census microdata from IPUMS. Includes individuals of all ages and all nativities, except young couples, who are 20–29 years of age and U.S. born.

**Table 2.**   The Rise of Nontraditional Unions: 1970–2000

|  | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black–White Married Couples (n) | 67,685 | 132,603 | 236,908 | 345,652 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage | −11.73 | −10.71 | −9.62 | −8.82 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage, young couples | −11.39 | −10.10 | −8.68 | −7.65 |
| Asian–White Married Couples (n) | 115,150 | 308,914 | 478,754 | 579,190 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage | −8.13 | −7.26 | −7.03 | −7.16 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage, young couples | −7.42 | −6.34 | −5.79 | −5.56 |
| Hispanic–Non-Hispanic White Married Couples (n) | 526,559 | 838,685 | 1,158,123 | 1,530,117 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage | −6.64 | −6.22 | −5.85 | −5.80 |
| Log odds ratio for intermarriage, young couples | −6.20 | −5.13 | −4.55 | −4.51 |
| Same-Sex Cohabiting Couples (n) | — | — | 173,842 | 669,984 |
| Percent of cohabiting couples | — | — | 5.29 | 12.80 |
| Percent of all couples | — | — | 0.29 | 1.09 |
| Same-Sex, Adjusted (n) | — | — | 173,068 | 359,805 |
| Percent of cohabiting couples | — | — | 5.27 | 7.30 |
| Percent of all couples | — | — | .29 | .59 |
| Heterosexual cohabiting couples (n) | — | — | 3,110,000 | 4,566,000 |
| Percent of all couples | — | — | 5.06 | 7.43 |

*Source:* Weighted census microdata from IPUMS. Includes individuals of all ages and all nativities, except young couples, who are 20–29 years of age and U.S. born.

random mixing, given the sizes of the two groups. The smaller the log odds ratio, the more uncommon the intermarriage compared to marriage within each group. The odds ratios of intermarriage are gender neutral, and therefore suppress the strong gender components of racial intermarriage (marriage to blacks is more common for white women than for white men, while marriage to Asians is more common for white men than for white women). The gender gap in racial intermarriage is an interesting subject in its own right (Jacobs and Labov 2002), but the subject is beyond the scope of our paper.

The log odds ratio for black-white intermarriage, the most socially transgressive racial combination, has been steadily increasing from −11.73 in 1970 to −8.82 in 2000 (and among young couples, the log odds ratio of black-white

intermarriage increased from −11.39 to −7.65).[4] The log odds ratio for Asian-white intermarriage among young couples increased steadily from −9.76 in 1960 to −5.56 in 2000, while the log

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[4] The natural log of the odds ratio is normally distributed if the counts in all four cells of the 2×2 table are large enough. Every difference in log odds ratios was significant except for intermarriage between young Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites in 1990 and 2000. The all-ages, all-nativity samples of Hispanics and Asians tend to underestimate the odds of intermarriage because many of the Latin American and Asian immigrants to the United States are married adults when they arrive in this country, and therefore they never participate in the U.S. marriage market.

odds ratio for all ages of Asian-white couples increased from 1940 to 1980, but was relatively flat from 1980 to 2000. A large part of the post-1990 increase in marriage between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, and in marriages between Asians and whites is due simply to the increasing number of Hispanics and Asians in the United States. The increasing log odds ratios of intermarriage for young couples, however, suggest that increasing minority populations are not the only reason for increased racial intermarriage. The rising log odds ratios for intermarriage among young couples imply that the social barriers (which prevented racial intermarriage in the past) continue to erode.

Weighted data from the 1990 census and the 2000 census show a sharp rise in reported same-sex cohabitation, from 173,000 couples in 1990 to 670,000 in 2000. These numbers imply a 10-year growth rate of 285 percent which is not reliable because of the inconsistencies in census methodology from 1990 to 2000. The adjusted count of same-sex couples (with dual marital status recodes excluded) imply a 10-year growth rate of 108 percent, which is perhaps more believable but still only a rough estimate of the growth of the same-sex population from 1990 to 2000.

Although we cannot quantify the growth of same-sex couples from 1990 to 2000 with precision, it is clear that the same-sex cohabiting population did grow. The growth in the number of persons who identify themselves as partnered with someone of the same sex could be due to several factors. One possible factor that might explain the increase in same-sex cohabitation from 1990 to 2000 is an increasing willingness of gay couples to be "out," and to report their status accurately on the census form. A second possible factor is a true increase in same-sex cohabitation. The increase in the willingness of same-sex couples to report their status accurately on the census and an actual increase in same-sex cohabitation are complementary forces that cannot be disentangled. The "out" gay couples are not only easier to study but they are also more relevant for our analysis. The independent life stage should not affect homosexual desire, but it does affect the ability of gays to find partners and to cohabit with those partners openly, despite parental objections.

## II: DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND THE RISE OF THE INDEPENDENT LIFE STAGE

In the post-1960 era, young men and women have spent an increasing amount of time living on their own before getting married. Figure 1 shows the percentage of U.S.-born single men and women who live with at least one parent. Between 1880 and 1940, the percentage of single young adults who lived with their parents increased. This increase was probably due to the increasing life span of older Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975). After 1950, even as parents were living longer and longer (so that more and more adult children had living parents, see Watkins, Menken, and Bongaarts 1987; Ruggles 1994), the percentage of children living with their parents began to decline. In 1950, 65 percent of single young men and women in the United States lived with their parents. By 2000 only 36 percent of young single women and 41 percent of young single men lived with their parents. Living on their own, single men and women in the late 20th century had the freedom to meet, date, and experiment beyond the watchful eyes of their parents.

While the decline of intergenerational coresidence is a key indicator of increasing intergenerational independence, coresidence with parents cannot be used to distinguish between traditional and nontraditional couples in the census, for two reasons. First, the percentage of young married and cohabiting couples in the United States who reside with their parents is negligible. Second, since the census is not a longitudinal survey, we can't know which of the couples lived with their parents before getting married or cohabiting.

Geographic mobility away from the state of one's birth is, as we have noted, a crude proxy for social distance from one's community of origin. Geographic mobility has the advantage, however, of being available for every respondent in the census since the 19th century. Figure 2 shows the percentage of young U.S.-born persons who were living in a state other than one in which they were born. Between 1940 and 1970, the percentage of young adults who were geographically mobile climbed from 23 to 37 percent. The increase in geographic mobility corresponds to the post–World War II construction of the interstate highway system and to the postwar expansion of the higher education system.

**Figure 1.** Decline of Coresidence with Parents: Single Young Adults 1880–2000

*Source:* Weighted Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) census microdata for U.S.-born individuals, 1 percent samples 1880, 1900–1920, 1940–1970; and 5 percent samples from 1980–2000.

Claude Fischer (2000) argues that Americans are becoming increasingly geographically rooted, and Figure 2 provides some support for Fischer's argument. Geographic mobility has declined somewhat for young adults since 1970, but the mobility of young adults remains substantially greater than it was before 1950. The increase in nontraditional unions since 1970 cannot be due to a general increase in geographic mobility, since geographic mobility declined slightly from 1970 to 2000. Rather, geographic mobility is an option that young adults employ selectively. While the majority of young adults in traditional unions are more likely to settle near their communities of origin, the small but rising number of young U.S.-born adults in nontraditional unions have been using educational opportunities and open labor markets to put physical and social distance between themselves and their communities of origin.

As recently as 1940, just over 12 percent of U.S.-born men and women in their 20s had been to college. In 1960, 27 percent of young men and 20 percent of young women had been to college. In 2000, 54 percent of young men and 63 per-

cent of young women had been to college.[5] Women, who were once excluded from many careers, now participate in the formal labor market nearly as much as men do. In 1940, only 33 percent of U.S.-born women ages 20 to 39 were in the labor force. In 2000, 75 percent of women ages 20 to 39 had at least some wage income the previous year. As the number of married couples with two incomes increases, young couples (especially young couples with some college education) are likely to have increased faith in their own ability to be financially independent in the future, and this naturally reduces the economic leverage that parents have over young adult children.

A final point concerns the age at first marriage. From 1960 to 2000 the age at first marriage for women climbed sharply, by more than

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[5] Percent college attendance comes from the authors' tabulations from weighted census microdata. 1940 was the first year the U.S. Census recorded the educational attainment of all household members.
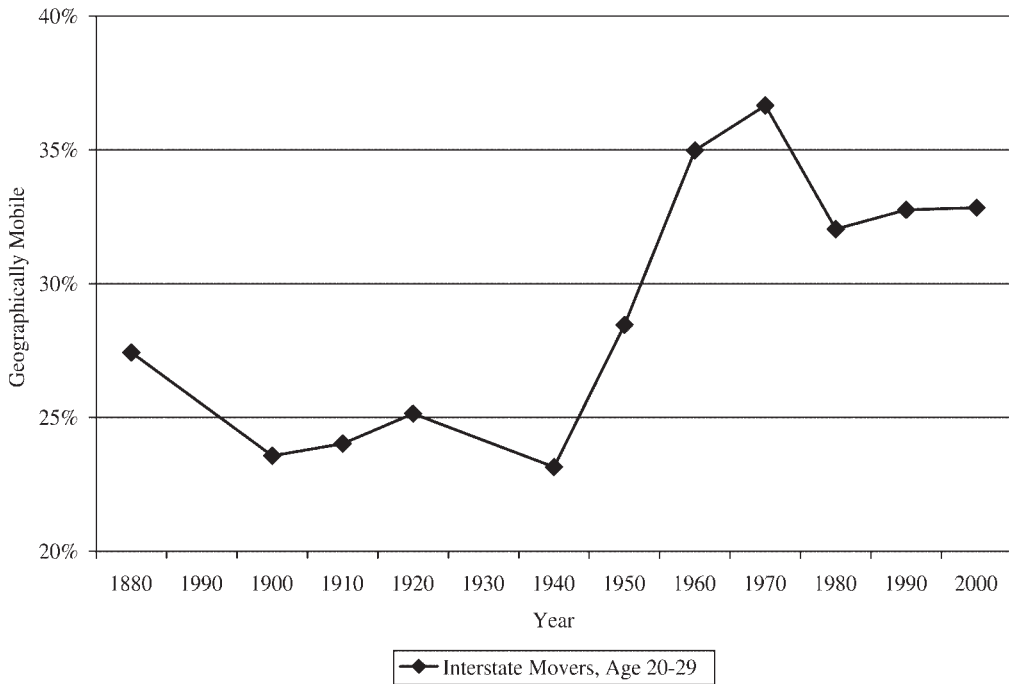
**Figure 2.** Geographic Mobility Away from State of Birth

*Source:* Weighted census microdata via Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 1 percent files 1880, 1900–1920, 1940–1970; 5 percent files 1980–2000.

one year per decade, to 25.2 years in 2000.[6] The pattern for men is similar. For men, the age at first marriage of 27.0 years in 2000 is higher than the historical precedent, but not dramatically so. For American women, on the other hand, the age at first marriage of 25.2 in 2000 represents a dramatic delay in marriage compared to previous generations. Because single young adults no longer live with their parents the way they used to, late age at first marriage prolongs the independent life stage.

## III: ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN THE INDEPENDENT LIFE STAGE, SAME-SEX UNIONS, AND INTERRACIAL UNIONS

A. GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY, INTERRACIAL UNIONS, AND SAME-SEX UNIONS. We argue that the independence of adult children from their parents and communities of origin is an important fac-

tor in the creation and maintenance of interracial unions and same-sex unions. Therefore,

*Hypothesis 1. Nontraditional unions are more geographically mobile.* Because interracial and same-sex unions are formed against explicit or implicit social and parental pressure, we expect interracial and same-sex couples to be more geographically mobile from their parents and communities of origin than traditional (heterosexual same-race married) couples.

*Corollary 1a:* The more transgressive the union type, the more likely the couple is to be geographically independent from their parents and communities of origin.

*Corollary 1b:* As nontraditional unions become less taboo and more accepted over time, their level of geographic mobility will decline relative to that of traditional same-race married couples.

Geographically mobile couples are defined as couples with at least one spouse or partner born

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[6] Authors' tabulation are from weighted census microdata.

in a state different from his or her state of residence at the time of the census. The dichotomy of "at least one partner a mover" versus "both partners non-movers" is an arbitrary one, but the substantive results are not affected by different operationalizations.

Table 3 shows the rate of geographic mobility for young (ages 20–29) U.S.-born couples by the type of couple. In 1990, among young heterosexual married couples of the same race, 48.1 percent had at least one geographically mobile spouse, which implies that the remaining 51.9 percent of these couples were living in the birth state of both spouses. In 2000, the geographic mobility for young heterosexual couples was 46.6 percent, indicating a slight decline in interstate mobility over successive cohorts. Despite the rise of the independent life stage, most heterosexual same-race married couples continue to settle in the state of their birth.

Among young interracial heterosexual couples in 1990, 59.1 percent were geographically mobile compared to 48.1 percent of the heterosexual same-race married couples. To compare the two percentages statistically, we use the odds ratio.[7]

An odds ratio that is significantly different from 1 means that the two percentages in question differ in a statistically significant way.[8] In Table 3, the geographic mobility of each type of couple is compared to the geographic mobility of heterosexual same race couples from the same year, the 'standard' for socially accepted types of couples.

For young interracial couples in 1990 the odds ratio of mobility compared to heterosexual same-race married couples was 1.56 (because $[.591/(1-.591)]/[.481/(1-.481)] = 1.56$). From 1990 to 2000, the odds ratio of geographic mobility of interracial unions increased slightly from 1.56 to 1.61. Though this difference was small and not statistically significant, we expected the relative geographic mobility of interracial unions to decline over

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[7] As with the odds ratios of intermarriage, the odds ratios here are also the cross-products of $2\times2$ frequency tables, specifically the $2\times2$ tables whose cell counts are the numbers of geographically mobile (*mob*) and geographically immobile (*non_mob*) couples from groups $i$ and $j$; OR=

$mob_i(non\_mob_j)/mob_j(non\_mob_i)$. The odds ratios can be calculated directly from the percentages in the table

$$OR_{i,j} = \frac{p_i / (1-p_i)}{p_j / (1-p_j)}$$

[8] The probabilities and the odds ratios are based on data weighted by the household weights provided by the Census Bureau. The standard error of the odds ratio is based on the unweighted data because the unweighted counts represent the actual number of responses, and therefore the true extent of the information in each category (Clogg and Eliason 1987).

**Table 3.** Geographic Mobility for Young Couples by Type of Couple, 1990–2000

| Type of Couple | 1990 | | 2000 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Movers, % | Odds Ratio of Geographic Mobility [a] | Movers, % | Odds Ratio of Geographic Mobility [a] |
| 1. Heterosexual, Same-Race, Married | 48.1 | | 46.6 | |
| 2. Heterosexual, Same-Race, Cohabit | 50.7 | 1.11*** | 46.9 | 1.01 |
| 3. Heterosexual, Interracial, Married, and Cohabit | 59.1 | 1.56*** | 58.4 | 1.61*** |
| 4. Same-Sex, Cohabit | 67.5 | 2.24*** | 51.7 | 1.23*** |
| 5. Same-Sex, Interracial, Cohabit | 74.4 | 3.13*** | 64.1 | 2.05*** |

*Source Data:* 1990 5% microdata and 2000 5% microdata, via IPUMS.
*Note:* All couples are U.S. born and 20–29 years of age. Geographically mobile couples live in a different U.S. state than the birth state of one or both partners. Adjusted estimate for same-sex couples in 2000 (discarding dual marital status recodes): geographic mobility = 55.9% for all same-sex couples, 71.7% for interracial same-sex couples.
[a] Odds ratio of geographic mobility compared to (1).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two tailed test).

time, as the racial taboos against interracial unions have softened.

Cohabitation among heterosexual same-race couples was only weakly correlated with geographic mobility in 1990, with an odds ratios of 1.11. By 2000, the geographic mobility of the same-race heterosexual cohabiting couples was indistinguishable from the geographic mobility of traditional same-race married couples. This is consistent with the finding that non-marital cohabitation has lost most of its former stigma (Bumpass 1990) and does not require cohabitants to move away from their parents and extended families.

In 1990, same-sex couples had an average geographic mobility of 67.5 percent, implying an odds of mobility 2.24 times as high as same-race heterosexual married couples. We pool the gay male and lesbian couples together because they are roughly equal in numbers and are demographically similar.[9] Between 1990 and 2000 the geographical mobility of same-sex couples declined sharply and statistically significantly (whether one uses the full sample or the adjusted sample for 2000). Young gay couples in 2000 were only slightly more geographically mobile than the comparison category of young heterosexual same-race married couples. To the extent that comparisons can be made between the 1990 and 2000 samples of same-sex couples, the pattern of sharply declining relative geographic mobility is consistent with increasing acceptance of gay couples by their parents and extended families.

Following Corollary 1a we can rank the types of romantic unions in 1990 and 2000 by geographic independence, and therefore by implied nonconformity to prevailing norms of union formation, race, and gender. According to Table 3, heterosexual same-race cohabitation was slightly nonconformist in 1990, but became conformist in terms of geographic mobility by 2000. Interracial unions were moderately nonconformist. Same-sex couples were highly geo-

graphically independent in 1990, but only moderately more geographically independent than traditional married couples in 2000. Interracial same-sex couples, facing both the stigma of interraciality and the stigma of homosexuality, were by far the most geographically mobile couples in 1990 and in 2000.

Table 3 groups all interracial couples together. In U.S. society, the black-white unions have always been the most controversial, while other types of interracial unions such as marriages between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites have been less stigmatized (Rosenfeld 2002). If relative geographic mobility were indeed a sign of and a response to societal taboo, we would expect black-white intermarried couples to be the most geographically mobile of the interracial couples.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of geographic mobility for black-white, Hispanic–non-Hispanic, and three types of racially endogamous married couples for 1970–2000. The interracial couples were more geographically mobile than the endogamous couples across all four censuses. Among the racially endogamous couples, blacks and whites had similar levels of geographic mobility whereas Hispanic couples were by far the least geographically mobile type of couple. Hispanics are highly concentrated in just a few U.S. states (California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, New York), and so it is not surprising that endogamous Hispanic couples should be more likely to settle in the birth state of both spouses. In 2000 only 27.5 percent of young endogamous Hispanic couples were geographically mobile, whereas 55.2 percent of the young Hispanic–non-Hispanic couples were geographically mobile.

Black-white married couples were the most geographically mobile type of couple in Figure 3 (58.9 percent of young black-white couples were geographically mobile in 2000).[10] The high level of geographic mobility of black-white couples is consistent with the hypothesized correlation between geographic mobility

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[9] In 1990, 67.9 percent of the young gay male couples were geographically mobile, compared to 67.0 percent for the young lesbian couples, and 67.5 percent for all same-sex couples. In 2000, 53.2 percent of gay male couples were geographically mobile compared to 51.2 percent of the lesbian couples, and 52.1 percent for both groups together.

[10] Asian-white couples are left out of Figure 3 to improve readability. Young Asian-white couples were the most geographically mobile racial combination in 2000.
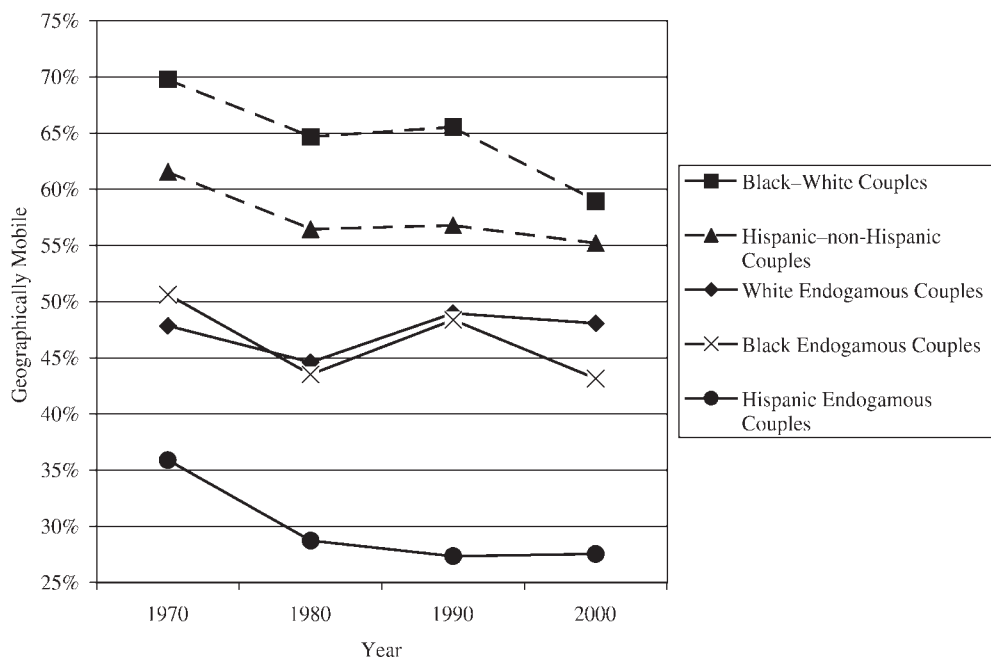
**Figure 3.** Geographic Mobility for Young Married Couples by Race, 1970–2000

*Source:* 1970 1 percent census microdata, 1980–2000 weighted 5 percent census microdata via Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS). Blacks and whites exclude Hispanics. *Note*: All individuals are ages 20–29 and U.S.-born.

and the strength of the social taboo that couples transgress.

B. Concentration of same-sex unions and interracial unions in cities. Urban centers should be the natural geographic and social sources of, and destinations for, interracial and same-sex unions. We expect same-sex and interracial couples to be overrepresented in urban centers because of the effects of selective migration and the culture of urbanism (Wirth 1938; Fischer 1975) and because of the effect of urban diversity on the choice of potential mates for young people (Blau 1977).

*Hypothesis 2. Transgressive couples are concentrated in the cities.* Interracial couples and same-sex couples should be overrepresented in urban areas for three reasons. First, we have already shown that interracial couples and same-sex couples are more geographically mobile from their families of origin. Second, the great metropolitan centers attract and support marginalized

groups that do not thrive elsewhere. Third, the diversity of the urban areas leads to more diverse kinds of unions for young people who find their mates in the city.

*Corollary 2a:* Urbanization for different types of couples is proportional to the degree of transgression against traditional family norms.

*Corollary 2b:* As nontraditional union types become more socially accepted over successive cohorts, their concentration in cities will decline, approaching that of traditional same-race married couples.

We have argued that the suburbanization of white society in the post–World War II era was, in part, an intentional retreat by white parents from the racial and sexual identity diversity of the central cities (Hirsch 1983; Massey and Denton 1993; Myrdal et al. 1944; Friedan 1974; Kennedy and Davis 1993). Table 4 shows urbanization across the different types of unions, for young U.S.-born couples. Among the young heterosexual same-race married couples (the

**Table 4.**   Urban Residence for Young Couples by Type of Couple, 1990–2000

| | 1990 | | 2000 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of Couple | Living in City, % | Odds Ratio of City Residence[b] | Living in City, % | Odds Ratio of City Residence[b] |
| 1. Heterosexual, Same-Race, Married | 17.9 | | 19.0 | |
| 2. Heterosexual, Same-Race, Cohabit | 30.7 | 2.03*** | 29.8 | 1.81*** |
| 3. Heterosexual, Interracial, Married and Cohabit | 30.7 | 2.03*** | 30.1 | 1.83*** |
| 4. Same-Sex, Cohabit | 56.6 | 5.97*** | 37.3 | 2.54*** |
| 5. Same-Sex, Interracial, Cohabit | a | a | 54.0 | 5.01*** |

*Source:* 1% Metropolitan Sample 1990, 5% sample 2000 census via IPUMS. All couples are comprised of U.S.-born individuals, age 20–29.

*Note:* Households whose central city status is unknown (a larger group in 2000 than in 1990) are excluded from the sample. Adjusted percentages of central city residence for same-sex couples in 2000: 43.7%; for interracial same-sex couples in 2000: 61.2%.

[a] Insufficient data.

[b] Odds ratio of city residence compared to (1).

*** $p < .001$ (two tailed test).

"traditional" form), only 17.9 percent lived in the central cities in 1990 (and the rate of urbanization is even lower for the white married couples).[11] For heterosexual same-race cohabiting couples, the odds of central city residence were twice as high as traditional couples in 1990. For heterosexual interracial couples, the odds of central city residence were also twice as high as traditional couples. Same-sex couples were the most likely to live in the central cities in 1990, with an odds ratio of 5.97 compared to traditional same-race married couples.

Same-race married couples, especially white couples, seem to be repeating the residential patterns of their parents by retreating from or remaining away from central cities (an analysis of white couples only, showing the same pattern as Table 4, is available from the authors). For young people in same-sex and interracial unions, the cities are the source of diversity, commonality, and mutual support (Wirth 1938; Fischer 1975). The need for commonality and

mutual support is greatest among same-sex couples, whose families are most likely to reject them (Kennedy and Davis 1993; D'Emilio and Freedman 1988). For young whites, cities represent social spaces that (compared to the suburbs) are less orderly and less subject to the control and supervision of their parents.

Between 1990 and 2000 the relative urbanization of nontraditional couples declined. For interracial couples, the decline was statistically insignificant, from an odds ratio of 2.03 in 1990 to an odds ratio of 1.83 in 2000. For same-sex couples, the decline in relative urban concentration from 1990 to 2000 appears to be more dramatic (and is statistically significant) whether one considers the full sample for 2000 or the adjusted sample, though comparisons of the 1990 and the 2000 same-sex data from the U.S. Census must be made with caution.

In 2000, the same-sex interracial couples were the most urban of all couple types. Interracial same-sex couples face the dual stigmas of breaking both racial norms and norms against homosexuality, and as a result are the most geographically mobile (Table 3) and the most urban type of couple (Table 4).

C. GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY BY URBAN/SUBURBAN/RURAL RESIDENCE. We have hypothesized that geographic mobility of nontraditional couples reflects the effect of social taboos and social distance from communities of origin. The high degree of urbanization of same-sex couples and interracial couples suggests an

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[11] Urbanization grew in the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but since 1920 the percentage of people (and, more germane to our research, the percentage of young adults) who live in cities has remained fairly flat, while the suburbs around the urban cores have grown. The growth of nontraditional unions since 1960 is therefore not due to a general increase in urbanization. Since 1960, young adults who are drawn to the city have been increasingly able to live in the cities before settling down and starting their own families.

alternative hypothesis: the apparent geographic mobility of nontraditional unions observed in Table 3 could be due to the pull of the great urban centers (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco), rather than the push of disapproving families.

Table 5 shows the relative geographic mobility of interracial couples and same-sex couples compared to heterosexual same-race married couples who lived in rural areas, suburban areas, and urban areas in 1990 and 2000.[12]

The relative geographic mobility of interracial couples and same-sex couples in urban areas is not surprising given the previous results of Tables 3 and 4. Table 5 shows, however, that

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[12] Here we are using couples of all ages because the sample size of young interracial same-sex couples was too small in some areas, especially in 1990. Where sample size was sufficient (interracial couples and also same-sex couples regardless of race), the findings for young couples were substantively consistent (available from the authors).

the geographic mobility of same-sex couples and interracial couples who live in rural areas is just as high as the mobility of nontraditional couples who live in the cities. For interracial heterosexual couples in 2000, the odds ratios of geographic mobility relative to traditional couples were 2.31 in the rural areas, 1.43 in the suburbs, and 1.56 in the cities (all significantly greater than 1). For same-sex couples in 2000, the odds ratios of geographic mobility relative to traditional couples were 1.17 in rural areas, 1.31 in the suburbs and 1.76 in the cities (again, all significantly greater than 1).

Whether they reside in the cities, the suburbs, or the rural areas, alternative couples are more geographically mobile than the traditional couples in the same neighborhoods. Geographic mobility regardless of destination provides preliminary support for the hypothesis that nontraditional couples are pushed away from their communities of origin in addition to being drawn to the cities.

**Table 5.** Geographic Mobility for Couples (of All Ages) by Rural/Urban/Suburban residence, 1990–2000

| Type of Couple | 1990 | | 2000 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Geographic Mobility, % | Odds Ratio of Mobility[b] | Geographic Mobility, % | Odds Ratio of Mobility[b] |
| Rural | | | | |
| 1. Heterosexual, Same-Race, Married | 44.0 | | 42.7 | |
| 2. Heterosexual, Interracial, Married and Cohabit | 63.3 | 2.20*** | 63.3 | 2.31*** |
| 3. Same-Sex, Cohabit | 54.1 | 1.50*** | 46.6 | 1.17*** |
| 4. Same-Sex, Interracial, Cohabit | 69.8 | 2.94*** | 70.0 | 3.13*** |
| Suburban | | | | |
| 1. Heterosexual, Same-Race, Married | 54.5 | | 52.6 | |
| 2. Heterosexual, Interracial, Married and Cohabit | 63.8 | 1.47*** | 61.3 | 1.43*** |
| 3. Same-Sex, Cohabit | 67.8 | 1.75*** | 59.2 | 1.31*** |
| 4. Same-Sex, Interracial, Cohabit | a | | 68.0 | 1.91*** |
| Urban | | | | |
| 1. Heterosexual, Same-Race, Married | 55.7 | | 53.9 | |
| 2. Heterosexual, Interracial, Married and Cohabit | 63.5 | 1.38*** | 64.5 | 1.56*** |
| 3. Same-Sex, Cohabit | 77.6 | 2.76*** | 67.3 | 1.76*** |
| 4. Same-Sex, Interracial, Cohabit | 77.4 | 2.73** | 74.5 | 2.50*** |

*Source:* 1% Metropolitan Samples 1990 (because the 5% microdata from 1990 did not have urban/suburban distinctions) and 5% 2000 census via IPUMS.

*Note:* 1990 rural couples are from 5% 1990 sample nonmetropolitan. All couples are comprised of U.S.-born individuals. Households whose central city or metropolitan status is unknown (a larger group in 2000 than in 1990) are excluded from the sample. Geographic mobility for same-sex couples (regardless of race) excluding dual marital status recodes in 2000: 56.3% mobility in rural areas, 65.5% in suburbs, 71.7% in cities.

[a] Insufficient data.

[b] Odds ratio of mobility compared to (1).

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001 (two tailed test).

D. MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF NONTRADI-TIONAL UNION FORMATION FOR MEN. To test more carefully the relationship between geographic mobility and alternative unions, multivariate methods are needed. In this section, we use logistic regression to reexamine the effect of geographic mobility on nontraditional unions, while controlling for individual and destination characteristics.

Table 6 presents the full set of coefficients for the first set of these logistic regressions, regressions predicting marriage to black women for married white men (compared to marriages to white women). In Table 6, Model 1 contains only the husband's education as a predictor for being married to a black woman. Each successive model adds additional controls; Model 5 controls for education, geographic mobility, husband's age, metropolitan exposure to black

women, and urban residence. Model 5 can be written

$$Ln\left(\frac{p_{alt}}{1-p_{alt}}\right) = \text{const}+\text{education}+\text{mobility}+ \\ \text{age}+\text{metro\_exposure}+\text{urban},$$

where $p_{alt}$ is the predicted probability that the individual respondent was married to a black woman in 2000.

Model 1 of Table 6 shows that men with college educations were substantially more likely than men with high school educations (odds ratio of 1.21 for men with some college and odds ratio of 1.13 for those with bachelor's degrees or higher) to be married to a black woman. Model 2 introduces the parameter for the geographic mobility of the husband, which is positive and significant, meaning that the odds of

**Table 6.** Predictors of Intermarriage with Black Women for Married White Men in 2000, Odds Ratios and Summary Statistics from Logistic Regressions

| Independent Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education | | | | | |
| <5 years | .77 | .78 | 1.40 | 1.39 | 1.41 |
| 5–8 years | .54*** | .55*** | .98 | .98 | 1.01 |
| 9 years | .57*** | .57** | .73 | .72 | .73 |
| 10 years | .62*** | .62*** | .73* | .72* | .73 |
| 11 years | .99 | .99 | 1.04 | 1.04 | 1.03 |
| High School (reference) | — | — | — | — | — |
| Some College | 1.21*** | 1.16*** | 1.07 | 1.06 | 1.03 |
| BA or more | 1.13** | 1.03 | .99 | .94 | .87** |
| Geographic Mobility | — | 1.56*** | 1.68*** | 1.63*** | 1.62*** |
| Age (years) | | | | | |
| <20 (reference) | — | — | — | — | — |
| 20–29 | — | — | .65 | .65 | .64 |
| 30–39 | — | — | .50* | .49* | .50* |
| 40–49 | — | — | .36** | .36** | .37** |
| 50–59 | — | — | .23*** | .23*** | .24*** |
| 60–69 | — | — | .14*** | .13*** | .14*** |
| 70–79 | — | — | .086*** | .088*** | .086*** |
| >80 | — | — | .076*** | .077*** | .074*** |
| Percent Black Women in Metropolitan Area | — | — | — | 1.05*** | 1.04*** |
| Live in City | — | — | — | — | 2.98*** |
| Constant | .002*** | .001*** | .004*** | .003*** | .003*** |
| Summary Statistics | | | | | |
| Log Likelihood | –27,074 | –26,390 | –25,860 | –25,722 | –25,434 |
| Δ–2LL | | 1,368 | 1,060 | 276 | 576 |
| df | 7 | 8 | 15 | 16 | 17 |

*Source Data:* 2000 5% census microdata, via IPUMS. Logistic regression models use data weighted by household weights.

*Note:* Unweighted N of U.S.-born married white men, 2,285,604. White and black are non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black, respectively.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two tailed test).

being married to a black woman were 1.56 times higher for white men who were geographically mobile (controlling for education). Interestingly, the inclusion of geographic mobility in Model 2 deflates the modest effect of higher education on black-white intermarriage. The deflation of the higher education effect when mobility is included suggests that the geographic mobility of going away to college (or the geographic mobility that follows college) is one reason why higher education is associated with nontraditional unions.[13]

Model 3 of Table 6 adds the husband's age (categorical, by decade) to the independent variables. The odds of being married to a black woman decline monotonically across age groups. Racial intermarriage has been increasing over time. Among married persons, older respondents were more likely to have been married in the past, when racial intermarriage was comparatively rare.[14]

Model 4 introduces a highly significant control for the metropolitan level exposure to black

women. The odds ratio of 1.05 indicates that a 1 percent increase in the percentage of women who are black raises the odds of intermarriage to black women by 5 percent. Metropolitan areas ranged from 0 to 31 percent in their percent of women who were black in 2000. Despite the power of exposure to nontraditional partners, the inclusion of this term has little effect on the geographic mobility term, which declined only from 1.68 in Model 3 to 1.63 in Model 4, and remained statistically significant. Model 5 introduces a control for urban residence, which is strongly significant (living in a city increased the odds of being intermarried by nearly three times), but has hardly any effect on the influence of geographic mobility.

Table 7 repeats the logistic regressions of Model 2 through Model 5 of Table 6 (the mod-

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[13] Geographic mobility had the same deflationary effect on the relationship between higher education and nontraditional unions for other types of nontraditional unions.

[14] Our theory predicts that those who married later

than the median age at first marriage should be the most likely to be married interracially, since later age at first marriage is associated with an extended independent life stage. Unfortunately, neither the 1990 nor the 2000 census included questions about age at marriage or even times married. The "age" variable in these regressions is chronological age, not age at marriage. Analysis of age at first marriage from the 1980 census suggests that the odds of interracial marriage were highest for those who married after the median age.

**Table 7.** Effect of Geographic Mobility on Different Nontraditional Unions for Men in 2000

| Base Population | Dependent Variable | Model 2 Mobility, Education | Model 3 Model 2+ Age | Model 4 Model 3+ Exposure | Model 5 Model 4+ Live in City |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Married White Men | Marriage to Black Women | 1.56*** | 1.68*** | 1.63*** | 1.62*** |
| | Δ −2LL | | 1,060 | 276 | 576 |
| Married White Men | Marriage to Asian Women | 2.58*** | 2.69*** | 2.44*** | 2.44*** |
| | Δ −2LL | | 1,752 | 8,956 | 576 |
| Married White Men | Marriage to Hispanic Women | 1.54*** | 1.64*** | 1.40*** | 1.41*** |
| | Δ −2LL | | 7,794 | 24,706 | 256 |
| Partnered Men | Same-Sex Cohabitation | 1.32*** | 1.37*** | 1.27*** | 1.28*** |
| | Δ −2LL | | 2,512 | 4,220 | 3,820 |

*Source Data:* 2000 5% census microdata, via IPUMS. Logistic regression models use data weighted by household weights.

*Note:* Data shown are odds ratios and summary statistics from logistic regressions. Model numbers correspond to models in the previous table. Unweighted N's: married white men 2,285,604, partnered men (married and cohabiting men), 2,706,642. Adjusted odds ratios (dual marital status recodes excluded) for geographic mobility's influence on same-sex cohabitation 1.59 (model 2), 1.71 (model 3), 1.58 (model 4), 1.60 (model 5), all statistically significant. Blacks are non-Hispanic black and whites are non-Hispanic white. Geographically mobile individuals live in a different state from the state of their birth. All individuals in the base populations are U.S. born of any age. Δdf = 7 (Model 3 – Model 2), Δdf = 1 (Model 4 – Model 3), Δdf = 1 (Model 5 – Model 4).

\* $p < .05$; \*\* $p < .01$; \*\*\* $p < .001$ (two tailed test).

els that include geographic mobility as a predictor) with three additional types of transgressive outcomes: intermarriage between Asians and whites, intermarriage between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, and same-sex unions. For each type of alternative union, model 4 controls for the metropolitan level exposure to the particular type of nontraditional partner (black women in the first row, Asian women in the second row, Hispanic women in the third row, gay men in the fourth row). In every case the inclusion of exposure to nontraditional partners and the accounting for urban residence improve the goodness of fit of the models significantly, but geographic mobility remains a positive and significant predictor of nontraditional unions regardless of which controls are introduced.

The results of Tables 6 and 7 support the idea that geographic mobility is a fundamental aspect of transgressive unions. Even though same-sex couples are highly concentrated in a few metropolitan areas, the last row of Table 7 shows that geographic mobility remains a significant predictor for same-sex unions even after individual attributes and destination characteristics are accounted for. We have performed the same regressions with white women (controlling for the racial distribution of potential husbands) and partnered women (controlling for the distribution of women with female partners), with the same substantive results, available on the ASR website.[15]

E. The association between interracial unions and same-sex unions. By treating both same-sex unions and interracial unions as two consequences of the independent life stage, we are explicitly arguing that these two kinds of unions, (usually analyzed separately) are part of the same fabric of family and social change. Our theory of the independent life stage suggests that interraciality should be correlated with same-sex couples.

*Hypothesis 3. Same-sex couples are more likely (than traditional heterosexual married couples) to be interracial.*

Hypothesis 3 has been suggested in the literature before (Kennedy and Davis 1993), but hard evidence has been lacking. Young adults who are able to or who are inclined to breach the racial norms should be especially likely or willing also to breach the norms against homosexuality, and vice versa. Kennedy and Davis (1993) argue that the lesbian culture that they studied was much more open to racial integration than was the wider society of Buffalo, New York.

Table 8 shows the percentage of couples in each group that were interracial, and the odds ratios based on those percentages. Among young heterosexual married couples in 1990, 5.68 percent were interracial compared to 9.64 percent for heterosexual cohabiting couples and 14.52 percent for same-sex couples. The odds of being interracial were 2.82 times as high for same-sex couples as for heterosexual married couples in 1990 (and 1.42 times as high in 2000). The odds ratio is symmetrical, meaning that for interracial couples the odds of being in a same-sex union were 2.82 times higher than the odds of being married in 1990.[16]

## DISCUSSION

The evidence of a strong correlation between geographic mobility and transgressive unions sheds some light on the forces that underlie the formation of couples in the United States. The key transitional moment in the cyclical pattern of social reproduction is the moment when

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[15] Interestingly, the association between geographic mobility and nontraditional unions is stronger for the men than for the women across samples, and for almost every model. Given that parents and society in general are historically more protective of daughters than of sons, we might have expected that geographic mobility would make a greater difference to women than to men in the formation of nontraditional unions, but the results confound this expectation.

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[16] Same-sex couples had significantly higher rates of interraciality than heterosexual couples in both 1990 and 2000. Although heterosexual cohabiting couples had the highest rates of interraciality in 2000, young heterosexual married couples outnumber the heterosexual cohabiters by 3.4 to 1 in 2000 (and by 6.4 to 1 in 1990). If we combine heterosexual cohabiters with heterosexual married couples into a single heterosexual category, the resulting rate of interraciality (6.21 percent in 1990 and 10.19 percent in 2000) would be close to the rate for heterosexual married couples alone, and significantly less than the rate of interraciality for same-sex unions.

**Table 8.**    Rates of Interracial Unions for Young Couples by Type of Couple, 1990–2000

| Type of Couple | 1990 | | 2000 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Interracial, % | Odds Ratio of Interraciality[a] | Interracial, % | Odds Ratio of Interraciality[a] |
| 1. Heterosexual Married Couples | 5.68 | — | 9.06 | — |
| 2. Heterosexual, Cohabit | 9.64 | 1.77*** | 14.02 | 1.64*** |
| 3. Same-Sex, Cohabit | 14.52 | 2.82*** | 12.41 | 1.42*** |

*Source Data:* 1990 and 2000 5% microdata via IPUMS.
*Note:* All couples are comprised of U.S.-born individuals, age 20-29. Interracial couples have partners with different races, where race is defined by the 4 categories non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, non-Hispanic Asian and all others (including those who identify as multiracial in 2000). Percentage of interraciality for all heterosexual couples (a weighted average of categories 1 and 2): 6.21% in 1990, and 10.19% in 2000. Adjusted estimate (dual marital status recodes excluded) for same-sex couples in 2000: 14.25% interracial.
[a] Odds ratio of interraciality compared to (1).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two tailed test).

young adults start their own families. In the past, this transitional moment was carefully controlled by law and custom and by direct intervention of the parents. In the age of the independent life stage, parents have lost much of their ability to influence their children's choices of mates. The loss of parental control has led to the growth of same-sex unions and interracial unions, the kind of unions that were rarely permitted in the past. The rise of racial intermarriage and same-sex cohabitation in the United States represents the fraying of a unitary system of heterosexual same-race marriage that had been assiduously maintained since colonial times.

The theory that transgressive and alternative unions can flourish only away from the tight social control of parents and communities of origin is not a new theory. The theory has been emphasized especially in gay studies literature (Bérubé 1990; Chauncey 1994), and the theory has been addressed in the literature on interracial unions (Romano 2003:14) and in the literature on the history of the family (Tilly and Scott 1987:191). The theory has, however, never previously been tested quantitatively.

We offer new measures of the independence of young adults, using census data for the entire 20th century. We show that in the post-1960 era, single young adults are much more likely to live on their own than ever before despite contrary reports in the popular press. The median age at first marriage, especially for women, is higher than it has ever been. We characterize residential independence and delayed union formation as "the independent life stage."

Our analysis of census data has shown that young people who are geographically mobile and urban have sharply increased odds of being in an interracial or same-sex union. In general the more transgressive the union type, the more geographically mobile the couple. Same-race heterosexual cohabiting couples are only just slightly more geographically mobile than same-race heterosexual married couples. Interracial couples and same-sex couples are substantially more geographically mobile, while same-sex couples that are also interracial couples are the most geographically mobile and the most urban.

Sociologists who study urban life have emphasized the role of the city in nurturing subcultures prohibited elsewhere (Fischer 1975; Wirth 1938). The concentration of American gays in the cosmopolitan centers of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago as well as San Francisco has been described in the historical (Chauncey 1994; D'Emilio 1998) as well as demographic literature (Black et al. 2000; Gates and Ost 2004). Our theory of the independent life stage suggests that nontraditional couples are pushed away from their communities of origin as well as drawn to the great urban centers. We substantiate the "push" effect by showing that nontraditional couples are more geographically mobile than same-race married couples even in rural parts of the United States, and even when the diversity of destination communities is controlled for.

We find that same-sex unions are more likely to be interracial, and equivalently, interracial couples are more likely to be gay. The correlation between same-sex and interracial relation-

ships has been suggested in the literature in the past (Kennedy and Davis 1993); we provide quantitative evidence for this conjecture for the first time.

We find that the association between nontraditional unions and the independent life stage seems to have declined over time. The declining correlation between nontraditional unions and residential and geographic independence suggests that the nontraditional unions (interracial unions, same-sex unions, and heterosexual cohabiting unions) are becoming more accepted within communities of origin and within U.S. society. Young people who find nontraditional partners are less likely to be shunned by their families than they were a generation ago.

The census data we use have several advantages, including massive sample size and a long historical record. The census data have disadvantages as well, including inconsistencies in some variables over time (especially for same-sex cohabiting couples in 1990 and 2000), and the cross-sectional rather than longitudinal structure of the census. Further study is needed to identify the longitudinal process of how the independent life stage influences the kinds of families young adults form.

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