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The Formation of Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions During Young Adulthood: Evidence from Two British Birth Cohorts

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Abstract

Legal recognition of same-sex relationships is intensely debated, but there is little research about the formation of same-sex unions. In this paper, I describe the sequencing, timing, and correlates of entering same-sex and different-sex unions using data from two British birth cohorts, the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Birth Cohort Study (BCS). The NCDS and BCS are unique sources of data because they contain retrospective data from young adults (age 16-34) about same-sex cohabiting unions since 1974. The results show that individuals usually have either male or female partners (rather than both male and female partners). Individuals enter same-sex unions later in young adulthood than they enter different-sex cohabitation or marriage. Young adults from later birth cohorts, more socially liberal regions, and high-skilled occupations are more likely to enter same-sex unions. This paper contributes to the emerging body of research on same-sex unions and sociological theory about union formation and the relationship market.

Central to the recent transformation of family life is the greater freedom individuals have to select a partner of their choice. Families, the State, and religious institutions have lost some of their ability to control individuals' choices for couple relationships (Goode 1970). This erosion of social control has contributed to the growth of interracial unions, non-marital cohabitation, and other previously stigmatized union types (Kalmijn 1998; Rosenfeld and Kim 2005). The influence of families, the State, and religious institutions ("third parties") may be particularly relevant to trends and differentials in the formation of same-sex relationships because these relationships remain stigmatized around the world (Pew Research Center 2007).

Same-sex couples are the subject of intense debate, but knowledge about same-sex union formation is sparse (see Frisch and Hviid 2006 for a notable exception). In particular, almost nothing is known about the demography of same-sex unions in the critical period of young adulthood or across recent historical periods in which attitudes and policies toward same-sex couples have changed dramatically. To address these gaps, I describe the formation of same-sex and different-sex unions in young adulthood using retrospective data from two British cohort studies, the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS). The NCDS and BCS attempted to collect data from all individuals born in Britain in a particular week in 1958 and 1970, respectively. The retrospective histories in the NCDS and BCS allow me to investigate entry into same-sex and different-sex co-resident unions[1] throughout young adulthood (age 16-34), as well as between different birth cohorts (1958 and 1970).

Drawing on sociological theory and research about relationship markets and third parties, as well as psychological literature on the development of sexual orientation, I pursue three goals in this study. First, I describe the sequences of same-sex and different-sex co-resident relationships that individuals follow throughout young adulthood. Specifically, I measure the extent to which young adults have both male and female partners compared to having only male or female partners. I also describe the demographic characteristics associated with following different sequences of same-sex and different-sex

unions. Second, I compare the timing of entering same-sex cohabitation, different-sex cohabitation, and marriage. Third, I investigate associations between entering each union type and demographic characteristics, including gender, birth cohort, family background, school enrollment, and occupation.

BACKGROUND

The Relationship Market and Third Parties in Britain

A fruitful way to conceptualize an individual's search for a relationship partner is to draw analogies with a job search (Oppenheimer 1988). Individuals enter the relationship "market" with a set of preferences about the type of partner they seek. Finding a match depends on several factors, including individuals' attractiveness to potential partners, the size and composition of the market, and the quality of the match an individual will accept. Individuals and their potential partners are key actors in the market. But institutions such as families, the State, and religious institutions ("third parties") also play important roles by shaping individuals' preferences, facilitating acceptable matches, and providing sanctions for inappropriate matches (Kalmijn 1998).

Although third parties remain important actors in the relationship market, their influence has waned because of growing economic independence and geographic mobility of young adults, as well as normative changes that favor individualism (Goode 1970). In addition, third parties such as the State have loosened restrictions about partner choice themselves by repealing anti-miscegenation laws and relaxing restrictions about interfaith marriages. The weaker control of third parties has led to the rise of previously-stigmatized couple relationships such as non-marital cohabitation, interracial unions, and interfaith unions (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005).

Despite the declining influence of third parties in general, third parties continue to affect young adults' choices about whether to enter a relationship with a man or a woman (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005). Most third parties are invested in promoting different-sex unions because same-sex unions are stigmatized (Pew Research Center 2007), despite growing tolerance in recent decades. The enduring stigma of

homosexuality is evident in wage differentials between gay and heterosexual men (Baumle and Poston 2011), negative parental reactions after a child discloses a minority sexual orientation (Heatherington and Lavner 2008), and policies of the State and religious institutions that treat same-sex and different-sex couples differently. Third parties may play a particularly important role in Britain, where young adults live longer with their parents compared to their U.S. peers on average (Kerckhoff and Macrae 1992). The longer period of co-residence with parents in Britain means that, on average, young adults are exposed to parental control and monitoring about partner choice for longer than are young adults in the United States.

The Sequencing, Timing, and Correlates of Same-Sex Unions

In this section, I propose that third party influence might lead to demographic differences in the formation of same-sex and different-sex unions. I focus on three key demographic dimensions of union formation: sequencing, timing, and correlates. For each dimension, I speculate about how third parties might alter individuals' preferences and opportunities for same-sex and different-sex partners, giving rise to distinct demographic patterns of union formation.

Sequencing

"Sequencing" refers to stability and ordering of same-sex and different-sex partners throughout young adulthood. Individuals might enter same-sex unions exclusively, different-sex unions exclusively, or may enter both same-sex and different-sex unions. Among those who have both male and female partners, some may enter different-sex union(s) and then progress to same-sex union(s). Others may enter same-sex union(s) first and subsequently enter different-sex union(s). To date, it is unknown how often individuals pursue these different sequences of co-resident partners.

Psychological literature provides clues into the sequencing of same-sex and different-sex unions. This literature shows that individuals are socialized to begin searching for different-sex partners, and only begin to search for same-sex partners after developing a minority sexual orientation or "coming out"

(Heatherington and Lavner 2008). This process is complex: Sexual orientation is multi-dimensional construct, comprised of same-sex and different-sex attractions, sexual behavior, identity, and close relationships (Lauman et al. 1994). These dimensions of sexual orientation are not perfectly correlated and there is considerable fluidity in these dimensions throughout adolescence and young adulthood (Diamond 2008; Kinnish, Strassberg, and Turner 2005). For example, Savin-Williams and Ream (2007) show that among adolescents who report exclusively same-sex attractions, only a quarter reported any same-sex attraction seven years later. Research also shows that some dimensions of sexual orientation are more fluid than others. Sexual attractions and behavior, for example, fluctuate more throughout adolescence compared to sexual orientation identity (Kinnish, Stressberg, and Turner 2005). There is also greater fluidity in sexual orientation among women (Kinnish, Strassberg, and Turner 2005; Peplau 2003; Savin-Williams and Ream 2007), those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with divorced parents (Diamond 2008).

Little is known about the sequencing of cohabiting and marital unions with same-sex and different-sex partners. Among a cross-section of same-sex cohabiters in the United States, 20% of men and 30% of women report ever being married (Black et al. 2000). In Sweden, 20% of male couples and 27% of Swedish female couples contained a partner who was previously married to a different-sex partner (Andersson et al. 2006). These studies provide limited information, however, because they are restricted to individuals currently in a same-sex relationship. They also lack data about any previous different-sex cohabitations and the number of previous relationships. Further, aside from gender differences, these studies do not investigate demographic differences in sequencing.

There reasons to expect a high level of stability in the choice of same-sex and different-sex co-resident unions, especially when compared to attraction, sexual behavior, and identity. That is, individuals are more likely to enter same-sex and different-sex unions exclusively, rather than entering both same-sex and different-sex unions. Moving in with a partner may be a public declaration of a minority sexual orientation to third parties such as families, friends, and religious institutions (Strohm et al. 2009).

Although possible, it may be difficult for a couple to hide their intimate relationship when living together. Sharing a residence often involves considerable investment in a relationship and logistical effort. In contrast, it is possible to quickly develop same-sex attractions and identities in private without third party knowledge. The public and logistical nature of co-residence means that individuals who choose to move in with a same-sex partner may have already gone through the process of "coming out" and may be unlikely to subsequently move back in with a different-sex partner. This implies that individuals are likely to consistently choose either same-sex or different-sex co-resident partners in young adulthood. For the few individuals who do enter both same-sex and different-sex unions, the psychological literature on "coming out" suggests that individuals may generally transition from different-sex into same-sex unions (rather than from same-sex into different-sex unions) as individuals develop a minority sexual orientation.

There may be demographic differences in the stability of co-resident partner choices. Consistent with psychological literature (Diamond 2008; Savin-Williams and Ream 2007), there may be less stability among women, individuals from lower socioeconomic status groups, and those from non-traditional family structures. There may also be birth cohort differences in the stability of co-resident partner choices. Due to the increasingly tolerant social climate, individuals from later birth cohorts may experience less pressure from third parties to enter different-sex unions. If this is true, then fewer individuals would enter both same-sex and different-sex unions, leading to greater stability of partner choices in later birth cohorts. It is unclear how other demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status may affect the stability of partner choices.

Timing

Relationship timing, or the age at which individuals enter relationships, affects the risk of union dissolution (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000) and shapes the transition to adulthood (Settersen and Ray 2010). Little is known, however, about the timing of same-sex unions. Three factors suggest that individuals might enter same-sex unions later in young adulthood compared to different-sex unions. First,

because individuals are socialized as heterosexual, they only begin to search for same-sex partners after a gradual process of "coming out." Individuals vary in when they develop a minority sexual orientation, with some not coming out until mid-life or old age. Because some individuals do not enter the market for a same-sex partner until later in life, same-sex union formation is delayed.

Second, for individuals who are in the market for a same-sex partner, living with parents may slow the development of same-sex relationships, particularly because of the extended period of co-residence with parents in Britain (Kerckhoff and Macrae 1992). Families may reinforce the norm of different-sex partnering by encouraging different-sex relationships and providing sanctions for entering a same-sex union. Searching for a same-sex partner might also involve disclosing a minority sexual orientation to disapproving family members. Individuals who find it difficult to search for a same-sex partner while economically dependent on parents might enter a different-sex union. In this sense, the timing of same-sex union entry may be related to relationship sequences—particularly whether an individual enters a different-sex relationship before a same-sex relationship. Alternatively, young adults who are economically dependent on parents may delay union formation altogether.

Third, the availability of partners may also lead to later entry into same-sex unions. A larger the pool of potential partners increases the probability of finding a match (Lewis and Oppenheimer 2000). Because the population searching for same-sex partners is small (Black et al. 2000), difficulties finding a match may delay same-sex union formation.

Demographic Correlates of Union Entry

What types of individuals are more likely to enter same-sex unions? One can surmise that young adults with more independence from third parties, or whose third parties are more accepting of same-sex partnering, would be disproportionately likely to enter same-sex unions. Indeed, Rosenfeld and Kim (2005) show that geographically mobile young adults are more likely than their immobile peers to move in with a same-sex partner. Rosenfeld and Kim interpret this pattern as evidence that independence from

families and other third parties has contributed to the growth of same-sex partnering. In addition, individuals who have access to a larger pool of potential same-sex partners might also be more likely to enter a same-sex union. In this section, I explore how demographic characteristics that are correlated with third party control and partner availability—cohort, gender, family background, school enrollment, and socioeconomic status—affect entry into same-sex unions.

Cohort

In recent times, public opinion towards homosexuality has become more accepting and policies towards lesbians and gay men have become more favorable. These changes may have led more individuals to identify as lesbian or gay and enter the market for a same-sex partner. Indeed, Butler (2005) finds that reports of same-sex sexual activity in the U.S. grew from 1988 to 1998. Further, the more favorable social context may have also facilitated matches among individuals who searching for a same-sex partner. Among later cohorts, families of sexual orientation minorities may be more accepting of their kin's same-sex partners, supporting relationships that may lead to co-residence. Thus, available evidence suggests that individuals from later birth cohorts may be more likely to enter same-sex cohabitation than those from earlier birth cohorts.

Gender

Compared to men, women are more likely to report same-sex attraction, have same-sex sex, and identify as a sexual orientation minority (Savin-Williams and Ream 2007), possibly due to their greater fluidity in sexual orientation (Diamond 2008; Peplau 2003). This difference suggests that women may also more likely to be searching for a same-sex partner than men. Rates of same-sex cohabitation may thus be higher for women than for men. Further, even among those in the market for a same-sex partner, women might be more likely to cohabit than men. The social psychological theory of self-construal (Cross and Madson 1997) suggests that women derive greater psychological rewards from being in

relationships compared to men, increasing incentives for lesbian and bisexual women to progress to co-residence compared to their gay and bisexual male peers. Further, cohabiting unions might be more attractive for lesbian and bisexual women compared to gay and bisexual men because of the economic benefits of co-residence, and because women are more likely to be caring for children than are men (Black et al. 2000).

Family Background

Growing up in a non-traditional family—a family without two married parents or a step family—may increase rates of same-sex cohabitation in two ways. First, growing up in a non-traditional family may weaken parents' ability to monitor and influence children, which may facilitate earlier initiation of sex and adult roles (Thornton 1991), as well as exploration of same-sex relationships. Second, parental cohabitation or separation may foster liberal values (Axinn and Thornton 1996) that are more accepting of non-marital living arrangements such as homosexuality. Indeed, parental separation is positively associated with entering same-sex marriage in Denmark (Frisch and Hviid 2006). I anticipate that individuals who grow up in a non-traditional family structure may be more likely to enter same-sex cohabitation than their peers who grew up in traditional families.

In addition to family structure, childhood region may also affect union formation in young adulthood. Marriage rates are higher and cohabitation rates are lower among individuals who grew up in Scotland and the North of England compared to other regions of Britain (Berrington and Diamond 2000). This pattern may reflect different socialization practices, whereby families, schools, and religious institutions in socially conservative regions discourage cohabitation and other non-traditional relationships such as same-sex relationships. Conversely, third parties in more socially liberal areas such as London and the Southeast of England (Stonewall 2007) might be more likely to promote positive attitudes toward same-sex partnering. Thus, one might expect higher rates of same-sex union formation for individuals from London and the Southeast compared to other British regions. Another reason for

expecting this difference is the greater concentration of lesbians and gay men in more urban regions such as London and the Southeast compared to other regions. As discussed above, a greater number of potential partners increases the probability of finding a match (Lewis and Oppenheimer 2000). Evidence for this hypothesis comes from Frisch and Hviid (2006), who find that being born in a large city is positively associated with entry into same-sex marriage in adulthood.

School Enrollment

Students in Britain are typically not economically independent and often live with their parents. School enrollment is negatively associated with marrying (Berrington 2001) because it reduces individuals' abilities to fulfill the economic obligations of marriage and signals the incomplete transition to adulthood (Corijn 2001). Being enrolled does not decrease the likelihood of cohabiting in Britain (Berrington and Diamond 2000). School enrollment may also hinder the development of same-sex relationships. Students' economic dependence on parents may lead to greater parental monitoring and control over their partner choices. As Goode (1970: 376) notes, parents have lost much of their control over children's partnership choices, but children's economic reliance on parents for the high cost of education makes education the last "lever" of social control over their children. Parental control and monitoring might reduce the likelihood that individuals enter the same-sex market, as well as slow the formation of same-sex cohabiting unions among those in the market. I anticipate, then, that enrollment will be negatively associated with same-sex unions.

Socioeconomic Status in Young Adulthood

During young adulthood, individuals are in the process of completing their education and transitioning into the labor force. Although members of all socioeconomic groups are likely to marry, there are differences in the timing of marriage (Berrington and Diamond 2000). Lower socioeconomic status groups are more likely to marry early, oftentimes without cohabiting (Kiernan 1999). Higher

socioeconomic groups marry later due the longer time spent in schooling and the greater opportunity cost of marrying, particularly for women (Berrington and Diamond 2000). There are few consistent associations between socioeconomic status and entry into different-sex cohabitation (Berrington and Diamond 2000), in contrast to the United States (Smock, Manning, and Porter 2005).

Whereas socioeconomic status affects entry into different-sex unions because it represents long-term economic resources (Sweeney 2002), socioeconomic status might affect same-sex unions for different reasons – namely, by providing resources to avoid third party control of partnership choices. Individuals who have enough socioeconomic resources to be economically independent from their parents are more likely to avoid any family disapproval of their partner choices. Rosenfeld and Kim (2005) suggest that geographic mobility is a key mechanism for developing a minority sexual orientation and same-sex relationships. Socioeconomic resources may allow individuals to migrate to regions that are more accepting of homosexuality and have a greater number of same-sex partners (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005), leading to higher rates of same-sex union formation.

METHODS

Data

I analyze data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS) (Bynner et al. 2005). The NCDS and BCS attempted to collect data from every person born in Britain during a particular week in 1958 and 1970, respectively. Follow-up interviews were conducted throughout childhood and young adulthood. In addition, immigrants born in the specified weeks in 1958 and 1970, identified through administrative records, were added to the cohorts through age 16. I analyze unweighted data from 11,469 NCDS cohort members who participated in the age 33 interview, as well as data from 11,924 BCS cohort members who participated in either the age 30 or 34 interviews. Of these 11,924 cohort members, 81% were interviewed at age 34, and 19% were interviewed at age 30 (but not

34). For those not interviewed at age 34, relationship histories for ages 30-34 are missing. I treat these histories as right censored in the event history analysis described below.

Like most longitudinal studies, the NCDS and BCS experienced attrition over several decades of data collection: 71% and 74% of eligible cohort members were interviewed in the NCDS and BCS samples I use, respectively. Despite this attrition, the NCDS and BCS remain representative of the target population (Government Statistical Office 1999), with several exceptions. Systematic attrition has been observed among men and lower socioeconomic status groups, as measured by social class background, educational attainment, and stability of job history (Government Statistical Office 1999; Hawkes and Plewis 2006). I also excluded 1.9% (n = 447) of cohort members because their relationship histories were inconsistent or incomplete (e.g., item non-response on dates, overlapping unions). These exclusions were more likely to occur for men, those from a non-traditional family in childhood, and those in low status occupations. The final analytic sample is 22,946 cohort members.

Relationship histories

During in-person interviews (age 33 for the NCDS; age 30 and 34 for the BCS), cohort members provided a retrospective history of all cohabiting and marital relationships lasting one month or more since age 16. Data were collected via paper-and-pencil for the NCDS and via computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) for the BCS. Cohort members were asked to provide the month and year of the beginning of the co-resident relationship, the month and year of the end of the co-resident relationship (if applicable), and the month and year of marriage (if applicable). In addition, cohort members were asked to report the sex of each previous partner, allowing me to classify cohabitations as same-sex or different-sex. Using this information, I created a person-month file that contains an individual's relationship status for each month from age 16 through 34. I consider four relationship statuses: (1) single (i.e., not married or cohabiting), (2) same-sex cohabitation, (3) different-sex cohabitation, and (4) married. No retrospective

data were collected about non-resident unions. Same-sex unions were not legally recognized throughout the observation period of the study.

Two types of measurement error may affect the quality of these retrospective data. First, due to social desirability bias, individuals in same-sex unions may refuse to be interviewed or may fail to report same-sex unions to maintain privacy about their relationship. Thus, there may be downward bias in the number of same-sex unions reported in the data. The second form of measurement error is the misclassification of same-sex unions. Previous research (e.g., Black et al. 2000) shows that in data collected via paper-and-pencil questionnaires, the sex of a cohort member's partner can be miscoded (e.g., men are coded as women), leading to a different-sex union being misclassified as same-sex (or vice versa). Even a small rate of this type of misclassification may lead to significant "contamination" of the smaller group of same-sex couples (Black et al. 2000). This misclassification is unlikely to occur in the computer-assisted BCS interviews, but might be present in the paper-and-pencil NCDS interviews, where stray marks are more likely and there are fewer quality control checks. Fortunately, the age 33 NCDS interview collected paper-and-pencil union histories twice during the same interview: once in a self-completion questionnaire and again in an interviewer-administered questionnaire. There were substantial inconsistencies: Of all same-sex unions reported, only 22% were reported in both data sources. To minimize measurement errors, I defined a union as same-sex if the union met three conditions: (1) the union was reported as same-sex in at least one data source, and (2) the respondent never reported marrying their partner, and (3) for current unions, the partner's sex in the household roster matched the partner's sex in the union history. This method resulted in 86 "spells" of same-sex unions from the NCDS, and is similar to extensive work by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, which collected the NCDS data (di Salvo 1995).

Independent Variables

I use a dichotomous indicator to identify those who grew up in a *non-traditional family structure*, which includes being born to an unmarried mother, experiencing parental separation, and not having biological parents acting as the child's mother or father at any of the childhood interviews (Steele, Kallis, and Joshi 2006). For *parental socioeconomic status*, I use a dichotomous variable to measure whether an individual's father was in a professional or managerial class. *Childhood region of residence* is a five category variable (London and the Southeast of England, the South and East of England, Wales and the Midlands, Scotland and the North of England, and missing/abroad) created from childhood interviews. Unfortunately, region of residence in adulthood is not consistently available in the NCDS and BCS. As a result, childhood region may not reflect the cohort member's region in adulthood. In particular, individuals from socially conservative regions might have migrated to more liberal areas by young adulthood (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005). This type of migration would result in bias toward the null in my estimated association between London and the Southeast and entry into same-sex unions.

The NCDS and BCS collected retrospective employment histories since age 16. Using these histories, I created a monthly, time-varying indicator of an individual's *occupation and employment status* with five categories: high-skilled occupation (e.g., managerial, professional, and technical), medium-skilled occupation (e.g., clerical, craft, protective/personal, and sales), low-skilled occupation (e.g., machine operation), not employed, and missing.[2] For brevity, I refer to this variable as "occupation." Because individuals may change their occupation or employment status in anticipation of entering a union, I lag this variable by twelve months.[3] Finally, I use a time-varying, dichotomous indicator to identify individuals who are *enrolled in full-time education* for each month, also lagged by twelve months. For these variables, I treat missing data as a separate category because multiple imputation of these monthly retrospective data was not feasible. I also sought to maintain the largest sample size possible, given the small number of same-sex unions in the data.

In Table 1, I describe the characteristics of individuals in the sample. The sample is equally split by gender and cohort (1958 and 1970). About a quarter of the sample is classified as living in a non-

traditional family in childhood, and three-quarters of the sample had a father in unskilled or partly skilled occupation. Twenty-two percent grew up in London and the Southeast. At age 18, 19 percent of the sample was enrolled in full-time education. By age 28, 29 percent were in high-skilled occupations, 37 percent were in medium-skilled occupations, 11 were in low-skilled occupations, and 16 percent were not working. Occupational data were missing for seven percent of the sample.

Table 1: Characteristics of Cohort Members in the NCDS and BCS

Analytic Approach

My analysis proceeds in three stages. The first stage focuses on the sequencing of unions throughout young adulthood. In this stage, I show the percentage of individuals that follow each of these trajectories by age 34:

1. Never entered a union
2. Entered different-sex union(s) only
3. Entered same-sex union(s) only
4. Entered different-sex union(s), followed by same-sex union(s)
5. Entered same-sex union(s), followed by different-sex union(s)
6. Switched between same-sex and different-sex unions (e.g., entered a different-sex union, followed by a same-sex union and then another different-sex union).

Next, I explore the demographic characteristics associated with the union trajectories. I restrict this analysis to individuals who ever entered a same-sex union. I then explore demographic variation in the likelihood of entering both same-sex and different-sex union(s) compared to entering same-sex union(s) exclusively (reference). I estimate a logistic regression in which the stability of partner choice is regressed on gender, cohort, childhood family structure, father's occupation, childhood region, school enrollment (age 18), and occupation (age 28).

In the second stage, I describe the timing of same-sex cohabitation, different-sex cohabitation, and marriage. I show plots of the smoothed hazard rate of entering each union type from age 16-34. The hazard rate refers to the instantaneous probability of entering each union type. I assume that individuals are "at risk" of entering all union types until they enter a union or are right-censored (due to attrition from the study or the end of the observation period). Individuals who experience union dissolution are returned to the risk set and become at risk of entering all union types. These hazard plots may contain multiple union entries per individual.

The third stage investigates the timing and demographic correlates of union formation using discrete-time event history models. These models consist of competing risks, multinomial logistic regressions predicting, for each month, whether an individual remains single (reference) or transitions into same-sex cohabitation, different-sex cohabitation, or marriage.[4] I use a competing risks model because I assume that individuals are at risk for both same-sex and different-sex unions throughout young adulthood, regardless of what unions they have entered in the past. There is no empirical or theoretical basis for dividing the sample *a priori* into separate populations "at risk" for same-sex and different-sex unions. Thus, I assume that individuals enter the risk set at age 16 and remain at risk until they report entering a union or become censored (due to attrition or never entering a union). When individuals are in a union, they are removed from the risk set and are returned to the risk set if the union dissolves. Because individuals may contribute multiple spells of "singlehood," I adjust all models are for the clustering.

The dependent variable has four categories: no transition (reference category), enter same-sex cohabitation, enter different-sex cohabitation, and enter marriage (without cohabiting). The independent variables are age (represented by linear splines for age 16-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34)[5], gender, cohort, childhood family structure, family socioeconomic status, childhood region, education enrollment, occupation, and union history (no previous union, had previous union of any type). In the results, I report the odds ratio and Z score for each variable. I also conduct tests of differences in the odds ratios across union types.

RESULTS

The Sequencing of Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions

In Table 2, I show the percent of individuals who report following different sequences of same-sex and different-sex unions in young adulthood. Thirteen percent of individuals never entered a union by age 34 and 87% only entered different-sex union(s). The next four rows represent sequences that contain at least one same-sex union. In total, 186 individuals (.8% of the sample) followed one of these four sequences. There are 135 individuals who entered at least one same-sex union, but never entered a different-sex union. This represents 73% (135/186) of all individuals who ever entered a same-sex union, suggesting that individuals' choices for same-sex and different-sex co-resident partners are fairly stable in young adulthood.

Table 2: Sequencing of Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions, age 16-34

There are 26 individuals entered different-sex union(s) but then entered same-sex union(s). These individuals follow a sequence typified in the "coming out" literature, in which individuals gradually develop a minority sexual orientation, sometimes after entering different-sex unions. Conversely, there are 22 individuals who first entered same-sex union(s) but then entered different-sex union(s). Although this sequence may reflect the true behavior of individuals, it could also reflect measurement error, in which different-sex unions are incorrectly classified as same-sex couples due to miscoding of partner's sex. The data I use cannot distinguish between true changes in behavior from measurement error. There were only 3 cohort members who switch back and forth between same-sex and different-sex unions at least twice (e.g., same-sex → different-sex → same-sex).

Next, I investigate whether the sequencing of partner choices in Table 2 varies by demographic characteristics. In this analysis, I restrict the sample to individuals ever in a same-sex union (n = 186). Table 3 contains the results of a logistic regression predicting whether individuals enter both same-sex

and different-sex unions or same-sex unions only (reference). The odds of women entering both same-sex and different-sex unions (relative to entering same-sex unions only) are twice as high as for men (Z = 2.16). Individuals growing up in London and the Southeast of England are less likely than those from other regions to enter both same-sex and different-sex unions, although this result marginally statistically significant (Z = -1.69). There are no statistically significant associations between the other demographic characteristics and the stability of partner choices.

Table 3: Parameters from a Logistic Regression Predicting Entry into Both Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions

The Timing of Entering Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions

Next, I present smoothed hazard plots and 95% confidence intervals for the transition from single to same-sex cohabitation (Figure 1), different-sex cohabitation (Figure 2), and marriage (Figure 3). Figure 1 shows that rates of entry into same-sex cohabitation increase steadily from age 16 to 34. This means that individuals are more likely to enter same-sex unions in their late 20s and early 30s compared to the teenage years and early 20s. The results are consistent with the hypothesis that same-sex unions may be delayed relative to different-sex unions, although these plots do not provide formal statistical tests.

Figure 1: Transition Rate from Single to Same-Sex Cohabitation, by Age

Figure 2 shows that rates of entry into different-sex cohabitation follow an inverted U-shaped pattern. The rates rise throughout the early and mid 20s, level off in the late 20s, and then decline in the early 30s. Rates of transitioning from single to married (Figure 3) also follow an inverted U-shaped pattern, though the rates peak in the early 20s and begin to decline in the mid 20s.

Figure 2: Transition Rate from Single to Different-Sex Cohabitation, by Age

Figure 3: Transition Rate from Single to Married, by Age

Demographic Correlates of Entering Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions

Table 4 contains results from a discrete-time event history model that provides formal tests of the relative timing and correlates of each union type. The parameters are taken from a competing risks, multinomial logistic regression predicting transitions from being single into the three union types. In addition to Z statistics that show whether each odds ratio differs from 1.0, Table 4 also shows the results of statistical tests of differences in the odds ratios *across* union types using superscripts.

Table 4: Parameters from Multinomial Logistic Regression of Union Entry

The parameters for the spline functions refer to the association between a one year increase in age and the rates of entering each union type at different ages. These parameters show that rates of union entry increase from age 16-24 for all union types. For example, a one year increase between age 20-24 is associated with a 16% increase in rates of entering same-sex cohabitation. The age gradient in union entry, however, changes after age 24. Between age 25-34, age is negatively associated with entering both different-sex cohabitation and marriage. In contrast, rates of entering same-sex cohabitation remain roughly level in the age 25-34 interval; the linear splines for 25-29 and 30-34 are not statistically significant. Post-hoc tests of significance, indicated by superscripts, show that the rate of increase is greater for same-sex unions compared to marriage between ages 25-34, as well as compared to different-sex cohabitation between ages 30-34 ($p < .05$). These results confirm the suggestive evidence in Figures 1-3 that entry into same-sex cohabitation occurs later in young adulthood compared to different-sex cohabitation and marriage.

Contrary to expectations, women are not more likely to enter same-sex cohabitation compared to men ($Z = -.22$). Rates of entering same-sex cohabitation, however, are 56% higher for individuals from the 1970 cohort compared to the 1958 cohort ($Z = 2.19$). Similarly, rates of different-sex cohabitation are 26% higher for the 1970 cohort relative to the 1958 cohort. Rates of marrying without cohabiting, however, are significantly lower for the 1970 compared to the 1958 cohort ($Z = -55.5$). Growing up in a non-traditional family is not associated with entering same-sex cohabitation ($Z = 1.1$), is positively associated with entering different-sex cohabitation ($Z = 14.2$), and is negatively associated with marrying

(Z = -4.9). Net of the cohort member's occupation, father's occupation is not significantly associated with reports of entry into same-sex cohabitation (Z = .34). To examine whether father's occupation has an indirect association transmitted through occupation in adulthood, I estimated a model excluding cohort member's occupation. Father's occupation is still not statistically significant in this model, suggesting that there is no indirect association through adult occupation.

Rates of entering same-sex cohabitation are 72% higher for individuals who grew up in London or the Southeast of England compared to those who grew up in Scotland or the North of England (Z = 2.47). Rates of entering different-sex cohabitation are also higher for those from London and the Southeast compared to Scotland and the North (Z = 5.03). Post-hoc tests show that this regional difference is larger for same-sex cohabitation than for different-sex cohabitation ($p < .05$). Young adults from London and the Southeast are 27% less likely than those from Scotland and the North to marry without cohabiting (Z = -9.38). Contrary to my expectation, there is not a significant association between being enrolled in full-time education and entering same-sex cohabitation (Z = 1.5) or different-sex cohabitation (Z = -1.4). Enrolled young adults, however, are less likely to transition from single to married than their non-enrolled peers (Z = -4.7).

Occupation is strongly associated with entry into same-sex cohabitation. Being in a high-skilled rather than a low-skilled occupation triples the rate of entering a same-sex union (Z = 3.3). Post-hoc tests reveal that the association between high-skilled occupation and union formation is stronger for same-sex cohabitation than for different-sex cohabitation and marriage. There are no differences in rates of same-sex cohabitation among those in medium-skilled occupations, low-skilled occupations, or individuals not working. In a supplementary analysis (results not shown), I re-estimated the model in Table 4 and included interaction terms between gender and occupation. There were no significant interaction terms between gender and occupation for entry into same-sex cohabitation. There were significant results for different-sex unions, however. Being in a high-skilled (versus low-skilled) occupation is associated higher

rates of entering different-sex cohabitation for men, but there is no association for women. High-skilled occupations were also associated with higher marriage rates for men, but lower marriage rates for women.

DISCUSSION

The decreasing influence of third parties affords individuals more freedom to pursue relationships of their choice such as same-sex unions. Despite increased attention to same-sex relationships, little is known about the demography of these unions, particularly from a longitudinal perspective. By describing the formation of same-sex cohabitations throughout young adulthood (age 16-34), this paper contributes to the emerging body of research on same-sex unions and sociological theory about union formation and the relationship market. Three key conclusions emerge from this research.

First, individuals' choices for the sex of their cohabiting and marital partners were fairly stable throughout young adulthood. Among those who entered a same-sex union by age 34, about three quarters entered same-sex union(s) only and never entered a different-sex union. Of course, some of these individuals might eventually enter different-sex unions later in the life course; it takes time, after all, to progress to co-residence. Thus, the sequences I observed through age 34 may underestimate fluidity over the entire life course. Nevertheless, this high level of stability for co-resident partners contrasts with the substantial fluidity of same-sex attraction, sexual behavior, and identity observed in other studies (e.g., Savin-Williams and Ream 2007). This discrepancy may stem from the fact that living with a partner is a public statement, visible to third parties, of investing in a relationship. In contrast, one can choose to report a different attraction or identity privately and quickly. Men and individuals from London and the Southeast of England were more likely to have only male or female partners. This gender difference is consistent with previous research (Savin-Williams and Ream 2007), but the regional difference is a new finding that bears future replication and explanation.

Knowledge about the sequencing of unions will benefit from methodological research that distinguishes true behavioral changes from measurement errors in the classification of same-sex and

different-sex unions. To the extent that different-sex unions were misclassified as same-sex, the present analysis may have upwardly biased the number of individuals who entered both same-sex and different-sex unions. In the present study, I was able to mitigate this measurement error because relationship histories were collected twice in the paper-and-pencil NCDS interview. When such repeated relationship histories from the same point in time are unavailable, as is often the case, researchers could identify misclassified unions by collecting retrospective relationship histories from the same individuals at different points. To reduce the burden on researchers and respondents, data could be collected from the small subsample of individuals reporting any same-sex relationships. Further, methodological research should also explore how the mode of survey administration affects sex miscoding. Most research on measurement error is based on self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires such as the U.S. Decennial Census (Black et al. 2000). Most retrospective data, however, are currently collected using computer-assisted interviews that may be less prone to measurement errors.

Second, individuals entered same-sex cohabitation later in young adulthood compared to different-sex cohabitation and marriage. One potential explanation for this pattern is that during the "coming out" process, individuals first enter different-sex union(s), delaying same-sex union entry. Results from the sequencing analysis, however, do not support this explanation. Approximately three quarters of individuals who entered a same-sex union never entered a different-sex union by age 34. And among with both male and female partners, there were equal numbers of individuals who entered same-sex union(s) before different-sex union(s) as those who entered different-sex union(s) before same-sex union(s). Thus, because same-sex unions are not always preceded by different-sex unions, there is little evidence that different-sex unions account for the delayed entry into same-sex unions. A more likely explanation is that same-sex cohabiters delay union formation until they are older and have achieved independence from family and other third parties that sometimes enforce norms of different-sex partnering (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005). One way of assessing this hypothesis in future research is to

include measures of independent living into models of same-sex union formation (Berrington and Diamond 2000).

Third, there was demographic variation in rates of entering same-sex cohabitation. Growing up in London or the Southeast, having a high-skilled (versus low-skilled) occupation, being a woman, and coming from the 1970 cohort (versus 1958 cohort) were associated with same-sex unions. These demographic characteristics might raise rates of same-sex union entry in two ways. First, these characteristics may lead individuals to enter the market for a same-sex partner. For example, individuals from London or the Southeast and later cohorts—whose families and other third parties were more tolerant of homosexuality—might be more likely to develop a minority sexual orientation. Higher socioeconomic status may increase the likelihood of identifying as gay or lesbian by facilitating independence from families (Rosenfeld and Kim) and weakening identification with group origins and socialization processes (Kalmijn 1998). Second, conditional on searching for a same-sex partner, demographic characteristics might also increase individuals' success in the market. For example, young adults from London and the Southeast might have access to a greater pool of potential same-sex partners, increasing the chances of finding a match. Being in a high-skilled occupation might be an attractive characteristic in the same-sex relationship market, as it is in the different-sex market (Sweeney 2002). To examine this specific hypothesis, researchers could integrate information about relationship preferences for different types of partners (Meier, Hull, and Ortyl 2009) into demographic studies of union formation.

Demographic characteristics may thus affect same-sex union formation by facilitating entry into the same-sex market and increasing success among those already in the market. Studying these two mechanisms may require researchers to assume whether an survey respondent is searching for a same-sex partner—or in demographic parlance, is in the "population at risk." Dividing the population by sexual orientation identity (gay/lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual) is one way to define the population at risk. Researchers could then examine associations between demographic characteristics and subsequent union formation among individuals who identify as gay/lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual. A limitation of this

approach is that sexual orientation identity may fluctuate over the life course. Thus, this design might be more feasible for older populations for whom sexual orientation is presumably less fluid compared to adolescents and young adults.

In sum, this research highlights the importance of third parties in the formation of same-sex unions. As more longitudinal data on same-sex unions become available, researchers will be able to describe which third parties (family, religious institutions, the State) affect same-sex union formation. Future research can also identify the normative and economic mechanisms, both intentional and unintentional, through which third parties shape preferences and opportunities for same-sex unions. Moreover, this paper suggests the value of studying third party influence in union formation more generally. Although the long-run historical trajectory is one of weakened third party control, the elongated transition to adulthood, combined with increasing economic reliance on parents (Settersen and Ray 2010), suggests that third parties may play an increasingly important role in the relationship market. This may be particularly true for young adults without economic resources to live independently from parents and other third parties.

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TABLES

Table 1. Characteristics of Cohort Members in the NCDS and BCS

	Percent	N
Gender		
Male	49	11,251
Female	51	11,695
Cohort		
1958	49	11,263
1970	51	11,683
Non-traditional family in childhood		
No	73	16,783
Yes	27	6,163
Father's occupation		
Professional/managerial	27	6,306
Unskilled or partly skilled	73	16,640
Childhood region		
London and Southeast	22	5,083
Scotland and the North	37	8,560
Wales and the Midlands	23	5,200
South and East	16	3,773
Missing or abroad	1	330
Enrolled in education (age 18) [1]		
No	74	16,869
Yes	19	4,429
Missing	7	1,648
Occupation (age 28) [1]		
High-skilled	29	6,744
Medium-skilled	37	8,509
Low-skilled	11	2,575
Not working	16	3,603
Missing	7	1,515

Notes: [1] Time-varying variable. Variables described in text.

Source: Unweighted data from the National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study.

Table 2. Sequencing of Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions, age 16-34

Sequence	Percent	Number of individuals
Never entered union	13	2,876
Different-sex union(s) only	87	19,884
Same-sex union(s) only	.6	135
Different-sex union(s) then same-sex(s)	.1	26
Same-sex union(s) then different-sex union(s)	.1	22
Switch back and forth (e.g., same-sex → different-sex → same-sex	< .1	3
Total	100	22,946

Source: Unweighted data from the National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study.

Table 3. Parameters from a Logistic Regression Predicting Entry into Both Same-Sex and Different-Sex Unions

	Odds Ratio	Z
Female	2.18	2.16
1970 cohort (1958 cohort)	1.36	.71
Non-traditional family	.83	-.48
Father was professional/manager	1.06	.14
Grew up in London or the Southeast	.50	-1.69
Enrolled in school (age 18)	.56	-1.33
High or medium skilled occupation (age 28)	.65	-1.01

Notes: Sample is limited to individuals who ever entered a same-sex cohabitation (n = 186). The dependent variable is coded "1" if an individual entered both same-sex and different-sex unions, and "0" if an individual entered same-sex unions only (reference category). Model also contains missing data indicators for school enrollment and occupation.

Source: Unweighted data from the National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study.

Table 4. Parameters from Multinomial Logistic Regression of Union Entry

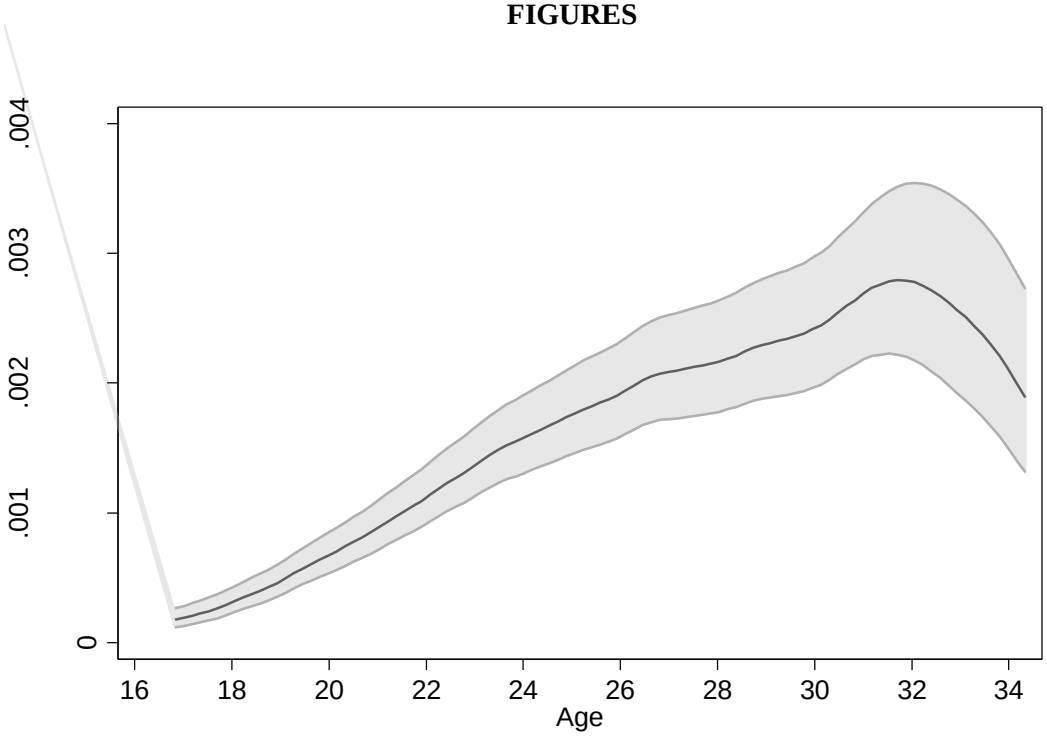
	Single → Same-Sex Cohabitation		Single → Different-Sex Cohabitation		Single → Marriage	
	Odds Ratio	**Z**	**Odds Ratio**	**Z**	**Odds Ratio**	**Z**
Age (linear splines)						
Age 16-19	1.37	2.07	1.55 [m]	23.45	1.73 [c]	23.05
Age 20-24	1.16	2.99	1.12 [m]	18.24	1.06 [c]	7.53
Age 25-29	.95 [m]	-1.08	.95 [m]	-8.24	.85 [ss, c]	-13.90
Age 30-34	1.11 [c, m]	1.54	.94 [ss, m]	-5.07	.88 [ss, c]	-3.95
Female	.96 [m]	-.22	1.21 [m]	11.61	1.70 [ss, c]	22.88
1970 cohort (1958 cohort)	1.56 [m]	2.19	1.26 [m]	13.00	.20 [ss, c]	-55.50
Non-traditional family	1.25	1.14	1.28 [m]	14.23	.87 [c]	-4.90
Father was professional/manager	1.07	.34	.98 [m]	-1.40	.84 [c]	-6.65
Father's occupation is missing	.73	-.62	.91	-1.80	1.01	.14
Childhood region (Scotland and North)						
London and the Southeast	1.72 [c, m]	2.47	1.11 [ss, m]	5.03	.73 [ss, c]	-9.38
South and East	1.35	1.11	1.20 [m]	7.57	.92 [c]	-2.58
Wales and Midlands	1.52	1.86	1.06	2.81	.99	-.30
Abroad and missing	.85	-.26	.95 [m]	-.80	1.55 [c]	3.56
Education enrollment (not enrolled) [1]						
Enrolled	1.47 [m]	1.51	.95 [m]	-1.40	.77 [ss, c]	-4.72
Missing	1.88	1.57	1.18 [m]	3.88	.92 [c]	-1.88
Occupation (low-skilled)[1]						
High-skilled	3.26 [c, m]	3.81	1.04 [ss]	1.39	1.00 [ss]	.04
Medium-skilled	1.55	1.43	.98 [m]	-.89	1.07 [c]	1.81
Not employed	1.33 [m]	.83	.72 [m]	-9.62	.40 [ss, c]	-16.61
Missing	1.64	1.20	.86	-3.53	.89	-2.08
Had previous union of any type	2.94 [c, m]	6.50	2.02 [ss, m]	32.37	.40 [ss, c]	-17.92

Notes: Reference category is given in parentheses. [1] Time-varying indicator; lagged by 12 months.

[ss] Odds ratio is significantly different from same-sex cohabitation at $p < .05$
[c] Odds ratio is significantly different from different-sex cohabitation at $p < .05$
[m] Odds ratio is significantly different from married at $p < .05$

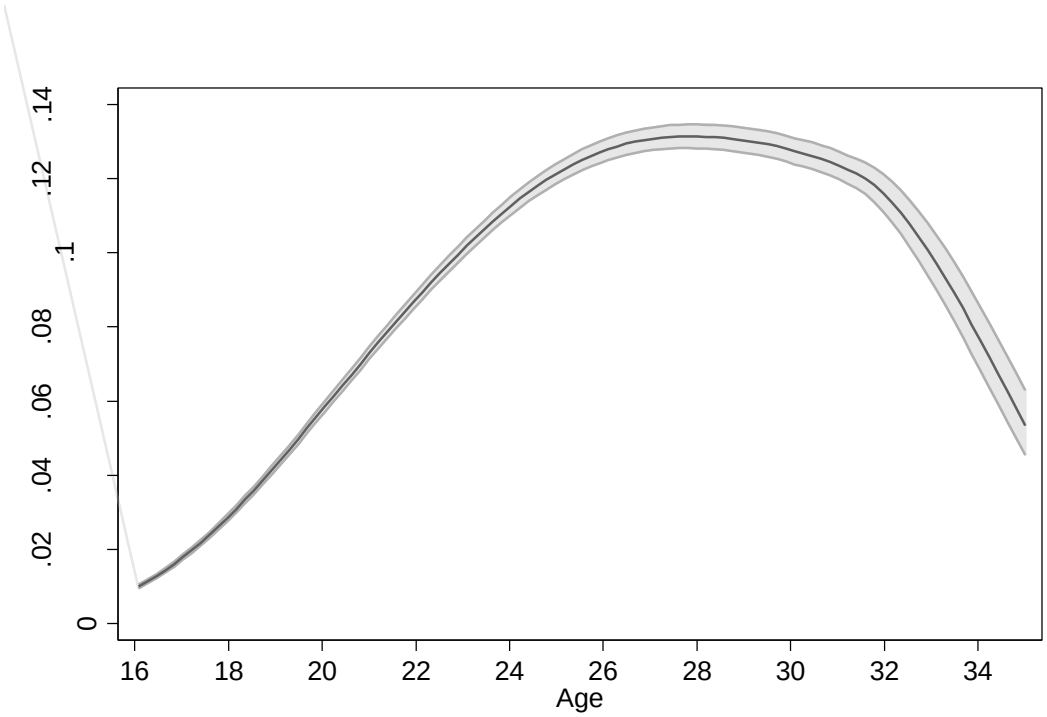
Source: Unweighted data from the National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Study.

FIGURES



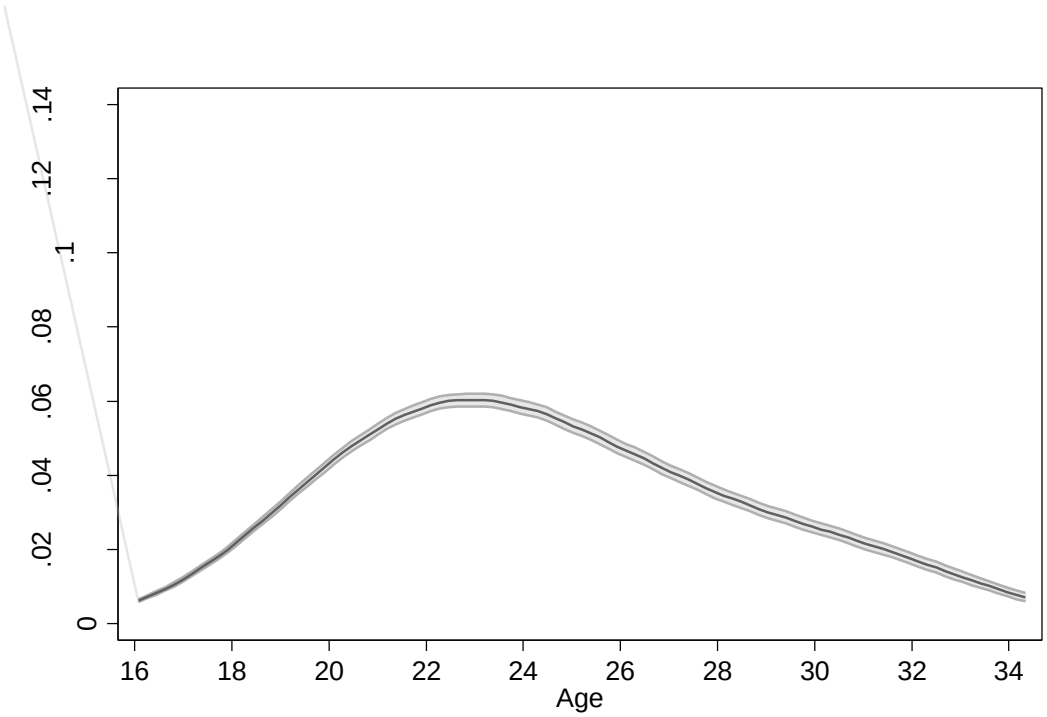
Shaded area represents 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 1. Transition Rate from Single to Same-Sex Cohabitation, by Age



Shaded area represents 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2. Transition Rate from Single to Different-Sex Cohabitation, by Age



Shaded area represents 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3. Transition Rate from Single to Married, by Age

[1] The NCDS and BCS do not contain data about relationships in which the members of the couple do not live together. I focus on marital and cohabiting unions because co-residence intertwines the partners' economic and social lives and is a signal of a committed relationship. To be sure, co-residence is not a perfect measure of a couple's commitment or interconnectedness, particularly for same-sex couples (Strohm et al. 2009). Unfortunately, studies rarely collect data on non-resident relationships. For brevity, I refer to cohabiting and marital unions simply as "unions."

[2] I experimented with using other socioeconomic measures such as educational attainment and years of school instead of occupation. These measures had generally similar associations with union entry as did occupation. Occupation, however, had a closer fit to the data according to the BIC criteria.

[3] Preliminary analysis showed that a twelve month lag had a closer fit to the data (according to the BIC criteria) compared to one and six month lags.

[4] I do not study the outcomes of different-sex cohabiting unions—marriage, dissolution, remain intact—because there is not a comparable transition for same-sex unions. Same-sex unions were not legally recognized during the observation period of the present study. Readers are reminded that entry into marriage refers to the transition between being single and marriage (not the transition from cohabitation to marriage.)

[5] In preliminary analysis, I experimented with a variety of specifications of age. This specification had the closest fit to the data according to the BIC criteria.