



Moving and union formation in the transition to adulthood in the United States



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ABSTRACT

Although previous research has paid attention to profound changes in union formation among young adults, few studies have incorporated moving events in the estimation of union formation. Moreover, less attention has been given to detailed moving experiences in young adults' life course. Using panel data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, we examine the relationship between moving and first union formation of young adults in the United States. Moving events are aggregated by distance moved, economic conditions in origin and destination places (i.e. moving within the same county, moving to new counties with better or the same economic conditions, and moving to new counties with worse economic conditions) and the time since a move. Our findings suggest that moving events, regardless of type, are significantly related to first union formation for females while the time since a move is important to union formation of males.

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1. Introduction

Diverse changes have occurred in the transition to adulthood during the last few decades in most industrialized countries, e.g. in the United States, Europe, and Canada (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Côte & Bynner, 2008; Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2005). In particular, the timing and type of union formation has changed considerably (Manning, Brown, & Payne, 2013; Schoen, Landale, & Daniels, 2007); first marriage is now delayed until the late 20s while cohabitation has emerged as either an alternative or a precursor to marriage for many young adults (Cherlin, 2010). As family formation appears to be a key contributor to diversity in the transition to adulthood (Amato et al., 2008; Billari & Liefbroer, 2010), prior research has given much attention to possible factors associated with the difference in union formation. These

studies have found that extended time in school and training for employment that can support a family have significantly transformed the way people form a union (Amato et al., 2008; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Guzzo, 2006). Marriage has also been delayed because young adults explore romantic relationships (Arnett, 2004), usually via cohabitation, as part of the emphasis on exploring that occurs during this period of life (e.g. assessing compatibility of marriage or singlehood, Sassler, 2010; Schoen et al., 2007). While prior studies have investigated core life course events in concert with union formation during the transition to adulthood, few studies have considered geographic mobility. Moving is, however, a significant life event that most individuals experience multiple times, and one that has implications for young adult's life choices, e.g. by providing both new opportunities and constraints (Elder, King, & Conger, 1996; Sharkey, 2012).

Union formation and moving are closely related to each other throughout life (Kulu & Milewski, 2007; Michielin & Mulder, 2008; Speare & Goldscheider, 1987). Mobility rates are high for newly-wed individuals although the rates decline as the marital duration increases (Speare &

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Goldscheider, 1987). It is also possible that newly-wed couples consider residential change before a wedding or during pregnancy (Michielin & Mulder, 2008). Particularly for young adults, residential change is a learning process that can promote independence and autonomy (Garasky, Haurin, & Haurin, 2001; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999; Mulder & Clark, 2002). For example, when leaving the parental home, young adults start to manage budgets and life decisions independently from their family of origin. Becoming independent is a crucial developmental task for those in the transition to adulthood (Erikson, 1968) that impacts all life course transitions, such as forming a family. Prior studies that have examined moving as a life course event are limited, however, because they use static measures of mobility such as ever moved (Jampaklay, 2006), or are restricted to only married or cohabiting couples (Boyle, Kulu, Cooke, Gayle, & Mulder, 2008; Clark & Withers, 2007; Jacobsen & Levin, 1997). Furthermore, no study has exclusively focused on young adulthood which is a dense period of demographic transitions.

The current study, therefore, expands upon our current knowledge and examines how moving is associated with first union formation among young adults in the U.S. First union formation in the current study refers to either cohabitation or marriage without premarital cohabitation. Findings from this study will expand our knowledge on the association between moving and union formation among young adults in at least three ways. First, we use longitudinal information from a nationally representative sample of young adults in the current study and include various life course transitions such as employment and educational history in the analyses. Studies that have reported the relationship between moving and union formation have employed cross-sectional data which are limited because they do not tell us how other factors interplay with the association between union formation and mobility. Second, we pay particular attention to contemporary young adults in the United States in this study. Although longitudinal information has been used in the past, no study has exclusively focused on young adults who undergo many life course transitions within a short time period. In addition, life course transitions have been restricted to only few years in previous research (e.g. those aged 44 or younger and their five to six years of retrospective information, Guzzo, 2006). Third, prior studies find that various types of moves have different motivations and implications for life course transitions (Schachter, 2001). Thus, this study disaggregates moving events in great detail by distance moved, economic conditions, and time since a move to examine how possible mechanisms influence the relationship between mobility and union formation. These contributions will add new knowledge that helps us better understand the role of mobility in the transition to adulthood in the U.S.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the patterns of union formation and mobility among young adults in the U.S.?
- 2) How are moving events related to first union formation?

- 3) How are different types of mobility related to the timing and type of first union formation?
- 4) How is the time since a move related to first union formation of young adults?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Moving and union formation in the transition to adulthood

The transition to adulthood has extended and now includes more time spent in school, delays in family formation and entry into the labor force (Furstenberg et al., 2005; Rindfuss, 1991). The most remarkable recent change in young adulthood is increased variation in the timing of family formation and composition of the families formed (Schoen et al., 2007). The number of children born to unmarried parents has increased from about 30% in 1980 to 48% in 2010 (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 2011) and marriage has been delayed until the late 20s in recent years (ages 28.9 and 26.9 for men and women in 2011, US Census Bureau, 2011). These demographic shifts parallel growing family diversity and the prevalence of nonmarital cohabitation, particularly among young adults. Young adulthood is a period of exploration for various life opportunities and a time for intensive self-focus, which is a key part of the identity formation process (Arnett, 2004; Arnett, Hendry, Kloep, & Tanner, 2011). Cohabitation may represent an exploration of intimate relationships for young adults because cohabitation requires a lower level of commitment and responsibility than marriage (Cherlin, 2010; Smock, 2000). For example, Schoen et al. (2007) find that fewer young cohabiting couples have children together or transition to marriage, which implies that cohabitation is more of an alternative to singlehood rather than a substitute or antecedent of marriage for this group.

For young adults who are the most mobile group (Franklin, 2003) moving can be closely related to union formation. Migration theories suggest that moving is an investment for those who are rational and have an ability to calculate the costs and benefits of mobility (DaVanzo, 1983; Massey et al., 1993; Tienda & Wilson, 1992). Therefore, moving should improve one's human capital (Massey et al., 1993), and it may also influence the timing and type of union formation (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004; Oppenheimer, 1988, 2003). For example, men's higher economic status promotes marriage among singles and cohabiting couples (Carlson et al., 2004; Oppenheimer, 1988; Smock & Manning, 1997). Cohabitation, in contrast, is considered a transitory state for those with unstable economic positions (Oppenheimer, 2003), and marriage is desired by most cohabiters once they establish economic stability (Cherlin, 2004; Oppenheimer, 1988). Therefore, positive gains from moving (i.e. higher earnings) can increase the likelihood of union formation, especially marriage. In addition, the association between moving and union formation may be more deliberate since moving changes socioeconomic conditions in which an individual resides. Studies find that variability of potential mates in a local marriage market influences individual's marital choices (Lewis & Oppenheimer, 2000; Lichter,

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