

NEW EVIDENCE ON THE TIMING OF EARLY LIFE COURSE TRANSITIONS: The United States 1900 to 1980

David A. Stevens

ABSTRACT: *This article is a description and analysis of the timing of early life course transitions in the twentieth century. Using data from national microdata samples of the census for 1900, 1910, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980, the study investigates the timing of seven transitions to adulthood, relationships between pairs of transitions, and how changes in these patterns affected the behavior of several population subgroups. The results show that youth in the second half of the century made the transition to adulthood earlier and followed a more prescribed and compressed schedule of transitions than their early-twentieth-century counterparts. The period of greatest change came after the Second World War, but by 1980 the trend toward earlier and increasingly age-graded familial transitions appeared to have reversed. Between 1900 and 1980 there is also a homogenization of experience among subgroups.*

The transition from adolescence to adulthood was the subject of renewed scholarly interest following the youth unrest of the 1960s and early 1970s. Many authors have explained the discontent of youth as the result of a longer period of growing up, more uncertain prospects, and greater separation from the adult world than in former times (Panel on

Youth 1974; Coleman 1961; Berger 1971; Musgrave 1965; Keniston 1972; Flacks 1971). Much of this argument can be traced to Philippe Ariés who in *Centuries of Childhood* claimed that childhood as a life stage distinct from the adult world was a modern phenomenon (Ariés 1962). Others agreed and adapted the argument to the idea of ado-

Journal of Family History

Volume 15, Number 2, pages 163-178

Copyright © 1990 by JAI Press Inc.

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved

ISSN: 0363-1990.

David A. Stevens is a graduate student in American History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research concerns the population history of the United States from the late nineteenth century to the present.

lescence. John Demos, for instance, argued that before the mid-nineteenth century the period of youth was short-lived and was characterized by the early assumption of adult responsibilities, in contrast to the pattern of delayed entrance to adulthood in the twentieth century (Demos and Demos 1969; Demos 1978).

Alternatives to this model were first offered by Joseph Kett and Michael Katz, who each argued that youth in the nineteenth century went through a period of "semi-independence." Challenging the idea that the youth of the twentieth century experienced a new lengthy period of adolescence, these two studies suggested that such a period had existed in some form since the early nineteenth century (Kett 1971, 1973, 1977; Katz 1975). Subsequent research has shown in fact that the transition to adulthood has become more strictly defined, rigidly timed, and compressed (Modell, Furstenberg, and Hershberg 1976; Winsborough 1978, 1979; Hogan 1981). There are, however, several important issues not covered by these studies. Modell and his colleagues compared Philadelphia in 1880 with the nation as a whole in 1970, even though Philadelphia was highly atypical in 1880. And because they studied only two points in time, they could not say when and at what rate the changes had occurred. This question was addressed later in separate works by Winsborough and Hogan, both of whom used data from the "Occupational Changes in a Generation II" survey to measure the timing of three life-course transitions for male birth cohorts starting in 1907. However, their data are limited in that they cover only mid-twentieth century males and have no information about the important transitions of leaving household of origin, establishing one's own household, and having one's first child. The inclusion of data from seven census years from 1900 to 1980 should help bridge a gap that in these studies left many questions unanswered.

DATA AND METHODS

This study addresses the question of changes in the timing of early life-course transitions using individual-level public use microdata samples of the federal census for 1900, 1910, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980. These data are described in Graham (1979), Strong (1989), and U.S. Bureau of the Census (1984a, 1984b, 1972, 1973, 1983). I am concerned primarily with the five transitions to adulthood used by Modell and his colleagues: leaving school, entering workforce, leaving household of origin, first marriage, and establishing one's own household. However, I have also included in my preliminary analyses entering school and birth of first child.

The study is divided into three sections. First I examine changes in the prevalence and quartile figures for each transition to determine if timing has become more rigid and rapid since 1900, and to examine when and to what extent such changes took place. Next I look at the relationship between pairs of transitions to see whether transitions have become more or less age congruous and whether they follow a prescribed order. Lastly I discuss some of the possible underlying causes, particularly the hypothesis that the changes were a function of the homogenization of American society, as class, regional, urban/rural, ethnic, and racial differences diminished over time.

The numerical evidence in this study is derived from synthetic cohort data. This means that I am treating data from a single census year as if it belonged to a single cohort. The measures employed here have the same advantages and liabilities as other period measures, such as life expectancy and fertility rates, used by demographers. Such analysis does not necessarily describe how any cohort actually behaved, nor is the use of synthetic cohorts without its pitfalls in times of massive change, as we shall see in the effects of the Great Depression and the baby boom on the age at bearing first child. De-

spite these cautions, the study of synthetic cohorts can provide reasonably precise results at particular ages. Although the liabilities of synthetic cohorts would be eliminated by longitudinal data as those used by Hogan and Winsborough, the former are the best available data to study the question historically.

In the first portion of the study I have applied the indirect method for estimating median age at first marriage to each of the transitions. The technique is straightforward: First, we estimate the proportion of young people of a synthetic cohort who will ever marry in their lifetimes (by convention, this is assumed to be the proportion ever married age 45 to 54). This is the *prevalence*: an estimate of the proportion who will ever experience the transition. The *median* is then calculated as the age when young people are at the halfway mark of this figure. *Quartiles* are derived in a similar fashion.¹ I have adapted this technique to the other transitions using prevalence figures understood as the highest mean of five-year age groups to experience a given status.²

Prevalence percentages for each transition through time are presented in Table 1. The N's represent the total males and females in the sample from which the figure is derived. School attendance is defined in 1900 as attendance of one month or more in the past year, and in subsequent years as "currently enrolled." Entering the workforce occurs when an individual has an occupation listed. For purposes of comparison with Hogan (1981) and Winsborough (1978, 1979), I have also included figures for full-time employment.³ Leaving household of origin occurs when neither parent is present. Since presumably every individual will leave home if he or she survives the parents, prevalence is the highest mean of having either parent present. Establishing one's own household occurs when an individual is listed as head of household or wife of head. Prevalence figures for age at first child in 1950 and 1960

were taken from external sources because the age group in question (45–54) had its child-bearing years during the low fertility era of the Depression. Using data from this cohort would lead to a ridiculously low prevalence percentage during the baby boom. The 1970 and 1980 figures were also externally derived for the opposite reason: the age group in question went through its child-bearing years during the peak of the baby boom, so that using data from this cohort would bias the results upward.

TIMING RESULTS

Table 2 presents the quartiles for the timing of the non-familial transitions by gender, as well as the interquartile range which represents how long it took the middle 50% to complete a transition. The age at entering school dropped consistently in each census year after 1900; by 1980 the median age at entering school is almost two years earlier than in 1900. The great rise in prevalence between 1900 and 1940 and the simultaneous drop in interquartile range suggest that these changes are a result of increased institutional standards of school attendance. As we would expect, the age at leaving school rose in each census year until 1970, then dropped slightly over the next decade. With the rise in college attendance after the war and the increase of the median age of leaving school, one might expect that the time it took a cohort to complete this transition might also have grown significantly. However, the range is surprisingly constant over the years, though women in 1970 passed through this transition more quickly than in any other year. The latter effect may be due to an increasing proportion of women completing high school, but a smaller proportion (than men) continued with college. This explanation is suggested by the fact that in 1970 the chief difference in range between the genders is at the third quartile, whereas in 1980 the timing of leav-

Table 1
Prevalence Percentage of Early Life-Course Transitions by Gender
Synthetic Cohorts 1900, 1910, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980

	1900	1910	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
<i>MALES</i>							
Attend School	76.5	88.4	92.6	95.5	96.3	96.3	99.0
Enter Workforce	96.7	98.0	95.6	95.5	95.6	97.9	96.3
Full Time Employment	—	—	75.4	86.4	85.0	81.1	85.1
Leave Household of Origin	97.7	99.5	95.5	96.2	98.0	98.6	96.6
First Marriage	91.6	89.7	86.4	92.0	92.7	95.7	95.0
Establish Own Household	90.2	86.6	89.1	85.7	93.5	94.7	95.3
N	8206 ^a	15585	5780	7014	4251	4800	12672
N (school 1950) ^b	—	—	—	1312	—	—	—
<i>FEMALES</i>							
Attend School	77.3	89.0	93.7	97.1	97.8	96.0	98.7
Enter Workforce	31.8	39.2	43.6	42.7	83.7	88.8	89.5
Leave Household of Origin	97.6	99.4	97.0	96.0	98.8	97.3	97.1
First Marriage	92.0	91.0	89.3	92.3	90.9	94.0	96.0
Establish Own Household	88.3	85.6	84.4	88.0	93.8	95.3	95.9
First Child	80.2	85.9	77.9	86.6 ^c	86.8 ^d	83.4 ^e	82.3 ^f
N	8167	15559	5937	7057	4305	4938	13550
N (school 1950) ^b	—	—	1286	—	—	—	—
N (first child) ^g	5015	6570	580	1558	2972	3668	10494

^aN's indicate the total number in the synthetic cohort from which prevalence, median, and quartiles are calculated.

^bSchool enrollment is only on the sample line in 1950.

^cPrevalence is mean of children ever born of women age 35-44 in 1970 sample.

^dSource: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1987. Current Population Reports. *Fertility of American Women: June 1986*. Percent childless, women 40-44.

^e*Ibid.*, women 35-39.

^fSource: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1989. Current Population Reports. *Fertility of American Women: June 1988*. Percent childless, women 35-39.

^gN's for first child are for married women age 14 or older.

ing school was nearly identical for males and females.

With increased number of years spent in school, one would expect that the age at which males began to work would also rise. This was the case for full-time employment,

in connection with which timing and changes in timing correspond very closely to the timing of leaving school. However, in the "enter workforce" variable, which includes part-time employment, there was a significant rise in the median and a narrowing of inter-

Table 2

Quartiles and Interquartile Range of Non-Familial Transitions by Gender Indirect Method Synthetic Cohorts 1900, 1910, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980

The first entry in each cell shows the 25th percentile, the second entry shows the median, and the third entry shows the 75th percentile. The offset entry shows the interquartile range.

	1900	1910	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
<i>MALES</i>							
Enter School	4.7	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.6	3.1
	7.0 5.0	5.9 3.7	5.6 3.3	5.5 3.1	5.4 2.9	5.0 2.9	4.6 3.1
	9.7	7.9	7.3	7.1	6.9	6.5	6.2
Leave School	14.6	14.8	15.7	17.3	16.9	17.9	17.7
	16.7 5.1	17.0 5.2	18.6 5.2	19.9 5.1	19.6 5.2	20.5 5.9	20.0 4.7
	19.7	20.0	20.9	22.4	22.1	23.8	22.4
Enter Work-force	12.5	13.0	16.0	15.2	14.5	14.3	14.6
	15.2 5.8	15.5 5.5	18.8 5.2	18.3 6.2	17.0 6.5	16.5 6.1	16.8 5.2
	18.3	18.5	21.4	21.0	20.4	20.4	19.8
Full Time Employment	—	—	17.0	17.3	18.4	18.6	18.2
	—	—	19.7 5.1	19.9 5.0	20.9 6.6	21.4 6.1	20.6 5.7
	—	—	22.1	22.3	25.0	24.7	23.9
<i>FEMALES</i>							
Enter School	4.6	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.6	3.1
	6.8 4.9	6.0 3.9	5.6 3.2	5.6 3.2	5.5 2.9	5.1 2.9	4.7 3.1
	9.5	8.1	7.1	7.2	6.9	6.5	6.2
Leave School	14.7	15.0	15.8	15.9	16.6	17.8	17.6
	17.0 5.1	17.5 5.3	18.6 5.0	18.7 5.1	19.2 4.8	20.1 4.0	19.9 4.7
	19.8	20.3	20.8	21.0	21.4	21.8	22.3

quartile range between 1910 and 1940, perhaps a result of the high unemployment of the depression and the child labor legislation of the 1930s. After 1940 the age of entering the workforce dropped in each census year until 1970, and the range continued to narrow until 1980. This was a result of changes in the relationship between school and work; 1940 was the only year in which more young people left school before having an occupation, whereas by 1980 many more students were working as they attended school. Changes in the relationship of these two statuses will be discussed later.

Table 3 presents the results for the familial transitions. Each of these transitions occurred earlier and were more age-graded in

the later years. Although significant changes in interquartile range occurred between 1900 and 1940, the most significant changes in the median ages for the familial transitions came during the post-war period. And in 1980 we clearly see a reversal of the long-term trend toward increased uniformity of behavior, as the median age and range for all four transitions began to rise (or continued to rise in the case of first child).

The first two quartiles of the age at leaving household of origin for males grew by about a year between 1900 and 1910, then held steady until 1940, except at the third quartile which grew significantly in 1910 and settled back to its 1900 level by 1940. After 1940, however, the timing of leaving

Table 3
 Quartiles and Interquartile Range of Familial Transitions by Gender Indirect Method
 Synthetic Cohorts 1900, 1910, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980

<i>The first entry in each cell shows the 25th percentile, the second entry shows the median, and the third entry shows the 75th percentile. The offset entry shows the interquartile range.</i>														
	1900	1910	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980							
<i>MALES</i>														
Leave Household of Origin	18.9	20.2	20.1	18.4	18.2	18.3	18.5							
	23.2	9.2	24.4	11.1	24.1	7.9	21.7	7.8	21.0	7.3	20.8	6.5	21.2	6.7
	28.1	30.2	28.0	26.2	25.5	24.8	25.2							
First Marriage	22.7	21.7	21.9	19.7	20.0	20.0	20.9							
	25.7	7.5	25.2	8.0	25.0	6.7	22.5	6.4	23.3	6.5	23.1	6.2	24.6	7.7
	30.2	29.7	28.6	26.1	26.5	26.2	28.6							
Establish Own Household	22.8	22.1	23.1	20.8	20.5	20.1	20.2							
	26.1	8.3	25.5	9.2	26.0	8.1	24.0	6.2	23.9	6.7	22.9	6.2	23.3	6.5
	31.1	31.3	31.2	27.0	27.2	26.3	26.7							
<i>FEMALES</i>														
Leave Household of Origin	17.8	18.8	18.5	17.3	17.6	17.5	18.0							
	21.5	9.4	22.4	12.1	21.3	7.9	20.2	6.8	20.2	5.5	20.0	5.1	20.2	4.5
	27.2	28.0	26.4	24.1	23.1	22.6	22.5							
First Marriage	19.2	18.9	19.7	17.6	18.5	18.8	19.4							
	22.1	7.4	21.9	7.3	21.9	4.5	20.0	4.7	20.1	4.4	20.7	4.8	22.2	6.7
	26.6	26.2	24.2	22.3	22.9	23.6	26.1							
Establish Own Household	19.5	19.4	19.5	18.7	18.7	18.8	19.2							
	22.9	8.7	22.6	7.5	22.3	7.4	21.2	6.1	20.9	5.3	21.0	5.5	21.5	5.8
	28.2	26.9	26.9	24.8	24.0	24.3	25.0							
First Child	19.9	20.0	20.0	18.9	18.5	19.3	19.9							
	23.5	8.9	23.5	9.7	24.0	8.7	22.2	8.1	20.8	5.4	22.8	6.3	23.7	7.4
	28.8	29.7	28.7	27.0	23.9	25.6	27.3							

home dropped dramatically, particularly in the upper two quartiles, and continued to its low point in 1970. This trend may again be related to the growth in college attendance, as growing numbers left home while still attending school. Between 1970 and 1980 the timing at each quartile increased slightly for males. For women, the decline in the interquartile range in age at leaving home is even more pronounced, though timing remains constant between 1970 and 1980.

The timing of first marriage became more age-graded for both genders. For males the greatest change of interquartile range occurred between 1900 and 1940 as the top

quartile began marrying earlier. After 1940 marriage age decreased to its low point in 1950, then increased slightly in each of the next census years. But between 1970 and 1980 the pace of this increase accelerated, as young people married significantly later and in a much less age-graded fashion than they did a decade earlier. Modell, Furstenberg, and Strong (1978), who found little change in the timing of marriage before 1940, speculated that the drop in marriage age came partially as a result of the more prosperous post-war economy. This argument could be extended to the changes that took place during the 1970s; as the economy ceased expan-

sion and young people faced more uncertain economic prospects, they chose to delay both marriage and the establishing of their own households.

The timing of the latter transition did not change significantly until after the Second World War. In 1950 young people at each percentile became household heads earlier and the interquartile range was almost two years narrower than a decade earlier. Timing remained relatively constant over the next twenty years, as the influence of the rise in marriage age was counterbalanced by the decline in the age of leaving home. Between 1970 and 1980, however, this transition was driven up by increases in *both* marriage age and the age of leaving home.

The final transition—bearing of first child—also shows interesting changes in timing, with 1960 women experiencing this event much earlier and in a more age-graded fashion than in any other year. In each of the subsequent census years, however, women bore their first child later and in a less age-graded fashion, a result of both the delay of marriage and of the entry of women into the workplace.

Figures 1 and 2 present graphically the median and interquartile range of each step in the transition to adulthood for each census year. Figure 1 displays the results for males, with each set of lines arranged from the top as follows: leaving school, entering workforce, full-time employment (except 1900), leaving household of origin, first marriage, and establishing own household. For females there are no work variables and bearing the first child is the last entry in each set. These figures show how the entire process shortened considerably between 1900 and 1970, resulting in a great degree of overlap in the ranges in the later years. Although all of the transitions became more compressed, the relationship between the timing of leaving school and leaving home has been transformed greatly. Also of interest is how the difference between the age at leaving school

and entering the workforce grew in each year after 1940. If one ignores entering the workforce, there is even greater age congruity between transitions in the later years. In 1980, however, the clustering of life-course transitions evident in 1960 and 1970 had begun to diminish, primarily because young people were marrying and having children much later.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TRANSITIONS

Since no transition takes place in a vacuum but is affected by previous transitions, it is important to study the relationships between pairs of transitions. Three significant topics that can be addressed are the order in which a cohort completes a sequence of transitions, whether completing one transition makes another more or less likely, and whether two statuses can be occupied simultaneously (as mentioned earlier in the relationship between school and work).

Table 4 presents the percentages of each gender, age 15 to 34, who have completed one of a pair of transitions but not both. A shrinking percentage over time indicates increased congruity. That is, as a percentage approaches zero, the closer the two transitions are to occurring simultaneously and the less compatible become a pair of statuses. From the table we can see that in most cases the percentage decreases over time, indicating increased age congruity. It is interesting that of the five exceptions to this trend (leave school/work, leave home/first child, leave home/marriage, first marriage/headship, headship/children), none consisted of mixed familial and non-familial transitions. The mixed pairs consistently became more age-congruous over time, suggesting perhaps that changes in school attendance and workforce participation affected changes in the timing of the familial transitions.

These percentages were then broken down to establish the order in which pairs of transi-

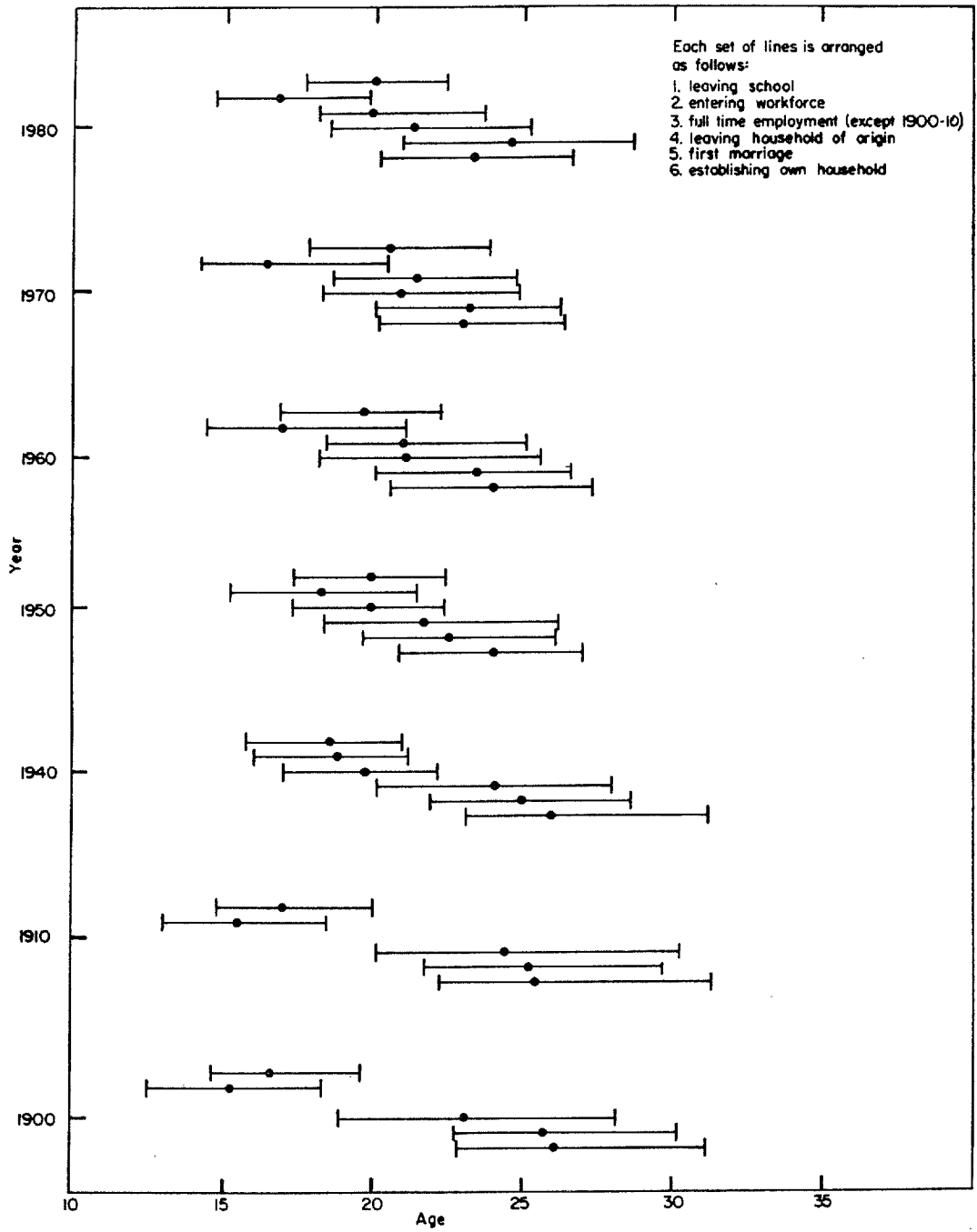


Figure 1. Quartiles of the age of leaving school, entering workforce, full-time employment, leaving household of origin, first marriage, and establishing own household for males.

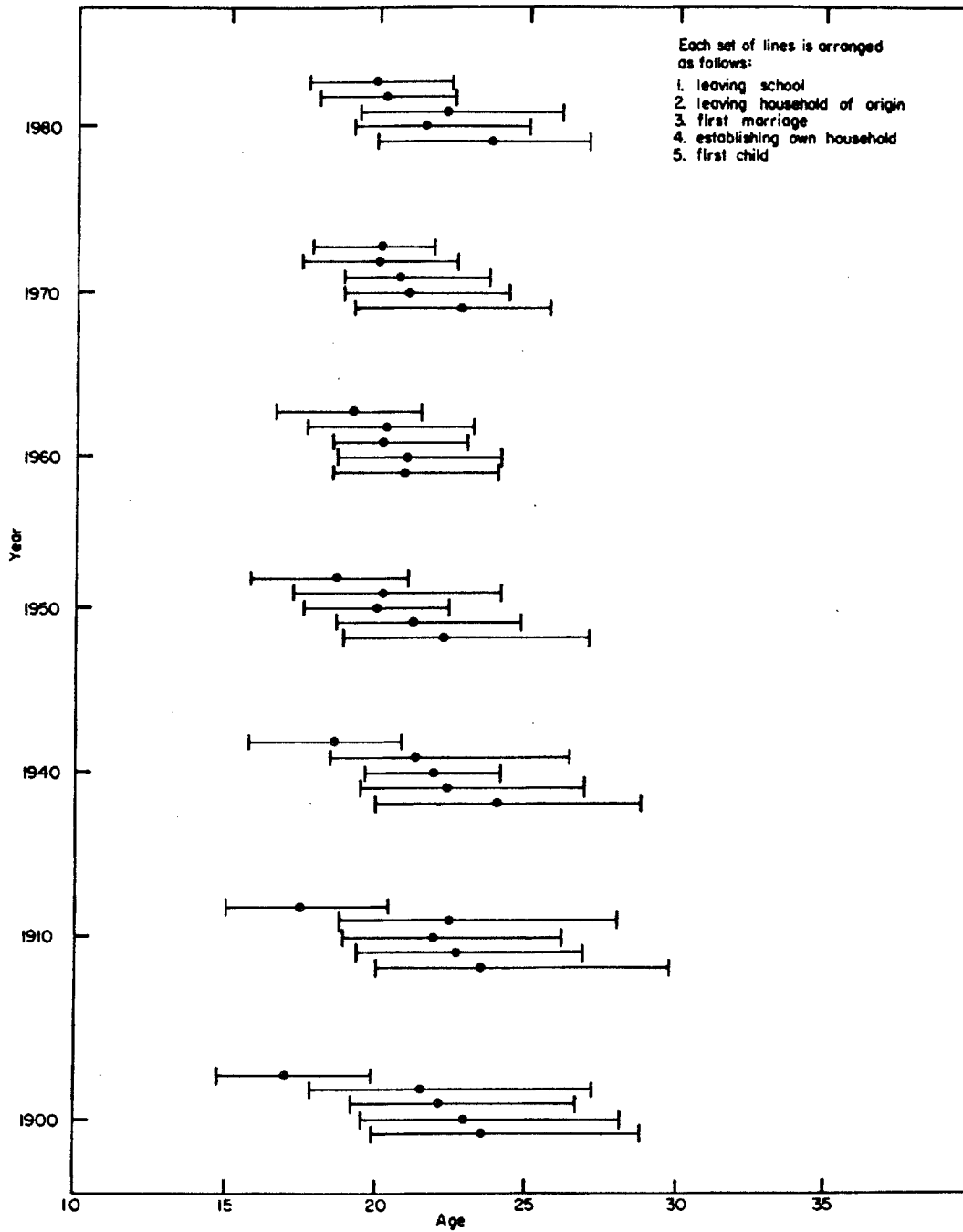


Figure 2. Quartiles of the age at leaving school, leaving household of origin, first marriage, establishing own household, and first child for females.

Table 4
 Percentage Completed One of a Pair of Transitions but not Both Ages 15–34
 Synthetic Cohorts for 1900, 1940, and 1980

	MALE			FEMALE		
	1900	1940	1980	1900	1940	1980
Leave School/Workforce	9.2	10.5	23.2	—	—	—
Leave School/Leave Home	38.3	35.4	24.4	32.3	26.6	21.3
Leave School/Marriage	53.0	44.4	33.7	39.3	30.8	26.6
Leave School/Headship	55.0	48.3	30.7	44.0	36.8	25.0
Leave School/First Child	—	—	—	50.1	43.3	35.4
Workforce/Leave Home	39.9	34.6	30.0	—	—	—
Workforce/Marriage	51.7	39.8	43.1	—	—	—
Workforce/Headship	53.3	42.2	37.4	—	—	—
Workforce/First Child	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leave Home/Marriage	22.4	18.7	23.1	17.7	16.2	20.0
Leave Home/Headship	21.5	20.4	14.5	16.9	15.9	12.2
Leave Home/First Child	—	—	—	26.1	28.4	32.3
Marriage/Headship	7.3	7.7	13.6	6.9	7.9	13.6
Headship/First Child	—	—	—	13.4	17.9	24.6
N	1538	2093	4495	1545	2139	4543
N (women on sample line) ^a	—	—	—	—	201	—

^aThe variable "children ever born" is available only in sample line questions for 1940; this smaller N applies to the pairs including the birth of first child for this year.

tions were experienced. The results of several of these are presented in Table 5. In the first panel are the results of the school/workforce relationship mentioned earlier. The data here indicate that whereas in 1900 most males left school before beginning work, in 1980 the opposite was true; of those having completed only one of the transitions, almost 3 of 4 had worked before leaving school.

For most of the other pairs of transitions the order remains as we would expect it through the years: in general, young people leave school before marriage, headship, and childbearing; males enter the workforce before any of the familial transitions; and both genders leave their households of origin before embarking on the other familial transitions. For instance, in Table 5b we see an example of a pair of transitions whose order has become more prescribed and rigid since 1900. This indicates that young people were more often single with no parents present and less often married with parents present in 1980 than in 1900.

There are, however, some pairs whose order became less clear through the years. An example of this is given in Table 5c. In 1900 both genders clearly were leaving school before leaving home. By 1980 this pattern had evened out to a certain extent as a result of a growing proportion of young people leaving home to attend college. In Table 5d, although the congruity for first marriage and headship is quite high throughout the period, the order has reversed. In 1900 one was more likely to be married and not household head than to be never-married and head. By 1980 the opposite was true, an indication of the rise of the primary individual (See Kobrin 1973, 1976a, 1976b; Ruggles 1988).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

My results support the assertion of previous scholarship that the youth of the second half of the twentieth century followed a more prescribed schedule of transitions than did its

Table 5
 Percentage of Those Completed One Transition by Sequence Status
 Age 15–34 for 1900, 1940, and 1980

	<i>MALE</i>			<i>FEMALE</i>		
	<i>1900</i>	<i>1940</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1900</i>	<i>1940</i>	<i>1980</i>
A. Leaving School—Entering Workforce						
Not in School/Not Occupation	70.2	78.5	27.9	—	—	—
In School/Occupation	29.8	21.5	72.1	—	—	—
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	—	—	—
N	141	219	1042	—	—	—
B. Leaving Household of Origin—First Marriage						
Left Home/Never Married	86.0	84.2	90.8	77.7	73.4	85.9
At Home/Ever Married	14.0	15.8	9.2	22.3	26.6	14.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	344	392	1040	273	346	910
C. Leaving School—Leaving Household of Origin						
Not in School/Parent Present	97.6	92.7	70.2	95.4	93.1	61.6
In School/No Parent Present	2.4	7.3	29.8	4.6	6.9	38.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	589	740	1097	500	668	969
D. First Marriage—Establishing Own Household						
Ever Married/Not Head	63.7	78.4	31.2	83.2	88.2	38.0
Never Married/Head	36.3	21.6	68.7	16.8	11.8	62.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	113	165	614	107	169	621

predecessors. Young people left school and began full-time employment later, and it took them longer to complete these two events. But the familial transitions in the later years all took place earlier and were more age-graded than in 1900, although a reversal of this long term trend is clearly evident by 1980. My examination of the relationship between pairs of transitions also confirms that most have become more congruous, and, with a few exceptions, their

order has remained as we would expect. Instead of facing a more uncertain, protracted period of adolescence and early adulthood, the youth of the 1960s and 1970s faced a much stricter and more age-determined passage to adulthood. These changes did not, however, occur solely at the turn of the century (Hareven 1987) or solely after the Second World War (Modell, Furstenberg, and Strong 1978). Significant changes in the interquartile range for the familial transitions

and in the congruity of pairs of transitions occurred between 1910 and 1940. However, it was not until after the Second World War that the most dramatic drop in the age of these transitions took place. The post-war period was characterized by an early transition to adulthood with less deviation from timing norms. By the end of the 1970s new trends emerged as young people, faced with more uncertain economic prospects, delayed the familial transitions and made the transition to adulthood with less uniformity.

The timing of this transformation has prompted speculations regarding its causes. Focusing on the post-war period, Modell and his colleagues (1978) pointed toward increased age-grading in education, the entrance of women into the workforce, and institutional innovations, such as Social Security and the G.I. Bill, which freed young people from barriers that earlier may have slowed down the schedule of transitions. This produces the somewhat paradoxical proposition that when young people have a choice, they choose to behave like each other. Winsborough (1978) also hypothesized about the influence of the military draft or the threat of it; he speculated that the likelihood of interruption of one's life by military service applied pressure to complete transitions earlier. He predicted that with the draft gone the duration of the early life course transitions would increase, an hypothesis validated by the changes between 1970 and 1980. And, as I have mentioned, there is speculation that these changes are a reflection of the post-war boom economy and the economic uncertainty of the 1970s.

Another possibility is that these changes are a function of the homogenization of class, regional, ethnic, racial, and urban/rural differences over time (Modell, Furstenberg, and Herschberg 1976). Differences among such subgroups have been found in a study of Providence, Rhode Island, between 1865 and 1900 (Chudacoff 1980) and in a

study of white and non-white female birth cohorts from 1890 and 1934 (Uhlenberg 1974). Tamara Hareven (1977) has claimed that the native-American white middle class was the first to adopt the "middle-class family type" of the twentieth century, while the working class, ethnic groups, and rural and small town groups lagged behind, infusing traditional patterns into an increasingly homogenized society. In Massachusetts, ethnic culture was found to affect how children made their transitions to adulthood, but gradual adoption of white middle-class American norms by these immigrants and by the working class helped to increase uniformity (Modell and Hareven 1978). In addition, a study of nineteenth-century urban family expenditures indicated that as Irish immigrants took on American ways of life, they adjusted their family strategies and timing patterns to meet the American norm (Modell 1978).

To examine a portion of this hypothesis I have broken down mean years lived before age 35 in school and in household of origin by occupational class, region, and race.⁴ The technique is analogous to the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM). This is an estimate of the mean number of years lived by a cohort before first marriage. It is calculated as the sum of the proportion single in successive age groups. The assumption behind this measure is that the change in the proportion single from one age to the next is a measure of the proportion of a cohort who married at that age. Although SMAM has the disadvantage that it may not be accurate for any particular group because it is a summary of all age groups in a census year it is preferable here because it can be used with fewer cases than with the indirect method and it incorporates deviance from the center into one number. It is also helpful in comparing the two-way transitions like women's work, as mentioned earlier (for a discussion of SMAM see Shyrock, Siegel et al. 1973, pp. 295-296).

Table 6 presents the results of this analy-

Table 6

Mean Years Lived before Age 35 in School and Household of Origin by Class, Region, Race, and Gender: Synthetic Cohort for 1900, 1980

	MALE				FEMALE			
	1900	1980	N	N	1900	1980	N	N
A. IN SCHOOL								
Occupational Class								
White Collar	9.9	17.7	341	2438	9.2	17.2	408	2714
Skilled Labor	7.9	14.8	633	2264	9.3	14.7	633	1942
Unskilled Labor	5.6	16.6	661	861	5.6	16.1	672	958
Ag. Proprietor	8.2	13.8	1221	138	7.9	14.3	1204	125
Region								
East	8.1	17.4	734	778	8.8	15.3	757	751
North Central	9.1	15.7	1002	1038	9.4	15.8	1068	1054
South	6.3	15.8	1129	1345	6.0	16.2	1171	1304
West	—	16.3	122	758	—	16.4	117	717
Race								
White	8.5	16.5	1973	3244	8.3	16.4	2077	3156
Black	4.3	16.2	2543	512	5.0	16.5	2549	516
B. IN HOUSEHOLD OF ORIGIN								
Occupational Class								
White Collar	24.1	22.3	341	2438	23.4	20.6	408	2714
Skilled Labor	22.9	22.1	633	2264	22.4	20.8	633	1942
Unskilled Labor	19.1	21.2	661	861	19.6	20.0	672	958
Ag. Proprietor	25.6	24.9	1221	138	22.8	21.4	1204	125
Region								
East	23.9	22.8	734	778	23.0	21.3	757	751
North Central	23.3	21.3	1002	1038	22.9	20.1	1068	1054
South	22.3	21.3	1129	1345	20.8	20.3	1171	1304
West	—	20.3	122	758	—	19.4	117	717
Race								
White	23.0	21.6	1973	3244	21.4	20.9	2077	3156
Black	20.1	20.2	2543	512	19.3	20.8	2549	516

sis.⁵ For all population subgroups, years in school increased dramatically between 1900 and 1980, but the differences between subgroups declined, particularly for the women. This homogenization of experience is even more apparent for mean years in household of origin. Excluding farmers, whose numbers by 1980 are insignificant, class differences of almost five years in 1900 virtually disappeared by 1980 for males. For women, again, homogenization is even more remarkable.

These results confirm that in these transitions behavior among subgroups has indeed become more homogenous over the course of the century. One can view this as a result of institutional factors like Social Security and the G.I. Bill eliminating constraints that may have affected these groups in different degrees. The results also suggest that post-war growth in the economy may also have loosened constraints, allowing more young people freedom to choose when to experience a transition, although, interestingly,

young people seem to have chosen to act more homogeneously. The disappearance of the agricultural proprietor may also have played an important role, as the country moved from an agricultural society where young men from farm families were the last to leave home, to an urban society in which all occupational classes experience this transition at the same time. This issue is worthy of further study, as is the issue of the "Americanization" of immigrants and second-generation ethnics. It would be most interesting to trace the decline in ethnic differences through the years, though this is impossible until we can bridge the datagap between 1910 and 1940. However, we can reasonably assume that the same forces that resulted in a younger transition to adulthood, a more rigid timing schedule, and increased uniformity among subgroups also would have resulted in increased homogeneity between ethnic groups and the native population through time.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed description of this method see Shyrock, Siegel, et al. (1973). The indirect method using synthetic cohorts is based on the assumption that once in a status, one remains in that status. When this assumption is violated, there is potential for biased results in the non-retrospective transitions (school, work, leaving home, and headship). For example, in the case of women working one would expect that both the prevalence and the percent working at any given age would be lower than the percent who had ever worked. Moreover, one would expect that the older the woman, the greater would be the difference between ever-worked and currently working. This could lead to a downward bias in medians and quartiles, as well as in prevalence. The problem is not too serious for transitions that are "one-way" in the great majority of the cases (e.g., leaving home or male work) but could be very serious for women's work. For this reason and because of the low prevalence percentages before 1960, the workforce transitions for women are left out.

2. The age at first marriage for females is an exception, for which I used interpolation by single year because the values for this transition seemed to progress in a more linear fashion within a single year of age than did the other transitions. I used linear interpolation by five-year age groups for all of the others.

3. Although the "enter workforce" variable will lead to younger ages than full-time work, it is used because the definition is uniform across all census years, and because the timing of full-time employment is so closely related to leaving school that they almost measure the same thing. In addition, this variable comes closer to the desired variable of "ever worked" than does full-time employment, which is subject to differences in unemployment at the time of each census.

4. Because of the changing definitions of urban and rural between census years, analysis of this factor is not included. Ethnicity is not tested because of the lack of sufficient second-generation cases after 1900. Immigrants have been excluded from the analyses because they may have been atypical individuals, and because the act of immigrating may have influenced when they experienced the early life transitions. Social class is determined by the occupation of the household head. If no occupation is given and the individual's father is present, the father's occupation is used. If the father has no occupation given and the mother is present, her occupation is used.

5. The unusually large N's for blacks in 1900 are derived from an extract sample.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank the Social History Research Laboratory at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, for help in the preparation of this study.

REFERENCES

- Ariés, Philippe. 1962. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. New York: Vintage.
- Berger, Bennett M. 1971. *Looking For America: Essays on Youth, and Suburbia, and Other American Obsessions*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

- Chudacoff, Howard P. 1980. "The Life Course of Women: Age and Age Consciousness, 1865–1915." *Journal of Family History* 5:274–292.
- Coleman, James S. 1961. *The Adolescent Society*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Demos, John. 1978. "Infancy and Childhood in the Plymouth Colony." Pp. 180–191 in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, edited by Michael Gordon. Second Edition. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Demos, John. 1986. "The Rise and Fall of Adolescence." Pp. 92–113 in *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and Life Course in American History*, edited by XXX. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Demos, John, and Virginia Demos. 1969. "Adolescence in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 31:632–638.
- Elder, Glenn H., Jr. 1974. *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1981. "Scarcity and Prosperity in Post-war Childbearing: Explorations from a Life Course Perspective." *Journal of Family History* 6:410–433.
- Flacks, Richard. 1971. *Youth and Social Change*. Chicago: Markham.
- Graham, S.N. 1979. *1900 Public Use Sample: User's Handbook*. Seattle.
- Hareven, Tamara K. 1977. "Family Time and Historical Time." *Daedalus* 106:57–70.
- . 1987. "Historical Analysis of the Family." In *Handbook of Marriage and Family*, edited by Marvin B. Sussman and Suzanne K. Steinmetz. New York: Plenum Press.
- Hogan, Dennis P. 1981. *Transitions and Social Change: The Early Lives of American Men*. New York: Academic Press.
- Katz, Michael B. 1975. *The People of Hamilton, Canada West*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Katz, Michael B., and Ian E. Davey. 1978. "Youth and Industrialization in a Canadian City." In *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family*, edited by John Demos and Sarane Spence Boocock. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Keniston, Kenneth. 1972. "Youth: a 'New' Stage of Life." In *The Prospect of Youth*. Edited by Thomas J. Cottle. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Kett, Joseph. 1971. "Growing up in Rural New England, 1800–1840." Pp. 1–16 in *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth Century Social History*, edited by Tamara K. Hareven. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- . 1973. "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth Century America." Pp. 000–000 in *The Family in History*, edited by Theodore K. Rabb and Robert I. Rotberg. New York: Harper and Row.
- . 1977. *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kobrin, Francis E. 1973. "Household headship and its changes in the United States, 1940–1960." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 68:793–800.
- . 1976a. "The primary individual and the family: changes in living arrangements in the United States since 1940." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 38:233–249.
- . 1976b. "The fall in household size and the rise of the primary individual in the United States." *Demography* 13:127–138.
- Marini, Margaret Mooney. 1984. "Age and Sequencing Norms in the Transition to Adulthood." *Social Forces* 63:229–244.
- . 1987. "Measuring the Process of Role Change during the Transition to Adulthood." *Social Science Research* 16:1–38.
- Modell, John. 1978. "Patterns of Consumption, Acculturation, and Family Income Strategy in Late-Nineteenth-Century America." Pp. 206–240 in *Family and Population in Nineteenth Century America*, edited by Tamara K. Hareven and Maris Vinovskis. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 1980. "Normative Aspects of American Marriage Timing Since World War II." *Journal of Family History* 5:210–234.
- Modell, John, and Tamara K. Hareven. 1978. "Transitions: Patterns of Timing." In *Transitions: The Family and Life Course in Historical Perspective*, edited by Tamara K. Hareven. New York: Academic Press.
- Modell, John, Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and Theodore Hershberg. 1976. "Social Change and Transitions to Adulthood in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Family History* 1:7–32.
- Modell, John, Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and

- Douglas Strong. 1978. "The Timing of Marriage in the Transition to Adulthood: Continuity and Change, 1860-1975." In *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family*, edited by John Demos and Sarane Spence Boocock. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Musgrave, F. 1965. *Youth and the Social Order*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee. 1974. *Transition to Adulthood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ruggles, Steven. 1988. "The Demography of the Unrelated Individual." *Demography* 25:521-536.
- Shyrock, Henry S., Jacob S. Siegel, et al. 1973. *The Methods and Materials of Demography*. 2nd Edition, rev. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- Strong, Michael A. 1989. *User's Guide: Public Use Sample, 1910 United States Census of the Population*. Philadelphia: Publisher.
- Uhlenberg, Peter. 1974. "Cohort Variations in Family Life Cycle Experiences of U.S. Females." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 36:284-292.
- _____. 1978. "Changing Configurations of the Life Course." In *Transitions: The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective*, edited by Tamara K. Hareven. New York: Academic Press.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1972. *Public Use Samples of Basic Records from the 1970 Census: Description and Technical Documentation*. Washington, D.C.
- _____. 1973. *Technical Documentation for the 1960 Public Use Sample*. Washington, D.C.
- _____. 1984a. *Census of the Population, 1940: Public Use Microdata Sample Technical Documentation*. Washington, D.C.
- _____. 1984b. *Census of the Population, 1950: Public Use Microdata Sample Technical Documentation*. Washington, D.C.
- _____. 1987. Current Population Reports. Series P-20, No. 421. *Fertility of American Women: June 1986*. Washington, D.C.
- _____. 1989. Current Population Reports. Series P-20, No. 436. *Fertility of American Women: June 1988*. Washington, D.C.
- Winsborough, Halliman H. 1978. "Statistical Histories of the Life Cycle of Birth Cohorts: The Transition from Schoolboy to Adult Male." In *Social Demography*, edited by K. E. Taeuber, L. L. Bumpass, and J. A. Sweet. New York: Academic Press.
- _____. 1979. "Changes in the Transition to Adulthood." Pp. 137-152 in *Aging from Birth to Death: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Matilda White Riley. Boulder, Colorado: Westwood Press.