

# 6 AGGREGATE-LEVEL BIOGRAPHICAL OUTCOMES FOR GAY AND LESBIAN MOVEMENTS

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As social change occurs, individuals' lives are altered. Whether produced by social movements or other forces, social change can affect the demography, life-course, and life chances of participants or of populations as a whole (Goldstone and McAdam 2001). Most empirical and conceptual work on how social movements affect biography focuses on effects on movement participants, who experience a range of lasting effects, as the introduction to this section describes. Movements can also shape biographical outcomes for the larger population, or for certain cohorts or demographics, what Guigni and McAdam (Goldstone and McAdam 2001; Guigni 2004; McAdam 1999) term "aggregate biographical outcomes." There has been little research on aggregate-level biographical outcomes. Existing work suggests that they vary according to cohort location, spreading from activists to the general population over time, as activists develop "alternative conceptions of the life-course and related behavioral norms," which then spread to subcultural locations such as college campuses, and finally diffuse to youth in general (Goldstone and McAdam 2001). Such life-course outcomes are generational; cohorts that have already begun trajectories of education, occupation, marriage, or childbearing are less likely to be affected by new norms. Factors such as gender and class also likely shape aggregate biographical outcomes; that is, social movements affect the life-course of different segments of the population in different ways (Hagan and Hansford-Bowles 2005; Van Dyke et al. 2000). As Guigni (2004) points out, such aggregate biographical outcomes are often unintentional.

In contrast to the previous focus on unintended effects on the general population, I focus on how social movements affect the life-course and biography of movement *beneficiaries*, the group on whose behalf the movement seeks change. Such effects can be intentional, although unintended effects also occur. Many social movements hope to change individuals' lives by opening up education, job, and housing opportunities, and changing how people identify, feel, and interact (Whittier 2009). These effects can occur despite the fact that most members of beneficiary groups (such as women, African Americans, or lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) people) do not participate in activism on their behalf and need not agree or identify with the relevant movement. Beneficiaries are affected in different ways and through different mechanisms than activists themselves. Participants' biographies are shaped by their immersion in activism and movement networks, collective identities, and ideological commitments; beneficiaries' biographies are shaped by movement outcomes. Ongoing participation in activism and lasting political orientation are outcomes for movement veterans, but not for beneficiaries or the general population. In contrast, when a movement successfully targets life-course patterns, as in the women's movement, changes in those patterns (lower marriage rates, later age of marriage, greater women's employment, norms of equity in relationships) are expected in the beneficiary population as a whole (Gerson 2004).

The LGB movement provides a focused case through which to examine aggregate biographical outcomes for beneficiaries. It targeted policy goals directly related to life-course and biography, including employment and housing discrimination (affecting income, occupation, and residence), marriage and domestic partnership, adoption, and child-bearing. Its cultural goals – to change societal views of LGB people and LGB people's own sense of self – are also relevant to aggregate biographical outcomes. Rapid social change around these issues cannot be attributed solely to the movement (but see Fetner 2008; Stone 2012); however, because the changes coincided closely with movement mobilization with no clear alternative drivers, we can assume that the LGB movement accounts for a good measure of them.

Aggregate biographical outcomes are part of the cultural and individual effects of movements. Social movements attempt to produce change in culture and individuals, but these changes are often very hard to track (Rochon 1998; Whittier 2009). As Guigni (2004) points out,

the vast majority of work on biographical outcomes focuses on the United States, the movements of the New Left, and the baby boomer cohort. The aggregate biographical outcomes of the LGB movement are more recent in time and cohort.

The LGB movement emerged in the United States on a large scale in the late 1960s, grew steadily throughout the 1970s, diversified and institutionalized organizationally and in movement communities during the 1980s (partly in response to the AIDS epidemic), and has continued to be vital at organizational, community, and protest levels throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Armstrong 2002; Ghaziani 2008). Substantial change has occurred over time in collective identity (Bernstein 1997; Ghaziani 2011; Taylor and Whittier 1992), the inclusion of women as well as men, bisexual people, and transgender people (Gamson 1995; Ghaziani 2008), tactics (Taylor et al. 2009), goals, and organizational development and institutionalization (Armstrong 2002).

My focus is on the lesbian and gay movement. Despite the inclusion of transgender issues under the acronym “LGBT” and in some movement organizations, the transgender movement and its outcomes proceeded differently and require a distinct analysis (Stone 2009a, 2009b). In contrast, I include bisexuals in “LGB” to recognize that these outcomes affect anyone in a same-sex relationship, regardless of sexual identity. Substantial division exists in the LGB movement over precisely the biographical outcomes under discussion here: whether LGB people ought to seek legal marriage or model relationships differently; whether child-raising, like marriage, represents undesirable assimilation into a mainstream model of family; whether employment in mainstream occupations is desirable; and whether residence in gay enclaves is preferable to residential assimilation. These debates, in general, center around the creation and preservation of a non-normative culture versus assimilation into mainstream culture. These are not simply questions of strategy and ideology, but of life-course.

Consequently, some life-course changes may be similar for activists and beneficiaries as a whole, but many likely differ. For example, continued residence in a gay neighborhood after the mainstreaming of residence patterns may be more likely for movement participants. Identification as “queer” rather than gay or lesbian, or (in the earlier period) as gay or lesbian rather than homosexual or homophile may occur both earlier and to a greater degree among activists versus the general population. Further, the diffusion processes from activists to the

general population differs. Activist and subcultural norms for relationships and life-course focused on critiquing conventional family patterns, while the policy outcomes tended to extend access to conventional family forms of marriage and legal kinship bonds with children, rather than non-nuclear families and chosen kin (Weston 1991).

Despite the debates, many movement outcomes have been policies that extend access to normative marriage, family, employment, and residence. In addition to policy change, two kinds of cultural outcomes affect individuals biographically: changing definitions of LGB collective identity and calls to come out; and increased social tolerance, facilitating coming out and entry into integrated social settings. Data for most arenas are imperfect. The US Census and American Community Survey, the best sources of information on most variables of interest, do not measure sexual identity and thus permit assessment of same-sex couples but not single LGB people. Changes over time in how same-sex couples are enumerated further complicates matters. Because few comprehensive data sources on LGB people exist, the paper draws on multiple sources to piece together life-course patterns; I clarify data sources and limitations throughout where relevant.

I will first assess effects of cultural changes and then move to employment, residence, marriage, and parenting. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the evidence for the expected aggregate biographical outcomes associated with each specific movement outcome.

### **Effects of cultural change on collective identity and coming out**

Collective identity is an important biographical outcome for movement participants. For some movements, including gay and lesbian movements, the production, definition, and diffusion of collective identity is also an important biographical outcome in the larger population (Bernstein 1997; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Gay and lesbian movements sought – and largely succeeded – to encourage individuals to define themselves proudly as gay or lesbian and to “come out,” disclosing their identity publicly. They saw this as a strategy for changing attitudes about homosexuality, and as a change in itself, enabling individuals to shed shame and live openly. Not only the participants adopted these new collective identities and disclosed them publicly, but LGB people in general did it.

Table 6.1 *Summary of aggregate biographical outcomes*

| Movement outcome   | Expected aggregate biographical effect   | Evidence   |
|--|--|--|
| Successful promotion of coming out   | Increased openness about identity  | Polls: more report knowing LGB people;<br>Qualitative work: less closetedness  |
| Cultural change: increased tolerance   | Increased coming out; “post-gay” identities  | Polls: more report knowing LGB people; Ghaziani (2011)   |
| Production of identity terms and definitions                                       | Self-identification (specific terms, meanings, and degree of similarity/difference to heterosexuals) | Ethnographic work on changes and meanings of identity; Ngrams (indirect evidence for changing terms and diffusion to general public) |
| Non-discrimination ordinances (state level);                                       | Decreased wage gap (men); Changing occupational distribution   | Wage gap no lower where there are non-discrimination laws; no evidence re occupation   |
| Employer non-discrimination policies and extension of benefits to partners/spouses | Partner health benefits (direct economic benefit)  | Increased wellbeing and openness about identity where employers offer benefits   |
| Residential non-discrimination ordinances and increased tolerance                  | Residential dispersal from gay enclaves  | Regional: evidence mixed but increased openness over time in conservative areas;<br>City: gay neighborhood to suburb dispersal       |
| Legal marriage/civil union   | Rates of coupling; Rates of marriage; Self-definition as spouses                                     | No evidence about coupling rates; Large increases in rates of self-reporting as spouses; biggest increases where marriage is legal;  |

Table 6.1 (*cont.*)

| Movement outcome   | Expected aggregate biographical effect   | Evidence  |
|--|--|---|
| Second-parent and joint adoption; adoption agencies and fertility treatment open to same-sex couples | Increased parenting rates; Increased parenting by choice, decreased parenting through prior heterosexual relationships; Increased adoption | Also increases in conservative non-marriage states (Definition of relationships changes, not just legal)<br>No evidence for increased parenting rate for lesbians; some evidence for gay men. Probable increase in parenting by choice; Higher adoption/foster rate in liberal states; Increase in adoption over time |

The label and associated meaning of the collective identity produced by LGB movements varies over time, and thus by cohort or generation (Ghaziani 2011; Whittier 1997). A short sampling of identity terms used by lesbian and gay people since the mid-twentieth century exemplifies this: gay, homophile, lesbian, butch, femme, stud, lesbian feminist, gay liberationist, GLBT, queer. The terms carry different meanings about gender, assimilation, sexuality, and commonality with other sexual minorities. “Queer,” for example, implies commonalities of sexuality over gender, in contrast to “lesbian,” which in turn emphasizes similarities between women who are attracted to other women over the differences in sexual practice and gender presentation highlighted by “butch” or “fem.” The identities characterize different periods in the movement and, following the diffusion model, each was first constructed by activists, and later spread to non-participants (Goldstone and McAdam 2001; McAdam 1999). Ultimately, diffusion of identity terms and definitions to the larger culture produces cultural change (Rochon 1998; Whittier 2009). Collective identity has implications for life-course. For example, Ghaziani (2011) suggests that a recent shift toward a “post-gay” collective

identity promotes a sense of commonality with heterosexuals and assimilation into mainstream organizations and life paths, in contrast to earlier eras that stressed cultural uniqueness and solidarity.

One way of tapping changes in identity terms over time is through the Google Books data analysis tool Ngrams. A graph of major identity terms shows the change over time. Figure 6.1 shows the terms, “gay, lesbian, queer, LGBT, and GLBT” from 1970 to 2008.<sup>1</sup>

All the terms except “homosexual” increased during this period, with “gay” and “lesbian” following similar patterns; “queer” began a rise in the early 1990s, “bisexual” peaked briefly in 1995, and the acronyms enjoyed only a small, brief rise in the first decade of the twenty-first century. “Homosexual” was replaced as the dominant term by “gay” and “lesbian” by 1992. The publication of books on LGB topics is an outcome of the movement (see Arthur 2009), as is the growth in these books of terms preferred by activists over “homosexual.”

Publications are one means by which identity terms diffuse to the larger culture where they are available for adoption by non-participants. “Queer,” for example, is commonly adopted as a self-descriptor by college students who encounter it in their course work via “queer theory,” whereas, in earlier cohorts, primarily activists adopted it through the work of the groups Queer Nation and ACT UP. Some individuals now choose “queer” if they want an indeterminate, umbrella term (Ghaziani 2008, 2011; Seidman 2002). By producing, redefining, and promulgating collective identities, activists changed the self-definitions available more broadly.

Declaring identity publicly through the process of *coming out* was understood by many as both activism and personal transformation (Whittier 2012). Movement strategy emphasized coming out, not just for activists but for all LGB people, through events such as National Coming Out Day (which became widespread around 1990). These strategies preceded an increase in disclosure of gay/lesbian identity, although causation is hard to establish. Seidman (2002) documents

<sup>1</sup> The following terms are omitted from the table but did not change results when included: “homosexuality” (tracks closely with “homosexual” but is not an identity label), “LGB,” “GLB,” “lesbian women,” “gay men” (very low frequency and LGB/GLB appear in other contexts). Results from prior to 1970 are excluded because of the use of “gay” to mean happy and “queer” to mean strange; both usages continued after 1970, but an examination of the results shows that they are rare. Results after 2008 are omitted because the database is incomplete and results are thus unstable.

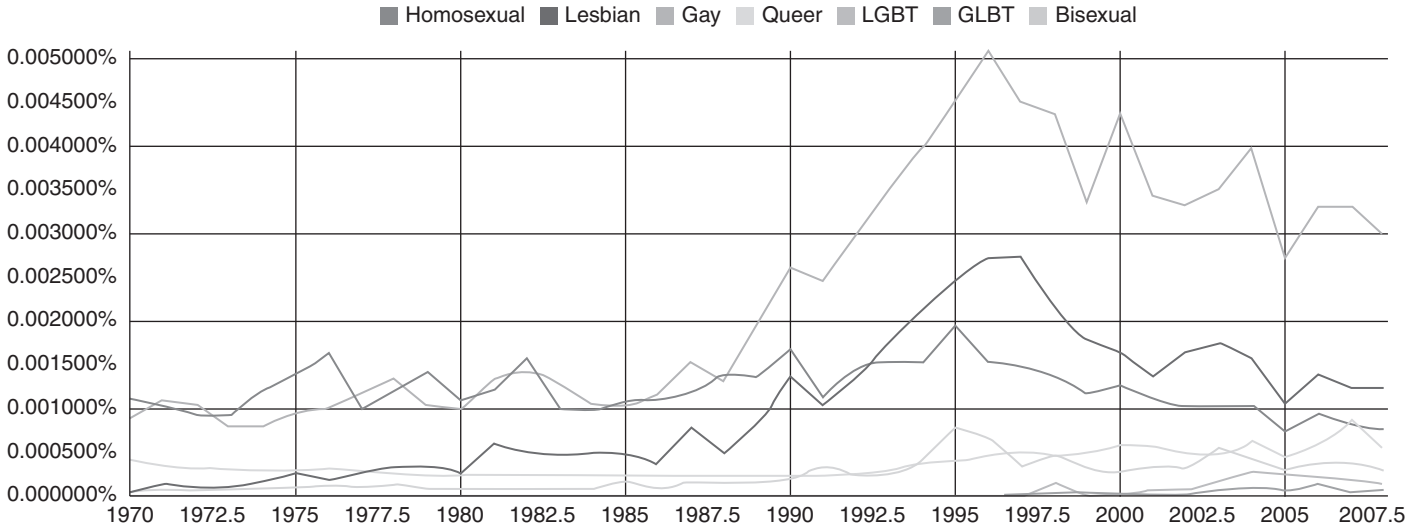


Figure 6.1 Identity terms' relative prevalence in American English-language books, 1970–2008.



increasing openness by LGB people, finding that even people who said they were closeted were out to many people.

Survey data confirm the pattern.<sup>2</sup> Increasing percentages of the US public report knowing someone who is gay or lesbian or having a close friend or family member who is gay or lesbian. Some of this increase is due to greater social integration, but most is due to increased visibility, or coming out. Polls (which use varying wording) show a clear shift from a relatively small number of people who say they know someone who is gay or lesbian to well over half (“Polling Report” 2012; Yang 1997). Prior to the mid-1990s, fewer than one-third of respondents said they knew any gay or lesbian person; by 1998, 59% said they had a family member, close friend, or acquaintance who was gay or lesbian. The number increased to 63% in 2010.

Increased coming out is both a biographical outcome for gay and lesbian people who live their lives more openly and a sign of cultural change more generally. Coming out itself has diverse biographical consequences, ranging from discrimination, rejection or acceptance by family, enhanced sense of personal worth, emotional transformations (from shame to pride), and entry into movement or community institutions (bars, coffee shops, activist organizations) (Seidman 2002). These consequences are conditioned by changes in LBG life more generally. Contact with openly lesbian and gay people is associated with more favorable attitudes toward homosexuality (Lemm 2006). In addition, media visibility of lesbian and gay characters increased during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Some polling suggests that media visibility contributed to increased social tolerance (Brewer 2003; Riggle and Ellis 1996).

Public opinion has shifted steadily in favor of a range of policies related to LGB rights. At the most basic level, the percentage of the US population who say that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex (GSS) are “not wrong at all” fluctuated between 11% and 14% from 1973 to 1991, but then began a steady increase to around 30% by 2002–2006, 36% in 2008, and 41% in 2010 (Smith 2011). Public support

<sup>2</sup> Willingness to disclose on a survey is an indicator of coming out. Representative surveys between 1988 and 1996 found that 1% of women and 2.5% of men identified as gay or lesbian (Gates and Ost 2004). An estimate of the lesbian and gay population based on the 2000 US Census is 2.5–3.8% of men and 1.3–1.9% of women. Comparing these estimates to the proportions found in the nationally representative surveys suggest that 25–50% of women and 0–30% of men did not disclose their identity to the survey-takers.

for same-sex marriage has also increased rapidly, from a low of 10.7% (combined strongly agree and agree) when the question was first asked in 1988 to 30% in 2004, 35% in 2006, 39% in 2008, 46% in 2010, and 54% in 2012 (Burns and Harris 2012; Smith 2011). By 2010, half of people age eighteen to twenty-nine said homosexual behavior is not wrong at all, and 64.2% supported same-sex marriage (Smith 2011), a number that increased to 73% in 2012 (Burns and Harris 2012).<sup>3</sup> These cultural outcomes foster biographical change, encouraging further identity disclosure and collective identities that emphasize similarity to rather than difference from heterosexuals (Ghaziani 2011), migration out of LGB enclaves (Ghaziani 2010), and open relationships and child-raising. Because of the marked cohort differences in attitudes toward homosexuality, it is likely that these life-course patterns are more common among younger LGB people than their older counterparts. In a feedback loop, such life-course changes further the cultural shift.

## **Policy outcomes and the life-course**

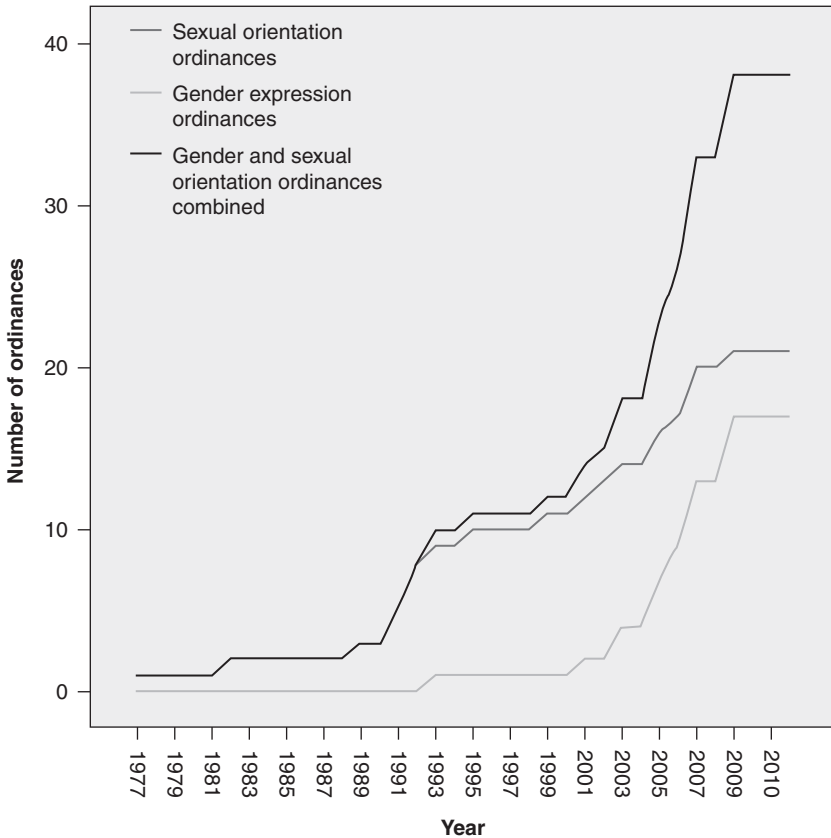
The central elements of the life-course for LGB people have changed over the past twenty to thirty years in direct response to related policy changes. For each arena, I will first describe the policy changes and then examine evidence of related life-course change. This chapter discusses legal and policy change through 2011. Note that the law, especially regarding same-sex marriage, has continued to expand rapidly since then.

### **Anti-discrimination ordinances and outcomes for employment and residential patterns**

The law barring discrimination against LGBT people, non-existent in the United States before the late 1970s, expanded dramatically from the 1990s to the 2010s. Figure 6.2 shows the number of states with anti-discrimination ordinances covering either sexual orientation alone, or sexual orientation and gender expression.

Similar expansion occurred in companies' internal non-discrimination policies and same-sex spousal benefits. Between 2000 and 2003, 75 Fortune 500 companies added domestic partner benefit

<sup>3</sup> The 2012 youngest cohort was eighteen to thirty-four (Burns and Harris 2012).



**Figure 6.2** US state ordinances prohibiting discrimination on sexual orientation and gender expression, by year.

*Source: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2012*

coverage; by 2006, half of Fortune 500 companies provided health benefits to same-sex partners and 86% had non-discrimination policies (Badgett 2008). In 2001, while only 15% of gays and lesbians worked in organizations that offered partner health benefits, 52% were in organizations that welcomed same-sex partners at social events, and only 18% in organizations that did not (Ragins and Cornwell 2007).<sup>4</sup> Women, whites, and the more highly educated were most likely to be in jobs that offered partner benefits, but the differences between groups were not large (Ragins and Cornwell 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Study based on random sample of members of gay, gay Latino, and gay African American organizations, stratified geographically.

Because non-discrimination laws and policies affect access to employment, compensation, and housing, we would expect they might produce changes in employment and occupation, income, and residential patterns. Note, however, that a majority of US states have no such law, meaning that discrimination against LGBT people remains legal; as such, life-course effects are limited.

*Biographical outcomes: employment and income*

Gay men earn less than heterosexual men, with a larger gap relative to married than unmarried heterosexual men. Although some evidence suggests that gay men disproportionately enter lower earning predominantly female occupations, the wage gap is not readily explained by differences in occupation (Badgett and King 1997; Badgett and Frank 2007). In contrast, on average lesbians earn more than or the same as heterosexual women, perhaps because as primary wage earners they work more hours, enter higher-paying gender nonconforming occupations, or are less discriminated against or more closeted than gay men (Badgett and Frank 2007). At the household level, female couples' average household income is similar to that of married heterosexual couples, while male couples' income is about \$10,000/year higher.<sup>5</sup> Among same-sex couples, both partners work fulltime more often than in heterosexual couples, explaining their higher combined income, despite lower individual income (Lofquist 2011).

The evidence about the effects of non-discrimination policy on income is inconclusive. An early study showed that the gay–straight wage gap was no lower in places with non-discrimination laws (Klawitter and Flatt 1998). Badgett and Frank (2007) attribute this to lack of enforcement or insufficient time for non-discrimination law to affect income and occupation. At the employer level, company non-discrimination policies and partner benefits appear to affect identity disclosure and well-being, if not earnings (Badgett 2001). Workers were also more likely to be out at work if they perceived their workplace as supportive, partners were welcome at work events, and co-workers' reactions were good (Badgett 2001; Ragins and Cornwell 2007). Regardless of whether workers were out or not, those whose employers offered health benefits were more

<sup>5</sup> Unmarried heterosexual couples' income is substantially lower than other groups'. Data, 2010 Census.

committed to and happier at their employer, and even more so when their partners were welcome at work events.

In sum, non-discrimination laws and employment policies seem not to have affected income or occupation, except – importantly – through partner benefits, a form of compensation. Cohorts entering the workforce before the late 1990s established work trajectories without benefit of the ordinances, which would have a stronger effect on more recent cohorts, those now around thirty to thirty-five years old. Over time, we may see stronger effects, particularly if a federal anti-discrimination law is passed.

### *Biographical outcomes: residence and housing patterns*

Although housing is covered by non-discrimination ordinances, residential patterns are driven more by other forces. There are two main types of shifts in LGB residence patterns: regional migration, and migration into and out of gay or lesbian neighborhoods. In both cases, we see over time first a concentration, and then a dispersion as discrimination and cultural disapproval decrease. Well-documented migrations to the coasts and port cities occurred following the Second World War, establishing gay enclaves in many major cities (D’Emilio 1998). Following the policy and cultural changes of the 1980s and 1990s, these patterns may be shifting.

Regionally, while most states’ rankings on concentration of same-sex couples remained stable from 1990 to 2006, several states’ rankings increased, notably Utah, Delaware, and New Mexico, none of which is historically gay-friendly (Gates 2007). The larger increases in same-sex couples in some regions is due partly to migration, but regional migration for same-sex couples doesn’t differ substantially from migration patterns for the US population overall (Gates 2007). The apparent increases more likely reflect an increase in residents’ willingness to come out, rather than a true increase in population. Gates (2007) argues that this is why the apparent increase in gay and lesbian population is greatest in conservative areas that historically had “bigger closets,” where more people were closeted in earlier surveys and came out in later ones. This suggests a socially significant change in the individual lives of LGB residents in more conservative regions.

Within cities, LGB residents historically formed gay neighborhoods, often distinguished by gender or ethnicity. These enclaves flourished from the 1960s through the 1990s, but may be diminishing more recently (Ghaziani 2010). Many cities still have consistently high concentrations of lesbian and gay residents, and “nine of the top ten cities in concentration of gay and lesbian couples have remained the same from 1990–2006” (Gates 2007; Gates and Ost 2004). However, in some cities, same-sex couples appear to be moving out of the central city and into the suburbs. Gates (2007) shows that in three metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Detroit) the numbers of same-sex couples dropped in the central city but increased in the larger metropolitan area, suggesting a move to the suburbs.

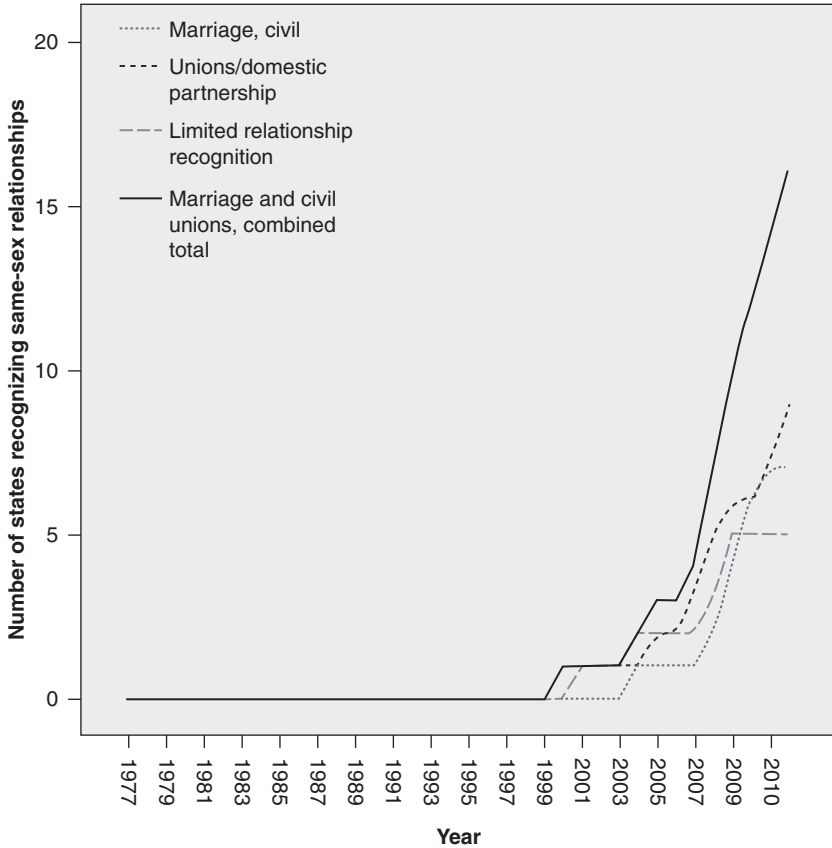
In sum, laws prohibiting discrimination in housing may have promoted some LGB migration out of concentrated neighborhoods, but a more likely driver is increasing social acceptance. Given the persistence of LGB concentration by region and city, the recency of the residential shifts, and the evidence that increased identity disclosure explains some of the apparent change, it is premature to conclude that LGB residential patterns are changing dramatically.

### **Marriage and civil unions**

Marriage, as a legal, social, and financial institution, is an important part of the life-course. Age and rate of marriage decreased for heterosexuals overall as an outcome of the New Left movements (Goldstone and McAdam 2001; Guigni 2004; McAdam 1999). For the LGB population, in contrast, marriage rates have increased because access to legal marriage is an outcome of the movement. Figure 6.3 shows the number of states with various forms of legal recognition for same-sex relationships over time: marriage; civil unions or domestic partnerships granting many of the rights of marriage; and limited forms of relationship recognition such as inheritance or hospital visitation.<sup>6</sup>

The biographical outcomes of interest are rates of coupling, rates of marriage, and whether couples consider themselves spouses regardless of legal status. There is no accurate way to tap changing

<sup>6</sup> Note that the United States does not recognize same-sex marriage at the federal level, nor do most states recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. Numbers will be updated before book goes to press.



**Figure 6.3** US states' legal recognition of same-sex relationships by type and year  
*Source: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2012*

rates of couplehood. The number of same-sex couples who reported themselves on the Census or the American Community Survey increased dramatically between 1990 and 2010, but the increasing numbers of same-sex couples who report themselves as unmarried partners may simply reflect increased willingness to come out on surveys along with the Census's changes in counting methods (Gates 2007; O'Connell and Feliz 2011).

Increases in the percentages of same-sex couples who report that they are spouses rather than unmarried partners is likely due to availability of legal marriage, a social moment outcome. Twenty percent of same-sex couples reported themselves as spouses on the 2010 Census, after the legalization of same-sex marriage in some locales, compared to

only 12% in 2000 (O'Connell and Feliz 2011). In states with legal same-sex marriage, 42.4% of same-sex couples reported they were spouses, versus 28.2% for states with domestic partnership or civil unions, and 22.7% in other states (Krivickas and Loftquist 2011; Lofquist 2011). In Massachusetts, the earliest state to legalize same-sex marriage in 2004, 6.5% of same-sex couples listed themselves as spouses in 2000 versus 46.7% in 2010, a dramatic change likely due to both actual legal marriages and changing meanings available for categorizing relationships. The other states that legalized marriage did so in 2008, 2009, and 2010, allowing less time for couples to marry before the 2010 survey, but also showed substantial increases and higher percentages of couples reporting as spouses than the national average.<sup>7</sup>

Couples who reported they were spouses may not necessarily have legally recognized marriages. The overall increase in the percentage of couples who consider themselves spouses also points to a more general change in the cultural templates and labels available to same-sex couples. In fact, several conservative states where same-sex marriage is banned also have higher than average percentages of same-sex couples reporting as married, so reporting a relationship as spousal is not tightly linked to the law (Lofquist 2011).<sup>8</sup>

Biographical outcomes vary among groups and cohorts (Van Dyke et al. 2000; Whittier 1995). As with heterosexual couples, the mean age of married couples is higher for lesbian and gay couples compared to unmarried partners, but the age difference is smaller than for heterosexuals (Lofquist 2011) because most same-sex couples, regardless of age or longevity of relationship, remained unmarried. Some groups are more likely to call their same-sex relationships spousal. Compared to same-sex couples as a whole, higher percentages of Black/African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Asian people, less educated couples, non-interracial couples, and people with children in the household report that they are married (Lofquist 2011). The presence of children in the household makes a particularly dramatic difference for gay male couples: 25% of male couples

<sup>7</sup> 12% versus 42.6% in Connecticut, 13.5% versus 32.1% in CA (where marriage was legal only for a few months in 2008), 0 versus 46% in Iowa, 0 versus 46.5% in New Hampshire, 6.7% versus 34.1% in Vermont. States that permit registration of domestic partnership but not same-sex marriage do not generally show a higher than average reporting as spouses.

<sup>8</sup> It is possible that some of these are errors (O'Connell and Feliz 2011).



reporting as spouses have children, versus 6.2% who report being unmarried.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, LGB couples have become more likely to call themselves spouses following legalization of marriage and civil unions. The increase is strongest in states where legalization of marriage occurred, but exists elsewhere as well. Age or cohort differences in rate of marriage, if any, are small, but age patterns in LGB marriages differ from heterosexual marriage. For heterosexuals, marriage is part of a transition to adulthood and first marriage occurs early in life and in the course of a relationship. (Note that there are substantial differences by race in these patterns in the United States.) LGB legal marriage, in contrast, occurred in all stages of relationships, with long-term and newer couples marrying when it became legal. Over time, couples may marry earlier in their relationship; this would be a notable cohort difference.

### Child-bearing and adoption

Policy changes related to both adoption and biological child-raising affect LGB parenting. Two policy issues affect LGB people seeking to adopt children. First, couples where one parent is the biological parent seek legal recognition for the second parent (“second-parent adoption”). Second, couples seek to adopt children jointly. In 2012, thirteen states permitted joint adoption by same-sex couples and second-parent adoption. Prior to 1995 none did; most added these rights after 2002. Thus, we see a significant change related to the life-course in a short period of time. In regard to biological parenting, access to donor gametes and assisted reproduction (including surrogacy) varies by agency; the professional associations for medical professionals issued statements in support of access by LGB people in 2006 (Ethics Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine 2009).

If these changes affected aggregate biographical outcomes, we would expect increased rates of parenting among LGB people. It is impossible to get solid numbers on the prevalence of child-raising among lesbians and gay men, especially prior to 2000. Estimates in the 1970s and early 1980s of lesbian mothers ranged from 30% to 45% of lesbians (including biological and non-biological mothers, the

<sup>9</sup> 26.2% of lesbian couples reporting as spouses have children, versus 23% of those reporting being unmarried.

latter of whom would not have had legal relationships to the children). Many of these were raising children from prior heterosexual relationships (Gottler 1984). Virtually all gay fathers during this period had children from heterosexual relationships because adoption by single men (regardless of sexuality) was very difficult and surrogacy was not yet available. Both lesbians and gay men often lost custody battles to former spouses or relatives. Custody cases gradually liberalized in the 1990s, allowing more gay and lesbian parents to retain custody or visitation with children from prior heterosexual relationships. In tandem with larger cultural changes around LGB issues, this permitted a growing number of openly lesbian and gay parents.

By 1990, the Census showed that an estimated “22% of partnered lesbians and about 5% of partnered gay men had children in their households” (Krivickas and Lofquist 2011). By 2008, 13.9% of male and 26.5% of female couples had children under 18 in their households, compared to 43% of male–female couples (Lofquist 2011; see also Gates and Ost 2004). This is a substantial increase over 1990, although the changing methods of counting same-sex unmarried partners make the precise change impossible to determine. Even higher percentages of all lesbians and gay men (including those who are not coupled) have had children (including children not currently living with them). In 2002, 35% of lesbians had given birth and 23% had lived with and had responsibility for a child to whom they had not given birth; 16% of gay men had children by birth or adoption (Gates et al. 2007). The number for lesbians increased to 49% in 2008 (remaining the same for men) (Gates 2011).<sup>10</sup> Many more lesbians and gay men without children wanted to have children. In 2002, 49% of lesbians and 57% of gay men who were not parents wanted children (Gates et al. 2007).<sup>11</sup>

The 2010 Census showed a slight decrease. 17.5% of same-sex couples – 10% of male couples and 24% of female couples – had children in their households (Lofquist 2011; O’Connell and Feliz 2011).<sup>12</sup> Gates (2011) argues that the decrease occurred *despite* dramatic increases in the percentage of lesbians and gay men adopting children. Parenting rates among lesbian and gay people include those

<sup>10</sup> GSS data. <sup>11</sup> For bisexuals, the percentages were 75 (women), 70 (men).

<sup>12</sup> Calculated from the supplemental tables in O’Connell and Feliz 2011. Using Census and ACS data on unmarried same-sex partners with children at home, Gates shows a steady increase from 12.5% in 1990 to 18.8% in 2006, and then a decline to 16.2% in 2009.

who had biological children in mixed-sex relationships, before they come out. As LGB people come out younger, they are less likely to have children in heterosexual relationships, reducing the overall parenting rate. Instead, they are more likely to have children after coming out via donor gametes or adoption. Regionally, the highest percentages of same-sex couples who are parents are in the East and West South Central states, and the lowest in the Pacific and South Atlantic regions (Gates 2011). But for same-sex parents through adoption and foster care, the patterns differ, with more in the more liberal New England, Mid-Atlantic, and West Coast states where gay adoption is easier (Gates et al. 2007). African American, Latino, and Native American/Alaskan Native same-sex couples are more likely to have children, but adoptive parenting is much more common among White same-sex couples. Adoptive parenting is more common among same-sex couples with higher education, but parenting overall is more common among those with lower levels of education (Gates 2011). These patterns suggest that parenting by choice through adoption is more common among higher SES couples in more liberal states (which permit adoption by gay or lesbian couples and second-parent adoption), while the reverse is true for having children through prior heterosexual relationships.

Routes to parenthood differ for same-sex and heterosexual couples and have changed over time. Adoption has become more common over time; 10% of same-sex couples with children had adopted children in 2000, compared with 19% in 2009 (Gates 2011). Dramatically more same-sex couples with children had only adopted or step-children (21.2%) or a combination of biological children, step-children, and children from adoption (6%), for a total of 27.2%, than did heterosexual married couples (total 9.2%) or heterosexual unmarried couples (total 12%) (Gates 2007).<sup>13</sup> “Four percent of all adopted children in the United States are being raised by gay or lesbian parents” (Gates and Ost 2004), as are 3% of all children in foster care (Gates et al. 2007). About half of all adoptive same-sex families adopt children through the foster care system, previously impossible, and 60% of adoption agencies will accept applications from LGB parents, although only 40% reported having placed children with LGB parents (Kennedy 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Variations in numbers due to different data sources.

Although there are substantial barriers to adoption remaining in a majority of states, very few agencies would have worked with open LGB parents before 1990. Routes to parenthood vary between lesbians and gay men, since biological reproduction for gay men through surrogacy and egg donation is more expensive and complex than for lesbians, who need only use donor sperm. For gay men, adoption is a major route to parenthood. The increasing percentage of gay male couples with children is a clear result of the opening of legal adoption to gay men in some states and agencies and “single” men in others. Adoption remains more difficult for gay men than for lesbians, because of barriers to adoption by male couples and because fewer agencies or countries permit adoption by single men than by single women. Adopted children living with male couples are much more likely to have disabilities and are older than those with female couples, suggesting that male couples may be more likely to adopt harder-to-place children (Gates et al. 2007).<sup>14</sup>

Overall, parenting by choice by same-sex couples has become more common over time, with liberalization of adoption law and availability of reproductive technology. Routes to parenting have changed; biological childbearing through heterosexual relationships prior to coming out has decreased, and adoption and use of donor gametes and surrogacy increased. These trends are strongest in regions where adoption and foster care law and policy is more liberal and where second-parent adoption is permitted. These changes are primarily due to LGB movement policy gains on adoption and access to reproductive technology, as well as cultural changes that led to earlier coming out.

## Conclusions

Overall, LGB movement outcomes included many that we would expect to influence biography: the production of specific collective identities, increased cultural tolerance, non-discrimination policies, legal recognition of same-sex couple relationships, and availability of adoption and second-parent adoption. In most arenas, life-course

<sup>14</sup> Note, however, that Gates et al. 2007 do not have data on the age at adoption, only the age at the time of the survey. 2000 Census data.

patterns did shift: increased numbers of LGB people disclosed identities publicly to family members, friends, and survey-takers; residential patterns dispersed; rates of legal marriage and the use of “marriage” and “spouse” as terms increased; child-raising through adoption and reproductive technology increased and (probably) child-bearing by LG people in prior heterosexual relationships decreased. Employment non-discrimination ordinances appear to have little or no effect on earnings or occupation, but company policies affect employees’ well-being and identity disclosure, and effects on earnings or occupations may emerge over time. Importantly, in the United States, non-discrimination law is not the norm, most locales and the federal government prohibit same-sex marriage, legal parenting remains difficult, and large portions of the public continue to view same-sex behavior as morally wrong. Aggregate biographical outcomes, thus, are limited.

Gay and lesbian movements are similar to other movements that seek to change the social position of disadvantaged groups: their success in doing so changes the life-course of the groups’ members. For example, feminist movements contributed to women’s access to some categories of employment and perhaps to greater labor force participation, delayed marriage and child-raising, and changes in gender divisions of labor within the household; immigrant rights movements can affect residence, employment, and education. As with other movements, the forces that shape aggregate life-course outcomes for gay and lesbian people include broader changes in norms about relationships, marriage, childbearing, and disclosure of personal identity. Disentangling these forces is a formidable methodological challenge.

Aggregate biographical outcomes among movement beneficiaries are shaped by gender, race, class, and cohort. Because economic inequality plays out differently for lesbians and gay men (with gay men earning more than lesbians, but having a larger wage gap compared to their heterosexual counterparts), any effects of non-discrimination ordinances will likely vary by gender. Because gay neighborhoods and migration to suburbs are sometimes structured by gender, race, and class, residential patterns will vary accordingly. Routes to parenthood differ for gay men and lesbians, and expansion of adoption rights was especially crucial for increased parenting by gay men.

In terms of cohort, non-discrimination ordinances primarily affect people early in their work history and access to parenthood is most relevant to the younger cohorts. Further, the meanings of marriage and parenting may vary by cohort. For earlier cohorts of lesbians, the definition of marriage as a patriarchal institution may lessen desire to enter it; and for earlier cohorts of both genders, alternative relationship arrangements such as non-monogamy and extended kinship/friendship networks that were normative in earlier eras may persist. Many individuals in earlier cohorts of both lesbians and gay men may not have been interested in parenting or may have assumed it was impossible; their attitudes toward increased parenting by younger cohorts, therefore, may be mixed. For the cohorts entering young adulthood now, the expectation of marriage and child-raising may become normative; marriage may be an expected expression of a committed relationship, and parents and peers may ask when to expect babies (Swarns 2012). This is a historically unique life-course experience for LGB people.

Many of these biographical outcomes were explicit goals of the LGB movement, in contrast to the life-course outcomes of the New Left movements, which were largely unintentional (Guigni 2004). Earlier activists were more likely to embrace ideologies critical of mainstreaming, while the policies they achieved led to increased mainstreaming by the general LGB public. Nevertheless, many activists view them with mixed feelings, torn between support for increasing legal and cultural equality and regret at the loss of distinctive cultural patterns and communities, or are critical of what they regard as a mainstreaming and entry into normative heterosexual patterns of family. Biographical outcomes, like other movement successes, are out of the control of the activists who set them in motion (Whittier 2009).

Aggregate biographical outcomes are related to, but distinct from, movements' policy and cultural outcomes. Evident at the individual level, they follow from policy changes related to the life-course and cultural changes in societal views of the group or its issues. My focus on the life-course consequences for movement beneficiaries is distinct from previous work on aggregate biographical outcomes. Whereas changes in the life-course patterns of overall populations may be unintended, changes in beneficiaries' biographies are an important part of many movements' goals. Assessing the degree of such changes is, therefore, crucial to understanding movement outcomes.

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