

Negotiating the Life Course: Changes in individual and family transitions

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Abstract

The period of young adulthood, from age 18 to 30 years, has been characterised by Rindfuss (1991) as 'demographically dense' because it is in these years that young people move away from their families of origin and move towards forming families of their own. The increased tendency for young people to delay these life course transitions means that the demographically dense age-range is being extended beyond age 30. This paper addresses the issues of change and dispersion in the pattern and timing of individual life course transitions. We focus on five key life course events, leaving home, cohabitation, marriage, fertility, and relationship breakdown and compare the experience of four birth cohorts, those born in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. We hypothesise that increased delay and dispersion of the timing of life course events is associated with the perception that young people must invest in human capital formation to a much greater degree than was the case in the past.

In 1986, Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa proposed that changes in family formation behaviour in Western countries constituted a second demographic transition. The features of this second demographic transition were high rates of cohabitation outside of marriage, low rates of marriage, high rates of divorce, high proportions of extramarital births and very low fertility rates. According to van de Kaa (1987), these behaviours had emerged not because of economic changes or changes in the structures of social institutions but because of a change in values from the conservative to the progressive. Beginning vaguely in the late 1960s but established in the 1970s, this change of values provided considerably greater freedom to individuals to decide upon their own forms of family and relationships. The authors of the theory related the transition to Inglehart's (1976) work on the shift from materialism to post-materialism. Postmaterialists are 'suspicious of technological innovation' and put their emphasis 'on meaningful personal relationships, spontaneity and self-reliance' (van de Kaa 1987: 7). They argue that the transition was facilitated by improvements in contraceptive technology and freer access to abortion. This made it possible for the choice for children to be made 'only when it is felt this would enrich a relationship or realize more of the potential of the individual concerned' (van de Kaa 1987: 26). The second demographic transition was presented as a pathway with four stages and, in 1986, different European countries were positioned at the various stages.

With hindsight, demographic measures in Europe and other advanced countries have not proceeded over the past two decades along the pathway postulated by second demographic transition theory. First, the values transition that the theory described was by no means universal in its application. Until today, Southern European countries maintain low rates of cohabitation outside of marriage, low rates of divorce and low levels of extramarital births (Lesthaeghe and Moors 2000). This is even the case for most second generation Australians of Southern European origin (McDonald 2003). Indeed, the transition in family formation behaviour signifying the second demographic transition remains largely confined to northern and western European countries and to the English-speaking developed countries (Lesthaeghe and Moors 2000). In addition, this pattern of behaviour has not emerged in the wealthy countries of East Asia that have long completed the (first) demographic transition. It has been argued that continued cultural variation in family organisation and behaviour as opposed to convergence can be expected because family organisations and behaviours are resilient to change. However, this resilience is much reduced in socially liberal environments (McDonald

1994). Consistent with this, van de Kaa (1987) has demonstrated and subsequent experience has confirmed (Lesthaeghe and Moors 2000) wide swings in family formation behaviour in the socially liberal countries of the developed world in the 20th century and relative resilience in the socially conservative countries¹.

Second, and more important given the titling of the transition as a demographic transition, very low fertility rates (below 1.5 births per woman) today are associated with the socially conservative developed countries, the countries in which the values changes associated with the transition are least in evidence. The socially liberal countries, those displaying the changes in relationship formation and dissolution that constitute the second demographic transition, generally have fertility rates of 1.7 births per woman and above (Coleman 1998; McDonald 2002). Third, quite counter to what would be predicted on the basis of second demographic transition theory, today there is a strong positive correlation between a nation's fertility rate and the level of labour force participation of women (Rindfuss and Brewster 1996; Coleman 1998; Castles 2002) These limitations of the paradigm of the second demographic transition suggest that an alternative, more nuanced, theoretical interpretation of changes in family formation behaviour over the past four decades is required. In this paper, we propose such an interpretation and demonstrate its applicability to changing family formation behaviour in Australia. Australia provides a good case study because successive eras of social change are demarcated by changes in institutions and legislation that characterise the nature of the social change.

¹ For the purposes of this study, the socially liberal countries include the Nordic countries, France, the Netherlands and the English-speaking countries while the socially conservative countries include southern European countries, Austria, Germany and Switzerland, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea.

Two waves of change: reflexive modernisation and the new capitalism

Reflexive modernisation

Emergent from the rigid social regime of the male breadwinner model of the family that held sway in the 1950s and 1960s and for decades before this period, two separate but related waves of social change have subsequently had profound effects upon family formation behaviour in western countries. The first is the values shift and associated institutional and legislative changes that van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe described as the second demographic transition but that is referred to by some sociologists as reflexive modernisation (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). Reflexive modernisation is modernisation of the *principles* of industrial society involving assessment by individuals or groups of the appropriateness of existing social institutions for modern life. It has brought a sharply increased capacity for individuals to pursue personal autonomy, to construct their own identities rather than having those identities defined for them by societal norms and institutions. Under reflexive modernisation, individuals are freed from institutional and normative constraints but, at the same time, they become responsible for the outcomes of their actions. In this latter sense, the risk to individuals is increased and society, in Beck's (1992) terms, becomes risk society and individuals become risk-sensitive.

Reflexive modernisation was characterised most importantly by at least partial fulfilment of the claims by women for a greater level of gender equity in the distribution of returns from modernisation particularly through engagement in paid employment. Structures that discriminated against women in the workplace were gradually dismantled. The ensuing changes in women's lives were facilitated by the revolution in contraceptive technology and legal judgements or legislative changes that enabled freer access to abortion. Control over their own fertility enabled women to plan and organise their lives irrespective of their place in society. Young women were encouraged to enhance their employability through increased levels of education and, as evidenced below for Australia, their education levels have risen sharply. Labour force participation rates and wage rates of women relative to those of men also rose sharply and the rises were greater in the socially liberal countries (OECD 2002; Macunovich 1996).

In Australia, the compulsory retirement of women from public sector jobs upon marriage was ended in 1966 and the male breadwinner approach to wage determination was abolished in 1973. In the same year, provision was made for equal pay for equal work and a sole mother's benefit, previously available to only deserted wives and widows, was made available to single mothers and mothers who left marriages. Soon afterwards, an Office for the Status of Women was created at the federal level to oversee and promote change and federal government support was provided for child care, albeit, very limited in scope.

In regard to family formation, reflexive modernisation lifted the lid on divorce, previously artificially held down by legislation and social opprobrium. Many countries enacted 'no-fault' divorce laws, unilateral divorce based upon the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage proven by a relatively short separation. Legislation of this type was passed in Australia in 1976 following a long social debate. Also in the 1970s, the pattern of early marriage and early childbearing that characterised the 1950s and 1960s gave way rapidly to cohabitation outside marriage and delayed childbearing. Various institutionalised rights were extended to cohabiting couples and to children born outside of marriage. For example, marriages and cohabiting relationships were treated equally for immigration purposes and for taxation purposes and the legal concept of 'illegitimacy' was abolished thus providing inheritance rights to children born outside marriage. Couples who chose to live together rather than to marry immediately were seeking to maintain their personal autonomy while testing the relationship for the stronger and more altruistic commitments involved in marriage. The rise of the cohabiting relationship can therefore be seen as a product of the risk sensitivity that came with reflexive modernisation. Cohabitation prior to marriage became an experiment in a form of intimacy that allowed the greater pursuit of personal autonomy (McDonald 1988). Subsequently, in Australia, it became such an integral part of the progression to marriage for most Australians that prior cohabitation must be regarded as a pathway that promotes the institution of marriage (McDonald 2000).

Reflexive modernisation has been extolled as providing the opportunity for 'pure relationships' that are held together not by social constraint but by freely-given intimacy (Giddens 1992) and derided as the selfish pursuit of one's own fulfilment at the expense of others and, more broadly, at the expense of the institution of the family (Popenoe 1987). A

more neutral position sees reflexive modernisation in a Kantian sense of autonomy that enhances the individual's capacity for self-direction. This capacity can be put to good or bad purpose. This is the social, as distinct from individual, risk associated with the provision of personal autonomy. The dilemma faced today is the same as that faced by the Enlightenment philosophers: 'the reconciliation of the goal of personal autonomy with the conviction that men and women are irreducibly social' (McDonald 1988: 44). Whether viewed as being good or bad, there is agreement that reflexive modernisation represents an important social change that has been driven by a shift in values, rather than by technological or organisational change. At the same time, there is a dualism between social values and social institutions. As already indicated, many changes in social organisation ensued from the reflexive modernisation movement and these, in turn, progressively affected values. For example, legislation of no-fault divorce was based upon a prior change in values associated with marriage but once legally available and accessed, divorce became more socially acceptable. Both extremes of the debate about the effects of reflexive modernisation (the good and the bad) seem to agree that this spiral of social change does not auger well for the future of the family.

The new capitalism

In the 1980s and into the 1990s, the world was swept by what has become known as the new capitalism. In keeping with the neoliberal philosophy that the free operation of the market is the most efficient and effective form of economic organization, in the past 20 years, regulations and restrictions have been reduced so that capital can flow easily in the direction that maximises business efficiency and profit. The theory is that profitable businesses mean improvements in employment and wages and, hence, in economic wellbeing. The characteristics of this new economic regime are small government and low taxation, free flow of capital across international boundaries, free trade, freedom for employers and workers to determine wages and working conditions, and curtailment of government-funded social welfare, the last being portrayed as wasteful of potentially productive capital.

It could be said that new capitalism resulted from the extension of reflexive modernisation to financial and labour market institutions. The principles of old capitalism were brought under scrutiny and found to be rigid and 'traditional'. Progress involved dismantling of the rigidities of the market by providing greater autonomy to firms, investors and workers to pursue the

most profitable outcomes. As the structures of the old capitalism (stability of industry and company structures, lifelong employment, routine jobs, unions, tariffs, currency controls, investment restrictions, relatively high taxation and state welfare provision) were designed to provide protections for both firms and employees, the new capitalism meant, as Beck (1992: 19) has said, that the social production of wealth became systematically accompanied by the social production of risk. Rapid advances in technology, particular information technology, have facilitated the advance of new capitalism. Computerisation vastly increases the speed of transmission of ideas and transactions, facilitates 'just-in-time' production, provides for the easier export of manufacturing industries to low-wage economies, enables multiple skilling of workers, reduces the need for hierarchical reporting and management systems and provides a vast range of new products for the consumer market.

In relation to family formation and dissolution, the most important dimension of the new capitalism is its impacts on the labour market. These impacts include: industry restructuring with a rapid increase in the producer services industries and decline in manufacturing industry; direct negotiation between workers and employees and the decline of large unions; a shift in labour demand to higher levels of human capital; flexibility of employment meaning easy movement within the system, flexibility of appointment, dismissal, work content, working conditions and working hours but absolute dedication to the completion of short-term tasks; downsizing as a short-term, cost reduction strategy and the end of 'jobs for life' and; contracting out to increasingly specialised (boutique) firms. Unemployment became more long-term in nature because it indicated 'failure' making job seeking more difficult. Or, even more simply, many people who became unemployed did not have the skills required by the new capitalism and were not in a position (because of age, education or family responsibilities) to obtain these skills. The new capitalism offers great rewards to those who are successful in its terms but is unforgiving of those whom it jettisons.

There is variability of application of the new capitalism across countries but the variability is much less than it is for reflexive modernisation. In general, the new capitalism has been extended to all advanced economies. In the case of the European Union, the conditions of new capitalism are conditions of membership. However, growth of part-time work in some

countries has been limited and unemployment rates for young people have been higher in some countries than in others.

Richard Sennett (1998, Chapter 8) has argued that the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism have led to a 'corrosion of character' including loss of a life-time identity, loss of trust in others, loss of a sense of the value of service (altruism), decline of community (social capital in Putnam's terms), vilification of the 'dependent', and fear of failure or being left behind. Overall, like Beck, Sennett describes new capitalism as leading to a greatly increased sense of risk. This sense of risk has been heightened by witness: witness of friends or colleagues losing their jobs even in the middle level ranks; witness of long-term unemployment, witness of vilification of the unemployed; witness of the continuation of recessions; witness of the collapse of major corporations through corruption, bad management or bad timing; and witness of relationship breakdown. On the other hand, in distributional terms, new capitalism rewards innovation and hard work and, hence, provides incentives for both. Jobs are less routine and can be interesting and challenging. The individual worker has greater freedom to sell his or her skills to the highest bidder, and with computer technology, is very much more productive. Thus, people also have witness of the successes of the new capitalism, particularly among young high fliers and corporate executives. Managers of large international corporations have become the supermodels of new capitalism. These outcomes can be seen as the positive end, the winnings, of the new capitalist game. Being engaged in a game of chance can bring reward or failure. The difference under reflexive modernisation and new capitalism is that the individual bears the responsibility and the consequences of the outcome of the game.

Beck and Sennett stress the negative outcomes of these social trends for individuals and for 'community'. They say little about outcomes for the family, although, implicit in their arguments is the sense that these trends would bring the institution of the family under great strain. Unlike the old capitalism where, at least in the 1950s and 1960s, the worker's wage was sufficient to support a wife and children, under new capitalism, employers have no interest in the family status of their workers and, accordingly, feel no responsibility for workers' family lives.

Like reflexive modernisation, new capitalism has been facilitated by governments through changes of laws relating to industrial relations, trade, financial institutions, taxation and rights to welfare. Ironically, some of the principal advocates of new capitalism in government, such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, were social conservatives who decried the impact of (reflexive) modernisation upon family life. The principal architect of new capitalism in Australia, Paul Keating, was also of this description as is his successor, John Howard. Social conservatives believe that the public world of the market economy and the private world of the family are separate worlds: that an individual can be highly competitive, individualistic and risk accepting in the market but then, just hours afterwards, be self-sacrificing, altruistic and risk averse within the family. Or, having never accepted the social changes wrought by reflexive modernisation, they see the individual in the market as male and the individual at home as female – not the same person. As something of a dilemma for social conservatives, new capitalism itself has placed a high market value upon the human capital of women.

Resilience, adjustment and adaptation; the conflict of autonomy and intimacy.

Despite the pessimism of interpreters of these social changes such as Beck, Sennett, and Popenoe, in broad terms, the family has remained central to most people's lives even in the most socially-liberal countries. While reflexive modernisation brought a flourishing of personal autonomy, there were also limits. There has been little tolerance of open marriages or open relationships where a person in a live-in relationship openly has sexual relationships with another person. Also, the increase in the proportion of births that are extramarital has been somewhat misleading in that the increase has been due largely to much higher proportions of young women not being married rather than to rises in age specific extramarital fertility rates (Carmichael). Even today, most extramarital births in Australia (all but about five per cent) occur to parents who are living together, have lived together recently or will live together in the near future (McDonald 2000). The father of the child is not acknowledged on only four per cent of the birth certificates of Australian children. Autonomy has not been extended to a point where society has allowed parents to decide not to support their own child. These limits can be seen as social limits to risk. More generally, survey after survey shows that a large majority of young people in most developed countries, including the socially liberal countries, continue to say that they would prefer to have a long-lasting intimate relationship (marriage, in most of these countries) and that they would prefer to have at least

two children . Caring support for aged people continues to be provided overwhelmingly by family members (McDonald 1997). Family remains central to the lives of most people and the quality of family relationships has a very strong association with the quality of life as a whole (Nolan 2002).

Values related to the family are not simply swept up in the tides of reflexive modernisation and the new capitalism. They represent a third dominant dimension of social values. Family values are resilient, as stated above, because humans are inherently social and have a strong need for intimacy. Isolation and loneliness are not desirable characteristics, and, for most people, these are avoided through the intimacy of family relationships. This recent report relating to Austria and Central European countries is indicative:

What is really important to Austrians and CEE citizens, especially EU candidate countries? On assignment by Generali Insurance Group, Market Research Institute Fessler-GfK in Vienna investigated and compared the needs and values of persons within the individual countries. Conclusion: Austria and the central European countries are dominated by the values of family/relationship, liberty/independence, and financial security (Puzzlewise 2/2003, http://www.oif.ac.at/puzzle/puzzleweise_02_2003_en.html, accessed 4 February 2003).

Liberty and independence are the aims of reflexive modernisation. Financial insecurity is an alleged consequence of the new capitalism.

Nevertheless, new capitalism has placed the institution of the family under great strain because it deals only with individuals and only then as inputs to the system of production. Consequently, in order to protect themselves from risk, individuals must maximise their utility to the market. This means that they need to focus upon the acquisition of saleable skills, work experience and a marketable reputation. At the same time, they need to accumulate savings or wealth as a personal safety net. They also need to maintain flexibility of time and place so that they can react to opportunities as they arise. The canny player in a game that rewards market production is unwise to devote time or money to social reproduction. Social reproduction involves altruism, that is, time and money devoted to others or to the society at large. While new capitalism and reflexive modernisation may generate people who are both risk-accepting and risk-averse, it is easier to be risk accepting when

others (including future others) are not affected by the outcome. The widespread desire for intimacy and family relationships especially children, therefore tends to make the majority of people risk-averse. As the effect of children upon women is greater than their effect upon men, women are likely to be more risk averse than men.

Young women today are equipped for market production at a level at least equivalent to young men and employers are very happy to employ women in the market economy. Where human capital counts, the free market will employ a skilled woman before an unskilled man, even before a man slightly less skilled than the woman. The risk-averse woman of today will ensure that she is able to support herself and, given the high probability of divorce, will be careful not to put herself at the risk of dependency upon a man. Couples recognise that dual employment provides a hedge against job loss for either one and banks reinforce this by providing mortgages on the basis of two incomes. As relative income for men falls, men become more dependent on the earnings of their partner (Macunovich 1996). Parents and schools encourage young women to accumulate skills that will enable them to remain attached to the labour force. As a result, there are very few young women today who see their future lives in terms of finding a husband and never thereafter being engaged in market work and, likewise, very few men who are looking for a partner with that future in view.

Improvement of gender equity was a central aim, if not the central aim, of reflexive modernisation. However, the progress of gender equity is severely hampered by the combination of the new capitalism with the continued resilience of the desire for family and children. The central hypothesis of this paper is that where reflexive modernisation is more advanced, that is, in the socially liberal countries, it has generated institutional changes that favour gender equity. These institutional changes then contribute to a social foundation that provides a better adaptation of fulfilment of family aspirations to the new capitalism. We suggest that this hypothesis explains why fertility rates have fallen to very low levels in the socially conservative countries. However, we further hypothesise that, among the socially liberal countries, the extent of adaptation has been more limited in the English-speaking countries (The United Kingdom, Canada and Australia) compared to the socially liberal countries of Europe (the Nordic countries, France, the Netherlands and Belgium). The essential difference is that in the English-speaking countries, governments have been

relatively active in re-shaping social institutions to provide for the combination of work and family. Consequently, although there has been a considerable change in values related to gender equity through reflexive modernisation, a change that, until the 1990s, has sustained fertility rates at moderate levels, the force of new capitalism is continuing to assault family formation behaviour (Sennett 1998; McDonald 2002). Governments in English-speaking countries responded to reflexive modernisation and new capitalism to facilitate their progress but, to a large extent, they have not responded to support people's family formation aspirations in ways that are consistent with reflexive modernisation and the new capitalism. They have tended to remain in a paradigm that separates the public and the private, a paradigm that is inappropriate for adaptation to reflexive modernisation and the new capitalism. In contrast, governments in the socially liberal countries of Europe have actively pursued institutional changes that support the combination of work and family. The United States is not included in the listed countries because its heterogeneity greatly complicates the argument.

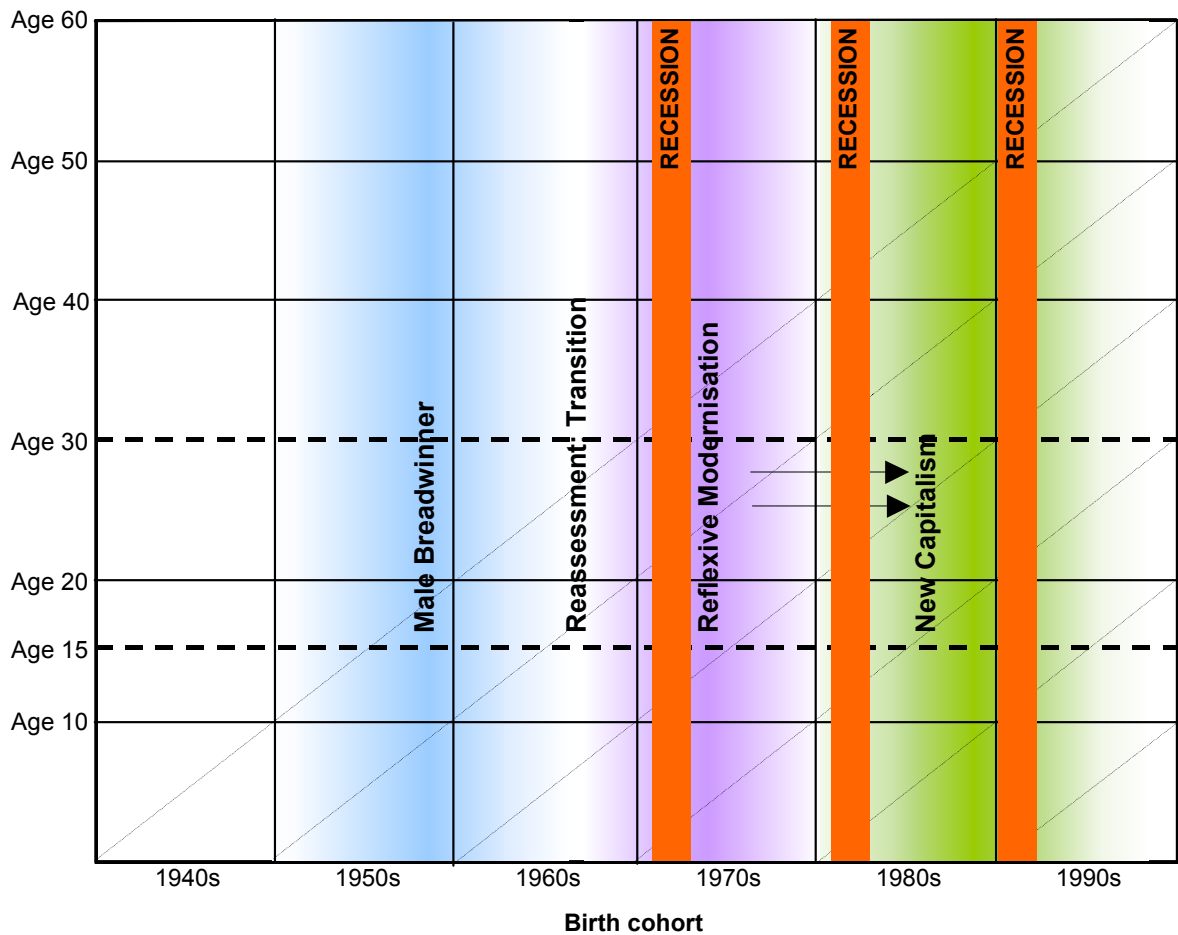
Methodology

To examine the effects of reflexive modernisation and the new capitalism on family formation behaviour in Australia, we examine the family formation history of four Australian birth cohorts: those born in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The principal data source is the Negotiating the Life Course Survey², a nationally representative longitudinal panel survey of Australians aged 18-54 years in 1997. So far, the panel has been interviewed in 1997 and 2000. The third wave of interviews will be conducted in 2003. The main statistical method that we employ is the cohort survival approach. For each cohort, we tabulate the proportions that are still living at home with parents, still unpartnered, etc. at particular ages. The combination of birth cohorts with their age defines calendar or chronological time. Reflexive modernisation and the new capitalism occur during particular time periods. Figure 1 shows chronological time on the horizontal axis and age on the vertical axis. The diagonal lines running across the figure from left to right follow the birth cohorts across time as they age. It also shows the timing of the onset and influence of reflexive modernisation and the new

² The Negotiating the Life Course (NLC) survey is a national random sample of 2,231 people who were interviewed by telephone in 1997 and 2000. For more information please visit <http://lifecourse.anu.edu.au>.

capitalism as well as the timing of economic recessions. Our principal focus is upon the ages 15-30 years as these are the central years in which family formation behaviour is determined. The diagram enables us to compare the timing of social transformations with the years in which each successive cohort was in the age range, 15-30 years.

Figure 1: Effect of cross-sectional social movements on birth cohorts of the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s



The diagram shows the following for each cohort:

1940s cohort: This cohort had reached age 30 largely before the onset of reflexive modernisation. Accordingly, their early family formation behaviour was influenced mainly by the male breadwinner ideology of the family. They were also largely through the 15-30 age range before the 1974 economic recession. Thus, their early experience was dominated by good and predictable economic circumstances. However, reflexive modernisation will have had an impact at later ages on their rates of relationship breakdown. At even older ages, this cohort felt the brunt of economic restructuring under new capitalism, especially those who entered manufacturing industry in the boom years of the 1960s. This later age experience is of interest because the members of this cohort are to a large extent the parents of the 1970s cohort.

1950s cohort: Reflexive modernisation was established at the time that this cohort was in the ages of principal interest, ages 15-30 years. In a sense, they were the pioneers of reflexive modernisation as it affected early family formation behaviour. They were the early designers of relationships and lifestyles that were influenced by reflexive modernisation. The 1974 recession struck as they were entering the labour force and the 1982 recession before they were 30. However, they had largely reached age 30 before the full impact of the new capitalism was evident. Accordingly, like the 1950s cohort, they did not experience the drive for the early accumulation of human capital and, again like the 1940s cohort, were not necessarily well-equipped for the employment restructuring that took place under the new capitalism.

1960s cohort: Reflexive modernisation was well established by the time this group were in the early years of family formation. The male breadwinner model of the family had drifted into history and education levels became similar for the two sexes. The prior cohort had established new forms of relationships. New capitalism struck when this cohort were in the 15-30 age range. The world of employment was changing under their feet at the time that they were attempting to establish themselves in that world. In their late twenties, they experienced the 1990 recession and they were attempting to enter the housing market at a time that (now deregulated) housing interest rates were at record high levels.

1970s cohort: Both reflexive modernisation and the new capitalism were well established by the time this cohort was entering the 15-30 years age range. The world transformed by these two waves of social change was their frame of reference. There was a very heavy emphasis on the early accumulation of human capital. They were imbued with the risk sensitivity of the new capitalism. From the beginning, they were players in the risk game of new capitalism.

Individual transitions and family formation

The remainder of this paper focuses on five key life course events, leaving home, cohabitation, marriage, fertility, and relationship breakdown and compares the experience of the four birth cohorts detailed above.

Leaving home

One of the key markers of the transition to adulthood is leaving the parental home. Leaving home is not a single event. It is something that can occur more than once and can be defined as a process rather than an event. The first wave of the NLC survey asked about the last time a person left home rather than the first time, and asked those still at home if they had ever lived away from home. It did not ask those not at home if they had ever, or how often they had returned home, limiting the possible analysis of the 'boomerang phenomenon' as described by Molgat (2002).

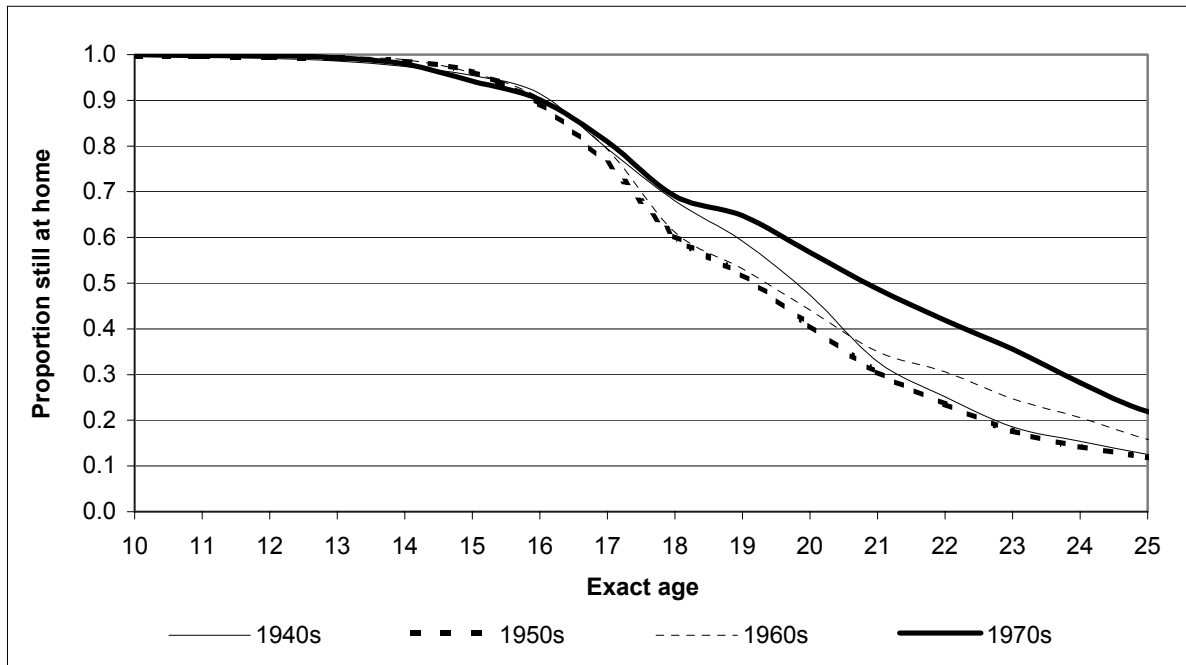
Age left parental home

During the 1980s the age of leaving the parental home was increasing in many developed countries after a period of decline (Billiari et al 2001; Molgat 2002; Young 1987; Corijin & Klijzing 2001). A recent Australian study has found that leaving home still occurs during early adulthood and has not experienced the delay felt in other demographic or lifecourse events. (Kilmartin 2000).

To assess changes in the timing of leaving the parental home, survival analysis has been conducted to compare the four birth cohorts. Survival analysis enables the calculation of the proportion of respondents who have left home at each exact age. People who have not left home at the time of the survey (censored cases) are accounted for by applying the rate of

leaving home at each age for cases where they have in fact left home. Figure 2 presents the results of this analysis.

Figure 2: Proportion living at home by exact age by cohort



Source: NLC 1997.

It is immediately apparent that there have been changes in the timing of the transition from the parental home. The cohort born in the 1970s are leaving the parental home at a much slower rate than their predecessors. However, this change has not been progressive across cohorts. Up to age 16 each cohort showed the same pattern of home leaving with roughly 10 per cent of each cohort leaving home by age 16. Between the ages of 16 and 18 the cohorts of the 1940s and 1970s follow a similar pattern, while the cohorts of the 1950s and 1960s begin a more rapid rate of home leaving. By age 18, 40 per cent of the 1950s and 1960s cohorts had left home compared with 30 per cent for those born in the 1940s and 1970s. From age 18 the earlier three cohorts converge and the 1970s cohort follows a much slower pattern of home leaving. By age 21 just over 50 per cent of the 1970s cohort had left home compared with between 65 and 70 per cent of the earlier cohorts.

Reasons for leaving the parental home

Reasons for leaving the parental home include relationship formation and marriage, education and employment, and a desire for increased autonomy and independence. Young's (1987) work on leaving home in Australia found that there had been a strong link between marriage and home leaving, particularly for women. By the early 1980s this link had weakened and young people were increasingly leaving home to pursue an independent lifestyle (Young 1987). Similar patterns have been found in other developed countries (Kiernan 2001; Molgat 2002).

The desire for increased independence often leads young home leavers to live with others. In other developed countries it has been found that at one stage or another, most young people live in shared households (Heath 1999, Garasky et al 2001). However, little information is available on this phenomenon in the Australian context. The research conducted by Heath (1999) also suggests that young people form living clusters based on occupation, although again little comparable information is available in Australia.

The NLC survey did not ask respondents the reason they left home, or the type of household they moved into. However, it is possible to get a rough estimation of those who left home to enter a live in relationship, either marital or cohabiting, by examining the timing of home leaving and first relationship formation. Table 1 presents the percentage of each cohort who left home to get married, to cohabit or for any other reason. The percentage of respondents who left home for other reasons increased between the 1940s and 1960s cohort and remained until the 1970s cohort.

The key area of change in this area is the move from marriage to cohabiting unions. The percentage of people who leave home to marry has dropped from 45 per cent of the 1940s cohort to eight per cent of the 1970s cohort. Conversely, only four per cent of the 1940s cohort left the parental home to cohabit compared with 30 per cent of the 1970s cohort. The effect of increased personal autonomy experienced through new capitalism can be seen in the risk-averse behaviour of the 1970s cohort.

Table 1: Reason left parental home by cohort (%)

	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	All cohorts
Living away from parental home in 1997					
Other reason	52	58	62	62	59
Marriage	45	31	17	8	26
Cohabitation	4	11	21	30	15
Total number living away from home	348	730	631	264	1,973

Notes: $p < 0.05$.

Data have been weighted to account for sampling bias.

Source: NLC 1997.

Over time the age of leaving the parental home has changed with the cohort born in the 1970s being more likely to stay at home longer than those in earlier cohorts. In addition, reason for leaving home has changed. Romantic relationships are still a major reason for leaving home, however they are far more likely to be cohabiting rather than marital unions for more recent cohorts.

Determinants of home leaving

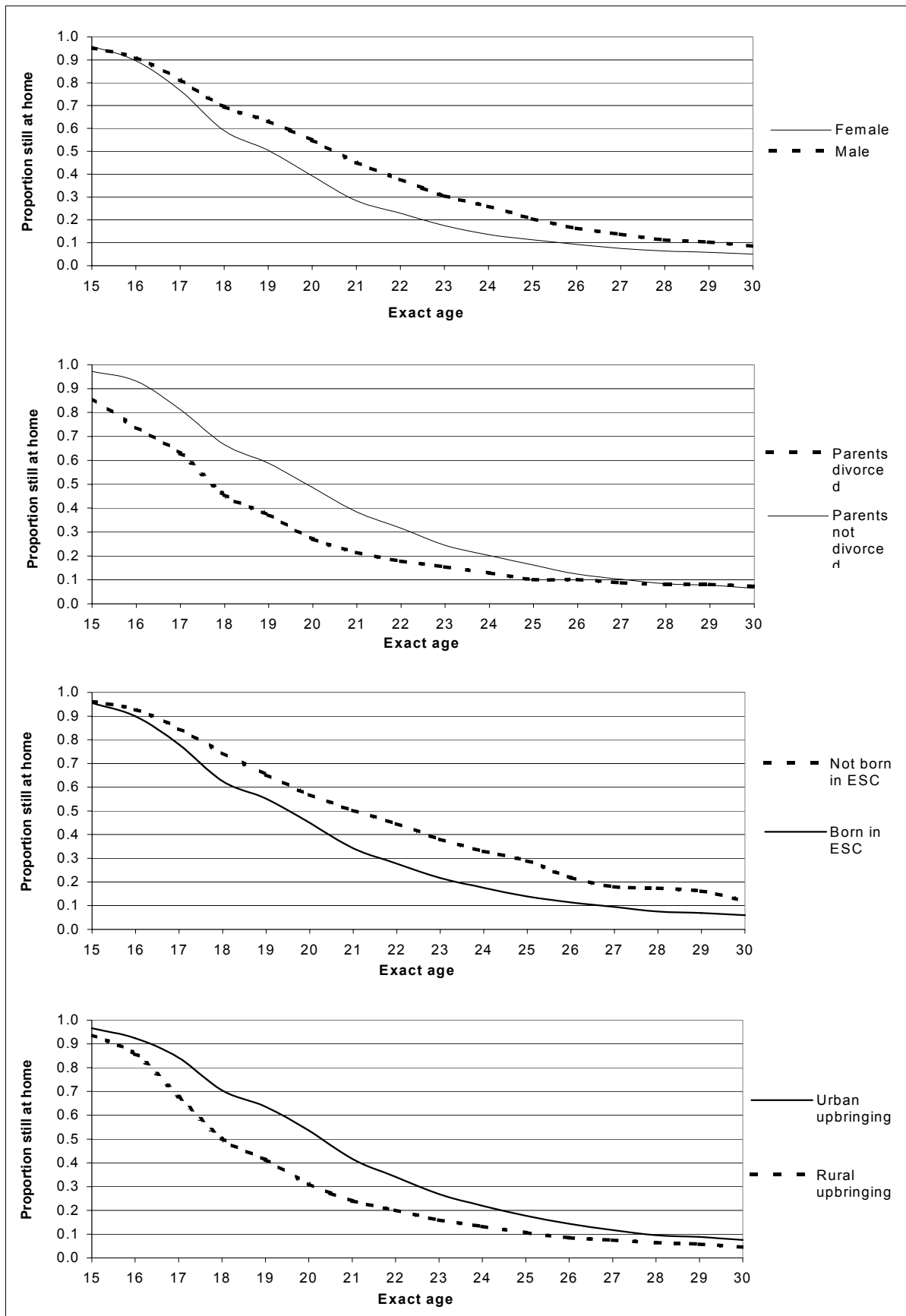
As seen above, one key determinant for the age of leaving home is the social environment experienced at the time of home leaving, measured through birth cohort. Other determinants that can be measured using data from the NLC survey include gender, country of birth and growing up in a rural or urban environment. Using Wave 2 of the survey it is also possible to determine the effect of parental divorce on leaving home. All of these factors have been found to be associated with early home leaving. Rural residence has been found to be associated with early home leaving reduced educational and occupational opportunities (Garasky 2002). Girls are also more likely to leave home before boys particularly when the reason for leaving home is marriage or relationship formation (Young 1987). Growing up in a sole parent family is associated with early transition to independence (Shanahan 2000; Garasky 2002).

The pattern of home leaving is different for males and females, with females experiencing an earlier acceleration into home leaving than males. Place of birth, area of residence during formative teenage years and parental divorce prior to age 17 could all be expected to significantly affect the age a leaving home. All of these factors measure the social and family environment in which a person grows up and develops. There is a large difference in the rate

of home leaving for those whose parents divorced before they turned 17 and whose parents never divorced or divorced when they were older. By age 15 there was already a considerable difference between the two groups in the proportion still living at home. Less than half of the respondents whose parents had divorced were still at home at age 18 compared with two-thirds of those whose parents had not divorced. Convergence between the two groups occurred from age 26.

Respondents who were born in Australia or another English-speaking country left home earlier than those who were born in a non-English-speaking country, particularly at ages younger than 20. Young people who grow up in a rural or remote area leave home earlier than their urban counterparts. This is most pronounced from ages 16 through 21. The lack of opportunities for work and education in many rural areas would be the driving force behind this trend.

Figure 3: Proportion living at home by exact age by various indicators



Source: NLC 1997.

Returning home

The issue of returning to the parental home is difficult to examine using data from the NLC survey. However, it is possible to gain an appreciation of the changes across time in the movements in and out of the family home. Using the question “Have you ever lived away from home on your own or with others?”. Table 2 presents the percentage of those who still live at home who have ever lived away from home, and the age at which they last returned to live with their parents.

Table 2: Leaving and returning home by cohort (%)

	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	All cohorts
Living in parental home in 1997					
Ever lived away from home	33	75	67	31	37
Age returned home					
15–19	0	0	14	48	37
20–24	0	7	5	45	34
25–29	0	40	47	7	17
30+	100	53	35	0	12
Total number living at home	3	9	30	217	258

Notes: $p < 0.05$.

Data have been weighted to account for sampling bias.

Source: NLC 1997.

For people born in the 1950s and 1960s a large percentage of those living in their parental home had lived away from home at some stage (75% and 67%). For those still at home from the 1970s cohort, just under a third had ever lived away from home. Censoring influences this figure, as the 1970s cohort has not had as much time in which to leave and return home. However, it is apparent that adults who live in their parental home are likely to have lived away from home.

In the second wave of the NLC survey (2000) respondents who still lived at home in 1997 were asked if they were still there, if they had left and returned, or if they had left and not returned by 2000. Table 3 presents the percentage of each cohort who left and returned home between 1997 and 2000. For the youngest two cohorts living at home in 1997, over half left home between 1997 and 2000 and did not return. The key difference between these two cohorts was in the percentage that remained at home for the period between 1997 and 2000.

Also, a slightly higher percentage of the 1960s cohort than the 1970s cohort had lived away from home since 1997 but had returned home by 2000.

The 1970s cohort does stand out when we compare returns home by those who were living away from home in 1997 (Table 3). Twenty percent of the 1970s cohort returned home between 1997 and 2000, half of these returned home and stayed and half returned home and left again prior to 2000. By comparison, of people living away from home in 1997 from the cohorts born in the 1950s and 1960s, 4 per cent and 5 per cent respectively returned home in the period between waves.

Table 3: Leaving and returning home, 1997-2000 (%)

	1950s	1960s	1970s	All cohorts
Living in parental home in 1997 and				
...remained there for past 3 years	53	31	40	39
...there now but have lived away	0	13	9	9
...left home between 1997 and 2000	47	56	51	51
Total number living at home in 1997	7	21	167	195
Living away from parental home in 1997 and				
...still away from home	96	95	80	94
...returned home and left again	2	3	10	3
...now living at home	2	2	10	3
Total number living away from home in 1997	610	496	166	1,272

Notes: $p < 0.05$ living away from home in 1997.

Data have been weighted to account for sampling bias.

Due to the small number of cases living at home, the 1940s cohort has been removed from this table.

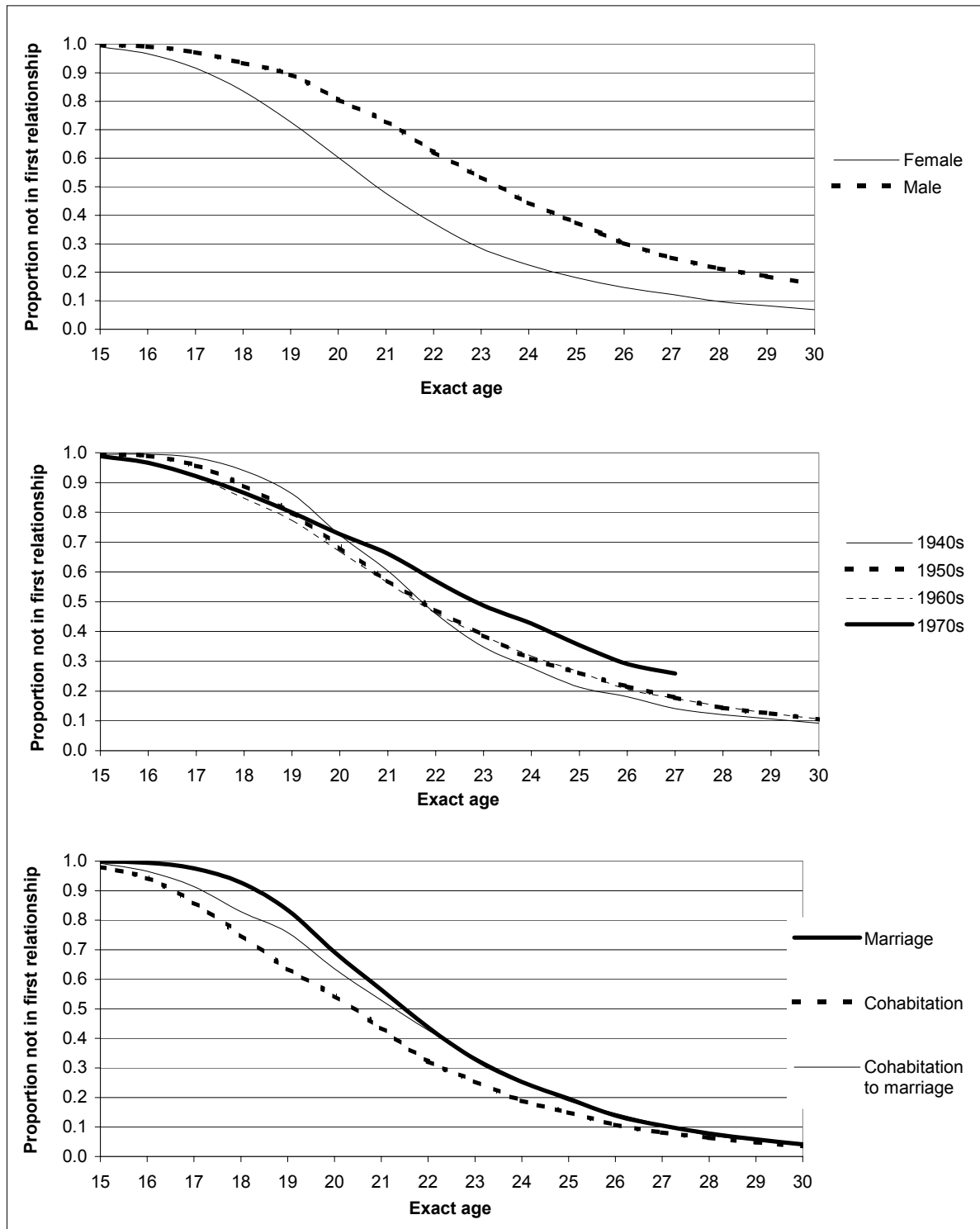
Source: NLC 1997 and 2000.

First live-in relationship

It has already been established that leaving the parental home has been associated with the forming of live-in relationships as people leave their families of origin to set up their own homes.

The age of first relationship has been calculated by measuring the time between the date of the earliest relationship, either marital or cohabiting, and the date of birth of the respondent. For those respondents whose first relationship was marriage, but who indicated that they had lived together prior to marriage had the period of cohabitation subtracted from their date of marriage. Figure 4 presents the results of survival analysis on the age of first relationship by sex, cohort and the type of relationship, whether it was marriage, cohabitation to marriage or cohabitation.

Figure 4: Proportion not in a relationship by exact age by sex, cohort and relationship type



Notes: Log-rank test; sex $p < 0.05$; cohort $p < 0.05$; relationship type $p < 0.05$.
 Wilcoxon (Breslow) test; sex $p < 0.05$; cohort $p > 0.05$; relationship type $p < 0.05$.
 Source: NLC 1997.

The timing of entry into a live-in relationship is different for males and females (Figure 4). Females enter into relationships at a younger age, particularly throughout the late teens and early twenties. However, over time there has been little change in the timing of home leaving as evidenced by cohort. Up to the age of 21 the proportion not in a relationship was similar for each cohort. From age 21 the cohort born in the 1970s lagged about a year behind their predecessors in the timing of entry into a live-in relationship. This delay by the 1970s cohort is associated with the need/desire for personal growth in terms of investment in their education and careers.

The final panel of Figure 4 shows the pattern of entry into first relationship by the type of relationship. There is a difference in the age the relationship began between cohabiting and marriage relationship type, particularly before age 21. Cohabiting relationships are entered into at a younger age. At the youngest ages, the cohabiting to marriage group is more similar to the cohabiting group than the marriage group. However, by age 20, they converge towards the marriage group.

The age at which people enter their first relationship has only seen relatively small changes over time. However, the type of relationship it is has changed dramatically (Table 4). Taking only those who had ever had a first relationship, the percentage whose first relationship was marriage has decreased from 78 for the 1940s cohort to 17 for the 1970s cohort.

Table 4: First relationship type by cohort (%)

	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	All cohorts
No first relationship	1	3	8	58	17
Marriage	77	54	33	7	40
Cohabitation	9	13	26	25	19
Cohabitation to marriage	12	29	34	9	23
Total number	341	721	650	518	2,230
Excluding those with no first relationship					
Marriage	78	56	35	17	49
Cohabitation	9	14	28	61	23
Cohabitation to marriage	13	30	37	22	28
Total number ever in a relationship	341	706	607	219	1,872

Notes: p<0.05.

Data have been weighted to account for sampling bias.

Source: NLC 1997.

Given that those born in the 1970s cohort are still in the process of forming first relationships (in 1997 58% had not yet entered a live-in relationship), it would not be unreasonable to expect that the cohabitation figure would decline as more people got married, increasing the cohabitation to marriage group. The direct to marriage group would also be expected to increase.

The key changes in first relationship formation across the four cohorts are a slight delay in the age at entry for the 1970s cohort and a distinct change in the type of relationships entered into. The delay in entry and the move away from moving directly into marriage indicates a level of risk aversion among the younger cohorts. The 1970s cohort in particular would be the first cohort to experience mass divorce amongst their parents in their formative years. This would have to affect their willingness to expose themselves to the same risk.

Dissolution of first live-in relationship

The previous section has highlighted the changing nature of the first live-in relationship. Along with these changes are changes in the way in which relationships are dissolved. For cohabiting relationships (Table 5: Panel 2) the trend is for the relationship to end in separation rather than marriage. This points to a situation where individuals are experiencing more than one live-in relationship and would suggest a move to shorter durations as well.

Table 5: Reasons for dissolution of first live-in relationship, by relationship type (%)

	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	All cohorts
Marriages only					
Divorced or separated	32	24	16	13	24
Still married	68	76	84	87	76
Total married	245	373	204	35	856
Cohabiting relationships only					
Separated	39	27	37	44	36
Married	58	69	57	27	55
Still Cohabiting	3	4	6	29	9
Total cohabiting	77	323	408	189	996

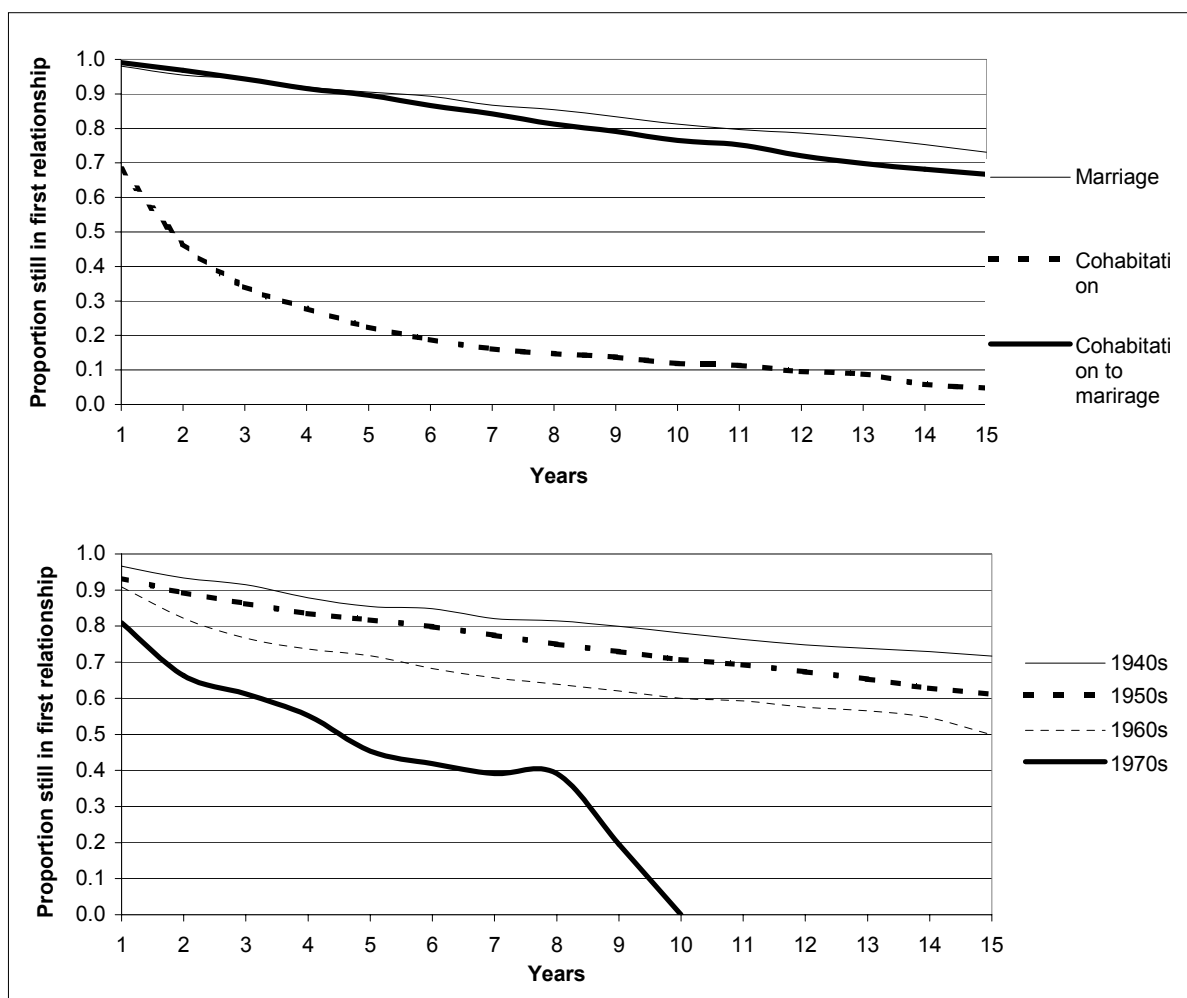
Notes: p<0.05.

Data have been weighted to account for sampling bias.

Source: NLC 1997.

Figure 5 presents the duration of first live-in relationship in years by cohort and relationship type. There is a marked difference in the length of relationship by type of relationship. Marital relationships, whether or not they were preceded by cohabitation, survive for a much longer duration than cohabiting relationships. When examined by cohort, it is apparent that the cohort most likely to have a cohabiting first relationship is also the cohort with the shortest durations of first relationship. The effect of reflexive modernisation is seen in the gradual shortening of length of relationships. However, the 1970s cohort, under the effect of new capitalism, has experienced a massive change in the duration of their first live-in relationship.

Figure 5: Length of first relationship in years by cohort and relationship type



Notes: Log-rank test; cohort $p < 0.05$; relationship type $p < 0.05$.
 Wilcoxon (Breslow) test; cohort $p < 0.05$; relationship type $p < 0.05$.
 Source: NLC 1997.

Fertility

The timing of entry into parenthood is measured by the age at first birth. Between the birth cohorts of the 1940s and 1950s there was a marked delay in the timing of the first birth. One half of the 1940s cohort had had their first birth by age 25 compared with only one third of the 1950s cohort. It took a further three years for 50 per cent of the 1950s cohort to have their first birth. For those born in the 1940s this early childbearing was occurring within the context of the male breadwinner model. Fully separate divisions of labour were normal with very few married women working full-time. As reflexive modernisation took hold childbearing is delayed, and the delay is reinforced for each successive cohort. The 1970s cohort seems set to embark into parenthood along an even flatter trajectory in the face of new capitalism.

Figure 6: Age at first birth by cohort



Notes: Log-rank test $p < 0.05$.

Wilcoxon (Breslow) test $p < 0.05$.

Source: NLC 1997.

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