

Research and Teaching Statement

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Current Research Projects:

1) The Changing American Family.

*2007. M. Rosenfeld. *The Age of Independence: Interracial Unions, Same-Sex Unions and the Changing American Family*. Harvard University Press.

*2006. M. Rosenfeld. "Young Adulthood as a Factor in Social Change in the United States" *Population and Development Review* 32(1): 27-51.

*2005. M. Rosenfeld and Byung Soo Kim. "The Independence of Young Adults and the Rise of Interracial and Same-sex Unions," lead article in the *American Sociological Review* 70 (4): 541-562

*M. Rosenfeld. "Interracial Marriage and Age at Marriage" (Revised and Resubmitted to the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*)

Origins of the project:

"The Changing American Family" is the major project which I have developed since graduate school. This project did not grow out of my dissertation,¹ but is, rather, a completely new endeavor. I started the project with a small number of in-depth ethnographic interviews with interracial couples and same-sex couples in the San Francisco Bay Area. Analyzing the interviews, I noticed that nearly all the couples had mentioned moving away from their families of origin as a crucial part of their couple formation. I began to wonder whether young adults had always been so independent from their parents, and what roles geographic mobility and distance from parents might play in the rise of nontraditional romantic unions in the US. To answer these questions, I turned to the US census.

The answers I derived from the US census have begun to overturn some of the received wisdom about the history of the American family. The classic histories of the American family generally argue that the family system is dynamic, and that the post-

¹ Rosenfeld, Michael J., "The Demographics of Mexican American Assimilation," unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, 2000.

1960 changes in the American family are simply the continuation of centuries of family change. Some aspects of family life, such as household size, have been declining steadily for 200 years. Other aspects of the post-1960 family system are, however, entirely new.

Part of my argument in the “Changing American Family” project revolves around the independent life stage, a life stage which has emerged since 1960. Young adults experience the independent life stage after they have left their parents' homes, but before they have settled down to start their own family. During the independent life stage young men and women go away to college, travel, begin careers, and enjoy a period of relative social independence.

The rise of the independent life stage has reduced parental control over the dating and mate selection choices of their children. The decline of parental supervision and control results in a sharp rise in interracial and same-sex unions, the kind of unions that previous generations of parents were able to prevent. Although most Americans and many scholars believe that young adults are returning home to the parental nest in ever greater numbers (a phenomenon the press has dubbed 'the boomerang effect'), this widely held perception has it exactly backwards. In fact what really distinguishes modern family life from previous eras is the new independence (geographic, residential, and social) of young adults from their families of origin.

Until very recently, individual level census data from the past had never been available for scholarly analysis. Our historical knowledge of family life came from diaries, from the official records of a few towns and churches, or from travel writers such as Tocqueville. Now that we have individual level census records from 1850 through 2000, we are able to look into long term trends in family life in a way that inevitably must cast some of our previous assumptions aside. I use the newly available census data to describe the rise of the independent life stage, and the sharp increase in the number of interracial and same-sex unions in recent years. My analysis of census data offers a new explanation for why the tumult of the industrial revolution failed to produce an increase in nontraditional unions: most families in the industrial revolution moved to cities and factory towns together, so the basic structure of parental supervision over young adults was maintained.

By placing the post-1960 family changes in a long term historical and demographic context, I am able to offer a new perspective on the dramatic recent diversification in American family forms. I use in-depth interviews to explore the life histories of families and couples, and to illustrate the role that the independent life stage plays in social change.

Same-sex marriage is one of the most divisive issues of our times. My book attempts to answer several questions related to same-sex marriage. First, why now? Why has the climate for gay rights in the U.S. changed so much in the past few years? Second, what do the historical precedents and current demographic trends portend for the future of same-sex marriage in the US?

2) Intermarriage and Methods to Study Intermarriage

* M. Rosenfeld. 2005. "A Critique of Exchange Theory in Mate Selection" *American Journal of Sociology* 110 (5): 1284-1325.

* M. Rosenfeld. "Racial, Educational and Religious Endogamy in Comparative Historical Perspective" (Revised and Resubmitted to *Social Forces*).

* M. Rosenfeld. 2002. "Measures of Assimilation in the Marriage Market: Mexican Americans 1970-1990," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64:152-162.

* M. Rosenfeld. 2001. "The Saliency of Pan- National Hispanic and Asian Identities in U.S. Marriage Markets," *Demography* 38: 161-175.

My paper "Measures of Assimilation in the Marriage Market" analyzed intermarriage data to explain assimilation between Mexican Americans and non-Hispanic whites. My paper "The Saliency of Pan-National Hispanic and Asian Identities" analyzed marriage data in order to determine whether intermarriage between Japanese and Chinese Americans, or between Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans occurs often enough to suggest that pan-national "Asian" and "Hispanic" identities play an important role in role in peoples' most important choices.

My recent work on intermarriage has focused more on methodology. My paper "A Critique of Exchange Theory in Mate Selection" won the 2006 Roger V. Gould memorial award (for the best paper in the *American Journal of Sociology* the previous year). "A Critique of Exchange Theory" discusses the long history of conflicting empirical evidence for and against status-caste exchange theory (introduced by Kingsley Davis and Robert Merton in 1941). In "A Critique of Exchange Theory," I attempted to understand how and why different methodological approaches seem to yield such different results. In my paper "Racial, Educational, and Religious Endogamy in Comparative Historical Perspective," I adapt some of the statistical tools that have been used by scholars to study assortative mating in order present a new, broad overview of assortative mating patterns in the United States.

New Projects Under Development:

1) Development of Children in Nontraditional Families

*M. Rosenfeld. 2007. "Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress Through School." (Currently under review)

Marriage equality for same-sex couples is one of the defining legal and public policy debates of our time. The performance of same-sex couples as parents has been a fundamental issue in the US courts whenever same-sex marriage or gay and lesbian adoption rights are litigated. The lack of high quality nationally representative data represents one limitation of current studies of same-sex couples and their children. The literature studying children of same-sex couples is entirely comprised of small N (and nearly all convenience sample) studies.

Taking advantage of the massive sample size of the US census, I show that children raised by same-sex couples have grade retention rates similar to the grade retention rates of children raised by heterosexual couples. Children in all family types have dramatically lower rates of grade retention compared with children living in group quarters. The dramatic disadvantage of children living in group quarters (i.e. under the care of the state) suggests that any policy which makes it more difficult for same-sex couples to adopt children, and which lengthens the time children wait to be adopted, is probably harmful to children's welfare. My grant proposal "Same-Sex Couples and their Children" has been revised and resubmitted (July 15, 2007) to the R03 program of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

New Projects Under Development:

2) How Americans Meet Their Romantic Partners

How Americans met their spouses used to be a central topic for American sociology in the 1930s and 1940s, when the topic was simple- people met each other close to where they grew up. The typical finding was that 30 percent of marriage licenses were granted to couples who lived within roughly 5 blocks of each other, despite the low frequency of premarital cohabitation. Now that middle class Americans marry later, attend college, and travel before they settle down (what my research refers to as the Independent Life Stage), the way in which we meet romantic partners must be different from what it was 60 years ago.

In March 2007, I received the pilot data (two questions, N=500) from my nationally representative survey of how couples meet. The pilot study oversampled gay and lesbian respondents (N=250) in order to test whether nontraditional couples meet their partners in different ways compared to more traditional couples. The pilot data show that heterosexuals are much more likely to have met their partners through friends and family, and heterosexual couples are more likely to have first met as coworkers. The more traditional ways of meeting romantic partners tend to encourage more traditional types of romantic unions. Same-sex couples are much more likely to have met over the Internet, and gay men are much more likely to have met their partners in bars and clubs.

I currently have grant proposals before the sociology program of the National Science Foundation (submitted August 15, 2007) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (submitted October 5, 2007) to fund a full-scale nationally representative study of how Americans meet their partners, with 1 and 2 year follow-up to study couple dissolution rates. I am also doing in-depth ethnographic interviews for this project because survey questions alone cannot capture all the complexity of how we find our romantic partners.

New Projects Under Development:

3) Sexual Minority Youth and the Risk of Suicide

In wave 2 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 24% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school students reported that they had considered suicide in the past year, compared to 10% of heterosexual students. Suicide risk peaks in the adolescent years, and students from sexual minorities clearly face a higher risk of

suicide, along with higher associated risks of anxiety, alienation from school, and loneliness. LGB students represent a fundamentally at-risk group in America's high schools. The at-risk status of LGB students makes learning and achievement more difficult.

This project will involve two stages. In the first stage, I will analyze the nationally representative data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), to determine the correlates of LGB student alienation and suicide risk. The special vulnerability of sexual minority students within schools is in part due to micro-contexts within schools; minority students may be harassed by conduct that other students take no notice of.

One potential school-level answer to LGB student isolation, victimization, and elevated suicide risk is the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). GSAs are reputed to have a strong impact on the safety of sexual minority youth in high schools. The GSA is a fairly recent innovation which has spread quickly in states such as California whose state laws promote anti-discrimination efforts in the schools. The substantial participation of heterosexual students in GSAs has important political and theoretical implications. The alliance aspect of GSAs can be seen as drawing upon the decades old research paradigm of cooperative learning between otherwise hostile racial groups, a classroom strategy which has a long pedigree and for which substantial gains (in terms of interracial friendships and comity) have been reported. I am planning to do in-depth ethnographic research with three Bay Area high school GSAs, to complement my work with the Add Health data. A proposal for this project is currently under review at the W.T. Grant foundation (submitted July 11, 2007).

Teaching Statement

I teach methodological classes at the undergraduate level (Introduction to Social Research) and at the graduate level (Loglinear Models). I teach substantive courses about marriage and the family (The Changing American Family), about race (Imagined Identities: Racial and Ethnic Identities), and about urban studies and public policy (The Urban Underclass). All of these classes have been highly rated by students; ratings for each class are included on my CV. The last time I taught Loglinear Models, in Fall quarter 2005, I received a perfect score of 5.0 on the class evaluations from 10 graduate students.

Syllabi along with substantial additional information for every class are posted on my website. Introduction to Social Research is an undergraduate class that I revived after it had languished for several years at Stanford. My approach to teaching is to emphasize student projects wherever possible. Instead of lecturing about social research methods, I transformed the class into a project-based class which gave students more creative outlets, and thereby made them more engaged in the material. I have closely mentored several undergraduates through their senior honors theses, including three award-winning honors theses in the past three years.