

# New Census Data Shows Steep Increase in Cohabitation

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Data from the 2000 Census finds that the number of unmarried partner households has increased 72% in the last decade, from 3,187,772 in 1992 to 5,475,768 in 2000. These figures include both same-sex and different-sex couples.

"The trends are clear," says Marshall Miller, co-founder of the Alternatives to Marriage Project (AtMP), a national non-profit organization for unmarried people. "Over the last few decades we've seen unmarried cohabitation transformed from something scandalous to something most people do before they marry or instead of marrying.

1990 was the first time the Census offered respondents an "unmarried partner" checkbox. In previous years, the number of cohabitators was inferred when two unmarried different-sex adults lived together, a situation the Census called POSSLQ (People of the Opposite Sex Sharing Living Quarters). The weakness of that system was that it provided no way to distinguish roommates from intimate partners, and no data at all on gay and lesbian couples.

"As the number of unmarried partners increases, it's more important than ever that cohabitators have a place at the table," says Miller. He points to marital status discrimination in housing, insurance, employment, taxes, and benefits eligibility as areas where attention is needed. "Cohabitators are part of the family landscape," he says. "We're not just young childless couples, but also parents, baby boomers, senior citizens, and the couple next door." Research shows that the majority of couples marrying today have lived together first.

"The fairytales misled us. Getting married isn't the only way to live happily ever after," concludes AtMP Executive Director Dorian Solot. "The truth is that some princes stay single. Some princesses are lesbians. And there are cohabitators living throughout the kingdom. We've entered a new era where family diversity is the norm."

The Alternatives to Marriage Project can often help journalists find cohabiting couples in their area who are willing to be interviewed.

Use Census data to calculate the number of unmarried partner households in a city, state, or region.

The Alternatives to Marriage Project is a national non-profit organization for unmarried people, including people who choose not to marry, cannot marry, or live together before marriage. We work for greater understanding and acceptance of unmarried people.