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Family Profile No. 16, 2025

Age Composition of Same-sex & Different-sex Couples, 2023

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Drawing on 2023 1-year estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS), an estimated 1.3 million U.S. households were headed by same-sex couples, including 774,000 married and 530,000 cohabiting couples (authors' calculations). In contrast, approximately 69 million households were headed by different-sex couples, comprising 60 million married and 9 million cohabiting couples. Prior research using the U.S. Decennial Census has shown that same-sex couples tend to have larger age gaps between partners than their different-sex counterparts (Schwartz & Graf, 2009). This Family Profile draws on 2023 ACS 1-year estimates to examine the age composition of married and cohabiting same-sex couples. Because the ACS identifies same-sex couples through a household roster that measures only the sex composition of the household head's coresidential relationship (Kreider & Gurrentz, 2019), these estimates are restricted to couples in which at least one partner is the household head. We present findings on age gaps between partners and the age distributions of both younger and older partners in same- and different-sex couple-headed households, disaggregated by relationship type (i.e., married and cohabiting).

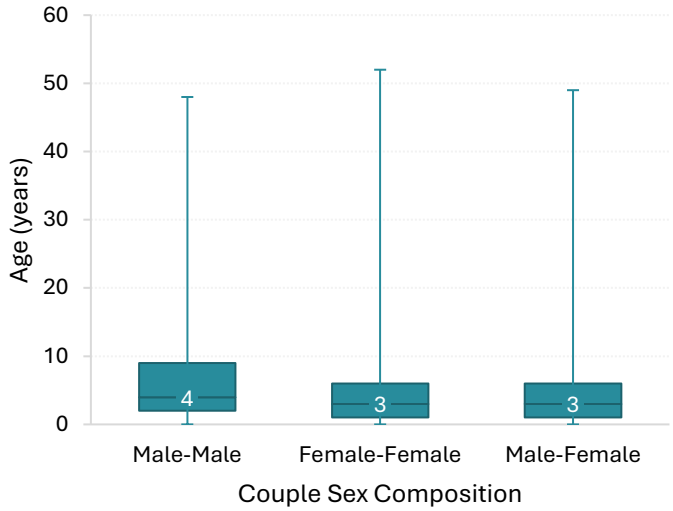
Age Heterogamy of Cohabiting Couples

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the age gap between partners in cohabiting couples according to their sex composition (i.e., male-male (M-M), female-female (F-F), and male-female (M-F)) using a box and whisker plot.

In the box and whisker plot, the lower half of the box reflects the 25th percentile, the middle the 50th percentile (median), and the top the 75th percentile. The whiskers (the lines above and below the boxes) range from the lowest possible value (i.e., 0, no difference in age) to the highest value (capped at the 99th percentile).

- The age gaps of female-female and male-female cohabiting couples were remarkably similar, with a median of 3 years, whereas male-male couples tended to show slightly more age heterogamy with an age gap of 4 years.
- The 25th percentile age gap was 2 years for male-male couples and 1 year for both female-female and male-female couples.
- Meanwhile, the 75th percentile age gap was 9 years for male-male couples and 6 years for both female-female and male-female couples.
- The age gaps within couples were clustered toward fewer years regardless of couple sex composition suggesting couples with larger age gaps were uncommon.

Figure 1. Age Heterogamy of Cohabiting Couples, 2023

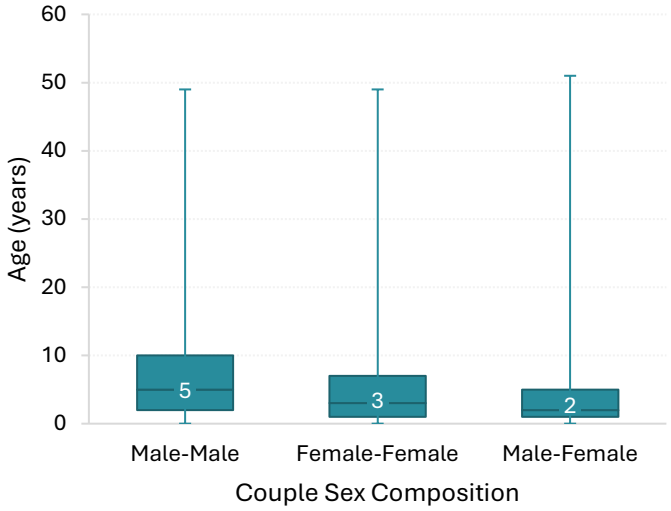


Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Age Heterogamy of Married Couples

- Like cohabiting couples, the age gaps between female-female and male-female married couples were more similar (median of 3 years and 2 years, respectively). In contrast, married male-male couples tended to exhibit greater age heterogamy (5 years).
- The 25th percentile age gap was 2 years for male-male couples and 1 year for both female-female and male-female couples.
- The 75th percentile age gap was 10 years for male-male couples, 7 years for female-female couples, and 5 years for male-female couples.
- Again, as with cohabiting couples, the age gap within married couples were clustered toward fewer years regardless of couple sex composition suggesting couples with larger age gaps were uncommon.

Figure 2. Age Heterogamy of Married Couples



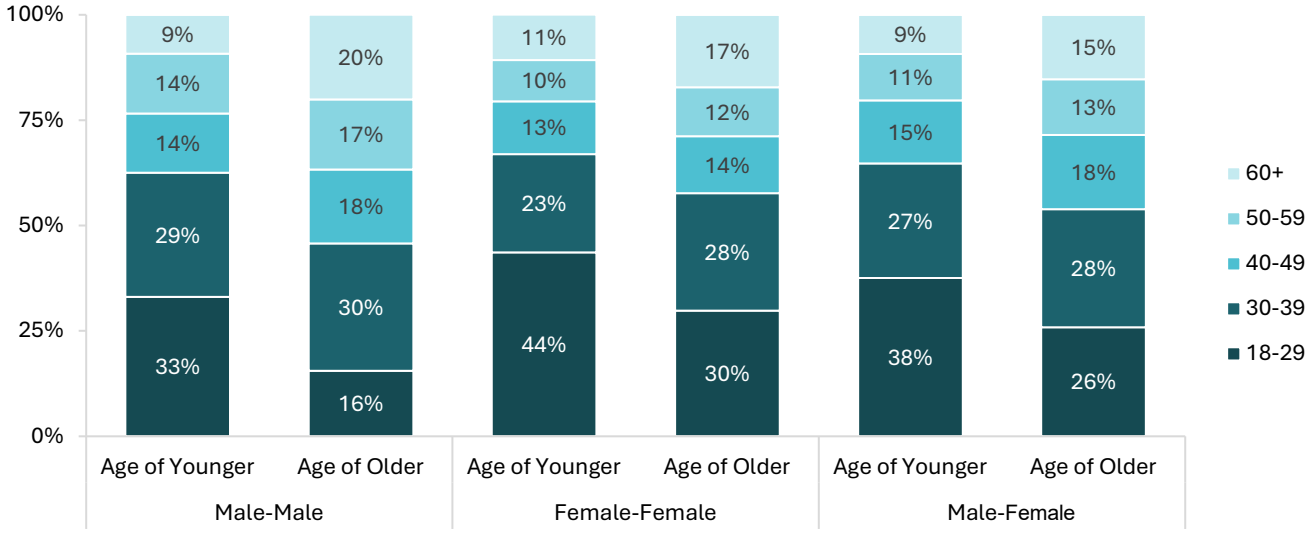
Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Age Distribution of Younger and Older Partners in Cohabiting Couples

Figure 3 illustrates the age distribution of cohabiting couples based on their sex composition. The "age of younger" column represents the age distribution using the younger partner's age, whereas the "age of older" column represents the older partner's age. If partners are the same age, then they have the same categorization for younger and older people.

- Male-male cohabiting couples showed greater variation across the age distributions of younger and older partners. For example, 33% of younger partners were 18-29, but only 16% of older partners fell within this range. Additionally, 9% of younger partners were 60+, compared to 20% of older partners.
- Female-female couples also displayed differences, though less pronounced than male-male couples. In 44% of couples, the younger partner was 18-29, compared to 30% of older partners. Meanwhile, 11% of younger partners were 60+, versus 17% of older partners.
- Male-female couples had more similar age distributions for younger and older partners than male-male or female-female couples. About 38% of younger partners and 26% of older partners were 18-29, whereas 9% of younger and 15% of older partners were 60+.

Figure 3. Age Distributions of Younger and Older Partners in Cohabiting Couples, 2023



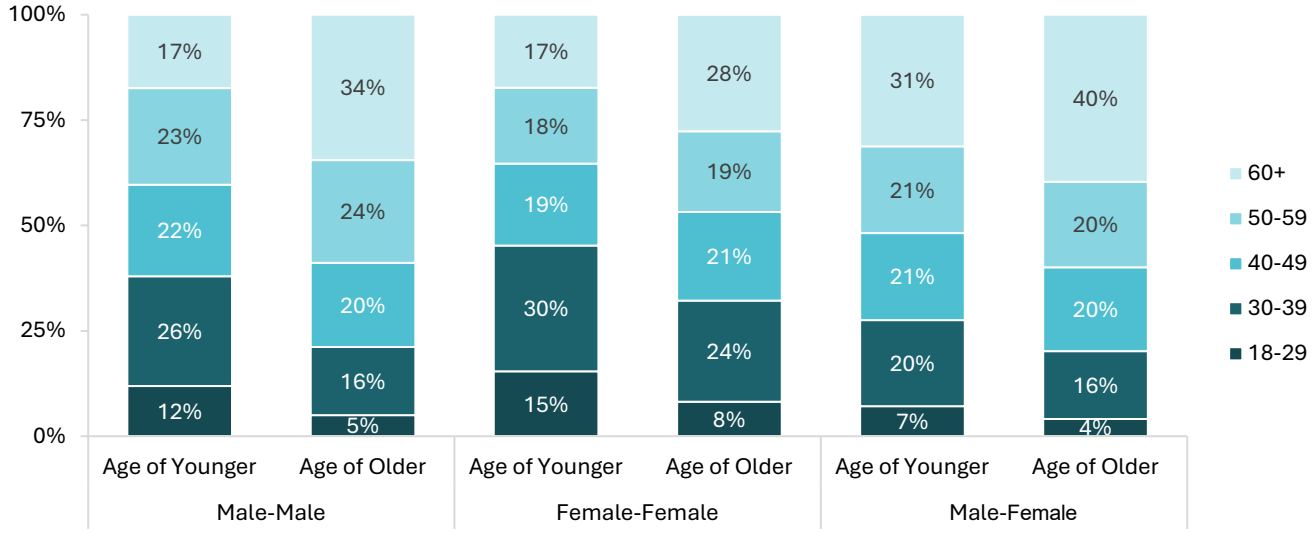
Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Age Distribution of Younger and Older Spouses in Married Couples

Figure 4 illustrates the age distribution of the younger and older spouses among married couples according to their sex composition.

- Compared to Figure 3, Figure 4 shows that married spouses tended to be older overall.
- Male-male married spouses had the most pronounced differences between the age distribution of the younger and older spouses. In 12% of married couples, the younger spouse was 18-29, compared to just 5% of older spouses. Meanwhile, 17% of younger spouses were 60+, while 34% of older spouses fell into this category.
- Female-female couples also showed differences, though less so than male-male couples. 15% of younger spouses were 18-29, compared to 8% of older spouses. Similarly, 17% of younger spouses were 60+, while 28% of older spouses were in this range.
- Male-female couples showed more similar distributions between the spouses and older spouses relative to male-male or female-female spouses. 7% of younger spouses were 18-29, compared to 4% of older spouses. Meanwhile, 31% of younger spouses were 60+, while 40% of older spouses fell into this group.

Figure 4. Age Distributions of Younger and Older Spouses in Married Couples, 2023



Source: NCFMR analyses of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates 2023 from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Data Sources

Ruggles, S., Flood, S., Sobek, M., Backman, D., Chen, A., Cooper, G., Richards, S., Rodgers, R., & Schouweiler, M. (2024). *IPUMS USA: Version 15.0* [Dataset]. IPUMS. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V15.0

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Kreider, R. M., & Gurrentz, B. (2019). *Updates to collection and editing of household relationship measures in the Current Population Survey*. U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from: https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/SEHSD-WP-2018-30.pdf.

Schwartz, C. R., & Graf, N. L. (2009). Assortative matching among same-sex and different-sex couples in the United States, 1990-2000. *Demographic Research, 21*, 843-878. https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2009.21.28.

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