
SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO? THE IMPACT OF AGE NORMS ON LEAVING HOME*

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This article studies the association between social norms and the timing of leaving home. Although largely overlooked by most recent studies on leaving home, life-course theory suggests that age norms and age grading influence life-course decisions in general and leaving home in particular. We use Fishbein and Ajzen's model of "reasoned behavior" to integrate this strand of research with the more individualistic view that dominates current thinking. Using data from a Dutch panel survey, we use a Cox regression model with a control for sample selection to estimate the association between perceived age norms and the timing of leaving home. We show that perceived opinions of parents are associated with the actual timing of leaving the parental home but that societal norms and friends' norms concerning the timing of leaving home are not. In addition, the timing of leaving home is also associated with the perceived costs and benefits of leaving home and with the perceived housing market situation.

Leaving the parental home is one of the first major transitions during young adulthood. In fact, it is one of the events that define the idea of "adulthood," together with financial independence, the completion of education, and the start of full-time work (Furstenberg et al. 2004). During the last two decades, a growing literature has studied the determinants of the age at which young adults leave the parental home. Most studies have focused on one or more of three general classes of determinants (Marini 1985). The first class of determinants deals with young adults' involvement in parallel events, such as getting a job, going to college, and marriage, that trigger the decision to leave home (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1993). Often, leaving home and these triggering events even occur simultaneously, like when one leaves home to start living with a partner (Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001; De Jong Gierveld, Liefbroer, and Beekink 1991; Mulder and Wagner 1993). The second class of determinants relates to the opportunities and constraints that either facilitate or impede the decision to leave the parental home, like housing market conditions (Jones 1995; Mulder and Clark 2000; Whittington and Peters 1996), economic conditions (Aassve et al. 2002; Avery, Goldscheider, and Speare 1992; Ermisch and Di Salvo 1997; Johnson and DaVanzo 1998), and the circumstances within the parental home (De Jong Gierveld et al. 1991; Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1989; Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1998; Murphy and Wang 1998; Whittington and Peters 1996). The final class of determinants deals with the propensity to leave home and focuses on the impact of cultural factors, like attitudes (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1989, 1993) and value orientations (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004).

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Most studies on leaving home view it as a relatively autonomous decision made by the young adult. This individualistic view on leaving home mirrors a more general tendency to stress the autonomy of young adults in deciding on the occurrence and timing of major life events (Buchmann 1989). Although it seems beyond doubt that the autonomy of young adults to act in accordance with their own ideas has increased in modern society, this individualistic view runs the risk of underrating the importance of social influences on decision-making processes during young adulthood. An exception to this individualistic view is the attention paid to the role of parental attitudes (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1989). For instance, Hill and Hill (1976; see also Mitchell, Wister, and Burch 1989) framed the decision to leave the parental home as a joint decision made by the child and his or her parents. However, the empirical interest in the role of normative factors in decision making about leaving home has been limited. This is remarkable, given the fact that the theoretical literature about leaving home, which is strongly embedded in the life-course approach, contains a critical emphasis on age and sequencing norms, as well as on cultural scripts that guide young adults' lives (Hogan 1978; Holdsworth 2000; Jones 1995). This is not to suggest that an interest in social norms has been absent from the literature concerning family formation. It has figured prominently in the discussion of changes in fertility (see, e.g., Bongaarts and Watkins 1996; Lesthaeghe 1980; Morgan and Berkowitz King 2001; Rindfuss, Morgan, and Swicegood 1988; Teitler 1996) and marriage (Modell 1980). Crook (1978: footnote 5), for instance, noticed that "A modernised (post-transition) society is still subject to social control; eyebrows are raised if individuals opt for large families." Nevertheless, little research has been done on the existence of norms about leaving home, and no research has been conducted on the association between such norms and actual behavior.

Given this background, the aim of this study is to increase our knowledge about the role of norms in the process of leaving the parental home, both theoretically and empirically. First, we discuss research on age norms and age grading to illuminate the ways in which norms influence life-course decisions in general and leaving home in particular. We use Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975; Ajzen 1991) model of "reasoned behavior" to integrate this strand of research with the more individualistic view that dominates current thinking. Second, in the empirical analysis, we examine whether perceived norms about the appropriate timing of leaving home are associated with the actual decision to leave home. For this purpose, we analyze data from a Dutch panel study on the transition into adulthood.

THEORY AND RESEARCH ON AGE NORMS

The importance of social norms for decision-making during young adulthood has been stressed within the life-course approach (Giele and Elder 1998; Hagestad and Neugarten 1985; Neugarten 1996; Settersten 2003). The basic idea is that social norms exist about the appropriate timing of major events in life. Such age norms are an integral part of an age system dividing "the life span into recognized seasons of life" (Hagestad and Neugarten 1985:35). Age norms also perform an important psychological function by providing guidance and regulation across individual life courses (Heckhausen 1999). By comparing themselves to age peers, people will be able to draw conclusions about whether they are "on time" with respect to important life transitions.

At least two questions have been raised with regard to the use of the concept of age norms. The most important one in this respect is whether age norms should be backed up by sanctions (Marini 1984; White 1998). Some (e.g., Marini 1984) have argued that to be considered norms, ideas about the appropriate age for events in the life course should be backed up by sanctions to prevent transgression. However, it is not clear whether there are really any sanctions attached to the transgression of age norms and, if so, what kind of sanctions they are. Alternatively, one could argue (e.g., Heckhausen 1999) that no sanctions need to be attached to age norms, given that they have been internalized by most people. Internalized norms are taken for granted by those who hold them, and, therefore, people

comply with these norms even in the absence of external sanctions. Another issue brought up in the literature concerns the precision of age norms—that is, whether they prescribe that an event has to occur at a specific age or rather that it should not occur outside a rather wide age range (Marini 1984; Settersten and Hagestad 1996).

Modell (1997:283) argued that the idea of age norms “has proven so attractive that social and behavioral scientists have tended to accept it with inadequate specification and empirical underpinning.” Still, some studies have tried to ascertain the existence of age norms concerning leaving home. Veevers, Gee, and Wister (1996) used in-depth interviews and showed the existence of age norms regarding the age at leaving home among Canadian women; they suggested that such norms have a specific role in parent-child interactions. Settersten and Hagestad (1996) presented the first broad empirical study on social norms on life-course events, based on a sample from the Chicago Metropolitan Area, and Settersten (1998) extensively reported results from this study on the topic of leaving home. He showed that the vast majority of respondents perceived an age deadline, that is, an age by which young adults ought to have left home: 78% of the respondents perceived an age deadline for men’s leaving home, and 69% perceived an age deadline for women’s leaving home. Age deadlines for leaving home were substantially shared by respondents, though some differences existed according to their gender and social group membership. At the same time, most people agreed that no specific consequences, including interpersonal sanctions, were attached to the violation of these perceived age deadlines. This supports the idea that informal age rules may be important in shaping life courses, even if they are not necessarily backed up by sanctions.

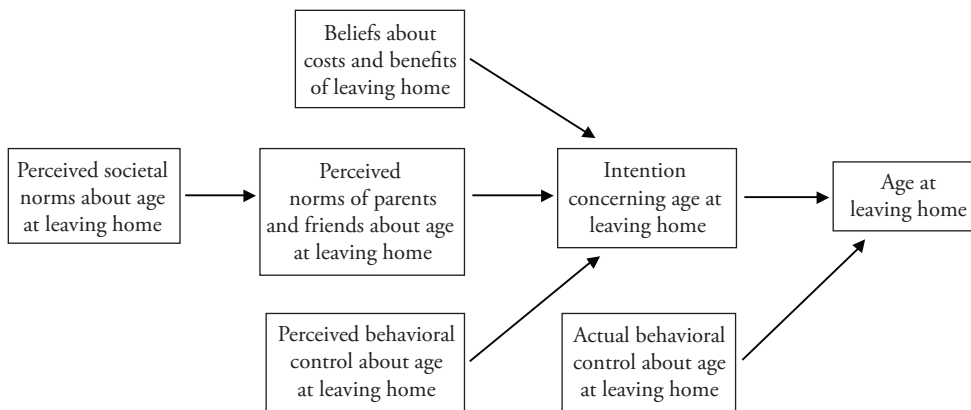
Although the study by Settersten (1998) suggests the existence of age norms, no study has yet studied their association with the timing of leaving home. In a cross-sectional study, Baanders (1998) examined the association between the perceived norms of parents and friends with regard to the timing of leaving home and the intentions of young adults to leave their parental home. She compared three categories of young adults: young adults who left the parental home in the previous year, young adults who intended to leave home in the next year, and young adults who did not intend to leave the parental home within the next year. She found that perceived normative pressures from parents and friends to leave home increased the likelihood that people intended to leave home in the next year rather than stay home for an extended period. The study did not reveal differences in normative pressures between young adults who intended to leave home and those who already had left in the previous year. Although these results are consistent with the theory that perceived norms influence leaving home, panel data are needed to better study the relationship between norms and actual home leaving.

THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The sociological and demographic literature on age norms reviewed above strongly suggests that age norms may influence the occurrence and timing of important life-course decisions but is not very helpful in explaining how norms relate to other factors that may influence home leaving. In our opinion, the theory of “reasoned behavior,” developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), is well-suited to illuminate these relationships and to derive testable hypotheses. We briefly discuss this theory, as elaborated by Ajzen (1988, 1991), and subsequently apply it to the process of leaving home.

According to Ajzen (1988, 1991), behavior is influenced by two proximate determinants: the behavioral intention and the actual control over the behavior under scrutiny. In addition, three more-distal factors play a role: attitudes or beliefs, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. These three factors directly influence people’s intentions and indirectly influence their behavior. The subjective norm in Ajzen’s model is determined by normative beliefs—that is, the perception that individuals have about whether “important others” will approve or disapprove of a given behavior. This emphasis on the

Figure 1. A Schematic Representation of the Causal Relationships Between Norms, Beliefs, and Behavioral Control in Explaining the Timing of the Decision to Leave the Parental Home



opinions of significant others can also be found in the more demographically oriented literature on social interaction (Bernardi 2003; Bongaarts and Watkins 1996; Kohler, Behrman, and Watkins 2001; Montgomery and Casterline 1996). The general thrust of this literature is that the impact of societal norms and scripts is transmitted by the social networks to which people belong.

Figure 1 offers a schematic representation of the causal links between these different factors in explaining the timing of leaving home that follow from the above discussion. First, the figure shows that the influence of perceived societal norms on the appropriate age at leaving home is mediated by the social networks to which young adults belong. Parents and friends—and, if available, the partner—are the most important mediating reference groups in this respect (Youniss and Smollar 1985). Although there are other channels through which societal age norms can be transmitted—for instance, through the media—we expect that parents and friends are by far the most potent mediating groups. These considerations lead to the formulation of our first two hypotheses.

First, perceived societal norms on age at leaving home are associated with the actual timing of leaving the parental home (Hypothesis 1). Second, the association between perceived societal norms and the timing of leaving home is mediated by the social networks young adults belong to, particularly by parents and friends (Hypothesis 2).

Earlier we referred to the individualistic thrust of much of the current thinking on decision-making during young adulthood and contrasted it to the long-standing sociological emphasis on norms and social influence. The Fishbein-Ajzen model allows for an integration of both viewpoints. The model stresses the fact that both aspects are important in explaining the intention concerning the age at leaving home and the subsequent actual timing of leaving home. In addition, the model includes perceived behavioral control as a third element that influences the actual timing of leaving home. What is interesting is that these three factors are conceptualized as having independent effects on behavior. However, the model does not make any a priori assumptions about the strength of each of the three elements. One could imagine that different types of societal conditions influence the relative strength of each of the three components. For instance, in a traditional society in which

social control and authority are still very important, one would expect a very strong impact of norms and networks on behavior. In a modern, individualizing society, in contrast, one would expect an increasing importance attached to individual beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of leaving home and a reduction in the importance attached to norms. Finally, in a society that is characterized by a very tight housing market, one would expect a relatively strong impact of perceived and actual behavioral control. These considerations lead to the formulation of a third hypothesis: perceived norms, beliefs about the costs and benefits of leaving home, and perceived behavioral control over leaving home are associated with the timing of leaving the parental home (Hypothesis 3). These effects are expected to be at least partially independent of one another.

Until now, leaving home has been discussed as an isolated process. However, as we pointed out earlier, it is often very closely related to other important decisions made by young adults, like the decision to enter college or to accept a job far from the parental home. Probably most important in this respect is the fact that for many young adults, leaving home coincides with the entry into a consensual union or marriage. The role of societal norms on leaving home in general and of the perceived opinions of parents and friends in particular may vary according to whether young adults leave home to live on their own or to live with a partner. As Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1989:87) stated, "marriage marked the 'normative' occasion for moving out of the parental home." If leaving home to live on one's own is triggered by external events like going to college or getting a job far from home, normative considerations would not be expected to play a major role. One has to leave home, whether or not this conflicts with general norms or parental opinions. Another reason why some young adults would leave the parental home to start living on their own is self-fulfillment and individualism. This reason to leave home has become more important, at least in the Netherlands (De Jong Gierveld et al. 1991). One could speculate that a taste for individualism is fostered by members of young adults' peer groups. If so, one would expect that if norms play a role in leaving home to live on one's own, the opinions of friends may be the most influential. However, one could also argue that most young adults who want to live on their own need financial support from their parents to realize this goal. If so, parental opinions on the proper age to leave home would gather strength. The situation is quite different when people leave home to start living with a partner. An acute trigger to leave the parental home often is not present, and as a consequence, some leeway in choosing the most appropriate moment to make this transition exists.¹ In those circumstances, norms on the appropriate timing of leaving the parental home are expected to gain importance, and this is particularly true for the norms of the parents, given parents' prominent role in providing current housing and future support to the couple (Goldscheider and DaVanzo 1989). In addition, parents may feel that the start of a union constitutes more of a final rupture in the parent-child relationship than living independently. If parents feel that the time to start a union has not yet arrived, parents may be willing to prevent undesired early union formation by showing disagreement (Axinn and Thornton 1992; Barber 2000). These arguments suggest that perceived norms may play a different role if young adults leave home to live with a partner than if they do so to live on their own. In the latter case, strong external constraints will often be present that reduce the likelihood that perceived norms play a role. This reasoning leads to the formulation of Hypothesis 4: perceived norms are more strongly associated with leaving home to live with a partner than with leaving home to live alone.

1. Of course, a pregnancy constitutes an exception to this reasoning. In this situation, a strong external trigger is present once again, and one would expect a smaller impact of norms on the timing of leaving home. The very low prevalence of pre-union pregnancies in the Netherlands renders this confounding effect unimportant in this study.

LEAVING HOME IN THE NETHERLANDS

This study focuses on leaving home in the Netherlands. Before we discuss the design of the study, some brief remarks on leaving home in the Netherlands are in order. Using retrospective life-history data on more than 20,000 individuals, Liefbroer and Dykstra (2000) observed a gradual decline in the age at which young adults left the parental home during the last century. The median age at which men born between 1901 and 1910 left the parental home was 24 years and 11 months. The median age at leaving home for men steadily decreased to 22 years and 4 months among men born between 1951 and 1960. For more recent cohorts, a slight reversal of this trend was observed. The median age for men born between 1961 and 1970 increased to 22 years and 6 months. The same trends were observed for women as well (Liefbroer and Dykstra 2000). The slight rise in the age at which young adults leave home among more recent cohorts has been attributed to the deteriorating economic situation of young adults (Baanders 1998). Since the 1960s, the Netherlands has had a welfare state that provides a relatively high level of support to young adults. The system of student loans, unemployment benefits, and rent subsidies allowed many young adults to start living on their own even with no or only limited financial support from their parents. Since the 1980s, welfare cutbacks have hit young adults particularly hard, making it more difficult for them to leave home and establish independent households.

Another important trend in the Netherlands among recent cohorts is that more young adults start living on their own rather than with a partner. For instance, 60% of the men born between 1931 and 1940 left home to start living with a partner. Among men born between 1961 and 1970, this percentage dropped to just over 40% (Liefbroer and Dykstra 2000). This growing proportion of young adults who start living on their own instead of with a partner is not just the result of the fact that young adults postpone union formation somewhat, but it also results from the increase of the young adult population that is enrolled in tertiary-level education.

DATA AND METHODS

Respondents

The data for this study come from the Panel Study on Social Integration in the Netherlands (PSIN; Liefbroer and Kalmijn 1997). The PSIN is a panel study designed to study the process of social integration of young adults within the life domains of living arrangements and family formation on the one hand, and education and occupation on the other. The panel study consists of five waves of data collection for a sample of Dutch young adults from the birth cohorts 1961, 1965, and 1969. Data were collected in 1987 (Wave 1), 1989 (Wave 2), 1991 (Wave 3), 1995 (Wave 4), and 1999/2000 (Wave 5). Respondents were approximately aged 18, 22, and 26 at the time of the first survey in 1987. Because most respondents who were living in the parental home at the start of the panel left the parental home relatively soon, and because we want to minimize potential bias resulting from sample attrition, we use data from only the first two waves.

In 1987, a two-stage stratified random sample of Dutch males and females (approximately equal in number) born in 1961, 1965, and 1969 was drawn (for details on the sampling procedure, see Liefbroer and Kalmijn 1997). In the first wave, 1,774 interviews were conducted. The response rate was 63.4%. In the oldest cohort, married young adults were somewhat overrepresented. Furthermore, students and respondents living in large cities were somewhat underrepresented. Apart from the underrepresentation of students, a comparison with data from other surveys showed that the educational attainment of the sample corresponded quite well to that of other surveys.

In Wave 2, 1,419 respondents (80% of the original sample) participated. Attrition between Waves 1 and 2 was somewhat higher among men, respondents born in 1965, and

those with low levels of education. Dropout was not related to living arrangements, activity status, and partner status at Wave 1 (see Liefbroer and Kalmijn 1997 for details). These data suggest that relatively minor selectivity seems present in this study.

The vast majority (more than 92%) of the respondents who belong to the oldest cohort (1961) already lived out of the parental home at the time of the first wave. Among young adults born in 1965, almost two-thirds (63%) had left their parental home at Wave 1. Among respondents born in 1969, however, the situation was quite different: a large majority (86%) of them were living at home at the time of the first wave. One of the manifestations of the potential sample selection problem we face is that we can conduct our main analyses only on young adults who live in the parental home at Wave 1 (630 respondents). However, we use information on young adults who already lived out of the parental home at Wave 1 (990 respondents) to control for the effect of sample selection. We do not include in the analyses the 154 respondents who were in the parental home at Wave 1 and subsequently dropped out of the survey. To control further for dropout selectivity, we use the level of education and place of residence as control variables in the multivariate analyses.

Measures

Timing of leaving home. The analysis of the determinants of leaving home is limited to respondents who had not yet left their parental home at Wave 1 and for whom information is available for at least one subsequent wave ($N = 630$). Duration between Wave 1 and leaving home (in months) is used as the dependent measure. In our multivariate analyses, respondents who had not left home within two years of Wave 1 are treated as right-censored. The choice for this strategy is discussed in the section on statistical modeling.

Simultaneity of leaving home and union formation. In order to distinguish between different destinations (i.e., leaving home to live alone versus leaving home to live with a partner), we compare the age at which respondents leave home and the age at which they start living with a partner. Given the potentially ambiguous timing of both events, a three-month window is used to ascertain simultaneity. If respondents start to live with a partner within three months after they leave home, they are classified as “leaving home to live with a partner.” All others are classified as “leaving home to live alone.”² Twenty-seven percent of all respondents leave home as single within two years, and 14% leave home to live with a partner within two years.

Age norms. Several options exist to measure age norms on life-course events (see Settersten and Mayer 1997). In the PSIN survey, the focus was not on age norms toward leaving home in general, but on the existence of timing norms thought to be of direct relevance to the situation of the respondents themselves. Therefore, the following question was used to obtain information on the existence of a societal norm on leaving home:

Opinions on living on one's own differ substantially. According to you, how does the majority of the Dutch population feel about living with one's parents among young people of your age?

1. that one should not live in the parental home anymore
2. that one should still live in the parental home
3. that it does not matter what you do

Such measurement is consistent with the theory of reasoned behavior. We expect that if young adults perceive that the majority of the Dutch population believes that someone of the respondents' age should still live at home, this will decrease their likelihood of leaving home. Alternatively, we expect that if young adults' perception is that the majority of

2. This last category includes people who went to live in student dormitories, with friends, or with a landlady/landlord.

the population believes that someone of the respondents' age should have left the parental home, they will leave home earlier.

In addition to a question on the existence of a societal norm, questions were posed on the norms of "significant others" within the personal network of the young adult. The following question was used to tap the perceived parental norm about leaving home:

Do your parents feel that:

1. someone of your age should not live with his/her parents anymore?
2. someone of your age should still live with his/her parents?
3. it does not matter whether or not someone of your age lives at home?

This question was asked for friends as well. If respondents believe that it does not matter to their parents or friends whether they live at home, then no norm on leaving home is operating. If they choose one of the alternative responses, a norm is operating: a norm is perceived suggesting either that respondents should still live at home or that they should already have left the parental home.

Table 1 shows descriptive information on perceived age norms and other variables used in our analyses. First, there is an interesting gradient in how young adults perceive social norms. Half of them perceive a societal norm either to leave home or to stay there. Many fewer perceive a norm among their friends: only about one-fifth of the respondents state that friends care about what they should do. The share rises to one-third when their parents are concerned. Hence, among young adults, norms at a societal level are more often perceived than norms by their parents, and the latter are perceived more than those of the peer group. Furthermore, a "stay" norm—that is, that one should still live in one's parental home at the respondent's age—is much more often perceived than a "leave" norm—that one should leave home at the respondent's age. This is particularly true with regard to parents: 28% of the respondents state that their parents feel that someone of their age should live at home, compared with only 6% who state that the parents think that someone should have left home at that age. The difference in proportions is smaller for perceptions regarding the Dutch population (36% versus 14%) and friends (14% versus 7%).

In general, a sizable minority of young adults perceive age norms for staying or for leaving home. However, when a norm is perceived, it is much more often a norm to stay at home than to leave home. For this reason, and given the small absolute number of respondents who observe a norm to leave home, the answers of the type "one should not live at home anymore" are pooled with answers of the type "it does not matter" and contrasted with the answer "one should live at home." Thus, the basic distinction is between respondents who perceive a "stay" norm and those who do not perceive such a norm.

Costs and benefits of leaving home. In line with other studies in the "reasoned behavior" tradition, a global measure was developed to tap respondents' general preferences for leaving home (Baanders 1998; Miller 1995). Respondents were asked to evaluate the consequences of leaving home for six aspects of their life: their level of independence from parents, the attention they could devote to their education or career, their opportunities to spend money on things they enjoy, their level of responsibility, their contacts with friends, and the recognition they receive from people around them. Each of these aspects could be scored on a five-point scale ranging from "would become much less" (-2) to "would become much more" (+2). In addition, respondents were asked to indicate how much importance they attached to these aspects on a five-point scale ranging from "not important" (1) to "very important" (5). By multiplying the perceived consequence and the importance of each aspect, we derive the score of each aspect, which could range from -10 to +10.

On average, respondents expected that leaving home would strongly increase their level of independence from their parents and their level of responsibility. They also expected a slight increase in their contacts with friends and in the attention they could devote to their career. Little change was expected in the recognition they received from people

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analyses ($N = 630$)

Variable	Cases Not Selected: Not Living in the Parental Home at Wave 1 ($N = 990$)		Cases Selected: Living in the Parental Home at Wave 1 ($N = 630$)	
	Percentage	Mean (SD)	Percentage	Mean (SD)
Dependent Variable				
Destination after leaving home (within 2 years after Wave 1)				
Single	n.a.		27.0	
With partner	n.a.		13.7	
Censored	n.a.		59.3	
Model Variables				
Societal norm				
Should not live at home anymore	n.a.		13.8	
Does not matter	n.a.		51.1	
Should still live at home	n.a.		35.1	
Parental norm				
Should not live at home anymore	n.a.		6.0	
Does not matter	n.a.		66.0	
Should still live at home	n.a.		27.9	
Friends' norm				
Should not live at home anymore	n.a.		6.8	
Does not matter	n.a.		79.5	
Should still live at home	n.a.		13.7	
Costs and benefits of leaving home	n.a.			1.5 (1.6)
Housing market situation	n.a.			2.5 (0.8)
Control Variables				
Gender				
Male	44.9		53.7	
Female	55.1		46.3	
Age at Wave 1				
18 years	7.8		67.0	
22 years	37.2		27.6	
26 years	55.0		5.4	
Father's educational level		4.2 (3.5)		4.4 (3.4)
Educational level at age 16				
Low	29.6		25.1	
Medium	33.0		33.7	
High	37.4		41.3	
Place of residence at Wave 1				
In a city	41.1		31.3	
Not in a city	58.9		68.7	

Note: n.a. = not available.

around them. Finally, respondents expected a clear decrease in their financial situation. Next, the total cost-benefit score of respondents was constructed by calculating the mean of the scores of the six items. A negative score indicates that respondents perceived more costs than benefits if they would leave home, whereas a positive score indicates that the benefits-costs balance was perceived to be positive. The mean score on this scale is 1.5 ($SD = 1.6$), suggesting that in general, the benefits of leaving home were perceived to outweigh the costs. More specifically, 16% of the respondents perceived higher costs than benefits, whereas 80% perceived higher benefits than costs.

Housing market. A third element that influences intentions and behavior in the “reasoned action” approach is the perceived behavioral control. With regard to leaving home, the respondents’ perceptions of the opportunity on the housing market seems to be particularly relevant. Therefore, a question was posed to respondents about how difficult they thought it would be to find affordable housing if they would leave home. Scores ranged from “no problem at all” (1) to “almost impossible” (5) (mean = 2.5; $SD = .8$). About half of the respondents thought that it would be no problem or quite easy to obtain affordable housing, whereas the other half thought that it would be difficult or almost impossible to obtain housing.

In addition to the model-based variables discussed above, a number of control variables were added to the analysis. These are briefly discussed below. Descriptive statistics for these variables are also presented in Table 1.

Gender. That women usually leave home at an earlier age than men (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1998; Mulder and Clark 2000) is confirmed when we compare young adults who were living in the parental home at Wave 1 with those who had already left home. In multivariate models, we included a dummy variable indicating whether a respondent was male.

Age at Wave 1. Respondents were 18, 22, or 26 years old at Wave 1, with a correspondingly higher level of young adults already living outside the parental home. We created two dummy variables indicating whether a respondent was aged 18 or 22, with age 26 as the reference category.

Father’s educational level. The more material resources that are available to young adults, the earlier they leave home (De Jong Gierveld et al. 1991; Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1998; Murphy and Wang 1998). Here, father’s educational level is used as an indicator of material resources available in the parental home. Our measure of educational level is the number of years (after primary school) needed to complete the level of education attained by the father of the respondent. This score ranges from 0 to 12. The mean level is similar between young adults who are living in the parental home and those who are not.

Educational level at age 16. Highly educated young adults leave home at an earlier age than young adults with relatively low levels of education (Mulder and Clark 2000). Because educational attainment at the time of the first wave is highly dependent on the sampling frame, we decided to focus on the educational level of respondents at the end of compulsory education, which is set at 16 years of age in the Netherlands. We categorize respondents as having low (vocational education at a low level), medium (general education at a low level), or high educational attainment (general and vocational education at a medium level) at age 16.

Place of residence at Wave 1. Urbanization may also play a role in the process of leaving home, although the direction of the effect is not clear-cut. On the one hand, young adults who live in urbanized areas could be expected to be living closer to institutions of higher education, thus diminishing their need to leave home in order to complete their education. On the other hand, young adults who live in urbanized areas could be expected to show higher rates of unconventional behavior and thus to leave home relatively early (Fischer 1995). We created a dummy variable indicating whether young adults live in a city with 100,000 or more inhabitants at Wave 1.

Statistical Modeling

Using the longitudinal information on life events obtained from successive waves of the PSIN, we can reconstruct the exact timing of leaving home and the destination after leaving home (i.e., leaving home to live with a partner versus leaving home to live alone) for those young adults who were living with their parents at Wave 1. Our statistical modeling strategy is based on event-history analysis, also known as survival analysis, because this is the appropriate set of techniques to study the associations between the variables of interest and the timing of the decision to leave home as well as the destination after leaving home.

Specifically, we model this relationship using the proportional hazard Cox regression model (Cox 1972). This model allows us to fully exploit the information on the timing of leaving home, which is available on a monthly time scale. However, we limit the analysis to the first two years after the initial interview (Wave 1). This decision is guided by three considerations, one that is theoretical and two that are more empirical. First, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) argued that their model works best during a relatively short time span after the model concepts have been measured because as time goes by, external events and developments may lead to a change in attitudes, norms, and perceptions of behavioral control. Second, the way in which age norms are measured in this study focuses explicitly on the situation at the time of the initial interview. It can be expected that such a measurement will be associated with mainly the short-term decisions of young adults, rather than with decisions made much later. Third, preliminary analyses (results not shown) strongly suggest that the association between perceived norms and leaving home is strongest during the first two years after they have been measured. Therefore, all young adults who have not left home within two years after the interview are treated as censored at 24 months.

As the descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate, we face a potential problem of sample selection in that we can test our hypotheses only on young adults who live in the parental home at Wave 1. Following similar examples in the literature (see, e.g., Ambrose, Capone, and Deng 2001; Lekkas, Quigley, and Van Order 1993) and in line with Heckman's (1976) approach to control for sample selection bias, we adopt a two-stage modeling strategy. In the first stage, a probit model is used to assess potential factors leading to sample selection (i.e., living in the parental home at Wave 1 versus having already left the parental home). The probit model is applied to all young adults ($N = 1,620$), excluding those who were in the parental home at Wave 1 and who dropped out of the survey between Waves 1 and 2. We use father's educational level, young adults' educational level at age 16, and place of residence at Wave 1 (city vs. other places) as predictors of sample selection. The results of the probit model are shown in Table 2.

In the second stage, a Cox proportional hazard regression model that includes a control for sample selection is fitted only to young adults who live in the parental home at Wave 1. In Cox regression models, we include the inverse Mills' ratio (originating for each individual from the estimates of the probit model) as a covariate. We use age and place of residence at Wave 1 only in the sample selection equation in order to avoid identification problems (place of residence does not influence the timing of leaving home in preliminary hazard regression models). To account for additional uncertainty induced by the inclusion of the inverse Mills' ratio and, therefore, with the potential measurement error in the control for sample selection, we derive estimates and standard errors for Cox regression models using 200 bootstrap replications for each model (Efron and Tibshirani 1993).

In order to test the first three hypotheses, we estimate a series of four Cox regression models, each time including the control for sample selection bias. To test the fourth hypothesis, we use a competing-risks, or double-destination, Cox regression model to estimate the association of covariates with the hazard of leaving home to live alone and with the hazard of leaving home to live with a partner; again, models include a control for sample selection bias.

Table 2. Estimates for a Probit Model Predicting Sample Selection (being in the parental home at Wave 1)

Variable	Coefficient	SD
Constant	-1.71**	0.12
Male	0.45**	0.08
Age 18 at Wave 1	2.72**	0.11
Age 22 at Wave 1	1.15**	0.10
Father's Educational Level	-0.02	0.01
Medium Level of Education at Age 16	0.14	0.10
High Level of Education at Age 16	0.01	0.10
Living in a City at Wave 1	-0.36**	0.08
Log-Likelihood	-654.72	

Note: $N = 1,620$.

** $p < .01$

RESULTS

Single-Destination Models

Table 3 shows the results of a series of four nested Cox regression models, with the timing of leaving home as the dependent variable; in all models, the control for sample selection bias is statistically significant. The first model shows that a perceived societal norm to leave home is not significantly associated with subsequent home leaving. Although young adults who perceive that youth of their age should stay at home are estimated to have a 12% lower hazard (the relative risk for this category is $\exp(-0.13) = 88\%$) than do other youth, this difference is not statistically significant, in contrast with our first hypothesis.

We also hypothesized (Hypothesis 2) that the association between societal norms and leaving home is mediated by the norms of parents and friends. Because societal norms are not significantly associated with the timing of leaving home, this hypothesis is rejected. Nevertheless, the second model reported in Table 3 shows that the perceived norms of parents are indeed significantly associated with the timing of the transition out of the parental home. Although the coefficient for perceived norms of friends is in the expected direction and is very close in magnitude to the coefficient for parental norms, it is not statistically significant. Thus, the results of this second model lead to the inference that the norms of parents are significantly associated with the timing of leaving home.

The third hypothesis concerns the independent association of cost-benefit evaluations, behavioral control, and age norms with the timing of leaving home. The third model in Table 3 includes all these variables. The model shows that young adults who perceive more advantages from leaving home leave home earlier than other young adults. At the same time, perceiving problems in finding suitable housing is associated with a lower probability of moving out of the parental home. Finally, the effect of a perceived parental norm remains significant as well. These results confirm Hypothesis 3, which suggests a partially independent association of the different aspects of the Fishbein-Ajzen model of reasoned behavior with the timing of leaving home.

The last model reported in Table 3 includes a set of exogenous control variables in order to test whether the effects of the variables considered so far are due to other factors. In fact, parental norms are still significantly associated with the timing of leaving home (the relative risk is 0.64). The estimated coefficients for attitudes and perceived

Table 3. Estimates for a Series of Single-Destination Cox Regression Models Predicting Leaving the Parental Home, With Controls for Sample Selection and With Bootstrap Parameter Estimates and Standard Errors

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Societal Norm: Should Stay at Home	-0.13 (0.14)	-0.02 (0.14)	-0.03 (0.16)	-0.09 (0.15)
Parental Norm: Should Stay at Home		-0.42* (0.20)	-0.39* (0.19)	-0.44* (0.17)
Friends' Norm: Should Stay at Home		-0.37 (0.28)	-0.41 (0.29)	-0.28 (0.29)
Costs and Benefits of Leaving Home			0.12** (0.04)	0.10** (0.04)
Housing Market Situation			-0.15 [†] (0.08)	-0.17 [†] (0.10)
Male				-0.31* (0.14)
Father's Educational Level				-0.05** (0.02)
Medium Level of Education at Age 16				0.11 (0.21)
High Level of Education at Age 16				0.35 [†] (0.18)
Inverse Mills' Ratio	0.53** (0.12)	0.42** (0.12)	0.43** (0.13)	0.42** (0.13)
Log-Likelihood	-1,578.34	-1,571.99	-1,564.62	-1,553.34

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. $N = 630$.

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

difficulties remain substantially unchanged. In all, these findings are consistent with Hypotheses 2 and 3: although societal norms do not matter, parental norms are associated with the timing of leaving home, and their effect coexists with cost-benefit perceptions and perceptions of behavioral control. The estimates are robust to controls for sample selection and for a set of exogenous variables that are known to influence the actual timing of leaving home.

Double-Destination Models

Hypothesis 4 predicts a stronger association of perceived age norms with leaving home to live with a partner than with leaving home to live alone. To test this hypothesis, we estimate a set of nested competing-risk, or double-destination, Cox regression models like those presented in Table 3, with a similar control for sample selection. To save space, we present in Table 4 only the results for the final model; the complete results are available from us on request.

In the case of leaving home to live alone, norms do not have a statistically significant effect. For leaving home to live with a partner, parental norms are strongly and significantly associated with the timing of an event (the relative risk is 0.27). Perceived costs and benefits are associated with leaving home to live alone, while housing market perceptions are not. With regard to leaving home to live with a partner, housing market prospects, rather than the cost-benefit calculation, is associated with leaving home. In all, these results largely confirm Hypothesis 4.

Table 4. Estimates for a Double-Destination Cox Regression Model Predicting Leaving the Parental Home to Live Alone or With a Partner, With Controls for Sample Selection and With Bootstrap Parameter Estimates and Standard Errors

Variable	Single	With a Partner
Societal Norm: Should Stay at Home	0.04 (0.18)	-0.48 (0.32)
Parental Norm: Should Stay at Home	-0.23 (0.23)	-1.31** (0.44)
Friends' Norm: Should Stay at Home	-0.42 (0.34)	0.30 (0.52)
Costs and Benefits of Leaving Home	0.11* (0.05)	0.04 (0.08)
Housing Market Situation	-0.02 (0.11)	-0.50** (0.17)
Male	-0.21 (0.18)	-0.60* (0.25)
Father's Educational Level	0.11** (0.02)	-0.11** (0.03)
Medium Level of Education at Age 16	0.20 (0.26)	0.08 (0.32)
High Level of Education at Age 16	0.54** (0.23)	0.04 (0.33)
Inverse Mills' Ratio	0.01 (0.18)	0.90** (0.21)
Log-Likelihood	1,020.74	489.96

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. $N = 630$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to further our knowledge about the role of social norms in young adults' decisions to leave home. In particular, we tested hypotheses derived from Fishbein and Ajzen's model of reasoned behavior. The results only partially supported our hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that young adults who perceive a societal norm that people of their age should still live at home stay in the parental home longer than young adults who do not perceive such a norm. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. By implication, our second hypothesis about the mediating role of perceived opinions of parents and friends was not confirmed either. However, this does not imply that perceived opinions of parents are unimportant. On the contrary, young adults who think that their parents want them to stay at home postpone leaving home in order to live with a partner. This situation clearly contrasts with the decision to leave home to start living with a partner, which is associated with the perceived norms of parents and with perceptions of the housing market situation. The reason that parents seem to be important in this respect could be that if parents think that their child is too young to leave home, they probably consider the child too young to start a union as well. Young adults in the Netherlands seem to be reluctant to go against the opinions of their parents in this regard, perhaps because of a fear of sanctions or because of a high degree of intergenerational transmission of norms and scripts. However, selection could play a role as well: young adults who highly value autonomy may be much

more likely to leave home to live alone. These same young adults may also assign much less importance to the opinions of their parents and more importance to the opinions of their peer group.

Another important implication of these findings is that societal age norms are not very important in the decision to leave the parental home. Although half of the young adults perceived a societal norm either to stay at home or to leave home, this perception did not seem to influence their behavior. This suggests that, at least for this event and in the Netherlands, societal pressure is not very strong. At the same time, however, the role of opinions within the social network is important. This could mean that social influence operates at the level of the social network rather than at the level of society. An interesting question for future research is whether this finding is true for other events and for other societies.

The model of reasoned behavior developed by Fishbein and Ajzen was fruitful in examining the association of norms and other factors with leaving home, even though our results were not in line with our expectations. It has also been used in other research to examine the determinants of other events in the transition to adulthood, like the choice between marriage and cohabitation (Liefbroer and De Jong Gierveld 1993) and the timing of first childbirth (Miller and Pasta 1994). The usefulness of the model as a heuristic device in examining the determinants of these transitions mainly derives from the fact that it offers a means of integrating the effects of social norms, individual considerations, and structural constraints. However, other factors may be important in understanding leaving home. For instance, the decision to leave the parental home is closely linked to events in other life domains, like the start of a university education, entry into the labor market, and marriage. In our models, only the link between leaving home and union formation was studied. A potentially fruitful avenue of future research would be to examine whether the association between norms and other subjective factors and leaving home remains significant after the inclusion of other important covariates of leaving home.

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