

Early Careers and Life Course Transitions for Three Cohorts of Young Adults

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Abstract

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A common claim among social scientists and commenters is that today's young adults do not follow the "traditional," direct road to adulthood and instead follow meandering, individualized paths. Increased and prolonged attachment to higher education, an increasingly mobile labor force, rising home prices, and changing norms around marriage and parenthood all contribute to this view of contemporary young adults as unmoored from traditional markers of adulthood. However, this characterization may overestimate differences between generations and underemphasize the substantial gender, racial, and class variations that occur within a generation. In this dissertation, I link the new employment narrative to the life course perspective to examine young adults' career and life trajectories at different moments in the labor market to empirically test claims about individualization and variation.

Using a mixed-method approach and data from two cohorts of young adults, I investigate how employment structures and economic contexts influence individuals' movement through the labor market and how their labor market experiences are linked to other spheres of life, chiefly

marriage and parenthood. In Chapter 2, I evaluate how employment transitions affect wage level and wage growth. Contrary to expectations, I find that voluntary mobility in the early career period has not increased and, in fact, workers in the 1980s have more employers in their early careers than workers in the 2000s. While moving from job-to-job increases wages for workers in both the 1980s and 2000s, both the prevalence and negative consequences of involuntary mobility is lower for workers in the 2000s. These findings suggest that there is less scarring from non-voluntary mobility for contemporary young adults and that voluntary, strategic mobility can be used to build financially rewarding careers. In Chapter 3, I compare sequences of employment, school, marriage and parenthood for two cohorts of young adults. I find that there has been a substantial increase in the concentration of young adults in trajectories defined by education and employment suggesting that contemporary young adults are prioritizing attending college and establishing their careers over starting a family in their 20s. This finding is especially pronounced for women. In Chapter 4, I use data from 19 interviews with young professionals living in Seattle to explore how they make sense of their employment and life experiences in the context of a fast-paced, changing economy. I find that these young professionals use narratives of decision making and personal responsibility to make sense of their own life paths and to define adulthood, ultimately reinforcing and reproducing their own privileges. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I compare the results of the sequence analysis conducted in Chapter 4 to the themes that emerged from the interviews in Chapter 4 to underscore the need for mixed-methods research to understand the both the empirical patterns and meaning making of the transition to adulthood.

Overall, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of coming of age in the 21st century by explicitly comparing employment and family formation patterns for two distinct cohorts, exploring variations along gender lines, and delving into the ways these patterns

reproduce social privilege and inequality. Broadly speaking, I find that life course for contemporary young adults is primarily organized around the labor market, and that for professional Millennials this orientation is reflected in narratives of personal and financial responsibility. This dissertation also advocates using both quantitative and qualitative research to fully understand the complexities of coming to age under evolving social structures and norms.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

“I feel like a grownup in that I can take care of myself and I can take care of my family. I feel confident and strong in that way. I don’t know, I still think there are so many times where I don’t know the right answer, and I don’t know how to make decisions. And I need help with just navigating the world. And I sort of always thought that grownups had more, were better at making decisions.” – Hallie, 34

The road to adulthood is fraught with decisions and turning points. In the short span of the 20s, young adults confront choices on multiple fronts including where to live, what job they want, if and when to have children, and if they want to share their life with someone. The decisions made during this period reflect who they are and who they want to be, and set the stage for their future lives. How the transition to adulthood unfolds is a product of individual desires, responses to external pressures, and adaptations to available opportunities. For many young adults, employment plays a crucial role in becoming an adult because it provides the income necessary to do things like moving out of parental home and leading an independent life. But employment is more than a means to an end. It also signals personal and financial responsibility and, for those with choices, is a reflection of their values and sense of self. Early jobs are also essential for jumpstarting satisfying and upwardly mobile careers as good first jobs often lead to good second jobs.

The paths individuals take as they move into adulthood are shaped by individual characteristics like gender and class background, and social contexts like entering the labor market during a recession. These factors dictate what opportunities are available to young adults, as well as social norms about what they ought to do. For example, young adults in rural and urban areas face different labor and housing markets, there are more occupations open to women

born in the 1990s than women born in the 1960s, and men and women confront different pressures for balancing work and parenthood. The social structures and norms that shape our lives evolve over time. In recent decades, the labor market has become increasingly organized around flexibility which has altered the ways we think about and plan for careers. At the same time, norms around romantic relationships and premarital sex have relaxed making cohabitation and postponed parenthood more common and accepted. Some researchers have suggested that the combination of these two forces—employment flexibility and relaxed family formation norms—has resulted in young adults becoming less attached to social institutions and are following more individualized paths from adolescence to adulthood (Arnett 2015). In dissertation, I evaluate this hypothesis by comparing the transition to adulthood for late baby boomers and Millennials.

Following C. Wright Mills, I am motivated by the idea that critical sociology takes place in the space in which “biography and history intersect” (Mills 1959). In this dissertation, I closely examine the ways structural and cultural changes impact the day-to-day lives of young adults. This dissertation sits at the intersection of the new employment narrative and life course research. The new employment narrative is a body of research that focuses on how employment structures and the meaning of work have changed over the last thirty years becoming increasingly organized around flexibility and career building across organizations. Life course research emphasizes the way structural and cultural landscapes influence individuals’ life histories (Elder 1994, 1998).

This dissertation focuses on the overarching question of how economic and social environments shape coming of age trajectories for two generations of young adults. Using data from late baby boomers and old Millennials, I explore the ways structural and normative

transitions have altered the transition to adulthood, especially in the spheres of work and family. While the demarcations between demographic cohorts are anything but crisp, they are useful for understanding large scale period effects. The baby boom generation was born in the decades following World War II, with many researchers considering 1965 the last birth year for this cohort. Late baby boomers, those born in the late 1950s and early 1960s, entered the labor market in the 1980s and experienced rapidly shifting expectations about work including the decline in the model of lifetime employment. Members of the Millennial generation were born in the 1980s and early 1990s. Millennials went to college, entered the labor market, and transitioned to adulthood primarily in the 2000s—a decade that included both the recession of the early 2000s and the Great Recession.

The Life Course Paradigm Meets the New Employment Narrative

While research on the life course spans from birth to death, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is viewed as a critical time in individuals' lives, with changes on multiple fronts taking place in a relatively short time span. Common indicators of the transition to adulthood include finishing education, finding stable employment, establishing an independent household separate from one's parents, getting married, and becoming a parent (Shanahan 2000). For many, transitioning from education to employment is a central, defining part of becoming an adult as employment provides a critical source of income and is seen as a desirable personal attribute and a marker of maturity, especially on the marriage market (Cherlin 2014).

The life course paradigm emphasizes the idea that life unfolds in patterned ways. Discrete historical events, evolving institutions, and changing norms shape the opportunities available to each generation and the life courses of individuals (Elder 1994, 1998). In this dissertation, I

examine how macro-level economic changes have impacted the transition to adulthood over the last four decades. In the decades immediately following World War II, the American economy rapidly expanded. The manufacturing, construction, and transportation sectors grew fueling migration from urban cores to the suburbs and allowing blue-collar workers to share in the post-war prosperity (Kalleberg 2011). During this “age of security,” an implicit social contract existed between employers and employees in which workers traded their loyalty for fair wages and stable employment spurring the model of lifetime time employment among white collar men. The model of adulthood born during this postwar expansion included a linear pathway through major milestones based on traditional gender roles: men worked to fulfil their breadwinner role, while women had home and family centered role in their early 20s. Young, white families took advantage of the expanding suburbs to purchase reasonably priced homes in which to establish an independent household and raise their children. While this model of adulthood was certainly never available to all Americans, it became the predominate normative model of adulthood and continues to hold the American imagination (Seterson 2011).

After 30 years of unprecedented growth and prosperity, economic pressures in the mid-1970s began to unravel the age of security. Increased price competition, globalization, weakened unions and the rapid expansion of the service and knowledge sectors deteriorated the social contract between employers and employees and pushed the organization of the labor market towards more flexible employment relationships. Today’s workers are more mobile, have a shorter tenure with employers, and make more employer transitions throughout their careers (Hollister 2012).

Job changes are commonly billed as a way for modern workers to build an interesting and lucrative career (Arthur 1994). And indeed, research shows that some job transitions do increase

wages. However, mobility can also result in wage loss and income instability, especially if the employment transition is not voluntary and/or results in time spent unemployed. For instance, Hollister (2012) demonstrates that compared to making no employment change, simultaneous employer and occupation changes increase the likelihood of *both* a wage increase and a wage decrease (Hollister 2012). That is, making a complex employment change may result in a big reward, but it comes with a big risk of loss. The benefit of employment change depends on both the cause of change, workers' skills and education, and workers' ability to successfully navigate the labor market. Workers with high levels of human and social capital are more likely to see benefits from employment changes than are workers with fewer skills and resources (Fuller 2008).

This leads to a critical point: the effect of structural changes and historical contexts depends on individual characteristics like gender, race, and class. Class background is particularly salient for accessing higher education, which is critical for entering into highly paid service and knowledge sector jobs (Carnevale et al 2010). In response to the growing demand for higher levels of skills and education, enrollment in higher education has more than doubled over the last three decades, rising from 8.5 million students in 1970 to 20 million students in 2013 (National Center for Education Statistics 2014). During this time, the cost of higher education has also increased substantially. In 1984, the average annual cost of 4-year institution including tuition, fees, and room and board was \$11,548 (adjusted to 2014 dollars), while in 2014, the annual cost more than doubled to \$25,409. The cost of a 2-year institution has also increased now costing an average of \$10,153 per year (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). To pay for these rising costs, young adults and their families are taking on large amounts of student debt. According to one estimate, 44 million Americans hold student debt with the

average student in the graduating class of 2016 having over \$37,000 in loans (Friedman 2017). While young adults from middle-and-upper class families are certainly feeling the rising costs of education, the burden is heaviest on lower-class young adults who are more likely start-and-stop school in order to work, and less likely to finish their degree on time or at all than their higher income peers (Borgen and Rumbaut 2011). This example demonstrates how individual characteristics intersect with structural changes: in this case socioeconomic class affects young adults' ability to obtain the credentials and skills necessary to compete for high-wage jobs in the service and knowledge sector. Young adults from middle-and-upper-class backgrounds are better positioned to take advantage of opportunities in the new labor market than are their lower-class peers.

Regardless of socioeconomic status, gender exerts a normative force on women and men that has traditionally pushed them towards distinct life course patterns. However, changes in norms around women's attachment to education and work suggest that the salience of gender in defining the transition to adulthood could be decreasing. A central question of this dissertation is whether gender differences in employment and life trajectories have declined between the 1980s and the 2000s. Since the 1970s, increased acceptance of women's participation in the labor market has contributed to women's gains in education and increased attachment to the labor force (Goldin 2006). This long-term cultural shift around women's roles has enabled women to invest in their own futures and participate more fully in the labor market. Furthermore, as employment is closely tied to other aspects of life, these changes employment have corresponded with changes in patterns of family formation. As women plan for long careers, they delay or forgo marriage and parenthood (Goldin 2006). In 1995, the probability of a woman having married by age 25 was 59% and the probability of marriage by age 30 was 76%. Fifteen years

later, in 2010, the probability of being married by 25 declined to 44% for women, and the probability of being married by age 30 dropped to 68%. While men have traditionally married later than women, their probability of marriage of age 30 has also declined to 56% (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher 2012).

Data and Methods

In this dissertation, I compare early career and life trajectories for multiple generations of young adults in order to improve our understanding of how economic contexts shape the transition to adulthood. In each empirical chapter, I explore questions about how young adults navigate complex economic conditions to jumpstart their working adult lives and how differences in women and men's transitions to adulthood have changed over time. I draw on three sources of data from two distinct cohorts to take an explicitly comparative approach to evaluating early adulthood.

The first data source is the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth 1979 cohort (NLSY79). This nationally administered sample began in 1979 and includes over 11,000 individuals born in the years 1957-1964. This cohort, representative of late baby boomers, transitioned from adolescence to adulthood primarily in the 1980s when the industrial composition of the American economy was rapidly shifting from manufacturing to service and knowledge sector (Plunkert 1990). The respondents in the NLSY79 faced the beginning years of the "new employment narrative" and saw the ushering in of new forms of employment relationships and career models, including a de-emphasis on lifetime employment. Additionally, this cohort saw dramatic increases in women's attachment to education and the labor force, especially for married women and women in professional occupations. Women's attachment to

the labor market not only contributed to changes models of employment, but also shifted patterns of family formation with women delaying motherhood until after finishing their education and establishing themselves professionally (Goldin 2006).

The second source of data comes from the 1997 cohort of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, which includes over 8,000 individuals born between 1980-1984. This cohort, early members of the Millennial generation (“old Millennials”), graduated high school and entered into young adulthood in the first decade of the new millennium. They faced two recessions during their early adult lives: the early 2000s recession spurred by the dot-com bust, and the Great Recession caused by the financial and sub-prime mortgage crises of 2007. During the Great Recession, unemployment rates for all working-aged people peaked at 10%, and young adults experienced even sharper declines in employment. In June 2009, the employment rate for men born between 1980 and 1982 reached a low of 82%, a decrease from a pre-recession high of 88%. Employment rates among young women also fell, bottoming-out at a low of 73% in 2009 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). At the same time that this group faced economic conditions not seen since the Great Depression, trends in the way professionals envisioned careers were exacerbated with an increasing emphasis on self-fulfillment, passion, and creativity—at least among professional workers.

The last source of data used in this dissertation comes from interviews with 19 professionals living in the greater Seattle area. Like the respondents of the NLSY97, all interview participants are Millennials. However, the age range of the interview participants is

larger and the sample includes both “old Millennials” and “young Millennials.”¹ The youngest of the interview participants was born in 1992 and is currently 25, and the oldest participant was born in 1981 and is currently 36. This sample includes individuals who graduated high school before, during, and after the Great Recession. While participants were born across the United States and internationally, all currently live in the Seattle area. They all hold at least a Bachelor’s degree and all but one is employed in professional jobs. While the members of this sample are not representative of all Millennials, they do encapsulate the views and experiences of highly educated young adults and, as such, provide a unique vantage of what it means to be a young adult in today’s economy.

In addition to being comparative across generations, this dissertation uses a mixed-method approach. The two NLSY datasets are designed to be similarly constructed and are ideal for comparing two generations that faced different economic and cultural contexts. While the ability to make these generational comparisons is a substantial benefit of using the NLSY surveys, there are also drawbacks to using secondary data sources. In particular, in using the available data for in the sequence analysis in Chapter 3, I take for granted conventional measures of adulthood (e.g. employment and family formation). Chapter 3 assumes that while economic and normative contexts may have changed, what constitutes adulthood has not. In Chapter 4, I use interviews to call into question the salience of these taken for granted markers for contemporary young adults. Using this mixed method approach, I am not only able to both show

¹ While there is no precise distinction between old and young millennials, the introduction of internet into the home as well as memory of 9/11 are commonly used to distinguish the two groups.

how empirical patterns of employment and family formation have changed between the two generations, but I am also able to discuss how the meaning of adulthood may be evolving.

Dissertation Outline

The remainder of this dissertation consists of three empirical chapters each focusing on different questions about coming of age in today's economy and a conclusion that synthesizes the conclusions from each analysis. Chapter 2 analyzes the cumulative effects of employment change while Chapters 3 and 4 focus on overall patterns of career and life development.

In Chapter 2, I use data from the 1979 and 1997 cohorts of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth to analyze the wage consequences of employment transitions and cumulative mobility in the beginning stages of career development. While strategic job mobility can help workers build successful and satisfying careers, all employment transitions are not equivalent and the effects of mobility are not uniform. Too much mobility and job transitions that are not worker driven may not improve wages and may lead to bouts of unemployment and wage declines because they signal a lack of commitment to future employers. However, as employment relationships change, the social meaning of mobility may also be changing (Fuller 2008). Given recent structural and normative changes in the labor market, it is important to understand what types of mobility are beneficial to workers and what types are detrimental, and if the relationship between mobility and wages has changed over time. The results of this chapter show that it is not the incidence of job changes that impact wages, but rather the cause of the job change. Layoffs and discharges lower wages and increase the likelihood of experiencing a substantial wage decline, while voluntarily quitting for non-family reasons increases wages and the probability of experiencing a substantial wage increase. While these general trends are

consistent in the NLSY79 and the NLSY97, both the prevalence and costs of involuntary employer separations are higher for workers in the 1980s which suggests that scarring effects of job loss are less consequential for workers in the new economy. Overall, this chapter adds weight to the argument that strategic mobility can be used to build upwardly mobile careers.

In Chapter 3, I again use data from the NLSY79 and NLSY97 to compare generational changes. In this chapter, I use extensive data on the dates of employment, education, marriage, and parenthood to construct sequences of early adulthood to evaluate the hypothesis that structural and normative changes have resulted in a more varied and complicated process of coming of age for young adults in the early twenty-first century. Sequence analysis accounts not only for the occurrence of roles or markers, but also the timing and duration of different life stages. I focus on four major states—school enrollment, employment, getting married and becoming a parent—and the permutations of these combined states. Some qualitative research has suggested that the prevalence and timing of traditional markers shifted in the late twentieth century, and that today’s young adults are less likely than older generations to follow a linear trajectory through these states and more likely to follow individualized pathways (Arnett 2015). However, using sequence analysis on four prominent indicators of adulthood, I find evidence to the contrary. Instead of pathways to adulthood becoming less standardized, I find an increase in standardization between age 18 and 29. This standardization is primarily driven by increased attachment to higher education and employment and the decline of family formation in the 20s. This trend is particularly pronounced for women. Young women in the early 2000s are less likely to get married and become mothers in their 20s than young women in the 1980s and are more likely to follow paths to adulthood defined by continual attachment to the labor market.

While in Chapter 3 I take for granted measures of adulthood commonly used by social scientists, in Chapter 4, I use data from interviews with high educated young adults in Seattle to call into question the meaning of these markers for professional Millennials. In particular, I focus on the ways in which young professionals draw on their own experiences to define adulthood primarily as the ability to make choices and to be personally and financially responsible. While they downplay achieving discrete markers like homeownership and parenthood, they emphasize the ability to make decisions for oneself. This view of adulthood is facilitated by their ample educational and income and ultimately reproduces class distinctions by reinforcing narratives of meritocracy, choice, hard work, and personal responsibility.

Lastly, Chapter 5 contains concluding remarks about what it means to be a young adult in first part of the 21st century. In this chapter, I discuss the connections between the results from the sequence analysis in Chapter 3 and the interviews in Chapter 4 to highlight how empirical patterns found in the sequence analysis align with and contradict the stories told by professional Millennials. For instance, I discuss the apparent discrepancy between increased concentration in education trajectories and the value professional Millennials place on education to define adulthood. I also address racial differences in pathways to adulthood. Chiefly, while the trends in increased attachment to education and delayed family formation hold for all race and gender groups, young black men are disproportionately unattached from both the labor and marriage markets, and young black women are disproportionately single parents. Lastly, in this chapter I also consider the implications of this dissertation on how social scientists should think about and measure the transition to adulthood. Above all, the qualitative work in this dissertation demonstrates how using conventional measures of adulthood neglects the moral narratives and justifications used by young adults that ultimately reproduce class structure.

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of early careers and early adulthood for contemporary young adults by showing common patterns to adulthood as well as subjective feelings about what it means to be an adult in today's economy. While some social scientists have hypothesized that prolonged higher education, increased workforce mobility, and relaxed norms around romantic relationships and parenthood have resulted in modern young adults living highly individualized lives, I find that this theory may overestimate the standardization of the life course of prior generations. The transition to adulthood for today's young adults centers around employment, resulting in both fairly standard life courses for young adults in their 20s and an emphasis on personal and financial responsibility. However, the ability to participate in modern models of adulthood is highly stratified. Young adults without access to resources that provide them with the education credentials to participate in today's labor market are left out of both the most common paths to adulthood, and the prevalent definition of what it means to be a responsible adult.

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Chapter 2:

Navigating Labor Markets: Strategic Employment Transitions and Wage Growth

“One is really obvious which is compensation which is key because it sort of levels the playing field between all the different possible things one could be working on and really helps you make a good objective decision about what are the best opportunities for you out there.”—Kevin, 29

Abstract

Job mobility across organizations can help workers build satisfying and financially rewarding careers. In particular, workers at the beginning of their careers often switch employers to find better fitting jobs and opportunities for growth. However, all employment transitions are not equivalent. Involuntary mobility and complex employment changes often result in stagnate or decreasing wages instead of wage growth. While mobility in the early career stage has always been common, changes in the structure and norms of the labor market over the past few decades have made employment changes increasingly common throughout the career potentially shifting the social meaning of job mobility and the way mobility is rewarded or penalized in the labor market. Using data from the 1979 and 1997 cohorts of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, this chapter analyzes the wage consequences of employment separations in early careers to assess the extent to which the social meaning and monetary effects of mobility have changed. I find that across both generations, the type of employer separation matters for wages and wage growth, with involuntary changes resulting in wage loss and voluntary changes resulting in wage gain. Additionally, I find that the costs of involuntary employer separations are higher for workers in the 1980s than workers in the 2000s suggesting that scarring effects of job loss may be less consequential for workers in the new economy.

Introduction

Strategic job mobility can help workers build successful and satisfying careers. While the job-shopping model assumes that workers will stop changing jobs and settle into long-term employment after finding a “good-fitting” job, the boundaryless career model assumes that workers will continue to change jobs throughout their careers. While these two models presume different long-term outcomes, both include strategic job mobility during the early career. And in fact, mobility in the beginning of the career has been shown to improve wages. However, employment transitions are not all the same and the effects of mobility are not uniform. Job churning—frequent movement through a series of jobs without upward mobility—and job transitions that are not worker-driven do not improve wages and may lead to periods of unemployment and wage declines. Frequent job transitions may scar workers and signal a lack of commitment to future employers reducing wages.

Using data from the 1979 and 1997 cohorts of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, this chapter analyzes the wage consequences of employment transitions and cumulative mobility in the early career for two generations of workers. Given recent changes in the structure and norms of the labor market, it is important to understand what types of mobility are beneficial to workers and what types are detrimental, and if the relationship between mobility and wages has changed over time. I find that while cumulative mobility has little impact on wages, the type of employer separations impacts wage level and wage growth. Involuntary employer separations (e.g. layoffs and dishcharges) lower wages and increase the likelihood of experiencing a substantial decline in wages, while quitting for non-family reasons increases wages and the probability of experiencing a substantial wage increase. While these general trends are consistent between the two cohorts, both the prevalence and costs of involuntary employer separations are

higher for workers in the 1980s suggesting that scarring effects of job loss are less consequential for workers in the new economy.

Background

Employment Transitions and Wages

Workers at the beginning of their careers are expected to benefit greatly from strategic job changes. Models of career growth theorize that workers use job changes, especially in the early career, for upward mobility. During the job-shopping period, young workers learn about the labor market and employers as they move through a series of jobs each one better-fitting than the one before. Job-shopping theory assumes that after this period of trying-on jobs, workers will settle into a long-term employment relationship with a single employer. Job changes are assumed to be voluntary, a time of learning, and to decrease after a worker finds a well-fitting job. While the boundaryless career model also assumes that workers use job transitions to build a career, it does not assume that workers will settle into long-term employment, but rather that contemporary workers will continue to change jobs to build dynamic career arcs. This model stresses that as workers move between organizations, rather than up a career ladder within an organization, they gain income, prestige, and satisfaction (Ricardo and Guest 2010). Bidwell and Briscoe (2010) weave together ideas from both the job shopping model and the boundaryless career model by arguing that the reasons workers change jobs shift over time and depend on their changing needs and skills (Bidwell and Briscoe, 2010). As workers acquire skills in one job, they use these cultivated resources to find new jobs in other organizations. Bidwell and Briscoe argue that turnover, especially during later stages of the career, is not be the result of a poor job match, but rather a strategic part of career growth and development.

Both the job-shopping and boundaryless career models presume that job changes are worker driven. However, mobility that is *not* voluntary can be detrimental to wages in both the short and long-term (Keith 1993, Fuller 2008, (Ruhm 1991, Gangl 2006, Keith 1993). Employers may interpret involuntary job loss as a signal of inferior worker quality and therefore be less likely hire job seekers and/or offer lower wages to perspective employees (Gangl 2006, Keith 1993).

A robust set of empirical research confirms that voluntary employment transitions can result in wage gains and involuntary employment transitions can lead to wage loss (Brand 2006, Topel and Ward, Keith 1993, Fuller 2008, Keith and McWilliams 1995, Alon and Tienda 2005). However, while the general relationship between type of job separation and wage remains constant across studies, the magnitude of this relationship varies widely by worker characteristics, dataset, and years covered by the study. For instance, Brand (2006) finds that job displacement can result in earnings loss from anywhere between 10-and-25%, but Keith (1993) finds that involuntary mobility results in a decrease in wages of 2%. Using data from the original sample of the NLSY, Keith (1993) finds that a voluntary employment transition results in an increase in wages for men by 1.6%, but using data from the NLS79, Fuller (2008) finds that voluntarily quitting a job for non-family reasons increases hourly wages by 3% for both men and women.

While a single job change certainly impacts immediate wages, cumulative mobility also determines career trajectories and wage profiles. While strategic mobility can be used to build upwardly mobile careers, too much mobility can signal a lack of commitment to potential employers. This is especially true for non-voluntary changes. Fuller (2008) shows that while a single lay-off does not significantly impact wages, multiple lay-offs have a negative effect on

wages. Similarly, Light (2005) finds that highly mobile workers have lower wage growth than their less mobile counterparts because mobility is negatively associated with employment continuity. Thus, while voluntary mobility can help build financially rewarding careers, workers with *too much* mobility, especially too much involuntary mobility, may see lower wages, especially when an employer separation also leads to time out of the paid labor force.

Women's Mobility

Women are less likely to see wage gain from mobility (Alon and Tienda 2005; Brand 2006; Brett and Stroh 1997). Women who leave a job for family related reasons and women with higher than average mobility experience greater wage penalties than their male counterparts (Fuller 2008). Women with a history of mobility may be penalized because employers interpret their mobility as a signal of being unreliable or uncommitted. Furthermore, in a study of managers, Brett and Stroh (2007) find that while male managers who find a new job in the external labor market experience substantial wage increases, female managers do not. Female managers who move organizations see no wage gains compared to female managers who stay within an organization's internal hierarchy. This study emphasizes that the effects of mobility to build a career varies by social location and women are less likely to catalyze employment transitions into earnings growth than men. In a meta-analysis of studies on the boundaryless career model, Rodrigues and Guest argue that the models of job shopping and the boundaryless career were developed around the experiences of male white-collar workers (Rodrigues and Guest 2010), and do not adequately describe the experiences of female, non-white, and lower-skilled workers.

Social Meaning of Mobility in the New Employment narrative

Fuller (2008) argues that the social meaning of mobility—the way employers interpret and reward or penalize mobility—is the key to understanding the differential effects of mobility on wages. Mobility history coupled with the characteristics of a worker may signal different things to employers. For instance, while a moderate level of mobility may signal ambition and drive, too much mobility may signal unreliability or lack of dedication. And workers who churn through a series of parallel jobs or whose employment history is spotted with spells of unemployment may be viewed negatively by employers, while workers who seamlessly move from one job to another in an orderly fashion may be viewed positively.

The social meaning of jobs, careers, and mobility is potentially changing in tandem with changes in the structure of the labor market. As Vallas and Prener write, there is a “complex interplay between economic and cultural constructs” (p.339) of the labor market and “culturally rooted shifts in work expectations have the potential to recast the way workers think about and experience the employment relationship” (p.338). That is, as the structure of the labor market changes, so too do norms of employment. Thus, as employment relationships become shorter and careers more flexible, the meanings of mobility and employment separations may be changing too (Vallas and Prener, 2012; Fuller 2008).

Declining employment tenure is one of the most significant changes in the labor market over the last three decades (Farber 2008, Bidwell 2013). While women’s increased attachment to paid labor has offset changes in long-term employment relationships, data clearly shows that men’s long-term employment has declined, and job churning—employment lasting a year or less—has increased (Farber 2008). Today’s career paths also include more occupation changes. Not only do today’s workers shop for optimal employers, they also seek out optimal occupations (Neal 1999). Contemporary workers are more likely to follow career paths that include both

employer changes, occupational changes, and simultaneous employer-and-occupation changes (Hollister 2012, Neal 1999, Chudzikowski 2012). However, complex employment changes do not necessarily result in wage growth. Hollister (2012) finds that compared to making no employment changes, making a simultaneous employer and occupation change increases the likelihood of experiencing *both* wage increases and wage decreases. As tenure decreases and mobility across the career grows, how employers reward or penalize mobility may also be changing.

Research Agenda

Proponents of the job-shopping and boundaryless career models of employment suggest that workers change jobs to build a satisfying and financially rewarding career. However, the benefits to mobility are not universal and mobility does not always lead to wage gains. Furthermore, changing norms in the new economy may be shifting the social meaning of mobility ultimately altering in the way mobility is rewarded in the labor market.

In this chapter, I examine if the social meaning of mobility has changed over the last three decades by analyzing the impact of employment history on wages for two cohorts of workers in the early stages of their careers. Using data from the NLSY79 and the NLSY97, I address the following questions:

1. Do voluntary and involuntary job separations have different impacts on wages for workers in the 1980s and in the 2000s?
2. Has the effect of cumulative mobility on wages changed for workers in the early stages of careers in the 1980s and the 2000s?
3. Are there differences in the relationship between mobility and wages by gender and generation?

The vast majority of existing research on the relationship between employment changes and wages was conducted on workers entering the labor market during the 1980s and 1990s, including numerous studies using the original NLSY cohort and the NLSY79 (Light and McGarry, 1998; Keith, 1993; Keith and McWilliams, 1995; Alon and Tienda, 2005; Fuller, 2008; and Hollister, 2012). Far less research has been conducted on younger generations, and I could find only one article that addressed the effect of employment change on wages for respondents of the NLSY97. This article did not disaggregate type of job separations or consider cumulative mobility, ended in 2011, and did not analyze women's wages (Malloy, Smith, Wozniak 2014). While it makes sense that the NLSY97 is currently underused to study career growth given the age of the respondents, the time is right to make use of this rich data set. The recently released 16th wave of data includes data from 2013, when the respondents were between 29 and 33 years old. Now that the majority of NLSY97 respondents have been in the labor market for around ten years, studying their career trajectories and wage growth is not only possible, but critical given the substantial evidence suggesting that changes in the labor market have rapidly increased over the last few decades (Sullivan and To, 2014).

Data, Measures, and Methods

Data and Sample

Respondents of the NLSY79 were born between 1957 and 1964, and respondents of the NLSY97 were born twenty years later between 1980 and 1984. In this chapter, I analyze wages at age 29 and wage change between age 22 and age 29. Table 1 shows the calendar years respondents turned 22 and turned 29. After the 2011 survey, the NLSY97 moved to a biannual interview schedule and did not interview respondents in 2012. Therefore, there are no recorded

wages for 2012. While some information on employment—like which employers a respondent worked for—was retrospectively added to the dataset after the 2013 interview, employer-specific variables, including wages, were not recorded in 2012. Thus, respondents from the birth year 1983 are not included in the analysis as there is no wage data for the year they turn 29. I can, however, use the 1984 birth cohort as they turned 29 in 2013—a survey year that included reported wages. The structure of the NLSY97 allows the cumulative mobility and employment history variables to still be properly calculated for the 1984 cohort despite the survey not occurring in 2012.

Table 2.1: Calendar Years NLSY79 & NLSY97 Respondents turn 22 and 29

NLSY79			NLSY97		
Birth Year	Year, Age 22	Year, Age 29	Birth Year	Year, Age 22	Year, Age 29
1957	1979	1986	1980	2002	2009
1958	1980	1987	1981	2003	2010
1959	1981	1988	1982	2004	2011
1960	1982	1989	(1983)	(2005)	(2012)
1961	1983	1990	1984	2006	2013
1962	1984	1991			
1963	1985	1992			
1964	1986	1993			

The two outcomes in this chapter are: (1) wage level at age 29, and (2) wage change between 22 and 29. Only respondents who have valid wages at both time points are included in the analytic sample. All models include employment history measures including reasons for past employer separations. Thus, I exclude respondents who were not interviewed in every survey between age 22 and 29. Lastly, following Fuller (2008), I exclude respondents for whom reported pay is less than \$1/hour or “longitudinally inconsistently” over \$100/hour.

Table 2.2: Analytic Sample Sizes

	NLSY79	NLSY97
Original Sample Size:	11,406	7,177
Analytic Sample Size:	4,832	3,861

1 The original sample size for the NLSY79 excludes the military sample; the original sample size for the NLSY97 excludes respondents born in 1983

2 The analytic sample size includes only observations that meet in the inclusion criteria including valid wages at age 22 and 29, interviewed in every survey year between 22 and 29, and no missing values on any covariate

Measures

Dependent Variables

The first outcome of interest is hourly wages at age 29. Wages are inflation-adjusted and logged. I use OLS regression to estimate wage level. The second outcome of interest is wage change between age 22 and age 29. Hollister (2012) shows that using a continuous variable for wage change produces skewed results that are sensitive to small starting wages and Dwyer (2004) notes that the vast majority of job changes include some variability in wages. Thus, to examine the effect of mobility on substantial wage change, I analyze four binary variables indicating a wage loss of 5% or more, a wage loss of 10% or more, a wage gain of 5% or more, and a wage gain of 10% or more. Each of the four wage change outcomes is estimated using a separate logistic regression model.

Independent Variables

I use a series of measures to capture employment history and employment characteristics. The first is a measure of overall mobility. I calculate this measure by counting the total number of distinct employers each respondent worked for between age 22 and 29. I also include the proportion of weeks a respondent spent employed, out of the labor market, and unemployed between age 22 and 29 to measure attachment to paid labor. Workers with higher attachment to the labor market (higher proportion of time spent employed) should see higher wages relative to individuals with lower attachment to the labor market (higher proportion of time spent unemployed).

To analyze differential impacts of voluntary and involuntary employment transitions, I count the number of times a respondent leaves a job due to a lay-off, a discharge, quitting for family reasons, and quitting for other reasons. Following Fuller (2008), I consider quitting for non-family reasons to be quitting for economic reasons. While the NLSY97 includes more nuanced reasons for leaving (e.g. including quitting to return to school and quitting to look for another job), the NLSY79 includes only broad categories of employer separations. In a supplemental analysis of the NLSY97, I disaggregate quits into quitting specifically to take another job and other quits. I first count the total number of times a respondent experiences each type of employment separation and then construct piece-wise categorical variables indicating experiencing a particular separation never, once, or two or more times. As Fuller argues (2008), while the first involuntary separation may be fairly innocuous, a history of involuntary separations may attach more stigma to the worker. I extend this argument to voluntary quits as well: a one quit may have a different impact on wages than a large number of quits.

Current job characteristics, including occupation, industry, working full-time, and tenure are included in all models. Occupation is coded into five categories: (1) management, professional, and specialty occupations, (2) technical, sales, and support workers, including health care technicians, (3) service occupations, (4) farming, fishing and forestry, and (5) construction, production, and operation occupations. Industry is coded into six categories: (1) agriculture, forestry, and fishing, (2) construction, manufacturing, transportation, and utilities, (3) wholesale and retail trade, (4) finance and professionals service, (5) other services, including entertainment, (5) public administration. Respondents working for 35 hours or more a week are considered working full-time, and respondents working less than 35 hours a week are considered working part-time. Job tenure is measured by the number of months from the start of the job to

time of interview, or if the job has recently ended, to job stop date. Lastly, inflation-adjusted, logged wages at age 22 are included as a baseline wage measure.

Control Variables

Control variables include current economic climate, age specific demographic controls, and time invariant demographic controls. Current economic climate is measured using the census region (northeast, north central, south, and west), an urban/rural dummy variable, and local unemployment rate for respondent's place of residence at age 29. Year-specific local unemployment rates are broken into quartiles.

Age specific control variables include education, marital status, and parental status at age 29. While the NLY97 includes more nuanced yearly measures of educational obtainment, I use only three educational categories (no high school degree, high school degree, and some college/college degree) to be consistent across cohorts. Marriage and parenthood are both dummy variables. Lastly, race and gender are included as covariates. Race is coded as (1) black, (2) Hispanic, and (3) Non-Black/Non-Hispanic². All also include models birth year as an additional control.

Table 2.3 Descriptive Information by Cohort

	1979 Cohort	1997 Cohort
Dependent Variables		
Wages age 29, Inflation Adjusted to 2013 dollars	548.89 (315.16)	1630.85 (1003.88)
Wages age 22, Inflation Adjusted to 2013 dollars	210.15 (105.27)	838.88 (924.02)

² The NLSY97 includes a mixed-race category. For this analysis, I group these individuals (83—less than 1% of the original sample), with the Non-Black/Non-Hispanic respondents as there is not a similar category in the NLSY79.

Percent Wage Change 22-29	2.04	0.98
	(2.44)	(1.86)
Wage Loss >5%	7.29	11.63
Wage Loss > 10%	6.27	9.87
Wage Gain > 5%	90.19	83.19
Wage Gain > 10%	88.7	80.39
Wage Gain > 25%	82.48	69.52
Employment History		
Number of Employers	4.80	4.42
	(3.05)	(2.49)
Proportion of Weeks Employed	0.86	0.83
	(0.17)	(0.19)
Proportion of Weeks Out of Labor Force	0.08	0.10
	(0.13)	(0.14)
Proportion of Weeks Unemployed	0.05	0.06
	(0.08)	(0.09)
Employer Separations		
No Lay Offs	46.25	68.64
1 Lay Off	24.55	22.38
2+ Lay Offs	29.19	8.99
No Discharges	84.27	81.79
1 Discharge	11.93	12.79
2+ Discharges	3.81	5.41
No Family Quits	87.7	92.26
1 Family Quit	9.57	6.53
2+ Family Quits	2.73	1.22
No Other Quits	15.07	8.99
1 Other Quit	19.25	16.84
2+ Other Quits	65.67	74.18
Full time, current job	83.44	80.08
Occupation		
Managerial and Professional Occupations	21.24	31.34
Sales and Support Occupations	30.72	30.3
Service Related Occupations	13.13	17.12
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	2.09	0.51
Construction and Production Occupations	32.82	20.73
Industry		
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	2.84	1.2
Construction, Manufacturing, Transportation	35.8	17.87
Wholesale and Retail Trade	18.86	14.46
Finance and Professional Services	25.61	47.32
Other Services	12.05	15.18
Public Administration	4.84	3.96

Local Unemployment Rate		
Bottom quartile	25.76	24.76
2nd quartile	25.18	24.84
3rd quartile	26.34	24.89
Highest quartile	22.73	25.51
Region		
Northeast	17.95	15.72
North Central	23.75	21.29
South	38.41	40.43
West	19.9	22.56
Urban	80.99	79.12
Education		
No High School	11.95	6.79
High School	63.02	25.38
College	25.03	67.83
Control Variables		
Married	54.6	38.67
Parent	48.94	54.23
Female	45.09	49.94
Male	54.91	50.06
Race		
Black	16.75	24.89
Hispanic	23.06	21.83
Non-Black, Non-Hispanic	60.19	53.28
Birth Year		
1957	9.5	
1958	10.75	
1959	10.89	
1960	15.36	
1961	14.76	
1962	13.48	
1963	13.37	
1964	11.88	
1980		23.96
1981		25.15
1982		25.41
1984		25.49

Results

Mobility and Job Separations

I begin by looking at differences in cumulative mobility and job separations by cohort. Table 4, below, shows the mean number of employers and types of employment separations for workers in the NLSY79 and NLSY97. Among this sample, workers that entered the labor market in the 2000s on average work for *fewer* employers in the beginning of their careers than workers who entered the labor market in the 1980s. The average worker from the NLSY79 held 4.8 jobs in the first eight years of their careers, whereas the average worker from the NLSY97 held 4.4 jobs—a decrease of 8%. Overall, while employment changes are more common in the NLSY79, more of the employer separations are driven by layoffs and family-related quits, and fewer of the transitions are quits for economic reasons. In the NLSY97, more employer separations are driven by quitting for economic reasons.

Table 2.4 Employer Separations and Mobility Measures

	1979				1997				
	mean	s.d.	min	max	mean	s.d.	min	max	
Number of Employers, Ages 22-29	4.80	3.05	1	23	4.42	2.49	1	29	***
Number of Layoffs	1.17	1.60	0	15	0.45	0.83	0	17	***
Number of Discharges	0.21	0.57	0	7	0.26	0.65	0	8	***
Number of Family Quits	0.16	0.47	0	5	0.09	0.34	0	3	***
Number of Other Quits	2.86	2.46	0	21	3.19	2.39	0	17	***

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < .001

The trends in Table 4 mask gender differences in mobility. Table 5 shows the mean number of employment transitions separately for men and women in each cohort. Male workers in the NLSY79 have, on average, more employers than female workers, and experience more layoffs and discharges. Female workers, on the other hand, experience 7.5 times more family

quits than male workers. There are fewer gender differences in the NLSY97 cohort. While male workers still experience more layoffs, they are *not* more likely to experience a discharge or less likely to quit for family reasons compared to female workers. However, female workers do have higher rates of quitting for non-family reasons than male workers in the NLSY97.

Table 2.5: Employer Separations by Cohort and Gender

	1979					1997				
	Male		Female		t-test	Male		Female		t-test
	mean	s.d	mean	s.d		mean	s.d	mean	s.d	
Number of Employers, Ages 22-29	4.93	3.18	4.65	2.88	***	4.45	2.58	4.39	2.39	
Number of Layoffs	1.39	1.75	0.90	1.35	***	0.56	0.98	0.33	0.64	***
Number of Discharges	0.26	0.63	0.15	0.48	***	0.28	0.68	0.24	0.62	
Number of Family Quits	0.04	0.22	0.30	0.63	***	0.09	0.34	0.09	0.34	
Number of Other Quits	2.89	2.52	2.82	2.40		3.00	2.32	3.38	2.44	***

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < .001

Mobility and Wages: Comparing the NLSY79 and NLSY97

Table 6 presents the results of an OLS regression on the inflation-adjusted, logged wages at age 29 for both the 1979 and 1997 cohort. While the number of jobs held between age 22 and 29 does not have a statistically significant effect on wage level, time spent unemployed and types of employment changes do. Unsurprisingly, workers who spend a higher proportion of time unemployed have lower wages than peers who spend less time unemployed. For both the older and younger generation, workers with less commitment to paid labor have lower wages than similarly situated workers, but the magnitude of this effect is larger for respondents of the NLSY79. A 1% increase in the time spent unemployed reduces wage level by 36% of the NLSY79 and 33% for the NLSY97.

For both the older and younger cohort, being discharged decreases wages, and the effect increases with the number of discharges. Workers in the NLSY79 who are fired once have wages that are 94% of the wages of workers who have never been fired, and workers who have been

fired two or more times make 88% of what workers who have never been fired make. The effect of multiple discharges is somewhat lower for workers in the NLSY97 cohort. Workers who have been discharged two or more times make 91% of the wages of workers who have never been discharged. For respondents of the NLSY79, quitting for family reasons, including pregnancy, also decreases wages, and the magnitude of this effect is larger than the magnitude of the effect of being discharged. Workers who have quit for family reasons two or more times earn 82% of what workers who have never quit for family reasons make. Quitting for family reasons has no effect on wage level for the 1997 cohort. Lastly, quitting for economic reasons increases wage level for the older generation. There is a positive effect of both one and two or more quits on wages indicating that multiple voluntary job changes benefited workers from the 1979 cohort, and there is not a decreasing effect of “too much” mobility. Surprisingly, there is no effect of quitting on wage level for the NLSY97 cohort, suggesting that strategic mobility does not result in higher wages in the new economy.

Unsurprisingly, wage level at age 22 has a positive effect on wages. For a one dollar increase in wages at age 22, we can expect to see a 24% increase in wages at age 29 for the NLY79 cohort and a 22% increase in wages at age 29 for the NLSY97 cohort. Tenure at the current employer also has a small, but significant, positive impact on wages.

While the wage premium for higher education exists for both cohorts, it is larger for the NLSY79. Compared to workers without a high school degree in the NLSY9, worker with a high school degree can expect 13% higher wages, and those with a college degree can expect 40% higher wages. For the NLSY97, workers with a higher school degree can expect 1% higher wages and those with a college degree can expect 11% higher wages than those without a high school degree.

Table 2.6: Effect of Mobility on Wage Level

	1979			1997		
	B	Std. Err.		B	Std. Err.	
Employment History						
Employer Count	-0.002	(0.003)		-0.005	(0.004)	
Wages age 22	0.212	(0.013)	***	0.198	(0.016)	***
Proportion of weeks employed	0.149	(0.119)		-0.026	(0.145)	
Proportion of weeks out of labor force	-0.139	(0.129)		-0.197	(0.155)	
Proportion of weeks unemployed	-0.459	(0.148)	**	-0.394	(0.173)	*
Tenure (months)	0.001	(0.000)	***	0.002	(0.000)	***
Full-Time	0.028	(0.016)		0.046	(0.019)	*
Employer Separations						
One Lay-off	-0.008	(0.015)		-0.025	(0.019)	
Two or more Lay-offs	-0.002	(0.017)		-0.054	(0.028)	
One Discharge	-0.066	(0.018)	***	-0.071	(0.023)	**
Two or more Discharges	-0.131	(0.032)	***	-0.094	(0.034)	**
One Quit for Family Quits	-0.076	(0.021)	***	-0.024	(0.030)	
Two or more Family Quits	-0.199	(0.037)	***	0.043	(0.065)	
One Quit	0.073	(0.020)	***	0.012	(0.031)	
Two or more Quits	0.101	(0.021)	***	0.053	(0.032)	
Occupation						
Sales and Support Occupations	-0.089	(0.017)	***	-0.233	(0.020)	***
Service Related Occupations	-0.227	(0.022)	***	-0.424	(0.026)	***
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	-0.399	(0.052)	***	-0.728	(0.126)	***
Construction and Production	-0.140	(0.020)	***	-0.251	(0.027)	***
Industry						
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	0.059	(0.045)		0.194	(0.083)	*
Construction, Manufacturing	0.106	(0.018)	***	0.095	(0.025)	***
Wholesale and Retail Trade	-0.101	(0.018)	***	-0.135	(0.024)	***
Other Services	-0.054	(0.020)	**	-0.207	(0.024)	***
Public Administration	0.083	(0.028)	**	0.282	(0.039)	***
Local Unemployment Rate						
2nd quartile	-0.026	(0.016)		0.009	(0.021)	
3rd quartile	-0.050	(0.016)	**	0.002	(0.021)	
Highest quartile	-0.083	(0.017)	***	-0.020	(0.021)	
Education Level						
High School	0.120	(0.019)	***	0.012	(0.031)	
College	0.342	(0.023)	***	0.101	(0.031)	**
Region						
North Central	-0.146	(0.018)	***	-0.061	(0.024)	*
South	-0.184	(0.017)	***	-0.087	(0.023)	***

West	-0.048	(0.019)	*	0.041	(0.025)	
Urban	0.083	(0.016)	***	0.026	(0.019)	
Controls						
Male	0.131	(0.014)	***	0.095	(0.017)	***
Hispanic	-0.030	(0.020)		-0.015	(0.023)	
Non-Black/Non-Hispanic	0.027	(0.017)		0.026	(0.020)	
Married	0.047	(0.013)	**	0.075	(0.016)	***
Parent	-0.008	(0.014)		-0.055	(0.016)	**
Constant	4.553	(0.143)	***	6.002	(0.190)	***
n		4830			3,762	
R2		0.434			0.372	

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < .001

Models include birth year as an additional covariate

Table 7 presents the results from four logit models on wage change from age 22 to age 29. Using wage change shifts the focus on analysis to career growth and development. While types of employer separations have substantial impact on experiencing wage growth for the 1979 cohort, they have little effect on wage growth for the 1997 cohort.

For the 1979 cohort, experiencing both lay-offs and discharges increases the likelihood of experiencing a substantial wage loss, and experiencing discharges decreases the likelihood of experiencing a substantial wage gain. Thus, involuntary separations decrease the probability of positive wage growth and increases the probability of wage loss. In contrast, quitting for non-family reasons decreases the probability of experiencing a wage loss and increases the probability of experiencing a wage gain. Overall, for the 1979 cohort, voluntary mobility works in the expected direction by improving wages for workers in the beginning of their careers.

While involuntary separations increase the probability of wage loss for respondents of the 1979 cohort, they do not impact the probability of wage loss for the 1997 cohort and have little impact on the probability of wage gain. One discharge decreases the probability of wage gain of 5%, while one quit increases the probability of a 10% wage gain. Taken together, these results indicate that mobility and employment history has a more substantial impact on wages and wage

growth for the 1979 cohort than the 1997 cohort. This could suggest that as mobility, especially voluntary mobility, becomes increasingly common and perhaps expected, its effect is less consequential for wage growth.

Table 2.7: Effect of Mobility on Wage Change

	Wage Loss 5%				Wage Loss 10%							
	1979		1997		1979		1997					
	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.				
Employment History												
Employer Count	0.007	(0.031)	0.043	(0.033)	-0.002	(0.033)	0.058	(0.035)				
Wages age 22	4.142	(0.205)	***	3.482	(0.191)	***	4.105	(0.212)	***	3.411	(0.195)	**
Proportion of weeks employed	-0.536	(1.207)		-0.092	(1.165)		-0.577	(1.254)		-0.639	(1.196)	
Proportion of weeks out of labor force	1.657	(1.294)		1.170	(1.229)		1.937	(1.344)		0.557	(1.266)	
Proportion of weeks unemployed	1.246	(1.465)		1.118	(1.353)		1.243	(1.526)		0.232	(1.408)	
Tenure	-0.016	(0.003)	***	-0.014	(0.003)	***	-0.014	(0.003)	***	-0.013	(0.003)	**
Full-Time	-0.379	(0.161)	*	-0.398	(0.145)	**	-0.396	(0.171)	*	-0.334	(0.155)	*
Employer Separations												
One Lay off	0.272	(0.178)		0.193	(0.148)		0.187	(0.191)		0.177	(0.158)	
Two or more Lay offs	0.417	(0.194)	*	0.289	(0.203)		0.354	(0.206)		0.251	(0.219)	
One Discharge	0.462	(0.193)	*	0.206	(0.175)		0.465	(0.207)	*	0.259	(0.187)	
Two or more Discharges	0.918	(0.276)	**	-0.053	(0.254)		1.090	(0.285)	***	0.053	(0.267)	
One Quit for Family Quits	0.515	(0.222)	*	0.414	(0.236)		0.518	(0.240)	*	0.392	(0.249)	
Two or more Family Quits	0.415	(0.367)		-0.264	(0.619)		0.557	(0.383)		0.017	(0.614)	
One Quit	-0.425	(0.248)		0.246	(0.291)		-0.231	(0.267)		0.202	(0.301)	
Two or more Quits	-0.521	(0.240)	*	0.044	(0.288)		-0.275	(0.259)		-0.130	(0.299)	
Constant	-21.910	(1.681)	***	-26.498	(1.855)	***	-22.018	(1.747)	***	-25.669	(1.901)	**
n	4,830			3,762			4,830			3,762		
R2	0.348			0.309			0.347			0.31		

	Wage Gain 5%				Wage Gain 10%							
	1979		1997		1979		1997					
	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.				
Employment History												
Employer Count	0.007	(0.028)	-0.046	(0.028)	0.004	(0.027)	-0.048	(0.027)				
Wages age 22	-3.944	(0.183)	***	-3.128	(0.165)	***	-3.819	(0.173)	***	-3.082	(0.159)	**
Proportion of weeks employed	0.279	(1.096)		-0.387	(1.061)		1.199	(0.982)		0.195	(0.978)	
Proportion of weeks out of labor force	-1.645	(1.174)		-1.632	(1.113)		-0.578	(1.058)		-0.995	(1.029)	
Proportion of weeks unemployed	-2.293	(1.319)		-1.662	(1.216)		-1.252	(1.204)		-1.242	(1.127)	
Tenure	0.018	(0.002)	***	0.014	(0.002)	***	0.018	(0.002)	***	0.015	(0.002)	**
Full-Time	0.233	(0.146)		0.341	(0.125)	**	0.228	(0.137)		0.359	(0.120)	
Employer Separations												
One Lay off	-0.226	(0.152)		-0.099	(0.126)		-0.187	(0.142)		-0.117	(0.120)	**
Two or more Lay offs	-0.158	(0.171)		-0.177	(0.176)		-0.103	(0.160)		-0.260	(0.167)	
One Discharge	-0.378	(0.170)	*	-0.310	(0.148)	*	-0.297	(0.162)		-0.436	(0.139)	
Two or more Discharges	-0.785	(0.252)	**	-0.355	(0.207)		-0.671	(0.243)	**	-0.326	(0.198)	
One Quit for Family Quits	-0.476	(0.196)	*	-0.231	(0.210)		-0.285	(0.187)		-0.149	(0.204)	
Two or more Family Quits	-0.435	(0.327)		0.295	(0.502)		-0.481	(0.298)		0.110	(0.454)	
One Quit	0.549	(0.216)	*	-0.049	(0.245)		0.496	(0.201)	*	0.107	(0.232)	**
Two or more Quits	0.552	(0.210)	**	0.093	(0.242)		0.545	(0.197)	**	0.122	(0.228)	
Constant	20.958	(1.515)	***	23.665	(1.621)	***	18.779	(1.366)	***	22.902	(1.624)	**
	4,830			3,762			4,830			3,762		
	0.327			0.2701			0.314			0.272		

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < .001

Controlling for occupation, industry, employment rate, education, region, gender, race, marital status, parental status, birth year

Quitting for Another Job: Detailed Analysis of the NLSY97

The above results suggest that despite speculation about mobility in the new economy, employment history and cumulative has little effect on wages and wage change for respondents of the NLSY97. However, the previous analysis only disaggregates quitting for family reasons from quitting for other reasons, assuming that these other quits are for what Keith and McWilliams (1995) call “quitting for economic reasons.” The NLSY97, however, provides many more detailed options for respondents to report why they left a job, including explicitly quitting to take another job. In this analysis, I separate quitting explicitly to take another job from other types of quits.

Table 2.8: Disaggregated Quits for NLSY97

Employer Separations	
No Lay Offs	68.7%
1 Lay Off	22.4%
2+ Lay Offs	8.9%
No Discharges	81.7%
1 Discharge	12.7%
2+ Discharges	5.6%
No Family Quits	92.2%
1 Family Quit	6.5%
2+ Family Quits	1.3%
No Quits for Another Job	42.0%
1 Quit for Another job	32.1%
2+ Quits for Another job	25.9%
No Other Quits	19.9%
1 Other Quit	23.8%
2+ Other Quits	56.3%

Table 9 presents the results of three models that use these updated employer separation variables: (1) wage level at age 29, (2) wage loss of 10% or more, and (3) wage gain of 10% or more. These models show that for the younger cohort, quitting explicitly to take another job increases wage level, decreases the probability of experiencing a substantial wage loss, and increases the probability of experiencing a substantial wage gain. In contrast, quitting for other

reasons decreases wage level and decreases the probability of experiencing a wage gain. The odds of a worker who has quit to take another job once experiencing a wage increase of 10% or more are 26% higher than the odds of a worker who has never quit to take another job. Furthermore, the odds of a worker who has quit to take another job two or more times experiencing a wage increase of 10% is 49% higher than the odds of a worker who has never quit. Thus, the results shown in the initial analysis mask an important distinction: when workers in the younger cohort have job lined up immediately after leaving one job, they experience wage gains and have higher wage levels. However, when they voluntarily leave for other reasons, including to look for a new job or to devote more time to school, their future wages are lower. This finding reiterates the idea that voluntary mobility can be useful in building a career, but only under specific circumstances. Furthermore, these results show that there is not “too much of a good thing” when it comes to voluntary mobility. Workers who quit to take another job more than once experience wage gains higher than those who have quit only once.

Gender and Mobility

As shown in Table 5, women, on average, have fewer employers than men, and experience fewer layoffs and discharges than men. In the 1979 cohort, women, however, experience significantly more quits for family reasons, while women in the 1997 cohort experience more quits for non-family reasons. Table 10 shows the results of employer separations on wage level, wage loss of 5%, and wage gain of 5% by cohort and gender. Because only 11 men in the 1979 cohort quit for family reasons and all experienced the same outcome (wage gain of over 5%), this variable was not used in the models for wage gain/loss for 1979 men and these 11 respondents were excluded from the analysis.

The results of this analysis show that quitting for family reasons has an effect on women's wage level but not men's, and only for the 1979 cohort. In the 1979 cohort, women who quit once for family reasons can expect to earn 7% less than women who never do so, and women who quit two or more times can expect to earn 18% less. In the 1979 cohort, women who quit for family reasons have lower wage levels than women who do not quit for family reasons. However, quitting for family reasons does not increase the probability of experiencing a substantial wage loss or a substantial wage gain. For women in the 1997 cohort, this pattern is reversed, while quitting once for family reasons increases the odds of experiencing a wage decrease by 136%, quitting has no impact on wage level. However, the effect of quitting multiple times for family reasons does not have a statistically significant on wage loss, wage gain, or wage level. Taken together, these results indicate that while the effect of mobility on women's wages is significant for the 1979 cohort, it is less consequential for the younger women.

Table 2.9: Supplemental Analysis of Effect of Quits on Wages in the NLSY97

	Wage Level			Wage Loss 10%			Wage Gain 10%		
	B	S.E.		B	S.E.		B	S.E.	
Employment History	0.00	(0.00)		0.05	(0.04)		-0.04	(0.03)	
Employer Count	0.19	(0.02)	***	3.52	(0.20)	***	-3.22	(0.17)	***
Wages age 22	-0.14	(0.14)		-0.58	(1.16)		-0.02	(0.96)	
Proportion of weeks employed	-0.27	(0.15)		0.23	(1.24)		-0.81	(1.02)	
Proportion of weeks out of labor force	-0.40	(0.17)	*	-0.21	(1.39)		-0.96	(1.11)	
Proportion of weeks unemployed	0.03	(0.02)		-0.27	(0.16)		0.29	(0.12)	*
Tenure	0.00	(0.00)	***	-0.01	(0.00)	***	0.01	(0.00)	***
Full-Time									
Employer Separations									
One Lay off	-0.01	(0.02)		0.20	(0.16)		-0.12	(0.12)	
Two or more Lay offs	-0.05	(0.03)		0.30	(0.22)		-0.30	(0.17)	
One Discharge	-0.06	(0.02)	**	0.27	(0.19)		-0.42	(0.14)	**
Two or more Discharges	-0.07	(0.03)	*	0.04	(0.27)		-0.28	(0.20)	
One Quit for Family Quits	-0.03	(0.03)		0.39	(0.25)		-0.19	(0.21)	
Two or more Family Quits	-0.01	(0.07)		-0.01	(0.63)		0.02	(0.47)	
One Quit for another job	0.04	(0.02)	*	-0.32	(0.16)		0.23	(0.12)	
Two or more Quits for other jobs	0.07	(0.02)	**	-0.50	(0.20)	*	0.40	(0.15)	**
One Other quit	-0.03	(0.02)		0.38	(0.23)		-0.37	(0.17)	*
Two or More other quits	-0.06	(0.02)	**	0.43	(0.24)		-0.61	(0.18)	**
Constant	6.11	(0.19)	***	-26.45	(1.90)	***	23.91	(1.53)	***
n	37622			37622			37622		
R2	0.3901			0.3164			0.2837		

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < .001

Controlling for occupation, industry, employment rate, region, gender, race, marital status, parental status, birth year

Table 2.10. Effect of Mobility on Wages and Wage Change by Gender

	Wage Level											
	1979 Men		1979 Women		1997 Men		1997 Women					
	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.				
Employment History												
Employer Count,	-0.01	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	*	0.00	(0.01)			
Wages age 22	0.24	(0.02)	***	0.16	(0.02)	***	0.19	(0.02)	***	0.20	(0.02)	***
Proportion of weeks employed	0.17	(0.14)		0.03	(0.24)		-0.15	(0.17)		0.56	(0.30)	
Proportion of weeks out of l.f.	0.09	(0.16)		-0.31	(0.25)		-0.22	(0.19)		0.38	(0.31)	
Proportion of weeks unemployed	-0.36	(0.17)	*	-0.79	(0.29)	**	-0.63	(0.21)	**	0.32	(0.33)	
Employer Separations												
One Lay off	0.00	(0.02)		-0.02	(0.02)		-0.01	(0.03)		-0.03	(0.03)	
Two or more Lay offs	0.03	(0.02)		-0.05	(0.03)		-0.01	(0.04)		-0.11	(0.05)	*
One Discharge	-0.09	(0.02)	***	-0.02	(0.03)		-0.08	(0.03)	**	-0.06	(0.03)	
Two or more Discharges	-0.12	(0.04)	***	-0.16	(0.06)	**	-0.09	(0.05)	*	-0.09	(0.05)	
One Quit for Family Quits	-0.04	(0.04)		-0.07	(0.02)	**	0.02	(0.04)		-0.08	(0.04)	
Two or more Family Quits	0.00	(0.12)		-0.20	(0.04)	***	0.02	(0.09)		0.07	(0.09)	
One Quit	0.06	(0.03)	*	0.07	(0.03)	*	0.01	(0.04)		0.03	(0.05)	
Two or more Quits	0.11	(0.03)	**	0.07	(0.03)	*	0.04	(0.04)		0.08	(0.05)	
Wage Loss												
	1979 Men		1979 Women		1997 Men		1997 Women					
	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.				
Employment History												
Employer Count,	0.04	(0.04)	0.01	(0.05)	0.05	(0.04)		0.06	(0.05)			
Wages age 22	4.00	(0.27)	***	4.96	(0.40)	***	3.44	(0.26)	***	3.75	(0.30)	***
Proportion of weeks employed	-1.36	(1.28)		2.89	(4.18)		0.71	(1.39)		-2.85	(2.42)	
Proportion of weeks out of l.f.	-0.61	(1.52)		6.26	(4.23)		1.98	(1.52)		-1.70	(2.47)	
Proportion of weeks unemployed	0.68	(1.65)		4.37	(4.46)		1.94	(1.68)		-1.88	(2.63)	
Employer Separations												
One Lay off	0.05	(0.26)		0.51	(0.28)		0.21	(0.20)		0.13	(0.24)	
Two or more Lay offs	0.09	(0.27)		0.92	(0.31)	**	-0.11	(0.28)		0.84	(0.33)	*
One Discharge	0.70	(0.25)	**	0.09	(0.36)		0.17	(0.24)		0.14	(0.27)	
Two or more Discharges	1.03	(0.36)	**	0.86	(0.51)		0.29	(0.31)		-0.72	(0.49)	
One Quit for Family Quits	0.36	(0.52)		0.44	(0.29)		0.10	(0.33)		0.86	(0.35)	*

Two or more Family Quits	-	-	0.19	(0.43)	-0.81	(0.93)	0.18	(0.89)	
One Quit	-0.13	(0.33)	-0.56	(0.43)	-0.09	(0.38)	0.60	(0.48)	
Two or more Quits	-0.39	(0.34)	-0.39	(0.40)	-0.01	(0.37)	0.00	(0.48)	
	Wage Gain								
	1979 Men		1979 Women		1997 Men		1997 Women		
	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	B	Std. Err.	
Employment History									
Employer Count,	0.02	(0.03)	-0.03	(0.05)	-0.07	(0.04)	-0.03	(0.04)	
Wages age 22	-3.77	(0.22)	***	-4.50	(0.34)	***	-3.34	(0.24)	***
Proportion of weeks employed	1.66	(1.10)		-0.78	(3.08)		-1.14	(1.29)	
Proportion of weeks out of l.f.	1.26	(1.31)		-3.46	(3.13)		-2.55	(1.40)	
Proportion of weeks unemployed	-0.33	(1.40)		-3.48	(3.36)		-2.97	(1.54)	
Employer Separations									
One Lay off	0.00	(0.20)		-0.53	(0.24)	*	0.06	(0.17)	
Two or more Lay offs	-0.03	(0.21)		-0.54	(0.28)		0.43	(0.24)	
One Discharge	-0.42	(0.20)	*	-0.08	(0.31)		-0.23	(0.21)	
Two or more Discharges	-0.80	(0.30)	**	-0.86	(0.45)		-0.56	(0.27)	*
One Quit for Family Quits	-0.32	(0.39)		-0.44	(0.25)		0.01	(0.30)	
Two or more Family Quits	-	-		-0.35	(0.38)		0.49	(0.69)	
One Quit	0.33	(0.27)		0.68	(0.36)		0.07	(0.33)	
Two or more Quits	0.28	(0.27)		0.63	(0.34)		0.18	(0.33)	

Discussion and Conclusion

The results in this chapter indicate that the social meaning of mobility has, to a limited extent, changed. Interestingly, results show that the cumulative number of employers does not have a significant impact on wages for workers in the 1980s or the 2000s. However, time spent unemployed and types of employer separation do impact wage level and wage change. Involuntary job changes are both more common and more detrimental for workers in the 1980s than they are for workers in the 2000s. While scarring from involuntary mobility reduces wages for respondents of the NLYS79, lay-offs and discharges do not have a negative effect on the wages of respondents from the NLSY97, suggesting that negative employment experiences were more scarring for workers in the 1980s than the 2000s.

On the flip side, quitting for non-family reasons, especially quitting to explicitly take a new job, can lead to wage growth and higher levels of wages. For respondents of the NLSY79, quitting for non-family reasons results in higher wages and a higher probability of experiencing a wage gain. For respondents of the NLSY97, this effect only occurs when quits are disaggregated into quitting explicitly to take another job and quitting for other reasons, suggesting that there is a benefit to voluntary mobility, but only under specific circumstances. Voluntary mobility and continuous employment (as measured by less time spent unemployed) do improve wages, while non-voluntary mobility, mobility for family reasons, and unemployment reduce wages.

The results of this chapter also show that quitting for family reasons has decreased, especially for women. While women in the 1979 cohort had, on average, 0.30 quits for family reasons, women in the 1997 cohort had, on average, 0.09 quits for family reasons. Furthermore, while quitting for family reasons decreased wages for women in the 1979 cohort, it did not have an effect on wages for women in the 1997 cohort. While this suggests that the consequences for

quitting for family reasons have decreased, it is important to remember that this sample includes *only* women who were employed at both age 22 and age 29—even if they had spells of unemployment throughout those years. This analysis does *not* address leaving the labor force all together for family reasons, whether by choice or by necessity. In particular, women who are forced to quit a job upon becoming a mother because of lack of maternity leave or child care are the most likely to experience lifetime loss of earnings, have the most difficult time reentering the workforce, and may be more likely to be subsequently fired for family related absences.

While employment separations have some effect on wages, they cannot account for everything leaving the question of what are other drivers of wages and wage growth for young adults at the beginning of their careers? Starting wages have a large and significant effect on both wage level at age 29 and wage change between the early and late 20s. For workers in both cohorts, wage level at age 22 has a positive effect on wages at age 29, decreases the probability of experiencing wage loss, and increase the probability of experiencing wage growth. In other words, workers with higher wages in their early careers can expect higher wages throughout their 20s, while workers with lower starting wages can expect stagnating and lower wages. These findings reinforce the idea that careers grow from early jobs.

Career Building

While many researchers use wage loss as an undesirable outcome of job change, Dwyer (2004) cautions that downward earning mobility is not always an unwanted outcome. She argues that trading pay for other job factors is a legitimate career path that is often ignored by sociologists who assume that all workers are striving for upward wage trajectories. Workers may trade lower paying jobs for more satisfactory work conditions, self-autonomy, or reduced hours and flexible schedules. Using data from the 1983 to 1992 waves of the Panel survey of Income

Dynamics, Dwyer finds that 30% of all employment shifts can be defined as voluntary downward shifts and therefore using wage declines as a negative outcome may be masking other employment trends, like the search for more satisfying and autonomous jobs (Dwyer 2004). This may be especially true for young adults in the new economy who may prioritize the work experience and the type of work they do over wages. Thus, while the results of this analysis do not show always show *monetary* rewards to mobility, they do not exclude non-monetary rewards, like job satisfaction.

Given this, future work should address other outcomes of mobility including job satisfaction and feelings of autonomy. An underexplored area of empirical research is if young workers in the new economy are more likely to trade wages for other job benefits than older generations. Future work should address this question, especially given rhetoric around the importance “following your passion” and finding personally meaningful careers.

Lastly, this chapter solely addresses employer changes, but does not examine occupation changes, and role changes within an organization. While much of the research and commentary on the new labor market focuses on changes across organizations, young workers may also build “boundaryless” careers through role changes within an organization. This type of “functional mobility” (Verbruggen, 2012) is positively correlated with both objective measures and subjective feelings of career success. In short, the search for an optimal career may be composed of both employer, occupation, and role changes (Neal 1999, Verbruggen 2012) and an optimal career may include both objective and subjective properties. Thus, while this chapter addresses monetary impact of employer changes, it does not fully describe how young adults today build careers using different considerations.

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Chapter 3:

A Sequence Analysis of Employment and Family Trajectories of Two Cohorts of Young Adults

“My mom and my dad got married when my mom was 23 and my dad was 27. They met at work, she didn't go to college she went to secretarial school...they met when she was 20-21, dated for year, engaged for year, married for 33 years. So definitely a different trajectory than me. But I try not to compare it because going right into the working world and not going to college is really different. And also, it was over 30 years ago, it was a different time. In my generation people are getting married later and later because they are working on their careers so they are going back to school. Or they just aren't that interested in getting married. Like there's no need to get married at 23 for most people.”—Taylor, 26

Abstract

What does the road to adulthood look like? Life-course researchers identify the many milestones that commonly mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood including finishing school, entering the labor force, establishing an independent household, and forming a family. Normative patterning of these markers offer scripts for young adults to follow on the road to adulthood. However, the ability to achieve certain milestones and follow particular scripts is contingent on both individual resources and structural and cultural contexts. Changes in structural opportunities and norms render some scripts outdated while providing the conditions for others to emerge. The 1980s and following decades saw significant changes in the structure and norms of the labor market including women's increased attachment to the labor force, the rise of the service and information sectors, and the decline of lifetime employment. Some researchers contend that these changes have resulted in increased variation in the pathways into adulthood for contemporary young adults. To evaluate these claims, I use sequence analysis to compare the trajectories of young adults in the early 2000s to those of young adults in the 1980s. I explore two questions: *1) are recent structural and cultural changes manifested in more individualized pathways to adulthood, and 2) how do trajectories differ by race, gender, and*

class? Findings show that the road to adulthood is *not* more varied for contemporary young adults, but rather that declines in marriage and parenthood in the twenties have instead resulted in a higher degree of standardization and concentration in less complex pathways. However, the transition to adulthood remains largely patterned by race and gender with Black men and women less likely to follow stable trajectories through education and employment than their Non-Black/Non-Hispanic counterparts.

Introduction

Life course research focuses on five traditional markers of adulthood, including leaving the parental home, finishing school, obtaining steady employment, getting married, and having children (Settersten 2011). While obtaining “adulthood status” does not necessitate that young adults achieve all five markers, realizing these markers and taking on the roles associated with them indicates adulthood (Waters, Carr, & Kefalas, 2011). While the prevalence of timing of traditional markers shifted in the late twentieth century, both the markers themselves and the order in which they are completed remain socially valued (Settersten 2011; Waters et al., 2011). However, the accomplishment, timing, and ordering of markers are stratified by social location. Gender, race, and socioeconomic status contribute to variation in pathways to adulthood by impacting resources available to achieve certain milestones, as well as norms regarding acceptable pathways. Furthermore, changes in culture and structure generate generational differences between cohorts who face different opportunities and constraints.

In this chapter, I use sequence analysis methodology to assess the hypothesis that structural and normative changes have resulted in a more varied and complicated process of coming of age for young adults in the early twenty-first century. In addition to accounting for the occurrence of adulthood markers, sequence analysis allows for a careful examination of the order, timing and duration of different states. I analyze the transition to adulthood for two cohorts of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth: one that came of age in the 1980s and one that came of age in the 2000s. These two cohorts vary not only in terms of the structural constraints and opportunities they encounter, but also in the normative frameworks they were raised with and models of adulthood they witnessed.

Background

Cultural scripts provide young adults normative roadmaps for moving between adolescence and adulthood (Waters et al., 2011). The “standard model” of the transition to adulthood in which employment follows education and parenthood follows marriage is one such cultural model of adulthood born from the 1950s era of postwar expansion. However, there are other models available to young adults. In their studies of young adults in rural Iowa, New York City, Minneapolis, and San Diego, Watters, Carr and Kefalas show that contemporary young adults “are more creative in the cultural scripts they adopt” (p.15) and, to some extent, mesh together parts of different cultural scripts to understand their own transitions to adulthood (Waters et al., 2011). The ability to follow scripts varies by both individual and environmental characteristics. Below, I outline research on how culture and structure affects the transition to adulthood resulting in between and within cohort differences in the pathways to adulthood. I end this section with a discussion of recent research that suggests that increased flexibility and insecurity in the labor market may be increasing variability in the transition to adulthood for contemporary generations.

Between Cohort Variability: Cultural and Economic Changes

Generational cohorts face historically and culturally specific structures and normative frameworks that constrain and enable period-specific life paths. Short-term fluctuations in economic conditions, discrete historical events, and long-term cultural shifts transform the opportunities each generation faces paving the way for newly acceptable paths while rendering other paths outdated. Rather than conceptualizing culture and structure as distinct, a dynamic view “recognizes that cultural differences are socially constructed and evolve in response to

changing circumstances” (Waters et al., 2011, p.14). That is, neither culture nor structure is solely an independent or dependent variable, but rather they are intricately linked in a continual feedback process.

Discrete historical events, like wars and economic depressions, alter opportunity structures. Prior research shows that the alignment between the occurrence of a historical event with an individual’s (or cohort’s) life history determines the effect of the event (Elder 1987, 1974). Cohorts that experience an event early in life are shaped differently than cohorts that experience the same event at an older age (Elder 1987, 1974). For instance, in his pivotal book Children of the Great Depression, Elder shows the experience of being a child during the Great Depression was fundamentally different than the experience of being an adult during the same period. The Great Depression shaped an entire generation by changing their opportunities, experiences, and perhaps most fundamentally, their expectations (Elder 1974). Fasang (2014) similarly examines how large-scale political and social events can alter family formation patterns through institutional, economic, and ideation factors (values) that interact with one another. Fasang shows that while German reunification resulted in de-standardization of family formation paths Eastern German women, it resulted in a moderate re-standardization of paths for Western German women (Fasang 2014). The same event, German reunification, had different effects in the two sub-cultures it affected resulting in contrasting outcomes for Eastern and Western women.

Historical events not only change the opportunity to accomplish certain milestones, they also shift cultural understandings of what ought to be. As patterns change, so too do norms. And, as norms change, so too do patterns. One of the most consequential cultural shifts over the last four decades is women’s increased participation in the labor market, which transformed

women's long-term education and employment trajectories, and family formation patterns by postponing or foregoing marriage and childbearing (Goldin 2006). Changes in the organization of work, increased acceptance of women continuing to work after marriage, and access to the birth control pill allowed women to see working as a long-term commitment as opposed to a temporary stage, and thus women started planning for longer work lives and seeing work as part of their self-identity. This long-term cultural shift around women's roles enabled women to invest in their own human capital and participate more fully in the labor market resulting in the opening of new employment trajectories for women (Goldin, 2006).

The above examples illustrate a final critical point. Changing norms and large events have differential impacts on cohorts depending on when the event "hits" a specific cohort. For instance, the effect of the Great Depression was different for those coming of age and those who were already adults. Likewise, changing norms of women's employment had a larger impact of women entering the labor market than those already embedded in the labor market in the 1970's.

Within-cohort variability: Gender and Class Divisions

While not compulsory for taking on an adulthood role, finishing school, finding employment, and establishing an independent family remain prevalent and normative indicators of adulthood (Waters, Carr, Kefalas 2011; Settersten 2011). However, there is substantial variation in the fulfillment, timing, and ordering of markers patterned along gender, race, and class lines. The book Coming of age in America: the transition to adulthood in the twenty-first century, edited by Mary Waters et al., compares the lives of young adults living in Iowa, New York City, Minneapolis, and San Diego in the early 2000s. The four case studies highlight how young adults vary in terms of the economic, human, social, and cultural capitals, and how these

differences in resources shape their paths to adulthood. In general, young adults with more resources have more options and opportunities than young adults with fewer resources.

Parental education and income are especially important resources when it comes to pursuing higher education. Young adults with families that are able to financially support them through college are more likely to have smooth trajectories through college and earn their degrees by their mid-twenties (Borgen & Rumbaut, 2011). In contrast, young adults who have to pay for their own college and/or work to support their families take longer to complete their degrees and are less likely to do so. In addition to tuition, middle and upper class parents provide money for down payments on homes as well as periodical financial support to help young adults from middle and upper class families jumpstart their own adulthoods (Swartz, Hartmann, & Mortimer, 2011). While working class families provide material support to their children in other ways, including housing and childcare, the vital financial resources that middle and upper class families provide help their children move towards adulthood with fewer obstacles. Differences in familial resources perpetuate class differences between working and middle class young adults as those that receive financial support, especially for tuition, are more likely to follow their own middle and upper class trajectories (Swartz, 2011).

While familial resources shape the opportunities available to young adults, gender, race and ethnicity frame norms about what young adults ought and ought not do to. For instance, Holdaway (2011) finds that the prevalence and acceptance of marriage, cohabitation and early parenthood varies by race, ethnicity, and immigration status. While African American women are skeptical of marriage, Chinese and South American immigrants do not approve of cohabitation as an alternative of marriage. And, while teenage parenthood is relatively common and accepted among Dominican, Puerto Rican and native black young adults, it is less common

and less accepted for West Indian and South American young adults. These attitudinal differences resulted in a high variation of household and family structures for different ethnic and immigrant groups living in New York City (Holdaway, 2011).

On average, women marry and become parents earlier than men: 44% of American women experience a first marriage by age 25 and 68% experience a first marriage by age 30, compared to 31% and 56% of men, respectively (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012). However, there are large differences in family formation within gender by race and education level: white women are more likely to marry than black women, and women with bachelor's degrees marry later than women with high school degrees. Compared to white women and women with bachelor's degrees, black women and women with limited postsecondary education are more like to become parents in their late teens or early twenties (Cherlin, 2014; Copen et al., 2012; Oesterle, Hawkins, Hill, & Bailey, 2010).

Because of women's biological role in childbearing and traditional role in childrearing, women's parenthood has a significant impact on their education and employment trajectories. A study of Swiss adults shows that compared to men, women are more likely to move in-and-out of full time employment, stay in household center roles, and work part-time. Women are also more likely to follow a "return trajectory" whereby they work full-time, move to a household centered role after having children, and then return to work, often part-time, after a few years (Widmer & Ritschard, 2009). In contrast, men are more likely to be continually employed regardless of marital or parental status (Widmer & Ritschard, 2009). Gender norms around parenthood and work influence young women's plans regardless of their current motherhood status. In a study of young Minnesotans, Swartz, Harmann and Mortimer write: "gender importantly influences young adults' perceptions of relationships between their work and family plans, regardless of

whether parenthood has already been attained. Accordingly, most of the women in our sample who were not mothers included a discussion of possible child-rearing responsibilities in their projections of their five-to-ten-year career plans—whether they aspired to continue to work or not (Swartz, Harmann, Mortimer, 2011, p. 76). While gender norms around women’s employment and familial decisions have certainly broadened, they still play an important role in women’s paths to adulthood.

Coming of Age in the 1980s and 2000s: The Rise of Individualized Trajectories?

Today’s young adults face markedly different labor market structures and expectations than their parents faced in their twenties. Over the last four decades, macro-level economic changes including increased price competition, globalization, and weakened unions have contributed to firms restructuring their employment arrangements to allow for greater flexibility (Kalleberg, 2011). During this time, employment tenure and stability has declined while involuntary lay-offs, voluntary quits, occupation changes, and nonstandard work arrangements have increased resulting in an increasingly mobile workforce (Hollister, 2012; Kalleberg 2011; Smith & Neuwirth, 2008). These macro-level changes have also contributed to stagnating wages, especially for men, between 1970-1990 (Gottschalk & Danziger, 2005).

The rise of service and information sectors has also increased the returns to higher education. As the number of well-paying jobs that require only a high school education decreases, more and more young adults are encouraged to attend post-secondary education. However, the increased necessity of credentials has been met with rising educational costs (Archibald & Feldman, 2008) resulting in extended periods of schooling in which many young adults start-and-stop their schooling and mix schooling and employment. One study finds that

only a quarter of young adults enrolled in higher education are traditional full-time, straight from high-school students enrolled in four-year colleges. The vast majority of students are part-time, returning, employed full time and/or enrolled in community colleges (Borgen & Rumbaut, 2011). Stopping-and-starting school and attending part-time extends the time to degree resulting in young adults being attached to higher education for long spans of 20s. Instead of completing schooling in the early 20s and then entering the labor market fulltime, many young adults go back and forth between student and worker into their mid-and-late 20s delaying establishing an independent household (Borgen & Rumbaut, 2011). In addition to prolonged attachment to higher education, the weak link between the American school system and the labor market contributes to variability and individualization in pathways to adulthood (Eliason, Mortimer, & Vuolo, 2015; Shanahan, Mortimer, & Kruger, 2002). American young adults enter the labor market later than European young adults, and enter the labor market with only general skills, as opposed to job or occupation specific knowledge, which contribute to “floundering” in the labor market as they take time to get a foothold in the labor market (Shanahan et al., 2002).

Life course researchers reason that shifts in the labor market have combined with a cultural emphasize on self-realization and personal development resulting in increased individualization of the pathways to adulthood for contemporary young adults. These researchers suggest that the prevalence of traditional pathways to adulthood is declining as contemporary young adults adhere less to proscriptive orderings of milestones and have more opportunities available to them. As Billari and Piccarreta (2005) write: “individualization means that more opportunities opened to young people leads to more individual specificities in the transition to adulthood, or greater heterogeneity for younger cohorts” (Billari & Piccarreta, 2005, p.98). For example, Shanahan contends that modernization has weakened familial and geographic

constraints resulting in changes in sequencing, timing and spacing of events, as well as the overlapping and reversing of milestones (Shanahan 2000).

Jeffrey Arnett argues that contemporary young adults experience a prolonged transition to adulthood called “emerging adulthood”—a period that spans from after adolescence to around age 30 (Arnett, 2015). According to Arnett, “emerging adulthood” is a period of exploration and trying out different possibilities and is marked by frequent changes. Arnett’s research highlights changes in norms about the timing of work and family formation. In contrast with the mid-twentieth century in which marriage was often the first step on the road to adulthood and frequently preceded financial security, contemporary young adults often view finishing education and finding employment as forerunners to marriage (Cherlin, 2014). Many of the young people in Arnett’s study consider employment stability and financial independence important precursors to family formation, as well as a critical marker of “full” adulthood, and delay marriage and parenthood until they feel financially secure (Arnett, 2015; Danziger & Ratner, 2010). However, as Arnett is quick to note, delayed family formation is both a consequence *and* a cause of emerging adulthood: as many young Americans see personal development in their professional and personal life as important prior to marriage, they prioritize this exploration in their 20s. The search for individual identity is also apparent in employment patterns as young adults churn through jobs while looking for a personally satisfying job that also allows them to be self-sufficient (Arnett, 2015).

Research Agenda

Increased employment mobility, economic uncertainty, delayed family formation, and cultural changes that emphasize self-realization and self-identity as components of becoming an

adult suggest that the transition to adulthood is becoming more varied and less patterned for contemporary young adults (Shanahan, 2002; Arnett, 2015). However, scholars have not yet used quantitative data to test the prevalence of these findings on a national level, or to determine what these pathways look like for most Americans across time. In this chapter, I use nationally representative data and sequence analysis to explore two overlapping questions: 1) are recent structural and cultural changes manifested in more individualized pathways to adulthood, 2) how are pathways to adulthood constrained by race, gender, and class?

Data, Methods, and Measures

Sequence Analysis

Sequence analysis is the study of the progression of a series of states or events. Gauthier, Bühlmann and Blanchard characterize sequence analysis as a way to describe multivalent processes that unfold over time “within a holistic conceptual model instead of observing allegedly independent observations over time” (Blanchard, Buhlmann, & Gauthier, 2014, p.1). Sequence analysis can be used to model individuals’ “unique [trajectories], defined as a string of states of specific nature, with specific durations and as specific order” (Blanchard, Buhlmann, & Gauthier, 2014) and to compare how similar or dissimilar individual sequences are to one another in order to classify sequences (Billari & Piccarreta, 2005).

Sequence analysis is well suited to studying the life course, and has been used to study family formation (Fasang, 2014), education trajectories (Dietrich, 2014), career progression, and residential trajectories (Blanchard et al., 2014). Sequence Analysis takes a holistic approach by treating the entire life course as a conceptual unit and analyzing the temporal array of various discrete events, like marriage, moving, and starting a new job (Billari & Piccarreta, 2005).

Sequence analysis can account for moving in-and-out of different states, reversal states, and being in multiple states at once. Compared to other types of analyses that focus on discrete events, like event history models, sequence analysis is better equipped to handle the complexities of the life course by describing complicated patterns of multiple states that change over time (Billari & Picarreta, 2005). Fasang (2014) points to three concepts of the life course paradigm modeled by sequence analysis: 1) multidimensionality—the idea that multiple spheres of life interact with one another (i.e. family and employment); 2) linked lives—the idea that multiple individuals’ sequences are linked together (i.e. the sequences of family members); and 3) destandardization and pluralization—the idea that historically specific contexts shape “collective life course patterns” (Fasang, 2014). In this chapter, I draw on the concepts of multidimensionality and pluralization.

The National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth and sample selection

The data for this paper comes from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth 1979 and 1997 cohorts (NLSY79 & NLSY97). The purpose of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth is to document the transition between youth and adulthood and as such, contains detailed information about the timing of education, employment, marriage and parenthood that can be used to construct detailed life histories. The 12,686 respondents of the NLSY79 were born between 1957 and 1964 and interviewed annually from 1979 to 1994 and bi-annually from 1994 to 2012. The NLSY79 includes three subsamples: a representative cross-sectional sample, a supplemental sample of “Hispanic or Latino, black, and economically disadvantaged non-black/non-Hispanic” respondents, and a representative sample of people serving in the four branches of the military (nlsinfo.org). I exclude the supplemental military sample from this

analysis. Respondents of the NLSY97 were born between 1980 and 1984 and interviewed annually from 1997 to 2011 and biannually beginning in 2013. The NLSY97 includes two subsamples: a representative cross-sectional sample, and a supplemental sample Hispanic and black US residents (nlsinfo.org). In total, 8,984 individuals were originally interviewed for the NLSY97.

The primary goal of this chapter is to study the progression toward adulthood that typically occurs between the late teenage years and the late 20s, and thus I limit my analysis to years when respondents are between the ages of 18 and 29. While all respondents in the 1979 cohort and some respondents in the 1997 cohort are interviewed past the age of 30, available data for the youngest respondents of the 1997 cohort ends at age 29. In order to use all observations for the 1997 cohort and to be consistent across all observations, I end observation at age 29 for all respondents. To maintain consistency across cohorts, I exclude respondents from the NLSY79 who were born between 1957 and 1960 as these respondents were over 18 at the time they were first interviewed. This reduces the cases used from NLSY79 by 48% to 5,939 respondents.

As with all longitudinal surveys, the NLSY suffers from attrition. In 2013, the last survey year used for the NLSY97, 79% of the original respondents were interviewed. In 1993, the last survey year used for the NLSY79, 71% of respondents were interviewed. Respondents who miss a survey year are not barred from participating in the survey in subsequent years. When respondents who skipped a round are interviewed in later years, the NLSY attempts to retroactively add data on job dates, education enrollment, and dates of marriage/childbirth to reduce the amount of missing information. While missing data tends to occur in later years, it also occurs throughout the observed period. For this chapter, I exclude respondents for which

monthly employment data is missing for 10% or more of the observed months (14 or more months). Table 1 provides basic demographic information for each cohort.

Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of NLSY Cohorts and Sample

	NLSY 1979			NLSY 1997	
	Non-Military Sample	Non-Military Sample, Birth Years 1961-1964	Analytic Sample	Full Sample	Analytic Sample
N	11,406	5,939	5,076	8,984	7,391
% Female	51.1	49.3	49.4	49	49.9
% Male	48.9	50.7	50.6	51	50.1
% Black	25.6	27.1	29.7	26	26.8
% Hispanic	16.9	17.6	19.1	21.2	21.5
% Non-Black, Non-Hispanic	57.5	55.4	51.1	52.8	51.7

1: The NLSY79 uses three race categories: Black, Hispanic and Non-Black, Non-Hispanic. The NLSY97 adds a fourth category for more than one race. 83 respondents are in the Mixed race category. To be consistent with the 1979 respondents, I recode these 83 respondents into the Non-Black, Non-Hispanic group. However, I recognize that these individuals may identify more closely with the Black or Hispanic respondents.

Sequences and States

I construct a 139-month sequence for each respondent from June in the year they turn 18 to December of the year they turn 29. This process aligns respondents' timelines by removing the calendar year while retaining the ordering and durations of events. Sequences span from Month 1, June of the year a respondent turns 18, to Month 139, the December they turn 29. June was chosen as it is frequently the month youth transition out of high school. Figure 1 illustrates the process of sequence alignment for the NLSY 1997 cohort and Table 2 shows the years in which respondent turn 18 and 29.

Figure 3.1: Alignment of Observations

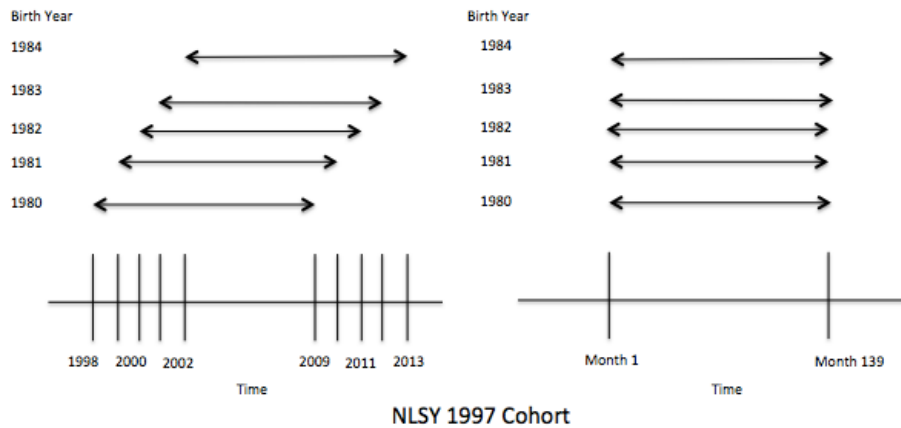


Table 3.2: Birth Year and Ages for the NLSY79 and NLSY97 Cohorts

1979 Cohort			1997 Cohort		
Birth Year	Year turn 18	Year turn 29	Birth Year	Year turn 18	Year turn 29
1961	1979	1990	1980	1998	2009
1962	1980	1991	1981	1999	2010
1963	1981	1992	1982	2000	2011
1964	1982	1993	1983	2001	2012
			1984	2002	2013

Each sequence is composed of labor market and family states. While labor market status, marital status, and parental status are measured separately, they are combined to create one channel for analysis. For labor market participation, each month is coded as either enrolled in school, employed, not working, or in the military. Months in which respondents are both in school and working are coded as enrolled in school and months in which respondents are either unemployed or out of the labor market are coded as not working. Binary measures are used for monthly marital and parental statuses. Parenthood is measured by having a biological child—not necessarily residing with the child or taking on a parental role (Oesterle et al., 2010). Table 3 enumerates the possible states for each type of element.

Appendix 1 shows that there are substantial differences in time spent in each state by cohort, gender, and race.³ Overall, respondents in the younger cohort spend fewer months as spouses and parents and more months in school than respondents of the older cohort. Male respondents of the NLSY79 spend more months in the military than any other group. Women in both cohorts spend more months married and as parents than men. Despite excluding respondents with a high proportion of missing observations, there remains a significantly higher proportion of missing data for the NLSY97 cohort.

Table 3.3: Labor market and Family Status State Description and Codes

Labor Force States		Family Status States	
Code	State Description	Code	State Description
C	Enrolled in higher education	S	Not married
E	Employed, not enrolled in higher education	M	Married
O	Not working: out of the labor market or unemployed	N	Not a parent
M	Military service	P	Parent
Combined Channel States			
Code	State Description	Code	State Description
CSN	College, not married, not parent	OSN	Not working, not married, not parent
CSP	College, not married, parent	OSP	Not working, not married, parent
CMN	College, married, not parent	OMN	Not working, married, not parent
CMP	College, married, parent	OMP	Not working, married, parent
ESN	Employed, not married, not parent	MSN	Military, not married, not parent
ESP	Employed, not married, parent	MSP	Military, not married, parent
EMN	Employed, married, not parent	MMN	Military, married, parent
EMP	Employed, married, parent	MMP	Military, married, parent
		XXX	Missing

³ Chi-square tests show statistically significant distributions of states between the 1979 and 1997 cohorts, men and women, 1979 men and 1979 women, and 1997 men and 1997 women.

Within Sequence Variation: Transitions and Complexity

Individual sequences are characterized by their number of transitions and complexity (Gabadinho, 2009). A transition is the change between two different states in a sequence—for instance, transitioning between employed and not working. The sequence “E-E-E-O-O-O” has one transition between the state E, employed, and the state O, not working. The sequence “E-O-E-E-O-E” has four transitions: (1) E-O, (2) O-E, (3) E-O, and (4) O-E. The maximum number of transitions in a sequence is one less than sequence length ($l-1$).

Complexity takes into account both the number of transitions and the number of states present in a sequence (Gabadinho, Ritschard et al., 2009). Complexity ranges from 0, a sequence with no transitions and only one state, to 1, a sequence in which all states are present, the duration spent in each state is equal, and the number of transitions is one less than the sequence length ($l-1$). The sequence “C-C-C-C-E-E-E-E” is less complicated than the sequence “C-E-E-O-O-O-E-M” because it includes fewer transitions, fewer states, and each state lasts for an equal length.

Between Sequence Variation: Distance and Transversal Entropy

While characteristics of individual sequences are useful for describing sequences, the real benefit of sequence analysis is the ability to compare how similar a group of sequences are to one another. Pair-wise dissimilarity measures the variation between sequences in a given set. I calculate pair-wise distances using an optimal matching algorithm and Dynamic Hamming distances. Dynamic Hamming distances use time specific substitution costs but do not use insertion or deletion costs. Compared to other cost-setting methods, Dynamic Hamming distance best captures temporal patterns in social science data because it does not warp socially meaningful timing by using insertions and deletions (Lesnard, 2010). Substitution costs are set to

the transition rates between states in each period. A low transition rate between two states translates to a higher substitution cost (Lesnard, 2010).

The three sequences in Figure 2 illustrate how substitution is used to calculate the distance between sequences. For this example, suppose all substitution costs are set equal to 1. To make sequences 1 and 2 identical would require making six substitutions (months 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8); to make sequences 2 and 3 identical would require three substitutions (months 1, 4 and 6); and to make sequences 1 and 3 identical would require substitutions for all eight months. Thus, Sequences 2 and 3 are more similar to each other than are sequences 1 and 2 and sequences 1 and 3, and therefore the distance between sequences 2 and 3 is less than the distance between sequences 1 and 2 and less than the distance between sequence 1 and 3. Distances are relational measure and *not* properties of individual sequences.

Figure 3.2: Illustration of Substitution costs

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Sequence 1	C	C	C	C	E	E	E	E
Sequence 2	C	E	E	O	O	E	M	M
Sequence 3	E	E	E	E	O	O	M	M

While between sequence distances capture the level of homogeneity for an entire sequence, transversal entropies measure the diversity of states observed across observations for each unit of time (in this case, for every month). Transversal entropy is equal to 0 when all observations in a set are in the same state for given unit of time and increases when there are multiple states present (Gabadinho, Ritschard et al., 2009). Transversal entropies quantify the information displayed in sequence distribution plots: when the distribution of states is concentrated into one state, there is low entropy and when then the distribution of states is

dispersed, there is high entropy. Transversal entropy is useful for examining adherence to scripts at a particular moment in time.

Clustering

Between-sequence distances are used to hierarchically cluster similar sequences together using Ward's method. Hierarchical clustering systematically merges clusters together by distance in a step-wise fashion starting with the most similar sequences. Using this approach, it is possible to have a number of clusters ranging from 1 (containing all observations) to the total number of observations in a given set. To select the most parsimonious number of clusters, I follow Dietrich et al. (2014) and select the number of clusters based on the proportion of variance explained, inspection of the dendrograms, and clarity of interpretation.⁴

Analytical Approach: Representative Sequences

I use a random sample of 1,000 respondents from the 1979 cohort to identify empirically common sequences that reflect different pathways to adulthood. Based on the proportion of variance explained, inspection of the dendrograms, and distinctiveness of the clusters, I selected a 10 cluster solution (Pseudo $R^2=0.315$). For each cluster, I constructed a representative sequences by identifying the mediod sequence—the observed sequence in each cluster that is least distant from all other sequences in the cluster (Aassve, Billari, & Piccarreta, 2007). Because mediod sequences are real observations in the data they contain idiosyncratic variation. To construct representative sequences that are more illustrative and less idiosyncratic, I smooth the

⁴ I use the TraMineR package in R to describe the sequence data and calculate distances and complexity (Gabadinho, Gilbert, Ritschard, & Muller, 2009) and the Cluster package to create the clusters groups based on these distances (Maechler, 2014).

medioid sequences by removing small fluctuations. Appendix 2 compares the original and smoothed medioid sequences.

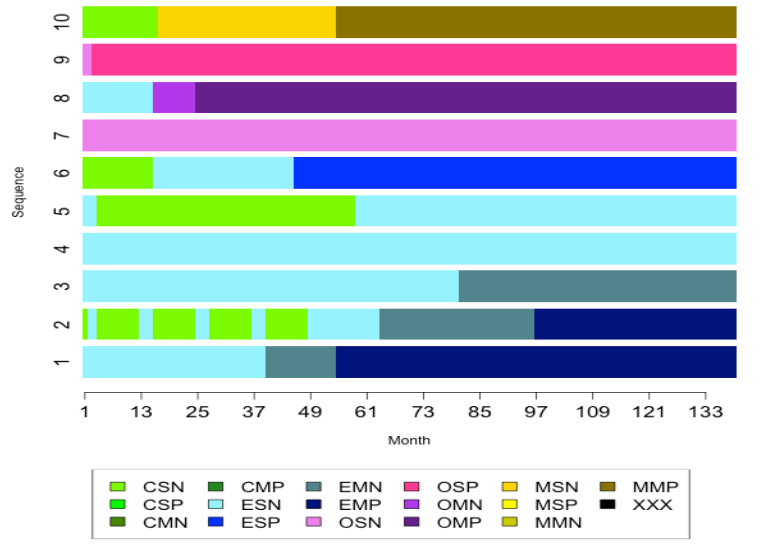
Clusters are defined both by the presence and absence of certain states, as well as the timing, ordering, and duration of states. Table 4 describes each cluster and Figure 3 shows the representative sequences. In the *Traditional Family Formation* trajectory, respondents move from high school to employment, and remain employed upon marrying and becoming parents in their mid-20s. The *Late Family Formation* trajectory similarly includes both marriage and parenthood, but individuals in this group enter the labor market after attending college, which generally pushes family formation to the mid-to-late-20s. Individuals in the *Working Marriage* group are employed throughout their 20s, and while they marry in their mid-to-late 20s, they do not become parents in the observed period. The next two groups, *No Family Formation* and *Career Devotion* trajectory, are defined by the absence of both marriage and parenthood. In the *No Family Formation* trajectory respondents move directly from high school to employment while in the *Career Devotion* group respondents attend college before employment. In the *Working Single Parent* trajectory, respondents may or may not complete some college before entering the labor market. Individuals in this group remain employed after becoming parents but do not marry in the observed period. The *Detached* group is defined by the absence of family formation and by lack of attachment to the labor market. While many people in this group move in-and-out of work, a substantial portion of time is spent not working. The *Not Working Single Parent* trajectory is also defined by lack of attachment to the labor force and the absence of marriage. However, in contrast to the *Detached* trajectory, respondents in this group become parents in their early-to-mid 20s. Lastly, the *Military* trajectory is defined by a large proportion

of months spent in military service. Many individuals in this group marry and become parents in their mid-20s.

Table 3.4: Common Trajectories of Adulthood defined by 1979 Sample

Cluster	Name and Description	Complexity	Number of Transitions	Number of States
1	<i>Traditional Family Formation</i> : respondents are continuously employed during their twenties, marry around age 22 and become parents approximately a year after marriage	0.068	2	3
2	<i>Late Family Formation</i> : respondents complete some college before marrying around age 25 and becoming parents around age 27	0.196	11	4
3	<i>Working Marriage</i> : respondents are employed continuously during their twenties and marry around age 25	0.042	1	2
4	<i>No Family Formation</i> : respondents work continuously and do not form a family in their twenties	0	0	1
5	<i>Career Devotion</i> : respondents attend college in their early twenties before working continuously	0.059	2	2
6	<i>Working Single parent</i> : respondents continuously work and become parents in their early twenties (around age 20)	0.065	2	3
7	<i>Detached</i> : respondents are detached from the labor market and do not form a family	0	0	1
8	<i>Family devotion</i> : respondents marry and become parents in their early twenties and are not in the labor force	0.054	2	3
9	<i>Not Working Single Parent</i> : these respondents become parents in their early twenties and are not married or working	0.014	1	2
10	<i>Military</i> : Respondents enter the military in their early twenties and form families in their mid-twenties	0.068	2	2

Figure 3.3: Smoothed Medoid Sequences from 1979 Sample



I use the representative sequences as benchmarks to which I compare all remaining observations. I calculate the distance between remaining sequences and the reference sequences and then scale the distances based on the complexity of the reference sequence by multiplying the distance between each sequence and each reference sequence by 1 minus the complexity of the reference sequence.

$$\text{Scaled Distance} = (\text{Distance between sequence and reference sequence}) * (1 - \text{Complexity of reference sequence})$$

There is no penalty for reference sequences that have a complexity of 0 while reference sequences that are more complex have a larger penalty. Scaling the distances accounts for the larger distances between more complex sequences that occur from differences in timing and duration of states and allows for comparison between more and less complex clusters. Remaining observations are assigned to a group based on the lowest scaled distance between the observed sequence and the representative sequences.

Results

Prevalence and Adherence to Common Pathways to Adulthood

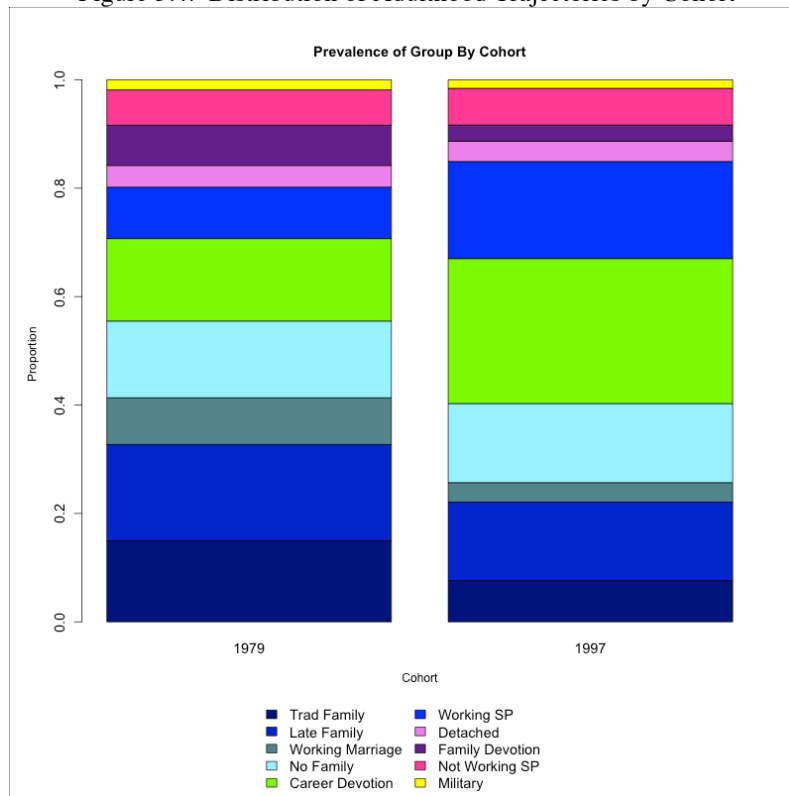
Figure 4 shows the distribution of pathways to adulthood by cohort. Compared to the 1979 cohort, there is smaller proportion of respondents in the 1997 cohort in the Traditional Family, Late Family, Working Family, and Family Devotion groups and a higher proportion of respondents in the Career Devotion and Working Single Parent groups. The single biggest change is in the proportion of individuals in the Career Devotion group: in 1979, 15.2% of respondents are in this group compared to 26.7% in the 1997 cohort.

Two general patterns are especially noteworthy: (1) there is more concentration in fewer trajectories for respondents in the 1997 cohort and (2) trajectories that include marriage are less prevalent for the younger generation. The three largest groups for the 1979 cohort are the Late Family Formation, Career Devotion, and Traditional Family Formation groups. Together, these three groups account for 48% of respondents, with 18% of respondents in the most prevalent group (Late Family Formation). The three largest groups for the 1997 cohort are the Career Devotion, Working Single Parent, and No Family Formation groups, which account for 60% of all respondents. Twenty-seven percent of individuals in the 1997 cohort are in the Career Devotion group.

The second noteworthy observation is that trajectories defined by the presence of marriage are less prevalent for the younger cohort, while trajectories defined by single parenthood are more prevalent. Forty-nine percent of respondents in the 1979 cohort are in the four trajectories characterized by marriage (Traditional Family formation, Late Family Formation, Working Marriage, and Family Devotion). Only 29% of respondents in the 1997

cohort are in these trajectories. Moreover, the three largest groups for the 1997 cohort not only account for nearly 60% of all respondents, but they are also all defined by the lack of marriage. On the other hand, single parent trajectories are more common in the 1997 cohort: 16% of respondents in the 1979 cohort are in the two single parent trajectories compared to 25% of respondents in the 1997 cohort.

Figure 3.4: Distribution of Adulthood Trajectories by Cohort



While examining prevalence is informative, it does not address how well the representative sequences resemble the month-to-month experiences of each generation, nor does it account for homogeneity within these groups. To evaluate how closely observed sequences within a group adhere to representative sequences and to each other, I analyze distance from the reference sequence, within group distances, and transversal entropy. The average distance between each sequence and the representative sequence measures how well the representative

sequence fits the sequences within a given group, while within group distance measures how similar the sequences within a group are to each other. Thus, the first measure indicates how closely the representative sequence matches the experiences of the individuals in a group while the second shows how much variation there is within each group. Average transversal entropy measures the diversity of states for each month. High entropy signifies a wide distribution of states in a given month while low entropy signifies a more concentrated distribution. Groups that adhere more closely to the reference sequence and to each other should also have lower transversal entropy.

Table 5 shows the results of two-sample t-tests by cohort on the distance from the reference sequence, within group distance, and the entropy for each group. Figure 5 displays the transversal entropies for the two cohorts. For five of the ten trajectories, the average distance between individual sequences and the representative sequence is significantly higher for the 1997 cohort than for the 1979 cohort. For these five groups, the reference sequence is a better approximation of the sequences within each trajectory for the 1979 cohort than for the 1997 cohort. The notable exceptions are Career Devotion and Working Single Parenthood groups. For these groups, the reference sequences are better representations of the data for 1997 cohort than the 1979 cohort, which is especially noteworthy given that the proportion of respondents in these two trajectories is nearly twice as high for the 1997 cohort than for the 1979 cohort.

While the overall within cohort distance is lower for the 1997 cohort than for the 1979 cohort, within group distance for eight of the ten groups is higher for the 1997 cohort—the exceptions again being the Career Devotion and Working Single Parent groups. Within group distance measures how close, on average, sequences within a group are to one another. Lower within group distance indicates that sequences within these eight groups are more similar to each

other for the 1979 cohort than for the 1997 cohort. On the flip side, sequences within the Career Devotion and Working Single Parent groups are more similar to each other in the 1997 cohort. Furthermore, the average transversal entropy is lower for the 1979 cohort for eight of the ten groups, but higher for the career Devotion and Working Single Parent trajectory meaning that there is more diversity of states across the observed period for the majority of groups. Taken together, these results suggest that for eight of the ten of trajectories, the 1979 cohort is more homogenous than the 1997 cohort. However, for the two groups that grew the most in prominence, there is both greater adherence to the reference sequence and greater within group homogeneity—which may account for the overall lower within cohort distance and lower entropy for the 1997 cohort. This suggests that while less common trajectories may be more individualized, the most common trajectories are less individualized and more standardized.

As shown in Figure 5 below, within group homogeneity changes over time. Each panel of Figure 5 compares the 1979 and 1997 month specific transversal entropies. Low transversal entropies signify less diversity in states in a given month, and therefore more homogeneity, while high transversal entropies signify more state diversity and less homogeneity.⁵ In general, entropy is highest during periods in which respondents transition from one state to another—especially when they transition to marriage and parenthood. For instance, in the Traditional Family group entropy is highest between months 1-60 (ages 18-23) and then declines. This pattern reflects differences in timing in marriage and parenthood in the early-to-mid-twenties. Once respondents in this group settle into the predominate state of employed, married, parenthood, entropy remains relatively low. The Working Single Parent, Family Devotion, and Not Working Single parent trajectories have similar entropy patterns as respondents in these groups move into the defining

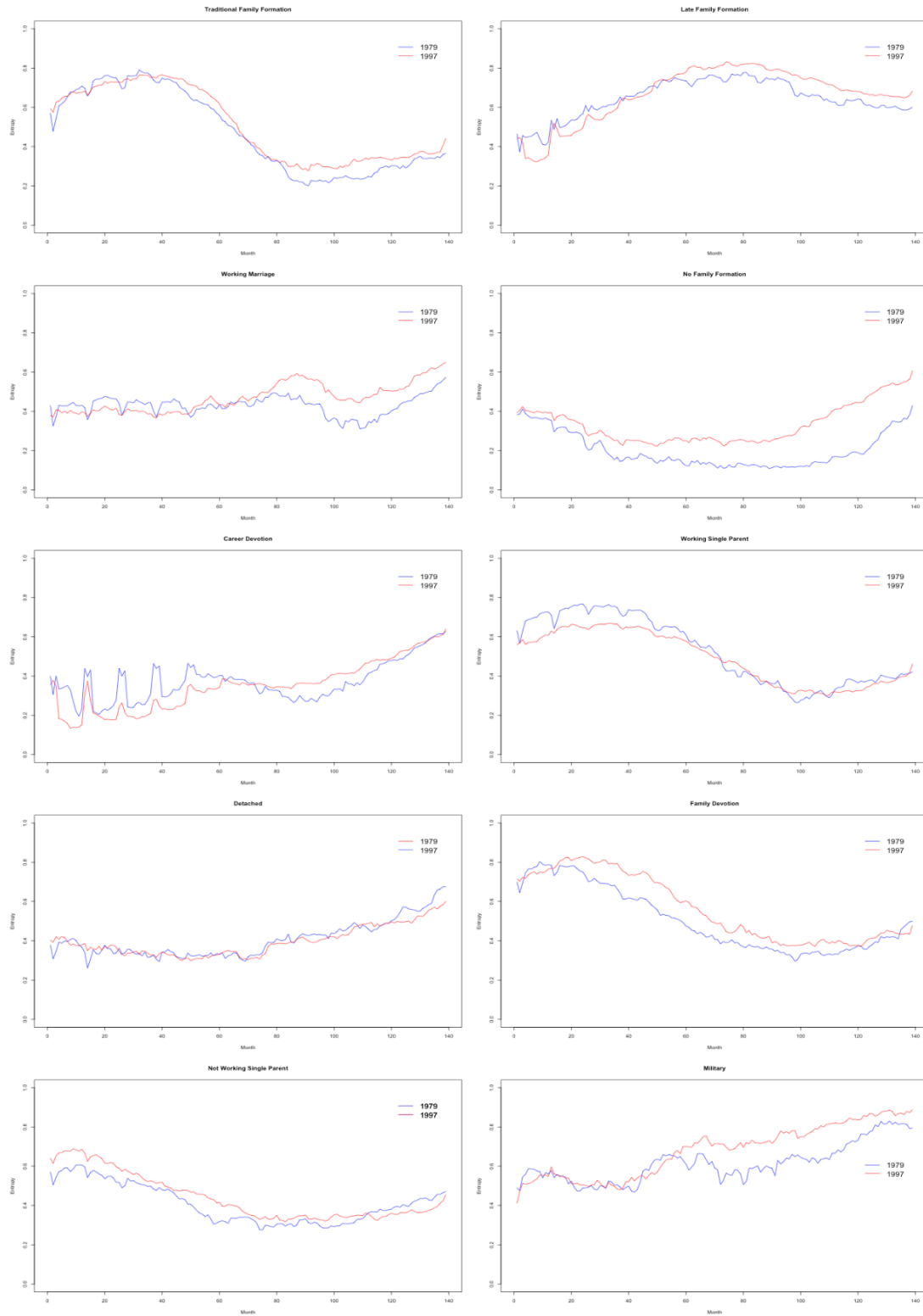
⁵ State distribution plots are in Appendix 6.

states of each trajectory. In contrast, entropy in the No Family Formation and Career Devotion groups begins to increase around age 27 as some respondents in these group start to marry and become parents.

Table 3.5: Measures of Distance by Adulthood Trajectory and Cohort

	Distance to Reference Sequence			Within Group Distance			Transversal Entropy		
	1979	1997		1979	1997		1979	1997	
Full Cohort	N/A	N/A		453.43 (99.79)	440.13 (108.91)	***	0.74 (0.06)	0.71 (0.09)	***
1: Traditional Family	227.48 (76.72)	243.51 (84.24)	***	277.70 (75.74)	298.16 (83.74)	***	0.47 (0.20)	0.51 (0.18)	
2: Late Family Formation	301.53 (96.51)	324.67 (95.38)	***	317.79 (74.84)	323.41 (75.43)	***	0.64 (0.10)	0.67 (0.14)	
3: Working Marriage	209.19 (80.22)	225.67 (82.60)	*	285.59 (87.05)	304.90 (94.36)	***	0.43 (0.05)	0.47 (0.07)	***
4: No Family Formation	150.86 (85.63)	156.86 (82.50)		231.36 (88.99)	232.54 (86.43)	***	0.20 (0.09)	0.33 (0.10)	***
5: Career Devotion	192.72 (80.56)	175.96 (88.95)	***	248.11 (79.34)	235.14 (84.02)	***	0.37 (0.10)	0.35 (0.12)	
6: Working Single Parent	263.55 (76.35)	244.87 (78.92)	***	316.43 (78.36)	306.63 (78.46)	***	0.53 (0.17)	0.49 (0.13)	
7: Detached	195.10 (91.72)	202.49 (92.14)		286.77 (86.51)	293.65 (90.56)	***	0.40 (0.09)	0.40 (0.08)	
8: Family Devotion	251.20 (80.90)	284.68 (73.11)	***	315.47 (80.02)	346.53 (77.14)	***	0.51 (0.16)	0.57 (0.17)	**
9: Not Working S. Parent	195.18 (102.23)	228.55 (89.97)	***	278.56 (96.80)	308.33 (83.67)	***	0.41 (0.10)	0.44 (0.12)	**
10: Military	550.12 (11.37)	545.44 (23.11)		374.20 (105.72)	394.67 (95.65)	***	0.61 (0.10)	0.68 (0.13)	***

Figure 3.5: Transversal Entropies by Adulthood Trajectory and Cohort



Contrary to what prior research suggests, sequences in the 1997 cohort are *not* more complex and do *not* include more transitions than the 1979 cohort. Table 6 shows the average complexity score, number of transitions, and number of states by group and cohort. Unlike the distance measures, complexity, transitions, and states are characteristics of individual sequences. Overall, these three measures are lower for the 1997 cohort than for the 1979 cohort indicating that younger generation does not follow more complicated trajectories. Notably, the mean number of transitions for the Career Devotion group is 16.0 for the 1979 cohort and 8.9 for the 1997 cohort. The prominent exception to the pattern of less complexity and fewer transitions is the Not-Working Single Parent group—for this group, the complexity score is 10% higher for the 1997 cohort than the 1979 cohort and includes on average one more transition.

Table 3.6: Sequence Characteristics by Adulthood Trajectory and Cohort

	1979					
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Full Cohort	0.191	(0.07)	13.35	(6.23)	4.99	(1.8)
1: Traditional Family	0.195	(0.06)	12.6	(5.83)	6.0	(1.56)
2: Late Family Formation	0.236	(0.06)	15.3	(5.85)	6.3	(1.50)
3: Working Marriage	0.183	(0.07)	11.7	(5.90)	4.9	(1.26)
4: No Family Formation	0.144	(0.06)	11.7	(6.37)	3.6	(1.23)
5: Career Devotion	0.201	(0.05)	16.0	(5.44)	3.9	(1.13)
6: Working Single Parent	0.203	(0.06)	13.7	(5.89)	5.3	(1.64)
7: Detached	0.159	(0.07)	12.3	(6.93)	3.5	(1.22)
8: Family Devotion	0.190	(0.07)	12.7	(6.21)	5.5	(1.77)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.155	(0.08)	10.9	(6.50)	4.3	(1.69)
10: Military	0.187	(0.07)	11.3	(5.66)	6.4	(1.99)

	1997					
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Full Cohort	0.166	(0.06)	10.53	(5.07)	4.69	(1.79)
1: Traditional Family	0.185	(0.06)	11.0	(5.10)	6.1	(1.56)
2: Late Family Formation	0.197	(0.05)	11.1	(4.49)	6.2	(1.55)
3: Working Marriage	0.172	(0.06)	10.3	(5.27)	5.0	(1.28)
4: No Family Formation	0.137	(0.06)	10.2	(5.47)	3.6	(1.09)
5: Career Devotion	0.143	(0.04)	8.9	(4.02)	3.7	(1.17)
6: Working Single Parent	0.187	(0.06)	12.1	(5.28)	5.2	(1.52)
7: Detached	0.144	(0.06)	10.0	(5.60)	3.5	(1.31)
8: Family Devotion	0.196	(0.06)	11.9	(5.49)	6.0	(1.81)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.171	(0.06)	11.9	(5.91)	4.4	(1.45)
10: Military	0.181	(0.06)	9.7	(3.90)	6.4	(1.92)

Variation and Individualization in the 1997 cohort

The above section addresses the questions of how closely the 1997 cohort follows the pathways to adulthood defined by the 1979 cohort. As shown, there has been a concentration of individuals into trajectories defined by attachment to higher education and the labor market and little family formation. Additionally, sequences have become less complicated and the younger

generation makes, on average, fewer transitions during their twenties. Despite the simplification of sequences, the representative sequences fit the observations from the 1997 cohort worse than the observations from the 1979 cohort. While not necessarily surprising as the reference sequences are defined using data from the 1979 cohort, this begs the question: *do new pathways to adulthood emerge in the 1997 cohort?* To answer this question, I conduct a second cluster analysis on the 1997 sample without using the reference sequences defined by the 1979 cohort and compare two 10-cluster solutions. Table 7 describes the trajectories defined by this analysis. While seven of the trajectories are similar to those defined by the 1979 sample, three new pathways emerge. An Extended College, a Family with Mixed Employment, and a Married Career Devotion trajectory replace the Working Marriage, Family Devotion, and Military Trajectories. Figure 6 shows the mediod sequence for the 10 trajectories and Table 8 shows the within group distance, complexity, transitions and states for each group.

The Extended College Trajectory, which accounts for 8% of the 1997 cohort, includes respondents who are enrolled in higher education throughout their 20s. For most respondents in this group, college enrollment is not continuous but rather interwoven with time spent employed, not working, and in the military. Enrollment is highest at the beginning of the 20s, peaks again in the mid-20s, and then declines as respondents near age 29. While school and employment status is mixed, family formation is largely absent from this trajectory, contributing to lower complexity and number of transitions. The second emergent trajectory, Family with Mixed Employment, is characterized by marriage and parenthood but mixed labor market experiences. Spells of college, employment, and time not working combine to create complex labor force trajectories and, as can be seen in the density plot in Appendix 7, there is an increase in single parenthood towards the end of this trajectory. This mixed trajectory is the most complex

trajectory, includes the largest number of states and transitions, and has the largest average within group distance. While this trajectory has low levels of standardization, less than 8% of the 1997 cohort is in this group. The last emergent trajectory is a Married Career Devotion group, which replaces the Working Marriage trajectory. Like the Working Marriage trajectory defined by the 1979 cohort, young adults in this group marry in their mid-20s. However, unlike the earlier generation, this group completes higher education before entering the labor force and getting married.

Table 8 shows the sequence characteristics of these clusters and Table 8A shows the demographic composition of each group. The emergent trajectory Family with Mixed Employment trajectory is the most heterogeneous group. This trajectory, which is defined by mixed labor market experiences and changing family arrangements, has a high level of within group distance (449.2) compared to all other trajectories as well as the highest average complexity, number of transitions, and number of states. While a relatively small group (7.6% of respondents), this group represents the most individualized and least standard pathway to adulthood. Overwhelmingly, this group is followed by women (68% women), especially Hispanic women (20%), and Non-Black, Non-Hispanic women (37.4%) who mix spells of employment with spells of being out of the labor market, while also being mothers. The emergent trajectory Married Career Devotion is also predominately followed by Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic women (17.4% and 36.9%), reflecting high educated women's increased attachment to the labor force, even after marriage.

Table 3.7: Adulthood Trajectories defined by Supplemental Analysis on NLSY97

Cluster	Name and Description	Prevalence
1	<i>Unmarried Career Devotion</i> : respondents attend college in their early twenties before working continuously	0.146
2	<i>Working Single Parent</i> : respondents continuously work and become parents around age 20	0.148
3	<i>No Family Formation</i> : respondents work continuously and do not form a family in their 20s	0.181
4	<i>Late Family Formation</i> : respondents complete some college before marrying around the age of 25 and becoming parents around age 27	0.128
5	<i>Traditional Family Formation</i> : respondents are continuously employed during their twenties, marry around age 22, and become parents approximately a year after marriage	0.103
6	<i>Not Working Single Parent</i> : respondents become parents in their early 20s and are not married or working	0.074
7	<i>Detached</i> : respondents are detached from the labor market and do not form a family	0.040
8	<i>Extended College</i> : respondents mix enrollment in college with employment throughout their 20s	0.083
9	<i>Family with Mixed Employment</i> : respondents form families in their mid 20s and have mixed labor market experiences, including time spent not working	0.076
10	<i>Married Career Devotion</i> : respondents attend college in their early twenties, marry after completing school, and are employed throughout their 20s	0.020

Figure 3.6: Medoid Sequences for Adulthood Trajectories from NLSY97 Cluster Analysis

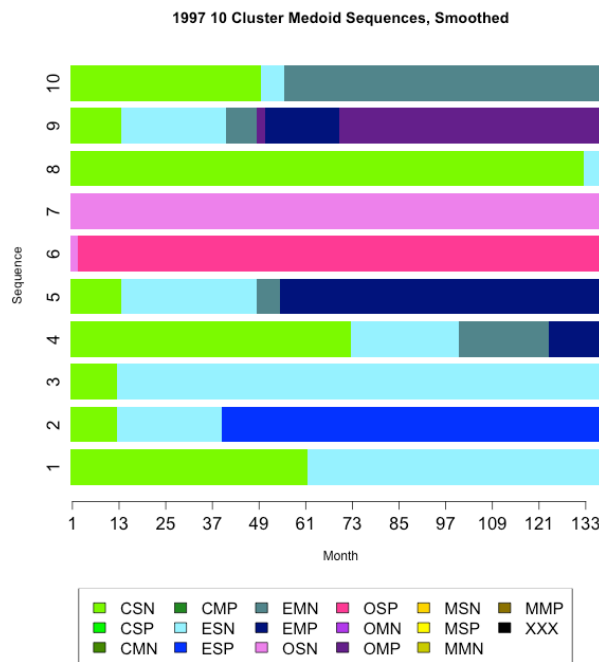


Table 3.8: Measures of Distance for Adulthood Trajectories of NSLY97 Cluster Analysis

	W/I Group							
	Distance		Complexity		Transitions		States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Unmarried Career Devotion	184.5	(80.7)	0.132	(0.04)	8.3	(4.2)	3.3	(0.9)
Working Single Parent	329.9	(95.3)	0.185	(0.06)	12.0	(5.2)	5.1	(1.4)
No Family Formation	261.4	(96.4)	0.144	(0.06)	10.3	(5.5)	3.8	(1.3)
Late Family Formation	319.7	(86.7)	0.177	(0.05)	9.7	(3.7)	5.5	(1.4)
Traditional Family Formation	346.2	(92.7)	0.189	(0.06)	11.1	(5.2)	6.1	(1.5)
Not Working Single Parent	325.4	(87.5)	0.170	(0.06)	12.0	(5.8)	4.4	(1.5)
Detached	343.0	(109.4)	0.163	(0.07)	10.7	(5.8)	4.1	(1.5)
Extended College	352.4	(110.9)	0.154	(0.05)	10.2	(4.0)	4.0	(1.4)
Mixed Family and Employment	449.2	(82.8)	0.210	(0.06)	12.3	(5.0)	6.7	(1.8)
Married Career Devotion	274.6	(89.8)	0.166	(0.06)	9.7	(4.9)	5.2	(1.2)

Table 3.8A: Demographic Characteristics for Adulthood Trajectories of NSLY97 Cluster Analysis

	Black Female	Hispanic Female	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Female	Black Male	Hispanic Male	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Male
Unmarried Career Devotion	9.4%	8.7%	30.2%	8.8%	8.5%	34.4%
Working Single Parent	29.2%	12.7%	14.9%	18.9%	12.4%	11.9%
No Family Formation	7.8%	6.6%	17.2%	14.1%	15.0%	39.4%
Late Family Formation	9.1%	8.3%	39.9%	6.8%	6.5%	29.5%
Traditional Family Formation	7.1%	14.9%	28.4%	8.2%	14.5%	26.8%
Not Working Single Parent	29.3%	13.9%	20.0%	22.5%	7.1%	7.1%
Detached	13.4%	8.4%	12.1%	39.6%	8.4%	18.1%
Extended College	13.4%	7.3%	24.9%	9.6%	11.7%	33.1%
Mixed Family and Employment	10.5%	19.9%	37.4%	6.9%	8.7%	16.5%
Married Career Devotion	6.0%	17.4%	36.9%	4.7%	6.0%	28.9%

Within Cohort Variation by Race, Gender, and Class

Race and Gender

Figure 7 shows the gender and racial composition of the ten original trajectories by cohort. For this analysis, I return to using the trajectories defined by the 1979 sample. The bars in this figure show the proportion of each trajectory that is female (red) and male (blue), by race. The first set of bars shows the gender and racial composition of the 1979 and 1997 cohorts. Both cohorts are nearly evenly divided between women and men, and have a higher proportion of

Non-Black/Non-Hispanic (darkest shade red/blue) respondents than Hispanic respondents (medium shade red/blue) and Black respondents (lightest shaded red/blue). Compared to the 1979 cohort, the 1997 cohort has a slightly higher proportion of Hispanic men (11% compared to 9%) and a slightly lower proportion of Black men (13% compared to 15%). The racial breakdown of females is nearly identical for the two cohorts.

Figure 7 shows the disproportionate demographic composition of certain trajectories. Some patterns are fairly consistent across the two cohorts: the No Family Formation, Detached, and Military trajectories are primarily followed by men, and the Family Devotion and Not-Working Single Parent trajectories are primarily followed by women. While Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic women are disproportionately represented in the Family Devotion group, Black women are disproportionately represented in the Not-Working Single Parent group. And, while Non-Black/Non-Hispanic men are overrepresented in the No Family and Working Marriage pathways, Black Men are overrepresented in the Detached trajectory. In general, Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic respondents are overrepresented in trajectories that include marriage, while Black respondents are overrepresented in trajectories that include single parenthood. Non-Black/Non-Hispanic respondents are also overrepresented in higher education trajectories.

Despite these consistencies, there are also substantial changes in the racial and gender composition of the trajectories over time. There is a higher proportion of women in the Traditional Family, Late Family, Career Devotion, and Working Single Parent Trajectory in the 1997 cohort than in the 1979 cohort and a lower proportion of women in the Working Marriage and Not-Working Single Parent groups. Both the Traditional Family Formation and the Career Devotion trajectories are more equally divided between men and women in the 1997 cohort,

whereas in the 1979 cohort both trajectories are predominately male. In contrast, the Late Family Formation trajectory switches from being primarily composed of women (53% female in 1979) to primarily composed of men (56% male in 1997), and the Working Single Parent Trajectory switches from primarily male (54% male in 1979) to primarily female (55% female in 1997). Overall, these changes reflect the high level of attachment to higher education and paid labor for women in the 1997 cohort.

Figure 3.7: Race and Gender Composition of Trajectories

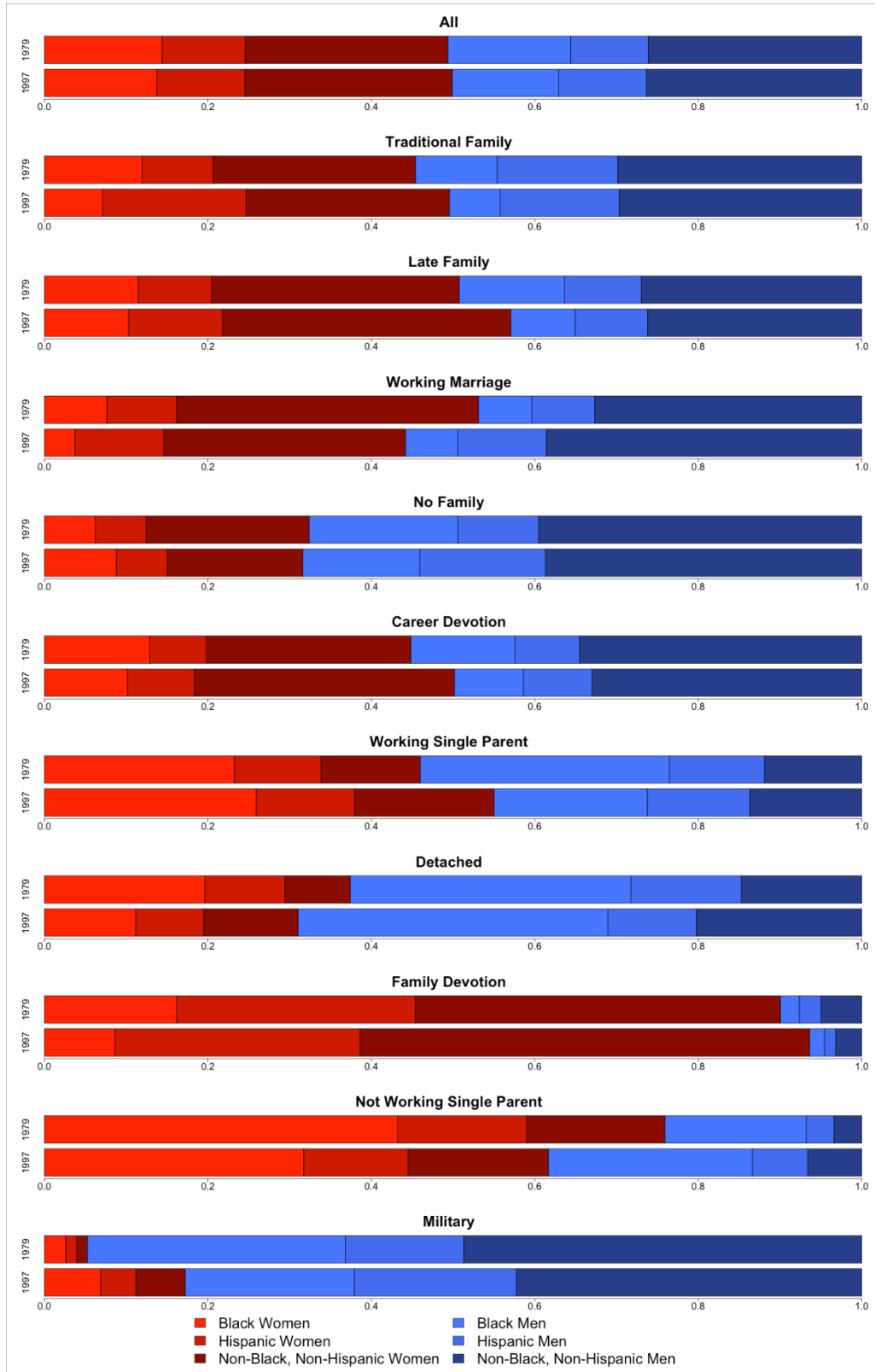


Figure 8 shows the proportion of respondents assigned to each of the ten trajectories by demographic group. The flip side of the patterns shown in Figure 7, Figure 8 emphasizes the changing prevalence of trajectories within demographic groups. For instance, as is shown in the first panel, the proportion of Black women assigned to the Not Working Single Parenthood trajectory decreased between the 1979 cohort and the 1997 cohort, but the proportion in the Working Single Parenthood trajectory increased. We see a similar pattern with Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic women. The other substantial change is the increase in the proportion of Non-Black/Non-Hispanic women in the Career Devotion group. Fifteen percent of Non-Black/Non-Hispanic women in the 1979 cohort are in the Career Devotion trajectory, but an astounding 33.5% of Non-Black/Non-Hispanic women are in this trajectory in the 1997 cohort. The proportion of Black and Hispanic women in this trajectory also increases between the two cohorts, but less substantially than for Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Women.

There are also substantial changes in the distribution of trajectories for men. As with women, the proportion of Black, Hispanic, and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic men in the Working Single Parenthood and Career Devotion trajectories is higher for the 1997 cohort than for the 1979 cohort. While the proportion of men in the No Family trajectory is relatively stable across cohorts, the proportion of men in the Traditional Family, Late Family, and Working Marriage trajectories decreases, reflecting the overall decline in these in these trajectories.

There is a meaningful increase in the proportion of Black men in the Detached trajectory and Not Working Single Parenthood trajectories. Nine percent of Black men in the 1979 cohort are in the Detached trajectory and 8% are in the Not Working Single Parenthood trajectory. In the 1997 cohort, these numbers increase to 11% and 13%, respectively. In total, 23.8% of Black

men in the 1997 cohort are best characterized by their lack of attachment to the labor force. While there is also a slight increase in the proportion of Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic men in the Not Working Single Parenthood trajectory (2% and 1%, respectively), there is a decrease in the proportion of Hispanic men in the Detached trajectory and no change in the proportion of Non-Black/Non-Hispanic men in the Detached trajectory, resulting in little change in the overall proportion of Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic men unattached to the labor market.

Figure 3.8: Prevalence of Trajectories by Race and Gender

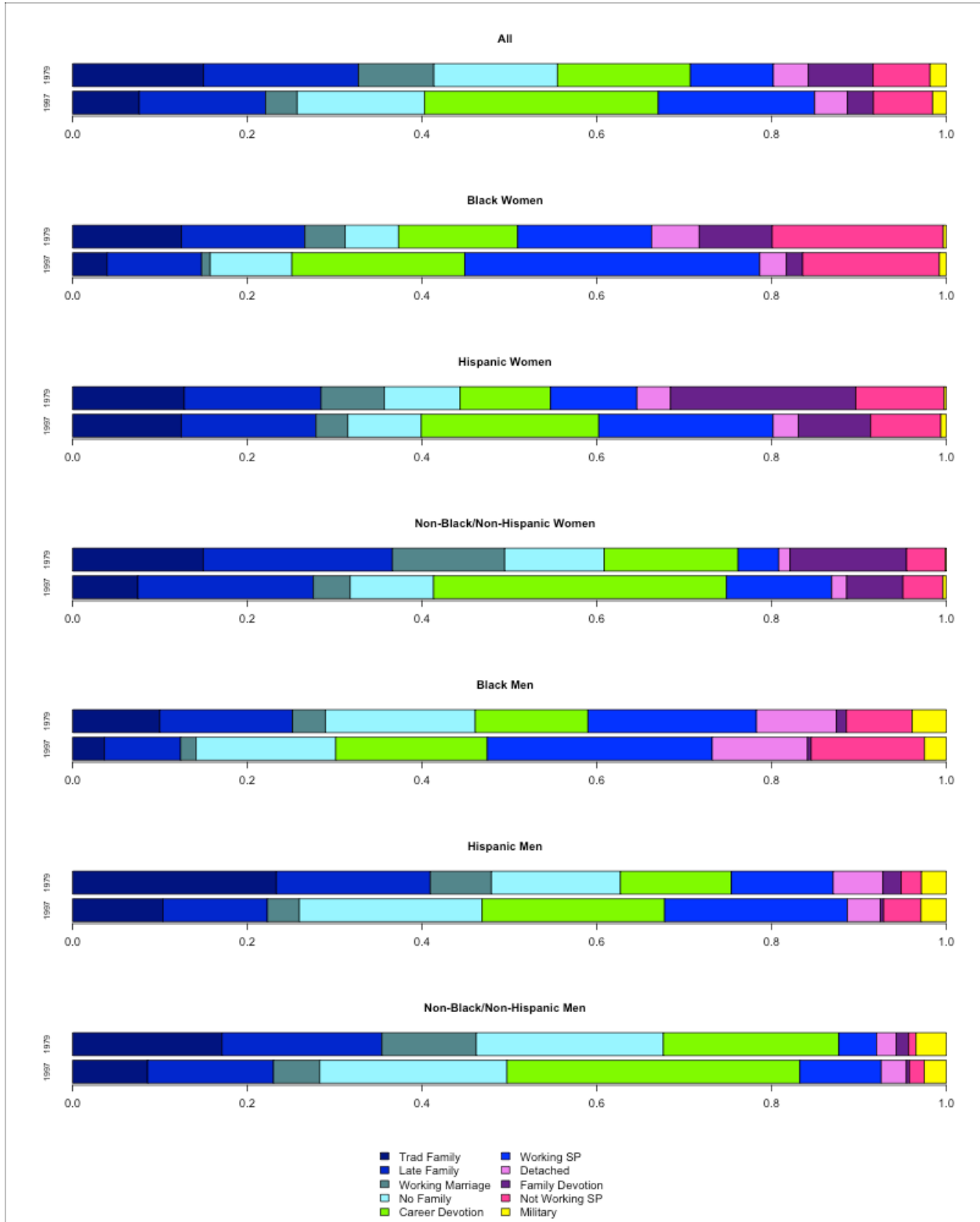


Table 9 shows distances and sequence characteristic by demographic group and cohort. In this table, within group distance refers to the average distance between all observations in a demographic group—for instance, the distance between the sequences of all Black women. Women, on average, have more transitions and more states in their sequences, and within group distance is higher for women than for men indicating more variation in the transition to adulthood among women than men. Within gender, Black and Hispanic men and women have higher within group distance than their Non-Black/Non-Hispanic counterparts indicating that the path to adulthood is more standardized and less varied for Non-Black/Non-Hispanic young adults than it is for Black and Hispanic young adults. However, there is little difference in the average complexity, number of transitions and number of states by gender and race.

Socioeconomic Status

A similar analysis was run using father's education as an indicator of socioeconomic status. Both the NLSY79 and the NLSY97 report the biological father's highest grade completed at the time of the first interview (1979 and 1997, respectively). I categorize this variable into less than high school education (less than 12th grade), high school education (12th grade), and more than high school education (more than 12th grade). Figure 9 shows the class composition of the original trajectories by cohort. The bars in this figure show the proportion of individuals in each trajectory that have fathers with less than a high school education (light purple), high school education (purple), and more than a high school education (dark purple). As shown in the first set of bars in Figure 9, there is a substantial increase in father's level of education between the two cohorts. For the 1979 cohort, 41.6% of the sample have fathers with less than a high school education, 34.3% have fathers with a high school education, and 24.1% have fathers more than a

high school education. For the 1997 cohort, 22.9% of the sample have fathers with less a high school education, 38.6% have fathers with a high school education, and 38.5% have fathers with more than a high school education.

Respondents with fathers with more than a high school education are overrepresented in the Career Devotion, Late Family Formation, and Working Marriage trajectories. Interestingly, for the 1997 cohort, respondents with fathers with high levels of education are also overrepresented in the Military trajectory. In both cohorts, respondents with fathers with less than a high school education are overrepresented in Single Parent, Traditional Family Formation, and Detached trajectories, and underrepresented in the Late Family, Working Marriage, No Family, and Career Devotion trajectories. For the 1979 cohort, respondents with fathers with high school level education are overrepresented in trajectories that combine family formation and work, while respondents in the 1997 cohort with fathers with a high school level education are over represented in the Single Parent, Detached, No Family, and Traditional Family formation trajectories.

Figure 3.9: Socioeconomic Composition of Trajectories

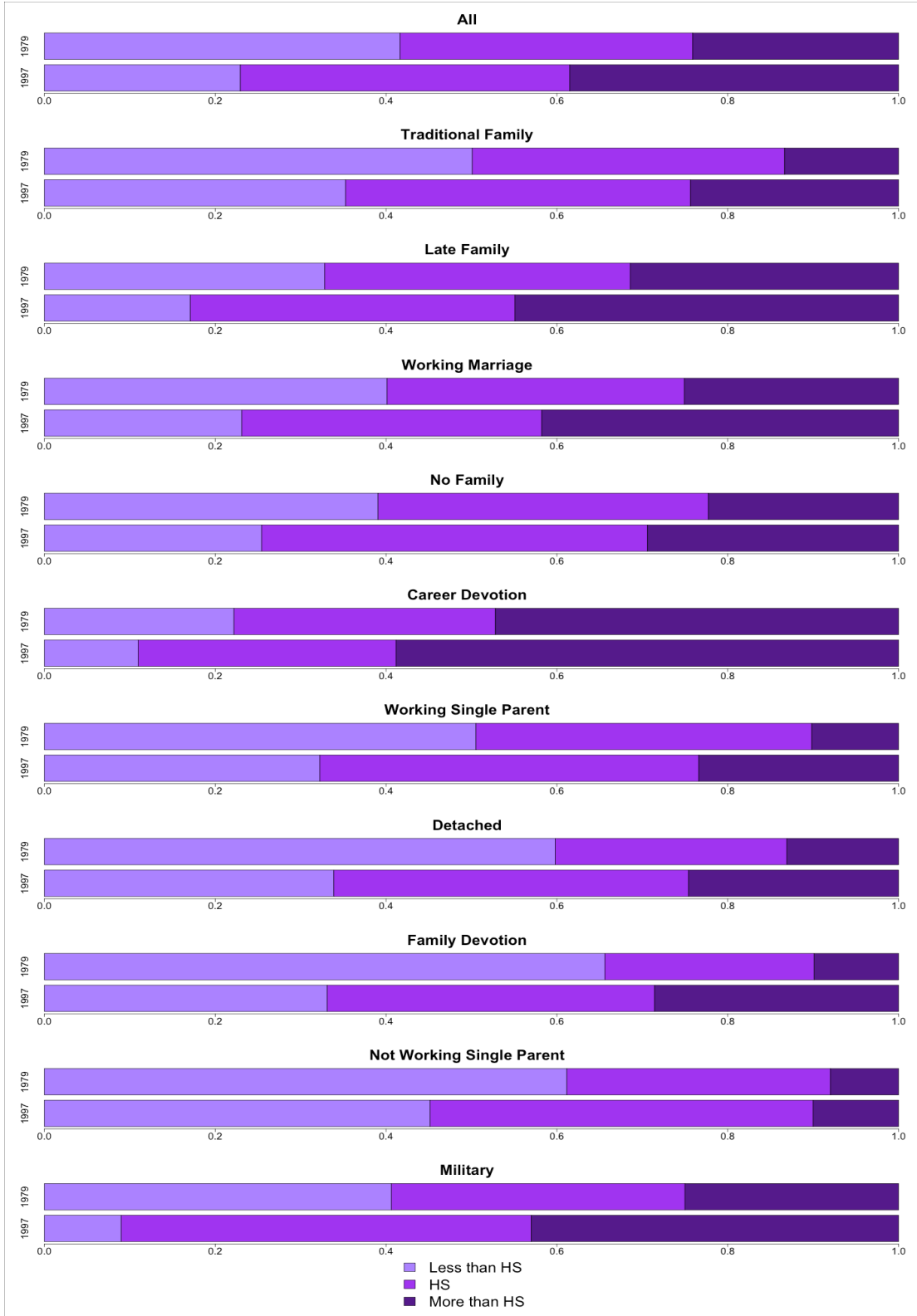


Figure 10 shows the proportion of respondents assigned to each of the ten trajectories by the father's education level to emphasize the changing prevalence of trajectories *within* each socioeconomic group. Overall, respondents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more concentrated in trajectories with strong attachment to higher education and employment, while respondents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be in family centered and detached trajectories. In both cohorts, respondents with fathers with high levels of education are concentrated in the Career Devotion and Late Family Formation trajectories: 33% of respondents from the 1979 cohort with fathers with more than a high school education and 44% percent of the respondents from the 1997 cohort with fathers with more than a high school education are in the Career Devotion trajectory. Respondents with parents with a high school and less than high school education are more dispersed amongst the 10 trajectories, but show less attachment to higher education. The three most common trajectories for respondents with fathers with a high school degree from the 1979 cohort are Late Family Formation, No Family Formation (16.2%), and Traditional Family Formation (16%), and the three most common trajectories for respondents with fathers with a high school degree from the 1997 cohort are Career Devotion (23%), Working Single Parent (19%), and No Family Formation (17%). While respondents with fathers with less than a high school education from the 1979 cohort are concentrated in the Traditional and Late Family Formation trajectories (18% and 15%, respectively), respondents with fathers with less than a high school education from the 1997 cohort are primarily in the working Single Parent and No Family Formation trajectories (24% and 16%, respectively). These results suggest that the resources afforded to young adults from higher socioeconomic

backgrounds help them fulfill high-achieving paths to adulthood, while those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds follow in their working-class parents' footsteps.

Table 9 shows the within group distances and average sequence characteristics by socioeconomic status and cohort. In both cohorts, the within-group distance is lower for respondents with fathers with higher levels of education, meaning that there is less variation and more standardization among respondents from a higher socioeconomic background than among respondents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (13% and 12% lower, respectively). Given that the majority of respondents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are in Career Devotion and other trajectories marked by attachment to the labor force and education, this indicates that this group of young adults who has access to cultural, social, and economic resources has relatively homogenous trajectories to adulthood.

Figure 3.10: Prevalence of Trajectories by Socioeconomic Status

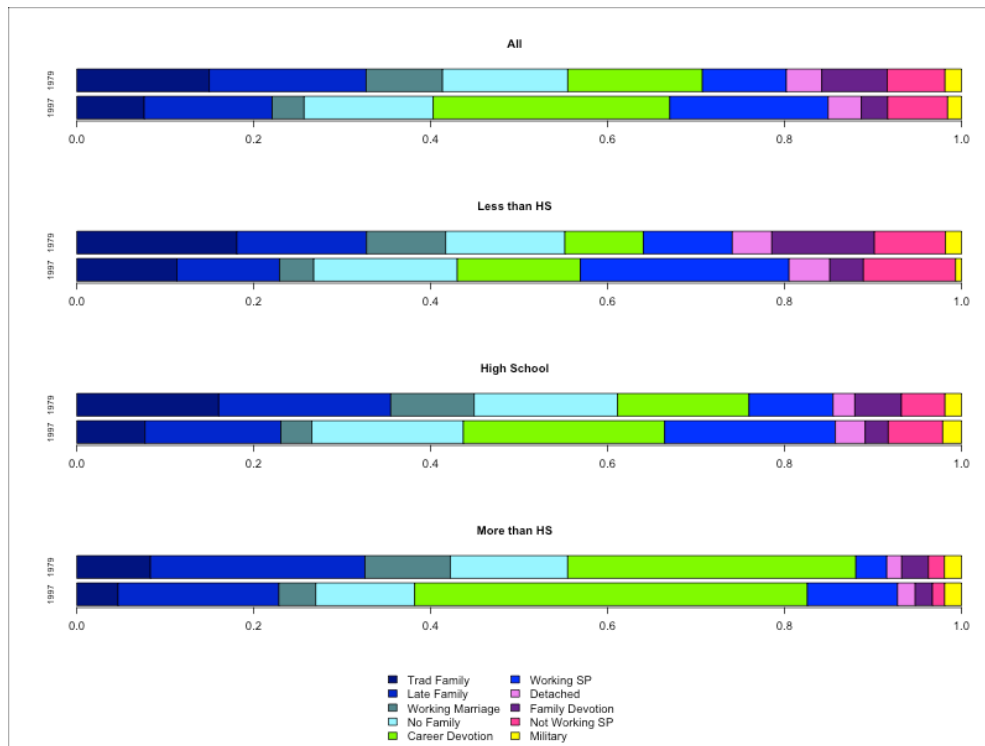


Table 3.9. Sequence Characteristics by Race, Gender, and Class

	1979							
	W/I Group Distance		Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
All Women	463.3	(95.6)	0.19	(0.07)	13.2	(6.2)	5.1	(1.8)
Black Women	464.9	(99.0)	0.19	(0.07)	13.0	(6.1)	4.9	(1.9)
Hispanic Women	464.7	(97.4)	0.19	(0.07)	12.9	(6.5)	5.1	(1.8)
White Women	447.3	(100.1)	0.20	(0.07)	13.5	(6.2)	5.2	(1.8)
All Men	435.3	(105.6)	0.19	(0.07)	13.5	(6.2)	4.9	(1.8)
Black Men	448.4	(98.8)	0.19	(0.06)	13.0	(5.8)	4.8	(1.7)
Hispanic Men	440.4	(103.2)	0.19	(0.07)	13.8	(6.7)	5.0	(1.8)
White Men	413.7	(113.5)	0.19	(0.07)	13.6	(6.3)	4.9	(1.8)
Father's Ed < HS	460.4	(95.8)	0.19	(0.07)	12.9	(6.3)	5.1	(1.8)
Father's Ed = HS	449.7	(102.1)	0.19	(0.07)	13.1	(6.0)	5.0	(1.8)
Father's Ed > HS	406.2	(110.7)	0.21	(0.06)	15.1	(6.1)	5.0	(1.8)

	1997							
	W/I Group Distance		Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
All Women	449.3	(105.0)	0.17	(0.06)	10.9	(5.0)	4.9	(1.8)
Black Women	446.6	(101.2)	0.18	(0.06)	11.6	(5.2)	4.8	(1.7)
Hispanic Women	462.3	(97.8)	0.17	(0.06)	10.9	(4.8)	5.0	(1.8)
White Women	430.2	(113.9)	0.17	(0.06)	10.6	(4.9)	4.9	(1.8)
All Men	425.4	(113.5)	0.16	(0.06)	10.2	(5.1)	4.5	(1.7)
Black Men	438.0	(104.1)	0.16	(0.06)	10.6	(5.3)	4.5	(1.6)
Hispanic Men	435.1	(111.1)	0.16	(0.06)	10.1	(4.9)	4.6	(1.7)
White Men	401.7	(120.4)	0.16	(0.06)	10.0	(5.2)	4.5	(1.7)
Father's Ed < HS	452.3	(101.0)	0.17	(0.06)	11.2	(5.5)	4.8	(1.7)
Father's Ed = HS	440.5	(107.9)	0.17	(0.06)	10.6	(5.1)	4.7	(1.7)
Father's Ed > HS	394.4	(122.5)	0.16	(0.06)	9.9	(4.6)	4.6	(1.8)

Discussion

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that individualization in pathways to adulthood may be less pronounced than prior research suggests and that the life courses of young adults remain largely patterned by race, gender, and class. The decline in the number of role

transitions in the 20s results in a high degree of standardization among the younger generation as well as concentration in less complex pathways. In particular, increased concentration of young men and women in trajectories with high attachment to education and employment and low levels of family formation produces fairly standardized trajectories into adult life. However, access to this route to adulthood is not uniform. While the trajectories of Non-Black/Non-Hispanic women and men have largely become more standardized, Black men and women's trajectories are more varied. Of particular importance is the increasing number of Black men in trajectories characterized by lack of attachment to the labor force and the increasing number of Black women in single parent trajectories. The findings in this paper suggest that standardization and individualization are not only the product of generational differences, but also the result of complex intragenerational differences across race, gender, and class lines.

There is substantial variation *within* each cohort along gender, racial, and class lines. In both the 1979 and 1997 cohorts, the Family Devotion and Not-Working Single Parent trajectories are predominately comprised of women illustrating ingrained gender norms regarding caregiving and motherhood. While the proportion of women in the 1997 sample who follow a caregiving role is less than the proportion of women in in the 1979 cohort who do so, household centered roles largely remain the domain of women. Men, especially Non-Black/Non-Hispanic men, are much more likely to remain attached to employment after marrying and becoming parents.

The results of this chapter also illustrate racial and class divides in terms of attachment to social institutions including higher education, the labor market, and marriage. While the vast majority of all demographic groups are attached to the labor market during the observed period, Non-Black/Non-Hispanic respondents are more likely to be highly attached to education than

Black and Hispanic respondents, and respondents with fathers with more than a high school degree are more likely to follow education-centered trajectories than their working and lower class peers. In the 1997 cohort, 51% of Non-Black/Non-Hispanic respondents are in the two trajectories defined by extensive participation in higher education, while only 34% of Hispanic respondents and 28% of Black respondents are in these trajectories. Similarly, in the 1997 cohort, respondents with fathers with more than a high school education are 2.5 times more likely to be in the two trajectories defined by education than respondents whose fathers have less than a high school education. Black men are particularly likely to be detached from the labor market: while less than a quarter of black men are detached from the labor market, the rate of detachment is twice that of Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic men. Additionally, Black respondents are less likely to be in trajectories that include marriage, and Black respondents who become parents during their 20s are more likely to do so without marriage. Black women are especially likely to be single parents compared to their Hispanic and Non-Black/Non-Hispanic counterparts. Taken together, these results highlight how intersecting gender and racial identities contribute to different patterns of role progression.

Generational changes in the pathways to adulthood reflect structural and normative shifts that have occurred over the last four decades. Notably, the use of sequence analysis highlights the multidimensionality of the life course by showing how increased attachment to higher education is coupled with decreased family formation, especially for women. The observed increase in women's attachment to the labor force and delayed or forgone family formation mirrors other research that shows that when women plan for long-term careers they often delay family formation, especially parenthood, until they are in their 30s (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001). It is important to emphasize that the women in the Career Devotion trajectory may not be

forgoing marriage and parenthood altogether, but rather they may be delaying starting a family until after launching their careers. The short scope of this study focuses solely on the life course in the decade of the 20s and it is entirely possible that women and men in this trajectory will form families in their next decade of life. However, this delay in itself reflects changing norms in the transition to adulthood. The observed family formation patterns reflect the growing norm that financial security and employment stability precede marriage and parenthood. As Arnett (2015) discusses, today's young adults are especially likely to prioritize financial security and independence before starting a family. Delaying family formation may be both personal, with individuals prioritizing their own self-development before "settling down," and pragmatic, as the high costs of education combine with rising home costs and insecure labor markets to make employment stability illusive for many young adults.

The findings in this chapter also reiterate research that shows the expansion of higher education. With the labor market continuing to shift away from manufacturing and to the service and knowledge sectors, higher education is increasingly important to achieve financial independence and secure employment. The proportion of young adults attending college drastically increased from the 1979 cohort to the 1997 cohort reflecting the demand for higher education. Illustrating the flipside of the changed occupational mix, I also find that the proportion of Black men who are detached from the labor market has substantially increased. The decline of manufacturing jobs, especially in urban areas, reduces the number of stable jobs available to those with a high school degree often leaving those with low levels of education detached from the labor market. Taken together, the increased proportion of individuals in trajectories defined by commitment to higher education as well as the increased proportion of individuals in trajectories defined by detachment from the labor market highlights both ends of

the polarized labor market. Non-Black respondents and respondents from high socioeconomic backgrounds are much more likely to be attached to education than Black respondents and respondents from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These findings indicate a wide disparity in the access to the contemporary normative transition to adulthood.

Researchers like Arnett (2015) and Shanahan (2005) theorize that increased individualization on the road to adulthood is a type of freedom from social constraints that is afforded to contemporary young adults. In particular, Shanahan argues that weakened familial and geographic constraints permit more flexible paths in which the timing and ordering of events and roles varies by individual. In this conceptualization of individualization, young adults construct pathways to adulthood that are less dictated by strong social norms and expectations, and are more a product of individual proclivity. However, in being free from traditional expectations of the life course, especially expectations around family formation, contemporary young adults are actually following relatively homogenous paths to adulthood. The ability to carve one's own path has resulted in trajectories that look remarkably similar, at least when examining the major markers of adulthood: education, employment, marriage, and parenthood. Without transitioning into familial roles in the 20s, contemporary young adults primarily experience two role configurations: that of a student and that of a worker. While contemporary young adults may indeed move from job to job, city to city, or romantic partner to romantic partner, this does not necessarily mean that they are unmoored from social institutions. Instead, findings in this paper reveal a high level of commitment to higher education and the labor market resulting in a relatively unchanging progression through the 20s. And while the push for higher education may benefit young adults in their future careers and earnings, it comes at a high cost

for young adults and their families. The pressure to conform to high levels of education may be particularly burdensome to young adults who start-and-stop college or never finish their degree.

Results in this chapter show that where individualization does occur, it does so in a way that may reflect not a type of freedom from social norms, but rather lack of access to and detachment from social institutions. Lack of standardization may be reflecting struggle, rather than success for young adults as they try to gain a foothold in today's polarized economy.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

Sequence analysis allows for careful analysis of the timing and ordering of common markers of adulthood including finishing school, finding employment, marrying and starting a family. In this chapter, I use sequence analysis to compare the roads to adulthood for young adults who came of age in the 1980s and 2000s and find that while in some ways the paths of these two cohorts are remarkably similar, in other ways they vary considerably. The majority of young adults coming of age in the 2000s forwent marriage and parenthood in their 20s and instead followed trajectories with a high level of commitment to college and the labor force resulting in exceptionally homogenous sequences. This finding is at odds with suggestions that today's young adults are carving their own individual paths to adulthood. In contrast to this idea, I find that that the road through the 20s is remarkably similar for a large proportion of young adults. Furthermore, where variation does occur, it often occurs by being unattached to social institutions like the labor market and marriage.

While these findings are illustrative of important social trends, there are limitations. Firstly, much of the research on coming of age in contemporary American shows that young adults experience change *within* the domains of work and relationships. In this analysis, I do not

consider job-to-job transitions, changes in romantic partners, or changes in location. However, while these changes may be important for young adult's sense of adulthood and stability, the states I do use are consistent with other life course research. Furthermore, I do not consider alternative forms of the major markers of adulthood. For instance, research shows that cohabitation is becoming increasingly common and is sometimes used as a substitution for marriage. I do not include cohabitation in this analysis, as cohabitation measures are not comparable between the two cohorts. I also do not include alternative forms of living arrangements and household configurations, like living with roommates, which young adults may engage in instead of marrying.

The research presented in this chapter shows that today's young adults are less likely to form families in their 20s than they were a few decades ago. However, this does not mean that young adults are forgoing marriage and parenthood entirely. Future research should consider extending this analysis into the 30s. The respondents of the NLSY97 turned 30 between 2010 and 2014, and therefore in the next decade of data can be used to answer the question of if marriage and parenthood occurred in the 30s. In addition, I consider differences in pathways to adulthood by race, gender, and socioeconomic status. However, research shows urbanicity and region are also salient factors in shaping young adults' lives and should be considered.

Lastly, this chapter takes for granted traditional demographic markers of adulthood. However, qualitative work suggests that contemporary young adults are redefining the meanings of adulthood and are, to some extent, detaching the subjective experience of adulthood from traditional milestones they see as outdated. Future research should attempt to reconcile the empirical trajectories found in this chapter with young adults' sense of adulthood in the new economy.

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Chapter 3 Appendix

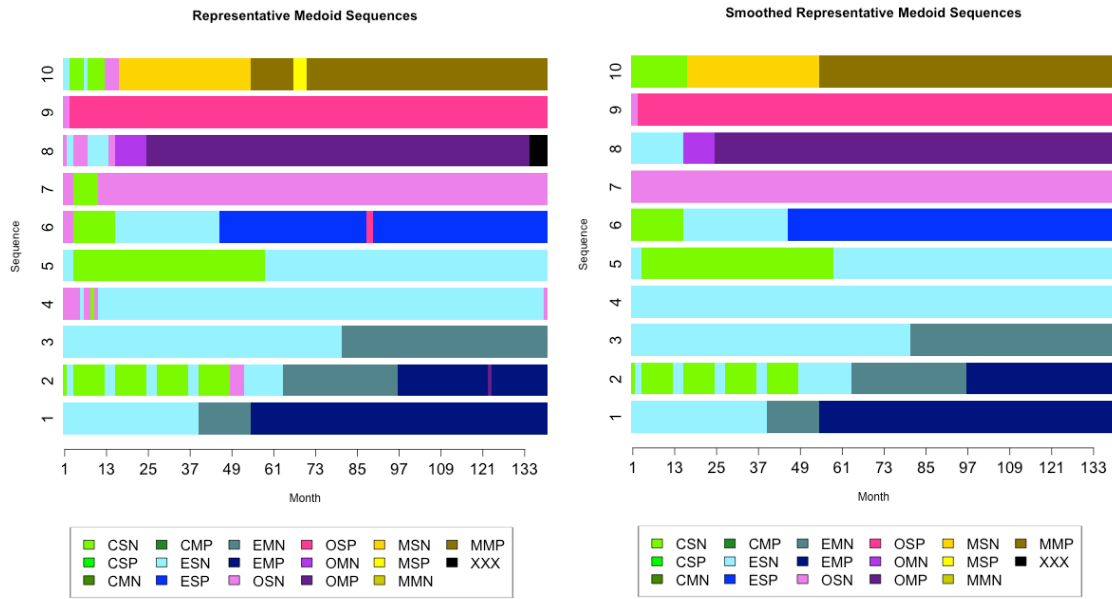
Appendix 3.1: State Distribution by Cohort, Gender and Race

1979 cohort									
	Combined	Women				Men			
		All	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic	All	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic
CSN	16.5	15.9	14.3	13.2	18.0	17.1	14.0	14.9	19.7
CSP	1.3	1.8	3.6	1.9	0.8	0.8	1.6	1.0	0.3
CMN	1.5	1.8	1.2	1.2	2.5	1.2	0.5	0.9	1.7
CMP	1.4	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.5	1.2	1.0	1.3	1.3
ESN	38.0	30.8	23.1	27.3	36.7	45.1	37.7	39.2	51.5
ESP	10.2	10.1	16.8	10.6	5.9	10.4	19.9	11.6	4.5
EMN	11.9	13.3	6.4	9.4	18.8	10.5	4.7	8.9	14.5
EMP	18.6	18.1	16.2	20.7	18.2	19.1	13.8	26.4	19.5
OSN	13.2	10.7	14.4	12.0	8.0	15.6	21.1	16.7	12.0
OSP	9.1	13.4	25.9	13.2	6.2	4.9	10.6	4.6	1.6
OMN	2.3	3.5	2.2	3.5	4.3	1.1	0.5	1.2	1.3
OMP	9.5	16.2	10.8	23.0	16.6	3.0	2.3	4.7	2.8
MSN	2.6	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.5	4.6	5.8	3.7	4.2
MSP	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.5	1.2	0.2	0.3
MMN	0.7	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	1.3	1.1	0.9	1.5
MMP	1.0	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.8	2.2	1.8	1.5
XXX	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.8

1997 Cohort									
	Combined	Women				Men			
		All	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic	All	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic
CSN	28.5	29.6	25.0	23.9	34.5	27.5	21.3	23.4	32.2
CSP	3.1	4.8	9.6	4.3	2.3	1.4	2.6	1.7	0.7
CMN	1.7	2.0	0.5	1.7	2.8	1.4	0.5	1.6	1.9
CMP	1.6	2.1	2.1	2.4	2.0	1.2	0.8	1.5	1.2
ESN	39.8	32.6	26.6	28.6	37.5	47.0	36.8	44.8	52.9
ESP	17.2	18.9	30.4	20.2	12.2	15.6	23.9	20.6	9.3
EMN	6.3	7.1	1.7	6.3	10.3	5.6	2.0	4.6	7.8
EMP	10.5	11.2	5.8	16.1	12.0	9.9	5.2	12.7	11.1
OSN	11.2	8.3	10.6	8.7	7.0	14.0	21.1	13.0	11.0
OSP	9.7	11.9	20.4	13.0	6.8	7.5	17.2	6.9	3.0
OMN	0.8	1.2	0.4	1.5	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5
OMP	4.2	7.1	3.1	9.9	8.1	1.4	1.5	1.8	1.1

MSN	1.7	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.5	2.9	2.2	2.7	3.2
MSP	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.3
MMN	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.3	0.7	0.9
MMP	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.9	1.1	1.2	0.6
XXX	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.2

Appendix 3.2 Comparison of Smoothed and Unsmoothed Mediod sequences for common pathways

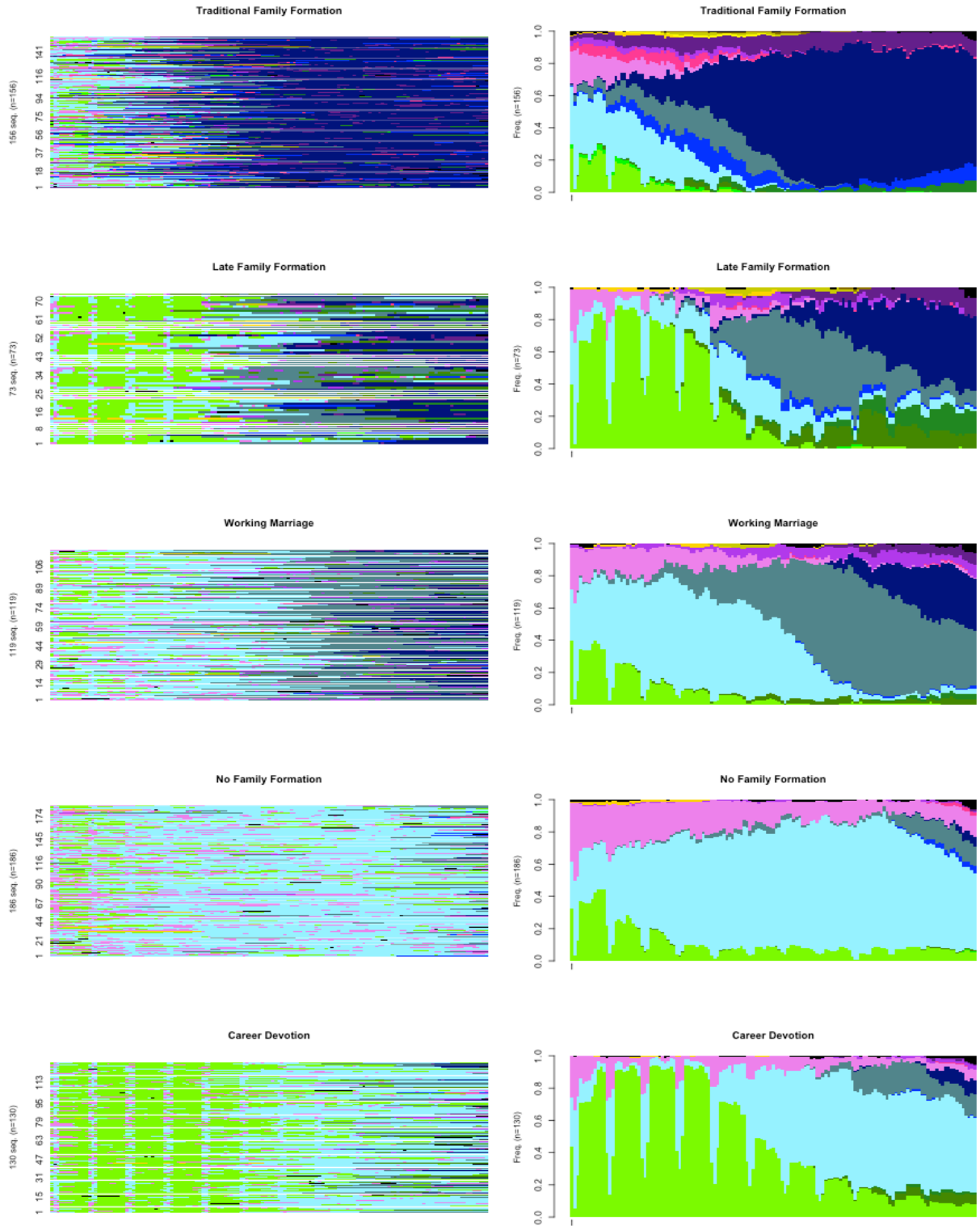


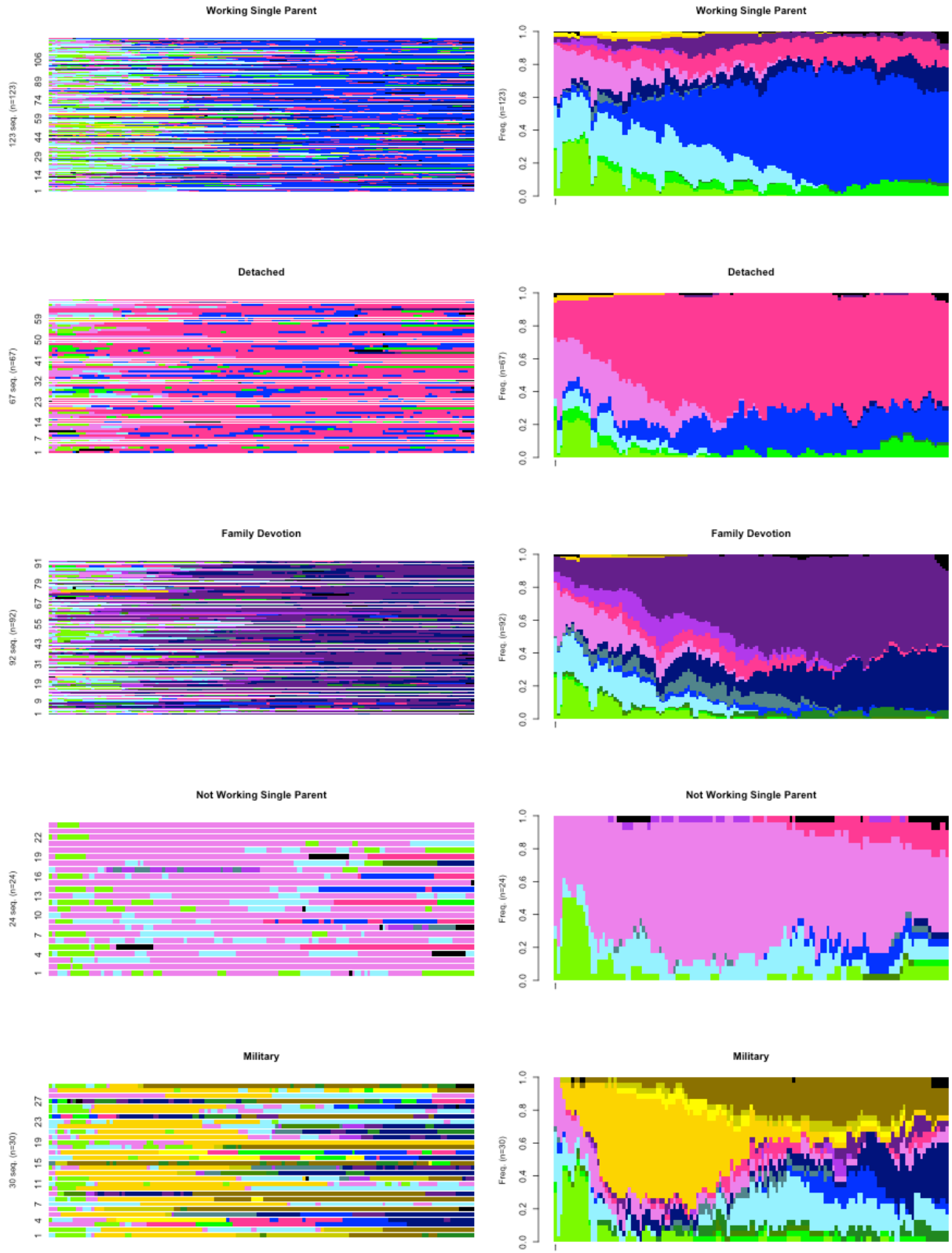
Appendix 3.3 State Distribution by Pathway

	1979									
	1 Traditional Family Formation	2 Late Family Formation	3 Working Marriage	4 No Family Formation	5 Career Devotion	6 Working Single Parent	7 Detached	8 Family Devotion	9 Not Working Single Parent	10 Military
CSN	3.6	25.8	11.4	9.7	50.8	4.9	9.8	2.3	2.2	9.0
CSP	0.8	1.2	0.5	0.2	0.2	5.3	0.1	1.5	4.4	0.5
CMN	0.5	4.6	3.5	0.2	1.2	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.0	3.3
CMP	2.8	3.3	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.0	3.1	0.6	2.4
ESN	16.0	23.5	50.5	98.9	62.5	17.5	26.9	5.8	3.7	10.1
ESP	6.5	3.9	0.5	2.2	0.7	66.8	2.7	4.4	19.3	1.9
EMN	9.7	23.5	50.3	3.2	6.5	1.3	0.8	3.7	0.3	2.2
EMP	73.1	25.1	3.1	1.2	0.6	8.3	0.5	22.0	2.8	4.1
OSN	5.2	8.3	9.8	18.7	12.2	9.4	87.4	5.6	10.2	4.9
OSP	2.5	2.0	0.7	0.7	0.3	17.2	3.7	7.6	88.5	0.6
OMN	2.1	4.0	4.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	3.0	6.0	0.4	0.3
OMP	13.1	6.4	1.6	0.4	0.2	3.2	0.9	75.0	4.7	1.4
MSN	1.0	3.3	1.0	1.7	2.6	2.1	1.4	0.2	0.2	43.6
MSP	0.1	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.3	5.1
MMN	0.5	1.7	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	13.2
MMP	0.6	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.1	35.8
XXX	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.8	1.4	1.1	1.3	0.6

	1997									
	1 Traditional Family Formation	2 Late Family Formation	3 Working Marriage	4 No Family Formation	5 Career Devotion	6 Working Single Parent	7 Detached	8 Family Devotion	9 Not Working Single Parent	10 Military
CSN	5.6	37.5	16.4	14.8	63.6	9.8	12.5	6.0	3.1	19.5
CSP	2.1	4.1	0.7	0.2	0.3	9.1	0.3	2.6	6.4	3.4
CMN	1.2	7.1	2.8	0.2	1.2	0.1	0.1	1.2	0.0	3.7
CMP	5.0	5.3	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.7	0.0	5.7	0.3	6.0
ESN	16.8	17.5	52.5	97.7	55.5	18.4	27.8	6.3	4.2	10.9
ESP	11.9	5.8	0.9	2.8	1.3	69.5	2.2	7.7	28.0	4.3
EMN	6.3	17.3	42.2	2.0	4.8	0.4	0.9	3.7	0.2	1.3
EMP	69.2	22.7	3.7	0.8	0.7	4.2	0.4	19.7	2.2	2.4
OSN	3.3	5.0	8.2	17.1	8.1	6.9	85.7	5.1	8.9	4.1
OSP	3.7	2.3	1.5	1.0	0.3	16.2	5.0	9.8	79.5	1.6
OMN	0.9	2.0	4.6	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.9	4.0	0.3	0.2
OMP	10.5	5.7	1.4	0.1	0.2	1.4	0.6	65.1	4.0	0.9
MSN	0.7	3.0	2.0	0.8	1.2	0.3	0.8	0.4	0.1	42.2
MSP	0.1	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.1	6.7
MMN	0.3	1.6	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	7.3
MMP	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.1	23.8
XXX	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.3	1.1	1.4	1.8	1.3	1.7	0.6

Appendix 3.4 Index and Distribution plots for common pathways



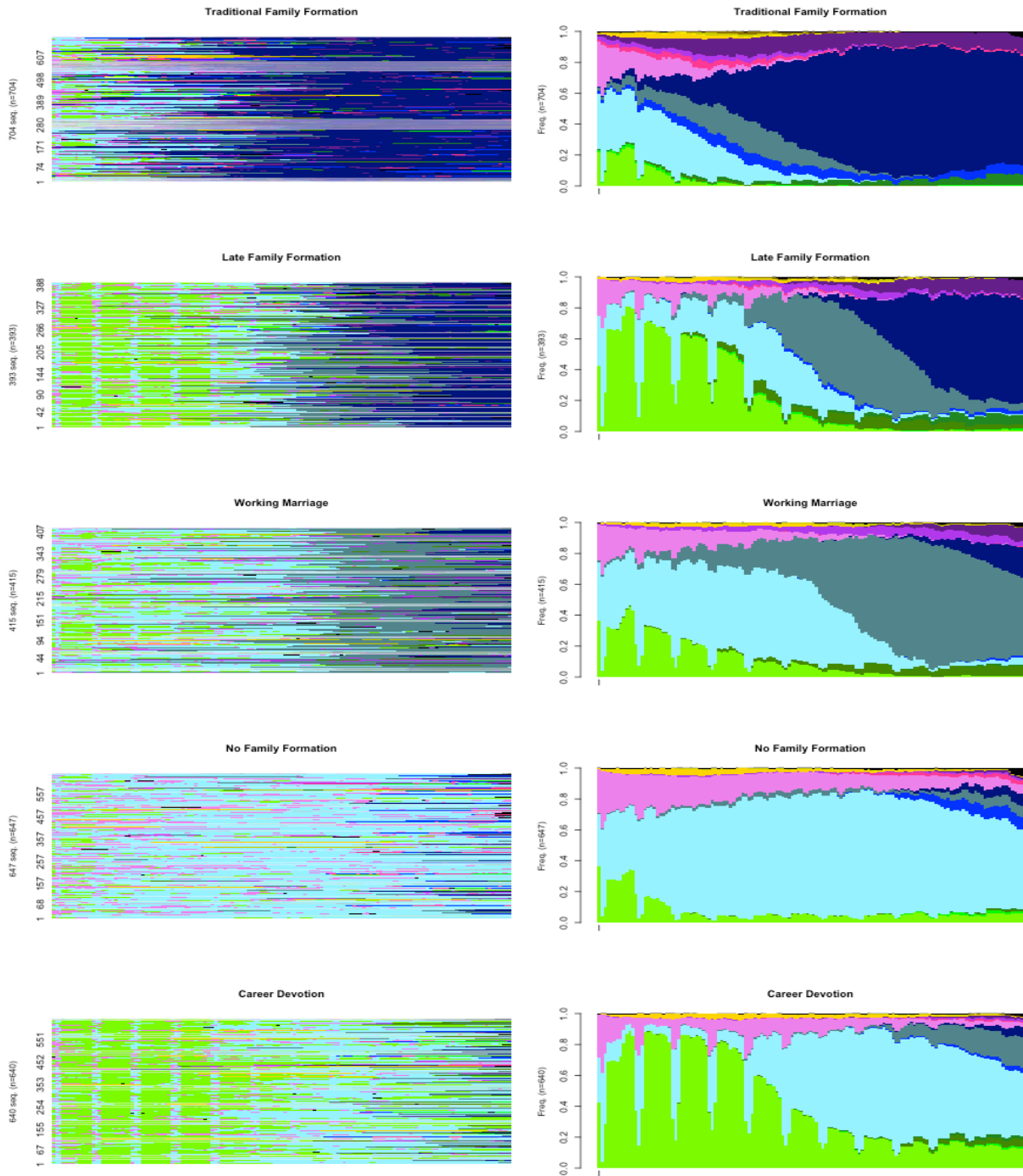


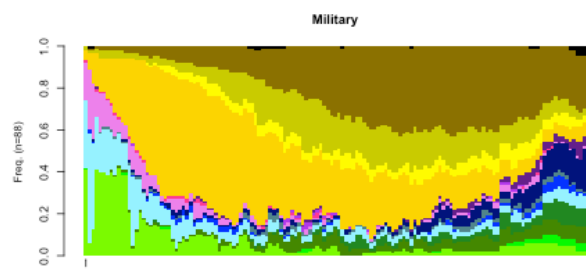
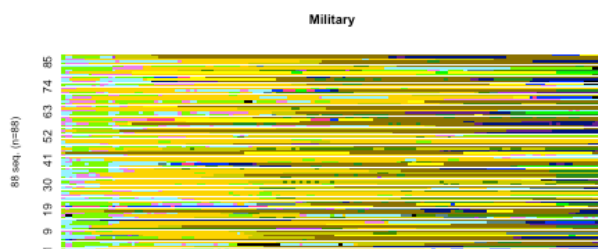
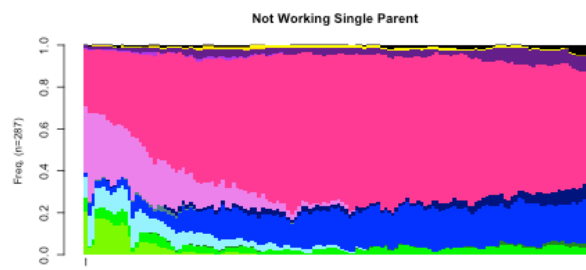
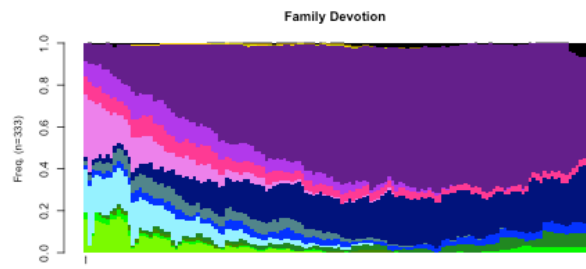
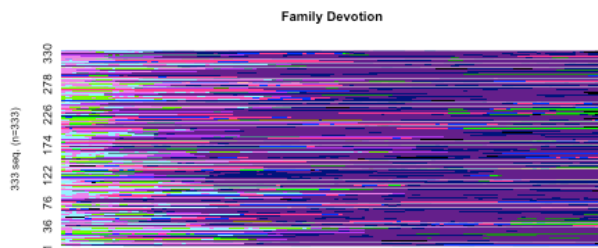
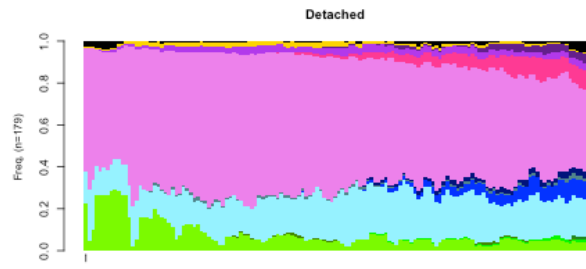
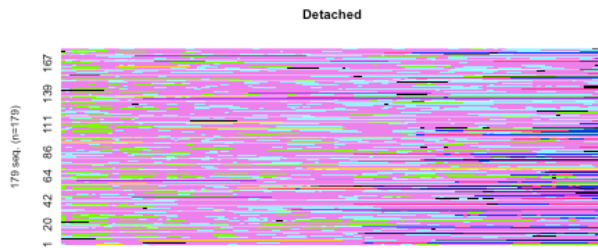
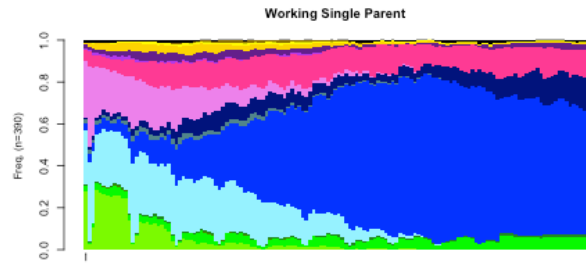
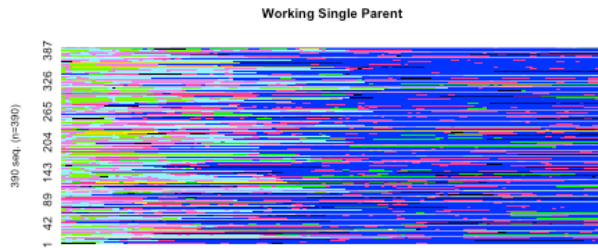
Appendix 3.5 Prevalence of Common Trajectories by Cohort

	1979	1997
Traditional Family Formation	0.150	0.076
Late Family Formation	0.177	0.145
Working Marriage	0.086	0.036
No Family Formation	0.142	0.146
Career Devotion	0.152	0.267
Working Single Parent	0.095	0.179
Detached	0.040	0.037
Family Devotion	0.074	0.030
Not Working Single Parent	0.065	0.068
Military	0.019	0.016

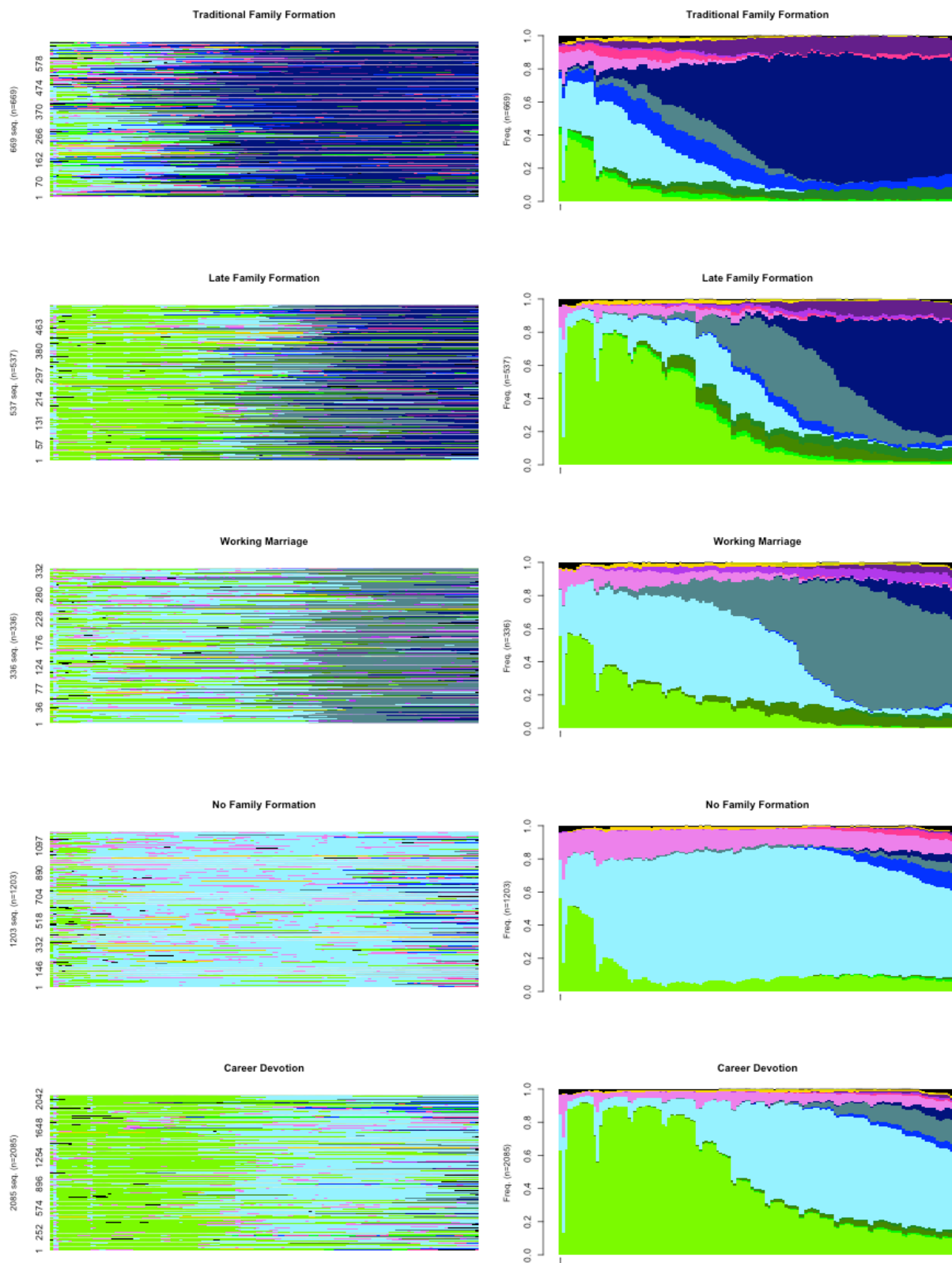
Appendix 3.6 Index and Distribution Plots for 1979 and 1997 clusters

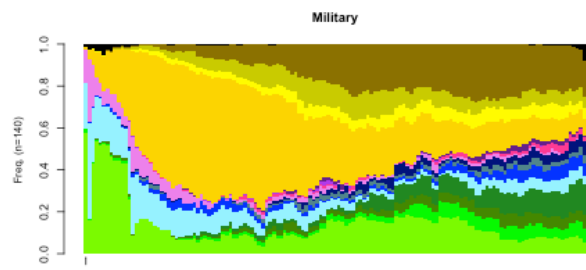
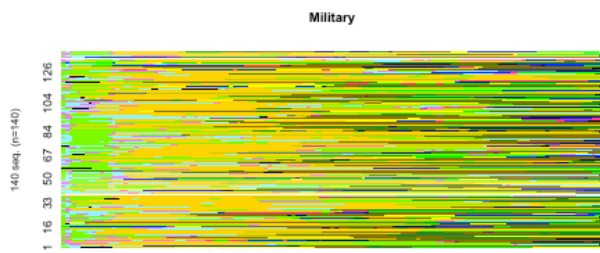
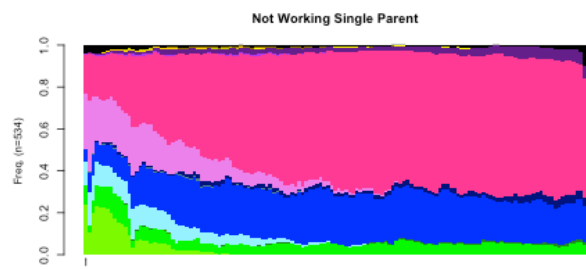
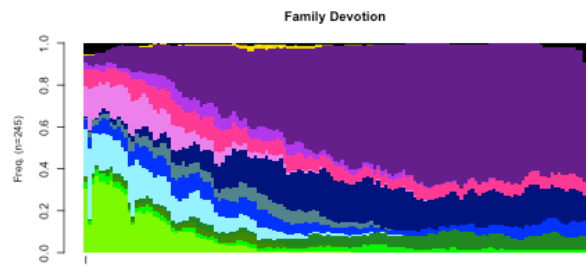
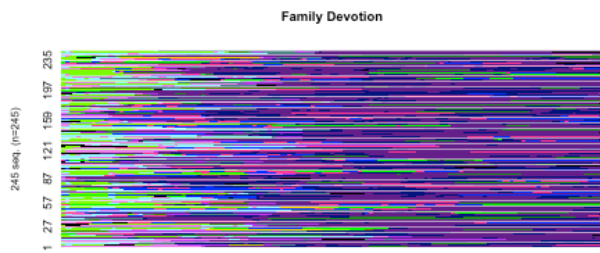
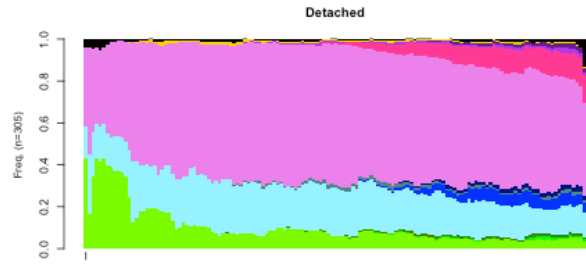
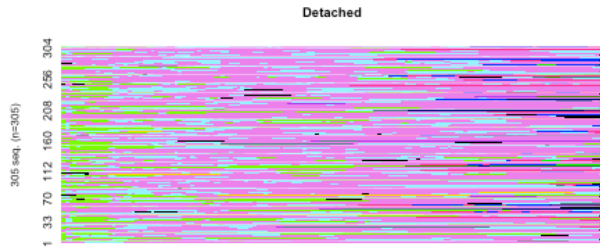
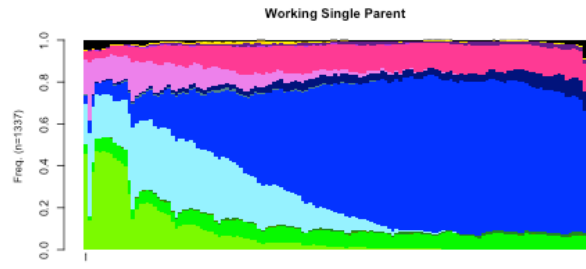
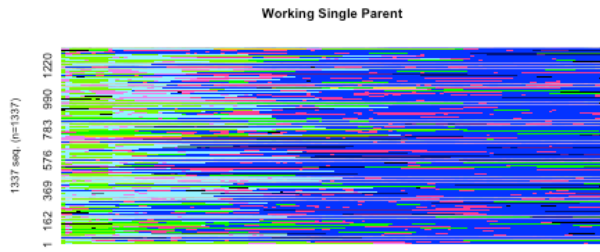
3.6A: 1979 cohort



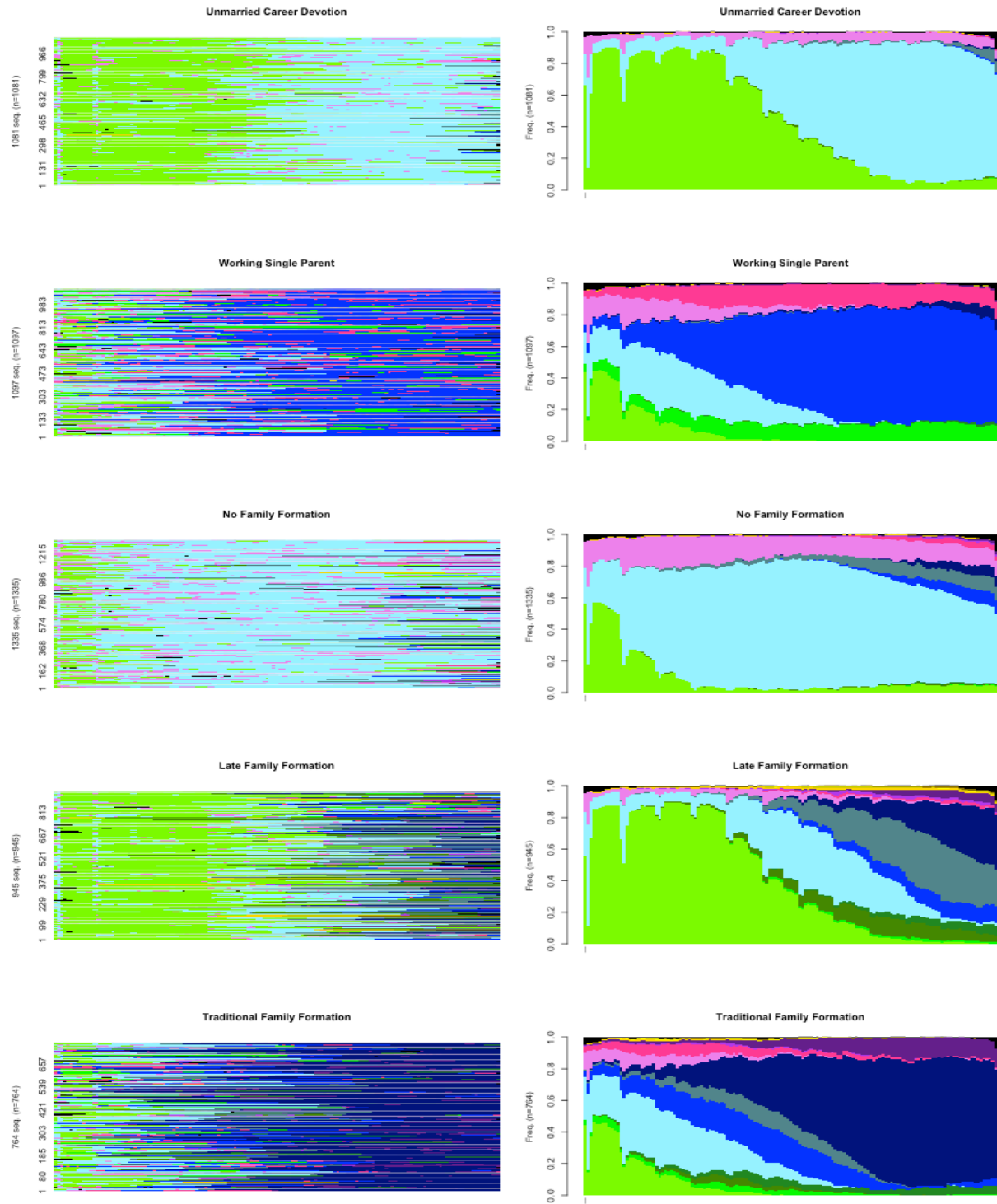


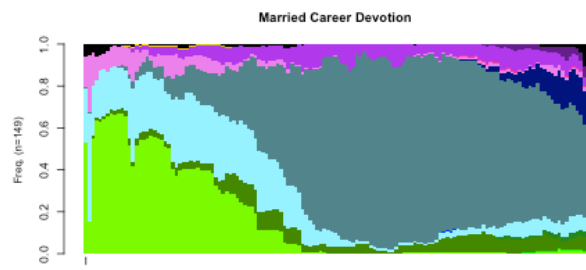
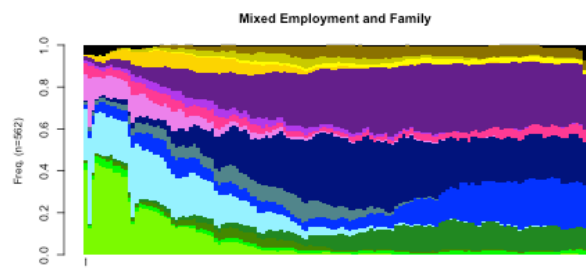
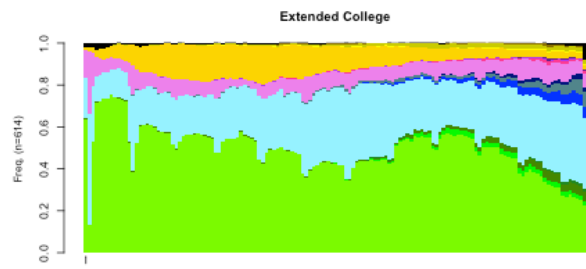
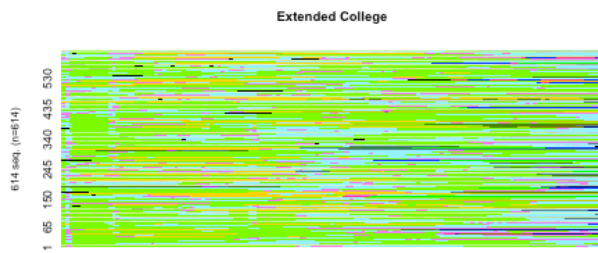
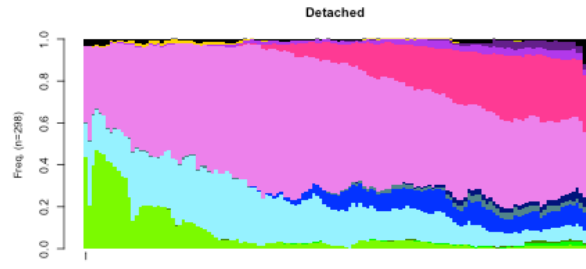
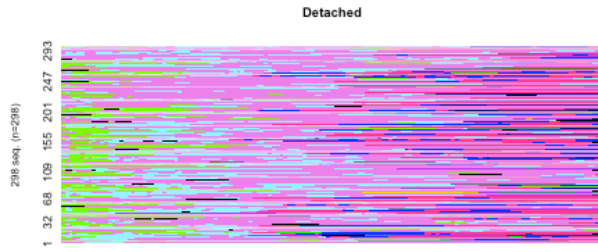
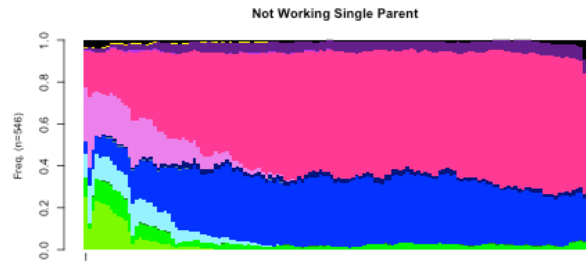
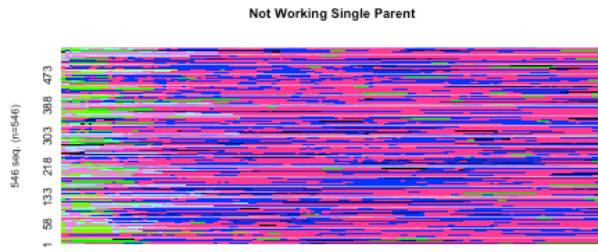
3.6B: 1997 Cohort





Appendix 3.7 Index and Distribution Plots for 10 Cluster Solution for Supplemental 1997 analysis





Appendix 3.8 Demographic Composition of Trajectories, by Cohort

1979						
	Black Women	Hispanic Women	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Women	Black Men	Hispanic Men	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Men
1: Traditional Family	0.120	0.087	0.248	0.100	0.148	0.298
2: Late Family Formation	0.115	0.090	0.303	0.129	0.094	0.270
3: Working Marriage	0.077	0.085	0.369	0.065	0.077	0.327
4: No Family Formation	0.077	0.085	0.369	0.065	0.077	0.327
5: Career Devotion	0.129	0.069	0.250	0.127	0.079	0.345
6: Working Single Parent	0.062	0.062	0.199	0.182	0.099	0.395
7: Detached	0.196	0.098	0.080	0.344	0.135	0.147
8: Family Devotion	0.129	0.069	0.250	0.127	0.079	0.345
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.432	0.158	0.169	0.173	0.034	0.034
10: Military	0.233	0.106	0.121	0.305	0.116	0.119
1997						
	Black Women	Hispanic Women	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Women	Black Men	Hispanic Men	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Men
1: Traditional Family	0.071	0.062	0.176	0.146	0.249	0.297
2: Late Family Formation	0.103	0.079	0.115	0.089	0.353	0.262
3: Working Marriage	0.037	0.064	0.109	0.109	0.296	0.386
4: No Family Formation	0.037	0.064	0.109	0.109	0.296	0.386
5: Career Devotion	0.102	0.084	0.082	0.084	0.318	0.330
6: Working Single Parent	0.088	0.143	0.062	0.154	0.166	0.387
7: Detached	0.112	0.379	0.083	0.108	0.116	0.202
8: Family Devotion	0.102	0.084	0.082	0.084	0.318	0.330
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.317	0.250	0.128	0.068	0.172	0.066
10: Military	0.259	0.187	0.120	0.125	0.171	0.137

Appendix 3.9 Prevalence of Trajectories by Gender and Race

1979						
	Women			Men		
	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic
1: Traditional Family	0.124	0.128	0.149	0.100	0.233	0.171
2: Late Family Formation	0.141	0.157	0.217	0.152	0.176	0.183
3: Working Marriage	0.046	0.072	0.129	0.038	0.070	0.108
4: No Family Formation	0.061	0.087	0.114	0.172	0.148	0.214
5: Career Devotion	0.136	0.104	0.153	0.129	0.127	0.201
6: Working Single Parent	0.153	0.099	0.046	0.193	0.117	0.043
7: Detached	0.055	0.039	0.013	0.092	0.057	0.023
8: Family Devotion	0.083	0.212	0.134	0.011	0.021	0.014
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.196	0.101	0.045	0.075	0.023	0.008
10: Military	0.003	0.002	0.001	0.039	0.028	0.035
Total	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

1997						
	Women			Men		
	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic	Black	Hispanic	Non-Black/Non-Hispanic
1: Traditional Family	0.039	0.124	0.075	0.036	0.103	0.086
2: Late Family Formation	0.108	0.154	0.201	0.087	0.120	0.144
3: Working Marriage	0.010	0.036	0.042	0.018	0.037	0.053
4: No Family Formation	0.094	0.084	0.095	0.160	0.209	0.214
5: Career Devotion	0.198	0.203	0.335	0.173	0.209	0.335
6: Working Single Parent	0.338	0.199	0.120	0.258	0.209	0.093
7: Detached	0.031	0.029	0.017	0.109	0.038	0.029
8: Family Devotion	0.019	0.083	0.064	0.004	0.004	0.004
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.156	0.080	0.046	0.130	0.043	0.017
10: Military	0.008	0.006	0.004	0.025	0.029	0.025
Total	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Appendix 3.10 Sequence Characteristics by Trajectory, Gender, Race and Cohort

1979 Black Women							
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States		
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
1: Traditional Family	0.200	(0.06)	12.8	(5.2)	6.1	(1.6)	
2: Late Family Formation	0.252	(0.06)	16.0	(5.3)	6.8	(1.5)	
3: Working Marriage	0.188	(0.06)	11.5	(5.5)	5.1	(1.1)	
4: No Family Formation	0.143	(0.05)	10.7	(4.2)	3.5	(1.1)	
5: Career Devotion	0.199	(0.05)	15.2	(5.5)	4.0	(1.2)	
6: Working Single Parent	0.204	(0.07)	14.2	(6.2)	5.1	(1.8)	
7: Detached	0.145	(0.06)	11.4	(5.8)	3.1	(0.9)	
8: Family Devotion	0.194	(0.08)	12.9	(6.8)	5.5	(1.7)	
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.138	(0.07)	9.7	(5.9)	3.9	(1.5)	
10: Military	0.261	(0.02)	19.5	(4.9)	5.5	(0.7)	

1979 Hispanic Women							
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States		
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
1: Traditional Family	0.176	(0.06)	11.4	(5.2)	5.7	(1.7)	
2: Late Family Formation	0.242	(0.07)	15.9	(6.7)	6.5	(1.4)	
3: Working Marriage	0.190	(0.06)	11.9	(5.7)	4.9	(1.0)	
4: No Family Formation	0.150	(0.07)	12.2	(6.2)	3.7	(1.5)	
5: Career Devotion	0.208	(0.05)	17.1	(6.2)	4.0	(1.1)	
6: Working Single Parent	0.188	(0.07)	12.5	(6.4)	5.1	(1.8)	
7: Detached	0.157	(0.10)	11.8	(9.8)	3.8	(1.2)	
8: Family Devotion	0.178	(0.07)	12.1	(5.8)	5.3	(1.7)	
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.149	(0.08)	9.9	(6.0)	4.7	(1.8)	
10: Military	0.306	NA	19.0	NA	9.0	NA	

1979 Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Women							
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States		
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
1: Traditional Family	0.206	(0.06)	13.3	(5.3)	6.2	(1.6)	
2: Late Family Formation	0.236	(0.06)	15.4	(5.5)	6.2	(1.4)	
3: Working Marriage	0.182	(0.07)	11.7	(6.1)	5.1	(1.3)	
4: No Family Formation	0.139	(0.07)	10.6	(6.4)	3.8	(1.3)	
5: Career Devotion	0.206	(0.05)	16.7	(5.7)	4.1	(1.3)	
6: Working Single Parent	0.216	(0.06)	14.0	(5.3)	5.9	(1.6)	
7: Detached	0.180	(0.09)	14.1	(8.8)	4.0	(2.0)	
8: Family Devotion	0.188	(0.07)	12.3	(6.0)	5.5	(1.8)	
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.155	(0.08)	10.7	(7.3)	4.2	(1.9)	
10: Military	0.196	NA	10.0	NA	8.0	NA	

1979 Black Men						
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d.
1: Traditional Family	0.190	(0.06)	11.6	(5.1)	6.0	(1.3)
2: Late Family Formation	0.234	(0.06)	14.8	(5.3)	6.5	(1.6)
3: Working Marriage	0.162	(0.06)	9.7	(5.4)	4.7	(1.4)
4: No Family Formation	0.148	(0.05)	11.3	(5.5)	3.4	(1.1)
5: Career Devotion	0.198	(0.04)	14.9	(5.2)	3.8	(1.0)
6: Working Single Parent	0.197	(0.06)	13.4	(5.9)	5.1	(1.2)
7: Detached	0.157	(0.06)	11.9	(5.9)	3.5	(1.0)
8: Family Devotion	0.257	(0.07)	18.4	(6.7)	6.1	(1.6)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.187	(0.07)	13.9	(6.7)	4.5	(1.5)
10: Military	0.189	(0.07)	11.4	(5.6)	6.6	(2.0)
1979 Hispanic Men						
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d.
1: Traditional Family	0.191	(0.07)	13.1	(7.2)	5.9	(1.6)
2: Late Family Formation	0.244	(0.06)	16.1	(6.8)	6.3	(1.4)
3: Working Marriage	0.186	(0.06)	12.4	(6.3)	5.0	(1.2)
4: No Family Formation	0.157	(0.06)	12.8	(6.1)	3.7	(1.3)
5: Career Devotion	0.201	(0.05)	17.0	(5.5)	3.7	(1.1)
6: Working Single Parent	0.187	(0.06)	12.4	(5.1)	4.6	(1.3)
7: Detached	0.159	(0.08)	12.7	(8.0)	3.5	(1.3)
8: Family Devotion	0.211	(0.06)	14.8	(5.4)	5.5	(2.4)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.195	(0.08)	13.2	(6.6)	5.2	(1.4)
10: Military	0.145	(0.07)	8.0	(5.4)	5.3	(1.9)
1979 Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Men						
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d.
1: Traditional Family	0.192	(0.07)	12.4	(6.1)	6.1	(1.5)
2: Late Family Formation	0.224	(0.06)	14.5	(6.0)	6.0	(1.5)
3: Working Marriage	0.185	(0.06)	11.9	(5.9)	4.7	(1.3)
4: No Family Formation	0.142	(0.07)	12.1	(7.0)	3.5	(1.2)
5: Career Devotion	0.198	(0.04)	15.9	(5.0)	3.7	(1.0)
6: Working Single Parent	0.231	(0.06)	15.8	(5.6)	6.3	(1.9)
7: Detached	0.172	(0.07)	13.5	(6.7)	3.8	(1.3)
8: Family Devotion	0.231	(0.06)	15.7	(7.0)	6.5	(1.2)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.215	(0.07)	15.0	(5.9)	5.8	(1.3)
10: Military	0.191	(0.07)	11.6	(5.4)	6.5	(2.0)

1997 Black Women							
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States		
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
1: Traditional Family	0.217	(0.06)	13.4	(5.2)	6.6	(1.6)	
2: Late Family Formation	0.199	(0.05)	11.5	(3.8)	6.2	(1.6)	
3: Working Marriage	0.192	(0.04)	11.9	(4.5)	4.9	(1.0)	
4: No Family Formation	0.156	(0.06)	11.7	(5.3)	3.7	(1.0)	
5: Career Devotion	0.140	(0.05)	8.7	(4.2)	3.7	(1.2)	
6: Working Single Parent	0.196	(0.06)	12.9	(5.1)	5.3	(1.5)	
7: Detached	0.123	(0.05)	8.5	(4.9)	3.1	(0.8)	
8: Family Devotion	0.214	(0.06)	13.2	(5.6)	6.7	(1.7)	
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.170	(0.06)	12.3	(6.0)	4.2	(1.4)	
10: Military	0.177	(0.06)	9.8	(3.8)	6.0	(2.4)	
1997 Hispanic Women							
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States		
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
1: Traditional Family	0.185	(0.06)	11.4	(4.9)	6.0	(1.6)	
2: Late Family Formation	0.206	(0.06)	11.7	(4.6)	6.4	(1.7)	
3: Working Marriage	0.166	(0.06)	10.5	(5.4)	4.8	(1.3)	
4: No Family Formation	0.142	(0.05)	10.1	(4.2)	3.8	(1.2)	
5: Career Devotion	0.146	(0.05)	9.1	(4.0)	3.8	(1.4)	
6: Working Single Parent	0.185	(0.05)	11.8	(4.5)	5.2	(1.4)	
7: Detached	0.164	(0.05)	11.0	(5.3)	3.7	(1.0)	
8: Family Devotion	0.182	(0.06)	11.0	(5.2)	5.5	(1.8)	
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.161	(0.06)	11.3	(5.8)	4.1	(1.3)	
10: Military	0.237	(0.06)	14.2	(6.1)	7.4	(2.3)	
1997 Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Women							
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States		
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
1: Traditional Family	0.196	(0.06)	11.8	(5.2)	6.4	(1.6)	
2: Late Family Formation	0.198	(0.05)	11.1	(4.2)	6.2	(1.4)	
3: Working Marriage	0.179	(0.06)	10.8	(5.5)	5.2	(1.5)	
4: No Family Formation	0.136	(0.06)	10.0	(5.4)	3.8	(1.3)	
5: Career Devotion	0.146	(0.04)	9.0	(3.8)	3.9	(1.2)	
6: Working Single Parent	0.188	(0.07)	12.1	(5.5)	5.4	(1.7)	
7: Detached	0.135	(0.07)	9.1	(6.3)	3.4	(1.3)	
8: Family Devotion	0.196	(0.06)	11.9	(5.4)	6.0	(1.8)	
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.192	(0.06)	13.3	(5.2)	5.0	(1.6)	
10: Military	0.190	(0.05)	10.4	(3.6)	6.6	(1.1)	

1997 Black Men						
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d.
1: Traditional Family	0.214	(0.06)	12.9	(5.7)	6.5	(1.8)
2: Late Family Formation	0.203	(0.05)	11.7	(4.9)	6.0	(1.5)
3: Working Marriage	0.163	(0.06)	9.7	(6.0)	4.5	(0.9)
4: No Family Formation	0.143	(0.06)	10.5	(5.4)	3.5	(1.0)
5: Career Devotion	0.146	(0.05)	9.0	(4.4)	3.6	(1.0)
6: Working Single Parent	0.188	(0.06)	12.0	(5.2)	5.1	(1.4)
7: Detached	0.137	(0.06)	9.4	(5.8)	3.5	(1.2)
8: Family Devotion	0.193	(0.08)	10.5	(5.9)	6.3	(2.2)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.152	(0.06)	10.0	(5.6)	4.3	(1.4)
10: Military	0.171	(0.06)	9.0	(3.7)	6.6	(1.9)
1997 Hispanic Men						
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d.
1: Traditional Family	0.170	(0.05)	9.7	(4.2)	5.7	(1.2)
2: Late Family Formation	0.205	(0.05)	11.7	(4.5)	6.4	(1.4)
3: Working Marriage	0.169	(0.06)	9.7	(5.1)	5.1	(1.4)
4: No Family Formation	0.128	(0.05)	9.3	(5.3)	3.4	(1.0)
5: Career Devotion	0.137	(0.04)	8.4	(3.9)	3.4	(1.0)
6: Working Single Parent	0.175	(0.06)	11.3	(5.1)	5.0	(1.5)
7: Detached	0.153	(0.06)	10.8	(5.2)	3.9	(1.9)
8: Family Devotion	0.249	(0.06)	17.3	(8.0)	6.3	(1.5)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.169	(0.05)	11.5	(5.3)	4.4	(1.3)
10: Military	0.194	(0.04)	10.6	(3.1)	6.7	(1.6)
1997 Non-Black/Non-Hispanic Men						
	Complexity		Number of Transitions		Number of States	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d.
1: Traditional Family	0.169	(0.06)	9.8	(5.0)	5.8	(1.5)
2: Late Family Formation	0.187	(0.06)	10.3	(4.8)	6.0	(1.6)
3: Working Marriage	0.169	(0.06)	10.0	(5.1)	5.0	(1.2)
4: No Family Formation	0.133	(0.06)	10.2	(5.8)	3.5	(1.0)
5: Career Devotion	0.142	(0.04)	8.8	(4.1)	3.6	(1.1)
6: Working Single Parent	0.182	(0.07)	11.9	(6.1)	5.2	(1.5)
7: Detached	0.160	(0.06)	11.4	(5.2)	3.7	(1.3)
8: Family Devotion	0.250	(0.06)	16.3	(6.2)	6.9	(1.7)
9: Not Working S. Parent	0.214	(0.06)	15.5	(6.6)	5.1	(1.6)
10: Military	0.173	(0.06)	9.0	(3.9)	6.1	(2.1)

Chapter 4:

Meanings of Adulthood Among Professional Millennials

“For me an adult means, it has more to do with responsibilities. Both to others and to myself.” –
Kara, 33

Abstract

How do young professionals coming of age in the 21st century define adulthood? Life-course research predominately relies on five traditional markers to define the transition from adolescence to adulthood—finishing education, beginning employment, living independently from parents, getting married, and becoming a parent—that originated from the post-war economic boom. However, today’s economic context and cultural norms complicate this model, as meeting these milestones may be more difficult, and localized social and economic climates facilitate different patterns of adulthood. Moreover, some contemporary young adults may be redefining adulthood and detaching their feelings of adulthood from traditional milestones. In this chapter, I examine what adulthood means to young professionals living and working in a fast-growing U.S. city distinguished by a highly-educated labor force and a high cost of living. Drawing from nineteen semi-structured interviews with individuals between the ages of 25 and 36, I find that adulthood in this context is not defined by achieving a set of prescribed milestones, but rather adulthood is demonstrated by individual responsibility, financial independence, and decision making. The ability to make choices—as well as to define adulthood by decision making—is enabled by this group’s education level and in-demand skills. This paper contributes to both our understanding of contemporary adulthood and the reproduction of class by discussing how narratives of choice define adulthood in a way that justifies inequality and privilege.

Introduction

Over the last decade or so, both popular media and social scientists have questioned if the process of becoming an adult has changed and if adulthood for millennials, the generation born between the early 1980's and late 1990's, is still marked by traditional symbols of adulthood like marriage and homeownership. News articles and commentary discuss how millennials are “shunning marriage and children in favour of education and a career” (Blair, 2017) while others go further using flashy headlines like “Young Americans Are Killing Marriage” (Steverman 2017). A Wall Street Journal article titled “New Ways to Gauge What Grown-Up Means” states that millennials “are less likely than ever to follow past generations' stair-step path to marriage, a house and kids” and instead are focusing on “amorphous goals” and “identity building” (Shellenbarger 2013). However, even among academic research, discussions of changing meanings of adulthood often gloss over how class and geographic location shape pathways to adulthood. What it means to be an adult and the ability to achieve traditional markers is stratified by class, gender, and race, as well as geographical location. The particular social and economic contexts in which young adults are embedded shape their transitions from adolescence to adulthood as well as how they understand adulthood.

In this paper, I examine how class and geographic location affect how a set of highly-educated millennials experience and define adulthood. The skills and credentials the young professionals in this study possess put them in an elite class of workers and how they define adulthood is based on their experiences as workers in prestigious fields. This group of young adults understands adulthood primarily as making choices and being personally and financially responsible, a definition that ultimately reproduces class distinctions by reinforcing narratives of meritocracy, choice, hard work, and personal responsibility.

Background

Changing Models of Adulthood

The modern American model of the transition from teenager to adult, born in the 1950's post-war economic boom, is "envisioned as remarkably uniform, swift, and unproblematic" (Waters et al, 2011). During the 1950's, young adults married, bought homes, and started families in their 20s, and families were structured around a male breadwinner and a mother with a home-centered role. Post-war expansion made this view of adulthood relatively attainable, at least for white young adults, fueling the growth of the middle-class and suburbs (Waters et al, 2011). While this version of adulthood was certainly not accessible to everyone, and in fact programs like the G.I. Bill purposefully excluded African American veterans from education and housing benefits, it still became a normative model of what middle-class American adulthood should look like.

As the post-war economic boom faded and social and gender norms started to shift, this normative pathway to adulthood became more complicated, difficult to achieve, and to some extent, less desirable even among middle-class young adults. Women's sustained participation in the labor force, increased access to birth control, relaxed norms around marriage and sex, increased participation in higher education, and rising house and education costs have all contributed to changes in the transition to adulthood (Waters, 2011). Despite these cultural and economic shifts, the linear model of adulthood retains a normative stronghold on the American. While many young adults recognize that their lives will not follow this orderly progression, they continue to believe in the normative, idealized pathway to adulthood (Settersen, 2011).

While young adult still draw from these traditional narratives, current research finds that contemporary young adults rely on personal narratives to define their sense of adulthood in the

absence of fulfilling traditional markers. For example, Jeffrey Arnett (2004) hypothesizes that delays in marriage and prolonged education have resulted in a distinct new phase of life called “emerging adulthood” that occurs between adolescence and “full” adulthood. Arnett describes emerging adulthood as a time when young adults see their lives as full of possibility and undergo explorations to pinpoint their identity. This period of exploration is also a period of instability with young adults moving between jobs, romantic partners, and living situations in search of the right fit. Emerging adulthood focuses on narratives of self-discovery and identity. While informative, Arnett’s work assumes that most young adults will move through emerging adulthood on their way to full adulthood, and he does not fully explore the possibility that full adulthood itself may be changing. And while he suggests that the meaning of traditional markers like marriage may have evolved, he also maintains that they remain clear signals of full-adulthood (Arnett, 2004).

Arnett’s work has been criticized as not fully acknowledging the role that class plays in the ability to partake in emerging adulthood (Silva, 2012). Jennifer Silva (2012) specifically focuses on the narrative stories that working-class young adults use to frame their transition to adulthood. The participants in her study come from modest backgrounds and primarily work in service sector jobs like bars, casual restaurants, and firefighting. Only a quarter of the participants in Silva’s study follow a traditional trajectory, and most are only tenuously attached to employment and romantic relationships. To substitute for their inability to meet traditional adult milestones, the majority of her working-class participants use therapeutic narratives of overcoming obstacles and bad family situations to define their adulthood. These coming of age stories define adulthood not by marriage and parenthood, but rather by “self-realization gleaned from denouncing a painful past and reconstructing an independent, complete self” (Silva 2012).

While therapeutic narratives and merging adulthood narratives differ to some extent, both focus on individual stories of personal development and growth rather than achieving specific markers.

Economic Contexts and the New Labor Market

Economic contexts—including job opportunities, home prices, and education costs—affect the ability to achieve traditional adult markers. How young adults interpret of the economy and labor market are informed by past personal experiences, prior generations, interactions and observations of peers, and the media (Newman 1999, Willis 1977, MacLeod 2009). In a summarizing how prospective mothers weigh their options, Shanahan (2000) writes, “...[prospective mothers] tended to evaluate their life chances and formulate plans according to their past experiences and to their projections of opportunity in the future. This intuitively appealing position suggests the importance of young adults' interpretations of their economic circumstances, past, present, and future” (Shanahan 2000, p.673).

A shifting economy, technological advancements and the restructuring of the labor market provide alternative opportunities, disrupt prior expectations, and render existing models outdated. The Great Recession transformed the short and long-term economic prospects for young adults coming of age in the mid-2000s, and catalyzed lasting changes in the structure of the labor market. During the Great Recession unemployment rates hit the highest levels seen in the United States since the Great Depression (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). While all workers felt the crunch of the slack labor market, young adults were hit especially hard (Current Population Survey), and many workers took jobs below their skill and education level affecting their ability to achieve financial independence and security. During this time, many young adults followed alternative pathways to adulthood than the ones defined by prior generations, including

moving in with parents, returning to or staying in higher education, and delaying marriage and parenthood. For instance, 36% of millennials (ages 18-31) lived in their parents' home in 2012—up from 32% in 2007 and 34% in 2009 (Fry 2013). Marriage rates among young adults also declined during the Great Recession—in 2012, 25% of 18-31 year olds were married, while in 2007, this rate was 30% (Fry 2013).

While data certainly show that the Great Recession affected the transition adulthood in the short-term, it is unclear whether these short-term fluctuations are indicative of a fundamental shift in narratives of adulthood. However, we do know that the Great Recession exacerbated trends in employment relationships. Since the 1970s, there has been a decline in long-term employment relationships and an increase in non-standard forms of employment, and building careers across multiple organizational boundaries is increasingly common, especially in innovative industries like tech. Today's young professionals are far less likely than their parents to stay with the employer for the majority of their work-lives.

Local Contexts

Work by Waters, Carr, Kefalas and Holdaway (2011) point to the importance of local context in discussing the transition to adulthood. Local social and economic factors—especially job and housing markets—constrain young adults' ability to fulfill traditional adulthood markers, as well as change the normative emphasis of these markers. In a study comparing young adults living in Iowa, Minneapolis, New York, and San Diego in the early 2000s, Waters and colleagues find dramatic differences in the timing and fulfillment of traditional milestones. The Iowan town they studied had few job opportunities, especially for white-collar workers, but land and living was cheap, supporting a more traditional transition to adulthood in which young adults

married, bought houses, and had children in their early 20's. On the flip side, the high cost of living and polarized service sector in New York City limited young adults' opportunity to establish independent households and many young adults continued living with their parents late into their 20s. New York and Iowa's distinct set of economic factors facilitate markedly different looking adulthood experiences for young adults.

Social and cultural norms vary by geographic location. For instance, Waters et al. find that education is considered crucial for achieving success among first generation young adults living in San Diego. The social pressure placed on young adults to attend and graduate college delay other parts of adulthood, like marriage and parenthood, for young adults as they work tirelessly to realize the dreams of their parents (Borgen and Rumbaut, 2011). In contrast, in the close-knit communities of Minneapolis attachment to traditional patterns of family formation continue to persist, and many young mothers with high-earning husbands choose to opt out of the labor market to enact their ideals of motherhood. Swartz, Harmann, and Moritmer find that while Minnesotans are accepting of fluidity in their work lives, they hold strong to traditional norms of family formation and parenthood (Swartz, Harmann, Mortimer, 2011).

Inequality and Class Reproduction

The transition to adulthood is not only an important time for launching an individual's life path, it is also a moment of class reproduction. Young adults draw on their economic, human, social, and cultural capitals to establish their independent adult lives (Waters, Carr, Kefalas and Holdaway, 2011). While some young adults have resources that allow for a relatively smooth, linear path from adolescence to adulthood, others face the treacherous waters of adulthood with fewer resources. Scaffolding from parents can help young adults launch their

adult lives. Parental support may come in the form of paying college tuition, down payments on homes, and other financial support, as well as help in navigating higher-education bureaucracy, and job-finding assistance. Middle-and-upper class children also draw on familial support to “smooth-out” tough situations like unemployment, divorce, or unplanned pregnancies. Unsurprisingly, young adults from middle-and-upper class families receive more financial support from their families than children from lower-income backgrounds.

Lack of familial financial support can be especially detrimental for attaining college degrees as young adults from lower-class backgrounds may take fewer credits or take intermittent time off school to work to support themselves and their families. Because students from lower-class backgrounds can’t fall back on their parents for financial help to the same extent as their middle-class peers, they are at higher risk of not completing their degrees, preventing them from obtaining higher-paying jobs in the future. As Swartz, Harmann and Mortimer write, “already disadvantaged young adults [are] further disadvantaged as they [are] unable to rely on a major source of support that was available to bolster their peers through crisis or toward greater attainment” (Swartz, Harmann, Mortimer, 2011).

Class distinctions are also reproduced by the frames adults use to understand their place in the world. In an ethnography of an elite East Coast boarding school, Shamus Khan (2011) outlines how elite high schoolers use narratives of hard-work and meritocracy to assert their elite positions. These young men and women do not justify their place in their place in the world through frames of inheritance and heritage, but rather through frames of hard work and achievement. In short, they believe that they are deserving of their elite status because of what they do, not who they are. This frame of achievement allows them to enjoy the privileges of their

positions without compromising their attachment to the American ideology of perseverance, individuality, and personal responsibility (Khan 2011).

Research Goals and Setting

Current research suggests that the economic and social changes of the last 50 years may be transforming pathways to adulthood as well as what it means to be an adult in the new economy. While models of adulthood incorporate class and geographic variation, there are no detailed studies looking directly at adulthood among millennial elite in the context of a rapidly growing city centered around the tech industry. The goal of this paper is to examine how highly-educated, professional millennials living in Seattle define and experience adulthood.

In many ways, Seattle is a context in which national employment, education, and income trends are exacerbated. From July 2015 to July 2016, Seattle was the fastest growing city in the United States, growing by 3.1% in a year (Balk, 2017). While Seattle's population, around 700,000, is still much smaller than major cities like New York or Los Angeles, the in-flux of highly-educated tech workers make Seattle a quickly changing, dynamic context. Seattleites are more educated and make more money than their peers nationwide. Fifty-nine percent of persons over the age of 25 living in Seattle hold a bachelor's degree—double the national rate—and the labor force participation rate is 72.3% in Seattle, compared to 63.3% nationally. According to census data the median household annual income in Seattle is over \$16,000 higher than the national average, and home prices are two-and-half times higher than the national average.⁶ In March 2017, the median price for a single-family house in Seattle rose to \$700,000 for the first

⁶ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/5363000,00>

time—more than doubling over five years. The cost of renting has also increased, climbing 57% over the past six years with the average renter paying just over \$1,700 a month.⁷

The tech-industry is a driving force behind Seattle's population and income growth. The Seattle area is home to ten Fortune 500 companies including tech-giants Amazon.com, Microsoft, and Expedia. Additionally, the area also houses two Google offices (one in Seattle proper and one on the East Side), multiple biotech firms and medical research centers, and dozens of tech startups. Because Seattle is home to industries that are at the forefront of changing how we think about employment and work, in many ways it provides an extreme case study of what it means to be an adult in the new economy.

Methods

Interviews

To find out exactly what adulthood means to professional millennials in the context of Seattle, I conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with individuals between the ages of 25 and 36 living in the area. Participants were recruited through a variety of channels including internal employee chat channels at Google and the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, the Families of Color of Seattle and Green Lake Moms email groups, and referrals from friends, acquaintances, and colleagues.

Interviews were conducted from April-July 2017. Interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and were conducted in coffee shops, breweries, cafes, places of work, and homes. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Interviews followed a semi-

⁷ <http://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/after-brief-slowdown-seattle-area-rents-surge-back-up-again-when-will-it-end/>

structured format starting with background information on the participants' education, employment and family experiences, and then moving to general thoughts about adulthood and life in Seattle. During the second portion of the interview, participants were asked to evaluate how important eight items are for adulthood including: (1) being financially independent, (2) no longer living in parents' household, (3) completing formal schooling, (4) being employed full-time, (5) having a child, (6) getting married, (7) being capable of supporting family financially, and (8) owning a home. Participants were given cards with these markers printed on them and were asked to discuss the extent to which each item is important for adulthood. Respondents were then prompted to discuss what they would "put on a blank set of cards" about adulthood. This method allowed respondents to discuss traditional metrics as well encouraged them to think about what they deem important.

Establishing trust and rapport with participants was relatively easy as my age, race, and conversation style closely matched participants. Participants were offered no incentives in return for their participation, and the vast majority refused my offer to treat them to coffee and snacks—more than one even offered to treat me. In contrast to Silva's (2012) participants who joked that their interviews were like "free therapy," my respondents called the interviews fun, and many told me they enjoyed thinking about these topics and planned to discuss them with their partners and friends. One participant even emailed me the day after her interview to ask if I could send her the audio-recording of her interview so she could keep it to share with her future children. Many interviews ended with the participants asking for my views on adulthood and asking what I've learned from other participants, offering book and movie recommendations, and offering to set me up with other potential participants. Overall, participants were engaged, happy to share their stories, and more than willing to freely share their thoughts and opinions.

All interviews were transcribed by me using InqScribe. During the transcription process, I kept an ongoing list of themes that emerged while listening to the interviews. Using this initial list of themes, I coded interviews in Atlas.ti adding more codes as appropriate. Responses to the card activity were coded an additional time by topic, rather than individual. I compiled the responses to each milestone in a separate document from the transcripts for coding. Appendix B provides a summary of the responses to the traditional milestones.

Sample

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the nineteen participants. Participants ranged between 25-36 years old, and the median age was 29. Twelve participants identify as female and seven as male. Sixteen participants identify as white and three as Asian. All participants have at least a bachelor's degree, and many hold a graduate or professional degree. All but one participant is employed fulltime in a professional job including software development, project management, litigation, and medicine. The one participant not employed is the primary caregiver of his four-month old son. Of the nineteen participants, three were born and raised in Seattle, but all lived out of state in their early adulthood before returning to Seattle. The remaining participants moved to Seattle after completing their college degrees primarily to take a job or for their partner's job. Those who moved to the area have lived in Seattle for between nine months and twelve years. Four participants were born outside of the United States; one immigrated as a child and three immigrated for a job or school. Ten of the twelve female participants are married or in long-term romantic relationships, one is separated from her husband, and one is single. One of the female participants is in a same-sex relationship. Three male participants are single, two are in long-term romantic relationships, and two are married.

Six of the female participants and one of the male participants are parents to children ranging in age from six weeks to three years. Appendix A provides details on each of the respondents.

Table 4.1: Participant Characteristics (n=19)

	n	%
Gender		
Women	12	63.2%
Men	7	36.8%
Race		
Asian	3	15.8%
White	16	84.2%
Education Level		
BA	11	57.9%
MA	4	21.1%
Professional Degree/Ph.D.	4	21.1%
Family Status		
Single	4	21.1%
Cohabiting/Long-Term Partner	4	21.1%
Married	10	52.6%
Separated	1	5.3%
Parent	7	36.8%
Homeowner	8	42.1%
Mean age	30	
Median age	29	

Findings

In many ways, the life trajectories of the nineteen participants are fairly similar. All graduated from a four-year university immediately after high school. After completing their undergraduate degrees, almost half went on to earn a graduate or professional degree and the others found full-time employment. The majority moved to Seattle almost immediately after finishing college either for their own or their partner's job. Since finishing college, eleven participants got married, seven became parents, and eight bought homes. While some

respondents worry about money, especially when it comes to paying for childcare and buying homes, all participants are stably employed and fairly financially secure. Most, especially those who do not have children, have ample disposable income and leisure time to pursue activities that contribute to their sense of self like organized sports leagues and dance lessons.

Overwhelmingly, the young adults in this study define adulthood not by the achievement of milestones, but rather by the ability to make decisions and take responsibility for themselves and others. While many want to get married, have children, and own a home, they do not consider these markers essential for adulthood. Rather, they emphasize financial independence, decision making, and responsibility to their families and communities as factors that distinguish adulthood from adolescence.

Personal Responsibility and Intentionality

For this group of young professionals, adulthood is a mindset that involves being responsible for oneself, family members, and communities. In this way, adulthood is defined not by meeting socially prescribed markers, but instead by the act of deciding and taking responsibility for choices and actions. That is, it is not being married or owning a house that makes one an adult, but rather deciding to marry or remain unmarried, or deciding to buy or rent.

Take this example from Todd, a 33-year-old software developer working for a large tech company. After starting his first job out of college, Todd purchased a house in a suburb of Seattle. However, purchasing his house did *not* make Todd feel like an adult. Instead, it had the opposite effect:

(Laughs) No. That felt...I have rarely felt as imposterish as I did as when I bought that house. And the reason was because I didn't buy the house because I particularly wanted the house or because I fell in love with the house or because I had grand plans or because it was part of my financial stability and all that. I bought the house because I thought that's

what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to graduate from college, and then you're supposed to get a job, and then you're supposed to buy a house. So I bought a house because you're supposed to buy a house. A terrible fucking mistake....so the reason it didn't feel like an adult decision was because it felt like it was imposed upon me. It didn't feel like something I created, that I decided. And again I associate adulthood with not imposing your will, that's too violent, but, doing things intentionally because you want to do them, because you have a plan, rather than you know because markers dictate what you really want and you just say "oh yeah okay" that doesn't feel...it's uh...it's an intentionality of thought. [Todd, 33, male]

Todd purchased his home because he felt like he was supposed to. In doing so, he followed a linear, middle-class model of adulthood—college, job, house—but it did not make him happy or make him feel like an adult. In fact, doing something that he hadn't decided for himself made him feel more like a child than an adult. In contrast, Todd felt most in control of his life when he took seven months off from work before starting his current position. While his parents saw his decision as “juvenile” and “impulsive,” Todd thought the decision to take a break from work was very adult: he weighed the consequences, was able to financially support himself during his time-off, and took responsibility for his actions. As he said, “I'm going to consciously choose take this time off [and] consciously choose to go spend the summer with my dog in the mountains.” In using a rhetoric of choice, intentionality, and responsibility to explain his decisions, Todd defines adulthood as a set of decision points with no right or wrong answer as long as one is acting responsibly and within their means. Since starting a new job, Todd has moved back within the city limits, rents a one-bedroom apartment he shares with his dog, and rents out his house in the suburbs. He is much happier now that his living situation reflects his personal preferences.

Kara, a 33-year old lawyer, explained how her definition of happiness and her world-view has changed between her mid-twenties and early-thirties. Like Todd, she agrees that adulthood isn't just about achieving items on a check-list, but instead she thinks that adulthood is

about working towards goals, and finding pride in what you do. While home ownership did not make Todd feel like an adult, it did for Kara as buying a home was a goal she had been working and saving for. For her, buying a home fits into her narrative of intentional, purposeful living and finding satisfaction in the things that she does, even when they aren't always fun. While her goals sound like the traditional set of milestones—marriage, a house, and kids—she emphasizes the intentionality of these actions as well as finding satisfaction in her choices:

We just bought this house. It was a goal that we've been working for years. Even though it was stressful, it was a sense of fulfillment. That even though I'm not necessarily happy in my job, I'm very prideful and it makes me feel very happy when I do a good job. Those kind of ephemeral ideas. Maybe it's satisfaction. Something that's bigger and necessarily ...like these things [referring the cards with printed milestones] I kind of think of someone's goal checklist. Um, I date [my husband], so like in a few years I want to marry him. In five years, my goal is to own a house and I think there are bigger things, like having kids, or maybe it's more that it's kids that aren't bullies. Having kids that are genuine. Contribute to society. Bigger concepts. When you are an adult your thinking changes into a broader picture than instant gratification. [Kara, 33, female]

Instead of pointing to specific markers as important for adulthood, both Todd and Kara emphasize the importance of intentionality and being happy with your choices. While buying a house felt like an obligation for Todd and therefore did not bring him happiness, for Kara, homeownership came with the satisfaction of achieving a goal she had set for herself. For both, fulfilling their intentional choices make them happy.

For many participants, looking beyond one's self, caring for the world at large, and self-growth and awareness are signals of adulthood. In the excerpt above, Kara discussed raising children who will contribute to society. She then goes on to say that as she gets older and more settled into her life, her outlook has become more globally and community oriented. Her “sphere of caring” has expanded from herself and her family, to her community, to a broader sense of being a global citizen. For her, this outward outlook is a marker of reaching adulthood—her

concerns are no longer centered around herself, but extend out to others in a more robust way. Connor, a 33-year old program manager for a non-profit, echoes this sentiment by saying that “there’s a certain awareness that’s achieved in adulthood, or when you’ve ‘adulted.’ When you’re really able to have a better vantage, a clearer vantage point beyond yourself. As you relate to that broader world around you. Figuring out what your role is in that is a big piece.”

While participants emphasize these large concepts of sense of self and responsibility to community, it takes time to get there. The transition from the early-twenties to the thirties is a growing process in which young adults try to figure out their life and find their place in the world. Taylor, a 26-year old graduate student, describes her “gradual shift to adulthood” after moving from the East Coast to Seattle. At 22, Taylor left behind her friends and family and had to find her adult footing:

I just kind of felt like, I definitely wasn't as responsible or aware as I am now... [I was] not concerned with what was happening outside of me because I think a part of moving here by myself was that I was like I felt like I had to be really selfish because there was no one else around to look out for me. And it took me a while to be like, I should be doing more for the community, I should be volunteering, I should be looking outside of myself and not just like thinking about my own self and my own problems or whatever. [Taylor, 26, female]

When Taylor first moved to Seattle, she had nobody to rely on but herself and it took most of her time and energy to figure out to live her life far from her friends and family, find a new social network, and adjust to a new job. Now, Taylor attends graduate school, works part-time, has an internship, and volunteers. While her schedule keeps her constantly busy, she not only has a greater sense of self, but she also has a broader concern for the world.

As Taylor’s story shows, striving for a greater sense of self and participating in the greater community often happens after immediate needs, like stable employment and housing, are taken care of. For some, a greater lack of purpose is never achieved making them feel less

adult. For example, when talking about what he is and isn't satisfied with in his current life, Todd brings up a lack of broader purpose.

In sort of a larger sense, I guess I don't really feel like I have something that is super fulfilling. I don't have a purpose for lack of a better word [...] But like you know some people [they] go to work and then they come home and they go volunteer or they have a thing they're building or something or they're going to go race around the world or like whatever it is, they have their thing. I don't feel like I have that. I'm very happy day-to-day. I'm not stressed. I have sort of a...I have a very comfortable life. I don't know if I have a really purposeful life. [Todd, 33 year-old, male]

While Todd is starting to work towards a broader sense of purpose by devoting time to organizing events for a sports group he belongs to, this lack of something “else” seems to nag at the back of his mind. Later in the interview, Todd compares himself to a coworker who just bought a house. To Todd, this coworker seems more “adult” in part because he and his wife are making improvements on the house, like building a deck, and taking planned vacations together. Todd, who enjoys his leisure time and hobbies but doesn't have any personal goals he is working towards, sees this type of commitment, and purpose as a strong indicator of being an adult, as well as something he lacks.

Overcoming Challenges and Personal Growth

Central to the idea of personal responsibility is the idea that an adult is someone who is capable of handling the stuff that life throws at them, be it a death in the family, a surprise pregnancy, or something else entirely. While there were few differences in how younger and older participants talked about adulthood, those over 30 were more likely to talk about the importance of handling tough situations and working through problems. For those who have experienced an obstacle, getting through it a sign of maturity.

A few years after getting married, Kara's husband started dealing with mental health issues. Working with her husband to get him the help he needed is something that Kara uses to distinguish her 20s from her 30s. Kara's discussion working through challenges highlights the how overcoming obstacles is also a form of personal responsibility:

[His mental health issue] really developed in the late 20s early 30s...And I think as someone in your 20s and 30s that's normally when you're dealing with stuff like that. You're dealing with crises of any kind. In my case, it was this issue. For other people, it could be that you lost your job in your 20s, that happens to a lot of people, or you moved jobs and you thought the grass was going to be greener and it wasn't. And trying to realize that and be an adult about it. And figure out what you're going to do next. So, I think there's a lot of changes in that period that you're not expecting. And I can't think of a single person I know in their late 20s or early 30s that did not deal with some kind of crisis that might have lead them to actually be an adult. But nobody ever really talks about. And nobody has a plan. Why would you? What would you do if this goes wrong? What am I going to do when shit hits the fan? Or I don't like my job so how am I going to handle that?...I think it's that there's major challenges and changes in the late 20s and early 30s that nobody really thinks about because your biggest thought after college is when you get your first job. But I think it's actually as you hit your late 20s and early 30s and those crises and changes have a profound effect...I think it's more "have you handled a crisis you weren't expecting?" and how did you handle it and how did you come out of it? Did you handle it as a mature adult? Or did you decide you just couldn't win. [Kara, 33, female]

In contrast to Kara, Connie, a 26-year old working for a tech firm, has never faced a big obstacle or major turning point in her life. Her parents, who are both IT professionals, encouraged her to pursue computer science, and in her words, "set [her] on a path" that she's "fine with." When asked if she considers herself an adult, she says no, in part because for her, adulthood is "taking a stand for things" and she hasn't found anything in her life yet that is worth putting effort into changing, or taking a stand for. Connie, like Todd in his early years, seems to be on adult autopilot doing the things she is supposed to do, like working in the tech industry and moving in with her boyfriend. While her ample tech-industry income makes her financially self-sufficient, she has not yet had to face an obstacle that forces her into making adult decisions. In this way,

she is playing at adulthood without having the full-weight of adult responsibilities on her shoulders.

While Kara's spouse's addiction is an extreme example of overcoming obstacles, others discuss how one faces day-to-day problems and challenges and focusing on self-growth is a sign of maturity and adulthood. When asked what he would put on a blank set of cards, Blake, a soft-spoken software engineer, says that "self-awareness is one of them, and that kind of goes with capability and capacity. Some of the most responsible people who I look up to have a way of being aware of their faults in a that they can address them." Taking responsibility for oneself and others and working through problems are characteristics that these young adults reiterate over and over in their narratives of adulthood. They draw from their own lives and the lives of their friends and peers to talk about how they successfully managed moving across the country, changing jobs, starting and stopping graduate school, earlier than expected pregnancies, and the other things that life throws at them. For these young professionals, successfully managing life and growing and developing as people are two factors that distinguish adults from adolescents.

Given the high level of education in this sample, it is somewhat surprising that participants unanimously agreed that completing formal schooling was *not* important for adulthood. Nearly all participants drew on examples of someone they know, work with, or an imaginary other to explain why formal education is not important for being a successful, mature adult. Instead, they again draw on narratives of maturity, problem-solving, and responsibility. As Chris says, "adulthood is more the school of hard knocks, there's really a lot you're not going to get from school." As long as someone is being financially responsible and working hard, these young professionals do not view formal education as essential. However, when individuals are

not living up to expectations, then respondents are more apt to stress how education is still beneficial and can give people more options.

Rethinking the importance of education is also a place where young adults assert how their own thinking has changed as they've grown up, reflecting the self-growth and self-awareness they value over formal education. A handful of respondents said that when they were younger they would have absolutely agreed that completing formal education is essential for being an adult. However, as they have met and worked with people without college degrees, they have rethought their stance. Connor, a program manager for a non-profit, epitomizes this progression in thinking:

Connor: I think that's been part of my evolution. I think 10 years ago, five years ago, two years ago, I would have said yeah, [completing formal education is] critically important. That's just sort of what you do. But, no. There's certainly a lot of people who don't need to go down that track to be successful in whatever field.

Interviewer: What made you change your mind on this?

Connor: I think a lot of the answer was and still is that college or formal education is what you make of it. There are a lot of people that just coast through it and get degrees and look great on paper. And so, I think yeah that there are a lot of people who don't go straight out of high school who really get every penny out of it, and working with those folks, or with folks that didn't go to college, or maybe not even through high school. I've had some epiphany along the way where I'll walk into a meeting maybe know a person's background and have all these judgements about them and just how irrelevant these judgements are when we have those meetings is always apparent. So, being able to actually judge people for who they are is a huge piece. [Connor, 33, male]

Connor is not alone in his evolution. The professionals I interviewed all came from backgrounds where completing education was expected of them. While the benefits of a college education are certainly recognized, participants have reframed education to fit within their narratives of decision making. While this reframing may seem progressive on the surface, it also reflects their deep-seeded privileges. Participants state that not everyone is “cut-out” for college or wants to go to college, but they do not discuss the inability of others to pay for college or the

trade-offs many young Americans weigh when choosing education over immediate employment. In this way, education is framed as choice that young adults get to make based on personal proclivities, not one that is made for them based on circumstances. While many participants said that they have student loans, none said they ever questioned their ability to pay for college, stopped attending school for financial reasons, or otherwise faced structural obstacles in getting their education. Their ability to get into, attend, and succeed in a traditional four-year college was never in question. Thus, while they say that going to college is a choice, it was a choice that they had the privilege of making. Furthermore, the examples they draw from to explain why formal education is not important are often exceptional, like Todd's coworker who taught himself how to code and now has a lucrative software job. In using these exceptional stories, they inadvertently prove the rule. By focusing on the stories of the individuals who pulled themselves up by the proverbial boot-straps, millennial professionals reaffirm their position in the social and economic hierarchy as earned and deserved.

Financial Stability and Independence

The ability to make choices and take responsibility for oneself and others is contingent on having the resources to be able to do so. The young professionals in this study simultaneously stressed the importance of making choices and taking responsibility, and emphasized being financially independent. In evaluating how important the eight markers of adulthood are, most respondents said that marriage, parenthood, and owning a home are not crucial for adulthood, but they almost unanimously agreed that financial independence—or at least the prospect of financial independence—is key to their definition of adulthood. Respondents emphasized the importance of being able to financially take care of themselves and the other people in their lives, but also agreed that financial independence is often a household, not individual, endeavor.

However, they underscore the point that even if an individual is not generating income for a household, having a handle on finances and budgeting is imperative. In this way, financial independence is not necessarily tied to making money, but rather is tied, once again, to responsibility and decision making.

Caitlin is a 29-year old medical resident. She and her husband, who is working towards his Ph.D. in finance, recently adopted a baby. While they both have student loans, Caitlin can see the long-term horizon in which they will have well-paying professional jobs and will be financially independent. While financial independence hasn't yet been achieved, for Caitlin, knowing that there's a roadmap to get there is important for her sense of self and her family plans.

[My husband] talks to me a lot about [finances], we had to take out a lot of loans for grad school and med school and he writes me out graphs when I get nervous about it...It helps me to be like, it's okay to eat dinner out every once in a while because even though we are in debt, a lot, eventually in this year we'll be paid off and then we'll have all this money. So, because it's a reality for us that we won't be independent for a long time, but we'll still be contributing towards like retirement and investing and charity and all that we're still doing it, even though we won't be loan free for a while. [Caitlin, 29, female]

Caitlin and her husband are financially responsible and secure, if not completely financially independent. They spend wisely, save for the future, contribute to charity, and are gaining the credentials to launch careers in high-paying occupations. In this way, they fit within their own definition of being in control of their lives and future.

Being financially independent is not just a marker of adulthood in and of itself, but it also enables young adults to make decisions, take care of responsibilities, and live their lives as they see fit. Jesse, a 25-year-old project manager at a research organization, summed up the importance of financial independence by saying:

I feel like this the main difference between an adult and a child. If you're financially independent, you're taking care of yourself. And you can take care of other people,

potentially. This is probably the big one for me. You have the choice to exist in the world the way you want to if you're financially independent. [Jesse, 25, female]

While a small handful of respondents mentioned that “circumstances” can make achieving financial independence challenging, only a few explicitly discussed an internal conflict over the idea of financial independence. Take Ava, a 36-year old project manager, for example. Ava lived paycheck to paycheck during her first job out of college, but now that she is mid-career, she takes tremendous pride and satisfaction in the ability to take care of herself and her family. She's worked hard to build her career and looks down on others, like her sister, she sees as not having control of their finances. When asked what makes her feel like an adult, the first thing out of Ava's mouth is being “financially independent.” However, when shown the financial independence card a few minutes later, she starts to waver:

Yeah, I think I do. I think that. You know, that's a hard one because politically I think there are a lot of adults who are not financially independent and I think it's our responsibility as a society to help everyone. So, this is a difficult one. It kind of depends on where you are...if your life circumstances are that you're trying as hardest as you can and you're still not, then I feel one way. But if I feel like you could be doing more, then no. So, I think that's kind of a mixed answer. [Ava, 36, female]

Ava expects herself and her peers to be financially independent, but does leave a little leeway for people with different “life circumstances.” She's empathetic and holds progressive beliefs about expanding social programs that support others, yet she can't break away from the ideal of being financially independent and secure. Hallie also has a hard time separating her desire for financial independence from her judgements of others. However, while Ava acknowledges that achieving financial independence is not feasible for everyone, Hallie attributes lack of independence to choice rather than circumstance:

I sort of think a big piece of being an adult in my mind is being financially independent. And I don't know where that comes from, but for some reason that's significantly like,

75% of being an adult in my mind. And so I think people who are my age who are like starving artists and getting help from their parents, it's really hard, I have to check myself, it's really hard for me to say like this is the thing they've chosen to do. [Hallie, 34, female]

Overall, the respondents of this study largely agree that a main component of adulthood is striving to be financially independent and responsible. Budgeting, living within their means, paying bills on time, saving for the future, and knowing about retirement are all aspects of financial responsibility that young professionals value and emphasize. Financial independence both enables their life choices like where to live and how to spend their free time, but it also provides a sense of maturity and competence.

Financial independence is especially crucial when it comes to the ability to make big life decisions. Two decision points are particularly pivotal to the young professionals in this study: the decision of if and when to have children, and the decision to stay in Seattle or move out of the area. In the next sections, I discuss these two decisions and how they emphasize choice, and financial and personal responsibility.

Parenthood

Of the nineteen participants in this study, seven are currently parents and all but one expressed interest in having children, or at least are considering having children, in the future. While most want to become parents, they emphasize that becoming a parent is not essential for adulthood. Parenthood is, however, frequently associated with an aura of respect and responsibility, especially among respondents who do not yet have kids. Kevin's answer to the question if parenthood is essential for adulthood is typical:

This is definitely one of those personal preference things. I actually know a bunch of people, men and women, who are not interested in having children. I enjoyed my

childhood a lot. And I think I've always looked forward to having kids. Yeah, I think having a child is definitely a marker of you should ideally have your shit together before you have a kid. I would say it's definitely a marker like "wow, that's an adult, they're pushing a stroller." But no, a lot of people have kids and maybe they aren't adults yet. Nor do I think it's necessary to have a child. [Kevin, 29, male]

For Kevin parenthood is like homeownership: it is a choice that signals maturity and responsibility, but it is still a choice. Using the logic of responsibility and intentionality, being a parent neither makes one an adult nor is required to be an adult. However, participants emphasized that they do expect more from parents than from non-parents. Respondents expect those who choose to become parents to be extra responsible, and to have a good handle on adulthood. Multiple participants also distinguished being a parent from being a *good* parent. Anyone can be a loving parent, but it takes a responsible, mature adult to be a good parent and to raise children in a responsible, socially conscious way. For instance, Kara discussed wanting to raise children who are emphatic to others and Connor talked about raising children to be environmentally and socially conscious. In a more lighthearted example, Chris explained that he and his wife love to watch MTV's "Teen Mom"—a show that chronicles the lives of teenage parents—in part to reassure themselves that they are doing a good job parenting their new son. In contrast to the young, ill-equipped mothers they see on TV, Chris feels like he and his wife have a good handle on being adults and parents.

The seven parents in this study all wanted to have children. For five of the parents the timing of their first child was a calculated decision. For two, parenthood came earlier than planned putting their timelines in, as Chris says, "fast-forward." When discussing family planning, women in particular emphasize meeting career goals, having the financial resources to provide a certain lifestyle for their children, and enjoying their pre-parent life to the fullest before motherhood. For many of the women I interviewed, becoming a mother is closely held desire,

but one that will come after series of other important events including career milestones, homeownership, and even in some cases, vacations. For other women, age and unexpected life circumstances push their hand to the baby carriage sooner than perhaps they would prefer.

At 33, Kara is the youngest person ever in the history of her firm to make partner. Kara loves litigating, but also knows that she wants to start a family soon. She wrestles with the tension between the demands of her job, money, and wanting to be available and present for her future children:

I made partner very young. I was the youngest partner ever in the firm. So, there's a lot of pride with that and potential for advancement. On the other hand, I want to have kids. Being a partner in a law firm is not very conducive for kids. Especially as the youngest partner in the firm, the youngest partner in the office, who is still trying to reach the upper level. Last year I had a trial with another female attorney who is married and has two children under the age of 10. And our trial was over Halloween and she missed like ten days of their life... Last night I worked to one in the morning. While that's not always the case, I certainly will be working at night. I certainly will be working on the weekends. And the part of my job I like is going to trial. There's a big tension there. Which is the other reason I'm debating whether or not I want to change jobs, careers, anything else. It's just a balance of can I afford to that and pay student loans, and afford a house, and afford a kid. [Kara, 33, female]

Kara loves going to trial and is mostly happy at her firm. She is proud of her accomplishments and appreciates the employment and financial security that her job affords her. Kara and her husband recently bought a house in a North Seattle neighborhood, and while her new commute is substantially longer, the benefits of living in the neighborhood was a trade-off she happily made.

At 33, Kara has a job and a house that will allow her to provide the lifestyle she wants for her future family. The last remaining thing standing between Kara and motherhood is taking a postponed honeymoon. After they return from their dream vacation, Kara and her husband plan to start trying to get pregnant. In a similar vein, Becca, a 29-year-old environmental engineer married to a tech worker, waited until after completing a set of goals before starting a family.

When I asked her why she decided now is a good time to get pregnant, she responded: "I'm 29

years old, and we have house and a dog and we have, you know, all the things we wanted to do, we went on our big trip last year. We went to New Zealand for two weeks. It was awesome. We did our big trip and now we're ready to have kids.” Both Kara and Becca experienced fulfilling pre-parenthood lives, established their careers, and found stable housing before starting a family.

While not all the women I spoke to had big vacations planned before starting a family, the idea of getting to a certain place in their careers or accomplishing other goals was a common theme. For men, on the other hand, the explanations for when to have kids were less formalized and more abstract—parenthood is something they look forward to, but the decision of *when* is less of a consideration. Connor, 33, is getting married this summer to a woman he describes as “slightly older” than himself. When I asked him about timeline for starting a family, he told me that it’s less about him, and more about his fiancé feeling the pressure to “get going.” Thus, even when there is careful calculation at the household level, it is, unsurprisingly, driven by the female partner.

Connor’s wife’s desire to “get going” is reiterated by Hallie and Ava—both of whom became mothers in their 30s. Like Kara and Becca, they always knew that they wanted to become moms, but first wanted to launch their careers and enjoy their pre-parent lives. However, each of them had the age 35 in the back of their mind, which helped push them into having their first child. As Hallie explains, she and her husband kept pushing parenthood further into the future because they loved their married life together. It wasn’t until they experienced an unexpected scare that they decided to have their first child:

I don't know if all women have this, but I definitely had the number 35 like bobbing around in my head. Like I need to start having babies by the time I'm 35 because doctors blah blah blah and health things. Which now turns out to be not actually [true]. (Interviewer: But you can't get the number out of your head?). It's just in there. But I loved living together and being married was so awesome and we were really in a good place and we kept pushing it off. I feel like every year we were like, a couple more years,

a couple more years. And what ended, I think we were kind of on the fence, we were like maybe a year, we were getting closer and then both of our parents got sick, they are both fine now, but both of our parents got sick in the same year and it was like after that cleared and everyone was healthy and fine...I think both of were kind of like, okay now we're doing this. [Hallie, 34, female]

Ava, too, felt the pressure of being 35. While she says that she would have waited to have kids “until our 40s” if not for the possible risks of being “considered advanced age,” she instead got pregnant soon after getting married. Now a mother of six-week old, she says she’s happy with her decision not to wait any longer, but is also starting to reconsider her orientation to work and her career. She likes her job and wants to continue contributing in a meaningful way, but wonders what combination of working and parenting will be best for her family. She is considering finding a way to go back to work on a part-time basis in order to spend more time with her son or looking for a job with a new company that provides more maternity leave for future children. Ava, like Kara and many of the other women I spoke with, discussed balancing their ideal ways of parenting with their desires to continue to build their careers. They want to be devoted to both their careers and their families and think critically about how to balance these competing demands when deciding on when to start a family (Blair-Loy, 2003). For these women, questions of if and when to become a parent come are compounded with other decisions about their lives and careers.

In contrast to the women who carefully planned their pregnancies, Sara’s two children were surprises. While she always wanted children, having kids before her career was established was a change of plans. When asked if her high-school self would be surprised with her current life she responds: “[I] probably would be surprised that I had kids already. Not that I’m not that young, I’m 31, going to be 32 at the end of the year. It’s not like I was a teenage mother. But I think I thought I would be like, establish my career all that stuff before I had kids.” Although

Sara's ideal plan for when to have children changed, she fits with the other women I interviewed in that she had wanted to establish her career and wished she had been able to be more financially secure before starting her family.

The majority of respondents stated that parenthood is not essential for adulthood and that plenty of people are adults without ever becoming parents. However, they also emphasize that choosing to become a parent includes choosing to take on a new set of responsibilities, especially financial responsibilities, that are important to "good" parenting. In their answers to the questions of about when to have kids, many women emphasized not only reaching specific personal goals, but also being able to support a family financially and provide a certain lifestyle for their children. Many of the professionals in this group will have what Annette Lareau (2003) calls a concerted cultivation style of parenting in which their children are engaged in structured activities and the parents have an intensive presence in all aspects of their children's development. This can be seen in Kara's worries that trials might get in the way of her participating in Halloween activities with her future children, Ava's reconsideration of her workload, and the numerous conversations I had with mothers and prospective mothers over neighborhoods and preschools. For this group of respondents, how to parent is just as much of a choice as whether *to* parenthood and both these decisions are compounded with questions about their careers.

Staying or Leaving Seattle

Next to becoming a parent, the decision of whether to stay in Seattle long-term weighs on the minds of the young professionals I spoke to. Staying or moving is a calculation of affordability, job opportunities, lifestyle, and family ties. Native Seattleites weigh the prospects

of more affordable housing against leaving their families, while Seattle transplants consider the tradeoffs of being far from their hometowns and a life in Seattle they love.

Sara is one of the few respondents who expressed true concerns over her financial future. While Sara enjoys her job working for a non-profit dedicated to racial justice, there is limited opportunity for career growth. Sara, the primary breadwinner in her family, feels the economic realities of Seattle's increasing costs of living. For her, home prices and job opportunities in her field are directly related to the question of if she and her family should stay in Seattle. It is important to Sara that her children attend a bilingual school so that they grow up speaking both their mother and father's native languages, but in order to be in the catchment zone for the bilingual elementary school, they have to pay high rent in a gentrifying neighborhood. Sara would like to move to Washington D.C. where she thinks she will have both better job opportunities and housing options. While she jokes that it's ridiculous that D.C. is more affordable than Seattle, the tone of her voice indicates that to her this matter isn't funny, but a serious concern for the future of her family. When discussing her future, it is clear that everything hinges on this question for her and her family: do they stay in Seattle where they cannot afford to buy a house in an area they want, or do they move somewhere more affordable? While non-Seattle natives weigh the costs of going back to their home states, Sara weighs the costs of leaving her family in search for a more affordable life for her family and growing her career in public policy.

A house on our block sold for like \$700,000. Are you kidding me? It's one, maybe two bedrooms if you count the basement as a bedroom. Like craziness. And in D.C., right outside of D.C. in Silver Springs which is super diverse community, has a Spanish language schools, is on the subway. You literally, I'm not kidding, you can buy a 1-acre, 4-bedroom house on an acre with a pool for \$700,000. I'm like that's ridiculous. D.C. is a world capital and it is like significantly cheaper to live there than here. It's just nuts (half-hearted laugh).

[Later in the interview]: I would love to own a home, have a yard, even if I don't own it. But I don't know if that's going to happen. And like....I'm excited to grow in my career, but I don't know when or where and that's a bigtradeoff between if we end up moving to D.C., then our kids won't know their extended family and that's not easy, and that's not going to feel good. Moving is pretty selfish. Why go back to D.C.? It's my career and my friends.

Sara is also one of only a small handful of participants who directly discussed the lack of racial diversity in Seattle. Sara's children are mixed-race and bilingual and she wants her children to grow up in an area where they will not be the only non-white kids in school. While Sara's decision to move or stay is more complex than other respondents', it embodies this careful balance between affordability, family, and lifestyle that all young adults consider when deciding where to set down roots.

For those who were born outside of Seattle, the idea of moving closer to family is a large consideration, and multiple respondents discussed the tension between loving their lives in Seattle and the costs of being far from family. This concern is especially salient for those planning on having their own children. After discussing how much she wishes she was geographically closer to her family, I asked Jesse if she would ever consider moving back to the Midwest. Her answer to this question typifies the tension that many young adults feel. On one hand, they wish they could join their families for weekly dinners, but on the other hand, they can't imagine living their adult lives in their hometowns. This tension provides a critical turning point for their adult lives. If they decide to stay in Seattle, they are committing to a life where family relationships are conducted over the phone and vacation time and money is devoted to commuting to see family. If they leave, they give up job opportunities, cultivated friendship networks, and the joy of living in Seattle.

Jesse: For the first few years that I lived in Seattle I thought that was inevitable. That I would have to move back because I couldn't imagine family life without my mom...So I spent a lot of time being like "okay, well Seattle's nice, but it has to end at some point. I have to go back." And, the more time that's gone by, the more I have no intention to move back...I think about moving back to [the Midwest] and I can't fathom it[.]

Interviewer: You said that when you first moved out here you felt that you eventually would move back. Was that something you thought inevitably people go home, that kind of a sentiment, or was it.....

Jesse: (cuts me off) For me specifically I think it had a lot more to do with...I think for me specifically it was very focused on when I go through certain stages of my life, like having kids or something like that. But I think, I think of certain life stages like that as needing family support. So I think that was the thing. Like I would not start a family without the support of my own mother. I can't fathom that. And so I've had to really struggle with that. [Jesse, 25, female]

When she first moved to Seattle, Jesse assumed she would eventually go back to her familial home in the Midwest, in part because she thought she'd need family support when starting her own family. However, the longer she stays in Seattle, the more attached she has become to the city and her way of life. The desire to stay in Seattle is common among the young professionals I spoke to. While they recognize the challenges of high home prices and being far from family, the pull of Seattle's job opportunities, progressiveness, and mix of culture and outdoor opportunities draws them to make it work. While most respondents see staying in Seattle as a choice, a few also mentioned the possibility of having to move home if circumstances, especially a sick parent, required it. Thus, while these young professionals prioritize choice in deciding where they live, they also recognize that obligation may stand in the way of their freedom of choice.

This pivotal question of where to set down roots is a turning point for many of the individuals in this sample. Deciding if and where to move for the next steps of their adult lives encompasses questions about family, lifestyle, and career opportunities. Choosing where to live is, in many ways, choosing what type of adult they want to be. The ability to make these choices

speaks to the breadth of choices and the resources available to this group of young adults. While they certainly face constraints, all participants, including Sara, have ample resources, education, and skills they can draw on whether they decide to stay in Seattle, move home, or search for greener pastures somewhere new. The opportunity to seek out better opportunities is, in itself, a privilege afforded to this group of professional millennials.

Seattle: Progressiveness and Complicity

The majority of the participants I spoke to are financially secure and leading comfortable lives in Seattle, which is met with at least some acknowledgement of being in a privileged position. Those in the tech industry are particularly aware of tension between their economic position and growing inequality and economic tensions in Seattle. Blake, a software programmer, recognizes his role in Seattle's changing economic landscape:

Seattle is still evolving and living in an active clashing set of cultures is always difficult. I think that, I lived in Ballard for a while and it is easy to both be sympathetic to the people that say that tech-people are coming in and kicking out all the people who have lived there for 60 years, while still being a tech-worker who is coming in there and kicking out people who have been there for 60 years....

It's hard to, being a tech-worker, it's hard to say that I'm against the in-flux of tech. I think technology is great, it's improved a lot of people's lives. But I do recognize that, tech, especially in the last five years or so, has focused on this concept of disruption and to say that we've disrupted things only in a positive way is ignorant of our own contribution. I think there are a lot of very legitimate gripes. [Blake, 26, male]

Connie, also in the tech industry, also feels tension between her high income and her values, but her discomfort is articulated by the way others may see her. Connie does not like it when she rides the bus to work and ends up next to a coworker who wants to talk about work during the commute. It makes her uncomfortable to flaunt her job, and therefore her income, in public places.

I have some coworkers who really like talking about their job. And they will talk about it on the bus when they run into each other the bus. I feel really weird about that. It's like people know how much you make by the words you're saying. I feel weird about it. [Boyfriend's] younger brother also lives here and he works at [the same company] and sometimes, I think the only thing we have to talk about is the cafeteria. So sometimes we talk about the cafeteria on the bus. But....it seems gauche to me. [Connie, 26, female]

Hannah and her husband who both work in the tech industry recently bought a condo in a pricey suburb of Seattle. They both emigrated from Australia and Hannah wonders if she is part of the problem of the influx of tech workers in Seattle. When talking about the cost of living, Hannah says: "I feel pretty bad about it. We're just coming here as immigrants and tech workers as well and there's a lot of things I think about. We just bought this place in Seattle. Did we displace a Seattle family that's been here for a long time? (nervously chuckles). I worry about all of these kinds of things. Those kinds of things worry me." However, she quickly moves on from her uneasiness of contributing to housing issues to how much she enjoys living in a community with people who share her interests. Later in the interview, Hannah justifies her move to Seattle by discussing the paltry tech industry in Australia. To have a prospering career she loves, Hannah argues, it was imperative to move to Seattle.

While professionals in the tech industry voice feeling uncomfortable over their high salaries and the level of inequality in Seattle, their high incomes also contribute to their happy lives. Blake and Hannah may express discomfort, but they do little about it. And while Connie used to participate in a group advocating for a basic income, she stopped attending meetings because of the group's lack of clear action. While says she still supports the cause, she is no longer actively involved in any type of organizing for systematic change. While these tech workers may talk about issues of inequality, and may in fact hold progressive ideologies in terms of social welfare, their day-to-day lives are not impacted by widening inequalities, nor is their

enjoyment of Seattle hindered by their acknowledgement that they are complicit in the problems they recognize. By turning the conversation back to the work and careers they love, they once again use the idea of hard-work and meritocracy to discount their role in reproducing inequality.

Discussion and Conclusion

This group of professional millennials defines adulthood as having an internal locus of control. They recognize structural problems, like high cost of living and a skewed labor market, but these structural problems are not barriers to them. By using the rhetoric of responsibility and choice, they can on one hand say they identify with progressive ideals, while on the other hand go about enjoying their lives filled with hobbies and plans for the future. By defining adulthood as the product of smart decision making, millennial elites justify their position in the class structure and reproduce class distinctions.

Many of the young professionals I spoke with said they identify with the progressive nature of Seattle, support local initiatives like expanding public transportation, and are concerned with women's issues and the environment. Many more spoke of their disdain with the outcome of the 2016 presidential election and talked about how they are worried about the state of democracy and the future of the United States. In general, I would characterize this group as liberal. Yet despite their progressive values, they still turn to rhetoric of meritocracy, personal responsibility, and choice to define adulthood. While they recognize that they are in many ways "lucky," they discount this luck by framing their lives as a string of decisions that got them to where they are. These professional millennials value the ability to make decisions for themselves—decisions about parenthood, where to live, and how to spend their discretionary income. They define adulthood for themselves and their peers not by achievements or

accomplishments, but rather by “having their shit together.” While these professional millennials identify as progressive, their use of personal responsibility rhetoric reproduces their class position. Just as the students Khan (2011) studied at St. Pauls’ boarding school explained their position in society as a product of their hard work and experiences, this group of professional millennials see themselves as having made decisions that have propelled them into their current positions and lifestyles. They see themselves as hard-working, responsible, and goal-orientated.

Similar to the therapeutic narratives that the working-class adults in Silva’s study use, the young professionals in this study also use narratives of self-development and growth (Silva 2012). However, in addition to overcoming challenges and fixing their personal faults, these young professionals also emphasize building intentional futures. For them, their lives are something that can be built to fit their personal desires and reflect their values. While their options are not limitless, they are ample and supported by their education, skill, and income levels. Even having the ability to move somewhere with a lower cost of living demonstrates the breadth of opportunity they have. The trade-offs the participants in this study face are certainly real, but their trade-offs also reflect the privileged place they occupy. Ava perfectly embodies this position. While discussing the high home prices in Seattle she says: “But we also accept that we also do a lot of things, like we go out when we want to go out for eating. We vacation. We go with our friends to Hawaii. We do all these things. We could make major lifestyle shifts and trade it for buying a house that we want. But we don't really, but we aren't really willing to do that. So, we also recognize that part of this is on us. A big part of it is on us.” While Ava and her husband ultimately would like to purchase a home, they aren’t willing to compromise their lifestyle to do so.

This study shows how young professionals use frames of personal responsibility and decision-making to define adulthood for themselves and their peers. In their explanations of what it means to be an adult, they emphasize financial responsibility and independence, and downplay traditional markers like marriage, parenthood, and full-time employment. They are accepting of different pathways, as long as those pathways are the result of active decision making. While this conception of adulthood allows for and accepts some types of exceptions from traditional models of adulthood, like not becoming a parent or not getting married, it does not account for structural obstacles that may prevent active decision making, like dropping out of college for financial reasons or being unable to make choices about what neighborhood to live in. In this way, defining adulthood by decision making and financial independence reserves full adulthood for their professional peers. This definition of adulthood requires resources and lack of structural obstacles that many young adults do not have access to.

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Chapter 4 Appendix

Appendix 4.1 Participant Information

Name	Age	Born	Race	Gender	Education	Occupation	Family/Relationship Status	Homeowner
Rohan	25	Bangladesh	Asian	Male	Master's	Researcher	Single	rent
Todd	33	Colorado	White	Male	Bachelor's	Software	Single	own & rent
Hannah	29	Australia	White	Female	Ph.D.	Software	Married	own
Kara	33	Boston	White	Female	Law School	Lawyer	Married	own
Jesse	25	Ohio	White	Female	Bachelor's	Project Coordinator	Partnered	rent
Caitlin	29	Nebraska	White	Female	Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine	Medical Resident	Married 1 child	rent
Sara	31	Seattle	White	Female	Master's	Policy Director	Married 2 children	rent
Becca	29	Utah	White	Female	Bachelor's	Chemical Engineer	Married	own
Connie	26	China	Asian	Female	Bachelor's	Software	Cohabiting	partner owns
Kevin	29	Seattle	White	Male	Bachelor's	Data Scientist	Single	rent
Blake	26	Kansas City	White	Male	Bachelor's	Software	Cohabiting	own
Jake	29	Detroit	White	Male	Bachelor's	Operations Planning	Married	rent
Connor	33	Philadelphia	White	Male	Bachelor's	Operations Planning	Engaged	rent
Emily	35	Philadelphia	Asian	Female	Doctor V.M.	Veterinarian	Married 1 child	own
Anna	29	St. Petersburg, Russia	White	Female	Master's	Software	Separated 1 child	own & rent
Hallie	34	San Francisco	White	Female	Master's	Speech Therapist	Married 1 child	rent

Taylor	26	New Jersey	White	Female	Bachelor's	Grad Student	Single	rent
Ava	36	Seattle	White	Female	Bachelor's	Project Coordinator	Married 1 child	rent
Chris	34	New Hampshire	White	Male	Bachelor's	Stay-at-home parent	Married 1 child	own & rent

Appendix 4.2 Summary of Responses to Traditional Adulthood Markers

	Important (n)	Unimportant (n)	Summary	Example
Financial independence	17	2	While the vast majority of respondents agree with this sentiment, they also have questions regarding what it means to be "independent," including if student loans make someone not independent. Almost all of respondents also stated that being a stay-at-home parent and financially depending on a spouse is very adult. Only a few participants acknowledged that ability to achieve financial independence depends on class background.	"I think that probably varies. You know. Depending on the family someone comes from, what profession they're in. But yeah, I'd say generally speaking I'd agree with that. Being financially independent is an important part of adulthood. Of course if you're married, things like that. You normally share finances. I'd say has a household you're financially independent. I'd say that's a common marker of adulthood. I'd agree with that." [Kevin]
No longer living in parents' house	11	8	While most agree that striving towards independent living is important, many also make a distinction between those living with their parents for smart, responsible reasons and those living with their parents out of laziness. Responsible reasons for living with parent including taking care of sick parents, saving money for down payment, and living within current means.	"I think it's a step. I have a lot of empathy for friends that have had to do it. Maybe one still does. So I think you know, circumstantially that's very tricky. But yeah, in terms of progressing towards independence and adulthood, I think it's hugely important. I have some friends that live with their parents to take care of their parents. So I think that's an exceptional case. Certainly admirable." [Connor]
Completing formal education	0	19	All respondents disagreed that formal education is essential for adulthood, and many pointed to someone they know who did not complete college who is "very adult." However, many respondents also stated that education was important for them, and that while not necessary for adulthood, college is useful for achieving financial independence. Multiple respondents also discussed changing their mind about the importance of education after meeting and working with a diverse group of people.	"No, I don't think that's necessary for being an adult. I mean all of the friends I have and people I work with have completed, have college degrees. But that said, I know some people who dropped out of college and still am successful. I don't know personally people who didn't complete high school but I can imagine that happening and them still being an adult, it's not that important." [Anna]

Being employed full-time	9	9	<p>Respondents are divided on the importance of employment. Most respondents agree that for most people employment is necessary for financial independence and security. However, about half said that a person who is financially secure without working full-time is no less of an adult. Only a few participants discussed the intrinsic value of work.</p>	<p>"Well if you consider being a stay at home parent a full time job, it is a full time job, it's not a paid job, but it's a job. Yeah, I think that would be important. Because I mean, if, well, if you can find part time job that pays well enough for you to pay for all your living expenses, that's great, you know. But I think that, working in some capacity, unless you have a trust fund that enables you to not work and still be okay, I think that working for the vast majority of people is part of being an adult, in some capacity. At least working enough to pay your expenses. Part time. Yeah, if you can pull it off. And then do something else with your time. Um that's great. Most people have to work full time." [Emily]</p>
Parenthood	4	15	<p>Most respondents, even the ones that have kids or want kids, do not think that having a child is a requirement for being an adult. However, many respondents also state that they view people who have kids as more adult.</p>	<p>"No. I think it's one of those things if you don't have a kid doesn't mean you're not an adult, but if you do have a kid then I expect a lot more of you as a person. However, people have kids all the time and they're not mature. I've seen a lot of that. So. I think I would have a similar reaction to having a child as being married. You are this level I'm not at. And part of me would be in awe of that and respect it. But part of me knows that people who have children are no more emotionally mature or necessarily financially independent." [Jesse]</p>
Marriage	1	18	<p>While most respondents want marriage for themselves, all but one also said that marriage is not a requirement for being an adult and draw from unmarried friends as examples.</p>	<p>"I don't really associate it. I mean, I associate it, but I don't think it as being important...Seriously like my most put together friend is not married, doesn't have kids, probably won't. She's like on it. So, yeah." [Hallie]</p>

Being capable of supporting a family financially	13	6	Most respondents agree that for people who choose to have a family being able to support them financially is critical. However, participants also emphasize that supporting a family is more important at the household level than at the individual level. Respondents also agree that it is more important to support oneself and one's choices than it is to necessarily support a family.	"Yeah, that's uh, well, if you're going to have a child, I think being able to support them and provide for them is important. " [Becca]
Home ownership	3	16	Few respondents explicitly stated that homeownership is important for being an adult, but many said that they view people who do own homes, especially in Seattle, as having a good handle on adulthood. Most respondents in this sample want to own a home, but for many, they don't see themselves being able to do so soon. Multiple respondents noted that home ownership is more important, and more available, in other regions. Homeownership seems to be the most fraught in terms of difference between expectations/desires and realities, like respondents are trying to be okay with <i>not</i> buying a house.	"I don't think it's necessary for adulthood. I think that was a big part of how I defined adulthood as a kid. And certainly is something I thought I would have, like. It's so ridiculously out of reach now. It's been an adjustment. " [Sara]

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

“There's an XKCD comic that puts it very well. I have a house, I have a stable job. But, any time the thought of putting of ball pit in my house comes into my head, I realize that like I feel like a child in an adult body and I need a little bit more practice at being an adult.” – Blake, 26

This dissertation was motivated by the idea that the way we move through the life course is patterned by the interaction between our individual characteristics and exogenous social forces. I was especially interested in the ways that economic contexts—including relationship to the Great Recession, flexibility in the labor market, and home prices—influenced the coming of age trajectories for late baby boomers and Millennials. Overall, the findings in this dissertation demonstrate young adults adapt and respond to the environment through their choices about education, work, where to live, and with whom to share their lives.

The three empirical chapters were designed to test the overarching hypothesis that an increasingly flexible and mobile labor force has resulted in young adults experiencing more transitions and a more individualized path to adulthood relative to earlier generations. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from baby boomers and Millennials, I examined how young adults navigate through the dynamic labor market and the ways that gender and class pattern the transition from adolescence to adulthood. In Chapter 2, I used regression analysis to analyze the effect of employment transitions on wages. In support of theories on career building, I found that voluntarily moving from job-to-job can increase wages for young adults. I also found that the negative effects of involuntary mobility on wages have decreased, suggesting that scarring may be less consequential for contemporary workers. In Chapter 3, I compared sequences of monthly employment, school, marriage and parenthood status for respondents of the NSLY79 and NLSY97 between the ages 18 and 29. Using between sequence distance and clustering analysis, I

found that there has been a substantial increase in attachment to education and employment, and a decrease in family formation during the 20s, especially among women. I find that contrary to popular belief, today's young adults do not follow highly individualized life paths but instead experience fewer role transitions which results in high standardization. In Chapter 4, I used qualitative analysis to interview young professionals about what it means to be an adult in Seattle. This group of highly educated young professionals value decision making, personal responsibility, and financial independence over traditional markers of adulthood like marriage and parenthood. However, in using rhetoric of personal responsibility, they undermine their progressive values and reinforce their privileges.

In this concluding chapter, I focus on the connections between the results of the sequence analysis presented in Chapter 3 and the interviews used in Chapter 4. I divide the following discussion by theme—education, employment, and family formation—and discuss the ways in which the results of the sequence analysis are echoed in the sentiments of the young professionals I spoke with, as well as where the empirical patterns do not align with their stories. Along the way, I consider limitations of my research and generate questions for future research.

The Quest for Education

The results of the sequence analysis presented in Chapter 3 show an increased attachment to higher education for contemporary young adults reflecting the drastic rise in the number of students enrolled in higher-education between the 1970s and 2010s (National Center for Education Statistics). Less than half of the respondents in the NLSY79 cohort are in trajectories that include a significant proportion of time spent in college. This rate increases to nearly two-thirds of respondents of the NSLY97 sample. Additionally, an Extended College trajectory

emerges when the NLSY97 sample is analyzed separately from the NLSY79. These findings suggest that lives of young adults' in their 20s are increasingly centered around education and obtaining the skills and credentials necessary for participating in today's dynamic, service and technology based economy.

Yet, the professional Millennials interviewed in Chapter 4 do not emphasize education as a salient factor in their definition of what it means to be an adult. While to some extent they agree that education has shaped their own careers and lives, they do not see education as necessary for being an adult or even achieving career success. In fact, many point to exceptional stories of peers who have done well for themselves without college degrees to demonstrate that education is not essential. And while some of the interview participants said that they have student loans, none expressed any substantial concern over paying for their education and none said that they ever put their education on hold for financial reasons. On the contrary, multiple respondents said that attending college was just expected from them. Yet, despite their own commitment to education, they devalued education as a marker of adulthood.

How do young adults for whom going to college is not a given view the importance of education? In their study of young adults growing up in San Diego, Borgen and Rumbaut (2011) reason that for children of immigrants, education is in fact seen as an essential component of becoming an adult. For these young adults, their socioeconomic mobility rests on their ability to earn credentials to compete in the labor market and for many, their entire families' economic security rests on their shoulders. While these young adults have high educational aspirations, they also have limited resources and frequently take fewer credits or pause their enrollment altogether to work to support their families. For these young adults, following a Career Devotion trajectory is something to strive for, and they delay marriage and parenthood to pursue their

education goals. In this way, their perceptions about what is important for adulthood are rooted in their goals and aspirations, in part because they can't take their economic future for granted.

My study of Millennials living in Seattle would have benefited from a larger comparison of individuals from different backgrounds and with different education trajectories. While focusing on people currently in professional occupations was intentional, the inclusion of only people with linear education trajectories was not. To more fully understand the way that class plays a role in experiencing adulthood, future work should include interviewing more people with diverse routes to their current positions. It is difficult to assess the extent to which class background compared to current class position influences perceptions about adulthood without having a wider variation of respondents from different class backgrounds.

Commitment to Work

The professional Millennials in this study were evenly split on the importance of employment for their sense of adulthood. Most agreed employment is necessary for most people to achieve financial independence and stability, but they also agreed that people who are financially secure without working are no less of an adult. They looked to stay-at-home parents as examples of people who they consider fully adult yet do not work in paid employment. By using the example of stay-at-home parents, these Millennials again reiterate their emphasis on choice and decision making. Being a stay-at-home parent, in their view, is the result of a calculated decision made at the household level by two financially and personally responsible adults. Furthermore, it is assumed that stay-at-home parents were at one point employed and could be employed in the future if they choose to return to work. People who are excluded from the labor market by chance, not choice, are largely absent from their discussions about work.

But what about people who are not working not by choice? In Chapter 3, I find a decrease in the proportion of individuals in the Family Devotion trajectory (7% in the NLSY79 cohort and 3% in the NLSY97 cohort). The individuals in this trajectory—married, parents, and predominately women—are those most likely to be out of the labor force by choice. On the other side of the equation, I also found a substantial number of Black men that are characterized by the Detached trajectory—a trajectory characterized by long spells of not working and little or no family formation. In the NLSY97, 11% of Black men are in the Detached trajectory, an increase of two percentage points from the NLSY79. These young men are likely out of the labor market not by choice or good fortune, but rather due to the lack of opportunities available to them. The shift from manufacturing industries to the service sector has largely evaporated job opportunities for people—especially men—with low skill and education levels.

Using the definitions of adulthood described by the professional Millennials in Chapter 4, are these young men who are out of the labor market adults? Above all else, professional Millennials value financial independence and the decision-making capabilities financial independence brings with it. And while they may downplay its importance, for this group, employment in professional services is the key to this piece of adulthood. Yet two questions are left unanswered. First, how do young adults who are left out of the labor market define adulthood? Without the educational credentials and stable employment that leads to financial independence, do they also rely on tropes of personal and financial responsibility to define adulthood? Or do they use other narratives, like the therapeutic narratives of overcoming difficult pasts that the working-class adults in Silva’s study use (Silva 2012)?

Second, do the professional elites I interviewed apply the same definitions of adulthood for those left out of the labor market? In Chapter 4, I argue that by defining adulthood using

frames of personal responsibility professional Millennials reserve full adulthood for people like themselves. However, I did not push them on what it means to be an adult when someone does not have access to the same resources they do. While some acknowledged that not everyone is able to fully support themselves, they did not reconsider their definitions of adulthood. Follow-up questions about their perceptions about non-professionals could have been used to answer this question.

Women's Career and Family Planning

In Chapter 3, I show that the life trajectories of young adults in their 20s during the early 2000s are more standardized than the life trajectories of young adults who came of age in the 1980s, especially for women. As women spend more time enrolled in college and starting their careers, they are less likely to marry and become parents in their 20s compared to their baby boomer peers, resulting in a high level of standardization. Yet, in the interviews with professional Millennials, I also find that contemporary women (and men) still desire marriage and parenthood. While these markers do not sit at the center of their definitions of adulthood, many of the women I spoke to aspire to couple their careers with marriage and children. The majority of professional women in my sample followed either a married or unmarried Career Devotion trajectory through their 20s. Of the twelve women in my sample, three had children in their mid-to-late 20s, three had children in their 30s, and six are not yet parents but said that they want children in the future. Of the six who are currently mothers, all finished college and started their careers before having kids. The remaining six talked about the goals they want to accomplish before having children—like making partner in their law firms. These professional

women spoke of the complexities of simultaneously managing their career development and having (or planning to have) children.

This leaves the question: what will Millennial women's trajectories look like in their 30s and 40s? As more Millennial women marry and become mothers in their 30s, will their life courses be as complicated as the life courses of baby boomer women, but delayed by a few years? While looking at the trajectories of young adults in their 20s showed that standardization has increased, will standardization decrease if the analysis was extended to include more years? Over time, future work can explore this question. While the NLSY97 has moved to a bi-annual survey, it continues to collect detailed information on dates of marriage, parenthood, and employment. As the respondents continue to grow up, this data can be used to investigate this question.

Concluding Remarks: Today's transition to adulthood

Overall, this dissertation demonstrates that the transition to adulthood is shaped by economic and individual factors. While the results from Chapter 3 reveal that the life courses of contemporary young adults are fairly standardized because of few role transitions, the stories presented in Chapter 4 show that this does not mean that the transition is emotionally uncomplicated and that young adults do not face difficult choices—like where to live, what job to take, and when to have children. This dissertation highlights the importance of using both quantitative and qualitative research to understand the intricacies of the life course. While Chapters 2 and 3 uncover important trends and patterns, Chapter 4 underscores the underlying human experience of this critical time in people's lives.

Furthermore, Chapter 4 emphasizes the point that that Sociologists cannot take life course markers for granted. The variables used to measure adulthood—in particular marriage and parenthood—may be changing in their significance. As young adults come to value different aspects of adulthood, our ways of thinking about and measuring adulthood should also evolve. As shown in this dissertation, future work should take seriously the task of thinking about how to meaningfully capture the adult experience in quantitative research.

Works Cited

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Vita

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