

Work and School in the Transition to Adulthood: Implications for Objective and Subjective Career Outcomes Across Individuals from Diverse Backgrounds

College is a key piece of the career pathways taken by many young adults today. However, college education is not a homogenous experience and varies in meaningful ways including the occurrence and timing of entry, type, and degree receipt. Moreover, many youth bypass college altogether and instead directly transition into the job market. Yet education and work after high school have commonly been examined as separate domains, often measured as binary transitions. Moreover, research on career development during the transition to adulthood has tended to ignore the contribution of employment. My research centers on providing a more comprehensive approach in understanding young adults' early career development by modeling career transitions that encompass diverse postsecondary education and work experiences, which may occur both with and without each other. I use National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), a longitudinal nationally representative dataset to identify young adults' career pathways and further explore the contextual factors that shape them and their links to subjective and objective career outcomes.

Chapter 1 introduces my motivation for studying young adults' work and school trajectories, the life course theory as an overarching theoretical framework of these studies, and the NLSY97 used as the main dataset in all three studies. In Chapter 2, latent class analyses were conducted to identify the common career trajectories among young adults based on multiple work and school transition characteristics beginning from the timeline of their expected high school graduation until about eight years after. The role of family socioeconomic status (SES), individuals' future expectations, and local labor market conditions in predicting work and school pathways were also examined. This study identified four work and school pathways associated

with a) pursuing a Bachelor's degree b) pursuing an Associate's degree c) entering the workforce with a high school diploma and d) showing limited engagement in both postsecondary education and early work. I also found that parental socioeconomic status and individuals' future expectations were associated with work and school pathways, whereas local labor market conditions were not. The aim of Chapter 3 was to examine how the work and school pathways identified in Chapter 2 were associated with their future subjective and objective career outcomes, and whether these associations vary by gender and SES. The findings suggest that the pathways were significantly associated with objective labor market outcomes but had limited relations with subjective career outcomes. However, the associations between work and school pathways and future job satisfaction varied by gender and SES. In Chapter 4, I used propensity score matching to estimate the career returns to different postsecondary educational experiences (e.g., Bachelor's degree receipt, Associate's degree receipt, some college experience, never enrolled in college) and further investigate whether the career returns vary by gender and SES. The findings indicate similar patterns to Chapter 3, in which postsecondary educational attainment levels significantly predicted objective labor market outcomes and had very little associations with job satisfaction. However, there were nuanced differences in the role of postsecondary educational attainment on job satisfaction across gender and SES. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides general contributions, integration of the findings, and limitations/strengths of the introduced studies as well as future directions.