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Latino Identity Development and the Path to Blue- or White-Collar Occupations:  
Lessons for Policy Across the Pre-Adult Lifespan

By

Raul Chavez

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Social Welfare

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Neil Gilbert, Chair

Professor Tina K. Sacks

Professor Frank C. Worrell

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## **Abstract**

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The problem of youth unemployment continues to rise in countries around the world, and for many adolescents whose early working lives are marred with challenges and obstacles, such disadvantages are likely to have lifelong implications and to ensure cycles of poverty and inequality. Policy responses to the youth unemployment problem, particularly in the United States, have largely ignored the evidence that adolescents are a unique population that requires both a deeper understanding of the problem and bespoke policy interventions.

This dissertation challenges policymakers to change their perceptions of the problem of youth unemployment to one of work disparities with the purpose of shifting the focus to the social and psychological nuances that are also a part of the problem. Doing so allows for the application to the study of the problem of psychosocial development theory, which posits that individuals develop an identification with work across their pre-adult lifespan, and that work roles, choices, and behaviors are extensions of this process. To understand youth work disparities thus requires examining their identity development experiences.

The findings of the quantitative study provide some support for the relationship between psychosocial development predictors and young adult work outcomes. Furthermore, the examination of the identity development and employment trajectories of 20 Latino males in California revealed stark developmental differences between those who had attained at least a four-year college degree and white-collar employment compared to those who had attained neither and who struggled with unemployment. The findings provide a base from which to develop new policies that focus on supporting developmental pathways to healthy employment outcomes across the pre-adult lifespan.



## **Dedication**

This research is dedicated to my parents, who for years toiled under the hot California sun so I could have better employment opportunities. I also dedicate this to my sister, who knew that I should pursue a doctorate degree long before I did. Finally, I could not have accomplished this without my number one cheerleader in life: my husband. You all are a part of these pages.

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## **Chapter 1: The Problem of Youth Unemployment**

In October 2013, Pope Francis called youth unemployment one of the most serious of all of the troubles afflicting the world today, adding, “[Youth] have been crushed by the present... Can you live crushed under the weight of the present? Without a memory of the past and without the desire to look ahead to the future by building something, a future, a family?” (LifeSite, 2013). With these words, one of the world’s most authoritative figures on social issues highlighted the importance of employment not just to adolescents’ present lives, but also to their entire life narrative. Indeed, the 2007 Great Recession disrupted the life trajectories of many youth throughout the world, including in the United States. The youth unemployment rate in America reached a historic high of 20% in 2009 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009), and it has since remained in the teens, robbing millions of youth of early work experiences. Yet the problem of connecting youth to the labor market had been ongoing for years before the Great Recession magnified the issue, suggesting that the problem’s roots extend beyond the 2007-2009 economic shocks. Beginning in 2000, American youth for the first time stopped joining the labor market at a rate higher than the growth of the youth population (Hotchkiss, 2009). And the youth labor force participation rate since 1990 has been on a steady decline.

As the precariousness of youth employment grows, trends suggest that its effects are being concentrated on particular groups of adolescents, especially ethnic minorities, males, those from low-income families, and those without a college degree. In 2014, the unemployment rate for Black adolescents was more than twice as high as that of White adolescents, at 21% compared to 10%. Latinos also had a higher unemployment rate compared to Whites, at 13%. Black adolescents in 2014 made up 14% of the youth labor force, yet they made up 24% of unemployed youth, while Latinos made up 20% of the labor force and 22% of unemployed youth. Whereas male adolescents have historically enjoyed a smaller unemployment rate compared to females, the opposite has been true since the 1980s (Pew Research Center, 2013). In 2014, the unemployment rate for male youth was two points higher than that of females, and they made up a larger share of unemployed youth relative to their share of the labor force. These disproportions are even greater when comparing adolescents based on their family income and educational attainment. According to data from the Community Population Survey, youth from low-income families in 2014 had an unemployment rate of 19% compared to 9% for youth from medium- to high-income families. Low-income youth made up 29% of the labor force and 47% of unemployed youth, whereas medium- to high-income youth made up 71% and 53%, respectively. Regarding educational attainment, 75% of adolescents in 2014 did not have a bachelor’s degree, and this group made up 90% of unemployed youth.

These statistical disparities in unemployment, however, are only one part of the work disparities problem. These figures focus solely on disparities based on employment status, making them bereft of other types of work disparities that impact adolescents’ position in the labor market, including, for example, wages, industry, job search time, and job benefits. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to push the dialogue of youth unemployment toward one of work disparities and, in doing so, to add to this discussion how unemployment disproportionately affects adolescents. The chapter continues as follows: (a) an argument is made for the redefinition of the problem from one of unemployment to one of work disparities; (b) data are analyzed to understand the different ways the problem can be measured; (c) theories of unemployment are reviewed, from those that focus on employment status to those that paint a more complex notion; and (d) and a review of the disproportionate economic, psychological, and sociological effects of unemployment is presented, followed by (e) a conclusion.



## Redefining the Problem

How a social problem is defined is crucial for policy agenda setting (Chambers & Wedel, 2012), and the problem of youth unemployment is a perfect example of how an ill-defined social problem can hamper policymaking. Historically, policymakers have treated unemployment as a problem of the individual, as evidenced by the very etymology of the word. A dedicated word to the concept does not exist in the English, German, Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish languages (Garraty, 1978). Instead, these rely on a simply constructed word that literally means “no work.” In English and German, this literal word did not come into general use until the late 1800s, suggesting that unemployment, as it is understood today, is a relatively new concept to society. The French language *does* have a dedicated word in use since the Middle Ages, but it also conveys negative perceptions of the unemployed. “Chômage” derives from the Greek *kauma* (“burning heat”) via the Medieval Latin *caumare* (“calm”), resulting in a word that means to “take one’s ease during the heat of the day.” Not unlike common perceptions today, such a definition undergirds the idea that the problem of unemployment lies on the individual, thus making it easy for policymakers to argue that the unemployed are not deserving of public help.

The United States Department of Labor (DOL) defines unemployment as encompassing all those individuals out of work who are available for work and who have actively looked for a job in the previous four weeks. Perhaps because of the very narrowness of the term, DOL officially utilizes additional terms that capture the wide range of unemployment situations that do not fit into this definition. People “marginally attached to the labor force” are those who do not have a job, are available for work, and have actively looked for a job in the last twelve months but not previous four weeks. And “discouraged workers” are people without a job who are available for work but have not actively looked for a job in over a year.

The one factor that separates the officially unemployed from those in the latter two concepts is the demonstration of desiring work through “recent” and “active” job seeking. Such a condition is reasonable given that, as English economist Arthur Cecil Pigou (1933) admitted, governments do not have the capacity to read people’s minds and employment intentions. What is more difficult to reason, however, is the limitation of active job seeking at four weeks. Such a limitation is trivial, and its main purpose is to allow the US Government to maintain a strong economic posture and to suppress the need to address the problem of unemployment by officially limiting the number of people who qualify as unemployed.

Intra-regional and global organizations have followed the US Government’s example and also make unemployment conditional on active and recent job seeking. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example, deems that the unemployed comprise all persons above a certain age who are without a job, are currently available for work, and are seeking work (OECD, 2003). Adopting a resolution from the 1982 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labor Statisticians, the International Labour Organization (ILO), for its part, defines unemployment using similar language (ILO, 2004). Unlike the US Government, however, both the OECD and ILO go one step further and consider the structural factors that drive unemployment. They both caveat that in situations where the conventional means of seeking work are of limited relevance, where the labor market is largely unorganized or of limited scope, where labor absorption is inadequate, or where the labor force is largely self-employed, the criterion of seeking work may be relaxed in the definition of unemployment. This relaxation of the definition shifts the focus of unemployment away from the individual and toward the labor market, as it presupposes that the labor market must provide adequate employment opportunities to require that people actively seek work.

The shift toward a more comprehensive understanding of unemployment that considers the structural factors that play out in the labor market and in society signal the need for a more objective term that envelopes the complexity of this social problem. The new term, “work disparities,” accomplishes what the word unemployment does not. First, in focusing on work disparities rather than the absence or not of employment, there is a presupposition in line with US ideals and values that most individuals are inherently self-sufficient and want to work. And if most individuals want to work, then other external factors, such as structural ones, must exist that keep them out of work. Second, it shifts the attention away from the question of whether or not the unemployed deserve public aid and toward the obstacles that prevent people from being employed. Disparity itself means a lack of equality, suggesting that obstacles exist that keep some people from equal access to employment. And, third, the term considers not just the status of employment, but the type and quality of it. Being employed is not enough for social well-being; the quality of work also plays an important role in the shaping of the problem.

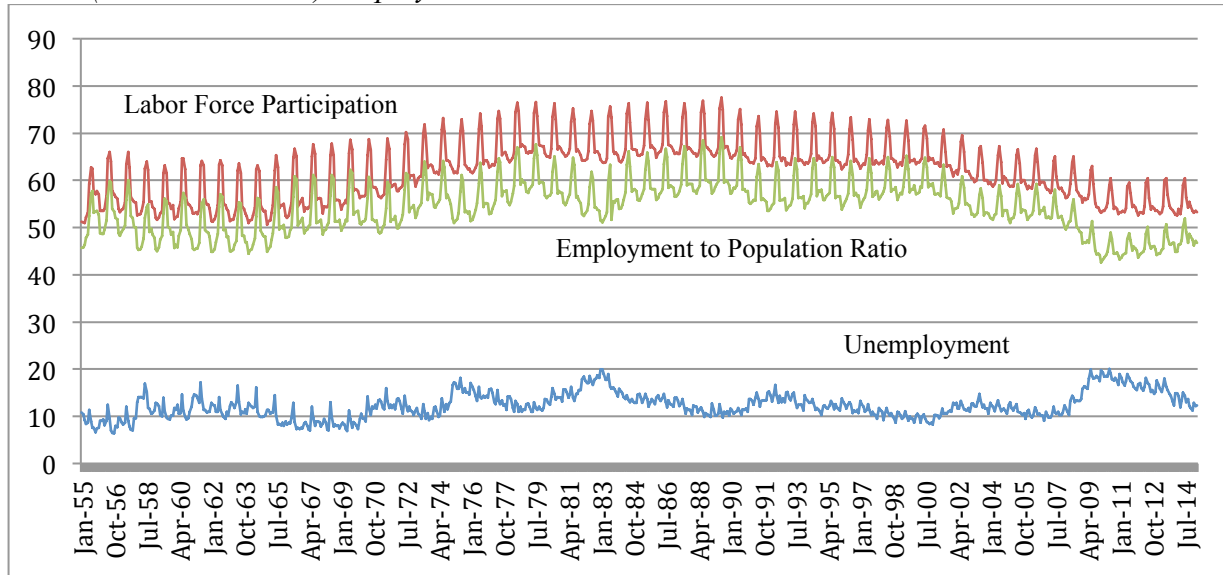
The term, work disparities, is similar to the term, health disparities, which does exist in the vernacular and, perhaps as a result, enjoys robust academic research and policymaking attention. The United States National Library of Medicine (2016) distinguishes between two different types of health disparities, both of which are applicable to the concept of work disparities. Healthcare disparities refer to differences in access to or availability of facilities and services. Similarly, there is an issue regarding the availability of employment opportunities for some communities that severely hampers the ability to find work. Health status disparities refer to the variation in rates of disease occurrence and disabilities between socioeconomic and/or geographically defined population groups. Similarly, as was previously discussed, the rates of employment status and work quality vary between socioeconomic and other types of groups.

### **Measuring the Problem**

The flaws in how the youth unemployment problem is defined indeed affect how the problem itself is measured and understood, as will be seen when comparing trends in the unemployment and civilian labor force participation rates, and the employment to population ratio. Since the onset of the 2007 economic downturn, the mass media has tended to posit the problem of youth unemployment as a new trend. Nonetheless, as Figure 1.1 illustrates, the unemployment rate—the number of unemployed individuals divided by the number of individuals in the civilian labor force—of 16 to 24 year olds over the last 60 years has not only had its share of drops and surges, it reached similar heights in the 1970s and 1980s. The unemployment rate reached its historic peak of 20% in June 2009, and it has not held below 10% for longer than a quarter since December 2000, long before the recession started. In spite of this worrying fact, that the unemployment rate has been steadily declining since 2010 makes it easy to argue that the youth unemployment problem does not deserve policy attention.

The employment to population ratio refutes this argument. It is a simpler measure that considers only the number of individuals who are employed relative to the non-institutionalized civilian population. In other words, the employment to population ratio captures the percentage of the total working-age population that is employed. As Figure 1 illustrates, the percentage of employed 16-24 year olds has continued to steadily decline since the 2007 Great Recession, indicating that the problem of youth unemployment not only has not disappeared, as the youth unemployment rate suggests, it has actually continued to worsen. At this rate, the employment to population ratio could soon reach the historic lows of the late 1960s. The ratio also suggests that there are many adolescents who have completely fallen out of the labor market who are not being accounted for by the unemployment rate because they are not actively seeking work.

Figure 1.1  
*Youth (16-24 Year-Olds) Employment Trends, 1955-2015*



The civilian labor force participation rate of 16 to 24 year olds supports this less optimistic trend, reinforcing the notion that defining the problem in terms of unemployment is ineffective. Calculated as the number of individuals in the labor force divided by the civilian population, the rate considers individuals who are either employed or unemployed out of the share of the non-institutionalized civilian population. As more youth enter the workforce, either by gaining a job or beginning to look for one, the civilian labor force participation rate increases. As Figure 1 illustrates, the rate has been steadily declining since the late 1970s, and the slope began a sharper decline beginning in the early 2000s, in spite of the fact that the American economy underwent its greatest expansion in history during the 1990s. This rate alone, one the US Government officially measures, demonstrates, again, that the problem of youth in the labor market is much more serious than the unemployment rate suggests.

Further work disparities in existing data can be seen when comparing the trends by ethnicity. Figure 1.2 illustrates the unemployment and civilian labor force participation rates for Blacks and Latinos compared to the overall youth rates for 13 available years. The rates of Black youth are consistently higher and lower, respectively, than the overall youth rates. It also appears that the gaps widened slightly beginning with the 2007 recession, suggesting that Black youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment compared to their average peer. The unemployment rate for Latinos has at times been lower than the youth average, except in the years after the onset of the 2007 recession. Likewise, their civilian labor force participation rate has at times been higher than the youth average. These trends reinforce the need for a turn to work disparities because, in spite of the fact that the employment status of Latino youth is not too dissimilar, and is sometimes better, than that of the average American adolescent, poverty is much more prevalent among this population. These rates suggest that Latino youth are faring well in the labor market, yet they remain relatively socioeconomically disadvantaged.

The unemployment and civilian labor force participation rates trends for males and females over the last 60 years also offer interesting insights that necessitate the need to move the problem beyond one of unemployment. As Figure 1.3 illustrates, the unemployment gap between males and females has widened significantly in favor of females at two points in time,

the 1980s and late 2000s. This suggests that adolescent females have a longer staying power in the labor market, especially in times of economic stress. The gap reached a historic high of 9.5% in January 2010, just at the official end of the recession, and males continue to have a higher unemployment rate than females. Females since the 1960s have been narrowing the gap with males in civilian labor force participation, and the gap has never been as narrow as it has been in recent years. These trends raise various questions regarding how the relationship with the labor market has changed in recent years for males and females, and for younger generations.

Figure 1.2

*Youth (16-24 Year-Olds) Employment Trends by Ethnicity, 2003-2015*

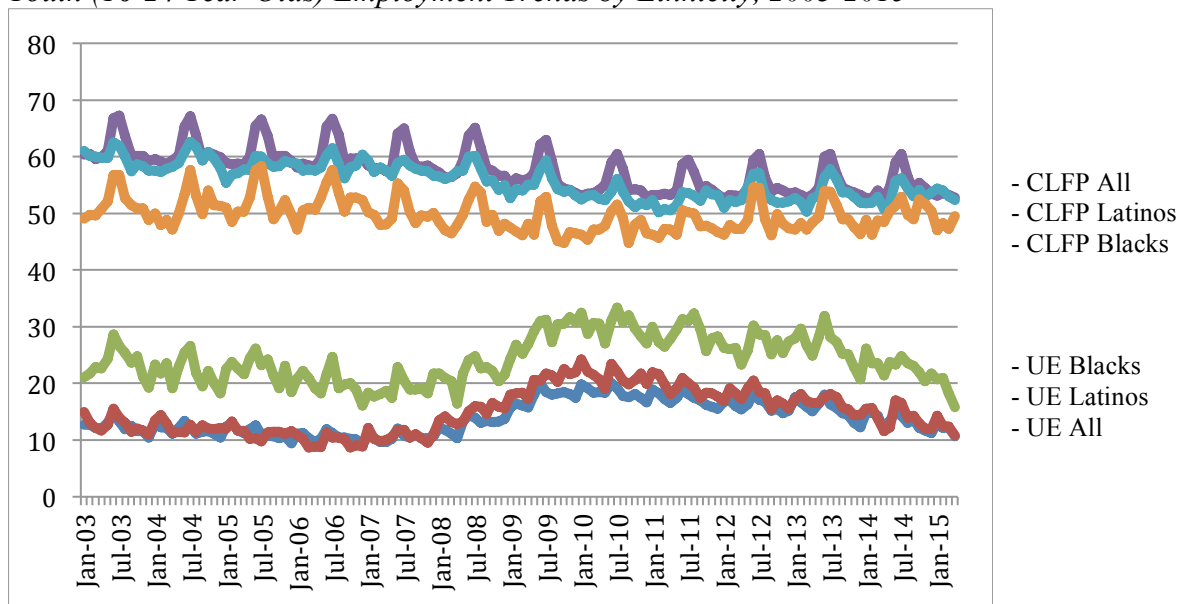
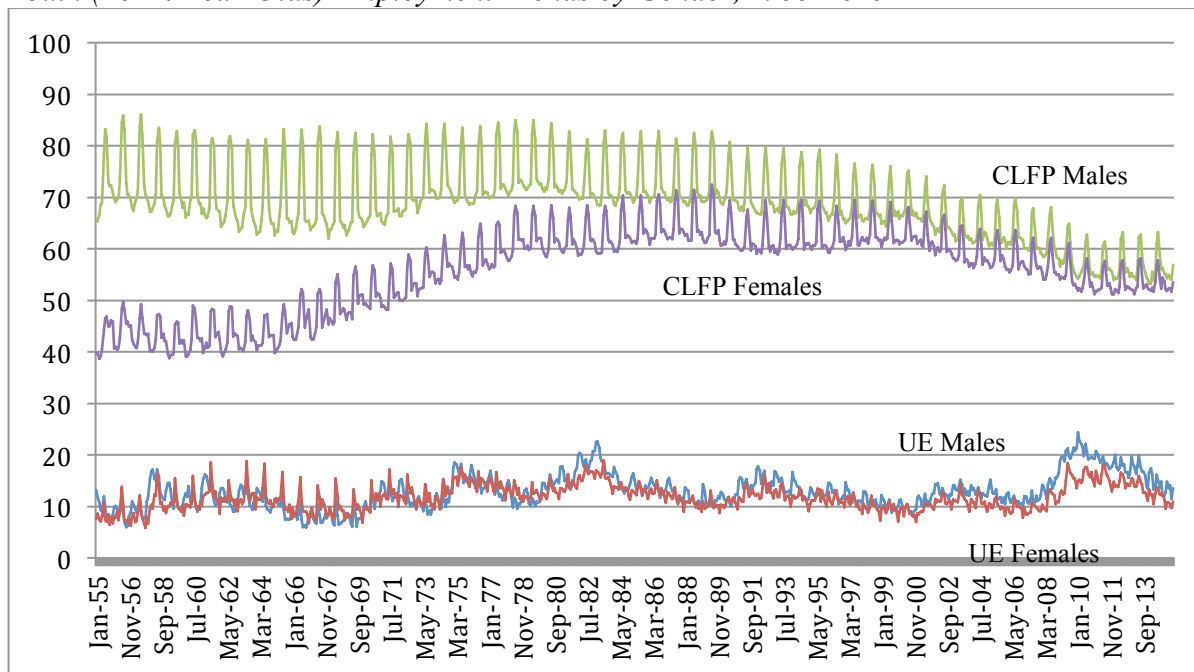


Figure 1.3

*Youth (16-24 Year-Olds) Employment Trends by Gender, 1955-2015*



## **Existing Theories of Unemployment**

**Economic theories.** The breadth of economic conceptualizations of unemployment can be placed along a spectrum, with some conceiving it as a product of a self-correcting economy that requires no government intervention on one end, and others who conceive of it as a product of complex socioeconomic structures that requires strong government intervention. These schools of thought carry implications for the problem of unemployment both in terms of how the problem is defined and in terms of the level of responsibility government has to alleviate it. The view that the economy is self-correcting purports that, whereas a natural rate of unemployment exists given drops in the business cycle, the economy cannot be blamed for the unemployment of individuals when the business cycle is high. As such, these economists define unemployment as an effect of a weak economy and expect it to increase with economic improvements. Perhaps as a result of this view, the US Government response to unemployment is often one that is focused on the needs of the economy rather than those of the unemployed. The notion, on the other hand, that there are inherent problems in the structures of the economy and society allows room for understanding the problem of unemployment as one of both economics and of individuals, and it calls on the government to address such deficiencies because they harm social well-being. This more complex conceptualization calls for a worthy term to the problem, such as work disparities.

Beginning with the school of thought that believes that the economy can correct itself, their philosophical foundation lies in Say's Law (Breit & Ransom, 2014), which postulates that supply creates its own demand. If the supply of labor exceeds its demand, then wages will drop, and if the demand for labor exceeds its supply, then wages will increase. As such, it is wages that should fluctuate, not the availability of employment. Adam Smith (1776) is perhaps the earliest proponent of this economic view, and he contended that under free competition, owners of resources would use them most profitably, resulting in an equal rate of return in equilibrium for all uses. As such, nothing more than the market is required to achieve full employment.

David Ricardo, a reader of Smith's work, and John Stuart Mill carried forth Smith's ideas by adding some complexity to their conceptualization of labor. Ricardo's theory of wages (1817) argues that because labor is simply another commodity that can be purchased and sold, it has a natural market price: that which is necessary for people to subsist and procreate. Again, the positing of the demand for labor as a naturally occurring phenomenon nullified for Ricardo a place for government intervention in the economy. Even when economists such as Mill further complicated the concept of labor by regarding it not as a commodity but as an investment in future employment (1848), the end result was an inverse linear relationship between wages and the supply of labor. According to Mill, it is the competition among workers that both brings down wages and keeps some workers out of employment, all of which could be resolved under labor supply and demand equilibrium. Unemployment, therefore, remained a simple and straightforward phenomenon for both of these thinkers.

The work of Friedrich Hayek (1948) doubled down on the thesis that only in a free market is equilibrium between labor demand and supply possible by adding that government intervention in the economy actually contributes to unemployment. Writing in large part in response to the creation of the welfare state in the United Kingdom, which included strong government intervention to keep unemployment at a minimum, he argued that government policies to combat unemployment would inevitably worsen the overall state of the economy. Because the best tool government has to keep unemployment low is to increase the money supply, such efforts lead to increased inflation, which in turn negatively impacts job creation.

Milton Friedman (1977) also leveraged this relationship between unemployment and inflation (known as the Phillips curve) to posit that a natural rate of unemployment exists, and that government intervention could only increase employment above this rate and only for so long as inflation was accelerating. Whereas Friedman's work marked the beginning of the acceptance that the market is not perfect and that lasting frictions could lead to unemployment in the long-term, he maintained the liberal economic view that there is very little that government can do about correcting this. For both Friedman and Hayek, the best unemployment policy was one that does not interfere with the natural business cycle, which ignores the notion that government could still address unemployment, such as by enhancing workers' employability.

The research of John B. Taylor (1979) best illustrates current notions of a simpler conceptualization of unemployment. Grounded in the understanding that government actions to alleviate unemployment are limited, he has provided specific guidelines known as the Taylor rule for government responses to changes in inflation, economic output, and other conditions to ensure that intervention does not worsen unemployment. Writing during the inflation shocks of the 1970s, a key stipulation of the Taylor rule is that the nominal interest rate should be increased by no more than one percentage for each one-percent rise in inflation. Privy to the use of new econometric methods and technology, as exemplified by the specificity of the Taylor rule, Taylor has kept alive the notion that the market itself remains the best solution for unemployment.

Joseph Schumpeter's work (1947) can be placed somewhere more toward the end of the spectrum that attributes the concept of unemployment to the market. His theory of creative destruction argues that innovation is the engine for the generation of new and more jobs, and that unemployment is a result of the lack of innovation. As entrepreneurs innovate a new product or a new way of doing business, they receive investments to make these innovations possible, which result in a new demand for labor. Unemployment, then, is a natural byproduct of the cycle of innovation and technological change, and where the labor market is in that cycle dictates the availability of employment.

Continuing further toward the end of the spectrum that views unemployment as a byproduct of the complex structures of the economy and society and that advocates for government intervention, the school of thought is rooted in the work of Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi (1847). Sismondi did not theorize on the economy given its complexities and instead sought to understand its problems for what they were. Sismondi's perspective was grounded in the belief that even if it was true that the economy and unemployment were inherently self-correcting, its short-term effects were too devastating on society for government to do nothing about it. He challenged the notion that economic equilibrium could be immediately achieved, positing that the market could not independently correct unemployment. He argued against laissez-faire capitalism and called on government to regulate the economy as necessary.

Thorstein Veblen (1904) carried forth Sismondi's belief that government can promote employment and should address and intervene on behalf of the unemployed. His business enterprise theory argues that the friction between business and industry leads to problems in the labor market. Because the goal of business is to maximize profits even at the expense of the welfare of society, business actions are naturally bound to actualize labor market problems that go on to negatively impact society. Veblen thus treated the economy not as self-correcting, but as a set of collective actions with selfish interests that pay little to no heed to their negative impact on social welfare. This observation led Veblen to assert that business alone cannot manage and lead the labor market, and that government has a responsibility to regulate the economy and ensure the welfare of society, including through the provision of employment.

John R. Commons (1934) continued the tradition of treating the economy and the labor market as complex and multidimensional, and, in doing so, of placing the responsibility of unemployment on government. Similarly to Veblen, Commons postulated that the economy was defined by the collective actions of institutions, and that, as with all collective actions, conflicts of interest with their own effects would naturally arise. In supporting such a definition of the economy, he believed that government could craft legislation that could correct the imperfections of the collective actions and ensure conditions that create social and economic change. Commons' teachings were very influential in the drafting of Wisconsin's worker's compensation program, which was the first of its kind in the United States. The legislation itself exemplified his argument that legislation could make the economy work for all of society's members.

Perhaps no modern economist best embodies the idea that unemployment is complex and that government should aid the unemployed better than John Maynard Keynes. For Keynes (1936), unemployment was an involuntary phenomenon that arose from the deficiency of aggregate demand. When investors believe the future economy will be unfavorable, they invest less in the market, which results in businesses employing less people. Conversely, when expectations about the future of the economy are favorable, investors invest more, and employment rises. Because of this central argument that private interests are what indirectly drive cyclical unemployment, Keynes was a staunch supporter of government intervention in the labor market to assuage the problem of unemployment, and Keynesians today continue to support efforts to stabilize the business cycle to improve employment opportunities.

Modern Keynesian economists such as Joseph Stiglitz have taken the tenets of Keynes' argumentation further to explain why full employment cannot be achieved in equilibrium. Stiglitz (2006) posited that market failure rather than market equilibrium is the norm because private sector decisions often lead to inefficient macroeconomic outcomes, so government can therefore almost always improve upon the market's resources allocation. In other words, for a market to be resourceful and ensure employment, strong government intervention is necessary. The argument that the market is imperfect extends the blame of unemployment away from individuals and calls on government to work to ensure that people can find employment.

No economic conceptualization of unemployment is more critical of the structure of the labor market and more protective of marginalized workers than Marxist and neo-Marxist thought. Grounded in the writings of Karl Marx (1867), Marxists and neo-Marxists contend that capitalism necessitates unemployment because it provides capitalists with a reserve army of labor that allows them to easily replace workers, to keep wages low, and to maintain control of the labor force. Writing during the rise of the industrial revolution, Marx also noted that this reserve army of labor would expand with increases in industrialization and automation, as labor itself became less necessary for the production of goods and profits. Furthermore, government policies that protected and bolstered capitalism at the sake of labor contributed to the resulting disparities between and within classes of workers. As workers lose labor market power, they lose the ability to unite and form a collective class struggle that could reset this imbalance. Neo-Marxists such as Harry Braverman (1974) and Ulrich Beck (2000) have pointed out, as Marx predicted, that workers in more recent years have in fact been forced to surrender their agency as the use of technology has increased and the demand for their labor has decreased. Beck further contends that globalization has impacted this phenomenon, and that the future labor market will consist of few winners at the top, and precarious employees, the majority unskilled poor, and people no longer needed in the labor market at the bottom. Such work disparities are thus expected to increase, reinforcing the need for such a conceptualization of unemployment.

**Psychological theories.** Psychologists have contributed to the adding of complexity to the conceptualization of unemployment by highlighting the fact that people's minds are themselves complex and that people's choices are what in the end drive unemployment. Marie Jahoda's (1971, 1982) latent deprivation theory posits that people experience psychological distress from unemployment because it deprives them of the latent functions that employment provides. These functions include time structure, purposefulness, participation, contacts and regular shared experiences outside the family, information about personal identity, a link with collective purpose, and enforced activity. Jahoda's theory emphasizes both the social aspects that come with a job and the conceptualization of individuals as reactive—rather than proactive—agents. Because of the latent effects of unemployment, psychological distress places people at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, which Jahoda contends arises out of the deterioration of activities such as cognitive performance, motivation, and perceptions of self-worth. Unemployment is as much a psychological and human condition as it is an economic one, and people work for reasons more fundamental than financial ones. As such, work disparities emerge not just from changes in the economy, but from the very choices people make given their psychological needs.

Similarly, David Fryer's (1986, 1997) agency restriction theory posits that unemployment has detrimental effects on individuals' psychological well-being because it restricts their ability to exercise their personal agency. The theory assumes that people are fundamentally proactive and independent given that human beings by their very nature are active agents who seek to organize and structure their own lives, to assert themselves, and to make plans for the future. A lack of employment weakens these human characteristics because it robs people of personal agency vis-à-vis the loss of income, and because unemployment stimulates feelings of shame and degradation, all of which combine to make it harder for the individual to regain employment. Furthermore, because the extent to which people's employment, income, and personal agency are tied to one other vary, some individuals are at a higher risk of losing a sense of personal agency from unemployment, leading to work disparities. Halvorsen (Ervasti & Venetoklis, 2010) has honed in on this in building on Fryer's model, adding that the unemployed try to find various ways of coping with the loss of employment, and that the extent to which they succeed depends on various personal, social, and economic resources. Unemployment, then, is not experienced equally across individuals, and those whose entire income and personal agency depend on their current job are more likely to be disproportionately affected by it.

Agency restriction theory parallels the incentive theory of motivation, which suggests that people are motivated to do things because of external rewards (Blanchard, Bean, & Münchau, 2006). In essence, people are motivated to go to work each day for the monetary reward of being paid. In the face of unemployment, it is the motivation to regain the lost external reward that drives people back into the labor market. Opponents of unemployment insurance often leverage the tenets of incentive theory to argue that people are unemployed because they lack the external motivation to engage in work and improve their personal income and standard of living. In other words, the level of well-being among the unemployed who receive government benefits may be sufficiently high to discourage them from searching for a new job and reentering the labor market (Nickell, Nunziata, & Ochel, 2005). Mortensen (1977) further added that the unemployed who receive no benefits have an incentive to become reemployed more quickly and are more likely to seriously search for and accept a job. Incentive theory again adds complexity to the concept of unemployment and highlights the notion that neither its effects nor the motivations to seek employment are equal across individuals.



**Sociological theories.** The notion of work disparities is inherent in sociological research into unemployment given that the field focuses on the social and economic structures that define a society and how these disproportionately affect individuals and groups. One major sociological contribution comes from the work of Mark Granovetter (1973), who established that labor markets are also regulated socially by demonstrating that many people seeking employment make extensive use of social networks rather than of more formal mechanisms such as job advertisements. His theory rests on the argument that it is the weak ties that people have within their social networks that matter for finding employment because they create shorter paths with a greater number of people than do stronger ties. For example, whereas many communities in America are racially segregated, they remain connected through weak ties. It is these weak interracial ties, Granovetter concluded, that are effective in bridging the social distance between different members of society. Because weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups, they could be described as the real engine of networking and social exchanges that goes on to influence the labor market. Weak ties have likely become more expansive and important in today's globalized and highly interconnected world thanks to technology such as the Internet and social networking sites. Given the variation of weak ties between individuals and their importance to employment outcomes, it is easy to see how work disparities materialize.

William J. Wilson's (1985, 1996) work encompasses another important sociological conceptualization of unemployment, which considers not only the structure of social relations, but also at the space in which these structures exist. Wilson articulated in length and developed the work of John F. Kain on spatial mismatches and their impact on access to employment, especially as it relates to the disadvantaged and the ghetto underclass of major cities. Wilson's theory posits that job accessibility is at least partly reflected in the spatial arrangement of racially segregated residences in the United States, and that it is this spatial isolation that results in the loss of well-paying jobs, especially for less educated ethnic minorities in inner cities. He highlights the flight of both ethnic Whites and employers during the 1980s from the cities to the suburbs, leaving behind the poor and ethnic minorities who did not have the capital to follow with few to no employment opportunities. Such social conditions have given rise to a drop in public school quality and to gang and various other forms of criminal activities, all of which reinforces the dire socioeconomic conditions in which people live and their work disparities. Wilson calls this the cycle of deprivation, which confines people to a social structure with few social mobility opportunities and long-term unemployment.

Other sociologists have applied a social structural lens to the labor market itself to argue that the problem of unemployment is increasingly becoming one of changes to the system of societal values that decides how employers and employees share the rewards of their business and labor. In their historical analysis of the structure of the US labor market, Chris and Charles Tilly (1998) argued that the employer-worker relationship has driven the changes to the labor market, and that the shift toward rewarding the employer more at the expense of the worker is what has placed an increasing portion of American workers in a precarious place in which neither their current nor future work is guaranteed. Such a change, Seymour M. Lipset (1986) argued, has occurred because of the weakening of the post-Great Depression national values that gave rise to a social contract reinforced by laws, norms, regulations, and worker power that allowed for the sharing of economic rewards. The national values that used to ensure a more equitable distribution of the rewards of the labor market have given way to modified ones that have ensured the rise of work disparities, especially those based on class and skills.

## **The Disproportionate Effects of Unemployment**

### **The economic effects**

**Ethnicity.** Existing research indicates that Blacks and Latinos face longer periods of and lose out more in wages from unemployment than other ethnic groups. The Urban Institute (2014) found that the Great Recession significantly exacerbated the wage gap that had been growing between 1983 and 2008 between Blacks and Latinos and other ethnic groups. While not a measure of a direct impact of unemployment, unemployment most likely played a significant role in the wage loss because it correlates highly with recessions. When out of a job, Black youth face higher unemployment duration spells than their White counterparts (Baffoe-Bonnie & Ezeala-Harrison, 2005), which compounds the fact that Black families on average have lower incomes than White families (Corcoran, 1995). Research suggests that Black youth are more likely to face longer periods of unemployment because of their limited access to ties of social worth (Smith, 2005), and because an increase in unemployment is associated with a decrease in their job access, whereas the same is not true for Whites (Fernandez & Su, 2004). Even Black and Latino college graduates lose out more economically compared to other ethnic groups, as they are twice as likely to have student loan debt (O'Shaughnessy, 2013).

**Gender.** The literature suggests that whereas females are more likely than males to quickly reenter the labor market after a bout of unemployment, their speedier return to the labor market often comes with lower-paying jobs that contribute to the overall gender wage differential. Baffoe-Bonnie and Ezeala-Harrison (2005) found that the incidence of unemployment accounted for 14% of the wage differential between males and females, with the duration of unemployment accounting for another 40%. They added that males were more likely to hold out longer for higher-paying jobs because the positive impact of human capital and work experience on the wages of males was greater than that of females. Other research has found that females were more likely than males to accept jobs closer to home (Fernandez & Su, 2004), suggesting that females limit their job opportunities more than males. Even when females do migrate to areas with higher employment opportunities, they remain more likely to accept low-salary and low-status jobs (Hammarstrom, 1994). Males are at an economic disadvantage compared to females in that, because they are more likely to hold out longer for higher-paying jobs, they are at a higher risk of slipping into bouts of long-term unemployment.

**Socioeconomic status.** A large body of research indicates that growing up poor in America predisposes youth to negative employment experiences that lead to disadvantageous economic consequences. Growing up in a low-income family is associated with large reductions in adult men's labor supply, hourly wages, annual earnings, and family incomes (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994). Corcoran and Adams (1993) found that growing up in a low-income family reduced hourly wages by over 30% and annual earnings by more than 40%, even with extensive family, neighborhood, and labor market controls. The impact of class on youth job prospects is certainly not negligible, as empirical studies have demonstrated that emerging adults were more successful in establishing themselves in the labor market when familial financial assistance was available (Schoeni & Ross, 2005), and that young adults in the top quartile of family incomes received three times more material assistance than children in the bottom quartile (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, & Carroll, 2012). Further class differences may also exist when it comes to acquiring employment. Furnham (1984) conducted a study comparing the job prospects of working class and middle-class youth and found ten significant class differences that placed poor youth at a job search disadvantage, including less knowledge of the job market, smaller employment networks, and fewer known job-hunting strategies.

**Education.** Major differences in the economic consequences of unemployment also exist based on educational attainment. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center study, young college graduates outperformed their peers with less education on virtually every measure of economic well-being and job attainment, including earnings, job satisfaction, and share of full-time employment. In 2012, the median income for college-educated youth in their mid to late twenties was \$45,500 and their unemployment rate was 3.8%. In contrast, the median income for the same age group with no college degree was \$29,000 and their unemployment rate was 5.8%. Whereas, proportionally, unemployed youth with a college degree lose more from unemployment simply because they earned more while employed, individually, the not college-educated have more to lose because they have smaller safety nets and hold lower amounts of human capital (O’Sullivan, Mugglestone, & Allison, 2014). Research has shown that the duration of unemployment spells is correlated with the accumulation of human capital (Baffoe-Bonnie & Ezeala-Harrison, 2005), and that early school-leavers are less likely to reenter stable employment (Bosick, 2009). According to Pew’s analysis, millennial high school graduates on average spent 15% more time than their college graduate peers finding work.

**Summary.** These findings indicate that ethnic minority females from low-income families and with no college education probably face the toughest economic consequences from unemployment, and that males from similar backgrounds are likely at a higher risk of facing similar economic consequences for long periods of time. They also illustrate how the economic ramifications of being out of work can compound themselves based on various demographic factors, some of which, such as ethnicity and gender, are largely outside of people’s control. The disproportionate economic effects identified here further contribute to overall work disparities among youth not just early in their careers, but into their later adult lifetime.

#### **The psychological effects**

**Ethnicity.** The literature suggests that differences in psychological distress from unemployment are quite striking when comparing youth by ethnic group. Goldsmith, Veum, and Darity (1997) found that Black females with otherwise identical personal characteristics to White females and with equivalent labor force experiences and childhood environments had a significantly lower level of self-esteem while facing unemployment, suggesting that racial discrimination has damaging effects on ethnic minorities’ self-perceptions. These perceptions often lead to pervasive feelings of hopelessness, anger, and alienation, all of which are associated with high rates of unemployment in Black communities (Gibbs & Bankhead, 2000). Furthermore, Gloria and Hird (1999) found that White students reported higher career decision-making self-efficacy and lower trait anxiety than their ethnic minority peers, and that ethnic minorities exhibited little perceived control or influence over their potential work environments. Hackett and Byars (1996) and Hasford (2010) also found that ethnic minorities suffered from heightened career-related anxiety and feelings of uncertainty and frustration compared to Whites. Mexican-American youth, for example, have been found to experience psychological stress in reconciling their career aspirations with their cultural values (Flores & O’Brien, 2002).

**Gender.** The research suggests that females overall psychologically suffer more than males from unemployment, albeit males are at a higher risk of suffering long-term distress. Hammarstrom (1994) and Novo, Hammarstrom, and Janlert (2001) found that females were more susceptible to poor psychological consequences of unemployment, including life dissatisfaction and depressed mood, making them more likely to feel passive and isolated. These gender differences were more pronounced during times of economic recession, suggesting that females are even more vulnerable during times of high unemployment. In another gender

comparison study, Singer, Stacey, and Ritchie (2001) found that females placed more emphasis on the economic effects of unemployment than did males, which could explain why females tend to suffer more psychological distress and are more likely than males to quickly reenter the labor market. Nonetheless, some research argues that the younger generation of working males is becoming more psychologically susceptible to unemployment (Dudley, Kelk, Florio, Waters, Howard, & Taylor, 1998). Furthermore, whereas males may better maintain their level of self-esteem when exposed to joblessness compared to females, their perceptions of self-worth have been found to decline more drastically over the long-term (Goldsmith, Veum, & Darity, 1997).

***Socioeconomic status.*** A wide body of empirical research has found extensive differences in the psychological impact of unemployment based on socioeconomic status. Whelan (1994) analyzed the impact of individual socioeconomic indicators and found income to be the strongest variable associated with a lower depression score. A study on suicides among Australian youth found that most were from the working class, experienced high levels of unemployment, and were as a whole marginalized from their peers (Dudley, Kelk, Florio, Waters, Howard, & Taylor, 1998). Bolam and Sixsmith (2002) reported the loss of agency from the loss of wages as the main driver of psychological distress amongst low-income youth. Lowered self-esteem, feeling down, and a lack of confidence compounded financial difficulties even under relatively brief periods of unemployment. When controlling for variables representing financial strain, Ervasti and Venetoklis (2010) found that levels of subjective well-being converged significantly among both employed and unemployed youth, making financial strain the most important factor affecting psychological well-being in their study. Low-income people have also been found to take poverty and the loss of wages personally and to blame themselves for their inability to survive financially (Evans, 2012).

***Education.*** The body of research maintains that disparities exist in the psychological effects of unemployment based on educational attainment. Berchick, Gallo, Maralani, and Kasl (2012) found that every year of schooling after high school was associated with an eight percent standard deviation decrease in depressive symptoms, and that educational attainment and income were the only significant predictors of psychological distress. Youth who do not go to college have a much harder time coping with unemployment (Bolam & Sixsmith, 2002), in part because employment leads to personal growth even among school-leavers, whereas unemployment leads to maladjusted work expectations and outcomes (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984). Long-term unemployed boys without high school education have been found to react to unemployment with lethargy, restlessness, passivity, and resignation, and to be more likely to have thoughts of and to have attempted suicide (Hammarstrom, 1994). Nonetheless, youth with a college degree are not immune to mental distress from unemployment. Buckham (2007) found a number of negative perceptions among college graduates regarding the competitive job market and their lack of work experience, whereas Schaufeli and VanYperen (1992) found that psychological distress affected employment attainment even amongst college graduates.

***Summary.*** The psychological consequences of unemployment were mostly a product of the imbalance between the loss of income and perceptions of self-worth and social realities. A healthy socioeconomic status and high educational attainment are largely protective of this imbalance, whereas the internationalization of an ethnic minority status and the cultural pressures that accompany gender place members of these groups at a higher risk of mental distress. It is not surprising that unemployment is higher amongst Blacks and Latinos, males, adolescents from low-income families, and those with little education, as the psychological effects of unemployment on these communities engender additional challenges to reemployment.

### **The social effects**

**Ethnicity.** Ethnic minorities are at an employment disadvantage primarily because they are more likely to grow up in areas with higher crime and with poorer access to good education, healthcare, and capital (Gilliam, 2014). Approximately 20% of the unemployment gap between White and Latino male teenagers in inner cities has been associated with housing segregation (Ihlanfeldt & Sjoquist, 1993). Cromartie (2000) found higher in- and out-migration rates for Black and Latino non-metropolitan college graduates compared to Whites, suggesting that ethnic minorities have a more difficult time establishing themselves in their hometowns, where they have built-in access to family and community support. A lack of scarce work opportunities for many ethnic minorities means that unemployment is likely to lead to informal work that is often illegal or dangerous and that can perpetuate the cycle of crime and violence (Lopez, Graham, Reardon, Reyes, & Reyes, 2012). Ethnic minorities were found to be more likely to drink heavily (among heavy drinkers) than Whites and to be more responsive in their drinking habits to the unemployment cycle (Lo & Cheng, 2013). Furthermore, another study (Brenner, 1980) found that a one percent increase in the youth unemployment rate was associated with a seven percent increase in homicide deaths and a five percent increase in motor vehicle accidents.

**Gender.** Whereas both males and females report fewer somatic and substance abuse problems when they are employed, the literature has established that unemployment is more likely to predispose males to crime and to activities that may hinder them from alleviating their unemployment situation. Hammarstrom (1994) found that unemployed boys reported more symptoms related to poor eating and drinking habits, as well as more traffic accidents. Females have been found to be more likely to increase their tobacco consumption during times of unemployment, although males fared worse when it came to alcohol and substance abuse, crime involvement, furthering education, and migration (Brenner, 1980; Hammarstrom, Janlert, & Theorell, 1988; Janlert & Hammarstrom, 1992). Males have also been found to significantly increase the use of alcohol, cannabis, and other illicit drugs during unemployment, and a one percent increase in the youth unemployment rate has been associated with increases in robberies by 10%, aggravated assaults by three percent, and manslaughter by 13%. Males have also been found to be less likely to attempt to alleviate their unemployment status, either by considering a college education (Canny, 1995) or by migrating to areas with greater employment opportunities (Garasky, 2002).

**Socioeconomic status.** Youth from low-income families are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods that provide lower quality schools, fewer good role models, less social control, fewer job networks, and a higher prevalence of teenage gangs and criminal activity (Corcoran, 1995), all of which severely challenge stable employment. Canny (1995) found that youth from the lower social classes were less likely to intend to enter college, mainly because their families could not financially afford for them to postpone their entry into the labor market. Furthermore, Wilson (1996) found that joblessness was the most important of the structural conditions that affect the expectations of low-income people, followed by high concentrated poverty and a low proportion of middle class residents with ties to social capital. Parental financial assistance has been associated with health and well-being outcomes (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, & Carroll, 2012), which helps explain why young boys and girls from disfavored social environments who already have the highest risk of being unemployed also have the highest probability of having poor health and of engaging in health risk behavior (Hammarstrom, 1994). Davis (2009) found that unemployed youth with higher poverty were more likely to have sex with multiple partners and to be less likely to use birth control.

**Education.** The literature shows that unemployed youth without a college degree are more likely to expect to migrate, to participate in health-damaging behaviors, to partake in drug use, and to be involved in criminal activities, severely limiting their ability to reintegrate themselves into the labor market following unemployment. Kodrzycki (2001) found that successful mobility increased with educational attainment, yet early school-leavers were also found to be more likely to expect to migrate (Canny, 1995), suggesting that school-leavers are less likely to find employment and easily transition into new environments. School-leavers were also more likely to participate in health-damaging behaviors (Barrowman, Nutbeam, & Tresidder, 2001). Americans with a high school education or less make up 40% of the US population yet account for 55% of the nation's smokers (Dwyer-Lindgren, Mokdad, Srebotnjak, Flaxman, Hansen, & Murray, 2014), and Bolam and Sixsmith (2002) reported that youth who have dropped out of further education experienced more problematic drug use than any other group. Furthermore, exposure to unemployment following dropping out of school was associated with increased risks of juvenile offending (Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood, 1997) and more serious types of crimes (Nardi, Arimatea, Giunto, Lucarelli, & Nocella, 2013).

**Summary.** The social consequences of unemployment clearly illustrate how the very communities in which unemployment is more prevalent are also the ones that face the most serious social obstacles to reemployment, reinforcing the notion that unemployment is both a cause and effect of poor social conditions. The extent to which the social effects feed back into the problem of unemployment depends on various social factors, and, as the literature shows, ethnic minorities, males, youth from low-income families, and uneducated youth are the most vulnerable. That these groups lack the social resources needed to withstand the impact of unemployment explains why they are disproportionately affected by its consequences.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to push for a reconceptualization of unemployment to one of work disparities. As the previous sections have suggested, such a concept may be new, but it is not entirely different from how most research has sought to understand the problem of unemployment. The existence of the term "health disparities" illustrates an acceptance that some life outcomes are deeply complex, and that how people are disproportionately affected is what lies at the heart of some social problems. The US Government already utilizes the concept of employment to population ratio to gain a more complex and honest understanding of how youth are struggling in the labor market. The evolution of economic conceptualizations of unemployment and psychological and sociological schools of thought all reinforce the notion that work disparities are an inherent characteristic of the labor market. And, finally, a review of how unemployment disproportionately affects individuals based on ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment reinforces the need for such a concept.

What emerges from the concept of work disparities is a model that proposes that some youth begin the path toward work at a disadvantage and face more obstacles simply because of the demographic variables they gained at birth; that when the economy is weak and unemployment increases, even more obstacles emerge in their path toward work; and that the compounding of these challenges incrementally makes it more difficult for them to continue their path toward employment or reemployment. The concept of unemployment would have policymakers believe that this model begins with a weak economy and ends with an improved one, and that those who remain outside of it are to be blamed for the problem. But the understanding of the problem must be deepened in a way that will allow government to alleviate it, especially as work disparities widen over the coming years with the changing work order.

## **Chapter 2: Applying Identity Theory to Youth Work Disparities**

In moving away from conceptualizing the problem of youth unemployment toward a notion that focuses on work disparities, a question that emerges is how to best approach finding answers to how these differences play out within and between individuals. In other words, what is it about being White or Black or Latino, male or female, from a wealthy family or a poor family, or having a college education or not having one, that leads some adolescents to accept roles, make choices, and exhibit behaviors that are conducive toward reinforcing their given work disparities, whereas others do not? After all, although work disparities are more prevalent amongst certain populations, members from such communities do manage to break the cycle and excel in the labor force. Likewise, belonging to a population that tends to benefit more from work disparities does not guarantee all members successful work outcomes. This is especially true for today's adolescents, for they have grown up in a globalized world that has allowed social changes to transcend economic ones, and allowed people's personal lives and their relationship with the world to take the front seat in the determination of both life and work outcomes (Midgley, 2007). As people's choices take center stage in life outcomes, the individual rises as the pertinent factor for understanding youth work disparities.

Identity theory emerges as an ideal framework for understanding the individual choices that perpetuate youth work disparities given its focus on the individual and of its treatment of occupations as extensions of individuals. Identity theory treats identities as self-cognitions tied to roles, and through them, to positions in organized social relationships (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Because roles are intertwined with identities, what one does cannot be separated from who one is (Stets & Burke, 2000). To study and understand the development of a person's identity is to study and understand his work roles, choices, and behaviors at any point in his lifetime. The aim of this chapter is to introduce identity development theory and the construct of an occupational identity to the study of youth work disparities. Such an application is grounded in the theory-driven argument that identity and work are mutually reinforcing. In other words, work impacts identity development, and identity development in turn influences work outcomes. In short, in turning to the study of the individual as an understanding of youth work disparities, the identity of individuals cannot be ignored, for it drives their work roles, choices, and behaviors that in turn impact work disparities.

Identity development theory allows one to consider the development of an occupational identity across the lifespan, not just at one point in time. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to gain a thorough understanding of the factors that help youth develop and achieve an occupational identity. Such an approach will help answer why youth who belong to marginalized groups, especially uneducated ethnic minorities from low-income families, are at a higher risk of facing unemployment and of having poor work outcomes compared to educated adolescents from high-income families. As this chapter will explain, the answers to this lie in more than just an economic understanding of the relationship between the market and youth labor. The chapter continues as follows: (a) it provides the theoretical foundations of identity theory; (b) it continues with a discussion of occupational identity to explain its applicability to the problem of youth work roles, choices, and behaviors; (c) it discusses how occupational identity is theorized to develop across Erikson's five stages of pre-adult development; (d) it presents a review of the occupational and vocational identity literature; (e) it discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature; and (f) it concludes with implications for research into youth work disparities. Undergirding this chapter is the notion that work is not an outcome at a point in time. Rather, work is a fluid part of people's identity development process.

## Theoretical Foundations

Erikson (1950, 1968) defined identity as something the ego does in integrating the various complexities of social life with the goal of making sense of the world and of one's place in it (cited in McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2014). In other words, to be born is to be embedded in a social matrix in which mutual regulation between individuals and society takes place, and an identity is the byproduct of this regulation that then drives the meanings individuals attribute to the happenings around them. Identity theory breaks down individuals into three distinct yet overlapping parts: (a) the biological or physical aspects with which individuals are born (ego identity), (b) the psychological aspects that emerge from social relations and contexts (personal identity), and (c) the group aspects that inform individuals of their membership in society and reinforce their sense of who they are (social identity; Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). It is important to note that these three forms of identity cannot be conceived of without the others. Instead, the three interact on a daily basis, allowing individuals to make salient whichever identity schema is relevant to any given social context. As such, individuals house many identity schemas and are not necessarily the exact same person at different points in time (Quante, 2007).

Ego identity is the aspect of identity that is the most fundamental, the most consistent, and the most resistant to change (Schwartz, 2001). It drives lower mental functions, which are genetic, inherited, unmediated, and involuntary (Swartz, 2009). Because of these elements, it is often conceived of as the innate or genetic characteristics that make a person who he or she is. Ego identity would exist within an individual even if that individual were the last person on the planet. As such, ego identity can be summarized by the term, "I." According to Erikson (1950, 1968), ego identity *develops* throughout the life course in a series of eight stages, each requiring achievement for the ego to be able to develop successfully in the proceeding stage. Furthermore, attaining an occupation is integral to the overall achievement of an ego identity (Muuss, 1995), suggesting that individuals with an unachieved ego identity are likely to have higher job choice conflict, and vice versa.

Personal identity emerges from the intersection of the ego identity and social context (Schwartz, 2001). It drives higher mental functions, which are socially acquired, are mediated by social meanings, and are voluntarily controlled (Swartz, 2009). These elements are rooted in symbolic interaction theory, which stipulates that humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to them, and the meanings that arise from the social interaction with others and society (Mead, 1934). Personal identity modifies these meanings through an interpretive process to deal with the social interactions individuals encounter. Personal identity can be summarized by the concept of "me," which emerges because of the existence of others: "me" is not you, nor he, nor she. Because personal identity emerges from the ego and social relations, it is often conceived of as a sense of self built over time as a person embarks on and pursues projects or goals that are property of that person (Hitlin, 2003). Individuals store, categorize, and organize information about themselves within their personal identity, which they use as a basis for future judgments and decisions (Markus, 1977). In effect, the goals, behaviors, and beliefs of individuals, including those related to employment, are not arbitrary or haphazard; they are extensions of the self and of the sense of who individuals are in relation to others.

Social identity emerges from the built-in tendency human beings have to categorize themselves into groups, which in turn alters the identity of each individual group member given their membership (Tajfel, 1986). Group membership affects individuals' self-concept in various ways: it informs individuals about who they are and who they are not; it provides both positive and negative self-esteem, depending on society's perceptions of the group; and it sets identity



boundaries that inform an individual of his or her distinctiveness from others, be it positive or negative. Social identity can be summarized by the term, “we,” which presumes that an individual has found inner solidarity with the group ideals (Schwartz, 2001). Parallel to social identity construction is the concept of self-categorization theory, which posits that individuals form psychological groups by forming shared social categorizations of themselves and of others (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). These categorizations become bases for attitudes and subsequent behaviors in any given situation, including those related to work. Social identity theory further posits that when an individual's group membership status becomes salient in a given social situation, they act first on the basis of group categorizations, not of self (Goar, 2007), making social identity highly important to the study of individuals and work choices.

Figure 2.1 illustrates a unified model of identity. Identity can be conceived of as a constellation with a dense core that represents the largely immutable ego identity. It is from this inner core that a personal identity emerges, as illustrated by the flare-like beams that emanate from the dense core. These beams continually vary in shape and length as individuals internalize meanings from social experiences into their identity. The larger beams represent schemas ranked higher in the overall identity, which are more likely to be made salient in a given social situation. These constellations exist and are continually in motion within a larger universe, the size of which depends on each individual's social space. Within these universes, each constellation seeks to identify with others based on the hierarchy of identity schemas, which are themselves reshaped given both in- and out-group membership experiences. This process of a fluctuating overall identity peaks during adolescence, making adolescence a unique period in the identity development process. During this time, a new form of identity emerges in which childhood identifications are altered to produce a new identity (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010).

Figure 2.1  
*Illustration of a Unified Theory of Identity*



### **Toward an Understanding of Occupational Identity**

The notion of an occupational identity (or, interchangeably, vocational identity) dates back to Erikson's work (1950, 1968) on the stages of psychosocial development. In his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson (1950, 1968) proposed that choosing an occupation is essential to the achievement of an identity during adolescence. Conversely, it is the inability to settle on an occupational identity that most disturbs young people and prevents them from achieving their adult identity. As technological advances transform the labor market and extend the period between school life and the world of work, Erikson argued, the psychosocial development stage of adolescence has become an even more critical and conscious period for youth. The period of adolescence is thus marked by the challenge that youth face in needing to mutually regulate their sense of who they are and the capacities they have acquired in infancy and childhood with the roles and skills work and adulthood demand of them.

Occupational identity is not so much a concept as it is a construct integral to the formation of an achieved identity (Vondracek, 1992). It is interwoven with all of the elements of an achieved identity, and, as such, its development can be traced back to birth. As Erikson (1968) postulated, all elements of identity, including the ones that are solidified in later stages of life, are branches rooted to a greater whole and to a single starting point. Occupational identity is not static, but fluid, dynamic, and developmental (Vondracek, 1992). It does not emerge haphazardly, but rather, it develops across the lifespan. Its importance to an integrated identity grows and reaches a critical point during adolescence, when youth are expected to independently project themselves imaginatively into the future via a possible occupational path (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). In short, without an occupational identity, there is no achieved overall identity, and without an achieved overall identity, there is no psychosocial transition into adulthood.

According to Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993), “occupational identity refers to an individual’s positive assessment of the occupation he/she is engaged in, and it indicates the importance of the occupational role to the individual’s self-identity” (p. 539). Occupations are not merely actions, but roles that are extensions of people’s identity (Super, 1957). In other words, identity drives the reasons why individuals choose to perform their occupational roles (Vondracek, 1991). Holland, Johnston, and Asama (1993) defined vocational identity, on the other hand, as “the possession of a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, and talents” (p. 1). This definition relates to an overall identity in that attaining a vocational identity requires a clear sense of self. One cannot exist without the other. The literature uses the two terms interchangeably in spite of the slight difference in definition because both terms ultimately convey the isomorphic relationship between identity and occupational roles and behaviors.

A significant amount of research has found empirical support for the correlation between high occupational identity status and mature identity formation (Anderson & Mounts, 2012; Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Dipeolu, Sniatecki, Storlie, & Hargrave, 2013; Healy & Mourton, 1985; Hirschi, 2010, 2011a; Robitschek & Cook, 1999; Savickas, 1985; Vondracek, 1995), substantiating Erikson’s theory that choosing an occupation is essential to the achievement of an identity. Skorikov and Vondracek (1998), for example, found amongst seventh and 12th grade students a developmental progression in vocational identity characterized by an increase in the proportion of students classified as identity achieved. Adolescents with a developed occupational identity are more mature, possess more constructive beliefs about career decisionmaking, and are free of disabling psychological problems (Holland, Johnston, & Asama, 1993), all of which are key components of an achieved adult identity.

Occupational identity has also been found to precede more advanced statuses in other identity domains, including the political, religious, and lifestyle spheres (Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998), elevating its importance to psychosocial development. Occupational identity is typically stronger than other identity domains because occupations are a primary way to communicate one’s identity and provide contexts for identity, because many interpersonal relationships are linked directly to the work role, and because most families are oriented toward work (Mortimer, Lam, & Lee, 2014; Phelan & Kinsella, 2009). Embedded within these suppositions lie the assumptions that every adolescent has an opportunity to make work choices and that work is a contained part of everyone’s lives (Swanson, 2013). To capture these challenges and to gain a thorough understanding of an individual’s occupational identity, it is vital to study its development across the early life stages, not just at the point of adolescence.

### **Occupational Identity Development Across Erikson’s Pre-Adult Stages**

**Stage 1: Infancy and the mutuality of recognition.** Encompassing the first 18 months of life, the psychosocial challenge infants must overcome to lay a healthy foundation for future development is to develop a sense of basic trust (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Infants' first social achievement is their willingness to trust that their maternal figure, who has become an inner certainty and an outer predictability to their needs, will consistently and continuously care for them, even when that person is out of sight. It is with a sense of trust that infants begin the lifelong journey of mutual regulation between inner capacities and outer providers to cope with needs, providing meaning to their and to others' actions. It is this mutuality that encompasses the earliest sense of identity. The amount of trust derived during infancy depends on the quality of the maternal relationship, and without it, or with a weak sense of it, the dystonic outcome is likely to be anxiety, self-debasement, and identity confusion in adolescence (Muuss, 1995).

**Stage 2: Early childhood and the will to be oneself.** It is from a firmly developed early trust that children between the ages of 18 months and 3.5 years begin to develop autonomy and a sense that they are independent individuals who can guide their own futures (Erikson, 1950, 1968). The matter of mutual regulation between children and their parental figures faces its severest test during this stage, as children begin to gain large-scale power over themselves and others. The experience of developing a sense of autonomy of free choice must be gradual and well guided, and parents' firmness must encourage healthy exploration and teach self-control. With excessive parental support or poor family functioning, children may not learn how to regulate experiences of shame and doubt as they explore their developing free wills, which could lead to a loss of self-esteem and self-worth, and to neuroticism and self-consciousness. Too much firmness may lead them to become brash and defiant adolescents, and they may struggle to connect their childhood personality and experiences with a new adult identity (Muuss, 1995).

**Stage 3: Childhood and the anticipation of roles.** It is out of a sense of autonomy that children by the end of their third year begin to face the new mutual regulation challenge of developing a sense of parental responsibility and gaining insight into the institutions, functions, and roles that will permit their responsible adult participation (Erikson, 1950, 1968). During this stage, children increase their initiative and sense of direction and must learn who they can become, to establish wider goals, and to expand their imagination to many roles, including based on gender norms. Family helps form these basic avenues of vigorous action, teaching children by example their capacities and the direction and purpose of their adult tasks. In doing so, children increase their conscientiousness, self-observation, self-guidance, and self-punishment, and they begin to moderate their own response to their early failures. According to Muuss (1995), children with low levels of initiative are marked by immobilization and an overdependence on adults.

**Stage 4: School age and task identification.** From the initiative stage of development, children enter school, and wider society becomes significant in influencing their understanding of meaningful roles in the economy (Erikson, 1950, 1968). As children begin to develop a sense of industry, they seek to positively identify with those who know things and know how to do things, and they attach themselves with teachers and other adults to imitate occupations they can grasp. It is in this stage that they begin to develop a sense of work duty, skills, principles, and diligence. They are eager to become a productive unit, to win recognition by producing things, and to begin to be a worker and potential provider. Their heightened awareness of wider society also allows them to recognize how factors such as skin color or parents' background affect their propensity for feeling worthy. Inadequate development during this stage can lead to adolescent

feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, and to estrangement from self, tasks, and skills (Muuss, 1995).

**Stage 5: Adolescence.** According to Erikson (1950, 1968), the establishment of a healthy relationship with the world of industry and the beginning of sexual maturity together lead to the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence. In their search for a new sense of mutual regulation given these rapid physical and psychosocial changes, adolescents are challenged to independently integrate a meaningful identity in which past, present, and future are unified (Muuss, 1995). Their confusion over their sense of self and their quest for self-exploration leads them to become overly concerned with what they appear in the eyes of others and to overidentify with cliques and crowds. The commitment to a system of values and ideologies that they will carry into adulthood also begins to develop during this stage. The major danger is role diffusion, and it is primarily the inability to settle on an occupational identity that leads to such an outcome (Erikson, 1950). Adolescents who do not achieve an identity are likely to have unrealistic work goals, to suffer depression, and to withdraw into adverse behaviors and habits (Muuss, 1995).

### The Literature Review

Research has largely treated occupational identity as distinct from overall identity development and measured it at one point in time (Vondracek, 1991, 1992) in spite of the empirical research substantiating Erikson's theory that occupational identity is developmental beginning at birth. Therefore, the objective of this literature review was to identify the factors relevant to Erikson's first five stages of psychosocial development that the existing research has found to be associated with occupational identity, and to integrate them to present a comprehensive review of occupational identity development from early childhood to adolescence. The results of the literature review (Table 2.1) help fill the longitudinal research gap and provide the foundation for future research so the treatment of occupational identity is no longer too simplistic or reductionistic.

**Stage 1: Anxiety.** Two findings relevant to the quality of the maternal relationship and the ability to develop a basic sense of trust and endure anxieties were identified. Lopez (1989) found a negative correlation of 0.06 for females and 0.1 for males between emotional independence from the mother in young adulthood and trait anxiety. Although the effect sizes were small, he concluded that such anxiety contributed to vocational identity concerns during late adolescence. Healy (1991) found that anxiety interfered with the acquiring of vocational identity by disrupting the experiences in which it develops and also concluded that anxiety and vocational identity were both directly and indirectly linked.

Table 2.1  
*Summary of Eligibility Criteria and Results Per Development Stage*

Stage 1.	Stage 2.	Stage 3.	Stage 4.	Stage 5.
Infancy and the mutuality of recognition <i>Trust vs. Basic Mistrust</i>	Early childhood and the will to be oneself <i>Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt</i>	Childhood and the anticipation of roles <i>Initiative vs. Guilt</i>	School age and task identification <i>Industry vs. Inferiority</i>	Adolescence <i>Identity vs. Role Diffusion</i>
0 to 1½ years	1½ to 3½ years	3½ to 6 years	6 to 12 years	13 to 18 years
"I am what hope I have and give"	"I am what I can will freely"	"I am what I can imagine I will be"	"I am what I can learn to make work"	"Who am I? Who am I to become?"
Relationship with maternal figure	Family organization	Family functioning, behaviors	School, teacher, peer experiences	Identity confusion

Basic trust, mutual trustworthiness	Individuality, distinction from others	Search for new identifications	Identification based on knowing, skills	Concern with others' perceptions of self
Hope	Independence and free will	More realistic sense of ambition, purpose	Sense of industry and competence	Overidentification, peer group recognition
Mutual recognition with outside world	Exploring and self-control	Conscientiousness of own actions	Learning to complete serious tasks, goals	Continuity of self in promise of a career
Enduring anxieties, loss, frustrations	Self-esteem and self-worth	Exploration, play, and curiosity	Sense of duty and work participation	Occupational preparation
Sense of continuity in all of life	Neuroticism, self-consciousness	Learning to move on after failure	Group self-esteem	Sex role
Meaning present in actions	Self-doubting	Gender roles and masculinity/femininity	Sense of inferiority and inadequacy	Fidelity to self and others
2 findings identified	15 findings identified	17 findings identified	25 findings identified	42 findings identified

**Stage 2: Family dynamics and parental support and firmness.** Five findings relevant to family organization and to parental firmness were identified. Blinne and Johnston (1998) and Johnson, Buboltz, and Nichols (1999) reported no significant differences in vocational identity based on parents' marital status, and the effects sizes of their findings were small. Nonetheless, Berrios-Allison (2005) concluded that participants who had experienced early separation from their parents were less achieved in occupational identity. Furthermore, participants from families that were supportive and that encouraged occupational exploration and commitments were also the most achieved in occupational identity. Meeus and Dekovic (1995) also reported that parental support had an additive influence of 0.39 on occupational identity development, making the effect of medium size. Hargrove, Creagh, and Burgess (2002), on the other hand, found that family organization and family enforcement of rules were not significant predictors for vocational identity, and the effect size of the result ( $r = 0.34$ ) was medium.

**Stage 2: Exploration and parent-child congruence.** Five findings regarding occupational exploration and parental agreement were identified. Vondracek and Skorikov (1997) identified large and significant positive correlations (ranging from 0.5 to 0.6) between vocational identity achievement and various measures of occupational exploration. Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, and Scanlan (2006) found that a perception of fewer barriers related to career exploration was related to a more integrated vocational identity, although the effect size was small ( $r = 0.18$ ). Carper and Becker (1957) concluded that occupational identity conflict occurred when disparities between parental and occupational expectations were present. Similarly, Nauta (2012) found that participants' vocational identity was associated with career interest agreement with their parents ( $r$  ranged from 0.17 to 0.63, and most of the effects sizes were medium). Song, Kim, and Lee (2016) reported that participants in occupational identity exploration status also experienced low inter-parental conflict ( $r$  ranged from -0.28 to -0.26, making the effect sizes small).

**Stage 2: Independence, locus of control, self-esteem, and neuroticism.** Five findings relevant to factors that are critical to healthy development during Erikson's second stage of psychosocial development were identified. Graef, Wells, Hyland, and Muchinsky (1985) reported that out of 103 males, the ones possessing a clear vocational identity were differentiated as not being too strongly independent or dominant ( $r = 0.58$ , with a large effect size). Dellas and Jernigan (1987) found that more internally controlled males were achieved in occupational identity, whereas their more externally controlled peers were diffused in occupational identity,

although the effect sizes for both were small ( $r = 0.1$ ). Furthermore, Munson (1992) reported that participants with high self-esteem scored significantly higher on vocational identity. Hirschi (2012) identified a relationship between higher neuroticism and the emergence of vocational identity exploration over time, albeit all of the correlations had small effect sizes ( $r$  ranged from -0.02 to 0.18). Similarly, Hirschi and Herrmann (2013) found a positive relationship between neuroticism and more problems in vocational identity.

**Stage 3: Family cohesion.** Five studies regarding factors related to perceptions of the usefulness of family behavioral patterns in achieving objectives were identified. Penick and Jepsen (1992) found that family members' perception of family functioning significantly predicted participants' vocational identity ( $r = 0.22$ ), albeit the effect size was small. Similarly, Johnson, Buboltz, and Nichols (1999) reported that family functioning, cohesion, and expressiveness were related to vocational identity, with expressiveness being the most predictive, however, the effects sizes were all small. Song, Kim, and Lee (2016) found that high functional family communication positively influenced occupational identity in achievement status, although the effect size was small ( $r = 0.28$ ). Nonetheless, Hartung, Lewis, May, and Niles (2002) found no association between vocational identity and perceived levels of cohesion and adaptability within the family, and the effect size of the finding was small. Shin and Kelly (2013) found that family cohesion and expressiveness moderated the link between optimism and vocational identity for Korean but not American participants, albeit the effect size was small (Cohen's  $d$  test = 0.08).

**Stage 3: Motivation, purpose, and self-efficacy.** Six studies relevant to the foundation for initiative were identified, all of which reported positive associations with occupational identity. Waterman and Waterman (1976) reported that intrinsic motivation was more related to vocational identity than extrinsic motivation, and the effect size was large ( $r = 0.52$ ). Kivlighan and Shapiro (1987) found that participants with realistic, investigative, or conventional sense high-point codes showed greater changes in vocational identity after a career counseling course ( $r = 0.31$ ) compared to those with artistic, social, or enterprising ones ( $r = -0.03$ ), and the effect size was medium for the former and small for the latter. Turning to self-efficacy, Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, and Scanlan (2006) and Gushue, Scanlan, Pantzer, and Clarke (2006) respectively reported that greater self-efficacy was related to a more differentiated vocational identity for Latinos ( $r$  ranged from 0.25 to 0.43, making the effect sizes small to medium) and for Blacks ( $r = 0.3$ , making the effect size medium). Jantzer, Stalides, and Rottinghaus (2009) found that participants with higher levels of career decisionmaking self-efficacy were more likely to have an achieved vocational identity. Hammond, Lockman, and Boling (2010) identified vocational identity as a clear self-efficacy factor with medium a size effect ( $r = 0.45$ ).

**Stage 3: Mental maturation measures.** Four studies relevant to measures of the mental maturation needed to undertake initiative were identified, all of which reported positive associations with occupational identity. Robitschek and Cook (1999) found that participants with higher levels of personal growth initiative had a more crystallized vocational identity ( $r = 0.43$ , leading to a medium effect size). Hirschi identified a positive association between a more crystallized vocational identity and greater orientation toward meaning and career engagement and away from pleasure ( $r = 0.27$ ), albeit the effect size was small. (2011a), He also reported a relationship between conscientiousness and maintaining or achieving a vocational identity ( $r$  ranged from -0.02 to 0.26, making all of the effect sizes small; 2012). Ahn et al. (2015) reported a large effect size in the correlation between occupational identity status and the cluster of curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk taking skills ( $r = 0.51$ ).

**Stage 3: Gender roles.** Two studies regarding how perceptions of gender roles and masculinity are related to occupational identity were identified. Vaz (1968) concluded that there was no association between the vocational identity status of males and their ranking of nursing based on masculinity level. Grotevant and Thorbecke (1982), however, reported large effect sizes in the positive relationship between vocational identity and self-perceptions of masculinity traits for males ( $r = 0.35$ ) and females ( $r = 0.34$ ).

**Stage 4: Ethnicity and socioeconomic status.** Six findings were identified that studied the correlation between occupational identity and ethnic and socioeconomic background. Jackson and Neville (1998) reported that strong and affirmative racial identity attitudes accounted for a significant amount of variability in the vocational identity of Black females but not males. Leong (1991) found no cultural group differences in vocational identity between Anglo and Asian American participants, whereas Abraham (1986) reported that Mexican American participants were more like to have foreclosed occupational identities than their Anglo American peers regardless of socioeconomic status. A New Zealand study found that more Anglo participants than indigenous ones had achieved an occupational identity regardless of socioeconomic status ( $r = 0.41$ ; Chapman & Nicholls, 1976). Solomontos-Kountouri and Hurry (2008) reported that upper class participants were less likely than working class participants to be in occupational identity diffusion status, albeit the effect size was small ( $r = 0.16$ ). Nonetheless, Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, and Zane (2007) concluded that belonging to a low socioeconomic status family bolstered vocational identity development by motivating stable employment.

**Stage 4: Academic and school ability and attitudes.** Nine studies that researched a correlation between occupational identity and academic ability and school experiences were identified. Meeus (1993) found that participants who performed well at school had a stronger occupational identity than those whose school performance was poor, although the effect size was small ( $r = 0.21$ ). Ochs and Roessler (2001) reported that special education students had significantly lower vocational identity scores than their general education peers (a mean of seven versus a mean of 11 on an 18-point scale). Lapan, Gysbers, Hughey, and Arni (1993) found that changes in perceived mastery of guidance competencies predicted increases in English grades and vocational identity for females by a score of 0.31, which amounted to a large effect size ( $r = 0.51$ ). Graef, Wells, Hyland, and Muchinsky (1985) identified a correlation with large effect sizes in females between a weak vocational identity and poor grade point average ( $r = 0.9$ ) and a negative academic attitude ( $r = 0.61$ ). Lopez (1989) similarly reported large effects sizes in the association of 0.52 for males and 0.49 for females between academic adjustment difficulties and vocational identity concerns during late adolescence. Coutinho and Blustein (2014) concluded from various models that vocational identity protected participants from school disengagement.

Three studies, on the other hand, found no association between occupational identity and academic ability factors. Chapman and Nicholls (1976) reported no relationship between occupational identity and intelligence quotient, and Kelly (1992) similarly found that gifted students were not higher in vocational identity than their regular curriculum peers. Healy, Tullier, and Mourton (1990) found that vocational identity was not correlated with participants' awareness of academic ability or grade point average, and the effects sizes were small ( $r$  varied between -0.03 and -0.08).

**Stage 4: Activities and work interest.** Four studies researched the relationship between occupational identity and activities and work interests. Although Meeus (1993) found no correlation with leisure-time behavior, a study that specified the activities as more intellectual

and creative reported that those who participated more in them were more advanced in occupational identity achievement (Munson & Widmer, 1997). Similarly, Graef, Wells, Hyland, and Muchinsky (1985) identified amongst females a relationship with a large effect size between few high school and cultural activities and the lacking of a clear vocational identity ( $r = 0.74$ ). Vondracek and Skorikov (1997) found a significant positive correlation between occupational identity achievement and interest in work.

**Stage 4: Goal formation and stability.** Three studies researched the association between occupational identity and the ability to make goals and to maintain them, and all found it to be significant and positive. Savickas (1985) found that vocational identity was related to having a clearer picture of vocational goals, abilities, and talents ( $r = 0.41$ ), which amounted to a medium effect size. Santos (2003) reported a large effect size in the correlation between vocational identity status and goal instability ( $r = 0.53$ ), and Hammond, Lockman, and Boling (2010) found a large effect size in the correlation between vocational identity development and having unstable career goals ( $r = -0.5$ ).

**Stage 4: Ability to overcome obstacles.** Three studies were identified that researched the ability to solve problems and overcome barriers, and all found a positive correlation with occupational identity achievement. Sweeney and Schill (1998) found that participants who scored higher on a self-defeating personality scale indicated a poorer sense of vocational identity, although the effect size was small ( $r = -0.09$ ). Similarly, Diemer and Blustein (2006) reported that participants with a greater ability to recognize and overcome sociopolitical barriers had a clearer vocational identity ( $r = 0.21$ ), although the effect size was small. Henry (1996) identified a positive correlation between participants' problem-solving appraisal and their vocational identity ( $r = -0.32$ ), which amounted to a medium effect size.

**Stage 5: Peer groups.** Five studies reported findings into how peer group membership affects occupational identity development. Becker and Carper (1956) concluded that participation in various kinds of organized groups, including peer groups and student cliques, affected experience and, through it, changes in the identification with an occupation. Johnson (1987) also reported a series of correlations between membership in social crowds and vocational identity scores. For example, nerds scored highest on investigative vocational interests, whereas freaks scored highest on artistic ones. Meeus and Dekovic (1995) identified intimate peer relationships as highly influential on participants' occupational identity development, with an  $r$  score of 0.26 (a small effect size). Song, Kim, and Lee (2016) found that high peer attachment in foreclosure status ( $r = 0.33$ ) and low peer attachment in diffusion status ( $r = -0.24$ ) influenced the level of vocational identity, and the effect sizes were medium and small, respectively). Nauta (2012), however, was unable to find a relationship between vocational identity and peer agreement with respect to career interests, although most of the effect sizes were medium.

**Stage 5: Integration of self-knowledge.** Four studies discussed the relationship between occupational identity and measures related to the integration of self-knowledge, all of which found positive associations. Johnson, Schamuhn, Nelson, and Buboltz, (2014) reported that higher levels of strong sense of self predicted higher levels of vocational identity ( $r = 0.14$ ), although the effect size was small. Graef, Wells, Hyland, and Muchinsky (1985) found a large effect size in the relationship for males between possessing a clear vocational identity and being socially well adjusted ( $r = 0.63$ ). Konik and Stewart (2004) identified through a series of models a relationship between identifying as a sexual minority and having more advanced occupational identity development. Taber and Blankemeyer (2015) reported that diffused vocational identity



status was associated with negative views of the past ( $r = 0.26$ ) and lower orientation toward the future ( $r = -0.23$ ), whereas an achieved one was related to a hedonic view of the present ( $r = 0.22$ ) and with being more mindful ( $r = 0.05$ ), although the effect sizes were all small.

**Stage 5: Career decisionmaking abilities.** Eight studies that reported on the correlation between occupational identity and career decisionmaking abilities were identified. Conneran and Hartman (1993) and Larson, Toulouse, Ngumba, Fitzpatrick, and Heppner (1994) both found vocational identity development to be negatively correlated with career indecidedness. The effect size for the former study was medium ( $r = 0.47$ ), whereas it was large for the latter one ( $r = -0.79$ ). Long, Sowa, and Niles (1995) reported a positive relationship between vocational identity and career decidedness, and Jantzer, Stalides, and Rottinghaus (2009) found that participants with higher levels of vocational identity also had more solidified career decisionmaking intentions and goals. Hirschi and Läge (2007) reported that vocational identity emerged as a direct measure for career choice readiness attitudes, and Hammond, Lockman, and Boling (2010) found that vocational identity development was correlated with greater levels of career decidedness measures ( $r$  ranged from 0.25 to 0.53, making the effect sizes small to large). Graef, Wells, Hyland, and Muchinsky (1985) identified a relationship in females between lacking a clear vocational identity and having an undeclared major, although the effect size was small ( $r = 0.19$ ). Whereas Leung (1998) similarly found that vocational identity was related to college major choice congruence ( $r = 0.16$ , making the effect size small), he was unable to report a similar relationship for career choice congruence, and the effect size was near zero.

**Stage 5: Career choice readiness measures.** Nine studies reported findings regarding the relationship between occupational identity and various measures significant for career choice readiness. Dipeolu, Sniatecki, Storlie, and Hargrave (2013) found that career maturity scores predicted vocational identity, although the effect size was small ( $r = 0.14$ ). Other studies also reported a positive correlation with career development skills (Hirschi, 2010; Sung, Turner, & Kaewchinda, 2012), commitment to career choices (Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Ladany, Melincoff, Constantine, & Love, 1997), and differentiation of vocational interests (Hirschi, 2011b; Im, 2011). Nonetheless, Healy, Tullier, and Mourton (1990) and Hirschi and Läge (2008b) were unable to correlate vocational identity with a series of models that measured participants' college enrollment plans or to their coherence of career aspirations, respectively. The effect size for the latter study was small ( $r = 0.12$ ).

**Stage 5: Career development treatments.** Sixteen studies researched the effects of career development interventions on changes in occupational identity, 13 of which were longitudinal and all of which reported that the treatment was successful. Such interventions included a career development course (Farley, Schriener, & Roessler, 1988; Henry, 1993; Johnson, Nichols, Buboltz, & Riedesel, 2002; Rayman, Bernard, Holland, & Barnett, 1983; Remer, O'Neill, & Gohs, 1984; Scott & Ciani, 2008; Thomas & McDaniel, 2004) or seminar (Johnson, Smither, & Holland, 1981), a computerized career course (Mau, 1999; Shahnasarian & Peterson, 1988), a career workshop (Hirschi & Läge, 2008a; Merz & Szymanski, 1997), self-help career counseling (Kivlighan & Shapiro, 1987), and a job search club for international graduate students (Bikos & Furry, 1999). Gold, Kivlighan, Kerr, and Kramer (1993) reported that feelings of support and encouragement accounted for most of the explained variance in positive changes in vocational identity amongst participants in career exploration classes, and Lapan, Gysbers, Hughey, and Arni (1993) found that changes in participants' perceived mastery of guidance competencies after a joint career development and writing skills course predicted

positive changes in vocational identity by a score of 0.14, which amounted to a medium effect size ( $r = 0.49$ ).

## **Conclusion**

**Summary of findings.** The current review found that the majority of the existing empirical research substantiated the notion that occupational identity is associated with the development skills learned across Erikson's (1950, 1968) pre-adult stages, and that not attaining the development skills in the appropriate stage can lead to negative consequences for occupational identity development in later stages. In spite of both the breadth and depth of Erikson's psychosocial development theory and his perspective on how an occupational identity emerges throughout this process, the current review found a good level of agreement in the empirical research throughout the five pre-adult stages of psychosocial development. This finding challenges the notion that work roles, choices, and behaviors are sole products of adolescence, and it urges academics interested in youth work outcomes to not limit their research to adolescence or adulthood, but, rather, to expand it to include individuals' psychosocial realities across their pre-adult lifespan.

The examination of the factors associated with occupational and vocational identity that are also relevant to Erikson's (1950, 1968) five pre-adult stages of psychosocial development revealed that occupational identity generally develops from infancy to adolescence as proposed in Erikson's theory. Occupational identity development is a process of mutual regulation between individuals' inner needs and capacities and the outer opportunities their environment provides. The current review revealed that there is little to no empirical disagreement regarding the role of various inner needs and capacities, including: parental attachment and support; parent-child occupational exploration congruence; independence, locus of control, and self-esteem; motivation, purpose, and self-efficacy, mental maturation; goal formation and stability; ability to overcome obstacles; ability to integrate self-knowledge; and capacity to make career decisions. Furthermore, the effect sizes were consistently medium to large in the studies that studied factors such as motivation, purpose, and self-efficacy; academic and school ability and outcomes; and goal formation and stability.

The majority of the areas in which there was more empirical disagreement and for which the effect sizes were largely small were, notably, those that consist of the outer components of the process of mutual regulation. As a result, there is less empirical certainty in what is known about how the intersection of individuals and their outer environments influences occupational identity development from infancy to adolescence, including parental firmness and family functioning; perceptions and expectations based on gender and ethnic background; socioeconomic status; academic abilities and school experiences; and leisure activities and interests. These factors are unquestionably much more complex and difficult to measure than individual inner needs and capacities, which challenges the ability of empirical research to agree on a clear understanding of their role in occupational identity development. And although the empirical disagreement over these outer factors demands further research, the current review did identify significant examples of evidence to suggest that Erikson (1950, 1968) was once again correct in positing that healthy and balanced levels of these factors are positively associated with occupational identity development.

What is not known at all about how occupational identity develops from infancy to adolescence is how these inner and outer factors *interact* with each other *across* the pre-adult lifespan and what other factors not included in Erikson's (1950, 1968) psychosocial development theory are important to such development. Most of the studies in the current review were cross-

sectional, and the majority of the available longitudinal studies simply tested for the before and after effects of career development interventions on occupational identity, severely limiting the understanding of occupational identity development to a simplistic and reductionistic one. Furthermore, as Erikson himself predicted, structural and institutional changes in society and in the labor market have fundamentally altered psychosocial development from infancy to adolescence, and these realities are not captured in the current literature.

Perhaps the most important implication of these findings for the understanding of work disparities is that, given the complexities of the occupational identity development process, not everyone is exposed to the types of people or environments across the entire early lifespan that are protective of the ability to develop an occupational identity and make work choices. As Sorell and Montgomery (2001 p. 123) stressed, “Many groups and individuals, even in this new century, spend entire lifetimes in regions of extreme political chaos, severe personal restriction, or dire economic circumstances where survival demands adherence to a limited range of roles, activities and beliefs.” That the previous chapter demonstrated that the youth who are struggling the most in attaching themselves to today’s labor market are ethnic minorities with no college education and from low-income families is thus not surprising from an identity development perspective. And although theory is useful for addressing policy solutions to this problem, more research will be needed to gain a clearer picture of *how* the key actors and contexts impact identity across the lifespan, especially for the populations who already face dire work disparities.

The adolescents with the most achieved occupational identity are more likely to have parents who created and maintained a supportive home and family environment, and who played an active role in their children’s career exploration. As McLoyd (1998) evidenced in her review of socioeconomic disadvantage and child development, low-income families are deeply challenged to provide such a home and family environment, which helps explain why uneducated ethnic minority youth from low-income families face the greatest work disparities. Persistent poverty limits parents’ ability to help their children succeed in school and the time they can commit to help develop their children’s socio-emotional functioning, both of which place youth at a higher risk of being unable to achieve an identity and make work choices. A lifetime of internalizing such family hardships into one’s identity further places these youth at an educational attainment disadvantage, especially for ethnic minority youth surrounded by similar impoverished families, all of which reinforces the challenges of entering the labor market. Families are the one factor that impact identity across the *entire* lifespan, suggesting that the limitations they face have considerable and lifetime effects on work outcomes.

It is in school environments that children first learn about their competencies, skills, and abilities to make it in the world of work, and no other mandatory endeavor plays such a critical role in occupational identity development than schools. Given this, it is again not surprising that the greatest youth work disparities were those based on ethnicity, educational attainment, and family income. Academic achievement, strong ties to the student role, and engagement in positive social activities may be important markers for occupational identity development, but they are also persistent challenges for some youth, especially for those who do not attain a post-high school education. Youth who struggle academically, especially throughout the majority of their student lives, have likely developed an identity with weak self-efficacy, self-esteem, and confidence, which places them at a higher risk of becoming detached from both school and, later on, from the labor market. For youth from communities that are historically underrepresented in institutions of higher learning, their membership to such groups facilitates their identification with the opposite of academic achievement and, ultimately, with poor work outcomes.

The ability to build strong relationships with others, including non-family members, protects adolescents from social detachment, and it makes them more likely to participate in all aspects of social life, including the world of work. Again, uneducated ethnic minority adolescents from low-income families are likely at a higher risk of being devoid of these occupational identity development factors because of the realities of the communities in which they tend to live. Growing up in poverty in America often means growing up in adverse communities with illicit activities that range from unemployment to drugs, to gang activity and violence. For the adolescents embedded within such social matrixes, there are considerable challenges to the ability to build and foment healthy relationships with individuals outside of the family. It is difficult, for example, for youth to learn how to form intimate relationships with others when growing up in areas with a high youth mortality rate. Such a devaluing of others contributes to the type of social detachment that places some adolescents at a higher risk of not becoming a contributing member to society and of remaining outside of the labor market.

Preparing adolescents to make career decisions and commitments is a lifelong process that requires early and sustained interventions in various contexts. For all children and adolescents, their first exposure to work and careers is through their parents' occupations, so it again is not surprising that uneducated ethnic minority youth from low-income families face the greatest work disparities. Indeed, some research has shown that two of the greatest predictors of youth work outcomes are adolescents' social origins and their father's occupational status (Blau & Duncan, 1967). Historic discrimination in the labor market has largely relegated ethnic minorities to limited types of employment (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012) that almost certainly limits the career information and exploration of young members of such communities. Likewise, youth from low-income families develop an occupational identity that does not match with higher-paying careers simply because they do not know someone in those occupations. In short, as uneducated ethnic minorities from low-income families prepare for the world of work, they do so with an identity that developed with limited career information and exploration.

**Recommendations for future research.** Four critical recommendations for future research emerge from the current review. The first is to conduct longitudinal studies to ensure the treatment of occupational identity as developmental and rooted to a greater whole, as Erikson (1950, 1968) intended. In lieu of this, retrospective studies in which participants are asked to recall their psychosocial development from their infancy to current time could be conducted. Second, qualitative research was scant in the current review, yet it is well positioned to allow researchers to gather comprehensive data and to generalize findings to theory (Maxwell, 2013), essentially testing its validity. Such research could also help expand on Erikson's theory by capturing missing factors that are nonetheless pertinent to occupational identity development. Third, future research should focus on studying the role of complex outer factors in occupational identity development, as well as undertake methods that could gather changes in psychosocial development in today's modern society, as much has changed since Erikson formulated his theory between 1950 and 1968. Finally, future research should diversify sampling, particularly based on ethnicity and class, to be more representative of the US and world youth populations.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### Quantitative Study

The purpose of the quantitative study is to gain a deeper understanding of youth work outcomes and subsequent work disparities. Defining the problem of youth unemployment as mainly a product of economics and demographics such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, hampers the political response to this social problem (Bardach, 2011). Similarly, defining the problem of youth unemployment as one of employment status—employed versus unemployed—drastically limits the understanding of the problem and how social workers and social policymakers respond to and attempt to alleviate the problem. To push beyond the usual youth unemployment rhetoric, the quantitative study is designed to analyze the relationship between available identity development variables and work quality factors.

Redefining the problem of youth unemployment as one of psychosocial development and work quality factors will allow for a deeper understanding of how youth develop an identification with work from their early lives and why and how they make the work choices they do as adults. Erik Erikson's identity development theory (1950, 1968) set the foundations driving the study. The identification of independent variables was grounded on his notion that parents, family, neighborhood, school, friends, and early work preparation experiences are the actors that drive individuals' psychosocial development. Furthermore, redefining the problem of youth unemployment as also one of work quality outcomes rather than the simple binary outcome of employment status will allow for a more complex understanding of youth work disparities. Several elements of work quality were identified to be able to test for their association with the independent identity development variables.

**Research question and hypotheses.** The research question was formulated with the goal of redefining the problem of youth unemployment as one of identity development and work quality outcomes. The research question is, *what is the relationship between identity development factors and measures of employment quality for young adults, and how does this relationship differ by gender and ethnicity?* The research question was formulated for two reasons: first, to deepen the traditional analysis of employment status based on economics and demographic factors; and, second, to test Erikson's theory (1950, 1968) that work roles, choices, and behaviors are associated with individuals' identity development. The research question was also designed to deepen the usual analysis of employment status and to highlight the importance of work disparities in the youth unemployment discussion by looking at other employment quality outcomes. The answers to this research question are also expected to elucidate the differences in work quality attainment for adolescents and young adults based on gender and ethnicity.

Erikson's theory (1950, 1968) posits that identity development is a fluid, dynamic, and ongoing process rooted at birth, and that individuals' work outcomes are products of the accumulation of their psychosocial development experiences. As such, the quantitative analyses are expected to identify a positive relationship between the predictor identity development factors and the outcome employment quality variables. Differences in this relationship are expected to emerge based on gender and ethnicity given that Erikson's theory also posits that belonging to a group socially perceived and treated as inferior can have negative consequences on identity development and, subsequently, on work quality outcomes. The relationship between the variables is therefore expected to be poorer for females and for Blacks and Hispanics, who are historically marginalized groups in US society.

**Participants and variables.** The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) is an ongoing survey the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics conducts annually to gather information from adolescents and young adults at multiple points in time. The survey was first conducted in 1997, and it included 8,984 adolescents born between 1980 and 1984. The respondents' ages ranged from 13 to 17 at the time of the first survey. The data used in this study were taken from Rounds 1 (1997) and 9 (2005) on all the participants born in 1980 not enrolled in college, and included 1,437 participants. This one-year limitation was set to avoid confounding from the impact of the accumulation of work experience and of the 2007 Great Recession on work outcomes. All of the variables available in the NLSY97 were scanned for fit with Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory and with work quality outcomes. Most of the psychosocial development data were extracted from Round 1, as these were meant to be a snapshot of participants' early life development. All of the work quality outcome data were from Round 9 (2005). These data, along with the demographic information, were extracted for first-round assessments to determine their inclusion in the study.

The variables considered for inclusion in the analyses are summarized in Table 3.1. A number of other variables were also identified for inclusion in the initial analysis, but they were removed because of high levels of missing data that would have made subsequent analyses difficult to conduct. Some of these variables were level of parental advice regarding work, level of quality time spent with family, how leisure time was spent, neighborhood gang activity, neighborhood violence measures, neighborhood unemployment, highest SAT math score, and highest SAT verbal score. With the exception of gender and ethnicity, the variables included for initial analysis were all coded so that the outcome improves as the data figure increases to facilitate analysis. In other words, a higher number indicates a more positive outcome.

Table 3.1  
*Variables List*

Variable		Code	Coding			
<i>Demographic Variables</i>						
	Gender	GENDER	0 = Female	1 = Male		
	Black	BLACKS	0 = Non-Black	1 = Black		
	Hispanic	HISPAN	0 = Non-Hispanic	1 = Hispanic		
	Family Net Worth	FAMNET	Continuous (capped at \$600,000)			
<i>Predictor Variables</i>						
Family Cluster	Relationship to Household Parent Figure	PARFIG	0 = Other/Non-Biological	1 = 1 Parent Biological	2 = 2 Parents, at least 1 Biological	3 = 2 Parents Biological
	Residential Mother's Support	MOMSUP	0 = Not Very or Somewhat Supportive	1 = Very Supportive		
	Residential Father's Support	DADSUP	0 = Not Very or Somewhat Supportive	1 = Very Supportive		
	Residential Mother's Authoritativeness	MOMAUT	0 = Permissive	1 = Strict		
	Residential Father's Authoritativeness	DADAUT	0 = Permissive	1 = Strict		
ol Cluster	Cumulative High School GPA	CHSGPA	Continuous (capped at 4.17)			

Peers Cluster	Teachers Interested in Students	SCHTEA	0 = Strongly Disagree	1 = Disagree	2 = Agree	3 = Strongly Agree
	Participated in Gifted Courses Program	SCGATE	0 = No	1 = Yes		
	Percent of Peers in Sports, Clubs, School Activities	PEEACT	0 = Less than Half	1 = About Half	2 = More than Half	
	Percent of Peers Who Plan to Attend College	PEECOL	0 = Less than Half	1 = About Half	2 = More than Half	
	Percent of Peers Who Belong to a Gang	PEEGNG	0 = More than Half	1 = About Half	2 = Less than Half	
	Percent of Peers Who Cut Classes or School	PEECUT	0 = More than Half	1 = About Half	2 = Less than Half	
Early Work Cluster	Cumulative Hours Worked from Age 14 to Age 19	TEENWK	Continuous			
	Ever Received Training Certificate or Vocational License	VOCTRN	0 = No	1 = Yes		

*Outcome Variables*

Occupation Type	OCCUPA	0 = Blue or Pink Collar	1 = White Collar		
Total Annual Hours Worked at Employee Type Jobs	HRSWKD	Continuous			
Average Annual Income Per Total Hours Worked	WPHWKD	Continuous			
Number of Paid Vacation and Sick Days	PAIDTO	Continuous			
Job Satisfaction	JOBSAT	Continuous (5 categories ranging from strongly dislike to strongly like)			

**Outliers and assumptions check.** Data on all of the non-categorical and non-capped continuous variables were checked for outliers. Q-Norm plots and histograms were created in Stata to identify outliers for the following four continuous variables: teenwk, hrswk, wphwk, and paidto. Table 3.2 summarizes the number of observations removed for each variable for violating the normality assumption.

Table 3.2  
*Summary of Removed Outliers*

Variable	Number of Outliers
TEENWK	3
HRSWKD	1
WPHWKD	2
PAIDTO	4

A goodness-of-fit test for the final logistic regression model was conducted in Stata to ensure that the assumptions of logistic regression analysis were met. Table 3.3 illustrates the output from the goodness-of-fit test. The Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-square score was 7.60 with a p-value of 0.4737, indicating that the logistic regression model fit the data well.

Table 3.3  
*Goodness-of-Fit Test for Final Logistic Regression Model*

Group	Prob	Obs_1	Exp_1	Obs_0	Exp_0	Total
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1	0.1418	5	2.8	27	29.2	32
2	0.2024	6	5.5	26	26.5	32
3	0.2695	4	7.5	28	24.5	32
4	0.3414	13	9.9	10	22.1	32
5	0.4081	8	11.6	23	19.4	31
6	0.4507	13	13.6	19	18.4	32
7	0.5475	16	16	16	16	32
8	0.6202	20	18.6	12	13.4	32
9	0.7464	22	21.6	10	10.4	32
10	0.876	25	24.9	6	6.1	31

A series of diagnostic tests were conducted in Stata to test for linearity and collinearity in the four final linear regression models. These included two-way scatter plots, residual versus predictors variable plots, augmented component plus residuals plots, k-density graphs, and variance inflation factor (VIF) models. Analysis of the plots led to the removal of the family net worth variable because it violated the linearity assumption. Table 3.4 summarizes the results of the VIF tests. None of the scores exceeded 10, indicating a lack of collinearity problems.

Table 3.4  
*Summary of Variance Inflation Factor Model Scores*

Model	Mean VIF
HRSWKD	1.36
WPHWKD	1.36
PAIDTO	1.39
JOBSAT	1.37

Residuals versus fitted values plots and Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg tests were conducted in Stata for the four final linear regression models to test for heteroscedasticity. As Table 3.5 illustrates, the results of the test for heteroscedasticity for the wphwkd and jobsat models suggested that these violated the homogenous assumption. Nonetheless, a comparison of the results for both models with models using robust standard errors revealed few to no changes in the *t*-values, suggesting that the levels of heteroscedasticity for both models were low.

Table 3.5  
*Summary of Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg Test for Heteroscedasticity Results*

Model	chi-square	p-value
HRSWKD	0.5	0.4777
WPHWKD	28.54	0.0000
PAIDTO	2.56	0.1094
JOBSAT	4.42	0.0356

Table 3.6



*Summary of Bivariate Analysis Results*

Independent Variable	OCCUPA		HRSWKD		WPHWKD		PAIDTO		JOBSAT		Total
	Coeff.	P>	Coeff.	P>	Coeff.	P>	Coeff.	P>	Coeff.	P>	
GENDER	-0.56	0.00	327.49	0.00	2.51	0.00	0.72	0.4	-0.001	0.99	3
BLACKS	-0.3	0.04	-414.99	0.00	-3.28	0.00	-1.49	0.12	-0.3	0.00	4
GEN_BLA	-0.42	0.04	-227.15	0.01	-1.56	0.25	-0.75	0.57	-0.21	0.04	3
HISPAN	-0.25	0.13	-37.26	0.61	0.1	0.93	-0.24	0.83	0.2	0.02	1
GEN_HIS	-0.68	0.00	226.01	0.01	-0.04	0.98	0.91	0.5	0.11	0.28	2
PARFIG	0.11	0.08	166.7	0.00	1.51	0.00	1.32	0.00	0.1	0.00	5
MOMSUP	0.24	0.17	37.15	0.62	-0.1	0.93	-0.45	0.7	0.03	0.73	0
DADSUP	0.33	0.06	162.17	0.03	1.59	0.17	-1.24	0.29	0.08	0.36	2
MOMAUT	0.03	0.83	23.32	0.7	1.87	0.03	0.42	0.64	0.11	0.13	1
DADAUT	-0.13	0.42	-41.7	0.56	1.28	0.23	-0.42	0.7	-0.08	0.32	0
SCHTEA	0.18	0.08	169.92	0.00	-0.12	0.87	0.98	0.16	0.06	0.29	2
SCGATE	0.94	0.00	334.09	0.00	2.65	0.06	3.13	0.04	-0.03	0.83	4
CHSGPA	0.01	0.00	2.49	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.0007	0.31	4
PEEACT	0.2	0.03	75.17	0.06	0.68	0.24	1.31	0.02	0.02	0.6	3
PEECOL	0.35	0.00	197.02	0.00	1.21	0.04	1.91	0.00	0.02	0.71	4
PEEGNG	0.35	0.00	202.96	0.00	2.56	0.00	1.58	0.03	-0.006	0.91	4
PEECUT	0.08	0.31	68.24	0.05	0.45	0.38	0.51	0.32	-0.02	0.56	1
VOCTRN	0.06	0.75	161.23	0.07	1.12	0.38	0.41	0.73	-0.03	0.78	1
TEENWK	0.00001	0.65	0.09	0.00	-0.00004	0.83	0.0003	0.06	0.00002	0.2	2

**Bivariate analysis.** A series of bivariate models were conducted in Stata to determine the relationship between each independent variable and each dependent variable. The purpose of this was to identify the independent variables that had the highest number of total statistically significant relationships and decide whether to include them in the final regression models. A p-value of 0.1 was selected as the threshold for statistical significance given that the aim of the study is largely exploratory (Lehmann, 1993). As such, a larger p-value will allow for the emergence of greater reportable findings. Table 3.6 summarizes the bivariate results for all of the possible combinations of independent and dependent variables. Of the 19 independent variables, only six had less than two statistically significant relationships with the dependent variables. The remaining 13 variables were selected for inclusion in the final regression models.

Table 3.7  
*Summary of Statistics for Final Observations*

Variable	Code	Summary of Statistics	
<i>Demographic Variables</i>			
Gender	GENDER	Female = 47.84%	Male = 52.16%

Black	BLACKS	Non-Black = 82.46%	Black = 17.54%		
Hispanic	HISPAN	Non-Hispanic = 79.27%	Hispanic = 20.73%		

*Predictor Variables*

Family Cluster	Relationship to Household Parent Figure	PARFIG	Other/Non-Biological = 3.87%	1 Parent Biological = 11.39%	2 Parents, at least 1 Biological = 17.54%	2 Parents Biological = 67.2%
	Residential Father's Support	DADSUP	Not Very or Somewhat Supportive = 35.31%	Very Supportive = 64.69%		
School Cluster	Cumulative High School GPA	CHSGPA	Mean = 2.84			
	Teachers Interested in Students	SCHTEA	Strongly Disagree = 1.14%	Disagree = 12.07%	Agree = 69.25%	Strongly Agree = 17.54%
	Participated in Gifted Courses Program	SCGATE	No = 85.1%	Yes = 14.81%		
Peers Cluster	Percent of Peers in Sports, Clubs, School Activities	PEEACT	Less than Half = 11.16%	About Half = 33.94%	More than Half = 54.9%	
	Percent of Peers Who Plan to Attend College	PEECOL	Less than Half = 15.49%	About Half = 28.47%	More than Half = 56.04%	
	Percent of Peers Who Belong to a Gang	PEEGNG	More than Half = 6.38%	About Half = 5.69	Less than Half = 87.93%	
Early Work Cluster	Cumulative Hours Worked from Age 14 to Age 19	TEENWK	Mean = 3,563			

*Outcome Variables*

Occupation Type	OCCUPA	Blue or Pink Collar = 58.49%	White Collar = 41.51%		
Total Hours Worked at Employee Type Jobs	HRSWKD	Mean = 1,862			
Average Income Per Total Hours Worked	WPHWKD	Mean = 14.65			
Number of Paid Vacation and Sick Days	PAIDTO	Mean = 11.37			
Job Satisfaction	JOBSAT	Mean = 3.12			

**Summary of statistics.** Observations with missing data for any of the final variables were dropped to ease analysis. Of the 1,437 observations, 998 observations were dropped for this reason, amounting to 69%. Table 3.7 summarizes the statistics for the final 439 observations. Means for each variable were compared utilizing both the data set with the 1,437 observations and the data set that did not include missing data. The means for most of the variables were relatively similar. For example, the mean for gender with the 1,437 observations and with the final 439 observations was 0.52, while the mean for cumulative high school GPA for the 1,437 observations was 2.72 compared to 2.84 for the 439 final observations.

**Statistical analysis.** Five different models were run for each of the five work quality outcome variables, for a grand total of 25 models. The models for the occupation type outcome variable were logistic regression models, and the rest were linear regression models. The first model tested for the relationship between each work quality outcome variable and the cluster of

demographic variables, which included gender, being Black, and the interaction between gender and being Black, and between gender and being Hispanic.

*Model 1*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Work Quality Outcome}_i & \\ &= \beta_o + \beta_1 \text{GENDER}_i + \beta_2 \text{BLACKS}_i + \beta_3 \text{GEN} * \text{BLA}_i + \beta_4 \text{GEN} * \text{HIS}_i \\ &+ \epsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

The second model tested for the relationship between each work quality outcome variable and the cluster of demographic variables, plus the cluster of family variables, which included the relationship to the household parent figure and the residential father's level of support.

*Model 2*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Work Quality Outcome}_i & \\ &= \beta_o + \beta_1 \text{GENDER}_i + \beta_2 \text{BLACKS}_i + \beta_3 \text{GEN} * \text{BLA}_i + \beta_4 \text{GEN} * \text{HIS}_i \\ &+ \beta_5 \text{PARFIG}_i + \beta_6 \text{DADSUP}_i + \epsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

The third model tested for the relationship between each work quality outcome variable and the clusters of demographic and family variables, plus the cluster of school variables, which included cumulative high school grade point average, perceived level of teacher interest in students, and participation in a gifted courses program.

*Model 3*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Work Quality Outcome}_i & \\ &= \beta_o + \beta_1 \text{GENDER}_i + \beta_2 \text{BLACKS}_i + \beta_3 \text{GEN} * \text{BLA}_i + \beta_4 \text{GEN} * \text{HIS}_i \\ &+ \beta_5 \text{PARFIG}_i + \beta_6 \text{DADSUP}_i + \beta_7 \text{CHSGPA}_i + \beta_8 \text{SCHTEA}_i + \beta_9 \text{SCGATE}_i \\ &+ \epsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

The fourth model tested for the relationship between each work quality outcome variable and the clusters of demographic, family, and school variables, plus the cluster of peer variables, which included percent of peers in sports, clubs, and school activities, percent of peers who plan to attend college, and percent of peers who belong to a gang.

*Model 4*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Work Quality Outcome}_i & \\ &= \beta_o + \beta_1 \text{GENDER}_i + \beta_2 \text{BLACKS}_i + \beta_3 \text{GEN} * \text{BLA}_i + \beta_4 \text{GEN} * \text{HIS}_i \\ &+ \beta_5 \text{PARFIG}_i + \beta_6 \text{DADSUP}_i + \beta_7 \text{CHSGPA}_i + \beta_8 \text{SCHTEA}_i + \beta_9 \text{SCGATE}_i \\ &+ \beta_{10} \text{PEEACT}_i + \beta_{11} \text{PEECOL}_i + \beta_{12} \text{PEEGNG}_i + \epsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

The fifth and final model tested for the relationship between each work quality outcome variable and the clusters of demographic, family, school, and peer variables, plus the cluster of early work experience, which included cumulative hours worked from age 14 to age 19.

*Model 5*

*Work Quality Outcome<sub>i</sub>*

$$\begin{aligned} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 GENDER_i + \beta_2 BLACKS_i + \beta_3 GEN * BLA_i + \beta_4 GEN * HIS_i \\ &+ \beta_5 PARFIG_i + \beta_6 DADSUP_i + \beta_7 CHSGPA_i + \beta_8 SCHTEA_i + \beta_9 SCGATE_i \\ &+ \beta_{10} PEEACT_i + \beta_{11} PEECOL_i + \beta_{12} PEEGNG_i + \beta_{13} TEENWK_i + \epsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

The analysis of the statistical output consisted of two parts. First, the output for each work quality outcome variable was independently examined to identify the variables that were most predictive and to identify the percentage of the variance explained of each cluster. McFadden's (1974) r-square was used to determine the  $R^2$ - values of the logistic regression models. Second, the output of the five final models was summarized to identify the most predictive variables and clusters *across* the five work quality outcomes. The purpose of this two-pronged approach was to gain both a micro and a macro understanding of how identity development factors were related to healthy work outcomes.

### **Qualitative Study**

A qualitative study accompanies the quantitative analyses to help elucidate the *how* and the *why* of the quantitative findings (Maxwell, 2013). The theoretical treatment throughout this study of work roles, choices, and behaviors as extensions of identity development *processes* makes qualitative research ideal, if not necessary, for improving the understanding of youth work outcomes. As has been mentioned in earlier chapters, the work roles, choices, and behaviors of adolescents do not emerge haphazardly or at one point in time. Rather, they are embedded in identity development and are products of lifelong *experiences*. Qualitative research also allows for a deeper study of the meanings and perspectives of the people studied, and to better understand how their physical, social, and cultural contexts shape those meanings and perspectives. Such a deep level of analysis provides the ability to make specific suggestions for the improvement of relevant existing practices, programs, and policies (Maxwell, 2013), which is the fundamental aim of this dissertation. Lastly, although qualitative research does not allow for the generalization of findings to a broader population, it does allow for the generalization of findings to theory (Maxwell, 2013), thereby contributing to a theoretical understanding of how children and youth develop an occupational identity across the pre-adult lifespan.

**Situating the research in existing theory.** The qualitative study helps fill a number of gaps in the occupational identity theory literature, which were identified in Chapter 2. First, it is one of the few examples of qualitative research in this area (Chávez, 2016), as most of the research is limited to cross-sectional studies. Second, and most significantly, the qualitative study allowed for the analysis of the development of occupational identity across the participants' lifespan, whereas previous research has been limited to the analysis of occupational identity at one point in time (Vondracek, 1991, 1992). Although the qualitative study is not longitudinal, it is a retrospective study of participants' life experiences from infancy to adolescence, which allows for a more dynamic understanding of participants' identity development and subsequent work roles, choices, and behaviors.

Third, the qualitative study allows for the analysis of the complex outer factors—family, neighborhood, school, and peer experiences—that are difficult to measure and to account for in quantitative studies but that are instrumental to psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Finally, the qualitative study focuses on Latino males, a population that is largely absent in the existing literature (Chávez, 2016) in spite of the fact that the Latino population consists of a large percentage of the American population. Such a focus will allow for the analysis of the unique

identity development experiences of such a population and for a better understanding of what makes their work roles, choices, and behaviors distinct from that in the existing literature.

**Research questions.** Qualitative research questions identify the phenomena or factors the study seeks to understand (Maxwell, 2013). The two research questions for the qualitative study were developed with this goal in mind. The first research question is, *How are Latino males in California developing their occupational identities from infancy to adolescence, and how are these processes similar and different based on their blue- or white-collar occupation status?* This research question seeks to understand the unique psychosocial development experiences of Latino males in California, as well as to identify the similarities and differences between the identity development processes of the participants that have attained blue-collar employment compared to those that have attained white-collar employment. The second research question is, *How can the work roles, choices, and behaviors of young Latino males in California be understood given their identity development processes from infancy to pre-adulthood, and how are these similar and different based on their blue- or white-collar occupation status?* This research question is intended to produce a more dynamic and robust understanding of young Latino males' work roles, choices, and behaviors by treating them as extensions of their identity development. Doing so will allow for the examination of Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory that treats work roles, choices, and behaviors as extensions of individuals' identities. Furthermore, identifying the similarities and differences based on occupation type will allow for the study of the developmental factors that led the participants toward either blue- or white-collar paths.

**Analytic strategy.** Qualitative methods are largely situated in an ontological and epistemological approach to knowledge that posits that the world cannot exist independently of the mind, and it is in this philosophical tradition that the qualitative study is grounded. Unlike a realist ontological approach, which purports that reality exists outside of the mind (Crotty, 1998), an idealist ontological approach maintains that individuals' interpretations of reality are of critical importance to the understanding of knowledge. Reality is subjective and multiple (Creswell, 2012). It is found in people's interpretations of the objects around them. Because reality is what individuals perceive it to be, qualitative methods are critical to the understanding of reality. In line with an idealist ontological approach, an interpretivist epistemological approach maintains that knowledge is socially constructed, and that the meanings individuals, societies, and cultures place on objects matters more than the objects themselves (Lin, 1998). The research goal of a qualitative study grounded in an interpretivist epistemological approach is to interpret the social world from the perspectives of those who are actors in that social world (Glesne, 2010). To do so requires interacting with people, talking with them about their perceptions, and collecting data from their point of view.

A paradigm is a framework or philosophy of science that makes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, the questions that should be explored, and how to go about accomplishing research under such terms (Glesne, 2010). The qualitative study follows a constructivist paradigm, which, similar to an idealist ontological approach and an interpretivist epistemological approach, assumes that reality is socially constructed and that phenomena are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure. As such, contextualization of the phenomena under study and an inductive approach to its analysis are important to its very understanding. It is from this paradigm that the conceptual framework emerges. The conceptual framework is a model of what is out there that the qualitative research plans to study, and of what is going on with these factors and why (Maxwell, 2013). In other words, it is a theory of the phenomena under investigation. Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory is the conceptual

framework driving both the design and the analysis of the qualitative study. Articulated in depth in Chapter 2, the data are analyzed and the findings are compared to this theory, which allows for the generalization of the findings back to the theory itself. Identity development theory fits with a constructivist paradigm, as it models individuals' development through personal life course experiences and interactions with the outside world.

**Research design and data collection.** The qualitative study is a collection of in-depth, semi-structured interviews that follow a constructivist grounded theory methodological approach. Although the traditional grounded theory methodological approach is founded on a positivist understanding of knowledge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a constructivist one concedes that no data collection methodology is free of the researcher's own biases and perceptions (Charmaz, 2006). As such, a constructivist theory methodological approach incorporates many of the methods and questions in line with constructivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological approaches. Such understandings of knowledge and of its collection are ideal for answering the qualitative study's two research questions through an inductive process. A constructivist grounded theory approach allows for a process that consists of collecting data primarily through interviews, identifying the themes and patterns in the data, and formulating a working theory for the phenomena under study. Doing so allowed for the emergence of a theory from the data that could then be compared to Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory of identity development and its treatment of work roles, choices, and behaviors as extensions of that developmental process.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that mostly relied on open-ended questions. At the root of the in-depth interviewing process was an interest in understanding the lived experiences of the participants and the meanings they made of those experiences. Such an interview approach fell in line with Seidman's (2006) work on qualitative interviewing, which posits that the way to meaning is to be able to put people's behaviors into their given context. The interviewing also provided access to information that led to an understanding of the meaning of participants' work behaviors, which was of critical importance to the study. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed using the main concepts of Erikson's (1960, 1968) theory of identity development, which posit that parents, families, neighborhood context, school experiences, and friends and peers are the most influential actors in pre-adult identity development. This approach also follows the quantitative study, which looked at the relationship of family, school, and peer clusters on work outcomes.

The first half of the interview questions focused on such pre-adult life experiences and identity formation. Participants were asked to describe the actors Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory proposes are the most influential, their perceptions of those actors, their relationships with them, and what they learned from them about themselves and about work. Participants were also asked questions about their identity status and the roles of their personalities and of their ethnic background in their identity formation process. To not limit the participants' identity development experiences to Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory, they were also asked to identify other actors or events that played an important role in their lives. The second half of the interview focused on the participants' occupational history. Participants were asked to recount all of their previous jobs, to explain what attracted them to their jobs, how they attained them, and what they liked and disliked about them. They were also asked about what work meant to them and about the importance of work on their identities. Finally, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. Melgosa's (1987) Occupational Identity Scale has been validated for measuring the status of individuals' occupational identity, from achievement to moratorium to foreclosure

to diffusion. The survey was conducted to gain a quantitative measure of the participants' occupational identity status and assist in the triangulation of the qualitative findings.

The interviews were conducted in 2016 between March and May. Before the start of each interview, I shared with the participants that their information would remain confidential, that there were no right or wrong answers to my questions, that I was not searching for any particular information, to not disclose the names of any people in their answers, and that they maintained the right to not answer all of my questions or to end the interview at any point in time. The interviews began after gaining their consent to continue. Nineteen of the participants were interviewed in cafés or coffee shops throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Efforts were made to ensure that the ambiance was conducive for the topic of conservation, and that the seating arrangement was private and comfortable for the participants. These considerations were maintained to enhance the participants' trust in me as the researcher and in the research process. The remaining participant was interviewed over the telephone. The average interview length was 65 minutes. The shortest interview was 39 minutes in length, whereas the longest interview lasted 88 minutes. The participants were compensated \$50 in cash at the end of the interview process. After each interview was conducted, I wrote a memo of my main observations and of the interview's main takeaways. These memos were compiled and leveraged to facilitate the data analysis. All of the interviews were audio recorded, and a private company was hired to transcribe the interviews for analysis.

**Sampling.** The qualitative study was limited to Latino males between the ages of 22 and 29 who were born in, raised in, and were living in California at the time of their interview. For sampling purposes, Latino was defined as an individual whose parents and/or grandparents originated from a Spanish-speaking Latin American country and who identified with the culture and traditions of said region. The wide age range was selected to gain a diverse set of identity development and work outcomes, to ensure that the participants were old enough to have work experience, and to recognize that current adolescents and young adults are taking longer to establish themselves in the labor market (Arnett, 2000). Efforts were also undertaken to gain a diverse set of participants based on educational attainment and occupational experiences to be able to answer the second part of the two research questions, which seeks to understand what distinguishes the male Latinos who attain white-collar employment from those who do not. Blue-collar employment was defined as any occupation that did not require a college degree, specialized training, or skills that require time and training to develop. White-collar employment, on the other hand, was defined as any occupation that required a college degree, specialized training, or skills that take time and training to develop.

Table 3.8 summarizes the 20 Latino males who participated in the study. The mean age of the participants was 25.15 ( $SD = 2.48$ ). Nine of the participants were born and raised in the Bay Area and another nine were born and raised in southern California, including the Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego areas. One of the participants was born and raised in Central California, and another one was born and raised in the Central Valley. Nine of the participants had attained and were employed in white-collar jobs, whereas the remaining 11 had only attained blue-collar employment. The nine white-collar participants had attained at least a bachelor's degree, whereas the 11 blue-collar participants had attained at most a high school diploma. Half of the participants were employed full-time, whereas the remaining half were either unemployed, casually employed, employed part-time, or between jobs. Finally, 16 of the participants were first-generation Americans, one was first- and second-generation American, and the remaining three were second-generation American.

Table 3.8  
*Summary of Study Participants*

Participant	Age	Area In Which Raised	Current Employment Status	Highest Degree Attained	Work Type
1	24	Bay Area	Unemployed	High School	Blue-Collar
2	25	Central Valley	Full-Time	Bachelor's	White-Collar
3	28	Southern California	Casually Employed	Less Than High School	Blue-Collar
4	23	Bay Area	Full-Time	Less Than High School	Blue-Collar
5	29	Bay Area	Unemployed	High School	Blue-Collar
6	28	Southern California	Full-Time	Bachelor's	White-Collar
7	23	Central California	Casually Employed	High School	Blue-Collar
8	27	Southern California	Casually Employed	High School	Blue-Collar
9	22	Southern California	Casually Employed	High School	Blue-Collar
10	23	Bay Area	Full-Time	High School	Blue-Collar
11	24	Bay Area	Part-time	High School	Blue-Collar
12	22	Southern California	Casually Employed	High School	Blue-Collar
13	25	Bay Area	Full-Time	High School	Blue-Collar
14	28	Bay Area	Full-Time	Master's	White-Collar
15	29	Southern California	Self-Employed	Bachelor's	White-Collar
16	27	Southern California	Full-Time	Bachelor's	White-Collar
17	23	Bay Area	Full-Time	Bachelor's	White-Collar
18	22	Southern California	Full-Time	Bachelor's	White-Collar
19	24	Bay Area	2 Part-Time Jobs	Bachelor's	White-Collar
20	27	Southern California	Between Jobs	Master's	White-Collar

**Recruitment.** Participants were recruited through a multi-pronged purposive sampling strategy to maximize their variability based on age, employment status, occupational history, and educational attainment. Attaining a diverse set of experiences based on these three factors



allowed for a more robust understanding of the phenomena under study by allowing for the emergence of differentiated narratives (Maxwell, 2013). Relying on participants with similar employment outcomes would have limited the study's ability to generalize to Erikson's theory (1950, 1968), whereas diversifying the study population allowed for the emergence of different examples of identity development. Furthermore, a diverse set of narratives allowed for a more robust theory-building process, which was an important goal of the study.

Participants were recruited through paid and unpaid online advertisements and through flyers posted in public places and community boards around the Bay Area (Appendix B), including public libraries, YMCAs, public transportation hubs, and coffee shops. The advertisements and flyers included basic information about the study, eligibility criteria, and the researcher's contact information. The eligibility criteria noted that the participants had to be male, between the ages of 22 and 29, of Latino heritage on both their father and mother's sides, and born and raised in California. The advertisements also noted that participants would be compensated \$50 for their time, and that the entire process would take approximately 90 minutes. Individuals were screened over the phone before being selected for inclusion in the study. During this screening phone call, participants were asked questions to ensure they met the eligibility criteria, they were asked about their ability to travel to a convenient location to conduct the interview, and an interview date and time was scheduled. The participants were also asked how they learned about the study. All of the participants except one learned about the study through advertisements on the Craigslist jobs section.

**Data analysis.** The data analysis followed Creswell's (2012) inductive logic of research, which falls in line with an interpretivist epistemological approach. According to this model, the data analysis process consists of three stages after the data has been gathered through open-ended questions. First, the data was analyzed for themes or categories. Second, broad patterns, generalizations, or theories were identified from the themes or categories. Third, generalizations were made to Erikson's identity development theory (1950, 1968). Such a data analysis process follows an inductive model of reasoning. This ground-up approach begins with data, patterns are then identified from the data, tentative hypotheses are inferred from the patterns, and, finally, the hypotheses are generalized to theory. This allowed for theory building not by applying Erikson's theory directly to the data, but by first creating a model of identity development from the data and then comparing it to Erikson's theory.

The coding strategy falls in line with this inductive model of reasoning, and it followed Maxwell's (2013) three-level coding technique. The first round of coding consisted of *organizational categories* that included broad areas or issues that merited further investigation or that served as a useful manner of ordering the data. The second round of coding consisted of more *substantive categories* that included descriptions of participants' concepts and beliefs. These were largely reflective of the categorized data and did not imply deeper meaning. Finally, the third round of coding consisted of *theoretical categories* that placed the coded data in a more general or abstract framework. These represent the researcher's concepts rather than the participants', and they were grounded in an inductive process of theory building. The three-tiered process allowed for robust analysis that continually built on the available data. Participants' simple categorical statements were winnowed down into more substantive concepts and beliefs, and these, in turn, were turned into a model to be able to generalize to theory.

Embedded into these data analysis and coding strategies was the goal of identifying the themes amongst the narratives to gain an understanding of the identity development and work trajectory similarities amongst all of the participants and the differences between the blue- and

white-collar ones. The analysis of the themes followed the life course of identity development given that the very concept of identity development develops across five life course stages from infancy to adolescence. The coded excerpts for each of the theoretical and interview protocol components (e.g., parents, family, neighborhood, school, etc.) for all of the participants were aggregated. The excerpts were then analyzed for themes. For example, themes for the excerpts coded under the parents section included “I am just like my parents,” “dad/mom supported me,” and “dad/mom were overly strict.” After all of the excerpts were tagged with a theme, a list of the themes that emerged was created. This list was then analyzed to deduce whether some of the themes could be collapsed into one. For example, the theme, “had to ask permission to go out,” was collapsed with the broader theme regarding parental boundaries.

After this process was completed for each section, the excerpts were then matched to the participants and their occupation type was identified. The themes were then counted based on whether the participant was a blue- or white-collar worker. The themes with the largest number of counts are the ones that were identified as the most important and that were included in the findings. Furthermore, themes that had a lot of counts for both blue- and white-collar participants were identified as being shared across the 20 participants, whereas themes that were disproportionately present in one of the groups was identified as being more important to that group and therefore different. For example, the theme of “gang activity in neighborhood” was shared across the 20 participants, whereas the theme of “participating in neighborhood illegal activities” emerged exclusively for blue-collar participants.

An in-depth analysis of each participant’s narrative was also undertaken. The purpose of this additional analytic component was to uncover the nuances in the narratives that were lost in the thematic analysis approach. In other words, although the thematic analysis incorporates the voices of the 20 participants, small differences were present in each individual narrative, which made it pertinent to undertake an in-depth analysis of each participant’s identity development and employment trajectory. The data of each participant was analyzed by development component. Given the available data, I deduced whether the participant met Erikson’s (1950, 1968) theoretical requirements to qualify as having had positive development experiences in that realm. For example, participants that spoke positively about their parents and who described them as exhibiting the parenting behaviors Erikson’s theory suggests are conducive to healthy identity development were marked as having had positive developmental experiences in the second stage of development. After this process was completed for all of the participants across the five stages of pre-adult development, the stages of positive identity development experiences were counted. These were then matched against the participants’ occupation type, and a chart of four developmental and work trajectory types were identified: largely positive identity development experiences and white-collar work outcomes, largely positive identity development experiences and blue-collar work outcomes, largely negative identity development experiences and white-collar work outcomes, and largely negative identity development experiences and blue-collar work outcomes.

**Presentation of findings.** The issue of counting in the presentation of qualitative research findings has been controversial for many decades (Miles, 1979). In spite of the differences in opinion, some guidance has emerged regarding when it is best to count and when it is best to avoid it. Hannah and Lautsch (2011) recommend avoiding counting in two circumstances: when it is important for researchers to gain access to the perspectives of the insiders regarding processes of interest, and when researchers seek to pursue unpredicted findings during an indicative data collection process. Given that the purpose of the qualitative

study is to both collect the narratives of the participants' identity development processes and to undergo an inductive data collection process, the presentation of the qualitative findings will avoid referring to counts. In Chapters 5 and 6, the cross-narrative findings are presented in narrative form and take a life course approach from infancy to adolescence. The themes that emerged from the analysis are embedded within each of the life course components. To supplement these findings and to allow for the emergence of nuances within the narratives, the narratives of representative participants were selected and leveraged to present the thematic findings. In Chapter 7, the participant-by-participant findings are presented. Similarly, the narratives of representative participants were selected to represent each of the four combinations of identity development and employment outcomes.

**Theory building.** The process of building theory from the data and generalizing it to Erikson's identity development theory (1950, 1968) followed Eisenhardt's (1989) process of building theory from qualitative data. This process includes analyzing the data within each narrative, identifying cross-narrative patterns to look beyond initial impressions and seeing the data through multiple lenses, shaping a model or hypothesis from the cross-narrative data, comparing it with the existing theory and literature, and accounting for the differences between the two. This is an inductive approach to theory building in that the researcher analyzes the existing data and from it objectively builds a model. This model is then compared to the existing theory that was leveraged in the research design. Rather than viewing the data through the lens of the existing theory, this process allows the data to speak to the theory on its own.

**Accounting for disconfirming evidence.** A second an equally important benefit of Eisenhardt's (1989) process of theory building is that the accounting for disconfirming evidence is built into the process itself. The process does not presuppose that the data perfectly fit with existing theory. Rather, it considers the possibility that the existing theory is imperfect, and that new data have the potential to improve on it. A second step was also taken to account for disconfirming evidence. Borrowed from Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007), the narratives were matched with participants' Occupational Identity Scale survey results (Melgosa, 1987). The questionnaire has been validated in its measurement of occupational identity development status. Comparing the participants' narratives with the results from the survey allowed me to triangulate the data collected through the interviews and reduce the possibility of basing findings on disconfirming evidence.

**Impact of researcher's presence.** As with all qualitative research, I acted as a research instrument in the collection and analysis of the data. As a first-generation Latino-American born, raised, and currently living in California, I share a similar background with the participants, which predisposes me to have my own opinions on the answers to the research questions. Furthermore, as a Latino who has attained several higher education degrees, I have preconceived notions of members of my community, especially those who are not educated or are employed in white-collar work, like myself. To alleviate these concerns, I conducted the data analysis without identifying whether the participant was a blue- or white-collar worker. It was only after the data analysis had been completed that I matched the coded excerpts with the participants' occupation type. My emic position relative to the participants as a fellow Latino male helped with the data collection. A number of the participants expressed that they felt more comfortable discussing their identity development and work narratives with me because I was also Latino. Furthermore, most participants at some point before or during the interview asked me where I was from, the answer to which always received a positive response. They also frequently used terms that indicated that they were able to relate to me, such as "you understand, too" or "you

know what I mean.” Such comments and reactions regarding my position relative to the participants indicate that I was able to collect more honest data than if I were not Latino.

**Study limitations.** The main study limitations revolve around issues of diversity in the identity development narratives, longitudinal effects, and the credibility of the data. Regarding the first limitation, it was difficult to ask interested participants to take the Occupational Identity Scale survey prior to the interview because it would have limited the amount of interest in participation. Doing so, nonetheless, would have allowed me to ensure diversity amongst the participants based on occupational identity status (achieved, diffused, moratorium, or foreclosed), which could have added more complexity to the data and subsequent findings. Nonetheless, at least one of each of the occupational identity statuses were represented in the sample. Regarding longitudinal effects, it is important to remember that the study is not longitudinal. To follow participants from birth to young adulthood would have taken 18 years and required heavy resources. Instead, the study was retrospective, making the data that was collected limited to that which the participants remembered at the time of the interview. Furthermore, given the life course scope of the study, from infancy to young adulthood, the study challenged participants’ to recall very early life experiences. This limitation overlaps with the third limitation of credibility of data. Self-reported data is naturally limited by the fact that it rarely can be independently verified, so the participants’ words have to be taken at face value. Such words can be selective or exaggerated, which affects the quality of the data. Furthermore, only I was involved in the coding of the interviews, which added to the limitations related to credibility. Nonetheless, the breadth and depth of the interviews, along with the triangulation of the qualitative data through the use of the Occupational Identity Scale survey, worked to collect robust, well-rounded data on each of the study’s main components, elevating my confidence that my findings were not based on simplistic, scant, or weak data.

**Data archive and confidentiality.** The archiving of the data and the maintenance of participants’ confidentiality adhered to Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Participants’ identifying information were not at any point in the research process linked to their data, which will help maintain the confidentiality of their information. Participants were asked to not mention any names at any time during their interview, and the findings section of the qualitative study refers to the participants by either a participant number or a pseudonym. All of the materials related to the participants, from the recruitment communication exchanges, to the audio-recorded interviews, to the transcribed interviews, to the completed findings, were maintained in password-protected electronic devices. Only the researcher had access to this information. Per IRB regulations, the audio recordings will be destroyed one year after study closure. The transcriptions will be destroyed in line with the University of California, Berkeley’s policy recommendation of after three years following study closure. The survey and interview notes are the only documentations that were not recorded electronically. These hard-copy papers were stored in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher has access, and they will be destroyed three years after study closure.

## Chapter 4: Quantitative Study Findings

This chapter introduces the findings of the quantitative study using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997). The research question the analyses sought to answer was, *what is the relationship between identity development factors and measures of employment quality for young adults, and how does this relationship differ by gender and ethnicity?* To answer this research question, the analyses conducted here tested for the relationship between five psychosocial development clusters (the predictor variables) and five different types of work quality factors (the outcome variables). To identify the predictor variables, all of the variables available in the NLSY97 were reviewed for overlap with Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory. A series of diagnostic tests were conducted to select the variables that were most predictive of the employment quality outcome variables, as described in Chapter 3. After the predictor variables were identified, they were clustered based on Erikson's identity development stage and included in these analyses.

The five psychosocial development clusters consisted of variables related to (a) demographics, (b) family, (c) school, (d) peers, and (e) early work. The number of variables within each cluster varied from one to four. The five work quality outcome variables were (a) occupation type, (b) annual hours worked, (c) annual wages per hour worked, (d) paid time off, and (e) job satisfaction. With the exception of occupation type, which was dichotomous, all outcome variables were linear. The significance level for all of the analyses was set at 10% given that this study was largely exploratory. Special attention was also paid to the effect sizes. The chapter continues with a presentation of the descriptive statistics, the results for each of the five outcome variables, a discussion that provides a psychosocial development interpretation of the results and positions the results in the existing literature, and a conclusion.

### Descriptive Statistics

**Predictor variables.** The descriptive statistics for the predictor variables are summarized in Table 4.1. The demographic cluster broke down the study sample by gender, ethnicity, and family net worth. Non-Black/non-Latino males and females were raised in disproportionately wealthy households compared to the Black and Latino participants. The average net household worth for non-Black/non-Latino males and females was \$185,864 and \$178,763, respectively. Latino males had the third highest mean household net worth at \$73,337, followed by \$67,980 for Black males and \$67,524 for Black females. Latinas had the lowest mean net household worth (\$64,921).

Regarding the family cluster, a higher proportion of Latino males lived with both of their biological parents (80.39%) out of all of the participants. Non-Black/non-Latino males came in second with 72.03%, followed by non-Black/non-Latina females (67.19%), Latinas (65%), and Black males (62.82%). Black females were far less likely to be living with two biological parents (40.48%). Regarding father support, a higher proportion (72.55%) of Latino males described their dad as very supportive. Non-Black/non-Latino males came in second (70.63%), followed by Black males (62.86%), Black females (61.9%), and non-Black/non-Latina females (61.72%). Latinas were less likely to describe their dad as very supportive (47.5%).

For the school cluster, non-Black/non-Latina females had the highest mean grade point average (GPA), at 3.15. Non-Black/non-Latino males had the second highest (2.82,) followed by Latina females (2.81), Black females (2.63), and Black males (2.57). Latino males had the lowest mean GPA (2.53). Regarding the agreement that their teacher was strongly interested in his or her students, a higher proportion (24.22%) of non-Black/non-Latina females agreed. Latinas came in second (20%), followed by 15.69% of Latino males, and 14.29% of both Black

Table 4.1  
*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic and Predictor Variables*

Variable		Female			Male		
		Non-Black/Non-Latina	Black	Latina	Non-Black/Non-Latino	Black	Latino
<i>Demographic Variables</i>							
Mean Net Worth of Household		\$185,864	\$67,524	\$64,921	\$178,763	\$67,980	\$73,337
<i>Predictor Variables</i>							
Family Cluster	Live with 2 Biological Parents	67.19%	40.48%	65.00%	72.03%	62.86%	80.39%
	Live with 2 Parents, 1 Biological	20.31%	19.05%	25.00%	15.38%	17.14%	9.80%
	Live with 1 Biological Parent	10.16%	30.95%	7.50%	9.09%	11.43%	7.84%
	Live with Other/Non-Biological Parent	2.34%	9.52%	2.50%	3.50%	8.57%	1.96%
	Dad Very Supportive	61.72%	61.90%	47.50%	70.63%	62.86%	72.55%
	Dad Not Very or Somewhat Supportive	38.28%	38.10%	52.50%	29.37%	37.14%	27.45%
School Cluster	Mean Cumulative High School Grade Point Average	3.15	2.63	2.81	2.82	2.57	2.53
	Strongly Agree Teacher Interested in Students	24.22%	14.29%	20.0%	13.29%	14.29%	15.69%
	Agree Teacher Interested in Students	63.28%	64.29%	72.5%	76.22%	74.29%	62.75%
	Disagree Teacher Interested in Students	12.5%	21.43%	7.5%	9.09%	5.71%	19.61%
	Strongly Disagree Teacher Interested in Students	0%	0%	0%	1.4%	5.71%	1.96%
	Yes Participated in Gifted Courses Program	24.22%	4.76%	12.5%	13.99%	8.57%	7.84%
Peers Cluster	More than Half of Peers in Sports, Clubs, School Activities	59.38%	59.52%	55.0%	53.15%	57.14%	43.14%
	Half of Peers In Sports, Clubs, School Activities	33.59%	23.81%	30.0%	37.06%	31.43%	39.22%
	Less than Half of Peers In Sports, Clubs, School Activities	7.03%	16.67%	15.0%	9.79%	11.43%	17.65%
	More than Half of Peers Plan to go to College	69.53%	40.48%	57.5%	59.44%	45.71%	31.37%
	Half of Peers Plan to go to College	21.88%	26.19%	25.0%	32.17%	37.14%	33.33%
	Less than Half of Peers Plan to go to College	8.59%	33.33%	17.5%	8.39%	17.14%	35.29%
	Less than Half of Peers Belong to a Gang	92.97%	73.81%	82.5%	97.2%	80.0%	70.59%
	Half of Peers Belong to a Gang	4.69%	11.9%	5.0%	2.1%	8.57%	11.76%
More than Half of Peers Belong to a Gang	2.34%	14.29%	12.5%	0.7%	11.43%	17.65%	
Early Work Cluster	Cumulative Hours Worked Ages 16-19	3,509	2,554	3,213	4,104	3,119	3,588

males and females. Non-Black/non-Latino males were last, with only 13.29% agreeing that their teacher cared about them. Finally, regarding participation in gifted and talented courses, non-Black/non-Latina females had the highest participation rate (24.22%), followed by 13.99% of non-Black/non-Latino males, 12.5% of Latinas, 8.57% of Black males, 7.84% of Latino males, and, finally, 4.76% of Black females.

Regarding the peers cluster, a higher proportion (59.52%) of Black females reported that more than half of their peers were involved in sports, clubs, or school activities, followed by non-Black/non-Latina females (59.38%), Black males (57.14%), Latinas (55%), non-Black/non-Latino males (53.15%), and Latino males, (43.14%). Regarding percentage of peers who planned to attend college, 69.53% of non-Black/non-Latina females reported that more than half of their peers had such plans, followed by 59.44% of non-Black/non-Latino males, 57.5% of Latinas, 45.71% of Black males, 40.48% of Black females, and 31.37% of Latino males. Regarding peer gang membership, 17.65% of Latino males reported that more than half of their peers belonged to a gang, followed by 14.28% of Black females, 12.5% of Latinas, 11.43% of Black males, 2.34% of non-Black/non-Latina females, and 0.7% of non-Black/non-Latino males.

For the early work cluster, non-Black/non-Latino males had on average between the ages of 16 and 19 accumulated the most working hours (4,104). Latino males followed with 3,588 hours, then non-Black/non-Latina females with 3,509 hours, Latinas with 3,213 hours, and Black males with 3,119 hours. Black females had accumulated the least, with 2,554 hours.

**Outcome variables.** The descriptive statistics for the outcome variables are illustrated in Table 4.2. Beginning with occupation type, 54.26% of non-Black/non-Latina females were in a white-collar occupation, followed by 47.06% of Black females, 40% of non-Black/non-Latino males, 37.5% of Latinas, 24% of Black males, and 21.21% of Latino males. Regarding annual hours worked at employee type jobs, non-Black/non-Latino males had the highest average (2,068 hours), followed by Latino males (1,988 hours), Black males (1,962 hours), non-Black/non-Latina females (1,903 hours), Latinas (1,432 hours), and Black females (1,212 hours). Latinas had the highest average annual income per total hours worked (\$16.88 per hour), followed by non-Black/non-Latino males (\$16.37 per hour), Latino males (\$15.23 per hour), non-Black/non-Latina females (\$13.38 per hour), Black males (\$11.36 per hour), and Black females (\$10.61 per hour). Turning to the average number of paid vacation and sick days, Latino males had the most, (14.26 days), followed by non-Black/non-Latino males (13.11 days), non-Black/non-Latina females (11.45 days), Black males (9.65 days), Black females (8.36 days), and Latinas (7.06 days). Finally, for the job satisfaction variable, Latino males had the highest mean job satisfaction index (3.36), followed by Latinas (3.25), non-Black/non-Latina females (3.15), non-Black/non-Latino males (3.11), Black males (3.0), and Black females (2.8).

Table 4.2  
*Descriptive Statistics of Outcome Variables*

Variable	Female			Male		
	Non-Black/Non-Latina	Black	Latina	Non-Black/Non-Latino	Black	Latino
<i>Outcome Variables</i>						
Percent in White Collar Occupation	54.26%	47.06%	37.5%	40.0%	24.0%	21.21%
Annual Hours Worked at Employee Type Jobs	1,903	1,212	1,432	2,068	1,961	1,988

Annual Income Per Total Hours Worked	\$13.38/hour	\$10.61/hour	\$16.88/hour	\$16.37/hour	\$11.36/hour	\$15.23/hour
Number of Paid Vacation and Sick Days	11.45	8.36	7.06	13.11	9.65	14.26
Job Satisfaction	3.15	2.8	3.25	3.11	3.0	3.36

## Results

**Occupation type outcome variable.** Table 4.3 summarizes the data output for the five logistic regression models for the occupation type outcome variable. The five clusters explained 15.5% of the total variance. Of the total explained variance, the school cluster contributed the most (68.39%), followed by the demographics cluster (20.65%), the peers cluster (5.16%), the family cluster (4.52%), and the early work cluster (1.29%).

Only the cumulative high school GPA predictor variable was statistically significant in the fifth and final model. Cumulative high school GPA had an odds ratio of 0.02 with a p-value of 0.00. Furthermore, the Z-score of 5.43 was the highest for any of the variables. The odds ratio indicates that each one-unit increase in cumulative high school GPA was associated with a two percent increase in the odds of attaining a white-collar occupation. For example, a participant with a 3.5 cumulative high school GPA had a two percent higher chance of attaining a white-collar occupation compared to one with a 3.49 cumulative high school GPA.

The interaction between gender and being Latino predictor variable was statistically significant in Models 1a and 2a, and the dad support predictor variable was also statistically significant in Model 2a. Nonetheless, these became statistically nonsignificant as more information about the participants was added to the models. In Model 2a, being Latino and male was associated with a 96% decrease in the odds of attaining a white-collar occupation. Regarding dad support, the switch from having a not very or somewhat supportive father to one who was very supportive was associated with a 42% increase in the odds of attaining a white-collar occupation.

**Annual hours worked outcome variable.** Table 4.4 summarizes the data output for the five linear regression models for the annual hours worked outcome variable. The five clusters explained 11.31% of the total variance. Of the total explained variance, the demographics cluster contributed the most (51.28%), followed by the peers cluster (19.01%), the school cluster (12.02%), the early work cluster (11.32%), and the family cluster.

The final regression model resulted in five statistically significant predictor variables. Gender had the largest effect size, followed by being Black, teenage hours worked, percentage of peers who were in sports, clubs, and school activities, and participation in a gifted courses program. The shift from female to male was associated with 282.88 more annual hours worked, and the change from non-Black to Black was associated with 329.38 fewer hours worked. As such, being male had a positive effect on annual hours worked, whereas being Black had a negative effect on annual hours worked. A one-unit increase in hours worked as a teenager was associated with a 0.05 increase in annual hours worked. In other words, every 20 hours worked as a teenager was associated with an increase of one hour in annual hours worked. The switch from having less than half of peers involved in sports, clubs, and school activities to half of peers, and the switch from half of peers to more than half of peers, were associated with an increase of 152.04 annual hours worked. Finally, participating in a gifted courses program was associated with a positive effect of 256.12 on annual hours worked.

The gender and Black interaction variable was also statistically significant in Models 1b and 2b. Nonetheless, the results for this variable became statistically nonsignificant as more



information about the participants was added to the models. In Model 2b, being Black and male was associated with 434.36 more annual hours worked.

**Annual wages per hours worked outcome variable.** Table 4.5 summarizes the data output for the five linear regression models for the annual wages per hours worked outcome variable. The five clusters explained 6.88% of the total variance. Of the total explained variance, the school cluster contributed the most (33.72%), followed by the demographics cluster (27.33%), the peers cluster (22.97%), and the family cluster (15.99%). Surprisingly, the early work cluster contributed nothing to the total explained variance.

The relatively low total explained variance of the final model resulted in very few variables with a statistically significant relationship with annual wages per hours worked. Only cumulative high school GPA was statistically significant in the final model. Every one-unit increase in cumulative high school grade point average was related to a three-cent increase in annual wages per hours worked. Cumulative high school grade point average was a continuous variable ranging from 84 to 417, making every 0.01 increase in cumulative grade point average related to a three-cent increase in annual wages per hours worked. For example, an A-plus participant with a 4.17 cumulative GPA made five dollars more per hour compared to a C-plus participant with a 2.5 cumulative GPA. The beta coefficient for this variable was 0.12, making the effect size one of the highest in all the models thus far.

The parental household figure was also statistically significant in Model 2c. Nonetheless, the results for this variable became statistically nonsignificant as more information about the participants was added to the models. In Model 2c, each unit increase in the number of biological parents in the household was associated with a \$1.79 increase in annual wages per hours worked.

**Paid time off outcome variable.** Table 4.6 summarizes the data output for the five linear regression models for the paid time off outcome variable. The five clusters explained 8.16% of the total variance. Of the total explained variance, the school cluster contributed the most (45.96%), followed by the demographics cluster (35.91%), the peers cluster (12.87%), the early work cluster (2.81%), and the family cluster (2.45%).

The final regression model resulted in two statistically significant predictor variables. Cumulative high school GPA had a beta score of 0.19, making it one of the largest effect sizes in all of the models. Every one-unit increase in cumulative high school GPA was associated with a 0.03 increase in paid time off. In other words, a 0.33 increase in cumulative high school GPA (in nominal terms) was associated with an additional day of paid time off, so that a participant with a 4.0 cumulative high school GPA would have three extra paid days off compared to one with a 3.0 cumulative high school GPA. Gender was also statistically significant with a relatively high beta of 0.16. The switch from female to male was associated with a 3.38 increase in paid time off, meaning that males were better off than females when it came to paid time off. This difference is significant given that the average paid time off for the entire sample was 11.37 days.

**Job satisfaction outcome variable.** Table 4.7 summarizes the data output for the five linear regression models for the job satisfaction outcome variable. The five clusters explained 2.56% of the total variance. Of the total explained variance, the demographics cluster contributed the most (79.3%), followed by the family cluster (10.16%), the school cluster (6.25%), the early work cluster (2.34%), and the peers cluster (1.95%).

The final regression model resulted in only one statistically significant predictor variable. The coefficient result for the being Black predictor variable was -0.39 with a p-value of 0.07.

Table 4.3  
*Data Output Summary for the Occupation Type Outcome Variable*

Variable	Model 1a			Model 2a			Model 3a			Model 4a			Model 5a		
	Odds Ratio	P-value	Z-score	Odds Ratio	P-value	Z-score	Odds Ratio	P-value	Z-score	Odds Ratio	P-value	Z-score	Odds Ratio	P-value	Z-score
GENDER	-0.41	0.14	-1.5	-0.44	0.11	-1.62	-0.21	0.49	-0.7	-0.19	0.54	-0.62	-0.2	0.51	-0.66
BLACKS	-0.12	0.76	-0.3	-0.13	0.74	-0.33	0.46	0.29	1.05	0.49	0.28	1.09	0.55	0.22	1.22
GEN_BLA	-0.63	0.33	-0.98	-0.6	0.35	-0.93	-0.84	0.23	-1.21	-0.9	0.19	-1.3	-0.93	0.18	-1.33
GEN_HIS	<b>-0.91</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>-1.92</b>	<b>-0.96</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>-2.02</b>	-0.44	0.39	-0.86	-0.4	0.45	-0.76	-0.35	0.5	-0.67
PARFIG				0.02	0.91	0.11	-0.12	0.45	-0.76	-0.12	0.48	-0.71	-0.12	0.46	-0.74
DADSUP				<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>1.72</b>	0.23	0.39	0.85	0.27	0.32	0.99	0.3	0.27	1.1
SCHTEA							-0.29	0.21	-1.26	-0.33	0.16	-1.4	-0.35	0.14	-1.48
SCGATE							0.45	0.22	1.24	0.39	0.29	1.06	0.39	0.3	1.05
CHSGPA							<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>5.55</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>5.43</b>
PEEACT										0.24	0.23	1.21	0.25	0.21	1.26
PEECOL										0.21	0.3	1.04	0.2	0.31	1.01
PEEGNG										-0.17	0.55	-0.6	-0.17	0.54	-0.61
TEENWK													0.00005	0.41	0.83
McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>	3.2			3.9			14.5			15.3			15.5		
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	-			0.7			10.6			0.8			0.2		
Proportion	20.65%			4.52%			68.39%			5.16%			1.29%		

*N* = 318

Table 4.4  
*Data Output Summary for the Annual Hours Worked Outcome Variable*

Variable	Model 1b			Model 2b			Model 3b			Model 4b			Model 5b		
	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta
GENDER	275.74	0.02	0.14	271.59	0.02	0.13	318.83	0.01	0.16	303.29	0.01	0.15	282.88	0.02	0.14
BLACKS	-580.3	0.00	-0.22	-524.93	0.00	-0.2	-446.31	0.02	-0.17	-393.78	0.04	-0.15	-329.38	0.08	-0.12
GEN_BLA	473.31	0.08	0.13	434.36	0.1	0.12	380.72	0.16	0.1	358.45	0.18	0.1	354.43	0.18	0.09
GEN_HIS	-79.34	0.64	-0.02	-94.4	0.58	-0.03	-56.87	0.74	-0.02	61.01	0.73	0.02	87.9	0.62	0.03
PARFIG				97.54	0.12	0.08	86.7	0.17	0.07	83.14	0.18	0.07	77.57	0.21	0.06
DADSUP				60.53	0.56	0.03	37.97	0.72	0.02	27.99	0.79	0.01	44.72	0.67	0.02
SCHTEA							6.8	0.94	0.004	-17.79	0.84	-0.01	-24.25	0.78	-0.01
SCGATE							279.44	0.06	0.1	260.03	0.08	0.09	256.12	0.08	0.09
CHSGPA							0.85	0.37	0.05	0.33	0.73	0.02	0.7	0.47	0.04
PEEACT										137.99	0.07	0.09	152.04	0.04	0.1
PEECOL										95.86	0.2	0.07	83.75	0.26	0.06
PEEGNG										118.8	0.25	0.06	125.47	0.22	0.07
TEENWK													0.05	0.02	0.12
R <sup>2</sup>	5.8			6.52			7.88			10.03			11.31		
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	-			0.72			1.36			2.15			1.28		
Proportion	51.28%			6.37%			12.02%			19.01%			11.32%		

*N* = 396

Table 4.5

*Data Output Summary for the Annual Wages Per Hours Worked Outcome Variable*

Variable	Model 1c			Model 2c			Model 3c			Model 4c			Model 5c		
	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta
GENDER	2.16	0.23	0.09	2.05	0.26	0.08	2.64	0.15	0.11	2.41	0.19	0.1	2.41	0.19	0.1
BLACKS	-3.6	0.26	-0.1	-3.17	0.32	-0.09	-1.86	0.57	-0.05	-1.39	0.67	-0.04	-1.35	0.68	-0.04
GEN_BLA	-1.4	0.77	-0.03	-1.84	0.69	-0.04	-2.21	0.64	-0.04	-1.43	0.76	-0.03	-1.44	0.76	-0.03
GEN_HIS	-1.14	0.67	-0.03	-1.32	0.62	-0.03	-0.13	0.96	-0.003	1.29	0.65	0.03	1.31	0.65	0.03
PARFIG				<b>1.79</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	1.64	0.13	0.1	1.72	0.11	0.1	1.71	0.11	0.1
DADSUP				0.34	0.84	0.01	0.009	1.0	0.003	-0.12	0.95	-0.004	-0.09	0.96	-0.003
SCHTEA							-1.68	0.26	-0.07	-1.86	0.21	-0.08	-1.87	0.21	-0.08
SCGATE							0.98	0.66	0.03	0.9	0.68	0.03	0.91	0.68	0.03
CHSGPA							<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.12</b>
PEEACT										-0.51	0.67	-0.03	-0.5	0.68	-0.03
PEECOL										2.03	0.11	0.11	2.03	0.11	0.11
PEEGNG										1.52	0.41	0.06	1.54	0.41	0.06
TEENWK													0.00003	0.93	0.006
R <sup>2</sup>	1.88			2.98			5.3			6.88			6.88		
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	-			1.1			2.32			1.58			0		
Proportion	27.33			15.99			33.72			22.97			0		

N = 258

Table 4.6  
*Data Output Summary for the Paid Time Off Outcome Variable*

Variable	Model 1d			Model 2d			Model 3d			Model 4d			Model 5d		
	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta
GENDER	2.57	0.13	0.12	2.66	0.12	0.13	<b>3.81</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.16</b>
BLACKS	-2.18	0.38	-0.08	-2.09	0.4	-0.08	-0.7	0.78	-0.03	-0.24	0.93	-0.009	0.11	0.97	0.004
GEN_BLA	-1.28	0.73	-0.03	-1.35	0.72	-0.04	-1.58	0.68	-0.04	-1.27	0.74	-0.03	-1.39	0.72	-0.04
GEN_HIS	1.16	0.67	0.03	1.11	0.68	0.03	3.04	0.28	0.08	3.61	0.21	0.1	3.8	0.19	0.1
PARFIG				0.26	0.77	0.02	-0.17	0.85	-0.01	-0.22	0.81	-0.02	-0.27	0.77	-0.02
DADSUP				-0.91	0.55	-0.04	-1.57	0.31	-0.07	-1.79	0.25	-0.08	-1.66	0.29	-0.08
SCHTEA							-0.82	0.56	-0.04	-1.1	0.44	-0.06	-1.25	0.39	-0.06
SCGATE							1.25	0.55	0.04	1.15	0.59	0.04	1.15	0.58	0.04
CHSGPA							<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.19</b>
PEEACT										0.22	0.84	0.18	0.23	0.83	0.02
PEECOL										0.0007	1	0.00005	-0.04	0.98	-0.002
PEEGNG										2.21	0.14	0.11	2.21	0.15	0.11
TEENWK													0.0002	0.49	0.05
R <sup>2</sup>	2.93			3.13			6.88			7.93			8.16		
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	-			0.2			3.75			1.05			0.23		
Proportion	35.91			2.45			45.96			12.87			2.81		

*N* = 210

Table 4.7  
*Data Output Summary for the Job Satisfaction Outcome Variable*

Variable	Model 1e			Model 2e			Model 3e			Model 4e			Model 5e		
	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta	Coefficient	P-value	Beta
GENDER	-0.06	0.65	-0.03	-0.07	0.59	-0.04	-0.08	0.59	-0.04	-0.08	0.6	-0.04	-0.08	0.58	-0.04
<b>BLACKS</b>	<b>-0.38</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	<b>-0.38</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>-0.39</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>-0.41</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>-0.17</b>	<b>-0.39</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>-0.16</b>
GEN_BLA	0.26	0.38	0.08	0.27	0.36	0.08	0.28	0.37	0.08	0.28	0.37	0.08	-0.28	0.37	0.08
GEN_HIS	0.24	0.25	0.08	0.23	0.27	0.07	0.22	0.32	0.07	0.2	0.38	0.06	0.21	0.36	0.07
PARFIG				-0.008	0.91	-0.007	-0.008	0.92	-0.007	-0.006	0.93	-0.005	-0.008	0.92	-0.007
DADSUP				0.1	0.4	0.05	0.11	0.39	0.05	0.11	0.38	0.06	0.12	0.36	0.06
SCHTEA							0.05	0.66	0.03	0.05	0.66	0.03	0.04	0.68	0.03
SCGATE							-0.07	0.68	-0.03	-0.07	0.67	-0.03	-0.08	0.66	-0.03
CHSGPA							-0.0002	0.85	-0.01	-0.002	0.9	-0.01	-0.00008	0.94	-0.005
PEEACT										0.02	0.84	0.01	0.02	0.82	0.01
PEECOL										-0.02	0.82	-0.02	-0.02	0.82	0.01
PEEGNG										-0.02	0.85	-0.01	-0.02	0.84	-0.01
TEENWK													0.00001	0.68	0.03
R <sup>2</sup>	2.03			2.29			2.45			2.5			2.56		
Change in R <sup>2</sup>	-			0.26			0.16			0.05			0.06		
Proportion	79.3			10.16			6.25			1.95			2.34		

*N* = 279

The result indicates that the change from not being Black to being Black was associated with a 0.39 drop in job satisfaction. The job satisfaction outcome variable was a continuous variable on a scale from zero to four, making a 0.39 drop in job satisfaction somewhat meaningful, as it could make the difference between participants liking their job very much and only liking it fairly well. Furthermore, the beta score for the Blacks variable of -0.16 made it one of the highest of all of the statistically significant variables in the 25 models that make up the findings, meaning that the effect size of this association was especially meaningful.

### Discussion

**Cluster analysis.** The results provided only partial evidence for the support that employment quality outcomes are products of psychosocial development, per Erikson’s (1950, 1968) framework. Table 4.8 summarizes the explained variance for the five outcome variables and provides the proportion that each cluster of prediction variables explained out of the five-model total. As the table illustrates, the demographics cluster explained the highest proportion of the five-model total, followed by the school cluster, and the peer cluster. The family and early work clusters together explained 11.45% of the five-model total.

Table 4.8  
*Summary of Explained Variance for Each Cluster and Outcome Variable*

Cluster	Occupation Type	Hours Worked	Wages Per Hours Worked	Paid Time Off	Job Satisfaction	5-Model Total	Proportion of 5-Model Total
Gender/Ethnicity	20.65%	51.28%	27.33%	35.91%	79.3%	214.47%	42.89%
School	68.39%	12.02%	33.72%	45.96%	6.25%	166.34%	33.27%
Peers	5.16%	19.01%	22.97%	12.87%	1.95%	61.96%	12.39%
Family	4.52%	6.37%	15.99%	2.45%	10.16%	39.49%	7.90%
Early Work	1.29%	11.32%	0%	2.81%	2.34%	17.76%	3.55%
Total	100.01%	100%	100.01%	100%	100%	500.02%	100%

*Note: Totals do not always add up to 100 because of rounding*

Three significant findings are present in this table. First, the emergence of the demographics cluster as the set that explained the largest proportion of the five-model variance demonstrates the important role gender and ethnicity play in determining the employment quality outcomes of individuals, even at this early stage. Such explanatory factors are largely absent in economic theories of unemployment, yet, as the findings illustrate, being female and being an ethnic minority present challenges to the attainment of high work quality outcomes. Interpreting this outcome through Erikson’s (1950, 1968) psychosocial development theory, it is possible that female, Black, and Latino adolescents’ psychosocial development processes are largely tinged with a sense of being inferior to other majority groups. As they reach an age at which they become more aware of their group memberships and of the social position of their groups, they internalize society’s perceptions of their groups, which feed into the development of an identity that reinforces their disadvantaged place in society (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Female and minority adolescents are then more likely to act in the labor market in manners that reinforce such identities (Stets & Burke, 2000), such as by limiting themselves to certain types of employment that provide fewer work quality factors.

Second, the emergence of the school variables as the most significant of the four psychosocial development clusters illustrates the strong association between the internalization

throughout childhood and adolescence of self-competence in an academic setting and adult employment outcomes. Although most explanations for the relationship between school and employment success are largely limited to intelligence and capabilities, Erikson's theory (1950, 1968) adds that it is the processing of messages that either reinforce or reject such attributes that leads to people's choices and behaviors. As Erikson himself posited (1950, 1968), schools form the first environment in which children are demanded to exercise their skills and abilities and in which they compare these to others'. Schools, therefore, have a profound impact in how children and adolescents ultimately develop an identity in the working world, as school experiences extend themselves into the labor market. These results add to the larger set of studies that have found an association between various measures of school ability and occupational identity development (Coutinho & Blustein, 2014; Graef, Wells, Hyland, & Muchinsky, 1985; Lapan, Gysbers, Hughey, & Arni, 1993; Lopez, 1989; Meeus, 1993; Ochs & Roessler, 2001).

Finally, the low ranking of the early work cluster in how much it contributed to the overall variance demonstrates that economic factors alone are insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of young adult work and unemployment outcomes. This challenges economic theories that ignore that the labor market is also regulated socially, not just economically (Jahoda, 1982). Although this study was unable to fully control for the impact of early work experience on the employment quality outcomes, the fact that the participants had only recently started their working lives indicates that early developmental experiences played a role in advantaging some in their entrée into the labor market, whereas it disadvantaged others. One key implication of this result is that young and recent labor market entrants do not enter the labor market in equal footing. Instead, the disadvantages likely begin much earlier in life, in the formative stages of psychosocial development.

#### **The relationship between family variables and employment quality outcomes.**

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), the family environment is the most critical factor in the earliest psychosocial development experiences of a newborn child. It is in the home—vis-à-vis parents, siblings, family members, and caregivers—where children between birth and the age of six learn to trust that they are safe in the world, where they have develop a sense of autonomy that allows them to explore and produce a sense of self-esteem, and where they begin to anticipate their future roles in society given their social group membership. In spite of the importance of family, the family cluster was only the fourth most significant of the five groups of predictor variables. It explained 7.9% of the total five-model variance, and none of the variables were statistically significant in any of the final models. The likeliest explanation for the lack of stronger evidence is confounding. In other words, the relationships between dad support and parent household figure and work outcomes are not direct.

Nonetheless, the two variables in the family cluster—dad support and parental figure in the home—were statistically significant in earlier models for the occupation type and annual wages per hours worked outcome variables, respectively, providing some evidence for Erikson's (1950, 1968) psychosocial development theory, which posits that parents play a role in shaping adolescents' employment quality outcomes vis-à-vis the developmental experiences they provide to them. According to psychosocial development theory (Muuss, 1995), without healthy developmental experiences vis-à-vis parents, children are more likely to experience identity confusion as adolescents and to have a difficult time identifying with work roles and making occupational choices. As such, the positive correlation between dad's support level and being raised by biological parents with two of the employment quality outcomes aligns with Erikson's theory. The findings also contribute to the limited occupational identity literature that has found



a negative association between occupational identity status and early separation from parents (Berríos-Allison, 2005), as well as a positive relationship between occupational identity status and level of family support (Meeus & Dekovic, 1995).

**The relationship between demographic variables and employment quality outcomes.**

It is in the fourth stage of psychosocial development that children begin to internalize their group self-esteem into their identity, to develop a sense of participation in the broader world, and to begin to identify with industry and competence (Erikson, 1950, 1968). As such, it was not surprising that the demographics cluster proved to be the most significant in predicting the five work quality outcomes both in terms of total amount of variance explained (42.89% of the five-model total) and in terms of the number of statistically significant variables. The results suggest that gender and ethnicity are highly important in the determination of young adults' employment quality outcomes.

Gender was predictive of hours worked and paid time off, and being Black was predictive of hours worked and job satisfaction. The interaction between gender and being Latino was also predictive of occupation type in two of the earlier models. Furthermore, these correlations also had some of the largest effect sizes. These results provide some support for the hypothesis that gender and ethnic minority status are negatively related to work quality outcomes, which was rooted in Erikson's (1958, 1960) stipulation that belonging to groups that are socially perceived as inferior or inadequate can negatively affect individuals' development vis-à-vis roles and task identification. The identity literature has reported conflictive findings regarding the relationship between occupational identity and gender (Grotevant & Thorbecke, 1982; Vaz, 1968) and ethnicity (Abraham, 1986; Chapman & Nicholls, 1976; Jackson & Neville, 1998; Leong, 1991). These results add support to the body of literature that has identified a relationship between work outcomes and gender and ethnicity.

**The relationship between school variables and employment quality outcomes.** As mentioned earlier, Erikson's (1950, 1968) psychosocial development theory posits that the school environment allows children to develop a sense of work duty and skills and to begin to identify with work tasks and roles. Given the importance of school experiences for positive psychosocial development and employment outcomes, it was not surprising that the school cluster was the second most significant in predicting the five work quality outcomes. The school cluster explained the second largest proportion of the total five-model variance (33.27%) and had statistically significant variables in all but the job satisfaction model. Furthermore, cumulative high school GPA had the largest effect size in all of the findings.

Cumulative high school GPA was predictive of occupation type, wages per hours worked, and paid time off, and participation in a gifted program was predictive of hours worked. These four relationships were all positive, providing support for the hypothesis that more positive psychosocial development experiences would be associated with more positive work quality outcomes. The findings also help support the occupational identity literature that has reported a positive association between school performance and a more achieved occupational identity (Coutinho & Blustein, 2014; Graef, Wells, Hyland, & Muchinsky, 1985; Lapan, Gysbers, Hughey, & Arni, 1993; Lopez, 1989; Meeus, 1993). From a psychosocial development lens, performing well in school contributes to achieving an occupational identity, which promotes participation in the labor market and higher employment quality factors. Whereas the explanation of these findings could be reduced to the economic notion that school success better positions youth for labor market success, applying a psychosocial development lens deepens this

notion by adding that it is what youth learn about their identities vis-à-vis school roles that drives them to seek the same in the labor market.

**The relationship between peer variables and employment quality outcomes.** The inclusion of a peers cluster into the models rested on Erikson's (1950, 1968) notion that actively exploring one's identity through social attachments marks the phase between adolescence and adulthood. The types of peer groups with whom adolescents spend time are indicative of their identity exploration and of the adult identities they may ultimately achieve. In influencing adolescents' identity formation, peers can also have an impact on employment quality outcomes. The peers cluster was the third most significant of the five predictor clusters (12.39%), lending some support to this notion that peers are predictive of work outcomes.

Of the three peer-related variables, only the variable that measured the percentage of peers in sports, clubs, and activities was statistically significant in any of the five models. A one-unit increase in the percentage of peers in sports, clubs, and activities was associated with an increase of 152 annual hours worked. Understanding this finding through an Eriksonian lens, having a high number of peers in sports, clubs, and activities is likely predictive of hours worked not because of the activities themselves, but because they are behaviors of healthy school, role, and task identification. In other words, youth with many peers involved in school activities are likely to themselves be more engaged with their school environment, which contributes to greater identity achievement and, therefore, to positive work outcomes. The correlation adds to the occupational identity literature that has similarly identified an association between occupational identity and peer group membership and influence (Becker & Carper, 1956; Johnson, 1987; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995; Song, Kim, & Lee, 2016).

**The relationship between early work experience and employment quality outcomes.** Early work experiences are important in determining employment quality outcomes not just because of the work experience individuals gain (Sum, Khatiwada, Trubskyy, Ross, McHugh, & Palma, 2014), but because, according to occupational identity theory, occupations are not merely actions, but roles that are extensions of people's identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). Because identity drives the reasons why individuals choose to perform their occupational roles (Vondracek, 1991), early work experience was expected to help solidify the participants' identification with and continued participation in the labor market. As such, it was surprising, from a psychosocial development perspective as much as an economic one, that the early work experience cluster explained only 3.55% of the total five-model variance, and that the teenage hours worked predictor variable was statistically significant in only one of the five models.

The results did show a positive correlation between teenage hours worked and annual hours worked at age 24 or 25. This positive relationship, in spite of the relatively weak effects, provides support for Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory, which stipulates that early task identification and exploration foments positive identity development, which in turn leads to an achieved occupational identity and career decision-making ability in adolescence. In other words, healthy psychosocial identity development contributes to participation in the labor market, and participating in the labor market contributes to achieving an identity. Again, it is difficult to attribute the finding entirely to such theoretical notions given that the models did not control for the additive influence that previous work experience has on later work experience. And although the relationship does conform to Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory, economic notions of the labor market could also account for the positive correlation.

**Study limitations.** As with any quantitative study analyzing the relationship between complex factors, there are some limitations worth noting. First, it was nearly impossible to

control for educational attainment, which other research has found is associated with work quality outcomes, especially occupation type, annual hours worked, and annual wages per hour worked. The study did control for participants enrolled in college to avoid treating their time in school as unemployment, but further controlling for educational attainment would have severely decreased the sample size and led to greater error terms.

Second, the study analyzed the relationship between two snapshots in time—psychosocial development factors at age 16 or 17 (1997) and work quality outcomes at age 24 or 25 (2005)—rather than longitudinally across the participants' lifespans, which would have been a much more appropriate approach given that psychosocial development, and, therefore, work outcomes, are not static. The available data in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997) prohibited the ability to address this limitation, as the necessary psychosocial development data were not available to make a longitudinal study possible.

Finally, as was mentioned in earlier parts of the discussion, the complexity of the predictor and outcome variables makes it difficult to confidently attribute the findings to Erikson's (1950, 1968) psychosocial development theory. Perhaps with the exception of the findings for percentage of peers involved in school clubs, sports, and activities, level of father support, and household parental figure, the remaining findings could also be explained utilizing other lenses. As such, whereas the findings correlated with Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory, it was difficult to know the extent to which specific psychosocial development processes played a role in predicting the work outcomes.

**Future research.** Although the findings provided some empirical support to the theory that work quality outcomes are also products of psychosocial development, two areas emerged for future research. First, the findings did not provide insight into the *processes* of *how* the psychosocial development clusters led to the work quality outcomes. As such, the question of *how* and *why* psychosocial development experiences influence work outcomes remains unanswered. A qualitative study would add insight into the processes of these phenomena and allow for a more focused generalization to the theory. Second, there was an absence of a statistically significant relationship between being Latino and the outcome variables. Why did Latinos' psychosocial development factors not correlate with their work outcomes, as was expected? Why was it that although Latino males had many of the worst psychosocial development averages relative to their peers, they fared relatively well in all but the occupation type outcome? Future research should test the applicability of Erikson's theory to Latinos and strive to better understand the work outcomes of the United States' second largest ethnic group.

### **Conclusion**

Young adults' identification with employment develops across the pre-adult lifespan through the psychosocial development experiences they have vis-à-vis their families, their group membership, their school experiences, their peer connections, and their early work experiences. As such, their employment quality outcomes are themselves products of their integrated psychosocial development experiences. The results in this study provided some support for this notion that work outcomes are also products of psychosocial development experiences. Participation in a gifted courses program, cumulative high school GPA, percentage of peers in sports, clubs, and activities, and teenage hours worked were all associated with at least one of the five employment outcome variables. Being female and Black, as predicted, were negatively correlated with some of the employment quality outcome variables. These results, however, should be interpreted carefully given the study limitations, especially the inability to control for all possibly confounding variables given that the study was limited to data available in the

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. Future research should address this limitation, as well as focus on Latinos, for whom no statistically significant correlations were identified in any of the final five employment quality outcome models.

## Chapter 5: Qualitative Study Findings: Cross-Narrative Themes in Identity Development

This chapter presents the cross-narrative themes that emerged from the narratives of the 20 participants regarding their identity development. It answers the first qualitative research question: *How are Latino males in California developing their occupational identities from infancy to adolescence, and how are these processes similar and different based on their current blue- or white-collar occupation status?* To gain an understanding of the participants' identity development trajectories from early childhood to young adulthood, the themes presented open with the participants' earliest identity development experiences, they continue with those pertinent to their home experiences, followed by those relevant to their experiences with the outer world, and they conclude with their transition into adulthood, or the age around which American adolescents complete high school and legally become adults. The chapter takes a bird's eye view of the patterns and relies on six participants (three for each of the two occupation types) who exemplify the patterns. It was organized to give the reader a sense of the experiences the two groups of participants shared and did not share to draw conclusions regarding the developmental experiences of blue- and white-collar Latino workers.

Following an inductive analysis and coding approach, the 20 transcripts were coded for themes. To conduct the cross-narrative analysis, excerpts were accumulated based on their code. For example, all of the excerpts from the 20 narratives that were coded "Parent-Strictness," were compiled into a Microsoft Excel sheet. The themes for each code were then identified, which sometimes involved grouping like themes into broader categories. After all of the theme categories were identified, a list was made of the number of times the theme appeared in the narratives. This allowed for the emergence of the most prevalent or common themes across the 20 narratives. To answer the second part of the research question and compare and contrast the themes by blue- and white-collar occupation, the themes were also counted based on the participants' occupation type. The participants' occupation type was not identified until this stage of the analytic process to increase objectivity in the initial coding and identification of themes. This two-pronged approach of identifying the most common themes across the 20 narratives and by occupation type allowed for an analytic focus on both the identity development experiences the 20 participants shared and those that were shared based on occupation type. Table 5.1 summarizes the themes that emerged from this coding and analysis strategy.

Table 5.1  
*Summary of Identity Development Themes*

Developmental Factor	Shared Theme	Blue-Collar Theme	White-Collar Theme
Ego Identity	Stubborn	Independent	Curious
		Rebellious	Inquisitive
		Not Serious	Shy/Quiet
Parents	Various parental figures	Raised by single parent	Balanced parental boundaries with independence
	Working class	Controlling/Strict	
	Encouraged education	Pushed out of home	Played parental role
	Strong work ethic		Parents modeled the behaviors they encouraged
Family	Large, supportive	Detached from family	Cohesive family

	family		dynamics
	Siblings attended college	Encouraged to de-identify with family	Shared family identity
			Shared family struggles
Neighborhood	Working class	Pressure to act macho	Involvement in positive neighborhood activities
	Positive living experiences	Involvement in illegal neighborhood activities	Identifying with positive role models
	Gang activity		Finding strength in adversity
School	Underperforming schools	Disliked school	High-performing schools
		Few teachers cared	School naturally easy
	Honors courses	Violence in classes	Identified with teachers
	Middle school difficult	Dropped out	School solidified path to college
	Did not prepare for real world		
Peers	Need in high school to identify with peers	Wide peer search	Narrow peer search
		Identified with similar, independent types	Identified with similar, studious types
			Peers supported path to college
Activities	Informal sports	Organized sports	School clubs
		Arts-related activities	College preparation activities
Latino identity	Being Latino poses social disadvantages	Latinos do manual, service labor	Does not limit what is achievable
		Disadvantaged in the labor market	Need to break stereotypes
			Positive identifications with Latino culture
Achieving an adult identity	None in the narratives	Still exploring identity at age 18	Strong sense of self at age 18
		Unsure of at 18 of who they wanted to be	Feelings of not having explored identity enough

### Themes Regarding Ego Identity

Participants were asked to open the conversation of their life narratives by discussing their ego personalities, which identity theory posits is the most fundamental, the most consistent, and the most resistant to change (Schwartz, 2001). Because the ego identity forms such a strong foundation to the lifelong development of an overall identity, it was important to capture data regarding this part of the participants' personalities. The most common ego identity description across the 20 narratives was the word stubborn. Blue- and white-collar participants alike were likely to use the word when asked about the parts of their personalities they believed had been with them since they were born. Nonetheless, the role of such a personality trait in the identity development of the participants likely depended on how it intermingled with their other ego identity traits, which the two groups of participants largely did not share. Aside from stubbornness, blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to mention that they were also independent, rebellious, unconventional, and not serious. As 22 year-old Pablo's words suggest, the combination of being both stubborn and independent made it difficult for his parents to shape him in the manner they sought even from a young age and to play an active role in the focus of his earliest identity development experiences.

I've definitely always been stubborn and creative from the start. When I was a little kid, I wouldn't listen to my parents that much. I would always find ways of doing things that weren't maybe conventional. If my parents would tell me to finish my homework so I could continue to play video games I would just write in a bunch of answers so I could continue to do what I was doing and then go back and redo it after I showed my parents my homework with everything wrong.

Although some white-collar participants also described themselves as independent, rebellious, or stubborn, many of them also used the words "curious" or "inquisitive" when describing their ego personalities. These two personality traits were exclusive to white-collar participants, as none of the blue-collar ones mentioned them when describing their own ego identities. The combination of stubbornness with curiosity and inquisitiveness helped create for the white-collar participants an early identity that lent itself to embracing learning and enjoying school later in life. As 29 year-old Diego mentioned, such ego identity traits were present when he was young and have stayed with him into adulthood, indicating that being curious and inquisitive has formed a foundational part of his identity development from an early age.

I think also my inquisitive nature. I think I've always had that. My parents and family members have always told me that even when I was young growing up, I was always the one that would rummage through something or want to figure out the mechanisms behind it. I was always the one taking stuff apart, whether they were toys or furniture, even when I wasn't supposed to. I was the one that was always trying to figure things out. I think that plays into what I do now.

The exclusive sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness amongst white-collar participants suggests that they were more likely to accept the path that today's society has organized in support of occupational identity development, which includes enjoying learning and excelling in school. Unsurprisingly, and different to blue-collar workers who were also more likely to

include sociability in their list of ego personality traits, white-collar participants also almost exclusively used the words “shy,” “quiet,” or “reserved” to describe their ego personalities. Such traits add to the list of curiosity and inquisitiveness ego personality traits that more readily support the achievement of an adult identity, which requires active introspection and self-reflection. For 24 year-old Alonso, being shy and quiet helped him focus in school and on working toward creating a future that was free of his parents’ occupational hardships.

The most impactful thing for me was moving. That impacted me a lot in the sense that I left a lot of good friends behind. Growing up I was always a little shy. I had trouble making friends back when I was younger. Moving constantly, I had to adapt to my environments. I did not like that. My mom would always constantly say, "Look son: this is what we have to do in order to get by. If you don't want this kind of lifestyle you got to focus in school. You got to get a good job, a good career, so that you don't have to put your children through that." That really hit home for me.

Participants were also asked how they believe their ego identities have influenced their life trajectories, and the cross-narrative themes reinforce the argument that blue-collar participants’ ego personality traits of stubbornness, independence, and rebelliousness played a role in predisposing them toward more challenges in maintaining a linear identity development path from home to school to college to work. The most common theme in blue-collar participants’ comments, which none of the white-collar participants shared, was that their ego personality influenced their choices to follow a life path that actively rejected what the actors in their lives were recommending. As Pablo recounts, such an ego identity played itself out in small ways when he was younger and in more life-changing ways as he became older.

I think I just don't like doing what people tell me to. It's almost like, "Drink this water. You're dehydrated." When I was younger if my parents would have told me that I would've said, "I'm not going to drink water. I don't want to do that," even though I probably actually wanted to, or something. It was just a way of rationalizing things when I was younger that looking back I would probably do something different. I think it was mainly just my personality like wanting to have my own route and be paving it as I go, not have a whole life planned out for me that I just have to walk on a straight line in order to get to the goal that was placed for me not by me.

For white-collar participants, on the other hand, their ego personalities of curiosity, inquisitiveness, and shyness were more likely to facilitate their the acceptance and embrace of a more traditional development path that included a strong parental and school role. As 25 year-old Gabriel mentioned, his ego identity played itself out in small ways when he was younger and in more life-changing ways as he became older.

I would probably say it was just my curiosity, trying to obtain as much information, knowledge, as I could. I was the kid carrying around a little notebook or a book when I was little. It really influenced my decisions to go into school with the emphasis to learn as much as I can and pick up on many abstract topics, so any book that would fall into my lap I would read... I hear a lot of these stories about people being pressured to do well in school and I never really got any, that kind of harsh treatment, I guess, from my parents.



Similarly for Diego, being shy and being able to focus in school were interrelated. His shyness gave him the space, away from peers, to focus on activities he could activate on his own, such as school, and school provided the vehicle to protect his shy nature.

I was always more of an introverted kid. I felt more comfortable staying to myself and just focusing, again, on school because it was easy and it was something that I could do on my own away from everybody else.

The ability to enjoy and embrace school in part because of their ego personalities attuned white-collar participants to future success beyond the classroom and into the labor force. For them, their enjoyment of school thanks in part to their ego personalities drove them whilst in school to want to pursue jobs that required an education and long-term commitments, which is different to the blue-collar participants, whose ego personalities challenged a strong parental and school role in their identity development. Whereas white-collar participants' ego personalities composed of curiosity and shyness helped them maintain an identity development path with a strong school role, blue-collar participants' ego personalities of independence and rebelliousness made it difficult for them from an early age to do the same. The differences in the participants' responses to the ego identity questions and in their life trajectories support Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory that ego personality forms the foundation on which an adult identity develops.

### **Themes Regarding Parents**

Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory posits that parental figures play the most integral role in the identity development of an individual, and that such a role begins at birth. Parental figures in particular help develop their child's identity around notions of trust, hope, autonomy, exploration, and self-esteem, and it is through parents that children first begin to develop an identity for themselves. Given the importance of parental figures beginning at birth, participants were asked to open the conversation of the role of external actors in their identity development narratives by describing the individuals who raised them. The 20 participants were largely born into families in which parents were the central parental figures and grandparents, aunts, and uncles also had parental duties.

Regarding the main parental figures, the majority of the participants described their parents as having busy working class jobs and to have attained little education. Some of the participants' also mentioned that their parents did not speak English. Such difficult socioeconomic realities shaped the parenting the participants received and, because of this, influenced their identity development. As 23 year-old Manuel stated, his parents' occupations dictated the amount of time he got to spend with his parents.

[M]y dad was always working... [He] works construction... She [mother] was like a dishwasher and a waitress for a little while. Once my mom had me, my dad got a good job, union-wise, and steady pay, and all that, so she didn't have to work anymore.

Being raised by parents who largely struggled to provide for their families and who were mostly preoccupied with providing their children's basic needs, however, is what the participants' parents largely leveraged in efforts to instill in their children the value of education. The majority of the participants, blue- and white-collar alike, mentioned that their parents made them aware of the difficulties of attaining well-paying work without an education and encouraged them to attain life outcomes better than their own. Nonetheless, given their work, education, and language limitations, not all parents had the ability to embody the advice they gave their children or to actively shape their child's identity development around education.

White-collar participants more than blue-collar ones were likely to mention that they had a parental figure who actively helped them embrace their parents' advice regarding school and education. As Gabriel said about his uncle, it was he who embodied the identity around education his parents had attempted with words to instill in him since he was a child.

I guess I had one person who I could really relate to in my family. He was my uncle, but he passed when I was in seventh grade. With him he'd be the person who had all these encyclopedias in his house and he would be interested in what I'm learning in school and how my education's coming along.

In spite of the participants' parents' limitations regarding their ability to serve as an example of an educated individual, blue-collar and white-collar participants alike largely credited their fathers for instilling in them a sense of hard work. Most of the participants described their fathers as hard-working family providers. There was also congruency in the participants' narratives regarding how they described their mothers. Their comments tended to focus on their emotional support for them, suggesting that mothers played a different role from fathers in the participants' identity development. Whereas the fathers served as the main conduits for developing a strong work ethic, the mothers played a more multidimensional role that included support, nurturing, and education. Alonso's comments regarding the different roles his father and mother played in his life suggest that the participants turned to their fathers and mothers for different components of their identity development.

[M]y mom has been a little bit more involved than my dad just because, like I said, he was the provider whereas my mom, she chose to be a stay-at-home mom. She dedicated 100% to my education while she taught me the importance of school. Whenever my dad could, he would always go to an award ceremony I would have or baseball games, soccer games, things of that sort. Whenever he could, he would always be there. To him, it's very important to provide for us. I understood that even at a young age.

In spite of the overlap in how participants described their parents, the narratives suggest that blue-collar participants were disadvantaged relative to white-collar ones when it came to their identity development *experiences vis-à-vis* their parents. For example, blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to describe their fathers in negative terms and as uninvolved in some way or another in their lives. The fact that blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to have been raised by a single parent or without a paternal figure likely contributed to blue-collar participants' negative experiences *vis-à-vis* their fathers. As 25 year-old Rolando mentioned, not having had his father in his life negatively impacted his own life trajectory and that of his brothers.

Not having my father around, it kind of misguided me because growing up... A mother's love goes a long way, but it takes a man to raise a child, his own child. I started getting in trouble a lot, and I went down a wrong way, a wrong path. I think that was because I didn't have my father teach me right from wrong. I grew up with two other brothers, so we all grew up just misguided. We just learned life on our own, like how to shave or how to do this, things that your father should teach you.

Furthermore, blue-collar participants were likely also disadvantaged in their identity development *vis-à-vis* their mothers compared to white-collar participants' experiences. Blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to describe their mothers as strict and

overly protective. Such parenting traits, according to Erikson (1950, 1968) can, among other identity development disadvantages, challenge individuals to connect their childhood personality and experiences with their young adult ones and to ultimately create a new adult identity. For Manuel, having such a strict mother made it difficult for him to feel safe at home and to explore occupations outside of his family's line of business.

Me and her [mother] always bump heads and she kicked me out a few times. I was getting older, but my dad was always, decisions in life do have consequences. He's just an easy talker, telling me things. My mom's more yelling at me, get out of here... My mom's more strict. [She's] supportive in work, yes. The [jobs] I want to do? Not really.

The combination of the blue-collar participants' most common ego personality traits of stubbornness, independence, and rebelliousness, combined with the fact that they were more likely than white-collar participants to speak about their parents' role in their lives as controlling, suggests that the blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to have internalized negative experiences vis-à-vis their parents into their identities. The lack of congruence between the blue-collar participants' needs given their ego personalities and their parents' parenting styles likely challenged their parents' ability to play a positive role in their children's early identity development experiences. For Manuel, such experiences only led him to rebel even more against his parents and to largely push them out of his identity development trajectory.

[M]y mom would be like, "I'm going to take away this, I'm going to take away that, if you don't do this." I was like, whatever. I don't need none of that... But it wouldn't work, you know. "I'm going to take away your video games." And I'm like, go ahead. You know, like everything. Not hard, I'll be outside hanging out. "Well, you can't go outside." I'd still sneak out and go outside.

Amongst the blue-collar participants, the tension between them and their parents became so great, that a number of them mentioned feeling imprisoned by their parents and leaving their homes. In contrast, none of the white-collar participants, whose ego personalities better aligned with their parents' parenting styles, shared this experience. For Rolando, the tension between his stubbornness and need for independence and his parents' controlling parenting style was so severe, that he found a way to leave home at age 16.

I was in high school up until my sophomore year when I was 16. I didn't want to live at home anymore and I didn't really want to be going to school, so I looked up ways to test out, and I was too young to take the GED, so I took this thing called the CHSPE. It's the California High School Exit Proficiency Exam, which is equivalent to a diploma or GED. As soon as I got that I left to live here in a van just because I didn't want to live at home anymore under anyone.

White-collar participants, on the other hand, were not only more likely to have been raised by their two biological parents or less likely to speak negatively about both their fathers and mothers, they were also more likely to describe both parents in similar terms. Such experiences vis-à-vis their parents indicate that congruence existed between the white-collar participants' ego personalities and their parents' parenting styles, and that white-collar participants therefore allowed their parents to play an active role in their identity development. The harmonious child-parent relationships the white-collar participants experienced probably helped foster an ability to regulate their actions and behaviors, as they exclusively mentioned

having found a balance between their need for independence and respecting their parents' boundaries. As Diego described, a part of his experiences vis-à-vis his mother involved working together to find the middle ground between his needs as an individual and hers as a parent.

[B]ecause she had a very traditional Catholic upbringing, she was very stern about a lot of things growing up. It was always, "Don't do that," as opposed to, "Do that." Always like that side of it... It was definitely a lot more limits, a lot more what you can't do versus what you can do. It's always that balance between me stepping over that boundary and then her checking me and pushing me back over it and figuring that out throughout.

A strong identification with parents and a balance in the child-parent relationship also likely encouraged white-collar participants to react positively to their own disadvantaged parental situations, thereby keeping them on track for healthy identity development. Rather than rebel against their parents and distance themselves from them, as blue-collar participants were more likely to have done, white-collar participants were more likely to have the maturity to take on parental responsibilities and help their parents. For Gabriel, his parents' challenges as immigrants forced him to take on certain parental roles, which almost certainly positively contributed to his development of an adult identity.

I felt like I got propelled into an early start into my maturity about how to do dealings with different things because they [parents] were primarily Spanish speakers. Their English is not too well developed, so as soon as I learned English, I was put on to be the main translator for them when it came to medical decisions, bills, even school related stuff where I would essentially be translating for my teachers about myself. I was like their, not necessarily their mediator, but even in their decision to purchase a new house or a car, I'd be the one who'd be there translating what the details were, this and that.

The penchant amongst white-collar participants for maintaining a balanced relationship with their parents and for connecting their needs and desires with their parents' boundaries and expectations probably also made them more likely to embrace their parents' messaging of valuing an education. Although most participants stated that their parents attempted to instill in them the value of education, white-collar participants were much more likely to push that notion and mention that their parents also took active steps to improve their educational outcomes and to maintain the expectation to do well in school. Such experiences likely facilitated the white-collar participants' abilities to internalize an identity that included education. For Alonso, the fact that his parents moved the family to a city that had public schools and being in a school system with rigorous academics facilitated his ability to internalize into his identity a commitment to doing well in school and to going to college.

We [family] decided to move back to [the South Bay] again. This time it was because, one, the commute, and also the school system. In Tracy, I think that's in the Joaquin Valley, the academics are not as strong as they were in the Bay area. That, for me, was a big transition academically. I definitely saw the differences in that.

Alonso's word choice in describing his family's decision to move to the South Bay because the public schools there were better indicate that there existed a shared identity between himself and his parents. In using the word, "we," Alonso spoke about himself and his family as one entity. In describing his commitment to school and to going to college, he effectively highlighted the importance of not breaking with his parents' expectations regarding education. In short, white-collar participants were able to internalize their parents' valuing of education into

their identities, and in doing so, they developed a shared identification with their parents that made their actions and behaviors not only their own, but extensions of their parents'. White-collar participants were more likely to be aware of the harmony between their parents' parenting styles, to find ways to balance their parents' boundaries with their individual desires, to join and help their parents in their struggles and disadvantages, and to not disappoint their parents vis-à-vis school likely because they had a strong identification with their parents, which made them and their actions moving forward extensions of their parents. This identification is evident in Alonso's comment, which other white-collar but no blue-collar participants shared, that their parents either demonstrated or encouraged not just hard work, but also progress and growth.

I think it all comes down to how they were raised within their household. If they weren't given that nurture that they were required as a young child, to tell them that they can do anything, they're smart, if they weren't given the time and dedication that a child needs growing up, then they just grow up to be complacent, especially if their parents are also complacent. If they don't see them striving for anything, it's like, "Why do I have to do anything?" It has to do with a lot with how their parents react with them and alongside them.

By the time the participants were old enough to prepare for the world of work, the narratives suggest that the differences in their identity development vis-à-vis their parents also led to a divergence in the influence that their parents had on their identification with work, in spite of the fact that blue-collar and white-collar participants alike mentioned that their parents, especially their fathers, attempted to instill in them a strong work ethic. The strong attribution of the identification with work to fathers was especially salient for blue-collar workers, who were also more likely than white-collar participants to not mention their mother's influence on their work outcomes. Blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to mention that their fathers took them to their places of work from an early age, and they exclusively shared that their fathers actively encouraged them to enter their lines of blue-collar employment, suggesting that blue-collar workers were more predisposed to focusing their learned strong work ethic on blue collar employment. In being able to see their fathers as embodiments of the type of work they were being encouraged to enter, the blue-collar participants were set on an identity development path that led to blue-collar work. For Manuel, his parents' definition of a real job continues to limit the options he considers in his occupational identity to blue-collar employment.

What I do right now [flooring installer, is what my parents consider a real job], or working construction, or something, because my dad works construction... [T]hat's always an option for me. My dad's always telling me, let me know when you're done fooling around and you want a real job. I'll throw you in here, and we'll get you a real job. That's always my plan B, you know.

In contrast, white-collar participants were more likely than blue-collar ones to attribute their identification with work to both of their parents, not just their fathers. The harmonious child-parent relationship most white-collar participants experienced, the shared identity between them and their parents, and the prioritization in the home of school over work, likely combined to foment an occupational identity development environment in which the white-collar participants had the space to explore and develop an identification with white-collar work. Nonetheless, the difficulty for most of the white-collar participants is that their parents did not

embody the occupations they were being encouraged to explore. As Alonso's words demonstrate, such obstacles for the white-collar participants were likely overcome thanks to the creation of a strong identity development path that both participants and parents internalized and overtly supported.

I got the value of hard work from my dad and I got the value of education from my mom. Combining that, I knew what I wanted and how to go about doing that... They [parents] know that I know what I'm doing. They know that I do my research really well. They know that anything or everything I do is for a reason. They're very supportive.

### **Themes Regarding Family**

Families play an integral role in developing children's sense of ambition and purpose, initiative, and exploration outside parents (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Building on participants' narratives regarding their ego identities and their experiences vis-à-vis their parents, participants were asked to describe their families to gain an understanding of the role they played in their identity development. The participants largely came from families that included extended family members—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—who helped raise and support them. Many of them described growing up attending various large birthday and other family celebrations. Regarding their immediate family units, most of the participants expressed having at least one sibling who was either enrolled in or had attended college, indicating that the participants were mainly raised in family units that provided the potential for attaining such an education outcome.

In spite of the overlap in family dynamics amongst the participants, a deeper analysis of the blue-collar workers' narratives indicates that they were, once again, disadvantaged in their identity development relative to white-collar participants. Blue-collar participants exclusively described detached family situations. Such circumstances were likely products of their disadvantages vis-à-vis their parents, who probably struggled to foment a strong and supportive family with which all of its members could identify. Blue-collar participants particularly spoke about being distant from their siblings and other family members, as well as feeling like they belonged more with their friends than with their families. Manuel's comments exemplify what belonging to a detached family produced for many of the blue-collar participants, particularly the ones who described tense relationships with their parents.

Yeah, we'd [siblings] go to parties and stuff, but I was more like the black sheep of the family. I just, I'd always go out, rarely be at home, like I'd rather be with my friends than my family. My friends knew me better than my family, honestly.

The stronger detachment of blue-collar workers from their family units almost certainly limited the influence that their families had over their identity development. In feeling detached from their family units, blue-collar participants, as Manuel's words illustrate, sought to identify with members outside of the family. Not surprisingly, and as discussed previously, blue-collar workers also exclusively shared a need to chart trajectories for themselves that were different from their families'. In speaking about their experiences related to their families, blue-collar participants also exclusively spoke about family members encouraging this developmental divergence. For many of them, such a divergence was encouraged out of a recognition that identifying with their family units would not help them move their lives forward, and that there was greater hope in identifying with a different path, regardless of what it was.

White-collar participants, on the other hand, were more likely to describe cohesive family dynamics and a stronger identification with and connection to their family units. Coupled with

statements exclusive to them that they felt a sense of responsibility to their siblings, the narratives indicate that, unlike the typical blue-collar participant, white-collar participants largely grew up in families that allowed them to maintain a strong family identification. Whereas blue-collar participants were encouraged to diverge away from their identification with their families largely out of reaction to poor family situations, white-collar participants were encouraged to maintain a strong family identification that was oriented toward obtaining white-collar employment. Diego discussed the importance of being a part of a strong family unit for the purposes of overcoming challenges, and he especially appreciated the family unit his parents were able to create given the challenges they faced in being supportive parents.

We [family] struggled early on financially, and that's just the nature of them coming early on and trying to get their bearings. Once they both got to work, we've all been lucky that it's been pretty good for us overall. He [father] would always make sure every night to be at the dinner table. He'd be there. We'd all make it a habit of eating at the dinner table together.

In spite of the lack of a strong connection between the blue-collar participants and their family units, they were much more likely than white-collar participants to attribute their work trajectories to their families. This was almost certainly because their families did not adequately equip them to navigate a path toward other forms of employment but the ones they already knew, leaving them with few employment options. Combined with the fact that blue-collar participants mainly came from blue-collar families, these family dynamics further propelled blue-collar participants to develop their identities along a path to blue-collar work. When asked what jobs he might consider outside his current one as a line cook, Rolando's response was entirely shaped by the type of work that was most familiar to his family.

When I want to get out of the culinary field, I could work on cars because my whole family... Most of them are into cars, and they're mechanics, so I thought this could be something good for me to have, to know.

White-collar participants, on the other hand, who were more likely to have been raised in more close-knit and supportive families, and whose families had done more to encourage them to attach their own identities to the ideals of education and hard work, were more likely to share that they perceived their work as a means for contributing to their family units. In describing the role of their families in their work experiences, the white-collar participants were more likely, yet again, to speak about their work choices as extensions not only of themselves, but of their family units. Alonso's comments demonstrate his belonging to a cohesive family unit, one in which each member of the family had a supporting role.

Since we moved back to [the South Bay], like I said, I've always been working and my folks taught me that it's always good for me because I'm working to contribute to the family, helping them out financially. I'm totally okay with that. Since I've been working, I've been contributing to rent, whether it be a hundred dollars, two hundred dollars. Depending on how much income I would get every week or biweekly.

The treatment of employment as an act through which they could identify with their families indicates that white-collar participants developed an occupational identity that was shared with their families. For most of the blue-collar participants, on the other hand, largely detached family situations meant they had few supports in learning to develop a sense of purpose

and initiative in the outside world. Their families, in short, played a limited role in their development of an occupational identity, and when they were influential, they mostly reinforced for the blue-collar participants a path toward the types of jobs the families already knew.

### **Themes Regarding Neighborhood**

The participants were asked to describe the neighborhoods in which they grew up and to discuss how they influenced their sense of who they are and what they have accomplished with their lives given that identity is produced in part through the interaction with the outside world (Erikson, 1950, 1968). The strong overlap in the descriptors the participants used to describe their neighborhoods indicates that they grew up in similar social and economic environments. All of the participants largely described their neighborhoods as working class and their neighbors as engaged in blue-collar work. In spite of the fact that they were not directly asked, the majority of the participants also mentioned the prevalence of gangs in their neighborhoods, indicating that their environments did present adverse social situations.

In spite of the similarities in how the participants described their neighborhoods, blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to express negative experiences vis-à-vis the neighborhoods. Not only were they more likely to describe the neighborhoods in which they grew up as dangerous because of the gang activities, they also exclusively shared feeling the pressure of acting like someone they were not in order to navigate their adverse environments. Such comments suggest that blue-collar participants felt more vulnerable to such adverse actors in their neighborhoods than white-collar ones. As Manuel's comments demonstrate, blue-collar participants had to actively negotiate how they interacted with the actors in their neighborhoods.

It's just it depends who you associate yourself with, and how you carry yourself. Because if you're rolling around, dressed all crazy, acting like you want something you're going to get something. If you're just walking around and minding your own business, you know, don't look at nobody funny, just mind your business and walk around, you'll be all right... Just because they want to act tough, they want to start stuff. You know, gangs influence a lot of kids.

In spite of describing their neighborhoods in similar terms, white-collar participants were more likely than blue-collar ones to mention positive experiences vis-à-vis their neighborhoods. They were more likely to state having taken part in neighborhood activities that connected them to their neighborhood, and they exclusively mentioned that they never felt different or inferior given where they grew up. Such a contrast in the experiences the blue- and white-collar participants had in spite of growing up in similar neighborhood environments indicates that the white-collar participants were equipped with a stronger sense of identity that protected them from outside actors, whereas blue-collar participants' weak sense of identity given their experiences in the home made them vulnerable to being influenced by their neighborhood gangs. Gabriel's comments regarding what it was like to grow up in the Central Valley demonstrate that it was possible to have positive neighborhood experiences in spite of the gang activity, and they also suggest that there was a sense of connectedness to the community.

I come up from a pretty unified place, so I feel that we were pretty much on par with our neighbors where everyone did some manual labor work, and at that point it wasn't really about competing with your neighbors, just living next to them and enjoying each other's company.



Again, the differences in how blue-collar and white collar-participants processed their neighborhood experiences suggest that white-collar participants' stronger and more stable identifications with their parents and family units protected them from identifying too closely with the members of the outside world that did not reflect or reinforce their identities. In anchoring their identities to their parents and families, white-collar participants were less likely to be impacted by the adverse neighborhood pressures. White-collar participants described finding positive ways of navigating the adverse aspects of their neighborhoods, including finding and identifying with the outside members who were on a similar identity development path. Diego mentioned how where he grew up influenced the schools he attended, which allowed him to find students he could identify with and who were on a similar academic path.

I think that we were also lucky in that the city where we lived is a small suburban city. We lived right on the outskirts of the city between that small city and a larger, more metropolitan city where the smaller city where we grew up had really good education. The schools themselves were a lot better, I guess, than the surrounding ones. I wouldn't say good education, but compared to the surrounding school districts they were better. Because of that, the students in my middle school and in my high school were all a lot better prepared.

For blue-collar participants, on the other hand, who were more likely to have been raised in homes that, like their neighborhoods, also presented challenges, not internalizing and identifying with the negative aspects of their environments was likely more difficult. Their weaker sense of identity, which was largely detached from their parents and families, probably made them more vulnerable than the white-collar participants to identifying with external neighborhood actors. For some of the blue-collar participants, such vulnerability eventually resulted in their identification with those external actors and in their becoming gang members themselves; an experience not one white-collar participant mentioned. For Rolando, such an event took place in adolescence: the age period in which individuals begin to expand and broaden their identity exploration (Erikson, 1950, 1968).

[I] wasn't getting anywhere. I was just going to jail... I think about middle school [is when I started hanging out with the wrong crowd]... Middle school, high school, yeah... All my friends that I knew were either getting locked up or going to jail or facing prison time. If they weren't, they were on that road.

Such developmental experiences vis-à-vis their neighborhoods added to the divergence in identity development paths for the blue- and white-collar participants. Blue-collar participants' identities were more likely to be detached from their parents' and families', which encouraged them to seek to identify with their neighborhood actors. The fact that the participants mostly grew up in working class neighborhoods with gangs contributed to the divergence in their identity development paths. As the blue-collar participants became more active members of their neighborhoods, they internalized experiences into their identities that brought them more life challenges and identity uncertainties.

White-collar participants, on the other hand, had largely developed identities anchored to their parents and families, and these were mostly centered on the notions of family harmony and the value of education, hard work, and progress. As such, they sought to identify with the outside actors that allowed them to extend that identity into their neighborhoods. In doing so, they participated in experiences that reinforced that strong sense of identity. Instead of falling

victim to their neighborhoods' adverse attributes, as blue-collar participants were more apt to do, they found the pathways that supported the direction of their identity development toward continued growth. Gabriel reflected on this experience, identifying shared family values as leading to the difference in his development path compared to those of his friends.

I felt like it [my neighborhood] never capped what my potential was. If anything it pushed me a bit more... All the friends I had were from the neighborhood. I've had these friendships since I was in kindergarten. We've been in the same houses since I was five. These friendships are lifelong. I still talk to them as well. It's just interesting seeing the difference in what I value, which was knowledge and education, and with them it wasn't really a priority. It's been a weird pathway.

### **Themes Regarding School**

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), schools form an environment for children and adolescents to develop a sense of industry, competence, goal setting, and the early identification with work roles. As such, schools form an integral part of the identity development process. Amongst the 20 participants, the divergence in the identity development paths that began to take shape beginning with the ego personality traits and that continued given the differences in identity development experiences vis-à-vis their parents, families, and neighborhoods was largely solidified for the participants by the time they entered high school. Most of the participants that before entering high school were on an identity development path that led toward blue-collar work were engaged in blue-collar employment at the time of their interview. Similarly, most of the participants that before entering high school were on an identity development path that led toward white-collar work were engaged in white-collar employment at the time of their interview. This suggests that by the time the participants reached high school, they were already quite committed to projecting themselves based on what they internalized about their identities from their parent, family, and neighborhood experiences, and that high school experiences did little to transform those identity development trajectories.

The majority of the participants described the schools they attended as underperforming, which was illustrative of the working class neighborhoods in which most of the participants grew up. Blue- and white-collar participants alike also mentioned having taken honors, advanced placement (AP), or college credit courses in high school. In spite of the overlap in how they described their schools and the classes they took in high school, what the participants learned about themselves and their future identity development varied based on the identities they had formed before they entered high school. For the white-collar participants such as Diego, the challenges his schools presented forced him to independently find the avenues that would allow him to continue down an identity development path that included school success.

The school that I went to was an underperforming school, so they didn't have much resources. Obviously my parents had no idea how to maneuver through the system. It was me just overhearing in class or taking it upon myself to go to counselors. It was a lot of me trial and error and trying to figuring it out as I go.

Blue-collar participants, on the other hand, almost exclusively commented that they disliked or simply did not care about school, particularly high school. Such an inability to identify strongly to the high school environment was almost certainly an extension of the difficulty of blue-collar participants to identify with their parents, families, or neighborhoods in

positive ways given their disadvantaged experiences in each of those three identity development realms. The identities blue-collar participants had developed vis-à-vis their parents, families, and neighborhoods were not set on an identity development path that included a strong school role. As such, school simply did not fit with the independent identity development path on which the blue-collar participants had been for 14 years. As Manuel recounted, feeling detached from the school environment marked his school experiences beginning at an early age.

I didn't like school. I don't like being held in there... Because it bored me. Yeah, I don't know, I just didn't like it anymore. Ever since I was in elementary, I didn't like sitting down, just being in class.

Blue-collar participants were also more likely to comment that few teachers cared about them or that not one teacher supported them, and their comments regarding the teachers they did like implied that they liked them because they did not defy the identities they had developed. Such experiences challenged the blue-collar participants' ability to identify with school actors who could help them transform their identities and redirect their identity development path toward one that included school and that led to white-collar employment. For Rolando, such experiences only served to reinforce the identity he had formed before high school.

We had some teachers that cared a little too much, tried to make things happen, a little too strict. Those are the teachers we'd break, we'd have them crying or something, because we'd act up. Pretty crazy, man, like the teachers I always liked, were the ones that were telling us, I'll be cool with you guys if you guys be cool with me. Those are the ones that I always respected the most... [They were] more real, yeah. The ones that only wanted their rules and this and that, those are the ones I rebelled against.

Further posing an obstacle to blue-collar participants' ability to attain and maintain an identification with school were the adverse behaviors to which they were routinely exposed. Blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to mention violence when describing their schools, and they also exclusively mentioned taking part in that violence, suggesting that such school experiences contributed to their identity development disadvantages during this part of their lives relative to that of white-collar participants. Their honing in on adverse activities in school suggests that school experiences for them were largely different to those of the white-collar participants in that they were less about academics and more about navigating negative behaviors. As Manuel stated, experiences with such negative school activities became especially salient during high school, when adolescents are in the identity development stage of narrowing down occupational options and solidifying an adult identity.

Elementary was great always. I remember elementary was great. Recess, lunch, little classes. Then middle school, it was all right. That's when I started to get into some kind of trouble, got in a few fights over stupid things. Like I got hit in the head with a rock, and then I beat up some kid one time. I just got really mad.

In a final act of being unable to identify with the world of school, blue-collar participants exclusively discussed being consistently truant or having dropped out of high school. Such choices, as identity development theory would posit (Erikson, 1950, 1968), were likely an extension of their weak identity development given that it up until that point it largely remained aimless, uncommitted, and detached. For many of the blue-collar participants like Rolando, dropping out of high school was followed with their entry into blue-collar work, as their poor academic success made attaining white-collar work impossible.

There'd be times when I would not go to school because I just didn't want to go. She'd [grandmother] make me do yard work, so it's not like I just got to chill and have fun.

These school experiences largely differ from those of the white-collar participants, who were more likely to have entered high school with identities anchored in their parents' and families' values and aspirations, which included internalizing the belief that school was a means to attaining better work and life outcomes. Although, overall, blue-collar and white-collar participants alike attended low-performing schools, white-collar participants were more likely than blue-collar ones to describe their schools as good, average, or high-performing. Such statements suggest that white-collar participants' school experiences were different from those of most blue-collar participants, and that they were also exposed to school experiences that reinforced the identity development path they had been on prior to entering high school.

White-collar participants also exclusively mentioned that school came naturally to them and that it was their top priority at that point in their lives, further indicating that the identities they had developed by the time they entered high school were in a symbiotic relationship with the school environment, thus allowing them to continue to project themselves forward along the identity development path their parents had helped them start. Evidence of this symbiotic relationship, in contrast, was largely missing in the narratives of the blue-collar participants. As Diego's words suggest, doing well academically and being on an identity development path that included college reinforced one another, allowing white-collar participants to further internalize into their identities high levels of competence and achievement.

I was always just naturally good in school. I never found anything really difficult. I was always the type of learner that if somebody taught me something visually, I picked it up right away. I didn't find it really difficult growing up. School was always easy. I knew that if I stuck with it that it would lead me into more positive paths.

The ability of white-collar participants to identify with their school environment extended into the actors who control it, as white-collar participants were much more likely than blue-collar ones to state that they had teachers in high school who actively helped them enter college. Such teachers served as conduits for white-collar participants' identity development along the same path they had been following prior to entering school. In other words, they acted as substitutes to their parents, who were less equipped to help their children successfully make the transition from school to college. In helping the white-collar participants transition into the next stage of their lives after high school, they reinforced their identification with college and, subsequently, the world of white-collar employment. As Alonso shared about one of his teachers, she filled his parents' gap of knowledge regarding how to gain acceptance into college.

My AVID teacher, she was incredible. She was the one that truly taught me how to research schools, how to research programs, look for scholarships... She pushed me in the right direction and she taught me so many things that I think my success in college, and getting into college, and graduating was because of her. She was the instrument that my parents would not have been able to provide. They did not grow up here. They did not have a college education... She taught me how to go about doing that.

The messaging the participants internalized from their school experiences support the argument that the identities they had developed at the point of entering high school—from their parent, family, and neighborhood experiences—continued to direct blue- and white-collar

participants toward divergent identity development paths. All participants alike, but especially blue-collar ones, described the period from middle to high school as a time of great personal change that challenged them to take greater control over their identity exploration and commitments, and to think more actively about who they were and who they wanted to become. As Pablo mentioned, the choices he made during this time affected how external actors treated him, and such treatment fed into the adult he was becoming.

Everything kind of changed in one night maybe sixth grade or the year I went to public school... I think just my grades started going down very slightly like from all As to Bs... Then, I don't know if that worried my parents or scared them, but I definitely was getting treated differently. Expectations were different because you go from an adolescent to a teenager and then teenager to an adult. I think I was just being treated a little differently and then also my environment started changing, people started changing.

How the participants managed these personal changes and identity formation challenges largely rested on the identity they had developed vis-à-vis their parent, family, and neighborhood experiences, as well as on their commitment to them. In navigating puberty and the social pressures of identifying with actors outside their family units, the participants were faced with deciding how to connect the identity they had developed with the one they wanted to attain in school. For blue-collar participants, connecting their identity—largely detached from the people in their lives and to which they were likely not strongly committed because of this—in manners that would steer them toward more successful life outcomes proved to be especially difficult. When asked why he dropped out of high school, Pablo had difficulty explaining his reasoning, but he ultimately focused on feeling like he simply did not belong in the school environment.

That's why I ended up leaving because I didn't feel like... I felt very alienated. Not too much of... I didn't feel like I was part of a group or even part of the high school community. Yeah, I just always felt like an outsider, kind of.

Given their weak ability to navigate the changes they experienced in their teenage years and their largely detached identities to which they were not strongly committed, blue-collar participants were more likely to connect their identities vis-à-vis school to their peers, particularly those undergoing similar challenges in identifying positively with school. Identifying with peers that shared a reaction against school and against a conventional identity development pathway reinforced blue-collar participants' inability to identify positively with school, steering them further away from an identity development pathway that could lead to college and ultimately to white-collar employment. Blue-collar participants exclusively shared comments that school was not for them and that their school peer identifications played a greater role in their lives during that time. As Rolando stated, the high school years for him were marked by the need to have fun with friends and to enjoy being young and carefree.

I would say maybe around 16 [is when I stopped caring about school]... I was just young and dumb. I just thought I didn't need school. I'd rather work or make money, and other things would be more important like hanging out with my friends and drinking, not going to school because I felt like it was a waste, or girls, and just that mostly.

White-collar participants' statements regarding the process that led to their school achievements, in contrast, largely focused on their parents, families, and communities, suggesting that the identities they had developed when entering high school were not only their

own, they were also extensions of others' with whom they closely identified. Such a strong anchoring likely made white-collar participants more committed to their identities, less susceptible to identifying with peers who did not share the same identity, and more likely to continue along an identity development path defined by achievement. As Alonso's comment suggests, having such a strong identity in high school committed to achievement helped him overcome any messages that told him that he did not belong in the world of academic success.

One thing I noticed was I was one of very few minorities in those [AP] classes. I can just tell that straight off the bat. That did not really discourage me. If anything, it made me feel proud that I was representing my community, my ethnicity. I was always happy about that. That's what I noticed.

Whereas the high school experiences of blue-collar participants largely reinforced their inability to connect to and care about school, the opposite was true for white-collar participants. White-collar participants exclusively mentioned that their high school experiences solidified their path to a four-year university, indicating that, although both blue- and white-collar participants attended largely similar schools, it was the differences in their pre-adolescent, pre-high school identities that in large part led to such vastly divergent school outcomes. Again, it was the *experiences* within those similar environments that were largely different for the blue- and white-collar participants, and what helped shape those disparate experiences were the differences in the identities the blue- and white-collar participants leveraged to propel themselves forward in the school world. As Diego articulated, the concept of going to college manifested itself slowly across his adolescent years until it finally took hold in high school thanks in part to the choices he made along the way that ultimately supported a pathway to college.

I think college never really came into my mind until probably middle school. I think that because after basically in middle school is when I started getting into more honors classes. The concept of college started becoming more apparent and working towards that end goal became more of the forefront. I think before it was just like an abstract concept like, "Yeah, I'll go to college, of course. We'll figure it out." It wasn't until later on where it was like, all right, this is the reality of what it takes to get to that point.

When it came to the schools' ability to prepare the participants for the world of work, blue- and white-collar participants alike shared that their high school experiences did not sufficiently prepare them to make work choices. Nonetheless, white-collar participants exclusively mentioned that high school did help them visualize and narrow down their viable life paths and college major and career options, indicating, again, that white-collar participants' strong identification with school allowed them to internalize experiences that reinforced their commitment to the identity development path on which they had been prior to entering high school. Alonso described the process that led him to choose his college major and ultimate career, and the role that school experiences played in that process.

I started taking drawing classes in high school sophomore year. I've always liked drawing growing up. I liked art. I liked math back in high school. My art teacher actually suggested something with architecture, something with engineering. I did more research myself and I thought, "Hey, this is pretty cool. They design buildings. They build these models..." I did explore architecture for most of high school, actually. I applied to Oregon and to USC senior year. I got into their architecture program.

For the blue-collar participants who overall entered high school with largely aimless identities and with a weak commitment to them, and who therefore struggled to identify with school in positive ways, their time in school was mostly perceived as a waste of time. Blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to focus their comments regarding what school taught them around an inability to help them face the real world. For them, the real world looked different than the real world of their peers who were on track to go to college and attain white-collar employment, and such a mismatch further challenged their ability to identify with school and to find it useful in their lives. For Pablo, the environment that reflected his identity was not in school, so he decided to leave school and identify instead with the working world where he could feel competent and industrious.

I think I prepared myself by leaving school and giving myself two years to do that... I don't think [school prepared me for the real world]. There's a few, like my friends who were excelling in school continued to excel because they were excelling from the start.

### **Themes Regarding Peers**

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), it is in adolescence and the teenage years when individuals begin to explore their identities vis-à-vis their peers. Such a period is marked by identity confusion, concern with others' perceptions of themselves, and the search for a future occupation with the prospect of adulthood. The narratives indicate that the identifications the participants made while in school not only reinforced the identities they had developed prior to entering adolescence and high school, they also solidified the future development path the participants had come to foresee for themselves. Although all of the participants made statements suggesting that they all underwent a process of identifying with peers, blue-collar participants were more likely to report having had a wide social circle whilst in high school. Such a broad approach to peer identification is reflective of the overall weak identity development experiences in the home. It is probable that because most blue-collar participants did not develop a strong identity that they shared with the actors in their home, they had less internal guidance in how they went about identifying with peers. When asked to describe how he went about making friends, Manuel used words that implied an erratic process.

Anybody. I hang out with so many different kinds of people... Yeah. It's always random for me.

Seeking to identify with actors outside their family units largely placed the blue-collar participants at risk of connecting their identities to individuals who reinforced their continuation along an identity development path diverged from that of the white-collar participants. Blue-collar participants exclusively mentioned that getting into trouble and partaking in illegal activities was common in adolescence, indicating that their peer experiences reinforced their rebellious identities and their difficulties identifying with school and with a white-collar path to work. As Rolando mentioned regarding why he had the friends he had and exhibited the adverse behaviors he did, it was all rooted in the inability to form a positive identification with his dad.

I realized that where I grew up a lot of my friends grew up without their dads, and it was strange because we're all from the same town, yet a lot of us don't have our fathers in our lives. It's because all of them made bad decisions, and they're all locked up or in jail. It was just strange how we all grew up without our dads, and we're all Mexican, and we all went down the wrong roads, and it's like a cycle.

White-collar participants' experiences in looking for and identifying with peers were also marked by a search for individuals who could reinforce the identities they had developed in their childhoods, albeit their searches were more narrow and focused. White-collar participants were much more likely than blue-collar ones to state that their peers were limited to college-bound, studious-types like them who avoided trouble, indicating that their stronger adolescent identities—anchored to their parents and families—and greater commitment to them made them less prone to embark on a wide exploration for friends. Alonso articulated this point in his explanation of why he has been successful when so many of his peers have not.

There was always one or two students that would goof off and wouldn't really take anything serious despite that she did her best to teach them, to get a college education. Those students, I can just speculate that it came from how they were raised, where they came from. At that point, it's really hard to change their perspective, change their mind in terms of going towards a more successful route instead of being complacent. Most of my AVID class did end up going to a four-year school, actually.

The peers with whom the white-collar participants identified whilst in high school not only reinforced their identities, they also helped shape their identity development path and post-high school life in direct ways. White-collar participants exclusively mentioned that their peers actively accepted and supported their pathways to college, indicating that they chose peers in part based on their ability to act as extensions of the their parents and families and to help them manifest their identity development path toward white-collar work. In his peers, Diego was able to share his work toward the identity goal he had created for himself years before in his home.

Yeah, all my friends were all very supportive. I think that, again, it was because of the fact that in middle school and high school it was all honors placement and AP classes. Everybody else was already going towards that goal.

### **Themes Regarding Extracurricular Activities**

Extracurricular activities serve as mechanisms for identity exploration during adolescence (Erikson, 1950, 1968). The cross-narrative themes regarding the extracurricular activities in which the participants partook whilst growing up further support the notion that blue-collar participants' weaker identity development and poorer commitment to their identities likely led them to seek broader social activities relative to white-collar participants, who during high school had a stronger sense of and commitment to self thanks to their positive identity development experiences vis-à-vis their parents, families, neighborhoods, and schools. Blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to participate in organized sports, and they exclusively mentioned that such activities were highly important to their high school years, that their parents pushed such activities on them, and that they quit them for frivolous reasons, all of which suggest high levels of identity exploration. Pablo recounted how rejecting his parents' development influence led him in high school to choose to quit soccer.

I used to play soccer. I had a little scholarship for playing on the club team. When I got a little older my parents started really pushing that, not extremely, but they would be like, "You have to practice every day." It just turned into homework and then I think that just my mind couldn't like oh my god this is just like school. My parents are doing whatever. Then I stopped playing soccer strictly because of that.



Blue-collar participants were also more likely than white-collar ones to mention participation in arts-related and informal sports-related activities during high school. Such comments suggest that blue-collar participants had more social space to explore their identities. White-collar participants, in contrast, were much more likely to mention strategic and controlled participation in activities that supported the identity development path on which they had been on since early childhood. They almost exclusively stated having participated in school club and college preparation activities, indicating that their more robust identity development experiences made them less susceptible to undergo broad social exploration or to deviate from their identity development path. In other words, extracurricular activities for most of the white-collar participants were avenues in which they could begin to manifest the adult occupational identities toward which they were working, as evidenced by Alonso's statement regarding why he chose to participate in a college preparation program.

In sixth grade I was given an orientation to the AVID program. Back then I was like, "Yeah. That sounds like something I would like to do." They're teaching about college. I know for a fact that my parents, they would have no knowledge of this. I figured back then that would be a good idea to enroll with that program. I stuck with it from sixth grade until senior year of high school.

The differences in the types of activities in which the participants were likely to have engaged also led to differences in what the participants learned about themselves and in what the activities contributed to their identity development. White-collar participants exclusively discussed having learned more about what they could achieve after high school, indicating that their activities reinforced their identity development paths toward continued success. In contrast, blue-collar participants were more likely than white-collar ones to mention that they learned nothing from their extracurricular activities or that they only partook in them to have fun.

### **Themes Regarding Ethnicity**

Participants were also asked about their ethnicity to understand how being Latino has been processed into the development of their overall identities. The narratives indicate that participants' identity development experiences also defined how the participants processed the internalization of their Latino background into their overall identities. Blue- and white-collar participants alike acknowledged that being Latino in America placed them at a social disadvantage, yet blue-collar participants' comments focused almost exclusively on broad and negative generalizations and stereotypes American society tends to place on Latinos.

Blue-collar participants also extended this negative understanding of what it means to be Latino in the United States into the labor market. Blue-collar participants exclusively mentioned that being Latino meant they were automatically disadvantaged in their employment options. Furthermore, when asked about the types of jobs Latinos tend to have, they were much more likely than white-collar participants to mention manual labor and service jobs, and they also exclusively conveyed through their statements a personal association with those types of employment, suggesting that blue-collar participants internalized into their identities more stereotypical social perceptions of Latinos than their white-collar counterparts. Manuel, for example, honed in on one benefit of being Latino in the labor market, yet his identity development path, which since childhood veered toward blue-collar work, prevented him from being able to apply the benefit of being bilingual to non blue-collar jobs.

Retail jobs because we're bilingual. People that don't talk English, doing retail, it's easier to talk to them. That's one big thing; just being bilingual just helps a lot, anywhere, really. Just retail, construction, you know, because you can talk to everybody. Being bilingual helps a lot. My dad always told me that, it's going to get you a lot of jobs just because of that.

In spite of such interpretations of what it meant to be Latino in US society and in the US labor market, blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to express that being Latino did not mean anything to them, and they exclusively mentioned that being Latino played no role in what they can achieve. Such comments indicate that the blue-collar participants made efforts in their identity development to protect themselves from the negative social perceptions of Latinos by minimizing the extent to which they internalized their ethnicity into their personal identities. In seeking to not perceive themselves as a Latino American stereotype, they had to reject the role that their ethnicity has played in their identity development. Manuel demonstrated this desire when talking about what being Latino meant to him.

It [being Latino] doesn't necessarily have meaning. It's just... I guess it puts you in a group. Doesn't necessarily mean nothing to me.

White-collar participants largely shared in blue-collar participants' comments regarding the negative perceptions of Latinos in America and their disadvantages in the US labor market. Nonetheless, white-collar participants exclusively mentioned that such disadvantages in part pushed them to succeed more and to work hard to not be a Latino stereotype. Once again, the differences in how the white-collar participants processed being Latino into their identities led to different identity outcomes. Such comments indicate that white-collar participants' stronger and higher commitment to their identities across their childhood and adolescence helped them form more positive identifications with their ethnic group. For Alonso, being Latino not only did not stop him from attaining college, it has not stopped him from pursuing fields of study and careers that are not traditionally associated with minorities.

In college, my major was neuroscience. Then I switched to human biology. It's still science. In the sciences, ever since I started pursuing sciences, I noticed that Hispanics and African Americans, they're always the minority. My level three organic chemistry class, I was the only Hispanic in that class... As these individuals grow up, you start to see a deviation. Those that really excelled in math and science, they're more likely to go towards that path. Unfortunately, very few Hispanics undergo that path.

White-collar participants were also much more likely than blue-collar ones to speak positively about their Latino culture and to have had experiences that allowed them to identify with their Latino ethnicity, suggesting that their stronger identity development experiences encouraged them to internalize rather than reject Latino attributes that overlapped with their personal identities. White-collar participants exclusively mentioned that as they got older, they felt a stronger need to connect with their Latino roots. Gabriel discussed this in the context of being self-sufficient and living away from his parents and place of origin.

I share the same interest in food, music, art, culture. It's like for me, going to college and developing myself, like I said, when I was growing up I really didn't like... I didn't hate it. I just didn't know too much about or enjoyed my culture as much... I got to a point where I kind of missed waking up and hearing certain music that my parents would be

playing or eating certain foods that they would prepare, celebrate certain things that they would. I guess that's where I, in a sense, have gone out of my way to get that exposure and immersion by going to Oakland and the Mission District, listening to the music that my parents would even though when I was younger and growing up I never would. I had another music taste but now in an effort to preserve my culture I'm reading up on what would be Latin American literature, music.

### **Themes Regarding Achieving an Adult Identity**

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), it is the accumulation of people's lived experiences in childhood and adolescence that produce an adult identity. Participants were also asked about their sense of self at age 18 to understand how the differences in their identity development paths produced different adult identity outcomes. As expected, the identity development paths the participants followed since birth and that as they aged became more and more diverged led to stark differences in the transition into adulthood. At the point at which most people graduate high school, blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to convey that they were still exploring their identities and that they did not have a good sense of who they were. Such comments reflect the overall weak identity development experiences the blue-collar participants had described in recounting their experiences with their parents, families, neighborhoods, schools, peers, and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the comments around identity confusion for most blue-collar participants tended to center around the lack of a clear career pathway, as exemplified by Pablo's comments regarding his jumping around jobs.

At that point [leaving high school], like I said, I was looking for an opportunity... I did try it [EMT training course] out and it's like a stepping stone because you can be an EMT and then you can go to paramedics school. You can be a phlebotomist, people who take blood at a hospital. You can even be a firefighter just from being an EMT with not having a huge degree or anything... Once I started feeling sad again because, all right, well I've done this program, I got the end result, I got paid, I have a place now, I don't want this, I quit the job.

Likely because of their weak early identity development experiences and more expansive identity exploration, blue-collar participants almost exclusively reflected on being ill equipped to decide upon completing adolescence who they wanted to be and what they wanted to do with their lives. Their comments tended to focus on the proposition that they needed maturing and growing up to gain a better sense of their identity and of how and in what direction they wanted to project themselves into their future lives, which is further indicative of the weak pre-adult identity development processes they experienced. As Manuel recounted, some of the blue-collar participants reflected on the decisions they made during that time with a sense of regret.

I think in terms of being foolish and doing senseless things, and not thinking, I think a lot more than I used to. I actually think about what's going to happen or what the consequences to what I'm doing. At that point [high school], I just figured if I cared about it or not.

In not having had more positive identity development experiences that would have set them up whilst still in high school to have a better sense of their identities and understanding of the occupational path they would pursue to project themselves into their adult lives, blue-collar participants missed the prime window for expanding their employment options. None of the

blue-collar participants at the time of their interview were on a path that led to high-skill work. Instead, turning 18 coincided with the need to be self-sufficient, which placed them on an identity development cycle limited to growth largely defined by the ability to survive financially. Pablo's description of what it's like to get ahead in life as a blue-collar worker indicates that there is an element of arrested development that comes with having few employment options, and suggests that adult identity development and professional growth are intertwined.

I find myself almost constantly progressing but also constantly regressing. I do feel like I know who I am and I do feel like... Yeah, I'm still young. I feel like I do, but it's like maybe if I was making enough money to pay my rent and do all that other stuff just with art, then I would say, "Yes, I know exactly what I'm doing." I know where I'm going. It's not super consistent so I have my doubts with certain things.

White-collar participants, in contrast, were much more likely than blue-collar ones to mention that they had a strong sense of self around the time they graduated from high school, suggesting that their more positive identity development experiences up to that point of their lives had better prepared them to achieve an adult identity. In having developed a strong identity by age 18, the white-collar participants were able to connect their past identity experiences with their present and their future work goals. Alonso, for example, discussed this in terms of being the same person at the time of the interview that he was when he was 18 years old, indicating that achieving an adult identity requires a sense of linearity and continuity in one's experiences.

Eighteen-year old me was not that different from right now. I've always been driven. By that age I knew what I needed to do.

Such identity achievement, however, did not always come without a cost, as white-collar participants also exclusively mentioned having difficulties embarking on an identity path separate from the one that their parents and families instilled in them at an early age. Such comments indicate that there are limitations to how rigid an identity development path can be. This notion has been captured in Marcia's (1966) foreclosed identity status, which is defined as an identity to which an individual is committed but who has done little identity exploration. As Diego described, growing up with such narrow space for identity exploration caused him later in life to reassess whether he wanted to remain on his life and career path.

After high school, again, it was more of me being more confident in myself because I felt like I had to overcompensate for my mom's more suppressive ways, like telling me what not to do as opposed to me figuring out like, "No, I want to do these things." I think it was more of an anger-based determination to figure out who I was. Then coming to college, it was more of a positive avenue as to figuring out who I was. It became not so much going against something, but going for myself, going and doing things for what I wanted to do and being happy with my decisions.

### **Summary of Chapter Themes**

The narratives demonstrate that although there were some shared identity development experiences between the blue- and white-collar participants, there were greater differences. Overall, blue- and white-collar participants alike were born into and raised in large and supportive families. They tended to have parents who were employed in blue-collar employment and had not attained high levels of education. Most of the participants had at least one sibling who was enrolled in or had attended college. Regarding the outer world, the participants

generally described their neighborhoods as working class, and virtually all of them mentioned the presence of gangs where they grew up. In spite of these disadvantages, most claimed that they did not have negative perceptions of themselves given their social position. Most of the participants also described the schools they attended as mediocre or average, and they mostly agreed that middle school was a time of profound change regarding their identities and relationship with school. They shared the need to create identifications outside of their families, and they talked about society's negative perceptions and treatment of Latinos as inferior.

The differences in their identity development experiences, however, were much more profound. White-collar participants largely described their ego personalities as conducive to learning, self-reflection, and introspection. They were more likely to have been raised by their two biological parents in one household and to describe their parents in similar terms. They also tended to describe a balanced relationship with their parents that allowed them to have both boundaries and independence and to take on parenting roles in the home. They were more likely to state that their parents took active steps in support of their education and to have a strong desire to not disappoint them in their school achievement. Furthermore, they largely described their family units as cohesive and their siblings as supportive and close. Regarding the outer world, their neighborhood disadvantages tended to give them a sense of empowerment and to lead them to find the factors that supported their positive identity development. They were more likely than the blue-collar participants to describe the schools they attended as good, to state that they enjoyed school and that it came easy to them, to share that school was their top priority, and to identify a teacher or counselor who helped them attain college admission. Their desire to identify with peers tended to be more narrow and focused, and they were more likely to identify with peers that supported a path to white-collar employment. They were also more likely to be involved in activities that supported a path to white-collar work, to have internalized positive aspects of their Latino ethnicity into their identities, and to have a good sense at the point of graduating high school of who they were and what career they wanted to attain.

Blue-collar participants, on the other hand, tended to describe their ego personalities as conducive to rebelliousness and independence. They were less likely to have a father in their lives, to describe their mothers as overprotective and their parents as controlling, and to have rebelled against them. Some of them even described being pushed, either directly or indirectly, out of their homes. They generally described detached family situations, not having close relationships with their siblings, and feeling like they were not entirely a part of their families. Regarding the outer world, most described identifying with and joining in the bad, illegal, and sometimes violent activities that took place in their neighborhoods and schools. They were more likely to have expressed a dislike for school, to state that their teachers did not care for them, and to be truant. Their desire to identify with their peers tended to be stronger and more expansive, and they also tended to identify in school with troublemakers. They were more likely to have been involved in organized sports or in art-related activities, and they generally had more social space to explore their identities. Their perceptions of Latinos in America largely focused on broad and negative generalizations, and they were less likely to be attuned to their Latino origins. They were less likely to have completed high school, to have a strong sense of who they were at that point in time, and to claim that they had no sense of what career they wanted to pursue.

## Chapter 6: Qualitative Study Findings: Cross-Narrative Themes in Work Roles, Choices, and Behaviors

This chapter presents the cross-narrative themes that emerged from the narratives of the 20 participants regarding their work roles, choices, and behaviors. It answers the second qualitative research question: *How can the work roles, choices, and behaviors of young Latino males in California be understood given their identity development processes from infancy to pre-adulthood, and how are these similar and different based on their blue- or white-collar occupation status?* To gain an understanding of the participants’ work roles, choices, and behaviors, the themes presented open with their early work experiences and plans, followed by various sections regarding the reasoning behind their work-related choices and behaviors, and concluding with the meaning of work and its importance to the participants’ overall identity. Similarly to Chapter 5, this chapter takes a bird’s eye view of the patterns and relies on six participants (three for each of the two occupation types) who exemplify the patterns. It was organized to give the reader a sense of the experiences the two groups of participants shared and did not share to draw conclusions regarding the work roles, choices, and behaviors of blue- and white-collar Latino workers.

Following an inductive analysis and coding approach, the 20 transcripts were coded for themes. To conduct the cross-narrative analysis, excerpts were accumulated based on their code. For example, all of the excerpts from the 20 narratives that were coded “Job Attraction,” were compiled into a Microsoft Excel sheet. The themes for each code were then identified, which sometimes involved grouping like themes into broader categories. After all of the theme categories were identified, a list was made of the number of times the theme appeared in the data. This allowed for the emergence of the most prevalent or common themes across the 20 narratives. To answer the second part of the research question and compare and contrast the themes by blue- and white-collar occupation, the themes were also counted based on the participants’ occupation type. The participants’ occupation type was not identified until this stage of the analytic process to increase objectivity in the initial coding and identification of themes. This two-pronged approach of identifying the most common themes across the 20 narratives and by occupation type allowed for an analytic focus on both the work roles, choices, and behaviors the 20 participants shared and those that were shared based on occupation type. Table 6.1 summarizes the themes that emerged from this coding and analysis strategy.

Table 6.1  
*Summary of Work Roles, Choices, and Behaviors Themes*

<b>Developmental Factor</b>	<b>Shared Theme</b>	<b>Blue-Collar Theme</b>	<b>White-Collar Theme</b>
Early Work Experiences and Plans	Chores from early age	Early work duties and plans about making money	Early job plans that required commitment
	Accompanied parents to work	No long-term work commitments	Work viewed as extension of parents and family
Occupational History	None in the data	Lacked focus and direction	Strong in focus and direction
		Had held many jobs	Jobs marked by stepping stones to long-term goal
		Bouts of un- and	

		underemployment	Held jobs for up to four years or longer
		Many jobs held for six months or less	
Job Attainment	Via family members	Via friends, acquaintances	Via the Internet Via schools, college
Job Attraction	None in the data	Money	Professional development
		Having few responsibilities	Upward mobility
		Doing something related to extracurricular interests	Related to academic priorities
Job Roles	Food and restaurant industry	Retail	Tutoring
		Warehouse	Information technology Research
Learned from Jobs	None in the data	Basic skills	Implement what was learned in school
		Career exploration	
		Nothing	Need to continue to build on skills, knowledge
Enjoyed about Jobs	None in the data	Freedom to do anything	Act on knowledge gained in school
		Not feeling constrained	Helping others
		Doing something that doesn't feel like work	Being an expert
Disliked about Jobs	None in the data	Manual labor	Obstacles to job growth
		Dealing with customers	
Reasons for Leaving Jobs	None in the data	Frivolous reasons	Maximized what they could learn
		Reasons outside of their control	Need to shift gears to continue to grow
Future Work Goals	None in the data	No good sense of future work goals	Grow within current industry
		Unrealistic career goals	
		Leaving current job	
		Dedicated to unconventional work roles	
Meaning of Work	Paying the bills	Money	Being a contributing member of society
		Loving what you do	

## Themes Regarding Early Work Experiences and Plans

According to Super (1957), occupations are not merely actions, but roles that are extensions of an individual's identity. In other words, identity drives the reasons why individuals choose to perform their occupational roles (Vondracek, 1991). Work roles, choices, and behaviors cannot exist outside of an individual's identity, making the two isomorphic. As such, the identity development experiences of the three blue-collar participants (Manuel, Pablo, and Rolando) and of the three white-collar participants (Gabriel, Diego, and Alonso) are intricately linked with their work roles, choices, and behaviors. To better understand how the participants have chosen their work roles, made their work choices, and exhibited their work behaviors, they were asked during their interviews a series of questions regarding their experiences with work, beginning with their earliest work experiences and plans.

With the exception of some blue-collar participants, most of the remaining 20 participants discussed having parents that made efforts to instill in them a strong work ethic from an early age. Blue- and white-collar participants alike discussed having had regular chore responsibilities from as young as 10 years old, which, according to Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory, falls within the age group of when children begin to identify more strongly with tasks and labor. Manuel described the various chore responsibilities his parents placed on him from an early age, which he understood as preparation for entering the labor market as an adult.

Mopping and sweeping, probably around 10. Before that, it was like, clean up your room, little things like that. Once I started getting big, I could move stuff, do things. My mom was like, "Do this, do that. Go clean the fucking backyard, break these branches, do this." Always telling me stuff to do for sure, but the only thing was, they were like, "The only reason we're telling you to do this is so you'll know how to do things if you ever go looking for a job. You can't go to somebody, 'Oh I want to cut grass,' and you don't even know how to turn on the machine, you know. We're teaching you all these things so you know a little bit of something."

Most of the participants also shared that their parents exposed them at an early age to real work experiences, not just household chores. Blue- and white-collar participants alike described joining their fathers or another male relative at their sites of work. White-collar participants exclusively mentioned that they also accompanied their mothers to their sites of work, suggesting that their mothers had more influence over their occupational identities relative to blue-collar workers. Given that most of the participants' parents had working class jobs, much of this exposure was limited to the occupations that are typically available to immigrants, such as landscaping and house cleaning. Nonetheless, what the participants learned from such early work exposure varied for the blue- and white-collar participants. As Diego discussed, white-collar participants were much more likely than blue-collar ones to state that such experiences had a long-term impact on how they view their work.

My dad does landscaping and mom does house cleaning. Working with my hands was always second nature. Most of the times growing up, I didn't want to do those things, but my parents would either have me do them around the house or help them from time to time at their jobs. Whether I wanted to or not, I learned to work with my hands and be comfortable with it. I think that now I'm really appreciating it now, cherishing it, and using it for a lot more things.



Again, how the blue- and white-collar participants processed their earliest work experiences led to thematic differences in what they gained and internalized from those experiences, providing support to the theory that identity and work behaviors are intertwined. Blue-collar participants, who by early adolescence had experienced poorer identity development experiences relative to white-collar participants, exclusively mentioned that the purpose behind their early work duties and plans was making money. Such a focus on an external reward indicates that blue-collar participants' identification with work was rooted in an outcome that did not transcend their overall identity, as exemplified by Pablo's comments.

First thing and one of the only things I could think about would be just washing my grandpa's car for five bucks, just offering to wash my mom's or my aunt's. Yeah... [From when I was] pretty young. Like middle school, maybe from 10 years old and up... [I did it] for money.

An early identification with work that mostly rested on the instant gratification of money or another tangible reward may have extended itself into the blue-collar participants' young adult work trajectories, as blue-collar participants exclusively discussed beginning their working lives in jobs that could easily make them money or that did not require a major time commitment. Such an identification with work likely made blue-collar participants more prone to having more and varied work experiences as they bounced around searching for jobs that paid them more money. Blue-collar participants exclusively expressed a lack of commitment to their early work plans and to the first jobs they had after high school, which reflected a lack of commitment to an identity at the time of graduating high school. Pablo's erratic work trajectory, in effect, was an extension of his poor identity development experiences and lack of a strong sense of self.

When I was 16, I was a computer technician. I went from being a computer technician to a pyramid scheme worker for a perfume company when I was 17. When I turned 18, I was being paid to get my EMT certification. I guess that was a job. Then either 18 or 19, I was a full-time EMT. From either 18 or 19 up until I was 20, I was doing that. Then maybe 20 and a half, I was a speech therapist assistant. Twenty-one, I was a full-time dog walker. Twenty-two, I deliver food now.

White-collar participants, in contrast, did not reference money or other tangible rewards in their early work experiences, and they exclusively mentioned accompanying both parents to their worksites. They also exclusively mentioned having had early job plans that required time and commitment to attain and that could serve as a means for achieving a better life for themselves and their families. Their comments suggest that white-collar participants' earliest identifications with work rested less on the monetary gains that accompany employment and more on contributing to a cohesive family unit. In having had stronger identity development experiences and a more solid sense of self by age 18, white-collar participants were able to treat jobs as the vehicles for their continued identity development, as exemplified by Gabriel's description of his identity at the point of graduating high school.

I've always wanted to be a scientist... As I got into college and moved away from family, it really gave me an opportunity to develop what my identity is and whereas before I really wasn't into my parent's culture, I was more Americanized I think, but I guess what I would identify primarily with would be in terms of race, definitely like a Mexican American, in terms of careers like a scientist.

### **Themes Regarding Occupational History**

All participants were asked to summarize their occupational histories, and the data indicate that blue-collar participants had more erratic work trajectories compared to white-collar ones. On average, blue- and white-collar participants alike had held four jobs (when rounding to the nearest whole number) at the time of their interviews despite the fact that the average blue-collar participant was one year younger than the average white-collar one. The typical blue-collar occupational history lacked direction and linearity. Manuel had worked as a gardener, a food preparer, a retail clerk, and at the time of his interview was a flooring installer with dreams of becoming a muralist. Pablo had worked as a computer technician, a pyramid scheme worker, an EMT, an assistant at a speech therapy clinic, a dog walker, and at the time of his interview was a food deliverer with aspirations to become an artist. Rolando had worked as a sales clerk in a retail store, a package handler at a warehouse, a layman for a construction company, and at the time of his interview was a line cook at a restaurant with no clear future work aspirations. Blue-collar participants' occupational histories also exclusively included temporary work and long periods of unemployment and underemployment. Less than half of the blue-collar participants at the time of their interview were employed full time.

White-collar participants' occupational histories, on the other hand, had more focused direction and were largely marked by stepping stones that led toward a long-term, high-skill work goal. Although they had also held blue-collar employment, especially at the beginning of their engagement in the labor market, they successively built on prior jobs to attain white-collar employment. Gabriel had been a construction worker, a fast food server, a college cafeteria worker, a barista, and at the time of his interview was employed as a medical research assistant and aspired to acquire a PhD and become a medical researcher. Diego had worked in retail, at an architecture firm, and was at the time of his interview a small business owner in the architecture field. Alonso had worked as a sales clerk, a caterer, a tutor, a layman for a construction company, and was at the time of his interview employed as a medical assistant at an emergency room and planned to become a doctor. Furthermore, with one exception, all of the white-collar participants were employed full-time at the time of their interviews.

### **Themes Regarding Job Attainment**

To gain a better understanding of the methods the participants employed to acquire their various jobs, they were asked questions regarding their job attainment. Blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to have relied on a friend or acquaintance to find employment, and they exclusively mentioned having found the jobs they had at the time of their interviews via similar means, suggesting that their peers largely drove the job opportunities to which they had been exposed. Given that the peers with whom they had identified since adolescence tended to have had similar poor identity development experiences, such job attainment methods have almost certainly limited their job options to low-skill jobs. As Rolando recounted, such an approach also contributed to his erratic occupational trajectory.

That job was from somebody [I knew], and the other job after that was through somebody [I knew]. Then the next job... That was from one of my brother's girlfriend's mom. She hooked me up with that job. Then working at shipping and receiving, I got that job from my friend who told me about a staffing agency that helps you find work, so they helped me find that job.

White-collar participants, on the other hand, mostly mentioned a diverse set of avenues for finding and attaining employment. Beginning with their earlier jobs, white-collar participants

almost exclusively credited their fathers with having found employment for them, indicating that job attainment for them was also a family affair, not just an independent endeavor. As the white-collar participants began to professionally outgrow such entry-level and lower skill jobs, they had to look outside their immediate network to attain employment. White-collar participants were much more likely than blue-collar ones to mention that they found some of their jobs through the Internet, and they also exclusively stated that they found employment through their schools and universities. Such methods indicate that white-collar participants had fomented an ability to identify with something outside of their immediate environment, that employment largely served as the vehicle on which they could place their future identity development, and that college facilitated that jump between an identity embedded in their home reality and one embedded in a world that did not necessarily look like them. Gabriel recounted such an experience in his discussion of how he found his job as a medical research assistant.

I was a part of a group on campus that catered towards first-generation scientists. With that came counseling, tutoring. We had a close-knit community of people of similar backgrounds and interests, so they also funded this thing where they say, "Oh, we have all these internships that people can partake in, just apply." I applied and I got it... [The] same lab, after doing volunteer work for a year, I was put on [full-time].

### **Themes Regarding Job Attraction**

To gain a better sense of the participants' motivations for choosing to take certain job roles, they were asked to discuss what attracted them to each of the jobs they had had. The factors the participants considered in their attraction to a job also differed significantly between blue- and white-collar participants. Blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to mention pay, having few responsibilities on the job, and doing something related to their extracurricular interests as what attracted them to their jobs. Such responses suggest that the early identification with work as a means to a monetary reward and a lack of a strong sense of self and of a career path extended into the participants' reasons for their work roles and choices. Manuel recounted leaving a job in which he had made it to the role as supervisor in part because of pay and going to a new job that did not build on the work experience he had gained.

I just needed a better job at that point, because I was working retail. I was doing it, but I didn't really like it. Then on top of that, I was a supervisor in that retail store and then I found out this other employee was getting paid just as much as me. I'm like doing twice as much work. So I told that guy, "Yo, I'm going to start finding another job," and then I found another job and I'm like, "I'm out."

White-collar participants, in contrast, tended to focus less on short-term gains and more on factors that would contribute to the manifestation of their long-term career goals when discussing what attracted them to their jobs. They almost exclusively mentioned that they were attracted to jobs that augmented their experience in their field of interest, that provided upward mobility, and that were related to their overall academic priorities. Alonso's response for what attracted him to his job as an emergency room assistant suggests that he took it because it provided a means to his ultimate goal of being a doctor and because it allowed him to work in an environment that facilitated his ability to identify with being a doctor. In other words, working in an emergency room provided an environment filled with experiences and messages he could internalize into his burgeoning occupational identity as a doctor.

What attracted me was the patient interaction. Mostly the clinical interaction because prior to that, all my other jobs, they weren't really in any kind of hospital or clinical environment. That's something that medical schools, they like to see applicants have under them, some experience so that they know for sure so that you know for sure that's something that you want to get into. That was the biggest thing, just being surrounded in that environment.

### **Themes Regarding Job Roles**

Participants were asked about their job roles to better understand how these served as extensions of their identity development experiences. Roles in the food and restaurant industry were the most common for all of the participants. Blue- and white-collar participants alike discussed having taken job roles in some part of the food industry, from preparing it to delivering it. Amongst the blue-collar participants, retail and package-related work roles were the most common. Blue-collar participants almost exclusively stated having had work roles that entailed packaging and stocking for either a warehouse or a retail store. Although the roles alone do not imply much about the blue-collar participants' identity development, the process of how they ended up taking such roles does. As Manuel mentioned regarding how he ended up working in a retail store, the path to the job was largely haphazard, which reflected his weak pre-adult identity development experiences. A lack of a strong sense of self, which included not having a clear and stable picture of his work goals and interests, made Manuel vulnerable to accepting employment opportunities that randomly presented themselves.

Yeah, [the retail job] just happened. I wasn't even trying to find a job at that point because I was going to school and stuff... Oh, stocking, ringing people up, cashier.

The overlap in work roles between the blue- and white-collar participants largely stopped at those in the food and restaurant industry, in large part because their identity development experiences guided their work trajectories toward white-collar employment and opened up avenues to higher-skilled and more diverse job roles. The most common job roles for white-collar participants, which they almost exclusively stated, were in tutoring, information technology (IT), and research. In taking such roles, the white-collar participants were able to internalize an identity around white-collar employment and to solidify their place as workers in the white-collar labor market. For example, Diego discussed how opening his own home remodeling business allowed him to connect his previous role as an architect and a future one as an IT consultant.

Then I also do IT consulting on the side... The residential remodel [business] makes sense, obviously, because of my architecture, and I took some construction courses. It's very hands-on. Again, I get to choose when I get to do the work myself or subcontract it out and be more of a manager. Then I guess with IT, it's been recent. I've only probably been doing it for four months... I was helping a guy remodel his house in Berkeley, and he just so happened to have an IT consulting company who had an opening.

### **Themes Regarding Skills Learned from Jobs**

The differences in the blue- and white-collar participants' work roles continued to manifest themselves in terms of the skills they learned from their jobs, suggesting that there was a symbiotic relationship in which identity development drove employment experiences, and such work experiences fed back into the participants' identity development. This symbiotic

relationship created a cycle that sustained the participants' identities and maintained their place in blue- or white-collar employment. Blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to say that they learned basic job skills, career exploration information, or nothing at all from their work roles. Such a shallow and disengaged approach to their work roles was reflective of their identity development experiences, which were also marked by lacking linearity and feeling detached from others, and indicative of their future work roles. For Rolando, who had relatively weak identity development experiences, a job in construction provided little besides forcing him to leave the job and end up, haphazardly, working as a line cook.

[Working construction] was really hard. You'd wear steel-toed boots. You had to go up and down different floors. We didn't know anything, so it was kind of like just being thrown into a swimming pool and learning how to swim. You have to learn everything as you go. That job was okay, but I learned a lot with a lot of older people, so it did help. I can't say it didn't help me. It did help me learn different skills but also taught me I don't want to work this field because I just had a bad experience with it. I wouldn't want to do construction.

White-collar participants, on the other hand, who had had more positive identity development experiences and a stronger sense of self throughout their pre-adult lives, were more apt to state that they learned how to connect their academic experiences to their work roles or that their job experiences made them want to continue to build on their skills and knowledge. Such comments suggest that white-collar participants maintained a linear identity development course that extended into the world of work, which set them up to seek jobs that would allow them to learn skills that would contribute to their growth and development. As Diego mentioned, his role as an architect allowed him to connect what he had learned in college to the labor market, and his experiences there allowed him to see himself as an entrepreneur and embark on opening his own home remodeling business.

I really enjoyed working there [architecture firm]. My boss is just an encyclopedia of knowledge in one person. I learned everything. Basically all of my foundation as to me working on my own has been through there.

### **Themes Regarding what Participants Enjoyed and Disliked About Their Jobs**

The notion of a feedback loop existing in the participants' identity development and work experiences is further supported by their responses to questions regarding what they enjoyed about the jobs they had held. Given the little overlap in what the blue- and white-collar participants' learned from their jobs, it was not surprising that there was also no overlap in these comments. Blue-collar participants exclusively mentioned that they enjoyed having the freedom to do as they pleased, to not feel constrained by the routine of work, and to be doing something that did not feel like work. Such comments indicate that blue-collar participants' identity development challenges, which were largely rooted in ego identities that were self-described as rebellious and independent, made it difficult for them to treat employment as a vehicle for projecting their future growth and development. In the same manner that they rejected the school environment because they could not identify with it in a way that aligned with their nascent identities, blue-collar participants rejected a deep relationship with work beyond a means for sustenance and survival. As Manuel noted, what he enjoyed about one of his jobs is that it exposed him to different experiences, people, and places.

I get to do what I want. The other thing, it's never the same. I don't like being in the same building every day. Like once I'm done with this one, I'm going to be somewhere else. I might be in Oakland. I might be in San Francisco, Vallejo. Who knows? Something different all the time. Never the same, different people.

White-collar participants' comments, in contrast, tended to have much deeper meaning than those of the blue-collar participants. What they largely enjoyed about their jobs rested on the ability to act on the knowledge they had gained over the years, whether it was through helping others or through having responsibilities that gave them a sense of being an expert in their field. Such comments indicate that, unlike the blue-collar participants, they had been able to treat their work roles as extensions of their identities. As such, investing in their work roles was the equivalent of growing and continuing to develop their identities. In describing what he enjoyed about being a tutor, Alonso spoke not just about the job and his role, but about himself, reinforcing the argument that white-collar participants treated identity and work roles as one.

I have enjoyed tutoring ever since high school. That has a lot to do with how... AVID showed me how to go about my classes. I excelled in particular subjects. I was always very happy to help out those that were struggling. I saw myself in those students. I used to be like you. I didn't know how to do this specific equation or this specific problem. I have that knowledge and I want to give it to you. That also stems from the fact that I learned a lot of things in life from mistakes. I didn't have that resource or someone that knew to teach me that. I feel very happy when I can help someone who doesn't know how to go about doing something. I have that knowledge and I want them to not make the mistakes I did. I really enjoy that, being a tutor.

There was also little overlap in blue- and white-collar participants' discussion of what they disliked about their previous and most recent jobs. Blue-collar participants focused their comments on disliking hard manual labor and dealing with customers, which were tasks that largely defined their occupational trajectories. In not treating work roles as vehicles for their identity development and in aimlessly pursuing jobs mostly for the purposes of making money, the blue-collar participants fomented a largely unstable connection with the labor market that made them vulnerable to bouncing between jobs and to under and unemployment. As Rolando stated, it was difficult for him to stay in the job roles that largely marked his occupational history because of the demands that they placed on his mind and body.

I also worked as a shipping and receiving person for a couple months at this company. They're the ones who get all the shipping boxes from Amazon and things you order online. There we would have get boxes, scan them and put them in the giant 18-wheeler trucks. You had to do it in a certain time limit, so that job was okay, but after a while you get tired of moving boxes and all that.

White-collar participants did not mention their main work responsibilities in their responses. Instead, they focused on obstacles to their job progression and to their long-term work goals, likely because such experiences entailed undercutting their identity development. When Alonso spoke about what he disliked about his job as an emergency room assistant, he focused his comments on the days in which he had few tasks to do. In talking about this, he also talked about the type of person that he is, reinforcing the notion that the white-collar participants experienced a deeper connection between work and their identities.

There are days that it's very slow. I have to find something to do, just something to do. I'm someone that does not like to not be doing something. I'm like, "I'm being paid to do something."

### **Themes Regarding Reasons for Leaving Jobs**

The participants' likes and dislikes of their jobs in part played a role in their decisions to leave their jobs. Blue-collar participants, who largely referenced superficial attributes regarding what they enjoyed about their jobs and who strongly disliked the type of work that marked most of their work experiences, were much more likely than white-collar participants to state that they left their jobs for frivolous reasons or for reasons beyond their personal control. Such comments reinforce the argument that blue-collar participants' weaker identities and shallower identification with the world of work made them vulnerable to making erratic work choices. Manuel, Pablo, and Rolando all mentioned having left at least one job simply because they became bored. The lack of commitment to their jobs and the absence of making job choices based on a linear plan replete with short- and long-term career goals were largely illustrative of their difficulties in committing to a sense of self and to growing that identity into adulthood.

Such an ability is something that was much more apparent amongst the white-collar participants who, in being set on seeking personal and professional growth through their employment, exclusively mentioned that they left jobs because they maximized what they could learn or because they believed they needed to shift gears to be able to continue to grow. Such comments imply a strong focus on behalf of the white-collar participants on linearity and continuity, both in terms of identity and work. Diego discussed leaving one of his jobs because he believed he had learned as much as he could, and because what he learned there facilitated his ability to identify with a new work role and to work towards it. Leaving his job and undertaking a new one, in effect, marked the calcification of an upgraded occupational identity.

I think ultimately that's what led me to leave that job is because I felt like I had learned enough that I couldn't take on more responsibility and be allowed more freedom to make the decisions sometimes as opposed to just going to my boss or my higher-ups every decision and get their okay. Because I felt like I had gotten enough time under my belt that I could do it.

### **Themes Regarding Time in Jobs**

The differences in blue- and white-collar participants' focus on and commitment to their work trajectories, which was reflective of their respective identity development paths, can especially be seen in the length of time the participants typically spent in their jobs. Blue-collar participants exclusively stated that they had stayed in some of their previous jobs for six months or less, and the most common time they spent in a job was one year. None of the white-collar participants mentioned having been in a job for less than six months, and the most common time they spent in a job was two years. Furthermore, white-collar participants exclusively stated having been in jobs for four years or longer, suggesting greater congruency between their identities and work roles, as well as a more developed ability to commit to their work roles.

There were also differences in how long the participants had been in the jobs they had at the time of their interviews. Most blue-collar participants had been in their jobs for a year or less, whereas most white-collar ones had been in their jobs for two to three years. Overall, the narratives demonstrate that blue-collar participants, much like their poorer identity development experiences, were much more likely than white-collar ones to bounce between jobs, to accept

and leave jobs for trivial reasons, and to continue to make work choices that placed them in a precarious position in the labor market. White-collar participants, on the other hand, leveraged their strong pre-adult identity development experiences to identify the occupations that could best serve as the vehicles for their continued identity development, which made them less likely to make erratic job choices and to establish stable a footing in their respective fields.

### **Themes Regarding Future Work Goals**

The notion that the participants' work roles, choices, and behaviors were extensions of their identity development is exemplified the most clearly by the themes regarding the blue- and white-collar participants' future work goals. When asked what they saw themselves doing in the future, blue-collar participants almost exclusively mentioned not having a good sense of their future work goals, occupational paths unrelated to their work histories, or the basic acknowledgement that they did not want to stay in their current lines of work. Such comments fall under the definition of having a poor sense of an occupational identity and further suggest that the blue-collar participants' future identifications with work will continue to be defined by exploration and varied erratic choices. Rolando's words illustrate the inner turmoil that many of the blue-collar participants experienced in attempting to identify an occupational path that overlapped with their sense of self.

I don't know [what I want to do in the future]. I've been asking myself that. I told my brother I don't know how long I plan to stay in this field. The restaurant we're at is really busy, so I might leave and go to another restaurant that's not so busy because then I can learn more at a slower pace which is better, but I really don't know if this is the career I want to do for the rest of my life.

For some of the blue-collar participants, their dedication to their occupational paths, regardless of how unrealistic they were or of the few efforts they had made to actualize their work goals, was much more solidified. In other words, not all blue-collar participants were challenged in choosing an occupational path, but they were all limited in the actions they had taken to manifest them. Some blue-collar participants, for example, described their work paths as unconventional, just as they described themselves. An identity developed around the notion of being out of sync with the rest of society given their weak identity development experiences in the home and school, is what led their perceptions of work roles. Pablo, for example, discussed resisting the typical work roles and protecting his perception of himself as an artist, and it was that process that drove his current and future work choices.

[Y]ou have to work in order to survive, especially in [the Bay Area]. I can make years and years of progress just being a full-time artist, focusing not keeping my head down. The second I start working at a Wendy's and I just become exhausted with my day-to-day life with that then I lose it. Not like I don't go crazy but I lose the connection to myself that I had developed.

White-collar participants, who up until the point of their interviews had followed a continuous and more narrow and defined identity development pathway that extended into their lines of work, exclusively mentioned plans to grow within their industries when asked about their future work goals. Their plans to continue to grow in their current lines of work were as focused and narrow as the identity development paths they had been on since early childhood. Gabriel was not only able to identify his future work goals, he was also able to articulate the



various steps he planned to take to achieve them and the reasoning behind it, which was something none of the blue-collar participants demonstrated in their responses that they could do.

Yeah, so everyone who volunteers and does research eventually has goals of applying to graduate school and it's almost a known that this isn't a lifelong career position, particularly research assistants or study coordinators, or maybe even lab managers for that reason. It's always like you're doing this to get more exposure, experience and references to apply to graduate school... I'll be doing this [work] for two years in August. I'm currently studying for the GREs. I will apply [to PhD programs] in December, get a decision back in March and hopefully get accepted somewhere for what I want to do and then by the time I leave I will have been there three years which I feel like is enough time and even the lab director, they'll be the person who writes me the letter. They know the next steps and they encourage that anyway.

### **Themes Regarding Meaning of Work**

To draw on the previous data and to gain a deeper understanding of the role that work roles play in the participants' overall identities, they were also asked what work meant. Again, blue-collar participants were much more likely than white-collar ones to mention tangible or superficial meanings. Blue-collar participants largely focused their comments on money and on doing something that they loved so that their jobs did not feel like work. Having had a less conventional identity development path and mostly identifying with work for the pay, however, did not preclude them from wanting to find continuity in their identities through their work. Blue-collar participants, like white-collar ones, also yearned for the ability to connect their past, present, and future through their jobs, especially as they transitioned from adolescence to adulthood. As Manuel explained, however, their lack of preparing themselves with the right skills severely limited their ability to find such opportunities, and frustrations over that reality contributed to their openness to keep exploring jobs in the hopes of getting lucky.

There's not a lot of jobs available to anyone. Usually just like cashiers, cooks, cooking, jobs that don't last very long. All the jobs that last long are taken. If you're thinking about doing this for a long time, it's already taken. You've got to wait until they retire so they can hire someone new.

White-collar participants' different responses to all of the work questions were captured in their comments regarding what work meant to them. Their answers suggest that they had indeed by the time of their interviews developed a stronger and clearer occupational identity relative to the blue-collar participants. Although many of them also mentioned paying the bills in what work meant to them, their statements largely focused on being a contributing member of society. White-collar participants exclusively mentioned that work meant feeling connected to others, suggesting that their identity development had begun to reach the later stages, which are defined by giving back to society (Erikson, 1950, 1968). In speaking about giving back to others, Diego alluded to his connection to his family, which helped him from an early age to define and to maintain course on his identity development path.

I want to focus on low-income housing specifically for the Latino population and specifically undocumented immigrants. I think that, again, because of my family and I've seen the difficulties of them in terms of housing. Because everybody wants a place for themselves, somewhere where they can call home, like a home base. I think that

especially in California and in America in general, it's getting more and more difficult for people to afford a house or a home.

### **Summary of Chapter Themes**

The narratives demonstrate an absence of shared experiences regarding the blue- and white-collar participants' work roles, choices, and behaviors. White-collar participants' earliest work experiences were largely shaped by both their fathers and mothers when they accompanied them to their respective jobs, and their early work plans were types that required education and long-term progress. Their occupational histories tended to be focused and linear, they generally were more able to connect the jobs they had toward the achievement of a greater work goal, and they were more likely to be employed full-time at the time of their interviews. They tended undergo a more expansive search for employment that included the Internet and the connections they made during college, and they were more likely to be attracted to jobs that augmented their experience, that provided upward mobility, and that moved them closer toward long-term work gains. They generally learned more from their employment experiences, and they tended to enjoy jobs that allowed them to act on their skills and capacities, and that allowed room for further growth. Related to this, they tended to dislike jobs that provided obstacles to growth and advancement. They were more likely to have stayed in their jobs for a long period of time, and when they left them, they tended to do so in efforts to find something related yet newly challenging. Their future work goals tended to focus on growing within their industries and on finding work that would allow them to contribute in some way to society.

Blue-collar participants, on the other hand, were more likely to have had no chores growing up, to be driven to do chores for a monetary or material reward, and to express a lack of commitment to their early work plans. Their occupational histories tended to be aimless, to have no direction, to be fragmented and not linear, and to be more erratic and varied. Most were not employed full time at the time of their interviews, and they were more likely to have had periods of unemployment or underemployment. They tended to attain employment through their friends and acquaintances, and to accept jobs because they knew someone who worked there. They tended to be attracted to jobs based on the pay, on having few responsibilities, and on the overlap between them and their extracurricular interests. What they learned from their jobs was more likely to be limited to basic skills and occupational exploration. They generally enjoyed jobs that allowed them to do as they pleased, that did not constrain them, and that did not feel like work. They typically disliked jobs for which they were most qualified, such as doing manual labor or providing customer service. Their typical duration in a job was short, and their reasons for leaving jobs tended to be either frivolous or because of employer-driven factors. They were more likely to express an unwillingness to conform to conventional office-type jobs, to state that they worked simply because they needed to make money, and to have doubts regarding their future work goals. Despite such different themes, they did share in white-collar participants' pursuit for personal growth and for the connection of their past, present, and future, albeit most were severely restricted in attaining the jobs that would allow them to do so.

## Chapter 7: Qualitative Study Findings: Narrative-By-Narrative Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the in-depth analysis that was conducted of each of the 20 narratives. Whereas the thematic analyses incorporated the voices of the 20 participants into two identity development and work outcomes trajectories (that of blue-collar and that of white-collar Latino young males) based on the overall patterns and trends, the findings presented here sought to uncover the individual nuances of the narratives that were lost in the thematic analysis. The purpose of this added element of analysis is to gain richer answers to both of the research questions: *How are Latino males in California developing their occupational identities from infancy to adolescence, and how are these processes different based on the participants' blue- or white-collar occupation status? And, how can the work roles, choices, and behaviors of young Latino males in California be understood given their identity development processes from infancy to pre-adulthood, and how do these differ by employment type?*

As mentioned in the methods chapter, the analytic process for these findings entailed a thorough and detailed review of each of the 20 narratives. The data, which had already been coded by identity development stage for the thematic analysis approach, was assessed by developmental component (e.g., developmental experiences vis-à-vis parents) and compared to Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory. This comparison determined whether the data for a given participant's developmental experiences conformed to Erikson's ideal positive developmental experiences for each of the five pre-adult identity development stages. For example, participants who spoke positively about their parents and who described them as exhibiting the parenting behaviors Erikson's theory suggests are conducive to healthy identity development were marked as having had largely strong developmental experiences in the second stage of development. In narratives that presented data that supported both the presence and the absence of positive identity development, counts were utilized to deduce whether the overall identity development experiences in that stage were strong or weak.

After all of the data were assessed for each of the 20 participants' five pre-adult identity development stages, the participants were then grouped into four different types based on their overall identity development experiences (largely strong versus largely weak) and on their work outcomes (white-collar or blue-collar). This resulted in a two-by-two table (Table 7.1). A participant who exemplified the identity development experiences and work outcomes of each group was then selected. It is these four narratives that are presented in this chapter. For the two groups that included several narratives, more than one narrative was analyzed and presented to further draw out some of the nuances that existed amongst the four types of narratives. Grounded in the presentation of these findings is the idea that people's life stories are so complex, their outcomes cannot be reduced to simple answers. These findings balance the reduction to simplicity through the presentation of the four narrative types with the acknowledgement of the nuances that existed *within* the four types of narratives.

Table 7.1  
*The Four Types of Identity Development Experiences and Work Outcomes Narratives*

	White-Collar Work Outcomes	Blue-Collar Work Outcomes
Largely Strong Identity Development Experiences	2, 6, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19	1, 8
Largely Weak Identity Formation Experiences	20	3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13

### Largely Strong Identity Development/White-Collar Worker

“Gabriel” (Participant 2, age 25) was one of eight study participants that embodied overall strong identity development experiences and the outcome of white-collar employment, and he was one of only five study participants whose identity development was likely continuous from birth to entering the labor force (Table 7.2). His identity development trajectory is the ideal example of healthy development across his entire pre-adult lifespan, and his stable adult work roles, choices, and behaviors reflect such a continuous identity development trajectory. His ego identity was conducive to embracing learning and enjoying school; he had parents that gave him flexibility, yet firm boundaries from an early age; his family had strong values that encouraged all members to contribute to the family unit; his school provided the college support and know-how to get him to college; and he had a strong sense at the point of graduating high school of how he would project himself forward as a young adult via an occupational path.

Table 7.2

*Participants with Largely Strong Identity Development Experiences and White-Collar Work Outcomes*

		Age	Maternal Figure	Parents	Family	Peers, Environs & School	Activities & Early Work	Occupational Identity Survey	Employed Full Time?
Participant	2	25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	Yes
	6	28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	Yes
	16	27	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	Yes
	17	23	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Foreclosed/Achieved	Yes
	18	22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	Yes
	19	24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	Yes
	14	28	✓		✓	✓	✓	Diffused/Moratorium	Yes
	15	29	✓		✓	✓	✓	Achieved/Diffused	Yes

When asked to discuss the personality traits he believed had been a part of him since the day he was born, Gabriel mentioned his curiosity and his innate desire “to obtain as much information and knowledge” as possible. He remembered since he was a child carrying around a little notebook or a book wherever he went. Without being prompted to discuss how his ego identity may have affected his life trajectory, he added that it “really influenced” his decision to “go into school with the emphasis to learn as much” as he could. This was especially important to him because, as he said, he had Mexican-born parents who did not receive an education past the middle school level, which limited their ability to help him get into college. Gabriel also described his ego identity as “determined,” which complemented his built-in need for learning.

I really want to be a researcher. That entails going to college, getting into a graduate program, and I feel like a lot of that requires a lot of determination, trying to push

yourself to do other tasks to get into that, like getting background experience, the background knowledge, and the kind of set-up to the connections.

Gabriel was born and raised in California's central valley. For all of his life, his father was a heavy machinery operator clearing out the fields after harvest, and his mother was a house cleaner. When asked to discuss each, he spoke about them in tandem, suggesting that they have had a balanced and harmonious relationship with each other and also as parents. He described them as "humble" and "very kind," and he said the most important thing to them was their family. As parents, they had been "very open and caring," and Gabriel and his brother had a lot of flexibility to pursue their interests "as long as it was in good faith," and as long as they were not involved in "trouble-making." Their English-speaking limitations forced Gabriel to get "propelled from an early start into his maturity about how to do dealings with different things," from making medical decisions, to paying bills, to buying the family car. Gabriel's comments indicate that his earliest identity development experiences were in lockstep with his parents, who both encouraged and actively modeled for Gabriel the type of person they wanted him to become. They also provided the space and the opportunities for Gabriel to actively imitate their behavior, thus allowing him to become an active and contributing family member from a young age. Furthermore, they encouraged him to explore his interests whilst also providing boundaries to prevent him from identifying with bad influences.

Gabriel's discussion of his family unit suggests that his parents provided the same supportive identity development environment not just for him, but for his brother, and that family functioning was focused on hard work and helping the family unit move forward. He grew up with a younger brother with whom he maintained a healthy relationship and who also attended and graduated from college. He had a grandmother who would take care of them after school when his parents were still at work to protect him from identifying with bad influences out on the streets. And he also had an uncle who encouraged his schooling and who acted as a bridge between Gabriel's closed home environment and the outside world, which allowed him to identify with a close family member who "had adapted well to American culture."

I had one person who I could really relate to in my family. He was my uncle, but he passed when I was in seventh grade. He'd be the person who had all these encyclopedias in his house and he would be interested in what I'm learning in school and how my education's coming along, but in his passing, like afterwards, it was really just hard work modeled through my parents, through all of my other family, doing what you have to do in order to provide for your family and give your kids a better future than they've had.

Gabriel described the neighborhood in which he grew up as ethnically diverse with plenty of opportunities for families to attain middle class status. When asked how his family stacked up to his neighbors, he said he felt that his family was "on par" with them, suggesting that he did not internalize significant negative messages into his identity vis-à-vis his neighborhood. "All the friends" he had growing up were from his neighborhood, many of whom he knew "since kindergarten." Because he had known his high school friends since he was a child, his friends accepted that he was the "nerd type kid," and the friends who were less inclined to do well in school did not attempt to negatively influence him or to try turn him into someone they knew he was not. Around this time, however, the recession had socioeconomically worsened his neighborhood, and he saw many friends' families lose their homes. Instead of letting such

events defeat him, the strong sense of identity he had developed at home prior to that point pushed him to do more with his life and to go “off to college.”

Gabriel’s ego personality conducive to learning, his strongly shared identification with his parents, who exemplified for him the virtues of hard work and contributing to his tight family unit, and his long-lasting friendships with individuals who either supported or accepted who he was, all allowed him to enter high school prepared to continue on his identity development path toward life success. He stated that his high school “was not necessarily a college preparatory environment” and that his peers would call him a “schoolboy” just because he “would do well in his classes.” Nonetheless, he was able to find the conduits that supported his path to college in an otherwise sea of adversity. Gabriel planned on applying to a local state college because he “had no idea about getting into college at all,” so his “whole notion was to apply” to the one school he knew. It was not until a teacher who recognized his drive and dedication to school encouraged him to apply to four-year universities of “higher caliber” that he considered applying to such schools. Gabriel also whilst in high school identified himself with activities that would support his pathway to college. He partook in a college preparatory program, which provided him with the resources his parents lacked. In identifying early with learning and hard work, Gabriel made himself available to being identified as college-bound, which enabled the appropriate actors at his high school to keep him on a path toward college and white-collar work.

Gabriel’s work trajectory reflected his continuous identity development narrative. Thanks in large part to his parents, he did not believe “that there is such a thing as natural ability,” and he instead embraced the notion that “hard work is all that is needed.” In adhering to such conventions, he effectively accepted that the world would reward him for his hard work. This mutuality of recognition with the outside world can be seen in how he has gone about making job choices. His jobs can be divided into three types: (a) early ones provided by a family member that exposed him to the labor market; (b) jobs he took out of need to pay his rent and bills; and (c) jobs that served as stepping stones toward his long-term career goal of becoming a researcher. His development of an identity that connected his past, present, and future made him seek out and accept work opportunities that could facilitate his entry into the research field, including an unpaid research opportunity that eventually did lead to his first research job.

When I say it was a dream come true, it's something I've wanted to do my entire life, and being in an environment where I could do that really made it come together.

Gabriel’s narrative demonstrates that he had a strong sense of his identity throughout his pre-adult span, one that was tightly connected to his parents at an early age and that slowly broadened as he projected himself into the outside world and as he became the sole driver of his identity. At the point of graduating high school, Gabriel stated that he was “very confident” in his ability to make work and job choices, suggesting that he had a strong sense of self at a time in which many adolescents are still exploring. When asked about his future work plans, he again made remarks reflective of continuous growth: “I will apply to PhD programs in December, get a decision back in March, and by then I will have three years as a research assistant, which I think is enough time.” Such planning indicates that occupations for Gabriel are not just roles; rather, they are vehicles that allow his identity to continue to grow into the future. His Occupational Identity Survey score also supports his narrative, as it overwhelmingly placed his occupational identity in achievement status. Overall, Gabriel personified the type of identity development trajectory most conducive to the attainment of white-collar employment.

Such an identity development trajectory, however, was not always perfect. As Table 7.2 demonstrates, Participant 17 also experienced continuous identity development across his pre-adult lifespan, according to his narrative. Nonetheless, his narrative and his Occupational Identity Survey score also suggest that his occupational identity status at the time of the interview was in foreclosed status, meaning that his identity development experiences may have been so constrained that he had not undertaken enough independent exploration of his identity, and that his commitments were instead largely based on identifications with his parents and other authority figures.

Furthermore, as Table 7.2 also demonstrates, the absence of healthy identity development experiences in even one of the five development areas was sufficient to lead to the divergence in occupational identity status, even if the participant had attained full-time, white-collar employment. Participant 14 is a good example of the precariousness of the occupational identity development trajectory for the study participants. He shared many of Gabriel's identity development experiences, and he was even advantaged in some respects. He described his parents as caring and supportive. He stated that they gave him sufficient room to explore, so long as he did well and continued to prioritize school. His mother's higher educational attainment gave him a developmental advantage over Gabriel, as his mother had an MBA and was employed in white-collar work. Like Gabriel, his extended family played a role in raising him. His grandparents lived with his family for a few years, and his grandmother was a teacher, so she was able to help him with his schooling. He had an older sister who set the example for him in terms of educational success and college attainment, and he also described her as "supportive." Furthermore, he never felt inferior or inadequate vis-à-vis his neighborhood, he considered himself near the top of the smartest students in his high school, and he was also involved in college preparatory programs that provided him with additional resources.

Unlike Gabriel, however, his parents divorced when he was a freshman in high school. The fact that the divorce came at a time when he was already beginning to seek to identify more with the outer world likely led him to act out in efforts to urgently seek to transfer the identifications he had with his parents to outside actors. This was probably especially so because his father was not involved in his life after the divorce, leaving him with the need to transfer the identifications he shared with him to anyone new willing to share them, but in a manner that was haphazard and no longer connected to his earlier development or to where he previously thought he was going.

Once my parents split up, my junior year and my senior year I was just like, "This is awful shit. I'm just going to hang out with the two best friends that I made from my soccer team, and if we don't hang out, then whatever. I'm just cutting class or whatever." I was being a class clown type. I was just trying to be popular and nothing worked out. I became very uninvolved with school. I would sometimes get home at 3:00 in the morning.

In short, his parents' divorce made the identifications he had been developing murkier, making it difficult to be able to connect his past, present, and future. He went from following a continuous path anchored in his parents to choosing between detaching himself altogether from his identity development path or for the first time exploring for himself his way forward.

I'm pretty sure it [the divorce] stayed with me. I got into a good college. I mean, I got into Cal, and then I was like, "No. This sucks. I'm going to Santa Cruz." I kind of was just done with stuff like... I went to grad school kind of like, "None of this matters kind

of thing." It's just like, kind of, do what you want instead of trying to succeed because, ultimately, doing what you want is a success.

As a result of this apparent identity confusion, the participant was largely unable to answer the various identity-related questions that were asked, including how he defined himself, how his parents influenced his identity, and what he wanted to do in the future. Instead, he responded with, "I don't know." His confused identity has been a combination of childhood developmental experiences that placed him on a path to success and adolescent developmental experiences defined by the need for detachment. This can be evidenced not only in his Occupational Identity Survey score, but also in his relationship with work. Although he managed to attain white-collar work, he was largely uncommitted to his current finance job, which he had been in for three years. He has chosen to stay simply because he doesn't want to commit to actively exploring other job options he has considered, including being a teacher, and altogether leaving the labor market to become "homeless for a while" and do nothing but "walk around reading all day."

**Largely Strong Identity Formation/Blue-Collar Worker**

"Francisco" (Participant 8, age 27) was one of two participants who embodied largely strong identity formation experiences and a blue-collar job trajectory outcome (Table 7.3). Francisco's narrative suggests that his work outcomes can be largely attributed to his unlearned ability to narrow down his identity exploration and commit to a viable career path. Although he grew up in a family in which his older siblings had followed a path to college and to white-collar work, Francisco's work trajectory has been defined by erratic choices and by jobs that have little to nothing in common except for the fact that they were offered to him by someone he knew. Francisco's identity development experiences, although largely positive, left him with an inability to commit both to a sense of who he is and to an occupation that reflects his identity, which has left him, at the age of 27, still exploring both of those notions, much like he did when he was an adolescent.

Francisco described the parts of his personality he believed had been a part of him since the day he was born as "really fun," "always like to have a laugh," "not that serious," "pretty social," and "stubborn;" all personality traits that might make it difficult for an individual to attain focus and discipline in life. He believed that his personality had affected some of his life choices, including work-related ones: "The recent work that I had was working as a soccer coach for kids. With that job, it kind of really lets me have fun with them and kind of act like a kid, too." He has sought out fun experiences in other aspects of his life, including throughout school. He explained that in high school he was more focused on having fun with his friends and that what he enjoyed the most was testing limits and getting into trouble.

Table 7.3  
*Participants with Largely Strong Identity Development Experiences and Blue-Collar Work Outcomes*

Participant	Age	Maternal Figure	Parents	Family	Peers, Environs & School	Activities & Early Work	Occupational Identity Survey	Employed Full Time?
1	24		✓	✓	✓		Moratorium	No



8	27	✓	✓	✓	Moratorium	No
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Francisco was born and raised in a community that straddles the Los Angeles and Ventura County line. His Mexican-born parents worked in housekeeping and machinery all of his pre-adult life. When asked to describe his mother and father as parents, he stated that they supported him, “took good care” of him, and even made sure to enroll him in “fun programs like soccer and karate.” Nonetheless, he also mentioned that they were “definitely not strict” with him, and that out of all his friends, he was “definitely the most not disciplined one.” He further added, “If I did something, I didn’t have to come home and answer to my parents. I could just be out whenever I wanted to.” Such comments suggest that Francisco since he was a child had a lot of room for identity exploration without any parental guidance or control. In having as much leeway as he stated that he had in how to go about his life, Francisco grew up with weak identity development boundaries, and he was likely allowed to enter the outer world with weak identifications with his parents and family. His father did attempt to encourage him to go to college whilst he was still in high school, but by that point, as Francisco said, he had already applied himself so poorly in his classwork to be able to gain entry into a four-year university.

His larger family unit, however, provided an environment in which he could have gained more identity development boundaries and established stronger identifications with his family unit. His two older sisters, whom he described as having had a “big influence” on him, played such an important role in his life that he also credited them with having raised him: “Both of them had a big influence. Just as much as my parents, I’d say. I picked up everything from them.” What Francisco did not fully pick up from them was an identity development pathway that led to college and to white-collar work. His sisters certainly attempted to get him to identify with and to commit to such a life path by helping him throughout his schooling with his homework and even filling out his community college application. Nonetheless, Francisco’s overall unrestrained identity development experiences from an early age thanks to his parents likely prevented him from fully embracing the pathway onto which his sisters attempted to place him. As he said regarding why he didn’t follow in his sister’s pathway to college, “That’s cool that somebody could do it, but we (he and his friends) wanted to explore other options, I guess. Even though I could have if I hadn’t fucked around so much in school.”

Although Francisco described the neighborhood in which he grew up as “comfortable” and “a pretty nice suburb,” and although he partook in healthy activities such as soccer and karate, his virtually complete disconnect from school largely eclipsed the positive identity development he may have gained vis-à-vis those experiences. As he stated, “I was a fucking little asshole. I was definitely very careless, sometimes too arrogant.” When asked to talk about his time in high school, Francisco solely focused on having fun and hanging out with his friends, suggesting that in the absence of a strong identity developed around his parents and family, he identified much more strongly with his peers. In identifying with peers that reflected his fragmented identity development at a time of heightened identity exploration independence, he prioritized his social needs over his academic ones. He mentioned that he simply didn’t care about school, and that it just wasn’t for him: “Just going there, it felt like a job. I wanted to be out getting money.” He was expelled from “regular high school” when he was a junior and sent to another one, and that experience solidified for him the inability to prioritize school over work.

Francisco’s varied jobs and erratic work choices since leaving high school were reflective of an overall fragmented identity formation trajectory. In spite of the strong potential for him to have had strong identity development experiences, the virtually boundless leeway he had in

directing his own development since he was a child thanks to his parents likely made it impossible for him to identify with a more conventional pathway. As he said about high school: “I was still finding my identity in that time. I had a good idea of who I was just because of the culture that I belonged to. I was really into counterculture.” Francisco’s job trajectory reflected that counterculture with which he identified in high school, but it also illustrated the reality of having to take whatever jobs were available to someone with few to no skills. He has worked in retail, in automotive repair, for a music production company, as a DJ, and at the time of the interview he was working two part-time jobs, one as an after school instructor and one as a soccer coach. When asked how his job trajectory was connected to what he wanted to do at the point of finishing high school, he said about himself and his friends: “I don’t think we were thinking that far ahead at those times. We were just busy partying, drinking, smoking pot, skateboarding, and whatever else we did.”

At 27 years of age, Francisco at the time of his interview was still unsure about his identity and via what occupational path he perceived projecting himself forward in life. As he said, “I’m a 10-year undergrad at a city college. I’ve been going really, really slow.” When asked how his sense of self has changed between high school and at the time of his interview, his response was, “Who knows if I’ve changed.” Francisco was even unable to describe one ideal job when prompted. He couldn’t make up his mind between being a DJ, a soccer coach, and a travel guide. When asked if he thought if he needed at some point to choose and focus on one, his response was, “I don’t really have to choose because I could do all of them.” His inability to narrow down a job, even in theoretical terms, was illustrative of his identity development narrative and of his occupational identity in moratorium status. Simply put, he has “too many interests,” and his largely fragmented identity formation has challenged him to hone in on one: “I just always have that problem with life. I know what I should be doing, but I don’t do it. I just get too distracted.” At his age, Francisco has started to doubt even more what the future holds for him, and he expressed concern that his window for exploring may soon be closing: “I feel like I’m getting old. I see that now.” Regardless of such fears, he is beholden to the part of his identity—defined by fun and games—that have been with him the most. As he said, “In my work, I have to be creative. I cannot just do an office job. I could, but I wouldn’t like it. I’d probably get fired quick.”

#### **Largely Weak Identity Formation/White-Collar Worker**

“Benjamin” (Participant 20, age 27) was the only example of largely weak identity formation experiences and the attainment of white-collar employment out of all of the study participants (Table 7.4). His identity development experiences were largely marked by a lack of support in direction, a desire to escape from his home and to identify with positive external actors, and continued feelings of self-doubt regarding his adult identity. Similarly, his work roles, choices, and behaviors were largely defined by a lack of direction and commitment, as well as continued exploration as of the date of his interview. As his narrative demonstrates, his pathway to achieving white-collar work was largely haphazard, suggesting that he easily could have ended up becoming another young Latino with poor employment outcomes. Instead, his curious ego personality and his drive to identify with actors different from his parents helped him attain white-collar work.

Table 7.4

*Participants with Largely Weak Identity Formation Experiences and White-Collar Work Outcomes*

		Age	Maternal Figure	Parents	Family	Peers, Environs & School	Early Work	Occupational Identity Survey	Employed Full Time?
Participant	20	27	✓				✓	Moratorium	No

Benjamin was born in the greater Los Angeles area into a broken home of Bolivian-born mother and a Mexican-born father. He described his ego personality as curious and friendly, and he added that his curiosity has since he was a child made him very interested in finding answers to questions. It was because of his inquisitive nature that he believed he enjoyed learning, and that he enjoyed school most of the time. He described his mother and grandmother, the two people who raised him, as having been very supportive and loving throughout his life, suggesting that his earliest identity development experiences were largely positive.

Nonetheless, Benjamin’s mother was largely inadequate at ensuring that he underwent positive identity development experiences as he grew older. He described his mother as “forgetful,” “disorganized,” and “young.” She has never in his life been strict with him and has supported every decision he has made, suggesting that she played a limited role in establishing his identity development direction and boundaries. Her “adventurous lifestyle” and penchant for traveling, and Benjamin’s remarks that he often found himself reversing parent-child roles with her further suggests that she herself did not have a strong adult identity that could have anchored and positively guided Benjamin’s own identity development. His grandmother was simply “another very good cheerleader” to him who told him that everything he did was “amazing,” indicating that she did not fill in his mother’s identity development support gaps. When asked what he has learned from his mother and grandmother about who he is, his response was, “I don’t know,” further supporting the notion that his two most important parental figures did very little to influence his identity development.

Benjamin’s father has been absent for most of his life. His father lived with Benjamin and his mother for only two years because he was “always in and out of jail” or in “his own apartment.” He has battled alcoholism and drug addiction since Benjamin was a child, and Benjamin summarized his description of him as a “very angry guy.” When asked how his father has influenced his life, Benjamin said that it’s because of him that he has never drunk alcohol or done drugs, and that he didn’t get a trade job or skip college because he never wanted to do something that his father did. This reaction to his father suggests that Benjamin from an early age sought to identify with actors and experiences that represented the opposite of what defined his father. When asked why he believed that he didn’t instead repeat his father’s cycle, as some individuals do, he said that he has “ended up repeating the cycle of” his mom, who is very nice and caring, and that he “may be falling into similar traps that she has” when she was his age. Such comments, and such identity development experiences vis-à-vis his mother, grandmother, and father, indicate that Benjamin’s adult identity rested on weak developmental foundations.

Benjamin’s home realities and desire to identify with actors outside of his home made him susceptible to identifying with negative external actors, as some of the other study

participants did. He described the neighborhood in which he lived until he turned 15 as a “pretty calm place,” so there were likely few opportunities for him to identify with bad peers. When he was 15, however, his family moved to a different part of southern California, and the neighborhood in which he lived had “a lot of gang people,” and drive-by shootings were common. He said that a lot of kids in his neighborhood did drugs, drank a lot, and exhibited other “destructive” behaviors. What likely prevented Benjamin from identifying with those crowds was his mother, whom he described as having actively protected him from his neighborhood influences, to the point that he said he had no relation with anyone from his neighborhood. By that age, Benjamin was also old enough to seek to protect himself. Because he was new to the neighborhood, he already felt different, and instead of engaging with his neighborhood, he enrolled himself in “long-term summer camps” that took him away from his home and from his neighborhood.

Benjamin’s mother also protected him from his new neighborhood by enrolling him in a magnet school, so he “didn’t really interact with the kids” in his neighborhood “as much as other people would.” Attending the magnet school may have protected him from the negative influences in his neighborhood, but not without a cost. Benjamin stated that he felt and looked “a lot more poor” than his classmates because his mom “was really poor,” so it was “hard for her to buy” him new clothes. This made him not care about anything, and to “not even try.” Going to school in a more middle-class neighborhood made him feel like an outsider, making his school experience “horrible” and “depressing,” although he did enjoy learning. His school experiences were compounded by his social experiences. At a time when adolescents seek to identify with groups that reflect their developing senses of selves, Benjamin stated that he did not have a lot of friends, and he described the few he did have as “mediocre” and “oddballs,” adding to his internalization of inferiority into his identity well into his adolescent years. When asked if he had a good sense of his identity upon graduating high school, his response was, “nothing.”

Benjamin graduated from high school with a C grade point average, and because his teachers pegged him as not college-bound, and because his high school also did not prepare him for the world of work, he graduated high school not knowing what he wanted to do or where he was going with his life. He accepted a job with a real estate company right out of high school that “did not work out.” At that point, an acquaintance that knew of his home situation and understood that Benjamin was keen to leave it suggested that he consider working with Habitat for Humanity. It was while working on a Habitat for Humanity project in Alabama that he was for the first time able to identify as someone who *could* attend college.

They [host family] helped me a lot, to learn about life. And they all went to college. But they weren't doing good financially. But they weren't that smart, actually. I think I was a little bit smarter than them. That made me think, “Man, if these dumb guys could go to college, I could probably get in.” That's what it made me think.

Upon returning to southern California, he reached out to an acquaintance from high school with whom he was never really close because the acquaintance “realized how dumb” he and Benjamin’s friends were. That acquaintance told him about government-provided financial assistance available to individuals who want to attend college, which is something he “never heard of” whilst in high school. He enrolled in his local community college and then transferred to a four-year state school. It was there that he chose his career as a social worker.

I didn't know what to do. That was another really stressful thing. But I didn't have a very high bar, actually. I took a sociology test by this guy named James McKeever. He's a

sociology guy. He's actually from my neighborhood. He told me that he was a parole officer. He told me it [social work] was a super easy job, but it paid really good. The whole point of that story was him talking about how messed up the juvenile system was. All I got from that lesson was that it paid pretty good. He said you could do it with a major in social work or sociology. I didn't believe him about the sociology part, so I picked social work. Social work is like a job. I wanted to get a degree where I could get a job.

Benjamin's attainment of white-collar employment, however, was not accompanied by the achievement of an adult identity, which has made his position in high-skilled employment precarious. His Occupational Identity Survey score overwhelmingly placed the status of his occupational identity in moratorium status, and his narrative supports this. Since completing his MSW, he has held two jobs as a social worker and one as a car salesman, illustrating his continued lack of commitment to his employment choices; a likely symptom of his haphazard identity formation processes that have made it difficult for him to attain a strong and committed occupational identity. His work behaviors were more similar to those of the blue-collar participants than white-collar ones, likely because his path to social work evolved haphazardly rather than as a result of more linear identity development. Benjamin at the time of the interview was about to start a part-time social work job, but he was also considering leaving the field because he had been disappointed with his work experiences as a social worker. He particularly complained about his low salary and feeling "inadequate" in the profession. When asked what he would do if he left the social work field, he said that he was "really lost" and "scared," and that he didn't know.

Overall, Benjamin's narrative exemplifies a fragmented identity formation process, and although his ego personality and his need to identify with roles diametrically opposed to his parents, particularly his father, drove him to attain white-collar employment, his work choices and behaviors continue to be as haphazard as his identity formation process. He admitted that he had "a very complicated relationship" with work, and that it had worsened with age. He was not looking forward to starting his new part-time social work job, adding that the idea made him "really bummed out." He had already told his future boss that he only planned on staying for six months, and that he might try Peace Corps, try to teach English abroad, or sell his "car and move to another country." His quest for an achieved identity and for a strong commitment to it, like his quest for the right career path, continued to elude him.

#### **Largely Weak Identity Formation/Blue-Collar Worker**

"Manuel" (Participant 4, age 23) was one of nine examples of having undergone overall weak identity development experiences and of having followed a blue-collar work trajectory, and he was also one of three blue-collar participants who was employed full-time at the time of his interview (Table 7.5). Manuel's occupational identity largely developed in a manner that strongly embraced hard work, but within constrained fields that resembled his parents' and family's blue-collar employment experiences. Such an identification with work was reinforced by poor developmental experiences vis-à-vis school, which prevented him from identifying with academic success and, ipso facto, with white-collar work. Thanks in large part to his parents and extended family, who encouraged his participation from an early age in hard work, Manuel identified early on with blue-collar employment, and his job trajectory reflected his weak identity exploration.

When asked to describe the characteristics of his personality he believed had been a part of him since the day he was born, Manuel described traits that may not have supported his ability to embrace a conventional path from school to college to work. He used words like, “funny,” “hardheaded,” and “a bit of a temper.” When asked how he believed such personality traits may have affected the decisions he has made in his life, he said, “Like when people tell me not to do things, and I’ll just do it anyway.” He later added, when talking about his parents, that he got the hardheadedness from his mother, and that he and her have often “bumped heads,” which has led her to kick him out of the house a few times throughout his life.

Table 7.5  
*Participants with Largely Weak Identity Formation Experiences and Blue-Collar Work Outcomes*

		Age	Maternal Figure	Parents	Family	Peers, Environs & School	Activities & Early Work	Occupational Identity Survey	Employed Full Time?
Participant	4	23	✓				✓	Moratorium/ Diffused	Yes
	5	29		✓	✓			Moratorium	No
	12	22	✓		✓			Achieved	No
	11	24	✓					Achieved	No
	9	22				✓		Achieved	No
	3	28						Diffused	No
	7	23						Achieved	No
	10	23						Achieved	Yes
	13	25						Achieved	Yes

Manuel was born in the East Bay to Mexican-born parents. His mother used to work as a dishwasher and a waitress and became a stay-at-home mom at 17 years old when he was born. His father has driven machinery for a construction company for most of Manuel’s life. Manuel credits her and his father for providing him with “confidence” and a sense of being “able to achieve something,” suggesting that both of his parents played positive roles in his identity development. As he said, “If I tell them I can’t do anything, they’re like, ‘No, you can do it.’ So I always got their reassurance.” Nonetheless, Manuel also spoke about his parents in different ways, suggesting that they have played dissimilar roles in his life. He described his mother as “more strict” and his dad as “more flexible,” and he has always found it easier to talk to his dad. His dad, as he said, was the “cooler parent,” whereas his mom was “always the one just yelling at everybody, yelling at me to get out of here.”

Manuel commented that the parental support he received was “supportive in work,” but not in the things he wanted to do, indicating that any efforts on his part to explore outside of his parents’ expectations was likely to result in conflict, especially with his mother. Manuel had

been interested for many years in pursuing art as a possible career trajectory, but his parents had not supported him because they did not consider it “a real job.” To his parents, a real job was “working construction or something” similar. Furthermore, Manuel’s family functioning was strongly geared toward hard work, which is why his parents were supportive of construction as a career path, but not of art. When asked how his family has influenced his work choices, he said:

A lot, because starting out, I didn't want to go to school and stuff. My grandpa does landscaping, so they put me to work with him. Like, “You don't want to go to school, you're going to go work.” I'm like, all right. Then, also, my dad had a restaurant at one point. I think I was about 16 through 19 that he had it. Like, that's how old I was. Then I worked there for a while because I didn't want to go to school either. I was already in high school and I dropped out and I just started working there. He's like, “You don't want to do anything, then you got to go work. If you don't want to go to school, then you got to work,” basically. It was one or the other.

Manuel’s family functioning was thus geared toward preparing him from an early age to identify with hard work and to undertake blue-collar work roles, even if at the expense of school and of his individual identity and occupational exploration. Likely because of such a narrow ability to explore his identity on his own, Manuel stated that he had “no clue” what he learned from his family experiences regarding what he wanted to do with his life, but that all he has wanted to be since he was a kid was “a famous artist.” Such a disconnect between his identity exploration goals and his family identity may have led to his perception of himself as “the black sheep of the family.” As he said, “I’d always go out, rarely be at home. Like, I’d rather be with my friends than with my family. My friends knew me better than my family, honestly.” When asked about his three younger siblings, Manuel spoke about them in terms that suggested that he was not very close to them, further supporting the lack of a strongly shared family identity.

In reacting against his family’s identity, Manuel sought to identify with other actors and activities outside his home. He described the neighborhood in which he grew up as diverse, somewhat “crazy” regarding gangs and violence, but largely dependent on “who you associate yourself with.” Although he was able to avoid identifying with and joining a gang because he knew how to “keep” to himself and because of his “interest in art,” he did end up associating with “misfits” and “troublemakers” beginning in middle school: “Middle school is when I started to get into some kind of trouble, got in a few fights over stupid things.” He described himself “as a bad kid” by the time he was 17, but he asserted that he was “a bad kid with good intentions.” He was just doing things with his friends for the fun of it, including partaking in alcohol consumption and experimenting with drugs. And although he was extremely social, he commented that out of all his friends, he was “the one to get everyone else motivated to do things,” such as finding work. His identification with non-home actors, in short, also did not support his desire to explore art as a career, and they provided little to his identity development, as they never motivated him to do anything positive or helped him “get a job.”

Manuel’s strong family identity focused on hard, blue-collar work, and his peers’ identification with nothing but fun activities, left him without a support system for his most passionate career ambitions. School, for its part, did not fill this gap, nor did it provide strong positive identity development experiences or other occupational options for Manuel to explore. His family’s prioritization of work over education and his identification with the school troublemakers instead led him to not take school seriously: “I was always in and out, just running around the school, always getting into trouble.” He very quickly became known as a perpetual

troublemaker, and he had more direct interactions with the discipline administrators than with his teachers. School, as he said, was not something he needed. Instead, he wished he had had more “hands-on learning,” and he didn’t learn anything about work or jobs from his high school. As a result of such experiences, Manuel left high school without graduating.

Manuel’s job trajectory was reflective of an identity torn between little to no exploration thanks to his family’s strong and narrow push toward blue-collar work, and a long-held desire to want to explore his plan of turning his passion for art into a career. His first two work experiences were both with family members, the first as a gardener with his grandfather, and the second as a host and food preparer in his father’s restaurant. He left both jobs because he “got bored.” Since then, he has held two jobs, one working in retail that he got unintentionally when he attempted to help a friend find work, and his most recent one as a flooring installer, which he attained through his cousin. When asked what the ideal job for him would be, he mentioned getting paid to paint murals, yet when asked how long he saw himself in his current job, he said, “I could see myself doing this for a while.” Art has always been a secondary occupational option, at first because his family did not encourage him to explore it, and as an adult because, as he said, “it’s not a sure thing.” As he has gotten older, his need to provide for himself has protracted his position in blue-collar work and made his dreams of becoming an artist less attainable. When asked what types of jobs he would not consider taking in the future, he mentioned anything outside of “restaurant jobs, retail, and construction” because that’s all he has done, so “it would be weird” to do anything else.

Manuel’s narrative and his Occupational Identity Survey score support the notion that his identity is both tied down to his family’s strong identifications with hard, blue-collar work and connected to attempting to make choices that would support a career in art. He continues to take the jobs that “were right there for” him, but he still wants his art to “pick up.” His work roles, choices, and behaviors, were thus clear extensions of an identity that developed without much individual exploration on the one hand, and with a commitment to *wanting* to explore on the other. He expressed confidence in his ability to make work choices in large part because he believed he was still young enough to consider various work options. Joining his father’s construction company, as he said, was a plan B that will “always be there, no matter what.” He was just “focusing on what” he “wants to do with his life right now,” and whether or not he will be able to propel his identity forward as an artist, it was “too early to know.”

Whereas Manuel was able to maintain an identification with and connection to the labor market thanks to his family and early work experiences, Participant 3 (“Pedro”) serves as an example of a participant who shared in Manuel’s poor identity development experiences, but who was even more disadvantaged in his identity development trajectory. As a result, Pedro, like Manuel, lacked commitments to his identity and to his employment, but he was not involved in any identity or occupational exploration at the time of his interview, placing his identity development in an even less developed status.

Pedro was born and raised in East Los Angeles to US-born Mexican parents. When asked about the parts of his personality he believed were genetic, he said: “I’d have to say just going against any type of authority, just being a rebellious soul, always trying to push back and fight.” His parents divorced when he was three or four, “so young, very young.” He described them as complete opposites. His father was a “run of the mill labor man who” did “what he’s told,” and his mother was “a wild soul” who did “whatever the fuck” she wanted and who never worked. The homes each parent provided him were equally different. In his father’s household he had no independence, whereas at his mother’s he could do “anything” he wanted. When



asked how his parents had influenced his life choices, he said: “No, no. No, not since I moved out when I was 16, so they really haven’t had much to do with where I’ve come since I took off.” His inability to identify with his parents and his parents’ failure to foment a cohesive family unit led him to have an unhealthy relationship with his only sibling: “I had a sister, but she was older and wasn’t really there.” When asked about other family members, he said he had none, which further prohibited him from being able to identify with someone outside of himself.

Pedro entered the outer world at a very young age and with no shared strong identifications with anyone. He expressed a strong dislike for his neighborhood, which he described as a place in which everyone was “the same” and in their own “clique or gang.” “I hate it,” he added. “I can’t stand it.” His school experiences were not any better. He identified as an “outcast” beginning in elementary school. His parents were unable to buy him the mandatory school uniform, so he became one of “maybe four other kids in the whole school” who did not wear one. By that point, as he said, he was already an outcast, so not having a school uniform made him “*really* that guy.” He expressed not having had any close friends during this time, only that he used to hang out with the “weirdoes” and other “outcasts,” likely because of his self-identifying as a member of such a group. His inability to identify positively with someone in school contributed to his dropping out of school early, which set him up for a lifetime of blue-collar work. As he said about school: “I didn’t go. I would leave every day.”

His work roles, choices, and behaviors were reflective of his greatly disadvantaged identity formation experiences. He has held only a handful of jobs, and he often referred to work as “hustling,” which was something he had been doing since very young: “I must have been under 10. I remember living by a golf course. I cut a hole in the fence, climbed in to find golf balls and sell them to the golfers.” Since leaving his house at 16, he has worked various random jobs, including as a package handler, a produce handler, and a food preparer. He has not held a job for more than six months, and at the time of his interview, he made money through temporary “gigs.” When asked what work meant to him, his response was, “slavery.” When asked what he planned to do in the future, he said, “just keep doing what I’m doing.” When asked if he would ever consider a more conventional job such as working in tech, he gave a resounding “No” and added, “I’m not one to sit in a cubicle day after day. It’s not who I am.”

### **Summary of Narrative-by-Narrative Analysis**

The analysis of the individual narratives reinforces the complexity of the identity development process. Although a focus on the nuances could lead to the treatment of each of the 20 narratives as unique, grouping them into four groups based on general experiences facilitated the understanding of the participants’ identity development trajectories. The narrative-by-narrative analysis also demonstrated that despite the fact that largely strong identity development mostly always extended into white-collar employment and healthy work roles, choices, and behaviors, strong identity development experiences alone did not guarantee such employment outcomes. Similarly, weak identity development experiences did not guarantee blue-collar employment, although, in the one case of largely weak identity development experiences and white-collar work outcomes, they did appear to ensure poor work roles, choices, and behaviors.

What appeared to matter the most for the participants regardless of their identity development and work trajectories was the level of congruence between themselves and their home environment and outer world. Out of the participants that overall experienced strong identity development, most attained white-collar employment and exhibited positive work behaviors, but not all: two of them rebelled against this pathway, prolonged their identity exploration, and attained blue-collar employment. Similarly, out of the participants that overall

experienced weak identity development, most attained blue-collar employment and exhibited poor work behaviors, but not all: one of them rebelled against this pathway and attained white-collar employment, although he did continue to explore his identity. Such findings demonstrate that although identity and work roles, choices, and behaviors were largely isomorphic, some participants still made work choices that did not entirely correlate with their identity status. In other words, identity is fluid, and because of this, work choices can be varied, and the reasons behind them complex.

## Chapter 8: Qualitative Study Findings: Summary and Discussion

### Summary of Findings

Piecing together the main findings of the thematic analysis and of the narrative-by-narrative analysis, the overarching finding of the qualitative study is that strong identity development experiences and work roles, choices, and behaviors are largely isomorphic, and that the determination of the participants' blue- or white-collar occupation outcome was also dependent on the congruence between the participants' external orientation toward one occupation type or the other and their internal ability and commitment to producing (or not) that work outcome. This combination of findings helps explain the occupational identity development trajectories of the 20 participants.

Eight participants had largely strong identity development experiences, and their acceptance of their external orientation vis-à-vis their parents, friends, and teachers toward college and skilled work led them to internalize an identity committed to academic achievement and to attaining white-collar work. Two participants also had largely strong identity development experiences, but their acceptance of an external orientation toward blue-collar work and their subsequent internationalization of an identity that did not include academic achievement placed them in the labor market without an ability or commitment to attaining high-skilled work. Similarly, but in reverse, nine participants had largely weak identity development experiences, and their acceptance of their external orientation or lack thereof toward unskilled work and their inability to commit to high-skilled training solidified their entry into low-skill, blue-collar work. The one participant who also had largely weak identity development experiences but managed to attain white-collar work did so because of the congruence between his acceptance of a path to academic success and white-collar employment, and his ability to find the means and resources to be able to commit to such a future identity different from his father's.

What distinguished the participants in spite of considerable overlap in family, neighborhood, and school background—who attained white-collar employment from those who attained blue-collar employment, to answer the research questions, was not just largely strong identity development experiences, but also an environment and a set of close, external actors that oriented their identities toward academic success, as well as an internal acceptance and commitment to that future adult and occupational identity. The removal of one of the components that produced these three experiences (largely strong identity development experiences, an external orientation toward skilled work, and an internal commitment to that future identity) weakened the pathway toward white-collar work, as evidenced by the participants who, in spite of having had positive experiences in some of these realms, did not attain white-collar employment and were struggling to make stable work choices. The developmental pathway for the participants toward skilled or white-collar work was thus precarious, as the data indicate that it necessitated an ideal combination of both externally- and internally-driven experiences.

The narratives also demonstrate that the identity development paths that eventually led to white- and blue-collar work began to diverge early in the home. Those who had parents and families that played an active role in their identity development were slowly released into the outer world and with an already highly developed sense of self oriented toward white-collar work, whereas those who did not entered the outer world ill-equipped in terms of their sense of self, had not absorbed a family identity, and had little to no orientation toward any type of work, making them more vulnerable to identifying with unconventional external influencers and to limiting themselves to easy-to-attain low-skilled work. Such a divergence in identity

development peaked in high school, at a time and in an environment in which adolescents become much more aware of their competence and abilities and in which they seek to explore more with their identities. As the paths peaked in divergence at this point, it ultimately drove the participants to work roles, choices, and behaviors that reinforced their orientation toward either white- or blue-collar work. And although all participants have since entering the labor market sought personal growth vis-à-vis employment, mostly white-collar ones, who since birth had been following a continuous development course, were successful in attaining it.

### **Modeling the Identity Development to Labor Market Trajectory**

The differences in the typical identity development path and work outcomes for the white- and blue-collar participants require that their trajectories be summarized separately. The identity development path for the *typical* white-collar participant began with an ego identity that programmed him to be inquisitive about the world and to enjoy learning, thus making him genetically more inclined to embrace school and personal achievement. He was raised by two parents that largely played equal and similar roles in his life and that directed him toward hard work, education, and life success. Such an orientation was accompanied by controlled boundaries for identity exploration that were in harmony with his personality and needs. His parents allowed him to take on parental responsibilities early in his life, which gave him a sense of ownership and commitment to his family identity. They also took overt steps to support his academic success, including the clear prioritization of school before work. By the time he was in high school, his strong sense of family identity made his personal academic success not only his, but an extension of his parents and family. Furthermore, his family unit was cohesive, and he and his siblings supported one another in their personal and family endeavors.

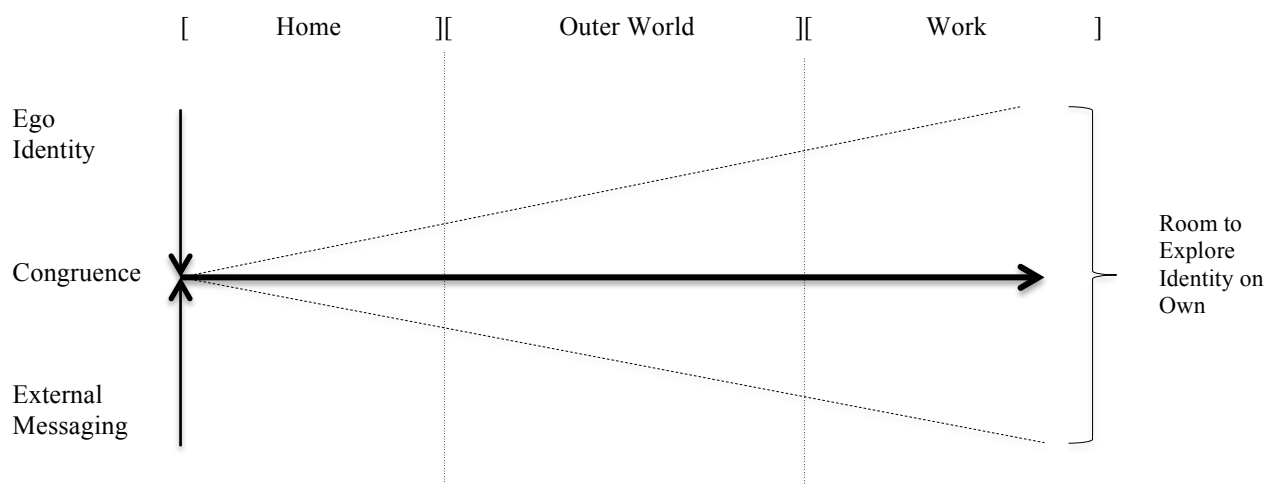
As his immediate environment expanded and the outside world began to play a more important role in his life, he already had a solid sense of his identity, and its strong connection to his parents and family would serve as the anchor that would help him make future identification choices. In spite of the adverse neighborhood in which he was raised, his strong sense of identity and its orientation toward life success protected him from feeling underprivileged or disempowered. Although he attended average to low-performing schools, his inquisitive nature helped make school easy for him. His ability to achieve academically throughout elementary school and middle school allowed his high school teachers to identify him as college-bound, which reinforced his identification with academic success and his orientation toward college. In identifying with peers, he undertook a more narrowed approach that allowed him to select those who shared in his past, present, and future identity development experiences, and who could support his path to continued life success. He identified with and partook in activities that supported his continuous identity development path, including college preparation clubs. By the time he graduated high school and was considering how he would project himself via a viable occupational path, he had a strong sense of his identity, which helped him narrow down his occupational choices and attain a clear sense of the path that lied in front of him.

His work roles, choices, and behaviors were not only reflective of his identity development experiences, they were also extensions of his continuous identity development pathway. His earliest identifications with working were vis-à-vis both of his parents, and even his earliest work plans were defined by requiring time, investment, and commitment. His occupational history, like his identity development trajectory, was marked by focus, direction, continuity, and small stepping stones toward the achievement of something greater and in the long-term. His attainment of jobs expanded with age, from relying at first on parents and family, to finding jobs connected to school or college, to relying on the Internet. His attraction to jobs,

largely reduced to those that could produce long-term gains, augment his work experience, and provide upward mobility, also reflected his continuous identity development. He liked jobs that allowed him to project himself vis-à-vis the knowledge and identity experiences he had accumulated, and he disliked jobs that provided obstacles to personal growth and job progress. His average time in jobs was long, illustrating a commitment to his work choices, just as he was committed to his identity, and he has mostly left jobs in order to continue to grow in another one. His future work plans reflect a desire and commitment to continuous growth, and work has come to mean for him an important means for being connected to and contributing to society.

Figure 8.1 is a model of the identity development pathway and work roles, choices, and behaviors of this typical white-collar participant. Identity development in this model is marked by continuous growth, from the ego identity (i.e., birth) to the labor market (adulthood). Such continuous growth makes the work roles, choices, and behaviors extensions of identity development. Furthermore, the continuity in development reflects his ability to connect his past, present, and future via an occupational path. The model also presents identity development as the product of an internalization process between the ego identity and external messaging. He received messages from external forces, beginning in the home and then from the outer world, that provided information about himself. His ego identity then processed that information, and he projected himself outward based on that processing. The acceptance of those messages—whether positive or negative—into his ego identity required a level of congruence, and it is this that decided what he internalized into his identity, including the perception of his future self as a white-collar worker. The level of congruence for him was steady throughout his development, in large part because his parents and family controlled his ability to explore his identity on his own, which allowed him to internalize messages that reinforced his family identity and to deflect messages that would allow him to identify with foreign influencers.

Figure 8.1  
*Model of Continuous Occupational Identity Development and the Path to White-Collar Work*



The identity development path for the typical blue-collar participant, on the other hand, began and ended very differently from that of the typical white-collar participant, and the process was marked less by continuity and more by fragmentation. As such, it would be more accurate to label his identity development as identity *formation*. The typical blue-collar participant's identity formation began with an ego identity described as rebellious, independent, stubborn, and

unserious, likely making him less amenable to accepting family and social conventions. He was either raised by divorced parents or by parents who were not on the same page regarding their parenting roles. His parents were controlling and his mother was largely overprotective and strict, to the point of making him feel constrained and to want to rebel. Such an imbalanced relationship between his parents and between him and his parents pushed him out of the home and into work at a young age and without a strong sense of identity with which to navigate the outside and working worlds. His family dynamics contributed to his inability to strongly identify with his family unit. He came from detached family situations, he was not close to his siblings, and he did not feel like a part of the family.

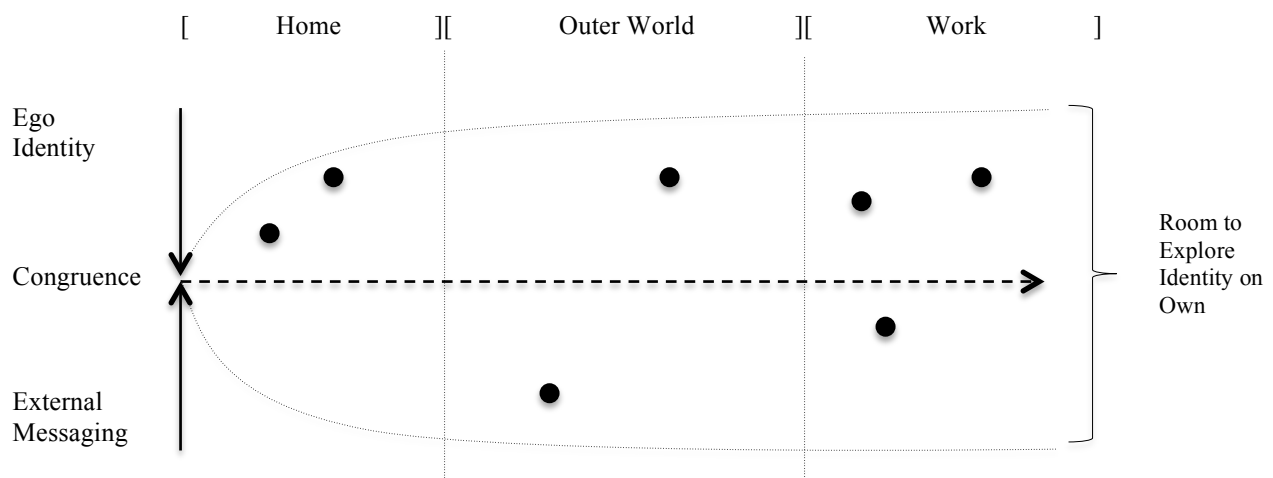
His overall weak identification with his parents and family and his exposure to the outside world at a young age made him vulnerable to identifying with others who shared in his identity formation experiences. His neighborhood, replete with gang activity and violence, made him seek to identify with tough behavior and to become involved in troublemaking and illegal activities, which peaked in adolescence. In not having a strong identity connected to the members of his home, he undertook a more expansive identification search for friends, leading him to have an expansive social circle. Given such experiences, he learned in middle school to dislike school and to feel like he did not fit into an academic and high-achieving environment. His high school teachers marked him as a troublemaker who was not college-bound and acted toward him in such a manner, reinforcing for him his role as a poor student for whom college was not in his future. In seeking to identify with something positive whilst in school, he acted out in class, and he was consistently a truant student. In his search for a more adult identity, he left high school before graduating, keen to immerse himself into the working world and to make money to gain more control over his life as an adult. Yet, because of his poor identity development experiences, he had a poor sense at that point in his life of his identity and of how to project himself via a viable occupational path.

The typical blue-collar participant's work roles, choices, and behaviors were extensions of his fragmented identity formation experiences. Although he was exposed early to work thanks mainly to his father, his main drive to complete chores and job tasks was to make money, and his first jobs were also driven by the need or desire to attain a salary. Such a rudimentary identification with work made it difficult for him to commit to his first jobs and to his early work plans. His occupational history since entering the labor market was largely aimless, erratic, and varied, and he has mostly held temporary gigs or part-time jobs, which has further entrenched his position in the labor market as a low-skilled, blue-collar worker. He attained most of his jobs through friends and acquaintances, and he has mostly been attracted to jobs based on the pay, on having few responsibilities, and on his personal interest in the work. Partly as a result, he has learned and grown little from his jobs. He enjoyed jobs that allowed him to do as he pleased, that did not constrain him, and that did not feel like work, and he disliked jobs that in which he had experience. His average time in a job has been short, and his reasons for leaving his jobs have either been frivolous or out of his control. He has sought personal growth vis-à-vis his jobs, but his limited work opportunities have made the search mostly impossible. He remains unsure of his future work goals and is unable to identify with or to seek white-collar jobs.

Figure 8.2 is a model of the identity formation pathway and work roles, choices, and behaviors of this typical blue-collar participant. Identity formation in this model is marked by fragmented identity formation, beginning with the ego identity (i.e., birth) to the labor market (adulthood). Such fragmented identity formation made the participant's work roles, choices, and behaviors equally fragmented, erratic, and aimless. Furthermore, the fragmentation in his

identity formation reflects his inability to connect his past, present, and future via an occupational path. The model also presents identity formation as the product of an internalization process between the ego identity and external messaging. He received messages from external forces that told him something about himself, such as his future role as a blue-collar worker. As he identified with unconventional behaviors in the outer world, such messages reinforced his social and work role as equally unconventional. The level of congruence between his ego identity and the external messages he processed also varied across his lifespan, in large part because he had from an early age great room to independently explore his identity. Having more room to explore his identity reduced his ability to attain congruence between the messages his parents and family wanted him to internalize and the ones he did, liberating the rest of his identity formation experiences.

Figure 8.2  
*Model of Fragmented Identity Formation and Unstable Work Outcomes*



It is worth noting that the models are not designed to imply that continuous identity development experiences always extended into white-collar work outcomes or that fragmented identity formation experiences inevitably extended into blue-collar work outcomes. Rather, these models illustrate the two most common trajectories identified in the narratives. These models illustrate 17 of the 20 narratives. If models for the outstanding three narratives were to be produced, they would not look too dissimilar from these. The differences would mostly lie in the congruence element of the model, as it is there that the participants were oriented toward white- or blue-collar work regardless of the quality of their identity development experiences.

The two typical narratives, in spite of their differences, support three key points. The first is the participants' innate need for personal growth and for the ability to connect their past, present, and future via a work path. Blue- and white-collar participants alike, as described in the cross-case analysis section, were ultimately driven in both their identity development and in their work roles, choices, and behaviors to grow in some manner. As Participant 14 stated, "Just piece your gigs together and make the life." The differences in identity development and work roles, choices, and behaviors, however, differentiated the extent to which the participants could attain personal growth and an ability to connect their past, present, and future. For the white-collar participants, whose identity developed continuously from birth to entering the world of work, such ability defined their narratives. Their experiences were linear, which allowed them at every point along their path to know how their past fit into their present, and how their present would

lead them to their future work goals. For the blue-collar participants, whose identity development was fragmented, such ability was difficult to impossible. In being unable to develop a strong identity at the point of entering the labor market, their means for growth was reduced to higher pay or to less laborious work, further entrenching their position in blue-collar work, and further making the achievement of an adult identity precarious.

The second key point is the early divergence in the pathways to blue- and white-collar employment. As mentioned in the cross-case analysis subsection, the participants who by high school perceived themselves as college-bound attained their goal, and most of those who perceived themselves by high school as destined for work without an education also attained that outcome. As the identity development and identity formation models illustrate, this was largely because the divergence in pathway to blue- and white-collar work began early in the home, with their earliest identity development experiences. The extent to which the participants developed identifications with their parents and families, and their parents' and families' orientation of those identifications (e.g., to education or to work) defined how well-equipped the participants were to navigate their identity exploration outside of the home. White-collar participants, whose identity at the point of entering adolescence was largely dependent on a strong family identity, narrowly navigated their external identifications in a controlled manner that allowed them to identify with similar actors. Blue-collar participants, on the other hand, whose identities were not strongly dependent on their families, and who actively sought to identify with actors and activities different from them, broadly navigated their external identifications in an uncontrolled manner that allowed them to identify with similar actors. As such, the window for attaining white-collar work for almost all of the participants closed in high school, at the time when their identity exploration orientation had already been largely set.

The final key point is the emergence of four types of narratives (Table 8.1). Participants whose narratives are examples of *congruent white-collar identification* were externally and internally oriented toward work and they attained white-collar work. Participants whose narratives are examples of *congruent blue-collar identification* were externally and internally oriented toward blue-collar work and they attained blue-collar work. Participants whose narratives are examples of *discordant blue-collar identification* were externally oriented toward white-collar work but were internally oriented toward blue-collar work and attained blue-collar work. Participants whose narratives are examples of *discordant white-collar identification* were externally oriented toward blue-collar work but were internally oriented toward white-collar work and attained white-collar work.

These four narrative types cover the experiences present in the data. Eight of the participants were raised in low-income homes by uneducated parents who did not speak English but whose identity development experiences were oriented toward white-collar work. They responded in kind to such a future identification and became white-collar workers. There were nine participants whose parents and teachers either oriented them toward blue-collar work or did not provide any guidance. They also responded in kind to such a future identification and became blue-collar workers. And there were three participants who rejected the external orientation toward work and internalized an identity orientation that was different. The four narrative types reinforce the overarching findings of the qualitative study in that they are products of both the participants' identity development experiences and of their acceptance of and commitment to effecting such an identification as adults. From these, a more concise and streamlined understanding of the narrative findings can be extrapolated.



Table 8.1  
*Summary of Four Narrative Types*

	Internal Orientation Toward White- Collar Work	Internal Orientation Toward Blue- Collar Work
External Orientation Toward White-Collar Work	Congruent White- Collar Identification	Discordant Blue- Collar Identification
External Orientation Toward Blue-Collar Work	Discordant White- Collar Identification	Congruent Blue- Collar Identification

### Fit in Literature

Qualitative research methods were selected for this study in large part because they are designed to tap the deeper meanings of particular human experiences and processes, as well as to observe as completely as possible a phenomenon under study. That occupational identity is fluid, dynamic, and complex *across* the lifespan thus necessitated a qualitative research design, and the findings presented here can be used to add depth and dimension to the quantitative findings presented in the theory literature review. This subsection leverages the qualitative findings to explain the processes behind the main factors the existing literature has found to be significantly related to occupational and vocational identity.

**Anxiety.** The literature has reported a negative correlation between anxiety and vocational identity status, and although the issue of anxiety did not emerge as a prominent cross-case theme in the findings, the developmental experiences of Participant 5 indicate that anxiety related to early separation from parents may have weakened his ability to connect his past, present, and future and, therefore, to develop a strong occupational identity. Participant 5 was adopted, and he blamed his adoption for his poor attitude growing up: “Because of my childhood, I was very downtrodden, in a way, because I’m adopted.” Although the home environment his adoptive family created for him was largely supportive and was replete with positive identity development experiences, Participant 5 found it difficult to identify strongly with his family in part because of his general malaise. As he said, “I was a nervous wreck until after junior year in high school.” His narrative and his Occupational Identity Survey score indicate that, at 29 years of age, his occupational identity remained in moratorium status. Anxiety related to his experience of being separated at a young age from his parents likely played a part in his challenges to strongly identify with the actors who attempted to help guide his development toward an achieved occupational identity.

**Parents and independence.** The literature disagrees regarding the relationship between occupational identity and family organization, but it does agree that there is a positive relationship between it and independence. The qualitative findings demonstrated that *how* the participants processed their parents’ divorce affected their occupational identity development. The participants that did not share strong identifications with their parents or whose parents divorced at a time of high identity exploration, for example, reacted to their parents’ divorce by seeking to dis-identify with their parents and to overidentify with external actors, such as their peers. Even in the case of Participant 14, who had established a strong identity by adolescence, his parents’ divorce and his father’s abandonment led him to seek new identifications that could help him make better sense of how his past identity connected to his present and future. Regarding the positive relationship between independence to explore their identity and

occupational identity status, the qualitative data illustrate that congruence between parental strictness and the participants' need and desire for independence was key to occupational identity development. Furthermore, the participants whose parents set boundaries that protected them from identifying with negative external influencers but who gave them the space to explore occupational paths maintained a better sense of self into adulthood. Both of these dynamics allowed some participants to maintain a strong identification with their parents and family and to have the necessary independence to explore their future adult and occupational identities.

**Family functioning.** The literature is mixed regarding the relationship between family functioning and occupational identity. The qualitative data demonstrate that the participants that were raised in and that were a part of cohesive family units, that took on some parental roles, that had close and supportive relationships with their siblings, and that actively contributed to their family units, were more likely to have undergone positive identity development experiences and to have a more developed occupational identity. A strong identification with their family units, however, was necessary to ensure that such family dynamics played a positive role in the participants' occupational identity development. Participant 12, for example, was raised in a healthy and supportive family unit, but his parents' strict control over his individual identity exploration led him to react against his family and to seek to identify with external factors. As such, family functioning for the participant needed to be accompanied by parent-participant congruence regarding identity exploration independence in order for his family functioning to have correlated with his occupational identity status.

**Motivation, goal formation, and mental maturation.** The literature completely agrees that a positive relationship exists between occupational identity status and motivation, goal formation, and mental maturation. The narratives support these findings, particularly the key point that the participants shared an innate need for personal growth and for the ability to connect their past, present, and future via a work path. White-collar participants, who had been oriented since birth toward white-collar employment and who were provided with the identity development experiences necessary to develop a strong identity into adulthood were more easily able to connect their past, present, and future given the linearity of their identity development. Such a continuous identity development trajectory provided them with the assurance throughout their pre-adult lifespan of where they were headed and that they were capable of attaining their long-term career goals, thus strengthening their occupational identities. In other words, their positive identity development experiences both fueled and reinforced their motivation for success, their ability to form and act on goals, and their initiative for personal growth. Blue-collar participants, on the other hand, who largely underwent poor and fragmented identity formation experiences, had a more difficult time connecting their past, present, and future, which debilitated their motivation, goal formation ability, and personal growth initiative, or redirected these attributes down pathways that reinforced their poor identity development experiences.

**Ethnic group membership.** Little research has been conducted regarding the relationship between ethnic group membership and occupational identity development, and the few studies that do exist disagree over whether or not cultural group differences are related to occupational identity status. The narratives do not support the research that Latino-Americans are more likely to have a foreclosed occupational identity. Although the narratives largely illustrate that the participants came from sheltered families and grew up in areas that did not expose them to varied occupations, only one of the participants had an occupational identity in foreclosed status at the time of the interview. The age of study participants likely matters, as growing up in sheltered families may have a bigger effect on the level of foreclosure when study

participants are young. The narratives do support the research that strong racial identity attitudes are positively related to vocational identity status. The participants whose narratives indicated that they had achieved an identity and were committed to it were more likely to identify with their Latino ethnicity and to have expressed being connected to their Latino roots. The ability to connect their past, present, and future and attain an achieved adult identity likely permitted such participants to extend their identity all the way back to their Latino roots, which helps explain the positive correlation.

**Academic ability.** The literature regarding the correlation between occupational identity status and academic ability is mixed. The qualitative data demonstrates that the extent to which the school environment fit with the participants' greater identity development path is what dictated whether or not their academic ability was related to their occupational identity status. For example, some participants who expressed feeling intelligent relative to their peers but who had been given a lot of space to explore their developing identities would likely measure in a quantitative study as having an uncorrelated occupational identity status and academic ability. Participant 9, for example, expressed that he performed well in high school, and he even mentioned that he could see himself enrolling in college in the near future, suggesting that he valued academic achievement. Nonetheless, academic achievement at the time he was in high school did not fit into his plans to become an artist, and the limitless space his parents and family gave him to independently explore his artist and other career goals further challenged his ability to achieve an occupational identity in spite of his high academic ability.

**Peers and activities.** The literature disagrees on the nuances in the relationship between occupational identity and peer group membership, although it is in agreement regarding the correlation with leisure-time activities, especially intellectual ones. The qualitative data demonstrated that the peers with whom the participants identified served as extensions of their own identities, indicating that peer group membership for the participants was the product of processing their identities and connecting with peers who reflected their identities. This was especially true for the white-collar participants, who largely underwent a narrow peer identification process, which allowed them to identify with peers who were on a similar identity development path toward white-collar work. This was less true, however, for the blue-collar participants, who largely underwent broad peer identification processes because their adolescent identities were more fluid and their levels of identity exploration were greater. As such, it was possible for them to identify with various types of peers, as some of them mentioned, which could lead for them to a lack of a correlation between peer group membership and occupational identity status in a quantitative study. Regarding activities, the narratives support the existing literature. Activities for both white- and blue-collar participants reflected their level of identity exploration and supported their position along their identity development pathway. White-collar participants largely enrolled in academic activities that supported their identity development path toward college, whereas blue-collar participants were more likely to have enrolled in various activities with little purpose and without a long-term goal attached to them.

**Self-knowledge and career decisionmaking.** The qualitative data provide strong support for the empirical research that identified a positive correlation between high occupational identity status and mature identity formation, reinforcing the notion that occupational identity and an overall adult identity are isomorphic. In other words, high levels of self-knowledge accompany high levels of career decisionmaking, and vice versa; one is unlikely to exist without the other. As such, the narratives support the literature that has found a positive association between occupational identity status and self-knowledge. This correlation, according to the

narratives, is made possible because the ability to commit to projecting oneself via an occupational path is an extension of positive identity development. The participants with narratives that suggested a high sense of self-knowledge also spoke about work and jobs as integral to their identities, whereas those that questioned their identities also doubted their ability to make work choices and identified with jobs based on basic factors like pay.

Nonetheless, the literature has also reported a lack of a correlation between vocational identity and career choice congruence, and other research was also unable to find an association between vocational identity and coherent career aspirations. The narratives do provide examples of the existence of these exceptions. Six of the blue-collar participants had overall negative identity development experiences, yet their Occupational Identity Scale survey measured their occupational identity status as achieved. The qualitative data support two possible explanations. First, there was a disconnect between the participants' *beliefs* and their *behaviors* regarding their commitment to their occupational paths. Four of the six participants, for example, did not have a full-time job to distract them from pursuing their real career interests, even if they only sporadically pursued the latter. As such, they were inwardly committed to their occupational pathway, but outwardly they did little to pursue it. Second, the experiences of other participants who when they were younger also had seemingly unrealistic work goals but who after they found a full-time job lost their commitment to those goals indicates that it could be a matter of age. Participants 10 and 13, for example, were two of the six participants in question, but they were employed full-time at the time of their interviews. As such, they had distanced themselves from their poor pre-adult identity development experiences and their earlier occupational goals through the attainment of jobs that provided personal growth and satisfaction.

### **Generalizing to Theory**

The summary of the findings for both white- and blue-collar workers is in strong accordance with Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory. As the theory postulates, the first stage of identity development sets the foundations for a sense of trust and of mutual regulation with the world vis-à-vis the primary caregiver, and the dystonic outcome is anxiety and identity confusion in adolescence. Although the narratives generally lack data regarding infancy experiences, the participants' comments regarding their primary caregiver provided a window into their identity development at this stage, and the participants who largely spoke positively about their primary caregiver were more likely to have followed a continuous identity development path. Furthermore, the experiences of Participant 5, who had been adopted and mentioned that he experienced anxiety up through high school, enhance the congruence between the qualitative data and the theory.

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), parents and families are the key elements during the second and third stages of identity development. Parents must gradually guide their child's developing sense of autonomy and be firm enough to encourage healthy exploration and teach self-control. The family unit, on the other hand, helps form the basic avenues of vigorous action, teaching the child by example their capacities and the direction and purpose of their adult tasks. The child with healthy development in these stages is able to gain the ability to self-regulate his actions and self-guidance as he or she prepares to take on more adult roles, whereas the child that does not may become brash and defiant, and may lack initiative to explore adult roles and tasks. The narratives largely followed the theory in these two stages. As mentioned earlier, both the experience of positive identity development *and* the direction in which the participants' parents orientated that development ultimately decided whether the participant identified congruently or discordantly with the actors in his home. White-collar participants were more likely to have had

parents that both encouraged and set boundaries to their individual identity exploration, and to have had families that supported their pathway toward labor market success. Blue-collar participants, on the other hand, were more likely to have had parents that permitted them to seek to identify with external actors and to have had families that did not encourage them verbally or by example to prepare to take on adult roles.

The fourth and fifth stages of Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory cover the child's entrance into the outer world. During school age, the child begins to develop a sense of industry and seeks to positively identify with those based on task performance. When the child becomes an adolescent, he or she is challenged to independently integrate a meaningful identity in which past, present, and future experiences are unified. The child that experiences healthy identity development at both of these stages is eager to become a productive unit and to win recognition from authority figures by producing things, and as an adolescent he or she is able to integrate his or her life experiences into an adult identity and to project them via a viable occupational path. The child that does not experience healthy identity in these stages, on the other hand, develops feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, estrangement from tasks, and is unable as an adolescent to narrow down occupational goals and to form an adult identity. Again, the narratives largely tracked with the theory. There was a difference based on their identity development experiences in how the participants attached themselves to school and in their abilities to formulate an adult identity in high school via a viable occupational path. White-collar participants were more likely to strongly identify themselves to school tasks and to have a strong sense of who they were in high school and what career paths they would follow, whereas blue-collar participants overall had a more difficult time identifying with school and did not have a strong sense of self or of their future work path at the point of leaving high school.

The narratives also support broader theoretical notions of ego identity, personal identity, and social identity. The participants' descriptions of their ego identities correlated with how they processed their pre-adult identity development experiences and, in turn, with how they projected themselves outwardly through their choices and behaviors. Many of them directly linked their ego identities to important life and work choices, further suggesting that their egos played an important role in guiding their identity development processes, as ego identity concepts stipulate (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Furthermore, the participants that described their ego identities using words that indicated they were conducive to learning and to growth were also the ones that in their narratives exhibited greater identity development.

Personal identity emerges from the interaction between the ego identity and social context (Schwartz, 2001), and the narratives were replete with examples of this identity development process. As the two models that summarized the qualitative findings illustrate, the participants throughout their life projected themselves forward based on how their ego identities processed the outside messages they received. This process, for example, led participants to develop different identifications with school based on their personal experiences, in spite of the large similarities in the quality of the schools they attended. Finally, social identity emerges from the ego identity's built-in tendency to self-categorize itself into groups (Tajfel, 1986), and this was also illustrated in the narratives. For example, the participants who because of poor identity development experiences in the home did not identify strongly with their parents or families sought to identify with and to self-categorize with peer groups that shared their experiences and identities. Likewise, the participants who had developed strong identifications with their parents and families sought in school to identify with and to self-categorize into groups that reflected and supported their identity development.

Although the existing literature has largely broken down Erikson's theory into its many parts to test for the relationships between identity and factors the theory postulates as integral to identity development, it is important to remember that Erikson's theory is developmental, and that none of the pieces can be understood in a vacuum; instead, they must be considered in the context of individuals' overall identity development. The narratives presented here reinforce this about identity theory, as it was possible, for example, for a participant to have had positive family experiences during the third stage of their identity development, but to not have internalized such developmental experiences into his identity because his earlier identity development experiences challenged his ability to do so. As the disagreements in the existing literature indicate, treating the concept of identity in a manner that ignores the main tenet of the theory can lead to varied findings that do little to elevate the understanding of the identity development process. In short, and as Erikson himself proposed (1950, 1968), every identity development experience is rooted to a greater whole, and to make conclusions about identity based on one variable is like judging 100 years of history based on the analysis of a sole event. Whereas the typical white- and blue-collar identity development narratives conformed to Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory of identity development, it was in the narrative-by-narrative analysis that disconfirming data emerged (Table 8.2). Four participants (7, 9, 11, and 12) measured in the Occupational Identity Survey as having an achieved occupational identity in spite of their overall poor identity development experiences. These four participants measured as being committed to their identification with artistic occupational paths (e.g., model and artist), but they exhibited few work roles, choices, or behaviors to manifest them. As such, their occupational identity commitments did not match with their work actions, like it did for the rest of the participants. The participants shared three characteristics that provide insight into the reasons why this was so: they were relatively young, they were committed to same occupational paths since they were in high school, and they were committed to careers attained more by luck than by work. These case studies suggest that it is possible to formulate an occupational identity in spite of poor identity development experiences, although it is more likely to rest on unrealistic work goals.

As both the narratives and the Occupational Identity Survey scores illustrate (Table 8.2), it was possible for the participants' occupational identities to simultaneously exhibit two different statuses. The narratives of Participants 4 and 14, as discussed in the case-by-case section, demonstrate the identity development processes involved in developing an occupational identity with markers of more than one status, and the participants' Occupational Identity Survey scores supported their narratives. These findings suggest that occupational identities are fluid and complex, as Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory postulates. Nonetheless, the work of Marcia (1966) into the four identity statuses—achievement, moratorium, foreclosed, and diffused—has largely reduced the conceptualization of identity as solely belonging in one of the four boxes. This conceptualization of identity status misconstrues the complexity of identity, and it also ignores the importance of identity *orientation*, which, as stated earlier, was as important as identity development itself in determining the participants' identifications. A conceptualization of identity that integrates the four different combinations of identity development and identity orientation *experiences* is therefore more representative of the identity development process and more aligned with Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity theory.

Table 8.2  
*Summary of Narrative and Survey Findings*

		Age	Maternal Figure	Parents	Family	Peers, Environs & School	Activities & Early Work	Occupational Identity Survey	Employed Full Time?	White-Collar Worker?
Participant	2	25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	✓	✓
	6	28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	✓	✓
	16	27	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	✓	✓
	18	22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	✓	✓
	19	24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Achieved	✓	✓
	17	23	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Foreclosed/ Achieved	✓	✓
	14	28	✓		✓	✓	✓	Diffused/ Moratorium	✓	✓
	15	29	✓		✓	✓	✓	Achieved/ Diffused	✓	✓
	1	24		✓	✓	✓		Moratorium		
	8	27	✓		✓		✓	Moratorium		
	20	27	✓				✓	Moratorium		✓
	4	23	✓				✓	Moratorium/ Diffused	✓	
	5	29		✓	✓			Moratorium		
	12	22	✓		✓			Achieved		
	11	24	✓					Achieved		
	9	22				✓		Achieved		
	3	28						Diffused		
	7	23						Achieved		
	10	23						Achieved	✓	
13	25						Achieved	✓		

### Recommendations for Future Research

Although the qualitative findings added to the theoretical understanding of how children and adolescents develop their identities across their pre-adult lifespan and provided support for the conceptualization of work roles, choices, and behaviors as extensions of identity development experiences, questions also emerged for future research. Beginning with broader questions regarding identity development, questions remain regarding the specific mechanisms that led some participants to identify with their parents and families and others to seek to identify more with external actors. The findings did provide some answers to this question, but what

remains unclear is how much messaging and what types of messages in the home were more instrumental in leading the participants to either identify or not with their parents and families. Finding answers to these questions is especially critical given that identity development experiences in the home were foundational for future identity development.

The remaining questions that emerged address the uniqueness of Latino identity development in the United States. The participants' own theories and their narratives both indicate that the identity development experiences of children and adolescents whose parents were not born in the United States may differ somewhat from the typical identity development path that Erikson (1950, 1968) proposed. First, more research should seek to understand the role of parents and families across the pre-adult lifespan, particularly the notion that Latino families are sheltered and sheltering. The participants themselves identified this detail as important for Latino work outcomes. Given that growing up in sheltered families can affect early levels of identity exploration, answers to this question could elevate the understanding of the role of parents and families in Latino identity development. Second, the narratives suggest that the participants internalized into their identities different messages from their fathers and mothers, so future research should seek to understand what makes the roles of fathers and mothers distinct in the Latino identity development process. The narratives suggest that the answers to this question could be especially important for understanding why and how Latino adolescents identify with white- or with blue-collar work. Both of these questions inherently address the uniqueness of Latino culture and the role it plays in the identity development of US-born children.

Finally, the narratives of most of the white-collar participants indicate that the identity integration process of connecting their past, present, and future included connecting their identities all the way back to their parents' country of origin. Such an experience makes the identity development and integration process unique to children of immigrants, who may have to consider not only who they were in who they are and in who they want to become, but also their parents' identities and culture. This could be especially true for adolescents whose parents do not identify with nor embody American culture and conventions, which likely further limits their ability to identify with stereotypically American pathways to college and work. The very meaning of being Latino American will remain in question without further research into the experiences and histories that encompass the Latino American identity.



## **Chapter 9: Policy Implications and Recommendations**

The quantitative and qualitative research findings illustrate that matters of unemployment are about more than economics, the health of the labor market, or even existing notions of the psychology and sociology of work. Work for all of the participants in the qualitative study was an extension of their identities and of the life experiences that produced those identities, and occupations embodied their senses of self and were vehicles for projecting those senses forward into their future lives. This more complex understanding of the importance of work to people's developmental trajectory calls for new policy responses to the problem of work disparities that focus on helping children and youth change their work roles, choices, and behaviors through the early transformation of their identities. For policies to have a deeper impact on the employment outcomes of young adults, they must address at an early age the very processes that lead to the internalization of an identification with work, while their occupational identities are still forming. Because such processes are developmental, they take considerable time, suggesting that the ideal policy solutions should both begin early in the pre-adult lifespan, before such identities are firmly set in high school, and continue through the beginning of adulthood to ensure that the internalization of identifying with positive work outcomes is firm and stable.

This chapter lays out policy recommendations founded in the research findings, primarily the evidence that indicates that the pathway toward work begins early in the home and is largely solidified by the time adolescents enter high school. The purpose of the chapter is not to lay out a set of specific policies replete with a funding and delivery scheme. Instead, it is intended to propose the foundations for future youth employment and unemployment policies to give them the most potential for improving the work outcomes of disadvantaged children. The chapter continues with a brief review of existing youth unemployment policies and discusses why, based on the quantitative and qualitative research findings, they are not optimal for alleviating the problem of youth unemployment. The proceeding section lays out recommendations for transformative policies with a focus on the home and school environments, which emerged as key areas of occupational identity development. It closes with a conclusion that makes a call for policymakers to remember that matters of youth unemployment are not just about economics, but about people and their identity development experiences.

### **The Central Weakness of Existing Policies**

The problem of youth unemployment has historically received little focused attention in the United States, largely because the U.S. Government's overall employment policies are strongly focused on matters of macroeconomics. Furthermore, youth policy in the United States is virtually non-existent: there is no comprehensive national youth policy, and no shared vision of how to address youth problems has ever been embraced at the national, state, or local levels (Walker & Blyth, 2008). This continues to make the few policy attempts to address youth-specific problems, like unemployment, fragmented and aimless. Yet, the problem of youth unemployment, as the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest, could be better addressed if it were treated as a unique experience tied less to the health of the labor market and more to the health of adolescents' occupational identity development. This is because the work roles, choices, and behaviors of young adults are products of a process that began long before the economy and labor market dictated what jobs were available to them or influenced what career path they chose to undertake. This understanding makes addressing identity development of utmost importance to alleviating the problem of youth unemployment. Instead of addressing youth unemployment before the problem has become entrenched, the few policies that have been enacted have focused on the problem after the window for major impact has largely closed.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 are the few and best examples of comprehensive attempts to politically address the problem of youth unemployment at the national level, and they also demonstrate the weakness of focusing policies on the later identity development stages of adolescents' lives. Both acts sought to keep adolescents connected to high school and to ease their transition into the labor market by introducing more work-based learning experiences into the high school curriculum. The Workforce Investment Act further sought to reengage low-income adolescents ages 14 to 21 that were not in education, in employment, or in training back into the labor market through the provision of services and resources that mitigated their obstacles to employment. These policies were hardly transformative, as they treated the problem of youth unemployment simply as a mismatch between youth work choices and labor market needs, rather than as an extension of adolescents' identity development experiences that extended back to infancy. In ignoring the identity development aspects of the problem, the policies ignored the identities of the adolescents themselves, which, as the qualitative findings indicate, are what ultimately guide individuals' work roles, choices, and behaviors. The policies, in other words, expected youth to act vis-à-vis employment in manners that were not symbiotic with their sense of who they are.

No other significant youth or youth unemployment policies emerged during the George W. Bush or Barack Obama administrations, although some White House working documents under the latter administration indicate that the treatment of the social problem at the national level continued to focus on later stages of identity development, when adolescents had for years been following an occupational identity development path that was already largely set toward particular employment outcomes. A 2008 U.S. Government Accountability Office review of federal options for addressing the problem of youth disconnected from the labor market identified and praised 39 different programs and organizations around the country working to alleviate youth unemployment. All of the programs, save one, worked with high school and post high school-aged adolescents in efforts to relieve the problem. In another example of how U.S. youth unemployment policies continue to focus on the problem after it is developmentally more difficult to effect identity change, a 2014 White House working paper on unemployment focused entirely on job training programs as the means for providing youth with secure and good jobs. Furthermore, the policy paper established the 2007 economic recession as the foundation for the recommendations, illustrating the strong influence macroeconomic policies continue to have on addressing social problems like youth unemployment.

In California, Linked Learning has over the last decade emerged as the most comprehensive policy for addressing the state's youth unemployment problem. Local leaders have touted the program as the most effective means for ensuring that more adolescents successfully transition from high school to the labor market (Great Oakland Public Schools, 2014), and Sacramento in 2011 provided state funding to expand the program into more school districts (ConnectEd, 2013). In short, Linked Learning is a work-based program that introduces to the high school curriculum career-focused courses that expose juniors and seniors to the world of work before they graduate from high school. Students are required to select a career path, akin to a college major, and to take one course each semester related to that career field. They are also provided internship opportunities, when available, with local businesses in their related industries. The program's strengths, from an identity development perspective, lie in that it addresses work outcomes at the stage in which adolescents are still deciding how to project themselves after high school via a viable occupational path. Although the employment benefits of the program remain unknown, the qualitative findings suggest that the program is more

successful in helping the youth who have had largely positive identity development experiences prior to entering high school because most adolescents have by high school largely tethered their occupational identity development path toward certain work outcomes.

Indeed, one of Linked Learning's greatest weaknesses in the Oakland Unified School District has been students' self-selection into career pathways based on their ethnic background: Asian and White students have largely selected careers that require a college education, whereas Black and Latino students overall have selected vocational careers (Chávez, 2015). Although there is nothing wrong with selecting a vocational career path, the trend speaks to the challenges that some populations face in being able to identify with higher-paying and higher-skill jobs. These challenges are in part due to adolescents' occupational identity pathways that by high school have already been largely set, as the qualitative findings suggest. To better address the problem of youth unemployment and to ameliorate the work disparities that by high school are already largely formed, youth unemployment policies should address the occupational identity developmental experiences that will produce young adults' work roles, choices, and behaviors. Doing so requires addressing the issue in childhood and early adolescence, while the occupational identity development pathways are forming. Occupational identities are, after all, the products of a lifetime of processing and internalizing of messages, and the earlier that children are provided with positive developmental experiences and messaging regarding who they are and of their role in society and in the labor market, the more likely they will naturally seek to positively attach themselves to high-skill work. In short, focusing on children and adolescents' occupational identity development experiences early in their identity formation pathway can improve policies that seek to alleviate youth unemployment.

The concept of transformative policies is not entirely absent in existing approaches to the youth unemployment problem. The Harlem Children's Zone in New York is an organization that works to holistically transform from an early age the identities of children in poverty-stricken areas. The organization's work is founded on the principle that for children from marginalized neighborhoods to succeed in life and work, they must from an early age be surrounded by people and educational, social, and community structures that support a successful path from birth to entering the workplace. Although the organization in its mission does not utilize the word "identity," its underlying philosophy and model essentially seek to transform the identity development experiences of marginalized children by surrounding them from an early age with healthy developmental messaging and by protecting them from the adverse messaging to which their social groups tend to be exposed. The organization's successes in 2010 inspired the U.S. Government to fund pilot projects in 21 cities across the country (U.S. Department of Education). Although it is too early to test the success of the program, the study findings indicate that it has the potential to transform children and adolescents' identities and work roles, choices, and behaviors, which is a goal that should be embedded in future policies.

### **Recommendations for Transformative Policies**

An identity theory-informed policy would require a set of interventions that cover the entire pre-adult lifespan, from the cradle to the workplace. Although the Harlem Children's Zone's model would provide a high number of integrated identity development supports and is for this reason highly identity development theory-driven, it is also important to recognize the high costs of the program (Gabrieli, 2014) and the difficulties in creating such wrap-around spaces for all of America's disadvantaged children and youth, which would make replication across the country difficult. Given these realities, the focus of these recommendations is on enhancing the identity development experiences of disadvantaged children in their current

neighborhood circumstances. As the qualitative findings suggest, the home and school environments are not only the two areas in which children spend the majority of their time up until the point at which they reach adulthood, they are also the two most important environments for identity development. As such, the focus of the policy recommendations presented here is on these two areas. If policy can help improve the identity development experiences of children in these two realms, this alone will almost certainly make a difference in the efforts to tackle the problem of both youth unemployment and work disparities, especially for marginalized children.

**Parents and families.** Some of the main difficulties in seeking to improve identity development experiences in the home are the variability of parenting styles and the socioeconomic disadvantages in which parents raise their children. Nonetheless, the identity development theory-driven goal of policy rests on the premise that more children need to have parents that can support their healthy identity development, which means that efforts that specifically target parental training can help improve the identity development deficiencies that many disadvantaged children experience in the home from an early age. The main tenet of the policy recommendation related to parents is the provision of a readily available training and support system that assists parents in how to best support their child's identity development in the home. Such a concept is not dissimilar from home visiting programs, which have a track record of success and consist of regular nurse or social worker visits to homes with children at risk for parental abuse and neglect (Gilbert, 2016). To improve the likelihood of effectiveness, the parental training should consist of phases that track with children's age and identity development stages, so children's occupational identity pathway is supported every step of the way.

The parental training and support system would consist of three stages, beginning with how parents can best support the healthy identity development of their child in their home environment. To best prepare new parents, the services would ideally begin during the second trimester of their pregnancy, as the earlier the expectant parents begin to learn about their child's identity development and their role as parents, the likelier they will be to adequately implement the parenting skills they learn. The first stage of parental training would cover the first two stages of Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory, all of which consist of the period of development that takes place vis-à-vis parental figures. The focuses of the first stage of parental identity development training would be on how to nourish children's strong identification with their parents, the consideration of children's ego personality and temperament in raising them, and how to balance parental strictness with independence, especially as it relates to children's developing sense of identity exploration. These focuses cover the main tenets of identity development during the earliest stages of identity development, and embedded into them is the nourishment of a strong development of children's identities anchored to their parents. These focuses also track with some of the themes that emerged from the qualitative study regarding identity development in the home.

The second stage of the training would focus on helping parents build a family unit that includes strong child-parent and sibling relationships. This stage would begin around the time the child is three years old. This stage in the training would comprise of Erikson's (1950, 1968) third and fourth stages of identity development, which are defined by the family unit developing the child's early sense of industry and identification with work roles. Additional family-centered training resources could enhance parents' abilities to provide their child with healthy identity development experiences during this stage, such as family therapy services and activities that are oriented around families and siblings and that give them the space to develop strong bonds with

one another and encourage them to support each other in life tasks. Similar services are already in place in some parts of California. For example, Oakland's Family Support Services of the Bay Area works to strengthen families and parent-child relationships that are at risk of disconnection. Ultimately, the purpose of this training stage would be to ensure that the family provides an environment that encourages the identification with the broader family unit as well as a healthy early identification with becoming a productive unit of the family.

The third stage of the training would focus on improving parents' ability to support their child's identity development vis-à-vis the outer world. This stage would begin around the time the child has approached the later years of elementary school, and it would focus on the main tenets of Erikson's (1950, 1968) identity development theory, including orienting the child to prioritize school before work, equipping the child to find strength in their adverse socioeconomic circumstances, protecting the child from identifying with negative influences, and enrolling the child in activities that contribute to their healthy identity development. These areas emerged in the qualitative study as key themes and form the theoretical foundations of how to equip children to positively navigate with more independence their identity exploration in adolescence. Because most children during this stage are preparing to embark on high levels of independent identity exploration, it is important that parents learn to adapt new roles in supporting their child's healthy identity development. Furthermore, parents would be trained in how to encourage their child's career interests beginning in this stage to help the child begin to narrow down on a viable occupational path that is symbiotic of their burgeoning sense of who they are.

**Schools.** Schools are the second most notable environment in which the participants in the qualitative study learned most about themselves and about how their skills, capacities, and ability to achieve compared to their peers, making the school setting highly important to occupational identity development. The correlations identified in the quantitative study between high school performance and work outcomes further suggest that the school context should not be ignored in policies aimed at improving the identity development experiences and work outcomes of disadvantaged children. Whereas the main goal of the policy recommendations addressing the home environment is to help parents create a home environment that supports healthy identity development, the main goal of the policy recommendation related to school is to introduce a work curriculum that exposes children to material about careers and employment at an early age and continuously throughout their pre-adult development. The work curriculum, just like the parent training program, would reflect the identity development model and consist of three separate stages that would cover kindergarten to high school.

The traditional school curriculum is composed of subject areas such as English, science, and math that are taught beginning in kindergarten and that increase in complexity and difficulty into the senior year of high school. This standard curriculum in recent years has received considerable criticism from youth policy advocates who argue that it is not reflective of the modern labor market or conducive to allowing adolescents to easily transition into the labor market. The first stage of the new work curriculum would focus on elementary school, and it would be taught in a similar vein as the long-existing traditional school subjects. The main goal of the curriculum at this stage would be to expose children at an early age to various types of careers and work options, especially high-skill ones. The curriculum would help fill the void of high-skill workers in the home and neighborhood environments of disadvantaged children, and help them internalize from an early age messaging that tells them that they too can attain such work outcomes as adults. In short, the goal of the work curriculum at this stage would be to prevent children from limiting their identification to working class jobs. Upon completing

elementary school, students' career interests would be noted down to allow middle school administrators to track the career interests of their incoming students.

Most middle schools divide subjects into separate periods, and the work curriculum at this stage would be granted its own study period that the students would follow and be mandated to take through the end of high school. Furthermore, it is at the middle school level that teachers are required to have specialized teaching certifications. To make the proposed work curriculum an integral part of the school environment, a new work and careers certificate should be created to ensure that the teachers who teach such courses are specialized in and focused on this area. Because identity exploration increases at this stage of development, as the qualitative data suggests, this stage of the curriculum would focus on students' active exploration of their career interests. Students could be given projects and assignments that ask them to pretend that they are adults who have attained their work roles of interest to give them opportunities to learn more in-depth about what the careers entail. Students could also be encouraged to connect what they are learning in their work and other courses so they can visualize how such classes are useful to working in the real world. Because the majority of the participants in the qualitative study discussed middle school as an especially difficult time that challenged their ability to identify with the school environment, the teachers who teach the work courses should also be trained in how to best support disadvantaged and culturally diverse students, as these are at a higher risk of solidifying an identity that does not perceive school as necessary to their future working lives.

In the third stage of the work curriculum, which would comprise the four years of high school, the curriculum should increase in complexity and challenge students to prepare for the actual making of work choices. The first year of high school would build on what was learned and experienced in middle school and provide the final year of active career exploration and continued exposure to white collar employment options through activities such as watching pertinent videos and hosting guest speakers. By the second year of high school, however, the work curriculum would require that students choose two career pathways akin to the Linked Learning model. Students would then take concentrated classes in their career pathways for the remaining three years of school, giving them three years' worth of time to visualize themselves in those careers after high school. Although students of minority and low-income populations may remain less likely than their wealthier and White counterparts to identify positively with work and occupations, implementing the work curriculum early in the education process is intended to lessen the number of disadvantaged adolescents who by young adulthood remain disconnected from themselves, from society, and from the world of work.

Providing mentors and summer internships during this time would further help students gain a better sense of how committed they are to the careers they have been considering and are hoping to pursue after high school. Furthermore, the work courses throughout the last three years of high school should also focus on teaching students the educational requirements that accompany their career options so they are knowledgeable regarding exactly what they have to accomplish to attain their work goals. While this may lead to some self-selection based on their disadvantaged backgrounds, the fact that students would have been actively exposed to and encouraged to identify with all kinds of skilled employment since they were in kindergarten should, in theory, ameliorate this concern. In short, the work curriculum would give disadvantaged children an early and 13-year-long means for internalizing an identity that includes the attainment of high-skill work options. Combined with the parenting policy recommendations, more children will have the resources to identify positively with skilled work.

## **Conclusion**

The problem of youth work disparities persists. As has been explained throughout this dissertation, adolescents form a special population whose presence in the labor market is more than a product of the economic cycle, and the consequences of youth disparities are great and contribute to inequality. As the qualitative findings amply suggest, youth who enter the labor market having undergone weak identity development are likely to enter a cycle of poor work outcomes whose effects worsen with age as their work limitations constrain their ability to develop as adults and to become parents who can fortify their own children's healthy identity development. For disadvantaged children and adolescents, the opportunities for having successful work outcomes are all the more constrained. The majority of America's Black and Latino children are born to poorly educated parents with little to no financial or social capital, and disproportionately attend low-quality schools that reinforce an identity based on inferiority.

For most adolescents, the window to the pathway to college and to high-skill work closes too early given their developmental trajectories. If society is unable to move the window further along in the identity development lifespan to when adolescents' identities are more solidified, then the remaining option is to move policy interventions to earlier in children's development. The policy recommendations proposed here take full consideration of the need to improve the work outcomes of disadvantaged children and to lessen their work disparities by transforming their occupational identities. Doing so necessitates intervening in earlier stages in child development and throughout their time in high school. Policies must focus on the home and school environments, as these are the two most significant institutions that inform children of who they are and of who they will become. In doing so, it will perhaps be possible to attain a more equal society in which race and class no longer guarantee poor work outcomes.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol

#### *Ego Identity*

1. How would you describe yourself and who you are?
2. What three words best describe your personality, and why?
3. Has your personality changed much from when you were younger?

#### *Personal Identity*

1. Who raised you, and how would you describe them?
2. Tell me about your relationship with them, both when you were younger and today.
3. What did you learn about who you are from them?
4. Tell me about your family growing up.
5. Tell me about your relationship with them, both when you were younger and today.
6. What did you learn about who you are from your family?
7. Where did you grow up, and what were the neighborhood and people like?
8. Describe the activities that you pursued in your neighborhood.
9. What did you learn about who you are from your neighborhood?
10. Describe the schools you attended, including the teachers.
11. Tell me about the kind of student you were and your relationship with the teachers.
12. What did you learn about who you are from your time in school?
13. Tell me about your closest friends, both from growing up and today.
14. What was your relationship like with them?
15. What did you learn about who you are from them?
16. What other people, social networks, or experiences have influenced who you are?

#### *Ethnic and Social Identity*

1. What does being Latino mean to you and to your family and community?
2. What does being male mean to you and to your family and community?
3. To what other groups would you say you belong to and don't belong to, and why?
4. For each group, how would you describe it, and how do you think society perceives it?

#### *Work Roles, Choices, and Behaviors*

1. What do work and having a job mean to you?
2. What types of jobs would you say fit with who you are, and what types of jobs don't?
3. What types of jobs would you be willing and unwilling to take, and why?
4. Tell me all of the jobs you have had and what you did in each one.
5. How did you hear about it, and how did you go about getting it?
6. What attracted you to the job, and why did you choose to take it?
7. What did you learn about yourself from the job and how did it influence your next job?
8. Why do you believe you have made the work choices that you have?

9. Why do you believe that you have had the work/job trajectory that you have?
10. How do you define work success, and what does it take for Latino males to achieve it?

