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Similarities and Differences in the Trajectories of Young Adults' Major Developmental Goals

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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By

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Master of Arts in Social Ecology

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Youth navigate the transition into young adulthood by deciding which developmental goals they want to pursue and when to pursue them. While societal expectations shape youths' decisions on goal choices, goal nomination may change over time based on individual characteristics and life situations. In this study, we used a person-centered approach to identify common profiles of self-reported major developmental goals (N = 462) at two time points: (1) the final year of high school, and (2) four years after high school graduation. Multinomial logistic regression was then used to examine whether factors including work status, values, and demographics predicted latent class membership four years after high school. Results indicated that career and education goals were nominated less frequently over time, while relational and financial goals became more frequently nominated over time. However, the goal categories retained rank-order stability with education and career goals as the most frequently nominated goals at each time point. The Latent Class Analysis revealed four distinct classes of individuals who shared commonality in their goal choice, which was predicted by work status, values, and demographic variables. Findings from this study suggest that there are both general trends and interindividual differences in goal nomination during the transition to adulthood.

INTRODUCTION

The transition to adulthood is a crucial time period in one's lifespan during which individuals make decisions that have long-term consequences (e.g., Havighurst, 1972; Hutteman, Hennecke, Orth, Retiz, & Specht, 2014; Luciano & Orth, 2017). In order to have a successful transition into adulthood, it is beneficial to have a sense of direction in one's life (e.g., Salmela-Aro et al., 2012). Goals direct and organize motivational resources toward reaching milestones such as attaining a college degree or starting a family (e.g., Heckhausen, 1997; Nurmi, 1992). While knowledge of age-graded normative goals provide commonality in youths' goal choices, not all individuals nominate the same goals over time (e.g., Settersten & Hagestad, 1996). For example, goal nomination may differ among individuals depending on factors such as working status (e.g., Bachman, Safron, & Schulenberg, 2003; Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009), gender (e.g., Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007; Schoon & Eccles, 2014), race/ethnicity (Desmond & Turley, 2009; Metz, Fouad, & Ihle-Helledy, 2009), and socioeconomic status (Beal & Crockett, 2013; Burton, 2007).

Previous studies have assessed different developmental goals that emerge during adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Beal, Crockett, & Peugh, 2016; Ranta, Dietrich, & Salmela-Aro, 2014). These studies have identified various patterns of youths' goal selection and the age that they typically aim to achieve these goals. In addition to identifying the common trajectories of developmental goals, prior studies have also examined factors that can influence individuals to diverge from the common path to adulthood (Desmond & Turley, 2009; Schoon & Eccles, 2014). However, few studies have investigated both the general pattern of goal selection and individual differences over time during the transition into young adulthood. To address this, the current study will take a person-level approach (Bauer & Shanahan, 2007; Howard &

Hoffman, 2018) to examine both how and why goal nomination changes during the transition into young adulthood.

CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS

Role of Goals in Lifespan Development

Individuals are active agents who influence their own development and outcomes throughout their lifespan (e.g., Hitlin & Kwon, 2016; Schoon & Amos, 2016). One way in which individuals organize and direct their agency is through their goal selection and pursuit, particularly long-term (*developmental*) goals (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010). Indeed, goal attainment itself is an indicator of successful adaptation in life and of life satisfaction (e.g., Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Maier, 1999; Marsiske, Lang, Baltes, & Baltes, 1995). Individuals' selection, pursuit, and attainment or disengagement from developmental goals shape their paths through life, which is captured by the metaphor of the epigenetic landscape (Waddington, 1957). Path divergence is especially pronounced at inflection points, such as the transition to young adulthood when multiple possibilities are present (Heckhausen & Buchmann, 2019).

Societal expectations and age-normative developmental goals structure goals that are chosen during various transition periods in one's lifespan (e.g., Neugarten, Moore, & Lowe, 1965; Shane & Heckhausen, 2016). In other words, individuals select goals partially based on society's timeline of major milestone achievements. Goal-setting and decision-making for the future begin during adolescence, a time in which individuals begin to ponder about and aspire to achieve major developmental goals (e.g., Nurmi, 2005; Nurmi, Poole, Kalakoski, 1993). As adolescents approach the transition phase into adulthood, they face the challenge of assuming new roles such as becoming college students, employees, and eventually parents (e.g., Schoon et al., 2009). Accordingly, pursuit and attainment of major developmental goals, such as finishing education, starting a career, becoming financially independent, and starting a family, function as markers that one has successfully transitioned from adolescence to young adulthood (Benson &

Furstenberg, 2006). Hence, adolescents share many common aspirations for their future as they finish high school and enter the next stage of life.

Prior research has shown that the developmental goals adolescents strive to achieve in different domains as they transition into young adulthood include educational, career, relational, leisure, and financial goals (e.g., Benson & Furstenberg, 2006; Nurmi, Poole, & Kalakoski, 1994). Some examples of specific goals include the completion of higher education, obtaining a dream job, traveling, becoming financial independent, or starting a family (e.g., Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). However, goals may not be selected at a stable frequency across different time points during the transition to adulthood. For example, Nurmi et al. (1994) found that educational goals are one of the most frequently nominated goals among adolescents, and they are expected to be the first type of goal to be attained. Consistent with the finding, a study by Chang and colleagues (Chang, Chen, Greenberger, Dooley, & Heckhausen, 2006) showed that participants highly prioritized educational and occupational goals. However, relational and financial goals were not prioritized during participants' final year of high school. A ten-year longitudinal study by Salmela-Aro, Aunola, and Nurmi (2007) demonstrated that once young adults reached their mid-20s, they began to disengage from education, travel, and friendship and instead engaged in work, family, and health domains. In another longitudinal study, Roisman and colleagues (2004) found that while engagement in academics during the transition to adulthood predicted academic success, engagement in romantic relationships did not predict success in the respective domain ten years later. Hence, the salience of goal domains may change, in part due to goal attainment.

Individual Differences in Goal Selection

Although age-normative conceptions and societal expectations impact adolescents' goal selection during their transition into adulthood, individual differences in life situations such as

work status can also influence goal prioritization (e.g., Butler, 2007; Mortimer, Staff, & Lee, 2005; Beal, Crockett, & Peugh, 2016). Individuals tend to select goals that are congruent with the opportunities that are presented during different time periods in their lifespan (Heckhausen et al., 2010). While some goals are more commonly selected during certain parts of the lifespan (e.g., education in young adulthood), not all individuals have the same opportunities to pursue these goals (e.g., Heckhausen, 2006; Ranta, Dietrich, & Salmela-Aro, 2014). Many studies have demonstrated the importance of factors such as SES, gender, ethnicity, and values in predicting goal pursuit among adolescents and young adults (e.g., Finlay, Wray-lake, Warren, & Maggs, 2015; Johnson & Reynolds, 2013; Ovink & Kalogrides, 2015). Hence, the present study will examine whether working status, values, and demographic factors contribute to differences in goal nomination four years after high school.

Work status. Life choices that adolescents make as they transition to adulthood can affect their educational and career attainment. While some findings from previous studies suggest either a positive (e.g., Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006) or a non-significant relation between working during college and education outcomes (e.g., Hammes & Haller, 1983; Warren, LePore, & Mare, 2000), other studies have found that working is negatively associated with academic success, especially when students are working full-time (e.g., Bachman & Schulenberg, 2003; Martinez et al., 2009). For example, Heckhausen and colleagues (Heckhausen, Chang, Greenberger, & Chen, 2012) found a negative association between the number of hours adolescents worked one year after high school and their educational outcomes four years later. While having educational goals early in the transition was positively associated with career-related outcomes four years later, having career-related goals early was not associated with career-related outcomes. Bachman and colleagues (2003) also demonstrated that

youth who desired to work were more likely to disengage from school and have low college aspirations. Moreover, the negative relation between working and educational aspirations has been shown to exist even after controlling for demographic variables including SES, gender, and ethnicity (Marsh & Keitman, 2005). In the present study, we will examine whether working one year after high school will influence goal prioritization four years after high school.

Values: Power, affiliation, and achievement. Prior research on implicit motives show that power, affiliation, and achievement strongly influence individuals' motivation and behavior (e.g., Weinberger, Colter, & Fishman, 2010). Therefore, we will focus on these themes in this paper, although it is important to note that the current study did not assess these using an implicit motive paradigm (e.g., projective tests using the TAT or PSE), but used a questionnaire instead (Pöhlmann & Brunstein, 1997). When examined using a self-report question format, researchers consider them as so-called explicit motives (Brunstein, 2019) or values (e.g., in sociology, Hitlin & Piliavon, 2004; Johnson, Sage, & Mortimer, 2012). For simplicity, we refer to them as values throughout the remainder of the manuscript.

Values show a substantial association with goal-related outcomes (See review in Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). For example, Wentzel (1991) reported that students who achieve academic success are more likely to have achievement goals compared to lower-achieving students. However, not many studies have examined the relation between values and selection of major developmental goals during the transition to young adulthood. It would also be important to further explore whether additional values such as affiliation and power are related to young adults' goal nomination in different domains. Specifically, we will investigate whether valuing achievement can predict nomination of education and career goals, whether valuing affiliation

can predict nomination of relational goals, and whether valuing power can predict nomination of financial and career goals.

Demographic influences on goal nomination. Goal selection may also vary based on group differences, which may exist as a result of different challenges, constraints, and opportunities. Some of the group differences include SES, gender, and ethnicity. Past studies have shown that adolescents with low SES have less resources to pursue higher education, and they are less likely to enroll in college than high SES adolescents (e.g., McDonough & Patricia, 1997). Other research indicates that financial struggles play a critical role for the academic pursuits of low SES youth. For example, Burton (2007) suggested that adolescents who grew up in an economically disadvantaged household assumed adult-like roles at an early age. This may include working in order to financially support the family. Furthermore, studies have revealed gender differences in educational aspirations (e.g., Schoon & Eccles, 2014). For example, Chang at el., (2006) found that women were more likely to mention educational goals than men. Studies have also demonstrated that women have an increased rate of growth in relational goals compared to men (e.g., Salmela-Aro, et al., 2007). In addition to gender and SES differences, Desmond and Turley (2009) found that Hispanics had much lower expectations for attending college than Whites and Asians. The results from the study suggest that the ethnic difference was due to familism, which is defined as the prioritization of family. Thus, this study will also explore goal selection based on racial and ethnic group differences.

The Present Study

Although prior research has examined specific goals that youth desire to achieve (e.g., Salmela-Aro et al., 2007; Vuolo, Staff, & Mortimer, 2012), not many studies have assessed both the patterns of goal nomination in multiple domains during the transition to adulthood and

individual differences over a five-year time period. Chang et al., (2006) conducted a cross-sectional study with the same sample. However, the present study expands upon this prior work by investigating the change of goal nomination between senior year of high school and four years after high school, using a person-level analysis to identify different classes of individuals who share commonality in their goal endorsement, and examining how individual differences (i.e., work status, values, and demographics) predict later developmental goals.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The current study addresses two research questions regarding similarities and individual differences in goal nomination: (1) are there similarities in adolescents' goal choices as they transition into adulthood, and (2) which factors influence individual differences in goal nomination.

Regarding the first research question, we hypothesize that: (1a) education and career goals will be prioritized more during the final year of high school compared to relational and financial goals; (1b) career goals will remain the most highly goal prioritized four years after high school. However, (1c) individuals will begin to also prioritize relational and financial goals as they progress in achieving education and career goals in early young adulthood.

Regarding the second research question, we hypothesis that: (2a) individuals who are working one year after high school will be less likely to nominate education goals four years after high school. We also expect values to influence goal nomination. Specifically, we hypothesize that: (2b) individuals with high achievement values will be more likely to nominate educational and career goals, (2c) individuals with high affiliation values will be more likely to nominate relational goals, and (2d) individuals with high power values will be more likely to nominate financial and career goals four years after high school. We further hypothesize that

demographic variables will also influence individual differences in goal nomination, such that: (2e) individuals coming from low socioeconomic status households will be more likely to nominate financial goals than those coming from high socioeconomic status households, (2f) Hispanics will be more likely to nominate relational goals than Whites four years after high school, and (2g) women will prioritize educational goals and relational goals more than men four years after high school.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

The data were collected in the Los Angeles School District from 2002-2006. A total of 1,183 high school seniors from four different high schools participated in the longitudinal study, beginning during their final month of high school before graduation in the spring. The sample consisted of students from ethnically and economically diverse backgrounds. Students who were under the age of 18 were required to have signed parental consent forms that were distributed a few days before they took the survey. All participants were required to sign assent forms in order to participate in the study. Participants were compensated through entering a raffle for gift cards. Five total waves of data were collected, with reassessment occurring once a year. Questionnaires were distributed during wave 1 of data collection, and were mailed out to participants in subsequent waves, along with phone interviews. Five waves of data were collected starting from participants' senior year in high school, and three time points will be used in the present study.

A total of 462 participants were retained for the current study, as they answered the questionnaires for the waves used for analysis in the current study (i.e., wave 1, 2, and 5). Little's MCAR test (Little, 1988) was performed on all the variables included in the analyses, and results showed that the data was not missing completely at random ((235) = 324.20, $p < .001$). Attrition analyses comparing the retained and original sample indicated that participants in the retained sample were significantly more likely to be female, White, older, have higher socioeconomic status, score higher on affiliation values, and were less likely to be African American. The samples were not significantly different in working status, achievement goals, and power goals. Demographics for the original and retained samples are presented in Table 1.

Measures

Life Goals. Adolescents were asked to report up to three most important life goals that they had within the next ten years of their lives. Goals were then coded into five categories: Education, Career, Relational, Leisure, and Financial. All goals were coded dichotomously, such that a "1" represented having nominated the goal, and "0" meant that the goal was not nominated. An example of an education goal is "getting into graduate school," an example of a career goal is "becoming a doctor," an example of a relational goal is "starting a family," an example of a leisure goal is "traveling," and an example of a financial goal is "buying a car." Due to low leisure goal nomination, the present study focused on educational, career, relational, and financial goals. The inter-reliability scores between the two independent coders were high (87.12%, kappa = .830, $p < .001$). Discrepancies between the coders were resolved by the research team.

Work Status. Participants were asked if they were currently working for pay one year after high school, indicating either "yes" or "no."

Values. Participants were asked to rate the level of importance of values reflecting affiliation, achievement, and power. The Pöhlmann and Brunstein Scale (Pöhlmann and Brunstein, 1997) consists of a 4-point likert scale ranging from 1 = "unimportant" to 4 = "extremely important." Each goal consisted of three items, which were averaged together to create one variable for achievement (Cronbach's alpha = 0.66), affiliation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.68), and power (Cronbach's alpha = 0.69). An example of an item from the achievement value is "to improve and develop my abilities and talents year after year." An example of the affiliation value is "to be able to spend a lot of time with people." Finally, an example of the power value is "to make important decisions that affect other peoples' lives."

Demographics. Participants reported on gender (Male = 0, Female = 1), ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The five ethnic groups included African American, Asians, Hispanics, Whites, and Multi-racial. We measured socioeconomic status by considering parental education as the indicator, differentiated by whether the participant's parents had at least a four-year college degree.

Analytical Plan

Proportion tests were first used to test the rank-order of goal nominations. McNemar tests were then used to determine whether nomination of education, career, relational, and financial goals varied significantly between the final year of high school and four years after high school. This test was chosen because the goal variables are dichotomous and the two goal variables are compared using the same sample (McCrum-Gardner, 2008). Both proportion tests and McNemar tests were conducted in Stata 15 (StataCorp, 2017).

Second, a latent class analysis in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017) was used to identify subgroups of participants who shared commonality along goal domains that they prioritized during their senior year of high school and four years after high school (Collins & Lanza, 2009). Number of classes were selected based on several model fit indices (Nylund, Asparouhov, Muthèn, 2007) including the Aikake information criteria (AIC), Bayesian information criteria (BIC), adjusted BIC (ABIC), entropy, the bootstrapped likelihood ratio test (BLRT p-value), and the Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test (LMR p-value).

Finally, a multinomial logistic regression in Stata 15 (Gu, Hole, & Knox, 2013) was conducted using latent class group membership four years after high school as outcomes (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011; Garnett et al., 2014; Lanza & Rhoades, 2013). Working status, values, and demographics were used to predict group membership four years after high school.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Goal Nomination

Proportion tests were first conducted between each of the four goals in wave 1 and wave 5. As shown in Figure 1, education goals were nominated significantly more than relational goals ($z = 16.44$, $p < .001$) and financial goals ($z = 21.86$, $p < .001$) in wave 1. Similarly, career goals were nominated significantly more than relational goals ($z = 18.14$, $p < .001$) and financial goals ($z = 23.48$, $p < .001$) in wave 1 (see Figure 1). The results support hypothesis 1a, in that adolescents prioritized education and career goals the most during the final year of high school. In wave 5, education goals were also nominated significantly more than relational goals ($z = 3.78$, $p < .001$) and financial goals ($z = 4.99$, $p < .001$). Career goals were also nominated significantly more than relational goals ($z = 4.84$, $p < .001$) and financial goals ($z = 6.05$, $p < .001$). Proportion tests also revealed that there were no significant differences between nomination of education and career goals during wave 1 ($z = -1.85$, $p < .064$) and wave 5 ($z = -1.08$, $p = .279$). These results partially support hypothesis 1b, such that career goals were prioritized more than relational and financial goals four years after high school, but not significantly prioritized more than education goals. All raw frequency scores for each goal at each wave are presented in Table 2.

McNemar tests were then run to compare the frequency of goal nomination between wave 1 and wave 5. Results showed that nomination of education goals significantly decreased between wave 1 and wave 5 ($\chi^2 = 10.89$, $p < .01$). Nomination of career goals also significantly decreased between wave 1 and wave 5 ($\chi^2 = 9.95$, $p < .01$). On the other hand, nomination of relational goals significantly increased between wave 1 and wave 5 ($\chi^2 = 13.39$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the nomination of financial goals significantly increased between wave 1 and wave 5

(χ^2= 47.29, $p < .01$). These results support hypothesis 1c in that relational goals and financial goals become more important four years after high school, and education and career goals become less prioritized. Cross tabulations of goal categories across wave 1 and 5 are presented in Table 3.

Latent Class Analyses

Two separate latent class analysis models were run to determine the goal domains participants prioritized during different life stages (adolescence to young adulthood). Beginning with the model during the final year of high school (wave 1), the 4-class model was chosen as the best-fitting model based on the fit indices (AIC, BIC, entropy, LMR p-value) (see Table 4). For the second latent class model four years after high school, a 4-class model was also selected as the best-fitting model (see Table 4).

The four different classes that emerged during the final year of high school were those who prioritized career goals, (*Start a Career* class: n= 115, 25%), those who prioritized education and financial goals (*Get a Degree and Make Money* class: n= 59, 13%), those who prioritized education and career goals (*Get a Degree and Start a Career* class: n= 263, 57%,), and those who prioritized relational and financial goals (*Start a Family and Make Money* class: n= 24, 5%) (see Figure 2). Four years after high school, the combinations of goals changed. The four classes were those who prioritized financial goals (*Make Money* class: n=111, 24%), those who prioritized educational and relational goals (*Get a Degree and Start a Family* class: n= 106, 23%), those who prioritized relational and career goals (*Start a Family and Start a Career* class: n=84, 18%), and those who prioritized educational and career goals (*Get a Degree and Start a Career* class: n= 160, 35%) (see Figure 3).

Predicting Goal Nomination in Young Adulthood

A multinomial logistical regression was used to examine which factors predicted goal-prioritization group membership four years after high school. Out of the four goal prioritization groups, the "Make Money" class was considered as the reference group. Results are presented in Table 5 and are discussed below.

For working status, those who were working one year after high school were less likely to be in the "Get a Degree and Start a Career" group than in the "Make Money" group (b = -0.79, SE = 0.32, 95% CI[-1.42, -0.17], p = .013). This result partially supported hypothesis 2a, which stated that those who are working one year after high school will be less likely to nominate education goals four years after high school.

Regarding values, no significant associations between achievement and affiliation values and goal nomination were found. These results failed to support both hypotheses 2b, which stated that those with high achievement values would be more likely to nominate education and career goals four years after high school, and hypothesis 2c which stated that those with high affiliation values would be more likely to nominate relational goals four years after high school. However, individuals with high power goals were more likely to be in the "Make Money" group compared to the "Get a Degree and Start a Career" group (b = -0.45, SE = 0.21, 95% CI [-0.87, -0.04], p = .032). This result partially supported hypothesis 2d, which stated that those with high power goals were more likely to nominate financial and career goals four years after high school.

For demographics, results showed that those who had low socioeconomic status were more likely to be in "Make Money" group compared to the "Start a Family and Start a Career" group (b = -0.88, SE = 0.37, 95% CI [-1.64, -0.11], p = .025). This result supported hypothesis 2e, in that those coming from low SES households were more likely to nominate financial goals

four years after high school. Results also showed that Hispanics compared to Whites were less likely to be in the "Start a Family and Start a Career" group than in the "Make Money" group (*b* = -1.13, *SE* = 0.53, 95% CI [-2.17, -0.10], *p* =.032). This result was counter to hypothesis 2f, which stated that Hispanics would be more likely to nominate relational goals than Whites four years after high school. No significant gender differences were found to predict group membership four years after high school, which did not support hypothesis 2g regarding women's higher prioritization of education goals compared to men four years after high school.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study examined goal prioritization in different domains among adolescents as they transitioned into adulthood using a person-centered approach. Our findings demonstrate the rank-order stability of goals between the final year of high school and four years after high school. However, goals that were not initially prioritized became more prominent in young adulthood. In addition to investigating change in goal prioritization, the present study also examined individual differences that predicted group membership in goals four years after high school. Young adults who were working one year after high school were less likely to be in the "Get a Degree and Start a Career" group compared to "Make Money" group four years after high school. Individuals who valued power were more likely to be in the "Make Money" group than in the "Get a Degree and Start a Career" four years after high school. Finally, demographic differences were found such that low SES individuals were more likely to be in the "Make Money" group than the "Start a Family and Start a Career" group. Compared to Whites, Hispanics were less likely to be in the "Start a Family and Start a Career" group than in the "Make Money" group. The results are now discussed within the overall context of similarities and individual differences in goal choice during the transition to adulthood.

Shift in Goal Prioritization

The different groups formed based on goal prioritization during adolescents' final year of high school and four years after high school reflect a shift in goal prioritization. As hypothesized, the majority of adolescents prioritized education and career goals during their final year of high school. As youth transitioned into young adulthood, however, they nominated more financial and relational goals. This finding is consistent with prior research regarding the shift in goal prioritization during young adulthood, which also found similar changes in goals in a sample of

Finnish university students (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). The current study extends the finding of increasing financial and relational goals to American young adults who were not all enrolled in a university during the study. This implies that the shift in goal prioritization during young adulthood may be a prominent trend in early adulthood for modern highly industrialized societies, in which large percentages of the population earn degrees in higher education.

Contrary to our hypothesis and prior studies (e.g., Salmela-Aro et al., 2007), education goals remained one of the most highly nominated goals four years after high school. This result can be explained by a significant increase in college enrollment in the U.S during the first decade of the 21st century (Davis & Bauman, 2008). Students who complete their degree at a four-year university may continue in education and pursue a graduate degree as well, as young adults in today's society are aware that earning a Bachelor's degree may no longer be sufficient in securing a competitive job (Tomlinson, 2008). Instead, attaining additional educational degrees may be necessary to gain an advantage to compete with other job applicants.

Work Status

Work status during early young adulthood may influence goal selection during the transition to young adulthood. In the current study, we found that young adults in the "Get a Degree and Start a Career" group were less likely to be currently working one year after high school than the "Make Money" group. Our finding is consistent with prior studies that have shown the negative relation between working and education outcomes (e.g., Heckhausen et al., 2012; Martinez et al., 2009). Individuals in the "Make Money" group may be more likely to be working one year after high school because of a lack of interest in school (e.g., Bachman et al., 2003) or a desire to gain immediate income (Bozick & Deluca, 2011). Young adults who work full-time are more likely to drop out of college (Martinez et al., 2009), which is consistent with

our finding that those who prioritize educational goals four years after high school were less likely to be working shortly after high school. Those who prioritize financial goals may also view working as a step towards achieving financial stability and independence or for acquiring material possessions (e.g., Xiao, Chatterjee, & Kim, 2014).

Values

Selection of developmental goals in different domains are influenced by individuals' values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), including achievement, affiliation, and power. These values have been shown to predict goal nomination and goal attainment (e.g., Wentzel, 1991). In our study, we found that individuals in the "Make Money" group were more likely to have high power motives than the "Get a Degree and Start a Career" group four years after high school. This result implies that those who prioritize financial goals may have a strong desire to gain power through gaining financial independence and material possessions. The results are consistent with prior studies, as the feeling of superiority and independence can be attained through gaining financial stability and material possessions (e.g., Lammers et al., Winter, 1973). Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman (2012) concluded that Millennials (born after 1982 and before 2000) were more likely to value extrinsic goals relating to money than goals relating to affiliation, which supports our finding of the predictive ability of power on goal selection. Our finding that individuals with high power value were actually less likely to prioritize career goals suggests that they believe monetary gain provides power rather than a leadership position at work.

On the other hand, neither achievement values nor affiliation values predicted preferences in education, career, or relational goals four years after high school. These results suggest that perhaps achievement and affiliation values are addressing different motivational tendencies than

the developmental goals investigated here. For example, formal education is more about attaining grades than mastering new skills and thus does not provide a nurturant context for achievement motivation (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018). Those who reported high achievement values may have focused more on mastering skills that are unrelated to education goals, such as in self-development or hobbies. Analogously, those who highly valued affiliation may have a stronger desire to make friends and maintain friendships with peers rather than to start their own family during young adulthood.

Demographic Differences

Finally, our findings show that ethnic and SES differences predict goal prioritization four years after high school. Those who had low socioeconomic status were more likely to be in the "Make Money" group than the "Start a Family and Start a Career" group, indicating that they were more likely to prioritize monetary gain when they may not be currently financially stable. The result supports hypothesis 2e and is consistent with prior literature (e.g., Burton, 2007) regarding young adults assuming adult-like roles at a young age to financially support their family. These individuals may focus on helping their family achieve financial stability, which may result in forfeiting other opportunities that could provide more financial stability in the future (e.g., Gennetian & Shafir, 2015). This pattern of prioritizing financial and relational goals was found in one of the high-school latent class profiles. However, it was no longer present four years post-high school graduation. This implies that low SES young adults may strive to achieve financial goals for themselves, and not just to support their families.

In addition, we found that Hispanics compared to Whites were also more likely to be in the "Make Money" group than the "Start a Family and Start a Career" group. The finding was surprising, as previous studies found that Hispanics highly prioritize family (e.g., Desmond and

Turley, 2009). Increasing individualistic values in America or indeed financial hardship may have possibly moved Hispanic young adults to focus on their own financial viability instead of supporting their family (e.g., Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2013). Finally, females were not significantly more likely to nominate education goals or relational goals four years after high school compared to males. This finding is at odds with prior studies (Chang et al., 2006; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007), which suggests that gender differences may disappear at later stages of the transition to young adulthood. This may be due to increased college enrollment and career opportunities for women (e.g., Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006), as women who are presented with more job options may focus more on career attainment and less on getting married and starting a family (e.g., Jensen, 2012).

Limitations and Future Direction

While this longitudinal study captured the change in goal prioritization during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, there were limitations that could be improved with future studies. First, attrition analyses revealed that there were significant differences between ethnicity and socioeconomic status in the original sample compared to the sample retained for this study. Hence, the results of the study may not be generalizable to broader populations of young adults. Second, the current study also only used parental education as an indicator for socioeconomic status. Although data on household income may be more difficult to collect with adolescents as respondents, future studies should include this variable as a proxy for socioeconomic status.

Third, participants were asked to report their goals between "now and ten years from now." It may have been important to examine whether there are differences in goal nomination if they are to be achieved within the next year, the next five years, and the next ten years.

Individuals who nominate goals that they want to achieve ten years from now may view those goals as extremely distant and possibly unrealistic in attainment. Furthermore, the data was collected from 2002 to 2006. Major events such as the Great Recession in 2008 may result in a delay in career entry or an increase in financial debt. These significant historical events may have cautioned young adults' ambition, as they become cognizant of constrained opportunities.

Finally, this study did not examine individuals' transition from one goal domain to another. Future research should focus on the factors that influence young adults' decision to transition from one goal domain to another. For example, one could examine the time point that individuals who initially nominate education and career goals disengage from those goals and instead begin to engage in relational and financial goals. Researchers could further investigate why individuals choose to disengage from their goals in each domain. Some potential reasons include goal attainment, discouragement from lack of progress in attaining the goal, or a change in interest and passion for certain careers. Future studies should also further examine which types of young adults persist with development goals in different domains over time, and which individuals continually change their developmental goals.

Conclusion

The transition to adulthood is a pivotal phase in one's life course. Hence, it is beneficial to understand the patterns and changes of goal selection as youth mature and strive to achieve important developmental milestones. The findings of our study contribute to the current literature on developmental goals by using a person-centered approach to confirm the shift in prioritization goals as youth transition into adulthood, while also identifying additional variables that influence goal prioritization that have not been assessed in prior studies. Interindividual differences such as work status and values can impact young adults' goal nomination four years after high school

graduation. Understanding how goal selection changes in young adults can deepen and broaden our understanding of achievement of major milestones during the transition to adulthood.

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Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for the original and the retained sample.

	Original Sample		Retained Sample	
Variables	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Males	539	46.07	204	44.44
Females	631	53.93	255	55.56
Age				
16	3	0.26	1	0.22
17	348	30.29	160	35.63
18	724	63.01	269	59.91
19	68	5.92	19	4.23
20	6	0.52	0	0.00
Ethnicity				
African American	144	12.26	40	8.70
Asians	228	19.40	94	20.43
Hispanics	376	32.00	129	28.04
Whites	283	24.09	138	30.00
Multiracial	144	12.26	59	12.83
Socioeconomic Status				
≥ 4 Years of College	481	44.58	237	51.86
< 4 Years of College	598	55.42	220	48.14

Table 2.

Frequency of Goal Nomination at Wave 1 and Wave 5.

Variables	n	%
Goals at Wave 1		
Education		
Selected	355	72.67
Career		
Selected	350	75.92
Relational		
Selected	189	41.00
Financial	94	20.43
Selected	118	25.60
Goals at Wave 5	59	12.83
Education		
Selected	293	56.56
Career		
Selected	309	67.03
Relational		
Selected	241	52.28
Financial		
Selected	220	47.72

Table 3.

McNemar Test Results Comparing Goal Nomination Frequency in Wave 1 and Wave 5.

Education Goals at Wave 5			
Education Goals at Wave 1	Not Selected	Selected	Total
Not Selected	66	**60**	126
Selected	**102**	233	335
Total	168	293	461
Career Goals at Wave 5			
Career Goals at Wave 1	Not Selected	Selected	Total
Not Selected	47	**64**	111
Selected	**105**	245	350
Total	152	309	461
Relational Goals at Wave 5			
Relational Goals at Wave 1	Not Selected	Selected	Total
Not Selected	145	**127**	272
Selected	**75**	114	189
Total	220	241	461
Financial Goals at Wave 5			
Financial Goals at Wave 1	Not Selected	Selected	Total
Not Selected	182	**161**	343
Selected	**59**	59	118
Total	241	220	461

Note: Goal comparisons for the McNemar test are bolded.

Table 4.
Model fit indices for Latent Class Analyses.

Model	LL	Free parameters	AIC	BIC	SABIC	Entropy	BLRT p- value	LMR p-value
Final Year of High School								
Two-class	-1074	9	2166	2203	2175	1.00	<.01	<.01
Three-class	-1056	14	2140	2198	2153	0.96	<.01	<.01
Four-class	-1039	19	2116	2194	2134	0.97	<.01	<.01
Five-class	-1039	24	2126	2225	2149	0.93	1.00	0.81
Four Years After High School								
Two-class	-1208	11	2437	2483	2448	1.00	<.01	<.01
Three-class	-1185	17	2404	2474	2420	0.89	<.01	<.01
Four-class	-1153	23	2352	2447	2374	0.88	<.01	<.01
Five-class	-1149	29	2356	2476	2384	0.91	0.03	<.01

Note. LL = Loglikelihood; AIC = Aikake information criteria; BIC = Bayesian information criteria; ABIC = Adjusted bayesian information criteria; BLRT = Bootstrapped likelihood ratio test; LMR = Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test.

Table 5.
Unstandardized Estimates Predicting Group Membership Four Years After High School

	"Get a Degree and Start a Family"				**"Start a Family and Start a Career"**				**"Get a Degree and start a Career"**			
			95% CI				95% CI				95% CI	
	b	*SE*	Lower	Upper	*b*	*SE*	Lower	Upper	*b*	*SE*	Lower	Upper
"Make Money" (Reference)												
Demographics												
Gender												
Female	0.50	0.33	-0.15	1.15	0.17	-0.52	0.86	0.86	0.10	0.30	-0.49	0.69
Ethnicity												
African American	-0.33	0.58	-1.47	0.81	-0.90	0.66	-2.20	0.40	-0.43	0.56	-1.53	0.66
Asian	-0.03	0.46	-0.93	0.87	-0.56	0.49	-1.52	0.40	-0.04	0.44	-0.90	0.82
Hispanics	-0.62	0.49	-1.59	0.34	-1.14*	0.53	-2.17	-0.10	-0.27	0.44	-1.14	0.59
Biracial	-0.27	0.54	-1.33	0.79	-0.69	0.58	-1.83	0.45	-0.20	0.50	-1.18	0.78
Socioeconomic Status												
4 Years of College	-0.44	0.37	-1.16	0.27	-0.89*	0.39	-1.64	-0.11	-0.51	0.34	-1.18	0.15
Working Status												
Working	-0.17	0.36	-0.87	0.53	-0.67	0.36	-1.40	0.06	-0.79	0.32	-1.42	-0.17
Values												
Power	-0.05	0.23	-0.50	0.40	-0.07	-0.25	-0.56	0.41	-0.45*	0.21	-0.87	-0.04
Affiliation	-0.02	0.24	-0.50	0.45	0.49	0.27	-0.03	1.01	0.21	0.18	-0.27	0.62
Achievement	0.20	0.24	-0.27	0.67	-0.07	-0.26	-0.57	0.43	0.29	0.22	-0.13	0.73

Note. *p < .05. Whites is the reference group for ethnicity.

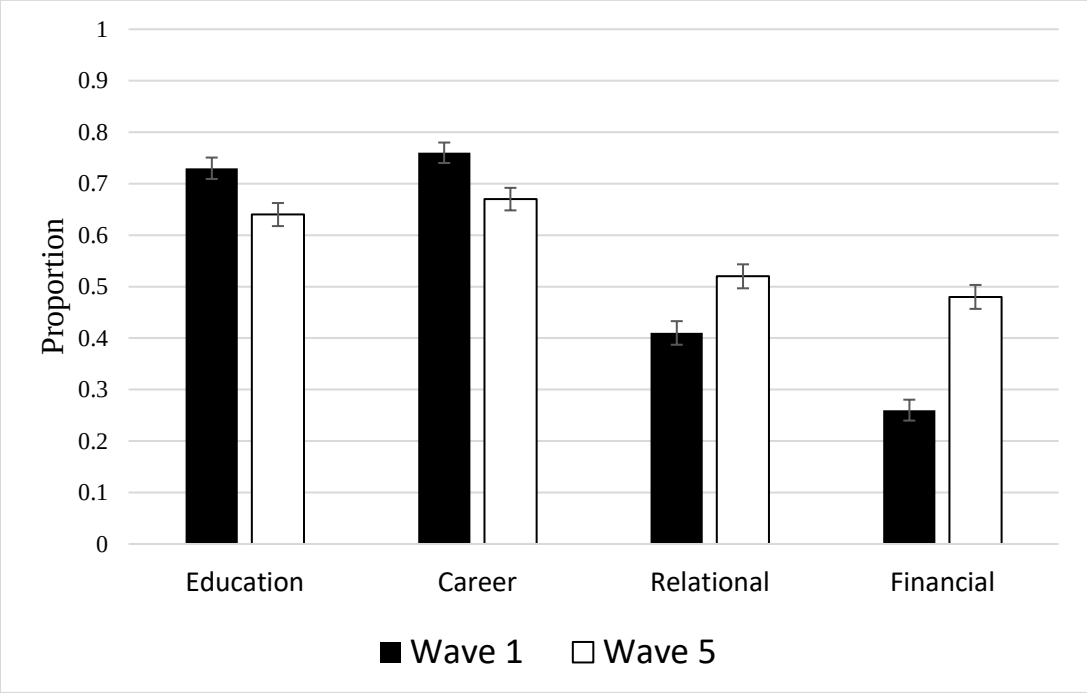

Figure 1: Frequency of goal nominations for each goal domain in wave 1 and wave 5.

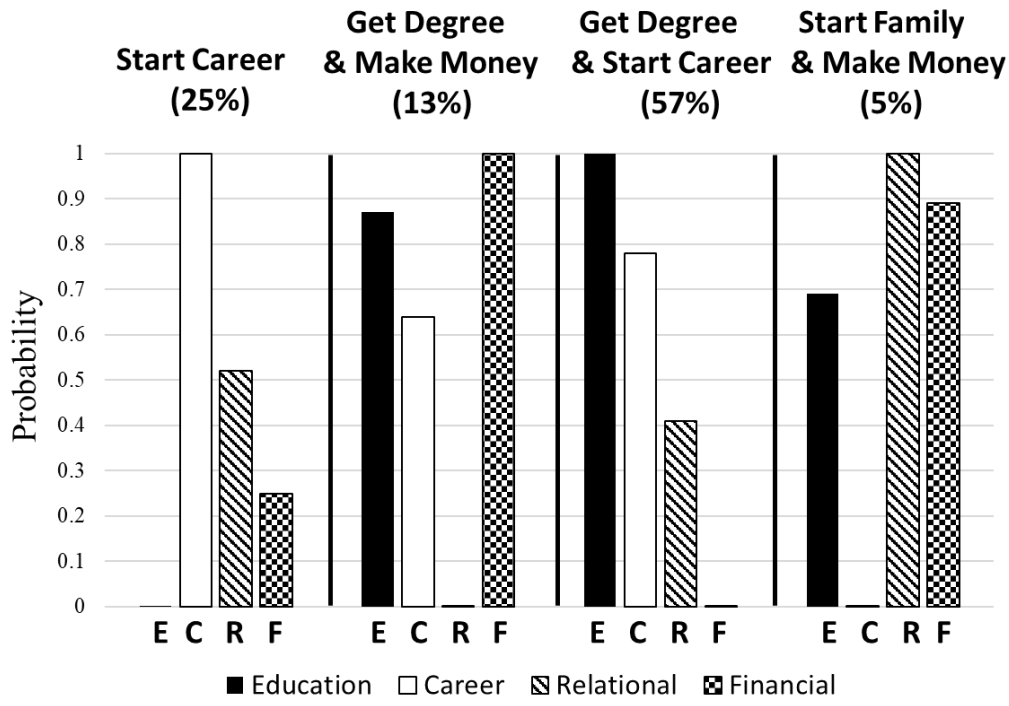

Figure 2. Estimated group patterns of highly prioritized goals for the identified k=4 solution in the latent class analysis during the final year of high school. Miniscule bars represent zero nominations for the goal categories.

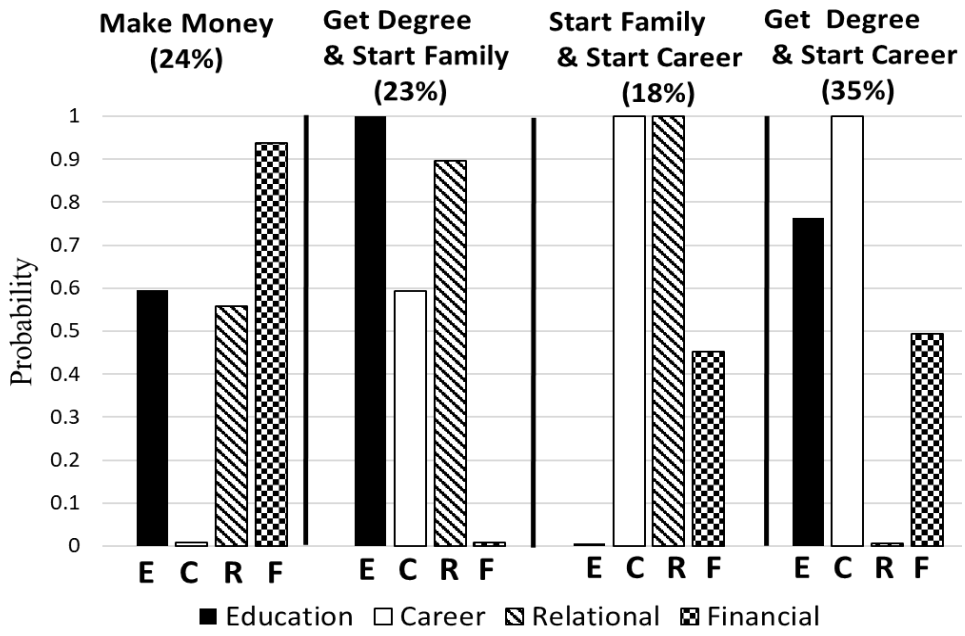

Figure 3. Estimated group patterns of highly prioritized goals for the identified k=4 solution in the latent class analysis four years after high school. Miniscule bars represent zero nominations for the goal categories.