Presented May 2, 2015 at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America

STRUCTURAL ADVANTAGES, PERSONAL CAPACITIES, AND YOUNG ADULT FUNCTIONING DURING THE GREAT RECESSION

Robert Crosnoe
Chelsea Smith
Population Research Center, University of Texas at Austin

* Correspondence concerning should be addressed to Robert Crosnoe, Population Research Center, 305 East 23rd St., G1800, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1700, Austin, TX 78712-1699 (email: crosnoe@austin.utexas.edu).

Abstract

Past research has demonstrated that severe economic downturns can have a major impact on the life course, and the Great Recession is unlikely to be an exception. Informed by life course theory, we describe how the transition into adulthood may have been sped up or slowed down by the Great Recession and how these effects may have varied according to family backgrounds and psychological/behavioral capacities. Historical comparisons of multiple cohorts of young adults in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—Young Adult cohort revealed some evidence that the Great Recession slowed down school enrollment, labor force entry, partnering, and becoming a parent among 18-25 year olds. The prevalence was especially low in the supposed recovery year of 2010, and school enrollment was the least affected status. This slow-down was more age group-specific for family roles. Variation by family background and psychological/behavioral factors was minimal.

Today, media stories about the possibility of a lost generation reflect fears about youth coming of age during the Great Recession, particularly young people in their late teens and early 20s who are trying to find a foothold in adulthood in a time of foreclosed opportunity (Grusky, Western, and Wimer 2012). These fears are certainly not unfounded, given past research showing that young adults are vulnerable during economic downturns because they are too old to be protected from the reality of what is happening and too young to have already secured foundational school and work experiences. Not all young adults are equally vulnerable, however, as some can draw on protective resources related to their advantaged structural positions in society or their own personal capacities to weather the storm (Schoon 2014; Settersten and Ray 2010). Yet, the very issue of how young adults fared during the Great Recession is unclear, as the natural lag between some historical event and empirical research on it can be long. Now that the worst of the Great Recession is technically over, this question can be carefully considered.

In this spirit, we delve into potential changes in the transition into adulthood during the years of the Great Recession in the U.S. with special attention to variation across different segments of the population and different types of youth. Drawing on life course theory and research from multiple disciplines, we begin with a conceptual discussion of potential recession effects on young adults that highlights who might have gotten off track on the road to adulthood and how they might have done so. Next, analyses of nationally representative data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979-Young Adult cohort (NLSY79-YA) will be discussed that demonstrate how the socioeconomic and family role statuses among young adults (defined here as 18-25 year olds) changed across four time points before and after the start of the Great Recession, including differences in any observed Great Recession "effects" on young adults according to their family backgrounds (tapping into structural advantages and

disadvantages) and according to their psychological and behavioral profiles (tapping into their potential agency or lack thereof). We end with a discussion of how these patterns are connected to more general life course processes.

Transitions into Adulthood and the Great Recession

In this study, we try to link two issues that are both of great interest to researchers, policymakers, and the public. The Great Recession is more of a short-term historical "event." The evolving transition into adulthood is a longer-term historical trend.

First, the historic Great Recession was enormous (Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, contraction of 4.1% in the U.S.) and long, and the "felt" recession has lasted longer than the official dating of late 2007 through mid-2009 (National Bureau of Economic Research 2012). Rooted in the collapse of the housing market and cascading into other problems, it was marked by persistently high unemployment, rising public debt, mortgage defaults, sharp market losses, and low consumer confidence. A core principal of the life course perspective is that the impact of a historical event will differ across cohorts (Elder 1998). In line with this idea, public discussions about the Great Recession have voiced fears that young people have the most to lose, with particular concerns about youth transitioning into the critical young adult period of status attainment and family formation. Indeed, recent Pew polling revealed that a near-majority of Americans (41%) believed that 18-25 year olds were most affected by the economic downturn. These concerns reflect grim job numbers and other standard of living statistics for young adults (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012; Taylor et al. 2012). To borrow a well-circulated quote from economist Richard Freeman (in Estes 2011), "These people will be scarred, and they will be

called the 'lost generation.'" Thus, the Great Recession is an important macro-level shock for understanding and serving the well-being and productivity of the young adult population.

Second, the transition into adulthood refers to the period linking adolescence to adulthood, when youth begin to independently assume adult roles. Moving into the 21st century, this transition is lengthening in Western societies, taking on a unique character so that it is close to becoming its own distinct stage of the life course, much as adolescence was "created" as a life stage around the turn of the 20th century (Settersten and Ray 2010). This redefinition reflects the global economic restructuring, reshaping of the labor market, and massive innovation in information technology that have converged to raise the returns to higher education to historic levels (Carnevale and Cheah 2013; Danziger and Ratner 2010; Goldin and Katz 2008; Bernhardt et al. 2001). These socioeconomic changes have been accompanied by evolving norms about involved parenting and changing expectations about the timing of family formation (Crosnoe and Johnson 2011; Roisman et al. 2004; Shanahan 2000; Hogan and Astone 1986). Consequently, the proportion of Americans who view 18-25 year olds as adults has declined steadily to a bare majority (Taylor et al. 2012). For some, the evolution of this transition is positive, as lifting constraints allow exploration and self-actualization. For others, it is about stagnation, with youth floundering as supposed freedoms mask scarcer opportunities. Importantly, whether the transition into adulthood is a positive "odyssey" or a problematic "adultolescence" is rooted in family background, as youth growing up in more advantaged circumstances are better able to capitalize on the potential for exploration before moving on to secure adult trajectories (Stroud, Mainero, and Olson 2013; Brock 2010; Furstenberg 2010; Settersten et al. 2005).

If the Great Recession and the evolving transition into adulthood are each significant foci of research, so too is the connection between them. The Great Recession is a shock within a long

historical trend, a trigger event recalibrating the transition into adulthood in ways that link individual circumstances to the unequal systems of opportunities and constraints in entire cohorts. Thus, tracking young adults across this recession has historical value in illuminating what happened to specific cohorts during a particular event, but the significance of this research is not limited to historical description. In studies of recessions dating back to the Great Depression (Grusky et al. 2012; Oreopoulos, von Wachter, and Heisz 2012; Ramanathan, Balasubramanian, and Krishnadas 2012; Elder 1999), researchers from multiple disciplines have argued for the careful documentation of recession effects to better understand the mechanics of the life course and to better serve recession-era youth as they age into the major voting, working, and parenting blocs of the U.S. carrying the potential scars of this recession and future youth who may be scarred from growing up in recessions yet to come. Thus, examining how youth make the transition into adulthood in the shadow of the Great Recession can advance science and inform policy to improve the future prospects of *today's* youth as they recover from the Great Recession and of *tomorrow's* youth who come of age in any new recessions.

Recession Effects

To understand this link between the transition into adulthood and the Great Recession, we can draw on related literatures for a compelling conceptual approach: 1) economic research on the effects of past economic downturns on the occupational outcomes of college graduates (Oreopoulos et al. 2012; Kahn 2010); 2) developmental research on the implications of major social change for the life trajectories of young people (Elder 1999; Silbereisen 2005); and 3) sociological research on historical variation in role transitions from adolescence into adulthood (Fussell, Park, and Costa Ribeiro 2010; Shanahan 2000). Integrating these literatures provides important insights into how to approach this timely issue.

Much of the work on recession effects on the life course has been acutely interested in basic dimensions of socioeconomic attainment, such as school enrollment, employment, and earnings (Kahn 2012; Shanahan et al. 1997). For example, economic research has documented how youth who graduated from college during past recessions had depressed earnings many years out traceable to their initially low job placements (Oreopoulos et al. 2012; Kahn 2010). This same socioeconomic focus has extended to research on the current recession. In fact, in an issue of *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* on youth in the Great Recession in the U.S. and Europe, the featured studies all examined socioeconomic outcomes (Groh-Samberg et al. 2014; Mortimer et al. 2014; Schoon 2014; Staff et al. 2014). This focus is understandable, given that recession effects are immediately felt in struggles to get a job, increased risk for losing a job, flat earnings, and difficulty affording rising tuition rates and associated costs of higher education (Grusky et al. 2012). Yet, other aspects of youths' personal lives compete with, support, undermine, and reinforce what they are doing at school and work. After all, school and work are only two of the major four roles of the transition into adulthood, with partnering and parenting being the other two (Settersten and Ray 2010; Shanahan 2000). Consequently, a consideration of how the Great Recession has shaped the transition into adulthood needs to take into account socioeconomic attainment *and* family formation.

Life course theory offers insight into the forces that may be altering the timing and sequence of young adults' acquisition of these social roles. *Destandardization* refers to weakening of macro-level institutional structures (e.g., the disruption of links between the educational system and the labor market) that define roles and dictate how they are to be acquired. *Individualization* emphasizes the replacement of traditional norms (e.g., class ideals, ethnic cultural values) about what roles entail and what they mean. The convergence of these

forces allows for more personal agency in how roles are constructed and enacted in young adulthood. One result is the changing timespan of young adult role transitions (Shanahan 2000; Beck 1992). In the long view, youth now take less time transitioning into work, school, and family markers of young adulthood. Relative to more recent cohorts, however, they take more time, reflecting economic development and state investments that impose more concrete signifiers of life transitions as well as shifts in consensus about when young adults should take on new roles (Shanahan 2000; Modell, Furstenberg, and Hershberg 1976).

Importantly, this long-term process can be disrupted by short-term historical events. A conceptual framework from international stratification research can shed light on how a short-term historical event, such as a recession, can lead to such disruption. This framework was developed to explain changing patterns of educational attainment and labor force participation across volatile economic climates, and so it is usually discussed narrowly within this school-to-work transition (Marteleto et al. 2012; Torche 2010; Ferreira and Schady 2009). In *income effect*s, short-term financial needs trump long-term investments in schooling and other sources of human capital. An income effect is evident when, on the population level, rates of educational attainment are truncated during hard economic times because more and more youth focus on the labor market rather than schooling because they think meeting their families' immediate material needs is of the utmost importance. In *substitution effects,* long-term investments in education are motivated by a current scarcity of economic opportunity. A substitution effect is evident when, on the population level, educational enrollments increase during hard economic times because, for more and more youth, scarcer job prospects mean less opportunity to forego.

Evidence has suggested the existence of both kinds of effects, with a tendency towards income effects in general but substitution effects increasing with socioeconomic status and in

some areas. The calculation of the costs and rewards of school relative to work is likely to be structured by life course stages, which is why a consideration of the income and substitution effects within the 18-25 age range of young adulthood is important (Irons 2009; Werum 2001; Shanahan et al. 1997; Walters and O'Connell 1988; Grubb and Lazerson 1982; Felson and Land 1978). Thus, we pose dueling hypotheses—will college enrollment increase or decrease relative to labor force activity during the Great Recession? Because young adulthood is when initial commitments to school and work can become highly cumulative (Danziger and Ratner 2010; Hill and Holzer 2007; Kane 2007; Roksa et al. 2007), experiences in our focal age range tap into decision-making under current conditions with long-range consequences, thereby illuminating potential mechanisms by which the Great Recession may shape youths' futures long after its end

One limitation of the income/substitution framework is that its logic is relevant to family formation but it is rarely applied to this life course trajectory. The idea of investment in this framework can be expanded to tap into time use, energy, and emotional engagement, rather than financial investment and enrollment/participation statuses. For example, partnering could be viewed as an opportunity to pool resources (an incentive to partner), but rising socioeconomic standards for entering unions could also create perceptions that partnering should be delayed for better times (a disincentive). As another example, economic crises could lead some youth to think that the time is not right to have children but others to think that the time might never be right and, therefore, go ahead despite current circumstances (Morgan, Cumberworth, and Wimer 2011; Cherlin 2009; Edin and Kefalas 2005; McLanahan 2004). Given that early partnering and fertility predict social, economic, and health trajectories into adulthood (Cherlin 2009; Thornton, Axinn, and Xie 2007), we expect that recession effects on the number of youth partnering and parenting would be significant in the long run.

Our first goal, therefore, is to consider changes in socioeconomic attainment among youth prior to and after the start of the Great Recession and then to expand this socioeconomic focus to also consider corresponding cohort differences in family formation. These objectives are organized by dueling hypotheses—whether young adults are more likely to favor work relative to school and acquire early family roles during (speed up hypothesis) or before (slow down hypothesis) the Great Recession.

Structure and Agency in the Great Recession

All young adults in a society might have gone through the Great Recession, but that does not mean that they were all affected by the experience. Any general effects of a major historical event like the Great Recession on human development are likely to subsume a great deal of heterogeneity (Silbereisen 2005; Elder 1999). That potential heterogeneity needs to be unpacked. Again, life course theory is useful, as it suggests that the divergence of life course pathways within some population likely reflects the interplay between social structure and agency. The former places constraints on some people while lifting them on others, so that two people with the same developmental capacities wind up at different ends depending on their structural positions. The latter taps into the ways in which developmental capacities allow some people to better control their lives, so that two people may react to the same structural position in different ways (Crosnoe and Johnson 2011; Elder 1998).

Beginning with social structure, shifts in young adult socioeconomic and family status acquisition during the Great Recession are likely to vary according to young adults' positions in the socioeconomic stratification system, as captured by their family backgrounds. Public discussion has generally centered on youth from families already in bad economic shape or lacking social and economic resources before the recession even began (Iverson, Napolitano, and

Furstenberg 2011). This concern is appropriate, but our income/substitution conceptualization calls for more attention to families at other points on the socioeconomic spectrum. Although better off overall than youth from poor families, youth in the middle may experience greater change in their circumstances during the Great Recession. Because they generally face more economic and institutional constraints on what they can do during the transition into adulthood than their socioeconomically privileged peers while having more opportunities than their socioeconomically disadvantaged peers, youth from somewhat but not too well-off homes may be more reactive to economic change than either (Lovell and Isaacs 2010; Williams and Boushey 2010; Irons 2009; Kane 2007).

Turning to personal agency, recession-related changes in the prevalence of young adult socioeconomic and family statuses could be less pronounced among those young adults who have developed, through childhood and adolescence, the capacity to see through present hardships and still focus on the future (Schoon 2014). For example, the complex interplay of genes and environment create diversity among young people in their psychological orientations to their own value, skills, and worth (Raevuori et al. 2007; Bandura 1982), and those orientations likely affect how they respond to challenges. Youth who feel confident in their own capacities and who see their lives as under their control may be less deflated by apparent hardships and setbacks while other youth are unable to handle these very same experiences or to recover from them (Yeager and Walton 2011; Wigfield and Eccles 2000). At the same time, the academic histories of young people might strengthen or weaken their responses to closed opportunities, as those who have experienced past achievement might be motivated to push through challenges while those with more checkered academic pasts might be more easily discouraged (Crosnoe 2011; Harackiewicz et al 2002; Wigfield and Eccles 2000).

Figuring out where in the population the transition into adulthood has changed the most during the Great Recession is key to identifying the youth in need of attention. Our second goal, therefore, is to compare evidence for the dueling hypotheses across diverse groups of young adults defined by family background characteristics that confer advantages to weather the storm on one hand and psychological and behavioral characteristics that may be buffering resources on the other. We expect that the speed up hypotheses will have more power to explain the experiences of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth and those without psychological resources or academic credentials. Pursuing these goals can, we argue, prepare us for the next time a recession occurs by identifying the youth and domains that may be most effectively targeted for intervention. At the same time, given the cumulative nature of recession effects and young adult experiences, understanding how the Great Recession has affected the transition into adulthood among today's youth speaks to which groups of adults will be most vulnerable down the line and what they might need.

Data and Method

Our exploration of recession-related changes in the socioeconomic attainment and family formation of young adults—and variability in these changes according to structural and personal factors—used data from the NLSY79-YA, a nationally representative dataset of young adult respondents. An offshoot of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979, beginning in 1986, the children of the female NLSY participants were biennially interviewed as part of the Children of the NLSY, and, beginning in 1994, those children age 15 and over completed a young adult survey (N = 980 in 1994, N = 6,102 in 2010). From the NLSY79-YA, we focused on four cohorts of 18 to 25 year olds—from the 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 survey rounds (n = 2,994;

3,303; 3,521; 3,171, respectively). Any youth still enrolled in high school were excluded from our analyses.

Some overlap among these cohorts did exist; for example, an 18 year old in 2004 would have been 20 in 2006 and, therefore, in both the 2004 and 2006 cohorts. Consequently, we chose to break each cohort down into two-year age periods (18-19, 20-21, 22-23, 24-25), which had the added value of allowing us to consider developmental changes along with historical changes. Another issue to keep in mind is that, because this sample was a cohort of young people born to another cohort of young people, the earlier cohorts included more children of young mothers than the later cohorts. Given socioeconomic and other differences that are closely connected to maternal age at birth, this compositional difference across cohorts is important. Thus, we controlled for maternal age (and several of its correlates) in the main models.

To capture young adult statuses (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics), we created four binary indicators: employed full-time (defined as working more than 35 hours per week), enrolled in higher education (four- or two-year college), partnered (married or cohabiting), and parenting (had at least one child or expecting one). With these statuses as outcomes, the competing hypotheses were adjudicated through a series of logistic regression models based on the equation: $YA = \alpha + \beta_1 Recession + \beta_j X + \varepsilon$, where *YA* refers to the young adult status of interest (i.e., school, work). *Recession* is a set of dummy variables for the four 18-25 year old cohorts, *X* is a vector of covariates (gender, race/ethnicity, maternal age, and the markers of structural position and personal capacities). Models were estimated in Stata with multiple imputation to account for missing data and sample weights to adjust for differential attrition across survey rounds and for the purposeful oversampling of certain racial/ethnic groups.

These models were then extended to explore variability in any observed recession effects on young adult statuses by adding interaction terms for each cohort marker with each socioeconomic factor and psychological/behavioral factor. The structural factors included parent education (a dichotomous variable differentiating youth with at least one parent who had a college degree from all other youth), family income-to-needs (annual total income divided by the poverty threshold for the family's household size), and family structure (1 = youth lived with both parents in adolescence, 0 = all others). Note, in Table 1, the aforementioned cohort differences in family background, likely reflecting the increasing maternal age across cohorts. The personal factors included self-esteem (the Rosenberg scale, the mean of 10 items, such as "I am a person of worth", on a four-point Likert scale), perceived mastery (the Pearlin scale, the mean of 7 items, such as "I can do just about anything I set my mind to", on a four-point Likert scale), and end-of-high school grade point average (on a four-point scale from low to high).

Results

Socioeconomic Attainment

Table 2 presents the results from the logistic regressions predicting the two socioeconomic factors by cohort within each of the four main age groups. Although we present only the results of models with the main recession cohort year (2008) as the reference category, we did estimate models with each cohort year as the reference. Our discussion of the recession-related patterns will draw across these different model specifications.

Beginning with full-time employment, the main effects showed that youth were generally worse off in 2010 than in other cohorts, but the overall pattern differed by age group. In one of the middle age groups (22-23), the cohort pattern was an inverted youth, with youth in having the

lowest employment in 2004 and 2010 and higher employment in between. In the other age groups, a more dichotomous split emerged, with the latest cohort having lower employment than all others. Consistently, therefore, the most recent (supposedly post-recession) cohort looked to be in trouble. They had the worst employment picture, net of other sociodemographic factors and taking into account the systematic cohort differences in maternal age. We next explored interactions of the cohort variables with the structural and personal factors, respectively. None of these interactions were significant at conventional levels, suggesting little variation in these recession-related patterns in young adult employment.

Turning to school enrollment, the logistic models revealed few cohort differences. Once the family background measures (especially the income-to-needs ratio) were controlled, none of the coefficients for the various cohort markers reached conventional levels of statistical significance. In other words, young adult enrollment in higher education did not differ across historical time in any of the age groups. Exploring the cohort x structural position and cohort x personal capacity interactions in subsequent modeling steps revealed some variation in cohort patterns of enrollment but only among youth who were old but not the oldest. In the 22-23 age group, parent education interacted with the 2004 cohort marker (odds ratio of 3.78, $p < .001$) while self-esteem interacted with the 2006 cohort marker (odds ratio of 2.53, $p < .05$). These interactions indicated that socioeconomic disparities in school enrollment (captured by parent education) reached a low point during the recession (2008) among 22-23 year olds, primarily because of a big drop in enrollment (and then rebound) during this period among the more advantaged youth (see Figure 1). At the same time, a rebound in enrollment between 2008 and 2010 was evident among youth with the highest self-esteem.

Family Formation

Table 3 presents the results from the corresponding logistic regressions for the young adult family statuses. The first status was union formation. The primary cohort difference was among teenagers. In the post-recession (2010) cohort, teenagers had significantly lower rates of partnership than did teenagers in prior cohorts, including the recession cohort of 2008. In no other age groups were any cohort differences observed. Two cohort x personal capacity interactions were statistically significant among younger age groups (2006 x GPA among 18-19 year olds: odds ratio of 1.79, $p < .05$; 2006 x self-esteem among 20-21 year olds: odds ratio of .44, $p < .05$). In the former case, the interaction indicates that being a good student in high school was associated with more of a delay in partnering right after high school (and being a poor student was associated with early entry into partnering) only once the Great Recession began in 2008. Figure 2 depicts this emergence of a GPA gradient in union formation from 2006 into 2008. In the latter, the interaction indicates having high self-esteem in high school was associated with more of a delay in partnering in the early twenties prior to the recession rather than during the recession (self-esteem mattered more in good times).

The final young adult status was being a parent. The basic pattern was that 2010 stood out, but only among young adults in their twenties. Among teenagers, no significant differences across cohorts were found. In the remaining age groups, however, the lowest level of parenthood was found in the 2010 cohort. In most cases, there was no general decline across cohorts to 2010 but instead a more dichotomous 2010 vs. all other cohorts patterns. One significant cohort x personal capacity interaction that emerged from the model was for 2010 x high school GPA in the 18-19 age group (odds ratio of .52, $p < .05$). This interaction occurred because the GPA gradient in parenthood (the transition into parenthood becoming less likely to occur as GPA went

up and more likely to occur as GPA went down) became most notable in 2010. The late emergence in this gradient is depicted in Figure 3.

Summary of Observed Recession Patterns

Some evidence of recession effects on young adult socioeconomic attainment and family formation was observed across the board, but these observed effects were not consistent and, at times, difficult to interpret. Some of these effects likely reflected general secular trends in young adult transitions that may not have been particularly responsive to the Great Recession, but others appeared to be demarcated by the timing of the Great Recession itself. Most often, 2010 (and not 2008) was the year in which young adult patterns appeared to be most different, which is interesting given that 2010 was technically post-recession. This pattern could have reflected a lagged effect of the Great Recession, with the effects finally being seen during the supposed recovery period.

When and where was evidence most suggestive of a Great Recession effect? Employment (across cohorts), partnership (among teenagers), and parenting (among twenty-somethings) seemed to show something of a recession-related decline, one that was centered on 2010 rather than on 2008. All transitions more or less bottomed out in 2010. The recession-related patterns were age-specific for the two family statuses and more generalized for the employment. Within this general picture, one interesting pattern was that school enrollment appeared to be the young adult status that was the least variable over time (before controlling for income, it showed the clearest recession effect; after, it showed almost none).

Overall, structural advantages or personal resources did little to condition the apparent effects of the Great Recession (or broader historical trends) on young adult functioning. We saw some evidence of moderation by structural position and personal capacities, but these somewhat

isolated instances of moderation did not add up to a clear pattern. The one pattern that needs to be examined more closely is the possibility of a GPA gradient in early family formation (high GPA as a potential protective factor, low GPA as a potential risk) emerging and/or strengthening at some point after the Great Recession began.

Discussion

The Great Recession might have generally slowed down acquisition of socioeconomic and family statuses among young adults, with some variation by age but little variation by structural positions or personal capacities (at least those examined here). In other words, we saw more evidence for the slow-down hypothesis than the speed-up hypothesis, but, belying expectations, no suggestion that the evidence for either one was highly population- or person-specific. Moreover, given that the slow-down pattern for working was not accompanied by corresponding evidence of greater enrollment in school, we cannot say that either income or substitution effects held. Youth were not working much, but they were also not responding to this lack of work by "warehousing" in schools during a time of lowered educational opportunity costs. At the same time, something akin to income effects might have been at work in family formation, as a lack of work did not seem to go along with a concentration on partnership or parenting—not working did not mean more time to take on family roles (similar to a substitution effect) but instead meant that family roles were harder to attain.

The evidence of recession effects, however, is far from fool-proof, and the extent to which observed recession-related trends were simply part of longer-term historical trends is hard to determine. Moreover, whatever recession effects that seemed to have existed were inconsistent, with no clear-cut patterns. This lack of consistency could have reflected the fact that

we took a very broad population-level view of the transition into adulthood during the Great Recession. The Great Recession was not monolithic event but instead varied considerably in impact and duration across time and place. Indeed, it was a highly regional and state-specific phenomenon. The upper Midwest and states with strong energy industries weathered the storm well, but many states that are dependent on heavy manufacturing and/or had real estate bubbles fared poorly and have continued to struggle after the recession officially ended (BLS 2012). Consequently, national cohort comparisons likely subsumed heterogeneity in vulnerability and resilience (Oreopoulos et al. 2012). State- and county-level analyses within the U.S. are needed, and these comparisons would be strengthened by going beyond cohort comparisons to capture the local economic conditions (e.g., unemployment rates, foreclosure rates) experienced by young adults.

Another important consideration is that the consequences of the Great Recession might not have been felt in the acquisition of any one young adult status, socioeconomic or family, but instead in the combination of multiple statuses. In other words, what may be revealing is not just how the Great Recession affects the assumption of each young adult role (e.g., Is a youth attending college?) but also how it affects the ways in which roles fit together (e.g., Is a youth juggling college studies with family and work responsibilities or concentrating on one or the others?). Like potential changes in role timing, this possibility reflects both destandardization and individualization. In recent decades, more diverse combinations of statuses have led to a "disordering" of the transition into adulthood due to changes in institutional structures and social norms (Fussell and Furstenberg 2005; Lichter, McLaughlin, and Ribar 2002; Rindfuss, Swicegood, and Rosenfeld 1987). This disordering needs to be considered in relation to the Great Recession and other economic downturns and should be a focus of future research.

References

Bandura, Albert. 1982. “Self-Efficacy Mechanism in Human Agency.” *American Psychologist* 37 (2):122-147.

Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Vol. 17. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bernhardt, Annette, Martina Morris, Mark S. Handcock, and Marc A. Scott. 2001. *Divergent Paths: Economic Mobility in the New American Labor Market*. New York: Russell Sage.

Billari, Francesco C. 2001. “The Analysis of Early Life Course: Complex Descriptions of the Transition to Adulthood.” *Journal of Population Research* 18:119-142.

Brock, Thomas. 2010. “Young Adults and Higher Education: Barriers and Breakthroughs to Success.” *Future of Children* 20:109-132.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2012. *The Recession of 2007-09*. www.bls.gov/spotlight.

Carnevale, Anthony P. and Ban Cheah. 2013. *Hard Times: College Majors, Unemployment, and Earnings*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Public Policy Institute.

Cherlin, Andrew. 2009. *The Marriage Go Round*. New York: Random House.

Crosnoe, Robert and Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson. 2011. “Research on Adolescence in the 21st Century.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:439-460.

Crosnoe, Robert. 2011. *Fitting In, Standing Out: Navigating the Social Challenges of High School to Get an Education.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Danziger Sheldon and David Ratner. 2010. “Labor Market Outcomes and the Transition to Adulthood.” *Future of Children* 20:133-158.

DiPrete, Thomas. 2002. “Life Course Risks, Mobility Regimes, and Mobility Consequences: A Comparison of Sweden, Germany, and the U.S.” *American Journal of Sociology* 108:267-309.

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Elder, Glen H. Jr. 1998. “Life Course and Human Development.” Pp. 939-991 in *Handbook of Child Psychology*, edited by W. Damon. New York: Wiley.

Elder, Glen H. Jr. 1999. *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change and Life Experience (25th Anniversary Edition).* Boulder, CO: Westview.

Estes, Adam Clark. 2011. “More Signs That American Youth Are a Lost Generation.” *The Atlantic*. September 22, 2011.

Felson, Marcus and Kenneth C. Land. 1978. "Social, Demographic and Economic Inter-relationships with Educational Trends in the United States, 1947-1974." Pp. 93-125 in *Research in Population Economics*, edited by J. L. Simon. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Ferreira, Francisco H. G. and Norbert Schady. 2009. “Aggregate Economic Shocks, Child Schooling, and Child Health.” *World Bank Research Observer* 24:147-181.

Furstenberg, Frank F. 2010. “On a New Schedule: Transitions to Adulthood and Family Change*.” Future of Children* 20:67-87.

Fussell, Elizabeth and Frank F. Furstenberg. 2005. “The Transition to Adulthood during the 20th Century.” Pp. 29-75 in *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory Research and Public Policy*, edited by R. A. Settersten Jr., F. F. Furtstenberg, and R. G. Rumbaut. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fussell, Elizabeth, Hyunjoon Park, and Carlos Costa Ribeiro. 2010. "Cross-Time and Cross-National Comparisons of the Transition to Adulthood: Brazil, Mexico, and South Korea, 1970-2000." Paper presented at the Population Association of American. Dallas, TX.

Goldin, Claudia and Lawrence Katz. 2008. *The Race between Technology and Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Groh-Samberg, Olaf and Wolfgang Voges. 2014. "Precursors and Consequences of Youth Poverty in Germany." *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 5:151-172.

Grubb, W. Norton and Marvin Lazerson. 1982. "Education and Labor Market: Recycling the Youth Problem." Pp. 110-41 in *Work, Youth, and Schooling*, edited by H. Kantor and D. Tyack. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Grusky, David, Bruce Western, and Christopher Wimer, eds. 2012. *The Great Recession*. New York: Russell Sage.

Harackiewicz, Judith M., Kenneth E. Barron, John M. Tauer, and Andrew J. Elliot. 2002. "Predicting Success in College: A Longitudinal Study of Achievement Goals and Ability Measures as Predictors of Interest and Performance from Freshman Year through Graduation." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94:562-575.

Hill, Carolyn J. and Harry Holzer. 2007. "Labor Market Experiences and Transitions to Adulthood." Pp. 141-169 in *Price of Independence: The Economics of Early Adulthood*, edited by S. Danziger and C. Rouse. New York: Russell Sage.

Hogan, Denis and Nan M. Astone. 1986. "The Transition to Adulthood." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12:109-130.

Irons, John. 2009. *Economic Scarring: the Long-Term Impacts of the Recession*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.

Iversen, Roberta R., Laura Napolitano, and Furstenberg, Frank F. 2011. "Middle-Income Families in the Economic Downturn: Challenges and Management Strategies over Time." *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 2:286-300.

Kahn, Lisa B. 2010. "The Long-Term Labor Market Consequences of Graduating from College in a Bad Economy." *Labour Economics* 17:303–16.

Kane, Thomas. 2007. "Public Intervention in Postsecondary Education." Pp. 1370-1401 in *Handbook of the Economics of Education,* edited by E. Hanushek and F. Welch. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science.

Lichter, Daniel T., Diane K. McLaughlin, and David Ribar. 2002. "Economic Restructuring and the Retreat from Marriage." *Social Science Research* 31:230-56.

Lovell, Phillip and Julia B. Isaacs. 2010. *Families of the Recession: Unemployed Parents and their Children*. Washington, D.C.: First Focus Campaign for Children.

Marteleto, Letícia, Denisse Gelber, Celia Hubert, and Viviana Salinas. 2012. "Educational Inequalities among Latin American Adolescents: Continuities and Changes over the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 30:352–375.

Marteleto, Letícia. 2012. "Educational Inequality by Race in Brazil, 1982-2007: Structural Changes and Shifts in Racial Classification." *Demography* 49:337-58.

Modell, John, Frank F. Furstenberg, and Theodore Hershberg. 1976. "Social Change and Transitions to Adulthood in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Family History* 1:7-32.

Morgan S. Philip, Erin Cumberworth, and Christopher Wimer. 2011. "The Great Recession's Influence on Fertility, Marriage, Divorce, and Cohabitation." Pp. 220-248 in *The Great Recession,* edited by D. Grusky, B. Western, and C. Wimer. New York: Russell Sage.

Mortimer, Jeylan T., Frank Lei Zhang, Jeanette Hussemann, and Chen Yu Wu. 2014. "Parental Economic Hardship and Children's Achievement Orientations." *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 5:129-150.

Muthén, Linda K. and Bengt O. Muthén. 2008. *Mplus User's Guide*. Los Angeles: Muthén and Muthén.

National Bureau of Economic Research. 2012. "U.S. Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions." Cambridge, MA: Public Information Office.

Oreopoulos, Philip, Till von Wachter, and Andrew Heisz. 2012. "The Short- and Long-Term Career Effects of Graduating in a Recession." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 4:1–29.

Raevuori, Anu, Danielle M. Dick, Anna Keski-Rahkonen, Lea Pulkkinen, Richard J. Rose, Aila Rissanen, Jaakko Kaprio, Richard J. Viken, and Karri Silventoinen. 2007. "Environmental Factors Affecting Self-Esteem from age 14 to 17: A Longitudinal Study of Finnish Twins." *Psychological Medicine* 37:1625-1634.

Ramanathan, Seethalakshmi, Natarajan Balasubramanian, and Rajeev Krishnadas. 2012. "Macroeconomic Environment During Infancy as a Possible Risk Factor for Adolescent Behavioral Problems." *Archives of General Psychiatry* 1-8; doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.280.

Rindfuss, Ronald R., C. Gray Swicegood, and Rachel .A. Rosenfeld. 1987. "Disorder in the Life Course: How Common and Does it Matter?" *American Sociological Review* 52:785-801.

Roisman, Glenn I., Ann S. Masten, J. Douglas Coatsworth, J.D., and Auke Tellegen. 2004. "Salient and Emerging Developmental Tasks in the Transition to Adulthood." *Child Development* 75:123-133.

Roksa, Josipa, Eric Grodsky, Richard Arum, and Adam Gamoran. 2007. “The United States: Changes in Higher Education and Social Stratification.” Pp. 165-191 in *Social Stratification in Higher Education*, edited by Y. Shavit, A. Gamoran, and R. Arum. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Schoon, Ingrid. 2014. “Parental Worklessness and the Experience of NEET among their Offspring.” *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 5:151-172.

Settersten, Richard A., Frank F. Furstenberg, and Rubén G. Rumbaut, eds. 2005. *On The Frontier Of Adulthood: Theory, Research, And Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Settersten, Richard and Barbara Ray. 2010. *Not Quite Adults: Why 20-Somethings Are Choosing a Slower Path to Adulthood, and Why It's Good for Everyon**e.*** New York: Random House.

Shanahan, Michael J. 2000. "Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:667-92.

Shanahan, Michael J., Glen H. Elder, Jr., and Richard A. Miech. 1997. “History and Agency in Men’s Lives: Pathways to Achievement in Cohort Perspective.” *Sociology of Education* 70:54-67.

Silbereisen, Ranier. 2005. “Social Change and Human Development: Experiences from German Unification.” *International Journal of Behavioural Development* 29:2-13.

Staff, Jeremy, Monica K. Johnson, Megan Patrick, and John S. Schulenberg. 2014. “When Teenage Work Disappears.” *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 5:173-188.

Stroud, Clare, Tara Mainero, and Steve OlsonImproving. 2013. *Improving the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of Young Adults (Workshop Summary).* Washington, D.C.: Board on Children Youth and Families; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council.

Taylor, Paul, Kim Parker, Rakesh Kochar, Richard Fry, Cary Funk, Eileen Patten, and Seth Motel. 2012. *Young, Underemployed, and Optimistic: Coming of Age, Slowly, in a Tough Economy.* Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, Social and Demographic Trends.

Thornton, Arland, William Axinn, and Yu Xie. 2007. *Marriage and Cohabitation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Torche, Florencia. 2010. "Economic Crisis and Inequality of Educational Opportunity in Latin America." *Sociology of Education* 82:85-110.

Walters, Pamela Barnhouse and Phillip J. O'Connell. 1988. "The Family Economy, Work, and Educational Participation in the United States, 1890-1940." *American Journal of Sociology* 93:1116-52.

Werum, Regina. 2001. "Warehousing the Unemployed? Federal Job Training Programs in the Depression-Era South." *American Journal of Education* 109:228-265.

Wigfield, Allan and Jacquelynne S. Eccles. 2000. "Expectancy–Value Theory of Achievement Motivation." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25:68-81.

Williams, Joan C. and Heather Boushey. 2010. *The Three Faces of Work-Family Conflict: The Poor, the Professionals, and the Missing Middle*. Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress.

Yeager, David S. and Greg Walton. 2011. "Social Psychological Interventions in Education: They're Not Magic." *Review of Educational Research* 81:267–301.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Focal Variables among 18-25 Year Olds, by Survey Year

	2004	2006	2008	2010
	% or M (SD)	% or M (SD)	% or M (SD)	% or M (SD)
Transition into Adulthood				
Working full-time	46.36%	48.22%	46.08%	36.73%
Enrolled in college	32.87%	32.47%	37.30%	41.13%
Partnered	29.10%	28.82%	26.87%	23.56%
Parent	29.91%	27.86%	24.96%	18.58%
Structural Positions				
College-educated parent	11.12%	14.67%	21.20%	25.66%
Income-to-needs ratio	2.67	2.97	3.40	3.87
	(2.15)	(2.46)	(3.09)	(3.50)
Grew up with both parents	48.91%	49.69%	52.48%	56.93%
Personal Capacities				
Pearlin mastery	3.09	3.10	3.10	3.12
	(0.41)	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.42)
Rosenberg self-esteem	3.21	3.21	3.20	3.20
	(0.41)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.40)
GPA at end of high school	2.84	2.91	2.98	3.02
	(0.79)	(0.78)	(0.77)	(0.78)
Maternal age at birth	21.77	23.20	24.81	26.48
	(2.77)	(2.96)	(3.03)	(3.01)
n	2,809	3,113	3,113	3,038

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Cohort Differences in Socioeconomic Transitions, by Age

	Full-Time Employment, Odds Ratio (SE)				Enrollment in Higher Education, Odds Ratio (SE)			
	Age 18-19	Age 20-21	Age 22-23	Age 24-25	Age 18-19	Age 20-21	Age 22-23	Age 24-25
Cohort (Ref: 2008)								
2004	1.132	1.086	0.694*	0.909	0.845	1.363	1.375	1.216
	(0.203)	(0.167)	(0.101)	(0.148)	(0.153)	(0.217)	(0.234)	(0.245)
2006	1.048	1.208	0.867	1.072	0.853	1.085	1.105	0.793
	(0.178)	(0.162)	(0.114)	(0.152)	(0.144)	(0.156)	(0.168)	(0.144)
2010	0.712†	0.665**	0.699**	0.689**	1.135	1.072	0.941	0.873
	(0.140)	(0.097)	(0.091)	(0.093)	(0.193)	(0.154)	(0.137)	(0.148)
Demographic Controls								
Race/ethnicity (ref: white)								
African American	0.845	0.739**	0.786*	0.675***	0.877	0.924	0.943	1.160
	(0.121)	(0.079)	(0.080)	(0.074)	(0.116)	(0.102)	(0.113)	(0.168)
Latino/a	0.833	0.944	0.926	0.817	0.796	0.909	1.002	1.491*
	(0.132)	(0.118)	(0.112)	(0.112)	(0.129)	(0.123)	(0.145)	(0.239)
Gender (female)	0.618***	0.708***	0.683***	0.655***	1.387**	1.197†	1.191†	1.149
	(0.075)	(0.068)	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.163)	(0.120)	(0.124)	(0.144)
Maternal age at birth	0.911***	0.939**	0.949*	1.000	1.067*	1.098***	1.094***	1.064*
	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.028)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.031)
Structural Positions								
College-educated parent	0.539***	0.613***	0.656**	0.882	3.083***	2.640***	1.825***	1.140
	(0.095)	(0.088)	(0.094)	(0.155)	(0.499)	(0.372)	(0.283)	(0.230)
Income-to-needs ratio	0.982	1.003	0.994	1.006	1.086**	1.082**	1.035	1.073*
	(0.023)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.034)
Grew up with both parents	0.938	0.908	1.147	1.185	2.001***	1.797***	1.365**	1.111
	(0.131)	(0.095)	(0.118)	(0.136)	(0.257)	(0.190)	(0.163)	(0.157)
Personal Capacities								
Pearlin mastery	0.972	0.966	0.961	1.523**	1.809**	1.431†	1.525*	0.874
	(0.194)	(0.165)	(0.148)	(0.247)	(0.375)	(0.266)	(0.282)	(0.189)
Rosenberg self-esteem	1.002	1.030	1.152	1.018	1.444†	1.717**	1.130	1.481†
	(0.211)	(0.169)	(0.188)	(0.169)	(0.306)	(0.320)	(0.213)	(0.325)
End of high school GPA	0.979	0.831**	0.992	1.287***	2.560***	2.263***	1.522***	1.561***
	(0.081)	(0.055)	(0.065)	(0.090)	(0.232)	(0.184)	(0.118)	(0.145)
n	2,537	3,261	3,217	3,018	2,531	3,259	3,213	3,017

Note: Weighted statistics shown; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Cohort Differences in Family Transitions, by Age

	Partnership, Odds Ratio (SE)				Parenthood, Odds Ratio (SE)			
	Age 18-19	Age 20-21	Age 22-23	Age 24-25	Age 18-19	Age 20-21	Age 22-23	Age 24-25
Cohort (Ref: 2008)								
2004	1.079	0.998	1.010	0.911	1.328	0.847	0.994	0.901
	(0.277)	(0.183)	(0.158)	(0.140)	(0.355)	(0.150)	(0.164)	(0.147)
2006	0.856	0.928	1.213	0.950	0.984	0.961	1.106	0.829
	(0.208)	(0.155)	(0.167)	(0.127)	(0.240)	(0.160)	(0.157)	(0.114)
2010	0.521*	1.023	0.948	0.925	0.671	0.677*	0.893*	0.758*
	(0.154)	(0.182)	(0.135)	(0.119)	(0.181)	(0.127)	(0.136)	(0.101)
Demographic Controls								
Race/ethnicity (ref: white)								
African American	0.299***	0.319***	0.358***	0.315***	2.472***	1.815***	1.813***	1.715***
	(0.071)	(0.046)	(0.045)	(0.037)	(0.450)	(0.229)	(0.210)	(0.196)
Latino/a	0.877	1.036	1.076	0.914	1.663*	1.887***	1.781***	1.755***
	(0.196)	(0.158)	(0.144)	(0.115)	(0.367)	(0.288)	(0.256)	(0.236)
Gender (female)	2.617***	2.242***	1.626***	1.314**	3.726***	3.350***	2.948***	2.279***
	(0.513)	(0.268)	(0.161)	(0.125)	(0.696)	(0.413)	(0.317)	(0.229)
Maternal age at birth	0.957	0.892***	0.934**	0.936**	0.971	0.909***	0.913***	0.908***
	(0.038)	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.037)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Structural Positions								
College-educated parent	0.731	0.566**	0.627**	1.173	0.454*	0.481***	0.474***	0.568**
	(0.207)	(0.117)	(0.102)	(0.193)	(0.145)	(0.103)	(0.092)	(0.101)
Income-to-needs ratio	0.985	0.958	0.965	0.980	0.931	0.872***	0.899**	0.925*
	(0.045)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.059)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.029)
Grew up with both parents	0.441***	0.595***	0.729**	0.934	0.578**	0.671**	0.675***	0.672***
	(0.092)	(0.083)	(0.084)	(0.098)	(0.120)	(0.093)	(0.080)	(0.076)
Personal Capacities								
Pearlin mastery	0.765	1.221	1.098	1.110	0.652	0.886	0.791	0.817
	(0.226)	(0.246)	(0.195)	(0.187)	(0.180)	(0.182)	(0.135)	(0.133)
Rosenberg self-esteem	0.800	0.643*	0.748	0.781	0.767	0.673†	0.762	0.820
	(0.257)	(0.135)	(0.134)	(0.136)	(0.238)	(0.142)	(0.136)	(0.148)
End of high school GPA	0.631***	0.754***	0.960	1.041	0.662***	0.638***	0.678***	0.671***
	(0.074)	(0.062)	(0.067)	(0.069)	(0.072)	(0.049)	(0.050)	(0.047)
n	2,537	3,261	3,218	3,018	2,536	3,259	3,216	3,015

Note: Weighted statistics shown; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$.

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of School Enrollment for 22-23 Year Olds, by Parents' Educational Attainment

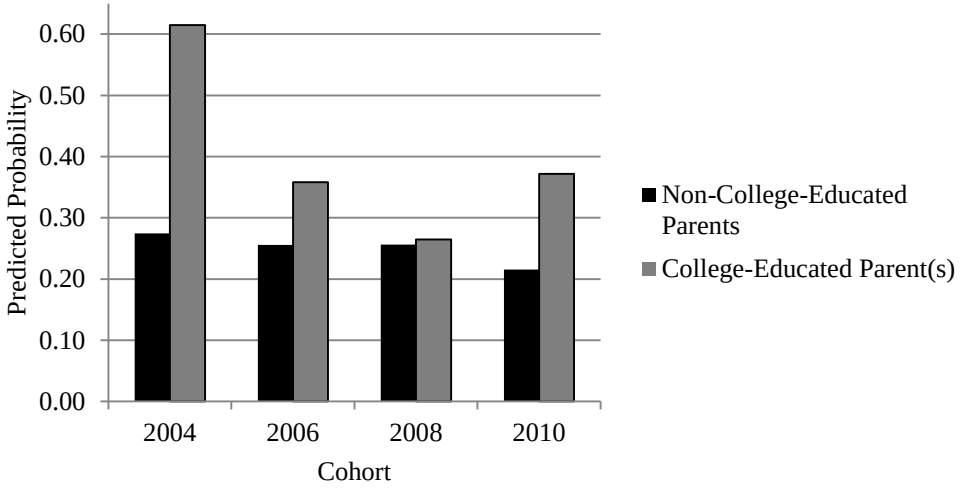

Figure 2. Predicted Probability of Being Partnered for 18-19 Year Olds, by High School Achievement

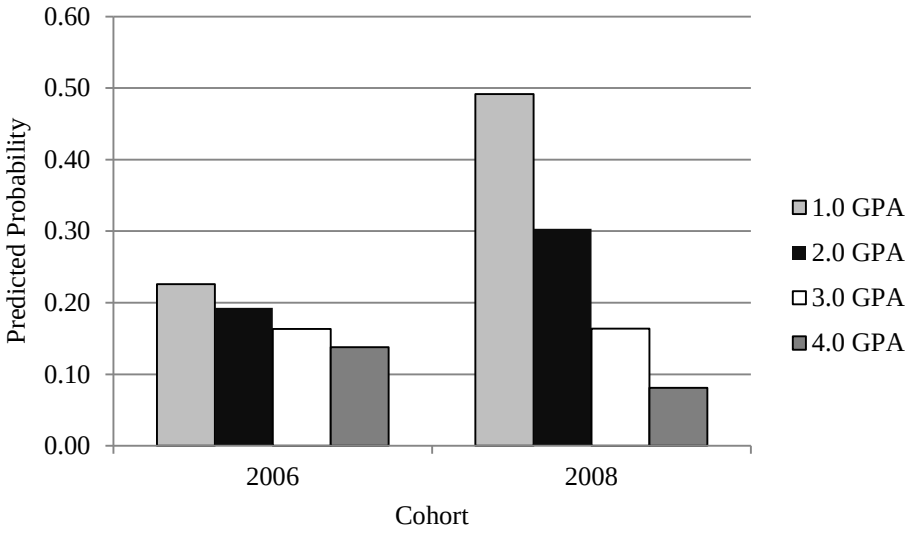

Figure 3. Predicted Probability of Being a Parent for 18-19 Year Olds, by High School Achievement