

BOOK REVIEW

Pathways to Adulthood: Educational opportunities, motivation and attainment in times of social change

Ingrid Schoon and Rainer K. Silbereisen (Eds), 2017

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This edited volume presents an interdisciplinary collection of papers on the transition to adulthood, resulting from the PATHWAYS to Adulthood Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme, funded by the Jacobs Foundation. The book has three sections exploring how the transition to adulthood and specifically educational opportunities and attainment are affected by (1) socioeconomic inequality; (2) motivation; and (3) social change.

The section on socioeconomic inequality has four chapters, which present cross-national evidence and commentary on the prevalence and potential causes of socioeconomic inequality and limited solutions to equalising educational opportunities. Jerrim and Anders review cross-national results from a variety of international assessments (e.g. PISA and PIAAC) and national longitudinal data for Australia, Canada, UK and USA to examine when socioeconomic status (SES) inequalities emerge and how they change as young people transition into adulthood. They find that SES inequality is lowest in Canada and highest in the USA through most of the youth life course and advocate for prolonged interventions across an individual's life in order to equalise opportunity. Bringing together the range of data from kindergarten to adulthood enables the reader to get a complete picture of SES inequality in education in these four countries.

Chmielweski provides convincing evidence on the prevalence of socioeconomic inequality in tracked school systems versus systems that differentiate on a course-by-course basis. She finds that SES segregation is lower in the latter and that tracking particularly affects self-concept and aspirations for university study. Low SES pupils in course-by-course systems have higher self-concept,

but lower university aspirations. This lends support for the big-fish-little-pond effect (Marsh and Parker, 1984) when it comes to self-efficacy and ties in well to the section on motivation.

Pensiero's chapter most directly addresses the question of how to equalise opportunity by presenting a framework for a mixed model of instruction, which combines common and personalised approaches, as opposed to either a comprehensive or tracked system. He presents evidence from out-of-school time, e.g. after-school study clubs, and gifted and talented programmes in the UK, arguing that the former have decreased the SES achievement gap and the latter have not increased it.

The first section concludes with a methodologically innovative chapter by Parker et al. using machine learning to analyse longitudinal data from Australia and identify the most salient predictors of university entry. The authors make a strong case for using new data techniques for 'Big Data' to analyse existing longitudinal data sets, especially when it comes to prediction, and highlight how this methodology can contribute to theory.

The second section on motivation is again composed of four chapters with a clear focus on the importance of exploring individual differences in motivation and engagement. In its first chapter, Moeller et al. focus on how best to capture engagement. They provide concrete suggestions for how to measure engagement in situation- and context-specific settings (e.g. flow theory and experience sampling method) since this type of engagement can be more malleable, and focus on subgroup analysis, e.g. based on engagement profile such as 'engaged-exhausted students',

because of the heterogeneity that exists between individuals or profiles. Cambria and Dicke follow on quite nicely from this chapter with their 'model of behavioural engagement' based on a 2x2 framework of engagement/disengagement and passive/active valence. They present the results of piloting their instrument and find that it compares well to the established scales of behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement in Fredricks et al. (2011), but offers an extension by going further into the behavioural aspects.

Tuominen et al. further make the case for exploring motivation by presenting person-oriented findings that reveal heterogeneity beneath the surface. They show that in an expectancy value theory (EVT) framework, the task value is not uniform across individuals, and make a similar case for the cost component (albeit this case is made less clearly). They conclude by advocating joining EVT and achievement goal theory (AGT), although how best to do this is left vague.

In the final chapter on motivation, Dicke provides an excellent overview of relevance interventions targeting declining motivation during schooling. She presents results for relevance interventions that focus on utility value presentation, utility value generation or combine them both. Again, there is a focus on subgroup analysis by SES and she points out that the efficacy of relevance interventions has been found to differ by the SES of individuals, which provides an interesting link back to the first section of the book.

The third section addresses social change and has five chapters setting the current context for transition to adulthood, albeit with a less clear focus on educational opportunities and attainment. Lyons-Amos provides an interesting analysis of the role of the Great Recession on fertility in the UK, finding that disadvantaged women, though normally averaging higher fertility rates than their advantaged counterparts, were more likely to delay first births in response to the economic crisis. Tomasik and Silbereisen present a model of how individuals develop in the face of social change (the Jena model) and test this model using data from Germany and Poland. These two countries are selected because of the massive social change that occurred following the end of Communism. They find that young people still in training or education are less fazed by social change (in fact they are

more likely to view it as a positive challenge) than those who have already entered the labour market.

Lechner and Silbereisen explore the role of religiosity in dealing with life uncertainties, proposing that individuals turn to religion in times of greater uncertainty or social change, that religiosity make individuals feel more certain and that it can protect them from the negative consequences of anxiety caused by uncertainty. Obschonka and Silbereisen examine entrepreneurship from a developmental perspective bringing together the biological, psychosocial and contextual factors that shape its development; while an interesting chapter, it is unclear how this fits into the book's theme of the transition to adulthood even if entrepreneurs make up a larger proportion of workers than in the past.

The final chapter of the book, by Pavlova and Silbereisen, focuses on trends in youth civic engagement over time. They examine three major social changes (changing work life, changing community life, and global migration) and how each of these has impacted young people's civic engagement, making a case for policymakers to acknowledge and promote new forms of online civic engagement.

Each section of this book provides an overview of existing evidence on its topic, some novel new methods or instruments and suggestions for how to equalise opportunity or make the transition to adulthood smoother. Special attention is paid to subgroup analysis, albeit with different subgroups across the chapters, allowing the reader to delve deeper into the underlying heterogeneity in the transition to adulthood.

One weakness of the book is the focus on a limited set of countries. While the transition to adulthood in low and middle income countries is characterised by very different challenges and perhaps warrants its own volume, several key European countries are overlooked. Given that the book proposes to examine transition in periods of social change, e.g. the Great Recession, it seems odd that there are no chapters focusing on Portugal, Italy, Greece or Spain, where youth unemployment rates were, and remain, the highest in Europe. While lack of longitudinal data surely plays a role in this, international assessment data is available for these countries. Another weakness is the at times unclear connection between the third section of the book and the overall theme of

educational opportunities and attainment during the transition to adulthood. Some of the chapters in this section do not directly address youth nor have any tangible connection to educational opportunities or attainment.

Nevertheless, *Pathways to Adulthood* makes a valuable contribution to the literature, especially in the chapters that present innovative use of

methodologies and new instruments and data (e.g. Parker et al. and Cambria and Dicke). The contributions of early career researchers to this volume showcase the promise of a new generation of academics working in this area and the effectiveness of the co-ordination provided by the editors and the Jacobs Foundation funding.

References

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News: Paper on school to work transitions wins LIVES Award

The 2nd LIVES Award for Early Scholars was won by Dr. Christian Brzinsky-Fay from WZB Berlin and presented at the opening of the SLLS annual conference in Stirling in October 2017.

[Dr Brzinsky-Fay's prize-winning paper](#), published in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, showed that vocational education and training (VET) systems facilitated occupational attainments across cohorts under different labour market conditions. However, he also identified that gender inequalities appeared.

Using sequence analysis with data from the German National Education Panel Study's adult survey (NEPS) covering five cohorts of German residents born between 1948 and 1977, Dr Brzinsky-Fay demonstrated that the proportion of young people experiencing smooth transition patterns increased over the cohorts, largely due to the rising attendance of secondary school before apprenticeship. Although they were the largest and met the poorest labour market conditions at the end of compulsory schooling, the 1965 and 1970 cohorts showed the lowest rate of non-linear school to work transitions.

Dr Brzinsky-Fay's paper considered not only the first entry into the job market, but the situation of all individuals at age 30. He thus showed that men nowadays succeed in compensating the usually longer duration of their education and display important rates of upward mobility, contrary to highly educated women. Upward mobility between first occupation and age 30 is much flatter for women across all cohorts.

The Award, which includes €2,000, aims to stimulate advances in the areas of vulnerability and life course studies. For more about the competition, visit: <https://www.lives-nccr.ch/en/award>

Dr Brzinsky-Fay is associate editor, social and economic sciences for the *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies: International Journal*.

Brzinsky-Fay, C. & Solga, H. (2016). Compressed, Postponed, or Disadvantaged? School-to-Work Transition Patterns and Early Occupational Attainment in West Germany. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, Vol. 46, Part A, pp. 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2016.01.004>