

Abstract

Social role patterning in early adulthood in the USA: Adolescent predictors and concurrent well-being across four distinct configurations

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The decade following secondary school is pivotal in setting the stage for adulthood functioning and adjustment. We identify four social role configurations of early adults in their mid-20s using latent class analyses in two nationally representative samples of American youth in their last year of secondary education (modal age 18) who were followed longitudinally into adulthood (age 25/26). We focus on the big five social role domains of early adulthood: education, residential status, employment, cohabitation/marriage, and parenthood. Aims were to identify latent classes of social role configurations in early adulthood, examine demographic and late adolescent educational predictors of these classes, and explore contemporaneous health and adjustment correlates focusing on life satisfaction, economic independence, and substance use. Four classes with very similar characteristics and prevalence were identified in the two cohorts who were born 12 years apart: Educated Students without Children (8% in 80s cohort/9% in 90s cohort); Working Singles Living with Parents (16%/18%); Educated Workers without Children (45%/46%); and Married Workers with Children (31%/27%). Late adolescent demographic and educational variables and mid-20s variables were related to class membership. Results evidenced notable similarities (and some differences) across cohorts. Discussion focuses on how roles facilitate or inhibit each other and the potential diversity of optimal patterns of transitions to adulthood.

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