AUTONOMY, AVOIDANCE, AND DELAYED ADULT TRANSITIONS

by

CHELSEY ADAMS

(Under the Direction of KARLO MAN-KIT LEI)

ABSTRACT

In the preceding decades, the timeliness with which young adults experience transitions to adulthood has been altered. Young adults now take more time to complete adult milestones such as leaving the family home and starting a family. Overarching structural changes in the economic and sociopolitical landscape that began taking shape in the 1970s have taken much of the credit for this change. However, research has revealed that changing young adult perspectives on their own "readiness" to become adults now influences their decisions to engage in these transitions. Coinciding with this paradigm shift is the rise of intensive parenting – a practice that involves sometimes excessive monitoring and autonomy restriction. Taking into account the role that parents play in "readying" their children for independent living and major decision-making, the impact of granted autonomy on transition timing is evaluated. Avoidance is considered as a mediator.

INDEX WORDS: Parenting, Autonomy, Life Course Studies, Adult Transitions, Avoidance, Emerging Adulthood

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CHELSEY ADAMS

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CHELSEY ADAMS

Major Professor:	Karlo Man-Kit Lei
Committee:	Leslie Gordon-Simons Ronald Simons

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To my mom, who I love. You will never read this dedication or this paper, but I know it will mean a lot to you all the same.

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I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Man-Kit Lei, as well as my committee members Dr. Leslie Gordon-Simons and Dr. Ronald Simons. All three have been encouraging and helpful at every single turn. Most importantly, they have been genuinely *kind* during a time where I very much needed it. I would also like to thank Yue Zhang and Stephanie Hanus. It was difficult, but with all of their powers combined, they managed to convince me that I could do this.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A New Age (Group)

Two decades have passed since Jeffrey Arnett identified emerging adulthood as a new developmental phase in the life course. Arnett's concept of emerging adulthood stemmed from changing patterns in the transition out of adolescence that he had observed in recent decades (Arnett, 2000). The transition to adulthood is marked by "a constellation of subjective indicators (e.g., feeling older compared to [others of a similar age]) and behavioral indicators (e.g., becoming a parent), that together shape future life course trajectories" (Furstenberg 2010, as cited in Turney & Lanuza, 2017).

Although the validity of emerging adulthood as a new, concrete developmental stage separate from young adulthood has been called into question, there is a general consensus among sociologists that dramatic demographic, cultural, technological, and economic changes of the 70s, 80s, and 90s have indeed resulted in a significant extension of the transition to adulthood for many adolescents (Arnett, 2000; Beckert, Chienti, & Albiero, 2020; Cote & Bynner, 2008; Furstenberg, Jr., 2010; Sironi, 2017; Sironi & Furstenberg, Jr., 2012; Twenge & Park, 2019). Traditional markers of maturity like leaving the home, becoming financially stable, participating in higher education, forming a union, and having children remain, but the timing with which they occur has changed – albeit unevenly – for all demographics (Cote & Bynner, 2008; Furstenberg, Jr., 2010; Sironi, 2017; Sironi & Furstenberg, Jr., 2012; Twenge & Park, 2019).

Pathways to Adulthood in the Life Course

Life course theorists in particular have zoned in on the concept of delayed transitions and the ripple effects they have on psychosocial development, economic and educational attainment, and family formation (Aronson, 2008; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2011; Setterson, Jr. & Ray, 2010; Smith, Crosnoe, & Chao, 2016). The theory refers to an "age-graded sequence of roles, opportunities, constraints, and events that shape the biography from birth to death'' (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008 as cited in Johnson, Crosnoe, & Edler, Jr., 2011). Life course theory's concerns with socio-historical context, agency, role transitions, sequences of life events, and cumulative effects carve out a natural space for it within the literature on changes in adult transitions (Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017).

The theory has been used to explain the effects of both macro and micro level variations (Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017; Setterson, Jr. & Ray, 2010). While macro variations like a changing labor market, differential access to higher education, and gains towards gender equality have been theorized to explain delays in adult transitions, sociologists have also pointed to accompanying trends in attitude changes.

CHAPTER 2

DELAYED TRANSITIONS

The Mechanics of Delayed Transitions

The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s saw a host of major cultural and economic changes in the United States and the West at large that coalesced to alter the timing of adult transitions. Manufacturing jobs began to vanish, technological advances in production reduced job availability, higher education became more of a necessity even as it became more expensive, the gender revolution made the job market more accessible to women, birth control gave individuals greater discretion as to when they would enter parenthood, and the age at which individuals first married and gave birth increased dramatically (Arnett, 2000; Sironi & Furstenberg, 2012; Twenge & Park, 2019). Moreover, there was a noted decline in the amount of adult activity that adolescents took part in (Twenge & Park, 2019). Fewer adolescents engaged in behavior typical of adults; the frequency or first age at which they had sex, drank alcohol, maintained full time employment, drove, and "went out" without their parents, indicating that they are now waiting much longer to take part in activities that "mark" them as burgeoning adults (Twenge & Park, 2019).

The Impact of Delays

The impact of delayed transitions cannot be understated. The timing of each one has important implications for an individual's health and well-being, interpersonal relationships and family formation, economic security, and the long-term "success" of those transitions (Barr, et al. 2016; McClendon, Kuo, & Raley, 2014; Li et al., 2019; Meier & Allen, 2008; Schneider,

Harknett, & Stimpson, 2018; Sironi & Billari, 2019; van den Berg, Kalmijn, & Leopold, 2019). Adults who experience delayed transitions tend to have diminished health and well-being relative to their counterparts (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). Inappropriate timing for each transition has been associated with adverse consequences ranging from higher levels of depression, emotional distress, and subjective well-being to poorer physical health to higher rates of substance use to self-efficacy (Carlson, 2011; Carlson & Williams, 2011; Mernitz & Dush, 2016; Mortimer et al., 2016; Ponomarenko, 2016; Vable et al., 2020; Walsemann, Hummer, & Hayward, 2018; Williams & Finch, 2019). This timing can influence the quality of an individual's relationships with parents, partners, and children (Li et al., 2019; van den Berg, Kalmijn, & Leopold, 2019).

Another important piece is that major adult transitions, when completed on time, tend to happen within a short window. These transitions overlap with one another and the completion of one transition often has a cascade effect that brings about completion of *other* transitions (Beckert, Lei, & Albiero, 2020). For example, financial independence is often cited by young adults as motivation for delaying other activities like leaving home, getting married, and having children (Hartmann & Swartz, 2006; Li et al., 2019; Sironi & Furstenberg, 2012). Leaving home is influential in and of itself; individuals are quite naturally less likely to cohabitate, marry, or have children when they maintain residence with their parents (Akin et al., 2020). Unemployment in adolescence and adulthood increases chances of unemployment later down the road, limits one's abilities to achieve financial independence, and constrains higher education opportunities (Ponomarenko, 2016). Higher education has become even more important in shaping opportunities on the marriage market and those, of course, shape opportunities to have children (Li et al., 2019).

"Reverse" transitions are also becoming more common. More young adults than ever before are reversing course and moving *back* into their parents' home due to financial instability, further stalling the completion of other major transitions (Sironi, 2017; Sironi & Furstenberg, 2012). In addition to thwarting any sense of independence, it is suggested that this return to the nest has negative consequences for a young adult's psychosocial development (Furstenberg, 2010). Navigating a sense of adulthood while still relying on their parents and living in close contact with them is difficult. This results in role conflict, which is in and of itself a great source of stress (Furstenberg, 2010). It has also been established that a young adult's off time transitions have a stress contagion effect on their parents that can reduce their subjective well-being and increase the chances that they experience stress and related chronic illnesses (Barr et al., 2018).

CHAPTER 3

CHANGING ATTITUDES

"Feeling" Like an Adult

Although macro-level factors once reigned supreme within the literature, research on adult transitions has expanded somewhat to include the impact of subjective feelings of capability and "readiness". The stage at which an individual "feels like an adult" is changing (Sironi, 2017). These feelings are now a significant part of the decisions that young adults make to engage in those behaviors marking their entrance into adulthood (Hartmann & Swartz, 2006; Sironi, 2017). However, adult transition research has not yet fully contended with the possible effects brought about by parallel changes in parent ideology that have taken place within the same time period.

The Rise of Intensive Parenting

The rise of intensive parenting, foreseen as early as the 1980s, has been startling (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Intensive parenting is "a child-centered approach that demands great parental time, financial, and emotional investments in childrearing" (Hays, 1996 as cited in Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). It has exploded in the last two decades and is now the dominant parenting ideology (Ennis, 2014; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Although a variety of factors like the aftereffects of the Great Recession have contributed to this dominance, the increasing ease with which parents in all demographics are able to monitor their children using modern technology has helped to make intensive parenting the norm (Nelson, 2012; Clark, 2014).

Intensive parenting and its related constructs – overparenting, overprotective parenting, helicopter parenting – are characterized by somewhat excessive levels of autonomy constraint and monitoring (Goger, Rozenman, & Gonzalez, 2020; Nanda et al., 2011). These behaviors in turn have a significant impact on an adolescent's ability to navigate their social world independently of their parents help.

CHAPTER 4

PARENTING IS KEY

The Long Arm of Parenting

Family research has long established that the environment in which a child is raised has serious implications for their wellbeing (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007; Pinquart, 2017). Whether evaluating a child's health, academic outcomes, social capabilities, personal relationships, criminal behavior, sex practices, or drug and alcohol use, parental behavior is singular in its overall impact (Hoskins, 2014; Pinquart, 2017; Simons et al., 2016). The effects begin during infancy and stay with individuals even after they have entered adulthood (Gorostiaga, 2019).

Of primary interest here is the way in which parents shape the problem-solving behaviors of their children. Prior research confirms that parents influence these behaviors in their everyday interactions with their children. Children react to behavioral, verbal, and visual cues like facial expressions that signify reactions to problems or negative stimuli (Fisak Jr. & Grills-Taquechel, 2007; Lebowitz et al., 2015). They then internalize the messages regarding appropriate reactions to similar problems or stimuli. Previous studies have established that "parental anxiety and modeling of anxious behaviors may contribute to maladaptive problem-solving strategies and lead to behavioral avoidance in children" (Barrett et al. 1996 & Chorpita et al. 1996, as cited in Young, et al. 2013).

Adolescent Development

A multitude of theories have addressed the impact of an individual's surroundings on their wellbeing, but self-determination theory is perhaps best suited to make sense of how the social environment facilitates personal development. Self-determination theory is concerned with the "basic psychological needs" that every individual has and how elements in their social environment can affect those needs (Deci and Ryan 2000 as cited in Fletcher et al. 2019; Gagne 2014). These basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are universal and require active development. Researchers have found support for self-determination theory's basic assumption that mental health and cognition are rooted in social environments (Darlow et al. 2017; Reed et al. 2016; Rousseau and Scharf 2015; Scharf et al. 2017; Schiffrin et al. 2013).

Adolescent Autonomy

It was Baumrind, Maccoby and Martin who theorized that parenting styles could be defined by levels of control and levels of responsiveness demonstrated towards a child (Simons & Conger 2007). This conceptualization of parenting styles remains the standard (Tussey, Tyler & Simons 2021). A key element of parental control is the amount of autonomy that a child is granted (Simons & Conger 2007). Whether this autonomy leads to positive or negative internalizing/externalizing behaviors depends on context. Levels of autonomy granted should be developmentally appropriate and paired with high levels of responsiveness; this results in better emotional development, greater confidence, a healthier attachment style, better problem-solving and decision-making abilities, decreased levels of depression and anxiety, fewer problems with deviant behavior, etc. (Simons & Conger 2007). When autonomy levels are too low or when they are paired with low levels of responsiveness, negative psychosocial outcomes are the inevitable result (Simons & Conger 2007).

Most studies on parenting behaviors that include low levels of autonomy granting have found that such behaviors have negative effects. Children who have been subject to this often develop issues like anxiety, depression, entitlement, narcissism, and other forms of psychological maladjustment (Segrin et al. 2012; Rousseau and Scharf 2015; Winner and Nicholson 2018; Perez et al. 2020; Cui, et al. 2019; Wenz et al. 2019). For instance, low levels of autonomy granting that are characteristic of overprotective parental behavior impair a child's confidence and knowledge of how to solve their own problems (Kiel and Buss 2010; Kiel and Maack 2012; Rubin, Burgins, and Hastings 2002). It appears that the constant intervention and monitoring prevents the development of adequate problem-solving abilities, which radiates into other elements of a child's mental health (Seiffge-Krenke and Pakalniskiene 2011; Karavasilis, Doyle, and Markiewicz 2003). This is also associated with social withdrawal, wariness, fear, and higher levels of behavioral inhibition in children (Clarke, Cooper, and Creswell 2013; Kiel and Buss 2010; Kiel and Maack 2012; Rubin Burgess, and Hastings 2002).

Parenting, Problems, and Solutions

One critical aspect of development relates to an individual's ability to problem solve. The development of autonomy and competence have frequently been examined in relation to this (Timko, Cronkite & Moos 2010). The tenets of self-determination theory, its focus on the development of autonomy and competence, and its ability to describe the development of problem-solving abilities make room for a possible link between autonomy and avoidance. Children who are granted less autonomy are being sent a specific message about their ability to make their own decisions. If this message is internalized, it could lead to avoidance in the face of problem solving and decision making.

The concept of avoidance is one that has been batted around among several different areas of study. This includes research on depression and anxiety, behavioral therapy, evolutionary studies, and even consumer behavior (Arnaudova, Kindt, Fanselow & Beckers 2017; Ottenbreit, Dobson & Quigley 2014). Avoidance has also been conceptualized as "a coping strategy, a problem-solving style, and a personality dimension" (Ottenbreit, et al. 2014). It has included both active and passive methods of avoidance as well as different forms like behavioral, experiential, decision, and harm reduction avoidance (Ottenbreit et al. 2014). Avoidance has been associated with greater levels of anxiety and depression, poor problem-solving and decision-making ability, and inappropriate autonomy restriction (Arnaudova et al. 2017; Young, et al. 2013). Avoidance as it relates to problem-solving and decision-making behaviors is the current object of interest. It is defined here as behavior that involves active, repeated attempts at distancing oneself from one's problems.

CHAPTER 5

THE CURRENT STUDY

Aims

In this study, the theoretical link between adolescent autonomy and delayed adult transitions will be tested. Restrictions on adolescent autonomy help shape the ways in which an adolescent views potential threats or problems. Avoidance will be tested as a mediator.

Contributions

The current study makes several contributions to the literature.

Much of what is known about delayed transitions has been driven by observations of major structural changes or variations in race, gender, socioeconomic status, and family structure. Parenting behaviors that result in individual personality differences have received comparatively little regard. In keeping with the increased role that “feelings” play in the decision to make major transitions, it stands to reason that these individual personality differences carry major weight. Neglecting them results in an incomplete picture of the driving forces behind off time transitions. Moreover, the effects of problem-solving behaviors, although critical to the successful completion of all major adult transitions, has not been adequately examined.

Another contribution is the discussion of avoidance. The examination of avoidance as a byproduct of parenting behaviors has not yet found a proper place within family studies despite the prevalence of research on both anxiety transmission from parents to children and the impact that parents have on their children’s decision-making abilities. The concept of avoidance

deserves greater consideration in a space where key factors in the development of cognition and problem-solving ability are so often discussed (Goger, Rozenman, & Gonzalez, 2020).

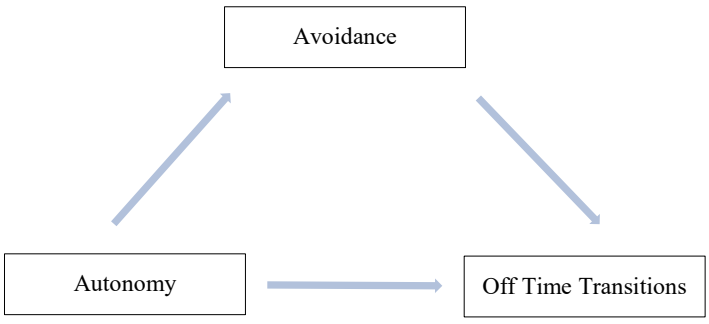
This research also examines six major adult transitions as opposed to the more traditional "big five". Measures for financial independence and living outside of the family home are included; researchers sometimes disregard the inclusion of both, but many times an inability to accurately *measure* the two plays a role. These two transitions are arguably the most influential on an individual's completion of the others. By including them, a more complete picture of the transition to adulthood begins to form.

Hypotheses

Consonant with the life course theory and self-determination theory, the following hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 1: Increased levels of autonomy will be associated with fewer delayed adult transitions.

Hypothesis 2: The link between autonomy and delayed adult transitions will be mediated by behavioral avoidance.



Conceptual Model

CHAPTER 6

METHODS

Sample

Data here is drawn from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health). The ADD Health study includes a nationally representative sample of adolescents who were in grades 7-12 when the data was first collected in 1994 ("Study Design"). Approximately 90,000 students from 132 schools completed the original self-report surveys. Researchers conducted follow up interviews with 20,745 of the youth and their primary caregivers. A second round of in-home interviews occurred roughly a year and a half later, and the third wave was collected between 2001 and 2002. The last wave was conducted in 2007-2009 and included 15,701 of the original participants.

In the first wave, adolescents and their parents were interviewed regarding home life, school environment, neighborhood, mental and physical health, family dynamics, personality traits, sociopolitical beliefs, and demographic variables ("Study Design"). The three subsequent waves did not include interviews with parents. Of note is that the ADD Health data also includes variables related to income, neighborhood characteristics, and employment.

This study includes respondents from waves one, three, and four of the ADD Health Study.

Respondents who were ages 25 or above at Wave 4 were the subject of analysis.

The final weighted sample consisted of 6,942 respondents. Missing cases were marked out and excluded from the analysis. Respondent age at Wave 1 ranged from eleven to seventeen;

the mean age for respondents at this wave was fifteen. The mean for total household income at Wave 1 was $49,000. Female respondents made up 48.62% of the sample. On average, the education level for respondent's parents was a high school degree but no college. The age range for respondents at Wave 4 was 25 to 34 years, and the mean age for respondents at this wave was 28 years.

Measures

Autonomy

As with other ADD Health research, autonomy was measured by a scale that includes six questions (α=.63). Respondents were asked about the level of autonomy granted to them by their parents with regards to decisions about their curfew, choice of friends, diet, clothing, and television viewing. (Ex: Do your parents let you make your own decisions about what you eat?). Each item was in the form of a yes/no question with 'no' coded as zero and 'yes' coded as one. Higher values indicated greater levels of autonomy.

Adult Transitions

In keeping with past literature, the following "markers" of adulthood were used to measure the transition to adulthood in Wave 4:

- Financial Independence – Financial independence was measured with two items asking respondents about whether they had received financial assistance from either of their parents.
- Union Formation – This was measured using three questions – one asking whether the respondent had ever been in a cohabitating relationship for three months or more, one asking whether the respondent had ever been married, and the other asking about the respondent's current relationship status.

- Higher Education – This was measured using one question about the highest level of education attained by the respondent.
- Parenthood – This was measured using one question about whether a previous pregnancy or instance of impregnating a partner had resulted in a live birth.
- Full Time Employment – This was measured using one question asking respondents whether they had ever worked for pay for more than 35 hours a week while not a student.
- Independent Living – This was measured using one question about the respondent's current living arrangements. Respondents were coded as either living with their parents or not. Fifteen of the respondents listed themselves as homeless and were removed from the analysis.

All transitions were coded as dichotomous variables. A completed transition was coded as '0' while incomplete transitions were coded as '1'. The number of successful transitions was summed, and each respondent was assigned a corresponding score. Higher scores indicated greater success in making timely adult transitions.

Avoidance

As in past literature using ADD Health, avoidance was measured using a singular question asking respondents how frequently they go out of their way to avoid difficult problems (Jacobson 2014). Responses were graded on a Likert scale ranging from 1) Strongly Agree to 5) Strongly Disagree. The measure has face validity and is phrased similarly to the current working definition of avoidance.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status was measured by family income and parents' educational attainment, as reported by parents. The measure for household income is identical to that used in

the ADD Health data. Income is measured in thousands. Values range from $10,000 or less to $200,000 and up. Educational attainment for each parent was measured on a scale of 1 to 6 with 1 indicating no formal education and 6 indicating that the parent had taken part in some sort of post-graduate education. Parent education was decided by the highest level of attainment achieved by either parent.

Race

Race was measured using a dichotomous variable. Respondents were categorized as white or nonwhite.

Age (W1)

Age at Wave 1 was a single-measure, continuous variable. This control was included to account for the obvious changes in granted autonomy that come with aging.

Gender

Gender was measured using a binary variable asking if the respondent was male or female.

Economic Hardship

Economic hardship was reported by primary caregivers. Caregivers were asked a singular question about their ability to pay their bills. Responses were reverse coded with '0' indicating that they were able to pay their bills and '1' indicating that they were not able to do so.

Adolescent Misconduct

Adolescent misconduct at Wave 1 was also used as a control variable to allow for the often-excluded consideration of a bidirectional effect between parenting and child behavior. Measurements for respondent behavior, delinquency, misconduct, etc. have varied somewhat in

previous ADD Health studies, but typically include at least some of the questions measuring the frequency with which adolescents had engaged in deviant behavior within the last year.

This behavior includes getting into physical altercations, shoplifting, burglary, and assault. Responses ranged from 0) Never to 3) Five or more times. In addition to this, three questions were included regarding alcohol, marijuana, and cigarette use. As a result of the small number of respondents who engaged in all of these behaviors – particularly those not related to alcohol and drug use – all variables were coded dichotomously. This approach has been taken with previous literature utilizing ADD Health data. A value of '0' indicated that respondents had never participated in a specific activity while '1' indicated that they had done so at least one or two times. The alpha for this 17-item scale was .81.

Analytic Strategy

All analyses were conducted using STATA 14. To measure the completion of each individual transition, six logistic regression models were run – one for each major transition. Afterwards, three negative binomial regression models were run to test how many cumulative transitions were missed by respondents. The first negative binomial regression model tested only the relationship between autonomy and delayed transitions, the second included all controls, and the third included the mediating variable of avoidance. Finally, a mediation model using the KHB method was included to test the direct and indirect effects of autonomy.

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS

Logistic Regression Models

The first logistic regression model tests the effects of autonomy on the transition out of the parental home. Covariates, including adolescent misconduct at Wave 1, were included in each individual transition model. The relationship between autonomy and this transition is not significant (b=-.37; *p*=.138). An increase on the autonomy scale is associated with decreased chances of delayed full-time employment. Age (b=-.120; *p*=.001), race (b=-.652; *p*=.000), parent education (b=-.106; *p*=.040), and total income (b=-.004; *p*=.011) had a significant effect as well. White respondents were more likely to live outside of the parental home by age 24 than their counterparts of color. Increased parent education was associated with an increased chance of living outside of the parental home by that age. The same effect held for those with higher levels of household income at Wave 1.

The second logistic regression model tests the effects of autonomy on delayed financial independence. The relationship between autonomy and delayed achievement of financial independence is significant (b=.536; *p*=.008). Increased levels of adolescent autonomy were associated with an increased chance of obtaining financial independence before age 25. Respondent misconduct was not significant (b=.045; *p*=.564). Age was, of course, significantly related to the timely completion of this transition (b=-1.04; *p*=.000). The effect of race was significant (b=-.343; *p*=.001). Gender (b=-1.69; *p*=.042) was as well. White respondents were

more likely to achieve financial independence from their parents before age 25. Male respondents were more likely to complete this transition on time.

The third logistic regression model tests the effects of autonomy on delayed educational attainment (bachelor's degree attainment or higher). The relationship between autonomy and delayed college graduation is significant (b=-1.068; *p*=.000). Increased levels of autonomy were associated with an increased chance of completing a bachelor's degree before age 25. Respondent misconduct at Wave 1 was significant in the model (b=.751; *p*=.000). Increases along the misconduct scale are associated with a decreased chance of completing this transition in a timely manner. Economic hardship had a significant association as well (b=.374; *p*=.002). Adolescents living in households that were experiencing economic hardship at Wave 1 were more likely to miss obtaining a bachelor's degree before age 25. The gender effect was significant (b=.299; *p*=.001) in this model. Being male was associated with a decreased chance in completing this transition before age 25. Parent education (b=-.616; *p*=.000) and total household income at Wave 1 (b=-.011; *p*=.000) were both significant. Increased parent education was associated with a decreased chance of not obtaining a degree before age 25. Increasing total household income at Wave 1 was also associated with a decreased chance of experiencing a delay in educational attainment.

The fourth regression model looks at delayed full-time employment while not in school. The relationship between autonomy and this transition is significant (b=-1.001; *p*=.018). Greater levels of autonomy increased the chances of obtaining full time employment (while not in school) before age 25. No other variables were significant in this model.

The fifth logistic regression model tests the effects of autonomy on delayed first unions. Although the relationship between autonomy and delayed first unions trended in the correct

direction, it did not approach significance (b=-.293; *p*=.200). However, adolescent misconduct at Wave 1 was significant (b=-.495; *p*=.001). Increases in misconduct were associated with an increased chance of delaying first union formation. Age at Wave 1 (b=-.128; *p*=.000), race (b=-.646; *p*=.000), gender (b=.347; *p*=.000), and parent education (b=.252; *p*=.000) were also significant. White respondents were more likely to make this transition before the age of 25. As the education level of a respondent's parents increased, their chances of completing this transition on time also increased.

The final logistic regression model tests the effects of autonomy on the transition to parenthood. The relationship between autonomy and delayed first-time parenthood is not significant (b=.115; *p*=.517). The relationship between adolescent misconduct at Wave 1 is, however (b=-.435; *p*=.000). Increases along the misconduct scale are associated with a decreased chance of having a child before age 25. Gender (b=.570; *p*=.000), parent education (b=.300; *p*=.000), and total household income at Wave 1 (b=.008; *p*=.000) all had significant effects in the model. Male respondents were more likely to miss having a child before age 25. As parent education increased, the chances that respondents missed having children before age 25 also increased. Increasing household income at Wave 1 had the same effect.

Negative Binomial Regression Models

In the initial negative binomial regression model, respondent conduct, avoidance, and controls were not included. The relationship between autonomy and the number of delayed adult transitions is significant (b=-.395; *p*=.000). Increasing levels of autonomy were associated with fewer delayed transitions.

After adding all control variables in the second negative binomial regression model, the relationship between autonomy and delayed transitions retains its significance, (b=-.212;

p=.000). Race (b=-.129; *p*=.000), gender (b=.105; *p*=.000), and age (b=-.050; *p*=.000) were all significant as well. White respondents were likely to experience fewer delayed transitions than their counterparts. The same was true for male respondents.

Autonomy remains significant after adding avoidance as a mediator into the third negative binomial regression model (b=-1.85; *p*=.000). Avoidance was significantly related to the number of delayed adult transitions (b=.062; *p*=.000) as well. Respondents who reported greater levels of avoidance were likely to experience more delayed transitions. Race (b=-.113; *p*=.000), gender (b=.102; *p*=.000), and age (b=-.049; *p*=.000) were all significant. White respondents and male respondents were likely to experience fewer delayed transitions.

Mediation Model

This model tested the direct and indirect effects of autonomy on off time transitions. Results show that the indirect effect of autonomy on off time transitions through higher levels of avoidance is significant (indirect effect = -.086, 95% CI [-.128, -.044]. *p*=.000) and accounts for 13.54% of the total effect.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Discussion

Conceptualizations of adulthood as defined by young adults contain both subjective feelings and behavioral indicators; as it becomes more socially acceptable to complete major adult transitions later in life, the "feelings" of readiness and competence that young adults have become more important in determining their next steps. Past research has found that both autonomy and avoidance are associated with variations in problem-solving ability, decision making, and perceived competence. Children model their own anxious behavior after their parents and look to them for cues regarding how to react to negative events. This research supports the argument that low levels of autonomy send a message to adolescents that they are not competent enough to do their own decision-making.

Drawing from life course theory and self-determination theory, I hypothesized that greater levels of autonomy would be associated with fewer off time adult transitions (Hypothesis 1) and that this relationship would be mediated by avoidance (Hypothesis 2). Both hypotheses were supported by the results. However, the differences in the impact on individual transitions versus the impact on the cumulative measure are interesting.

Off time transitions to independent living, union formation, and parenthood were not significantly impacted by levels of autonomy granted to respondents. With regards to union formation, there is little literature to which I can compare my results. However, one study on the relationship between the timeliness of marriage and needs satisfaction (autonomy, relatedness,

competency) found that individuals who believed that they were “on time” for marriage expressed greater needs satisfaction (Pekel-Uludağlı & Akbaş, 2018). Research on the link between the timing of parenthood and autonomy is similarly scarce, although living in a house with strictly imposed rules has been associated with a speedier transition to parenthood for men (Hofferth & Goldschedier, 2010). There is a little more in the way of research on leaving home. Autonomy supportive parenting has been associated with leaving the parental home earlier (Akin et al., 2020).

The impact of the covariates for socioeconomic status, race, and gender varied from model to model as well. In the final negative binomial regression model measuring the number of cumulative off time transitions, the addition of avoidance as a mediator eliminated the significance of socioeconomic status while race and gender remained impactful. At least one measure of socioeconomic status was significant in each of the individual transition models, with the exclusion of the models for educational attainment and full-time employment. This break with the literature can possibly be attributed to the measures for educational attainment (which will be discussed later) or the stipulation that full-time employment as measured in this study requires that respondents have been employed while *not* in school.

Race was significant for all major transitions excluding educational attainment and full-time employment. Although the stipulation attached to the full-time employment measure may be a factor here, another possible explanation for this break in the literature is that the variable was measured dichotomously. All respondents were labeled as white or nonwhite. This might obscure between group differences among respondents of color.

Gender was significant in each of the individual transition models excluding leaving the parental home and maintaining full-time employment while not in school. Studies on the gender

effects of home leaving have found conflicting results, so either outcome was likely (Akin et al., 2020). As for the break in previous literature on gender and employment, this could be due to gender differences in higher education participation.

Several steps were taken to improve on previous studies. First, the inclusion of six transitions instead of five was used. Second, respondent misconduct at Wave 1 was included to account for potential bidirectional effects between adult and adolescent behavior. Third, prospective reporting was used rather than retrospective reporting.

Study Limitations

There are some notable study limitations. First, levels of autonomy as granted by parents were reported only by respondents. It is preferable to obtain such measures from both children and parents. Otherwise, there is only a report of a child's *perception* of parenting behaviors.

Second, attainment of a four-year degree as a measure of adulthood is a bit more unwieldy than the others. Completion of a four-year degree is not as "universal" as the other transitions, and access to higher education is still heavily constrained by socioeconomic status. In addition to this, alternate education pathways deserve consideration. The completion of two-year degrees or graduation from trade schools serve the same purpose as graduation from a four-year college. However, those who achieved those academic milestones and not a bachelor's degree were deemed to have experienced a delayed transition.

Another of the measures, the exit from the parental home, may capture some individuals who completed and then "reversed" this transition. As moving back to the parental home becomes more and more common, it is possible that some respondents who took this route were grouped with those who never left at all.

There is also the matter of the avoidance measure. Although it has considerable face validity, avoidance as a construct is better measured using a scale. Unfortunately, this was not possible using the questions within the ADD Health data. Future research should incorporate a more robust measure of avoidance.

Future Directions

As demonstrated here, autonomy restrictive or supportive parenting behaviors do indeed impact the timeliness of adult transitions. The study also makes important connections between two overarching trends that have taken place at the same time – the increased variation in the transition to adulthood and major changes in behaviors related to intensive parenting. The increase of autonomy-restrictive practices has been an issue for some time now. In the absence of evidence suggesting that this is changing, it is vital that family researchers expand their focus to include a more complete picture of how these practices influence adjustment in young adulthood. The effect of helicopter parenting, overparenting, overprotective parenting, etc. on the timing of adult transitions should be evaluated in the future.

This study yielded some interesting results with regards to race, gender, and socioeconomic status on individual transitions. One or more of these factors would be worthy of consideration in future research as a potential moderator in the relationship between autonomy and off time transitions.

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Table 1

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Delayed Transitions	6943	1.7578	1.1228	0	6
Autonomy	6943	.7263	.2188	0	1
Avoidance	6943	2.7282	1.1129	1	5
Misconduct	6943	-.0156	.4938	-.432	2.717
Age	6943	15.2800	1.7740	11	21
Economic Hardship	6943	.1551	.3620	0	1
Parent Education	6943	2.9990	1.2478	0	5
Total Income	6943	49.4828	46.3476	0	999

Table 2

Table 2 – Correlation Matrix

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Transitions	1.000*									
(2) Autonomy	-0.152*	1.000*								
(3) Avoidance	0.148*	-0.104*	1.000*							
(4) Misconduct	-0.044*	0.091*	0.048*	1.000*						
(5) Age (W1)	-0.169*	0.398*	-0.056*	0.103*	1.000*					
(6) Economic Hardship	0.044*	-0.025*	0.042*	0.044*	0.017*	1.000*				
(7) Parent Education	-0.070*	0.043*	-0.108*	-0.029*	-0.024*	-0.152*	1.000*			
(8) Total Income	-0.056*	0.059*	-0.092*	-0.031*	0.034*	-0.177*	0.376*	1.000*		
(9) Gender	0.080*	-0.007*	0.028*	0.141*	0.028*	-0.018*	0.002*	-0.021*	1.000	
(10) Race	0.111*	-0.045*	-0.124*	-0.025*	0.030*	-0.173*	0.182*	-0.155*	-0.008	1.000

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Figure 1

Regression Model 1 – Leaving Parental Home							
Living	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-.37	.248	-1.50	.138	-.86	.12	
Misconduct	-.091	.106	-0.85	.395	-.301	.12	
Age	-.12	.036	-3.35	.001	-.191	-.049	**
Economic Hardship	.056	.13	0.43	.671	-.202	.313	
Race	-.652	.123	-5.30	.000	-.895	-.408	***
Gender	.081	.118	0.69	.491	-.152	.314	
Parent Education	-.106	.051	-2.07	.040	-.207	-.005	*
Total Income	-.004	.001	-2.59	.011	-.007	-.001	*

**** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 2

Regression Model 2 – Financial Independence (*N*=6943)							
Financial Independence	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-.536	.2	-2.68	.008	-.931	-.14	**
Misconduct	.045	.077	0.58	.564	-.107	.196	
Age	-.104	.024	-4.39	.000	-.151	-.057	***
Economic Hardship	-.138	.095	-1.46	.147	-.325	.049	
Race	-.343	.098	-3.50	.001	-.536	-.149	***
Gender	-.169	.082	-2.06	.042	-.331	-.006	*
Parent Education	.009	.03	0.29	.775	-.051	.068	
Total Income	.001	.001	1.94	.055	0	.003	

**** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 3

Regression Model 3 – Bachelor's Degree Attainment (*N*=6943)							
Bachelor	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-1.068	.219	-4.87	.000	-1.502	-.634	***
Misconduct	.751	.11	6.84	.000	.534	.969	***
Age	.016	.027	0.59	.557	-.038	.071	
Economic Hardship	.374	.12	3.11	.002	.136	.612	**
Race	.055	.103	0.53	.601	-.149	.258	
Gender	.299	.085	3.51	.001	.13	.468	***
Parent Education	-.616	.042	-14.51	.000	-.7	-.532	***
Total Income	-.011	.002	-5.38	.000	-.015	-.007	***

**** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 4

Regression Model 4 – Full Time Employment (*N*=6943)							
Employment	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-1.001	.416	-2.41	.018	-1.823	-.178	*
Misconduct	-.447	.3	-1.49	.138	-1.041	.146	
Age	.003	.063	0.04	.966	-.121	.126	
Economic Hardship	.109	.178	0.61	.543	-.244	.462	
Race	-.229	.193	-1.18	.239	-.611	.154	
Gender	-.297	.202	-1.47	.143	-.696	.102	
Parent Education	-.02	.07	-0.28	.779	-.159	.12	
Total Income	-.003	.002	-1.27	.207	-.007	.002	

**** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 5

Regression Model 5 – Unions (*N*=6943)							
Union	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-.293	.227	-1.29	.200	-.742	.156	
Misconduct	-.495	.139	-3.56	.001	-.771	-.22	***
Age	-.128	.035	-3.66	.000	-.197	-.059	***
Economic Hardship	.067	.126	0.53	.597	-.183	.317	
Race	-.646	.112	-5.75	.000	-.868	-.424	***
Gender	.347	.087	4.00	.000	.175	.519	***
Parent Education	.252	.043	5.82	.000	.166	.338	***
Total Income	.001	.001	1.64	.105	0	.003	

**** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 6

Regression Model 6 – Parenthood (*N*=6943)							
Parenthood	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	.115	.177	0.65	.517	-.235	.464	
Misconduct	-.435	.073	-5.95	.000	-.58	-.291	***
Age	-.183	.026	-7.15	.000	-.234	-.133	***
Economic Hardship	.081	.093	0.88	.382	-.102	.265	
Race	.031	.096	0.32	.752	-.16	.221	
Gender	.57	.069	8.30	.000	.434	.705	***
Parent Education	.3	.034	8.75	.000	.232	.368	***
Total Income	.008	.001	5.76	.000	.005	.011	***

**** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 7

Negative Binomial Regression Model 1 (*N*=6943)							
Transitions	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-.395	.051	-7.76	.000	-.495	-.294	***

**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Figure 8

Negative Binomial Regression Model 2 (*N*=6943)							
Transitions	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-.212	.057	-3.72	.000	-.325	-.099	***
Misconduct	-.03	.024	-1.27	.207	-.077	.017	
Parent Education	-.019	.01	-1.82	.071	-.039	.002	*
Economic Hardship	.038	.024	1.56	.121	-.01	.086	
Total Income	0	0	-0.60	.548	-.001	0	
Race	-.129	.023	-5.51	.000	-.175	-.083	***
Gender	.105	.023	4.63	.000	.06	.149	***
Age	-.05	.008	-6.23	.000	-.066	-.034	***

**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Figure 9

Negative Binomial Regression Model 3 (*N*=6943)							
Transitions	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Autonomy	-.185	.055	-3.34	.001	-.295	-.076	**
Avoidance	.062	.012	5.29	.000	.039	.085	***
Misconduct	-.037	.024	-1.57	.119	-.084	.01	
Parent Education	-.015	.01	-1.48	.142	-.034	.005	
Economic Hardship	.038	.025	1.53	.130	-.011	.086	
Total Income	.000	0	-0.29	.772	0	0	
Race	-.113	.024	-4.78	.000	-.159	-.066	***
Gender	.102	.022	4.64	.000	.058	.145	***
Age	-.049	.008	-6.04	.000	-.065	-.033	***

**** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 10

Decomposition using the KHB-Method
Decomposition using the KHB-Method
Model-Type: ologit Number of obs = 6943
Variables of Interest: Autonomy Pseudo R^2 = 0.03
Z-variable(s): Avoidance
Concomitant: Misconduct Age Economic Hardship Race Gender Parent Education Total Income

		Robust				
Transitions	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95%Conf.	Interval]
Autonomy						
Reduced	-0.633	0.154	-4.120	0.000	-0.935	-0.332
Full	-0.548	0.154	-3.570	0.000	-0.849	-0.247
Diff	-0.086	0.021	-4.010	0.000	-0.128	-0.044

Summary of confounding

Variable	Conf_ratio	Conf_Pct	Resc_Fact
Autonomy	1.157	13.540	1.001

Components of Difference

Z-Variable	Coef.	Std_Err	P_Diff	P_Reduced
Autonomy				
Avoidance	-0.086	0.021	100.000	13.540