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Preparing Students for Adulthood: Comparing the Experiences of Degree and Non-Degree Seeking Graduates

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The role of secondary education is critical to preparing graduates for adulthood. This study explored the transition experiences of high school graduates and factors that impacted their preparation for adulthood. This descriptive study focused on the experiences of degree and non-degree-seeking graduates. Surveys were distributed to students enrolled in a general education course at a state university and marketing research participants not enrolled in post-secondary programs. The survey sought to identify overall preparedness, responsibilities deemed necessary to teach in high school, and influence factors that prepared them for adulthood. The overall findings displayed that graduates seeking degrees felt more prepared for adulthood. While both groups agreed that many adulthood-responsibility topics should be taught, degree-seekers found less value in teaching parenting skills in a high school class despite identifying that parents have a more significant impact on preparing them for adulthood. Researchers recommend that in addition to college and career-ready curricula, instruction should include preparation topics that align with 21st-century markers that better support non-degree-seeking graduates toward successful transitions into adulthood.

Keywords*:* adulthood transition, adulthood literacy, adulthood preparation

Introduction

Events in 21st-century society have transformed adulthood and the transitional experiences entering adulthood. The adjective *adult* is defined as "fully developed and mature" (Adult, 2023). In modern context, the term adult has been modified using the verb term *adulting,* shifting from a person's characteristics to emphasizing their lived experiences. This shift in the meaning of adulthood also displays alternative perceptions of adult responsibilities and proficiencies. For example, posts on social media platforms using the identifiers #adulting and #adultfail carry a literary tone exhibiting feelings of fear and frustration toward adulthood competency. "Adulting is scary, and honestly I feel so cheated by school because no one taught us those [sic] stuff we ACTUALLY need to know. #adulting" (AmberlynClick, 2018). As educators, we may cringe when hearing such critiques, knowing that students are presented with opportunities and curricula that support their emergence into adulthood.

Evaluating the experiences of the youngest members of the millennial generation, born between 1982 and 2004 (Strauss & Howe, 1997), can inform stakeholders about the educational needs of Generation Z and Generation Alpha to prepare them for life as an adult. Observing millennials' behaviors offers insight into the modern realities of adulthood and adulthood preparation (Arnett, 2010). While criticisms of millennials cite high levels of narcissism, laziness, and apathy, these complaints are associated with the five traditional markers of adulthood used throughout the 20th century: (a) completing an education, (b) attaining a career, (c) living independently, (d) entering marriage, and (d) having children (Arnett, 2000, 2007, 2018; Katsiaficas, 2017; Oesterle et al., 2010; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Shanahan, 2000; Twenge, 2013). On the surface, millennials are the most educated and technologically literate generation to date, yet they report higher levels of unemployment and poverty, along with lower levels of wealth and income than the two preceding generations (Cramer, 2014; Cutler, 2015; McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014).

In response to the educational push for college and career readiness, many millennials chose to seek advanced degrees to secure their path to adulthood. Post-secondary education and training options include higher education institutions, certified training programs, apprenticeships, and more. Despite the benefits of other post-secondary options, the four-year degree remains a universal go-to assumption for preparation for long-term success. Yet, the American dream of financial liberation through higher education has not guaranteed stability and is vocalized by those impacted. "Adulthood is basically just deciding whether you pay your student loans or health insurance each month. Living the dream my friends, living the dream. #adulting #studentloans #millennialproblems" (SaralynV, 2018). Unfortunately, within the early years of the 21st century, young adults not seeking post-secondary degrees or training have been at greater risk of struggling as modern environments for the working class were observed to increase financial instability (Silva, 2012). A lack of post-secondary education has also expanded the equality gap among classes and resources available to prepare the youth for adulthood (Chen, 2018). Contemporary movements to bring more recognition to alternative routes for education and training have begun to utilize credentialing opportunities (Kato et al., 2020; Zanville & Travers, 2022). As industry and post-secondary institutions continue to adapt to 21st-century realities by providing more opportunities for advancing one's education and skills, certain demographic groups continue to lack access to these prospects (Carnevale et al., 2022). Since education standards are designed to support all students, there seems to be a disconnect between the traditional markers and methods to prepare adolescents for adulthood aligned with the climate of the 21st century.

Adolescents' exposure to opportunities preparing them for life after high school is subject to innumerable combinations of factors within the home and other social environments. The education system provides the most consistent commonality, providing all students with the same content and learning experiences constructed from national and state learning standards (Holmstrom et al., 2002). While learning expectations may focus on college and career readiness (Imperatore & Hyslop, 2017), preparing students for life extends beyond academic knowledge and employability. The

skills supporting daily responsibilities and functioning can be referred to as life skills; however, the researcher will refer to these stills as *adulthood literacy*. Career and Technical Education supports adulthood literacy, providing the skills to complete tasks and functions associated with the broad responsibilities of adult life. Depending on the verbiage used in education standards, career-ready skills can be mistakenly synonymous with college preparation skills. While this linkage is not necessarily negative, it does fail to represent a substantial population of adolescents who will not engage in post-secondary education or training. Because of the inherent connection between career preparation and college readiness, this article identifies individuals pursuing two- or four-year degrees as degree-seekers. Conversely, those graduates pursuing alternative vocational training or choosing not to pursue post-secondary education are referred to as non-degree seekers. The references do not imply differences in the rigor or quality of programs.

The inequality of preparation for life among non-degree-seeking graduates was discussed in the 1988 report, *The Forgotten Half* (as cited in Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 2015). This report brought awareness to the struggles of this population regarding career prospects, respectful societal recognition, and the ability to reach traditional adulthood markers. Since the report's release, secondary education standards have focused on students pursuing degrees in higher education rather than non-academic opportunities. High school environments provide heavily structured and closely monitored support systems focused on student success. Degree-seeking graduates can transition into higher education environments, offering more autonomy and responsibility while offering abundant resources and services to facilitate student success. Resources include but are not limited to financial support, health services for physical and mental well-being, career coaching and preparation, food pantries, and student housing. These resources and possible supplemented support from family and the students themselves support progress toward meeting traditional adulthood markers. Non-degree seekers, however, are not transitioning into environments where an equivalent of ample resources is readily available as they embark into adulthood. If using the traditional markers to identify adulthood proficiency, non-degree seekers are expected to display competency despite access to fewer marker-related resources than their counterparts. High expectations and fewer supports increase the risk of failing to complete one or more traditional adulthood markers (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Silva, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

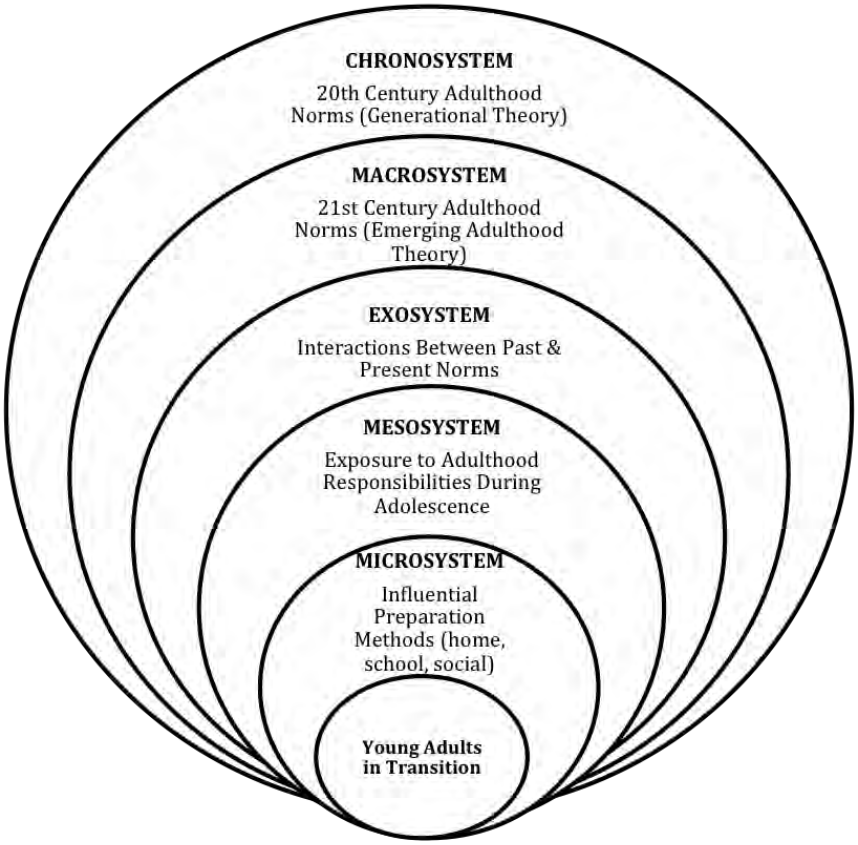
A comprehensive approach to adulthood preparation is challenging because individuals' backgrounds, resources, and lived experiences are unique. The evolving dynamics of societies also impact what a proficient transition into adulthood looks like. The theoretical framework utilizes the structure of the Chronosystems Model of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (2005) (see Figure 1). Two additional theories within the framework represent contemporary situations impacting millennials' experiences: the Generational Theory (Strauss & Howe, 1997) and the Emerging Adulthood Theory (Arnett, 1998, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Ecological Systems Theory illustrates the connectivity between environmental systems that progressively impact the human experience during development. Each environment is nested into another, identifying the level of impact. Within the theoretical framework, the young adult and their level of preparation for adulthood are positioned to be primarily influenced by factors within the microsystem immediately surrounding the individual, including the home, school, and other social environments. Extending further in the framework are two influential environments where the young adult's level of engagement varies from person to person. First is their exposure to adulthood responsibilities throughout childhood and adolescence (Mesosystem), and second is their experiences merging the 21st-century norms within systems constructed by traditionally held norms of the 20th century (Exosystem). The final framework environments demonstrate the juxtaposition of modern experiences challenging a universal understanding of what adulthood is and is not. The Emerging Adulthood Theory (Arnett, 1998) represents a 21st-century realism that a hidden stage of life exists between adolescence and adulthood (Macrosystem). The theory was constructed after observing that the behaviors of millennials, ages 18 to 25, contradicted the traditional adulthood markers. New markers have been identified to represent millennials' lived experiences: financial independence, taking responsibility for self, and independent decision-making (Arnett, 2000). However, these new markers have yet to be included, along with traditional markers as adulthood indicators.

The final environment within the theoretical framework (Chronosystem) is guided by the Generational Theory, identifying generational differences in adulthood perception based on lived experiences (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The theory recognizes how "events shape the personalities of different age groups differently according to their phase of life, and how people retain those personality differences as they grow older" (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 34). The experiences of each generation imprint generational ideologies as they forge their way through transitional periods during social and economic fluctuations, thus creating expectations for future generations to follow. The different experiences result in older generations holding critical opinions of younger generations, disapproving of their behaviors and decision-making, and not recognizing their contributions as they enter adulthood.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Purpose and Objectives. While ample research describes the experiences of high school graduates transiting into adulthood, the literature predominately represents the lived experiences of college students. This study aimed to explore the perceptions and transition experiences of young adults aged 18 to 25 who represent the transition experiences discussed in the Emerging Adulthood Theory within the theoretical framework (Arnett, 2000). A specific emphasis of the research was to explore the experiences of non-degree seekers compared to degree-seekers to identify if adulthood preparation methods equally support the various trajectories of high school graduates' futures. The research objectives for this study were:

1. Determine graduates' perceptions of responsibilities necessary to prepare adolescents for adulthood.
2. Determine the most influential factors preparing graduates for adulthood.

3. Determine any differences in transitional experiences among graduates.

Methods

To address the purpose and objectives of this study, a descriptive, cross-sectional design was used. Due to the substantial child, adolescent, and young adult population residing within Utah (Fray, 2018; U.S. Census, 2018), recruitment was focused on participants who graduated from a Utah high school. The study was approved by the Internal Review Board at Utah State University and followed all procedures of consent and anonymity. An online instrument was distributed to two groups in the spring of 2019. Group A consisted of students at a four-year university (degree seekers) enrolled in a general education course at Utah State University. Group B included participants who were not enrolled in a four-year college (non-degree seekers). These participants received their survey through Centiment, a national online marketing research service. Distributing surveys through the Centiment platform provided a balanced representative pool of non-degree-seeking respondents to address the research objective.

The survey instrument was created using relevant literature as well as Utah and national education standards. Multiple expert panels were consulted to ensure the instrument's validity before and after a pilot of the instrument (Colton & Covert, 2007). The 16-question instrument included a variety of question formats requiring participants to identify singular or multiple responses, ranked responses, and Likert scale responses. The survey sought to explore participants' adulthood transition experiences, including their readiness for adulthood and what influential factors provided guidance for adult responsibilities. A section of the survey focused on adulthood literacy, asking participants to rank the importance of teaching specific adulthood responsibilities in high school. The survey was uploaded to Qualtrics and distributed to both groups. Cronbach's alpha was used to confirm high reliability, with the instrument's internal consistency for group A and group B measuring at $\alpha = 0.89$.

Among the 115 participants recruited for group A, a link to the Qualtrics survey was distributed via email, with 39 participants completing the survey. The participant recruits for this group were sent two reminder emails over three weeks. For group B, a link to Qualtrics was distributed through Centiment, where 287 participants who met the criterion questions completed the survey. Due to the nature of the Centiment platform, the survey remained open for interested participants for three weeks and was closed when responses ceased. Centiment provides compensation to survey completers. Between both groups, there was a total of 326 participants who met the criteria of being between 18 and 25 and having graduated from a Utah high school.

Data from both groups was uploaded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to effectively capture the characteristics of the instrument and the sample in this study. The use of the Mann-Whitney *U* test supports the comparison of ordinal data (summated scaled responses) between the two independent groups with disparate response sizes (Mertens, 2014). In the data analysis, the Mann-

Whitney *U* test detected sensitive differences within the distribution of scores between group A ($n = 39$) and group B ($n = 287$).

Findings

Demographic information was collected to understand the adulthood experiences shared in the survey. Additionally, this information provided context to the overall findings of the study. For instance, none of the degree seekers had children at the time of the survey, while 26.5% ($n = 76$) of non-degree seekers were parents. As for employment, more non-degree seekers were employed full-time (46.3%, $n = 133$) or unemployed (34.8 %, $n = 100$), while the majority (82.1%, $n = 32$) of degree seekers were employed part-time. The survey did not include a follow-up question to employment responses to elaborate on the reason for unemployment. The participants' living situations also identified variations in adulthood experiences as most degree seekers lived in more independent situations, alone, with a significant other, or with roommates (61.5%, $n = 24$). In comparison, the largest number of non-degree seekers resided within dependent living situations, residing with parents or extended family (44.3%, $n = 127$).

While the difference between groups A and B was the enrollment in a four-year university, data from group B displayed additional post-secondary education and training. Due to the nature of the environment for group A, 100% of participants were enrolled in a four-year university. Among group B participants, 0% were enrolled in a community college program, 3% ($n =11$) were participating in a certified training program, and 21% ($n =60$) reported enrollment in an alternative education or training program. The majority (75%, $n =216$) were not enrolled in any post-secondary program. Table 1 provides a complete list of reported participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Group A ($n = 39$)		Group B ($n = 287$)	
Demographic variable	*f*	%	*f*	%
Age				
18-19	10	25.6%	69	24%
20-21	16	41%	64	22.3%
22-23	12	30.7%	73	25%
24-25	1	2.6%	82	28.5%
Children				
Yes	0	0%	76	26.5%
No	39	100%	211	73.5%
Employment				
Full-time	2	5.1%	133	46.3%
Part-time	32	82.1%	54	18.8%
Unemployed	5	12.8%	100	34.8%
Living Situation				
Living with roommate	24	61.5%	53	18.5%
Living alone	1	2.6%	18	6.3%

Living with spouse	11	28.2%	55	19.2%
Living with family	3	7.7%	80	27.8%
Living with a significant other	0	0%	65	22.6%
Living with others	0	0%	16	5.6%
Post-Secondary Enrollment				
4-year university/college	39	100%	0	0%
2-year community/college	0	0%	0	0%
Certified training program	0	0%	11	4%
Other	0	0%	60	21%
Not enrolled	0	0%	216	75%

The first research objective sought to identify significant differences in adulthood preparation levels among degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking graduates. More degree seekers (79.2%) indicated that they felt more prepared to transition into adulthood (Mann-Whitney U = 4394, p = .021) compared to non-degree seekers (17.9%). The primary analysis for this objective looked at differences between the two groups. However, when breaking down responses of non-degree seekers, two (18%) participants in certified training programs and 16 (27%) participants in other post-secondary programs reported feeling prepared for adulthood.

The second objective examined differences in the perception of teaching adulthood responsibility topics in high school. Participants ranked adulthood responsibilities based on how important they felt the concept was to teach to students—the listed responsibilities aligned with concepts from the literature representing traditional and 21st-century markers. Responsibility topics included living independently, budgeting money, self-awareness, career preparation, healthy relationship behaviors, parenting, family finance planning, service, and effective communication. As seen in Table 2, there were similar findings between groups in eight of the nine areas. The responsibility of parenting showed the only significant difference (Mann-Whitney U = 3716.0, p = .001). Over half of degree-seekers (61.4%) reported parenting as low importance, while over a quarter of non-degree seekers (26.1%) reported the same. Adulthood responsibilities found to be equally important between groups were budgeting money (53.8%-degree, 53.7% non-degree), effective communication (51.3%-degree, 39.3% non-degree), living independently (38.5%-degree, 38.7 non-degree), and healthy relationship behaviors (41.1% degree, 25.4% non-degree).

Table 2

Adulthood Responsibilities Perceived as Important to College and Non-college Participants Summary

Important Content	Group A HI/MI/LI *f* *(%)*	Group B HI/MI/LI *f* *(%)*	Mann-Whitney U *U* *p* value
Living Independently	15/18/6 (38.5/46.1/15.4)	111/77/99 (38.7/26.8/34.5)	U = 5202.0 p =.471
Budgeting Money	21/14/4 (53.8/35.8/7.7)	154/31/102) (53.7/10.8/35.5)	U = 5040.5 p =.306

Self-Awareness	10/16/13 (25.7/35.9/33.3)	108/86/93 (25.7/41.1/33.3)	U = 5400.0 *p* =.719
Career Preparation	14/12/13 (35.9/30.8/33.3)	70/139/78 (24.4/48.4/27.2)	U = 5510.5 *p* =.875
Healthy Relationship Behaviors	14/17/8 (41.1/46.2/20.5)	73/165/49 (25.4/57.5/17)	U = 5400.5 *p* =.719
Parenting	6/8/24 (15.4/20.6/61.4)	73/136/78 (25.4/47.4/26.1)	U = 3716.0 *p* =.001*
Family Finance Planning	10/12/17 (25.7/30.8/43.6)	64/106/117 (25.7/30.8/40.8)	U = 5552.0 *p* =.935
Community Involvement Through Service	6/6/26 (15.4/15.4/82)	94/45/148 (32.7/15.7/51.6)	U = 4575.0 *p* =.101
Effective Communication	10/13/6 (51.3/33.3/15.4)	113/73/100 (39.3/25.4/35.2)	U = 4737.0 *p* =.117

Note. HI = high importance, MI = moderate importance, LI = low importance. Following data analysis, most important, 2nd choice, and 3rd choice of influence were collapsed into the high importance column, while 4th, 5th, and 6th choices were collapsed into the moderately important column, and least important, 8th, and 7th choice were collapsed into the low importance column for reporting purposes only.

*Denotes results displaying statistical significance. An effect size is not measurable with the Mann-Whitney U analysis.

The theoretical framework was utilized for the final objective to identify what factors of the microsystem were most influential in preparing adolescents for adulthood. Table 3 displays the frequencies and percentages of recognized influence. The six choices of influential factors were parents, grandparents, friends, media, high school, and self. Rank options ranged from *most* to *least influential,* with four sequential options in between. Two of the six factors displayed significant differences in impact on each group. More degree seekers (77%) than non-degree seekers (58.6%) reported that parents were the most influential factor in preparing them for adulthood (Mann-Whitney U = 4394.5, p =.000). On the opposite scale of impact, media was identified by more degree seekers (71.8%) than non-degree seekers (56.8%) as being the least influential factor in preparing for adulthood (Mann-Whitney U = 3231.0, p = .000).

Table 3

Adulthood Preparation Influence Factors for College and Non-college Participants Summary

	Degree Seekers		Non-degree Seekers		
	MI	LI	MI	LI	Mann-Whitney *U*
	f	*f*	*f*	*f*	*U*
Influence Factor	*(%)*	*(%)*	*(%)*	*(%)*	*p* value
Parent	30/9 (77)	9 (23)	168/119 (58.6)	119 (41.4)	*U* = 3626.0 *p* = .000*
Grandparents	11 (28.2)	26 (66.6)	135 (47)	152 (53)	*U* = 4377.5 *p* =.078
Friends	17 (43.6)	21 (53.9)	138 (48)	149 (51.8)	*U* = 4943.5 *p* =.336

Media	9	28	124	163	U = 3231.0
	(23.2)	(71.8)	(43.2)	(56.8)	p = .000*
High school courses	18	21	142	145	U = 5551.0
	(46.2)	(53.8)	(49.5)	(50.5)	p =.933
Self	28	11	156	131	U = 4891.0
	(71.8)	(28.2)	(54.4)	(45.6)	p =.193

Note. MI = more influential, LI = less influential. Following data analysis, the more influential, 2nd choice, and 3rd choice of influence were collapsed into the more influential column, and the least influential, 5th, and 4th choice of influence were collapsed into the less influential column for reporting purposes only.
*Denotes results displaying statistical significance. An effect size is not measurable with the Mann-Whitney U analysis.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

When examining the demographic findings from this study, it can be concluded that degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking graduates display some differences in lived experiences and perceived levels of preparation for adulthood. Almost three times as many non-degree-seeking participants were unemployed compared to degree participants. One consideration for this may be attributed to the education and training requirements for many careers in the workforce. Without education or post-secondary training, graduates are limited in their options for career futures. This exemplifies the conflicting interactions of old and new environments within the exosystem. The evolution of workforce environments is becoming more progressive. However, industries and educational systems led by older-generation stakeholders have yet to reach a point where they fully complement one another to merge the needs and goals of both systems for younger generations (Carnevale et al., 2022).

The level of autonomy between groups was noticeable, as twice as many degree seekers reported preparing for adulthood by themselves. This discrepancy highlights the lack of recognized autonomy among high school graduates. Experiences concerning independent living between both groups also display distinct variances. Degree seekers were more prepared to live in independent situations without another adult of authority. In contrast, non-degree seekers were more likely to reside with family members considered head of the household. This finding supports a prior study on millennials that found when young adults co-reside with parents, it results in lower life satisfaction levels (Kins & Beyers, 2010). Low life satisfaction would impact one's perception of adulthood proficiency.

The most profound finding regarding factors that prepare adolescents for adulthood confirms the importance of incorporating adult responsibilities and conversations into the microsystem. Parents, school, friends, and media were found to influence how participants engaged in adulthood. These findings support multiple studies that position parents as a dominating influence in the developmental stages leading to adulthood (Larson et al., 2002). For example, the works of Bouchard & Lachance-Grezla (2016) and Clarke et al. (2005) corroborate that adolescent exposure to positive financial behaviors from parents increases financial literacy during adulthood transitions. The impact of such financial literacy is critical for future generations, considering that 68% of millennials classify themselves as financially precarious or at risk (Sinha et al., 2018).

The increased resources available to high school students within the last three decades to introduce, prepare, and support graduates to engage with post-secondary education have increased college enrollments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Settersten et al., 2005). However, findings from this study confirm the newly *forgotten half* of graduates are those who chose not to enroll in post-secondary education or who enrolled and later dropped out (Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 2015). The differences in transitional experiences between participant groups represent the dynamics of the mesosystem in the theoretical framework, as exposure to adulthood responsibilities differs among students. Findings that degree seekers are more prepared for adulthood confirm prior literature identifying the need to restructure outdated systems to represent modern realities (Arnett, 1998; Holmstrom et al., 2002; Settersten & Ray, 2010). The push for students to enter college or post-secondary training is beneficial to those who choose that option and can follow through. The substantial support systems built into these institutions create a structured environment that promotes life-long success (Holmstrom et al., 2002). Degree seekers are given more understanding and acceptance when they have not met traditional markers, partly because their actions to earn a degree are recognized as growth toward their future (Chen et al., 2017). However, society is less tolerant of providing the same grace and acceptance for non-degree seekers who may also be taking additional time to explore where and how they can meet those same markers.

While this study has contributed insight into the topic, it is crucial to recognize its limitations. Firstly, the gap between groups' sample sizes has the potential to exert a notable influence on measures of central tendency and introduces skewness in the results. Despite the small sample size of degree-seekers, the results from the study support prior research on the population (Katsiaficas, 2017; McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014; Settersten et al., 2015), providing confidence in the reliability of the findings. A second limitation of the study is the narrow scope of experiences of graduates from one state. It is recommended to exercise awareness of the generalizability of the research due to the instrument's design incorporating characteristics relating to the culture and state education standards. Study findings provide multiple opportunities to replicate the research to support a comprehensive scope of experiences throughout the U.S. For example, a follow-up study to identify the experiences of Gen Z graduates would provide immense insight into post-pandemic transitions into adulthood. Another recommendation is to concentrate on the under-supported populations highlighted in the *Forgotten Half*, primarily minority students (Rosenbaum & Rosenbaum, 2015). Future investigation of the adulthood preparation approaches of minority students would increase awareness and inform stakeholders of the importance of supplying inclusive adulthood preparation curricula in public education systems. The disproportionate rate of gender response also signifies a need to research transitional experiences of all genders, including participants identifying as trans and non-binary.

Upon reviewing the traditional and modern markers of adulthood, the breadth of responsibilities associated with adulthood literacy exists within the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educational standards. The Association of Career and Technical Education recognizes that the purpose of FCS is to “prepare students for family life, work life, and careers in FCS” (2023). Another way to embed valuable experiences that

prepare students for adulthood is to provide experiences that mimic situations occurring within the emerging adulthood period. For instance, a common budgeting simulation activity in FCS courses focuses on personal and family finances, and students create budgets using projected career salaries. To better reflect emerging adulthood experiences, this activity can depict wages aligned with realistic employment for 18 to 25-year-olds, budgeting for the current housing market, student-loan debts, and other financial considerations young adults face. Whether in FCS or other CTE classrooms, students need to be exposed to and practice skills that reflect the modern adulthood markers supporting the realities of the emerging adulthood years. Only referencing traditional markers may overlook young adulthood experiences and fast forward to more established decades of adulthood.

Overall, the results from this study identify incongruences between current educational practice and adulthood transition reality. Educators, curriculum developers, and other stakeholders should use these findings to provide high school students with more opportunities for adulthood success through comprehensive adulthood preparation in the classroom. Recognizing that non-degree seekers are less inclined to be prepared for adulthood from in-home influences, it is imperative for robust educational opportunities to occur in high school to support the development of adulthood literacy. In a world affected by social inequalities, a comprehensive curriculum that recognizes the adulthood transition experiences of all students can equalize the students' futures regardless of the trajectories students take after graduation.

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