

Work and its Positive and Negative Effects on Youth's Psychosocial Development

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Abstract

The combination of schooling and employment is a near-universal teenage experience. Because adolescence is a highly formative and potentially vulnerable period of life, it is important to consider how employment influences adolescent development. Much research shows that teenage employment is associated with problem behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, and various forms of deviance, though whether such behaviors are attributable to employment, or part of a syndrome of “precocious adulthood” that attracts youth to work, remains controversial. Employment is also thought to place adolescents at risk because it threatens educational achievement, limits participation in the academic and extracurricular life of the school, and confronts them with stressors for which they are not yet ready. On the other hand, a job may signify progress in moving toward adulthood for the young person and enhance vocational identity. By providing opportunities for vocational exploration and by teaching generic work and coping skills, employment can promote adaptation to the future adult work role. The temporal investment as well as the quality of work must be considered in assessing its positive or negative impacts on development and socioeconomic attainment. Investigators need to further address the processes through which adolescents enter into various work contexts, and the processes through which employment exerts developmental influence.

Introduction

During adolescence, most young people acquire their first formal jobs; many begin to work informally for pay at younger ages. Given the prevalence of youth work [Manning 1990; Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor 1998; U.S. Department of Labor 2000; Staff et al. 2009], most teenagers will be exposed to whatever benefits, or risks, employment has to offer. Because adolescence is a highly formative and potentially vulnerable period of life, it is important to understand the developmental impacts of this experience.

This paper reviews the evidence and controversies surrounding employment's developmental impacts. On the negative side, employment is said to promote problem behaviors like drinking, smoking, and other substance use, getting into trouble at school, and various forms of delinquency. Much concern is expressed about employment's threats to educational achievement. Employment is also considered to be a potent stressor for teenagers who have not yet developed relevant coping skills. In a more positive vein, working is thought (by most youth and their parents) to promote positive character traits, such as self-confidence, responsibility, and independence; to enhance vocational development; and to teach generic occupational and coping skills. Such positive outcomes would likely promote socioeconomic attainment and adaptation to the adult work role. We will see that work may be a source of both negative and positive

experiences and outcomes; understanding its impact requires consideration of both the teenager's temporal investment in employment and the quality of that work experience.

Negative Effects of Employment

Problem behavior

Adolescents who work longer hours more frequently use alcohol, cigarettes and illicit drugs, and report more minor delinquency and school misconduct [Bachman et al. 1986; Bachman and Schulenberg 1993; Schulenberg and Bachman 1993; Greenberger 1984; Greenberger and Steinberg 1986; Mihalic and Elliott 1995; Blum and Rinehart 1997; Steinberg and Dornbusch 1991; Steinberg et al. 1982; Wofford 1988; Wright et al. 1997]. The positive association between adolescent work intensity and alcohol use is one of the most robust findings in the literature [Steinberg et al. 1993; Mortimer et al. 1996a]. There is evidence implicating the quality of youth work as well. The Monitoring the Future studies [Schulenberg and Bachman 1993] at the University of Michigan show that low skill utilization at work is positively associated with high school seniors' cigarette, marijuana, and alcohol use (the latter, only for females). Bachman and Schulenberg [1993] also report that long hours of work are associated with unhealthy lifestyles (less sleep and exercise, skipping breakfast).

Critics of youth work point to developmental risks in the work setting that encourage these problematic behaviors. Acquaintances with older coworkers could introduce adolescents prematurely to alcohol and other substances, and encourage their frequent use. Greenberger and Steinberg [1986] allege that alcohol use reflects the stresses adolescents experience at work and their attempts to restore a positive mood state. Of course, employed teenagers have greater disposable income with which to purchase alcohol, cigarettes and drugs.

Still, investigators debate whether it is working itself that encourages youth problem behavior, or whether youth who engage in such behaviors are more likely to seek employment and to work longer hours [Staff et al. 2009]. According to Bachman and Schulenberg [1993], teenage employment is part of a syndrome of "precocious development" that precipitates a hastened transition to adulthood. Engaging in more "adult-like" ways of handling stress or spending leisure time, as well as working, may be considered means of affirming adult status.

Consistent with the "precocious development" hypothesis, there is mounting evidence that the link between employment and problem behavior is, in fact, spurious. It is clear that teenagers who are disengaged from the educational enterprise are more likely to work long hours. Ninth graders who did not plan to complete college, had low GPA's, and had been held back in school were more likely to work intensively in their senior year [Bachman and Schulenberg 1993]. Time-use diaries from a sample of Seattle youth revealed that prior orientations toward work and school predicted subsequent work hours as well as school performance [Warren 2002]. Students in the St. Paul Youth Development Study (YDS) who had lower educational promise (gauged by educational aspirations, grade point average, perceived intelligence, and intrinsic motivations toward schoolwork) in the ninth grade worked more intensively in the 10th through 12th grades; problem behavior in the ninth grade predicted subsequent sporadic work of high intensity and low duration [Mortimer 2003]. Paternoster and his colleagues [2003] find that intensive hours of work do not affect substance use, delinquency, and school-related misconduct once individual differences in prior deviance are taken into account. Apel et al.

[2006] also show that movement into intensive formal work does not increase the likelihood of problem behavior. If delinquency precedes involvement in work, the observed associations between paid work and deviance could be spuriously related to preexisting differences between individuals. (In Apel et al.'s study, however, movement into informal work did increase the risk of both delinquency and substance use, compromising educational and other beneficial activities.)

A similar pattern arises when we consider the relationships between employment and educational achievement. Steinberg and Cauffman [1995] allege that adolescent work draws young people away from school and promotes behaviors that interfere with achievement. A long-standing critique of teenage employment is premised on a "zero-sum" model of time use: work has substantial "opportunity costs" because teenage jobs limit time for homework, extracurricular activities in the arts, sports, and school-based clubs, and other engagements designed by adults to promote achievement, exploration of interests, and healthy development [Greenberger and Steinberg 1986; Steinberg and Dornbusch 1991; Marsh 1991; Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000]. Instead, working youth spend their leisure time partying, using drugs and alcohol, and cruising around in cars, because these activities are attractive and compatible with their work schedules [Safron et al. 2001].

But contrary to the "zero-sum" model, time spent in school-related work and extracurricular activities is not compromised when youth limit their involvement in paid work to 20 or fewer hours per week. Moderate hours of employment apparently do not restrict other types of work and leisure, such as homework, school activities, and reading outside of class [Mihalic and Elliott 1997; Schoenhals et al. 1998], as the "well-rounded" adolescent is equally involved in paid work, school, and extracurricular activities [Shanahan and Flaherty 2001]. Paid work may actually "squeeze out" more passive leisure activities, as young people watch less television as work hours increase [Osgood 1999].

Again, preexisting differences may explain the associations between work intensity and academic achievement. Youth who have less involvement and success in conventional adolescent activities—such as going to school and participating in extracurricular sports, clubs, and organizations—are more likely to invest themselves in paid work and to prefer work over school. Studies based on the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS88) find no effects of work hours on school performance once pre-existing grades, aspirations, problem behaviors and family social class background are taken into account [Schoenhals et al. 1997; Warren et al. 2000]. Similar findings emerge from the YDS [Mortimer et al. 1996a; Mortimer 2003]. Moreover, recent analyses of NELS data using propensity score matching [Lee and Staff 2007] show that intensive employment has no effect on dropout for those whose backgrounds, attitudes, and behaviors make them strongly inclined to pursue long work hours. This research finds evidence for a causal influence of work hours on dropout only for teenagers who have low to moderate propensity to pursue long hours.

Whereas there has been relatively little investigation of the quality of work and educational outcomes, it is possible that high quality work experiences moderate whatever negative effects high intensity work may entail. When the quality of work is high, there seems to be little association between work intensity and school performance deficits; but when work quality is low, relatively more hours at work is linked with more class cutting and lower grades in school [Barling et al. 1995].

Work as stress-promoting

According to a long-term critique of teenage employment, working places adolescents at risk because they are not yet ready for the stressors they are likely to encounter in the workplace or for the challenges inherent in balancing demanding school and work schedules. The developmental literature points to the dangers inherent in experiencing problems too soon, before the person is ready to handle them effectively [Simmons and Blyth 1987]. Greenberger [1983, 1988] depicts young workers as taking on adult responsibilities without adequate coping skills. According to this line of argument, work stressors increase adolescent vulnerability and are "stress sensitizing," lowering thresholds of reactivity and diminishing the effectiveness of coping with similar problems in the future. The experience of overwhelming stressors at work, or failure in managing diverse responsibilities, could foster a general sense of ineffectuality, depressive affect, and low self-esteem. Greenberger [1988] expressed fear that working disrupts bonds with parents, and even close relationships with peers, the social supports that enable youth to successfully cope with problems. Mortimer and Shanahan [1991, 1994], however, find no evidence that this is the case.

Like the realms of problem behavior and educational achievement, investigations of adolescent work and mental health have focused on adolescent investment in employment (hours of work per week). These studies mainly yield null findings [Bachman and Schulenberg 1993; Bachman et al. 1986; Steinberg and Dornbusch 1991; Steinberg et al. 1993]. Similarly, in the YDS, indicators of temporal investment in employment---work status, hours per week, and the cumulative duration and intensity of work during high school---show no consistent relation to adolescent mental health, including depressive affect, self-derogation, and other dimensions (Mortimer et al. 1994; Mortimer and Johnson 1998).

A more promising line of research is based on the premise that the consequences of part-time work for adolescent mental health will depend on its quality. Analyses of longitudinal YDS data, incorporating controls for background and lagged criterion variables, indicate that stressors at work, such as work overload, role conflict, exposure to noxious work conditions (heat, cold), and other negative experiences heighten adolescents' depressed mood, and reduce their self-esteem and self-efficacy [Shanahan et al. 1991; Mortimer et al. 2002a]. Early decision-making capacity on the job, suggesting too much autonomy, and the responsibility for things that are beyond one's control, also increase adolescent depressed mood, while the acquisition of useful skills on the job diminish depressive affect [Shanahan et al. 1991; Shanahan 1992].

The quality of work experience has also been found to condition the effects of work hours. When work is of poor quality, long working hours may have particularly deleterious consequences for personal development. Shanahan [1992] reports that both work stress and self-direction increased depressed mood only among YDS boys working more than the median number of hours in the 10th and 12th grades. Showing a similar pattern, seniors in the Monitoring the Future (MTF) study who described their jobs unfavorably (as not using their skills, unconnected to the future, and "the kind of work that people do just for the money") used cigarettes more frequently as their work intensity increased [Schulenberg and Bachman 1993]. In the MTF, work intensity was found to be less consequential for youth who described their jobs as relevant to their futures.

Still, the potential psychological benefits of encountering and successfully dealing with difficult situations are well known [Rutter 1985; Masten and Garmezy 1985; Compas 1987; Simons and Blyth 1987]. Shanahan and Mortimer [1996] proposed a model of "eustress," indicating how stressful experiences can foster successful adaptation, sometimes immediately, but often in the long-term. *Primary eustress* occurs when positive outcomes, including a sense of challenge, heightened confidence, and the development of coping skills, occur with the experience of stressors. *Secondary eustress* occurs when earlier stressful experiences heighten the person's adaptive capacity in the face of later stressful encounters. Successful mastery of difficult tasks, even when they are perceived initially as stressful, can heighten thresholds of reactivity to subsequently experienced stressors, strengthen self-efficacy and motivational structures to surmount them, and increase the propensity to select contexts that are ever more challenging yet still controllable. Such outcomes would "steel" the adolescent for future challenges.

Consistent with the secondary eustress hypothesis, we find that adolescent work stressors moderate the deleterious effects of early adult work stressors on mental health four years after high school [Mortimer and Staff 2004]. It is only among those who experience relatively little work stress during adolescence that young adult work stressors diminish self-esteem and self-efficacy and heighten depressed mood. The findings thus suggest that early work stressors heighten youth's resilience. The relatively moderate levels of work stressors reported by a community sample of employed adolescents appear to represent stage-appropriate challenges that enhance preparation for subsequent challenges at work.

Work as Beneficial

Character-building and positive self-concept formation

A widespread popular belief posits that adolescent employment has positive developmental consequences. Parents believe that paid work builds character, instills a positive "work ethic," and provides opportunities for growth-inducing experiences that are not available in other settings [Phillips and Sandstrom 1990; Aronson et al. 1996]. Consistent with this view, adolescent employment is positively associated with self-reported dependability, personal responsibility, punctuality and self-reliance [Greenberger and Steinberg 1986; Greenberger 1984]. The role of future worker is a key component of the adolescent future "possible self" [Markus et al. 1990; Johnson and Mortimer 2000]. Just having a job may lead to changed self-concepts and new identities, new expectations of responsibility and independence on the part of parents [Phillips and Sandstrom 1990; Aronson et al. 1996] and high esteem in the eyes of peers [Mortimer and Shanahan 1991].

The ability to function effectively in the work world could signal to the adolescent an immediate capacity to control important outcomes, as well as to function capably as an adult in the future. Employed adolescents may learn to better manage their time as they juggle the multiple activities of worker, student, friend, and family member. Capably handling diverse activities in adolescence could promote a self-image as one who is able to meet the challenges of diverse adult roles [Elder and Caspi 1990]. Consistently, there is evidence that positive experiences in the workplace, signifying the youth's success in the work role, enhance self-efficacy [Call 1996; Call et al. 1995; Call and Mortimer 2001]. Experiences of success and validation of one's role as

worker (e.g., through the belief that one is paid well for the work one does) are associated with both global and economic self-efficacy [Finch et al. 1991; Grabowski et al. 2001].

Vocational development

Through their early jobs, adolescents may gain knowledge about the labor force, explore their vocational interests and identities, form occupational values, learn how to behave appropriately in the workplace, and acquire skills that facilitate adaptation to adult work [Mortimer 2003; Mortimer et al. 2002a; Youniss et al. 1999; Vondracek and Skorikov 1997; Skorikov and Vondracek 1997]. Prestigious task forces in the late 1970's emphasized this aspect of paid work [Panel on Youth 1974; Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education 1980; and National Commission on Youth 1980]. James Coleman's Panel on Youth suggested that working adults could mentor youth in preparing for future careers, teach them responsibility and independence, and convey the importance of what students were learning in school. Most parents appear to share this perspective [Phillips and Sandstrom 1990; Aronson et al. 1996].

Vocational development, involving the exploration of career interests, work values, and options, intensifies during adolescence and continues into "emerging adulthood" [Meeus et al. 1999]. To make viable occupational choices, young people must understand their own interests and capacities, as well as the affordances and demands of particular lines of work. Vocational exploration may be particularly important in the contemporary United States where most education is not specific to a vocation and institutional bridges between schools and workplaces are lacking [Mortimer and Krueger 2000]. Whereas the increasing prevalence of higher education and the prolonged transition to adult roles during the past few decades has extended vocational exploration to older ages [Mortimer et al. 2002b], adolescents who have greater understanding of their nascent skills, work values, and interests are likely to make better post-secondary educational choices [Schneider and Stevenson 1999].

In formulating a vocational development theory based on self-determination and intrinsic motivation theory [Deci and Ryan 1985], Blustein et al. [1994] describes vocational exploration during adolescence and young adulthood as an agentic process. Those who are able to formulate career goals and mobilize their energies to move toward them are more successful in career establishment [Nurmi et al. 2002]. Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer [2007] found that youth who crystallize their vocational decisions during high school or in their early-to-mid twenties are more likely to complete college by their mid-20s than those who exhibit greater indecision or vacillation in their career objectives. Those who were unable or unwilling to articulate occupational goals in response to survey questions were disadvantaged with respect to educational attainment, career establishment and job satisfaction.

Agentic adolescents will select work experiences that enhance their career exploration and further their attainments. Many adolescents initiate a process of selection and optimization of their work environments and career pathways, which continues through the transition to adulthood [Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer 2007]. Through their employment, young people begin to gather information about the self, other people, and the world of work. Interviews focused on the subjective process of vocational development show how teens in middle and especially late adolescence begin to formulate their goals for the future (both what they hope to accomplish and what they hope to avoid) in response to the experiences they encounter, both

positive and negative, in the workplace [Mortimer et al. 2002b; Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer 2007].

It is clear from YDS survey data that the quality of work experience is associated with several vocationally-relevant outcomes. Consistent with prior studies (e.g., Kohn and Schooler 1983; Shanahan et al. 1996; Skorikov and Vondracek 1997; Vondracek and Skorikov 1997), those who report more learning opportunities in their jobs come to have higher levels of intrinsic, people-oriented, and extrinsic occupational rewards [Mortimer et al. 1996b]. Those who invest more in work activity during high school appear to develop more confidence in their capacities as workers, anticipating greater economic efficacy in the future. Even with background variables and lagged economic efficacy controlled, occasional workers and nonworkers, those who invested the least in labor force activity, exhibited less confidence in being able to achieve their economic goals than the most invested workers; sporadic and steady workers manifested levels of efficacy similar to those of the most invested [Mortimer 2003].

Impacts on trajectories of attainment

Much of our research indicates that adolescents are active agents with respect to their work experiences [Mortimer 2003]. Teenagers whose prior attitudes and resources (measured in the first year of high school) suggest high potential for academic success moderate their subsequent labor force participation. High grades and strong intrinsic motivations toward school promote a steady (high duration, low intensity) work pattern (and lessened the likelihood of “most invested,” high duration-high intensity work). Youth who had lower grades, who were more strongly oriented to their peers, and engaged in more problem behavior were more likely to pursue a sporadic work pattern, involving intense (high intensity) but sporadic (low duration) bouts of work. These relationships suggest strategic behavioral patterns in which adolescents assess the likelihood of their succeeding in school (and post-secondary educational pursuits), establish educational goals, and gauge their involvement in the teen labor force accordingly.

As a result, adolescents whose academic orientations and performance and family resources indicate greater payoff from involvement in school choose to be employed, like other adolescents, but they limit their hours of work so as to be able to engage in the full gamut of academic and extracurricular activities, and to have time remaining for friends and family. Steady workers during high school were the most likely to say they wanted to save their earnings for their future educations.

Adolescents with more limited academic potential or family resources make heavier investments in paid work and acquire experiences that will contribute to their human capital development through work, and prepare them for entry to the full-time adult workforce. These youth, less engaged and less successful in the formal educational system, instead look to the workplace as a context for job exploration and human capital development. Youth in the YDS who manifested the most invested pattern of employment were more likely than those who pursued other patterns to say that they began work to learn new skills.

Linkages between work investment patterns and the features of work that youth reported during high school similarly suggest agentic selection processes. If youth who invest heavily in work during high school are expecting to develop their skills and prepare themselves for adult employment through this early participation in the labor force, one would expect that they would report higher quality employment experiences than those who are less invested in em-

ployment. In fact, those who worked longer hours (the most invested and sporadic workers), reported more learning and advancement opportunities in their jobs than occasional and steady workers and reported relatively high psychological engagement in their work. They also, however, experienced more stressors at work.

In general, the work of the more intensively employed students was more “adult-like;” they worked more hours, had higher earnings, and received more extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. They seemed to be experiencing in a more pronounced way than their less intensively employed counterparts the diverse benefits as well as the drawbacks of work.

Although critics of youth work contend that teenage work diminishes adult socioeconomic standing by disrupting academic achievement, relatively few studies examine long-term outcomes of employment. This lack of attention is unfortunate because the full benefits and costs of youth work may not appear until well after the adolescent period. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979 cohort), Carr, Wright, and Brody [1996] and Ruhm [1997] find that intensive work hours during high school increased wages and employment 10 years later but decreased college attendance, especially the completion of 4 or more years of college. While intensive teenage employment was associated with reduced educational standing in early adulthood, limited hours of employment were linked to higher wages and occupational standing from 6 to 9 years after the scheduled date of high school graduation.

Still, Hotz et al. [2002] argue that the effects of prior work status on adult attainments are due to selection processes. For the NLSY79 cohort, employment while attending school does not benefit wages from ages 13 to 28, once differences in school performance, orientations, socioeconomic background, and ability are considered. Their work measures, however, do not incorporate distinct patterns of employment over time, their outcomes do not include educational attainment, and they do not include females.

Much of the most recent YDS research has been directed to determining whether the seemingly strategic patterns of investment in school and work have demonstrable payoffs. We have broached the influence of high school work patterns on long-term attainment processes in two ways: first, by examining post-secondary education, specifically, months of school attendance and receipt of a B.A. degree [Staff and Mortimer 2007]; second, by investigating movement into jobs, self-identified by the respondent as “careers” [Mortimer et al. 2008]. Continuous life history calendar data, collected since 1991 (the expected high school graduation year), enables estimation of discrete-time logit models of the time it takes to get a BA, or to acquire a career, controlling background variables, prior orientations relevant to work and achievement, and time-varying post-secondary schooling, work investments, and family experiences.

What we find provides further confirmation for conceptualizing adolescent employment as a strategic, agentic process. First, those youth who worked steadily during high school (at high duration, low intensity) are found to pursue a similar combination of schooling and working after high school, as they work their way through college. These youth are shown to have a clear advantage in acquiring the highly-coveted bachelor’s degree [Staff and Mortimer 2007]. Youth who have little educational promise appear to gain the most advantage in pursuing a steady pattern of work. The most invested (high duration, high intensity) workers, previously exposed to the more “adult-like” demanding, challenging, and engaging work, instead move more quickly toward acquiring career-like employment (Mortimer et al. 2008). Each pattern of work investment thus moves youths toward an outcome that might have been predicted based on

their earlier goals, resources, and motivations. Importantly, the effects of the high school work patterns are persistent even when these prior orientations and behaviors, implicated in the process of selection to work, are controlled.

In summary, through their choices regarding school and work, both during high school and in the years immediately following, young people can shape their biographical pathways and thereby influence their potential for socio-economic attainment.

Selection and Socialization in the Youth Work Setting: Issues for Consideration

We have seen that many of the linkages between adolescent work and both negative and positive outcomes are linked to selection processes. Differences between students in their prior rates of deviance and substance use, school performance and orientations toward work and school, as well as family background and demographic characteristics, predate employment and may explain many of the benefits of moderate and high quality work and the negative impact of intensive and poorer quality work. Understanding the developmental significance of adolescent employment requires assessment of both the selection processes through which young people arrive at their occupational destinations, and the socialization processes through which work may exert its influence.

Following are some questions and issues for our group to consider:

Whereas parents believe that working will make their children more successful in navigating the transition from school to work, do young people share this view and deliberately plan their investment in work accordingly? Do they anticipate and mobilize their job search activities to effect strategies of school and work investment that enhance their educational attainment and career progress?

Second, if socialization does occur in the work setting, how does it happen? For example, we have speculated that the academic attainment of steady workers is mediated by the development of time management skills. Because most college students are employed (about 80%, see Horn et al. 2002), those who have learned how to work while attending high school will likely meet the challenges of combining the college student and worker roles more effectively, enhancing their capacity to obtain the B.A. degree. If the effective balancing of paid work and school is learned during high school and facilitates post-secondary educational attainment, early work could be an integral part of the educational attainment process.

Third, while primary attention has been directed to the temporal features of youth work, we need to know more about the features of work that are most developmentally important. What kinds of job qualities engender what outcomes, and for what types of youth? Evidence with respect to multiple developmental domains indicates that the benefits of employment for adolescents are enhanced when they have higher quality work environments and experiences. Work may be considered to be of high quality for adolescents when it affirms their competence in the work setting, when it promotes psychological engagement and interest, and when it involves positive and cooperative relationships with adults. To assess job quality, analysts have examined a multitude of job characteristics: intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, relations with supervisors and co-workers, and stressors [Mortimer 2003]; earnings [Shanahan et al. 1996]; supervisory work, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and job feedback [Mael et al. 1997]; autonomy, role clarity, skill variety, and school-work conflict [Barling et al. 1995];

cognitive complexity, physical challenge, motivation, cynicism, opportunities to develop social competence, and stress in the workplace [Stern et al. 1990]; work-related skills and career role models [Flouri and Buchanan 2002]. Which of these are most important? Do the various dimensions come in bundles that are particularly significant? Do they act as substitutes for one another?

Fourth, the potential interactions of youth characteristics with particular qualities of jobs deserve more attention. YDS research indicates that patterns of work investment have different implications for educational attainment for youth with varying levels of educational promise. To develop effective youth work policy, we need to know more about how the youth's own background, motivation, and ambition moderate the developmental impacts of both high and low-quality work experiences.

Finally, recent precipitous declines in opportunities for teenagers to work raise questions about whether youth may be protected from certain employment-related risks but also less likely to receive the benefits from employment that are described in this review. Might other experiences, like unpaid or volunteer work, be assuming some of the functions of paid work in preparing young people for their future roles in the labor force?

Questions to Consider for Discussion

- 1) Whereas parents believe that working will make their children more successful in navigating the transition from school to work, do young people share this view and deliberately plan their investment in work accordingly? Do they anticipate and mobilize their job search activities to effect strategies of school and work investment that enhance their educational attainment and career progress?
- 2) If socialization does occur in the work setting, how does it happen? For example, we have speculated that the academic attainment of steady workers is mediated by the development of time management skills. What other mechanism might explain work's positive and negative impacts?
- 3) What features of work are most developmentally important? What kinds of job qualities engender what outcomes? The benefits of employment for adolescents appear to be enhanced when they have higher quality work environments and experiences. Work is of high quality for adolescents when it affirms their competence in the work setting, when it promotes psychological engagement and interest, and when it involves positive and cooperative relationships with adults.
- 4) Least explored are the potential interactions of youth characteristics with particular qualities of jobs. What kinds of jobs are salutary, or detrimental, for what kinds of youth? YDS research indicates that patterns of work investment have different implications for educational attainment for youth with varying levels of educational promise. To develop effective youth work policy, we need to know more about how the youth's own background, motivation, and ambition moderate the developmental impacts of both high and low-quality work experiences.

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