Changes in Work Values and Beliefs during Emerging Adulthood: A Two-Cohort Study

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Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies
International Conference
Bielefeld, Germany
26 – 28 September, 2011
Changing Work Values: Previous Research

• Early studies of adults (e.g., Kohn, Schooler)
  – How preferences for work rewards are shaped by background, education, and employment
  – How work values shape education and employment

• Large-sample longitudinal studies of youth (e.g., Johnson; Mortimer)
  – How work values change in teens and 20s; antecedents and consequences

• In both literatures, emphasis on
  – extrinsic work values (*importance of earnings, benefits, job security*)
  – intrinsic work values (*autonomy and decision-making, opportunities to use skills and abilities, interesting work*)
Cohort / Generation Differences in Work Values and Beliefs?

Recent cohorts of young people

- acquire more post-secondary education (PSE) and may have unrealistic occupational aspirations
- are seen by some to be alienated (Generation X), at risk of failure (Generation on Hold), directionless (The Ambitious Generation), and narcissistic and entitled (Generation Me)
- “[explore] a variety of possible life directions“ in a context where "little about the future has been decided for certain" (Arnett)
- Have values and make choices that are less influenced by family background, gender and other structural determinants (Beck)

Few cohort comparisons of changes in work values (extrinsic and intrinsic) and beliefs (job entitlement)
Research Questions

• Are extrinsic work values and job entitlement beliefs stronger in a more recent cohort of high school graduates (Class of 1985 vs. 1996)?

• Do work values (extrinsic, intrinsic) and beliefs (job entitlement) change during emerging adulthood (age 18 to 25) and, if so, in what direction?

• What are the predictors of work values and beliefs at age 25, and are they the same for both cohorts?
Study Setting: Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Class of 1985

- *T1*: Grade 12 students (age 18) in 6 high schools (N = 983)
- *T2*: Age 25 in 1992 (N = 404; 41% response rate)
- Very high unemployment rates in 1985, then a decline, followed by high unemployment again in 1992
- Extensive participation in Alberta’s expanding post-secondary education system

Class of 1996

- *T1*: Grade 12 students (age 18) in 8 high schools (N = 747)
- *T2*: Age 25 in 2003 (N = 308, 41% response rate)
- Moderately high unemployment rates in 1996 which declined over the next seven years
- Part-time and temporary work now more common
- Extensive participation in further expanded post-secondary system
## Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class of 1985</th>
<th></th>
<th>Class of 1996</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* p &lt; 0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<td>56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SES (1 or 2 parents with university degree) *</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>39%</td>
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<td>Academic track in high school *</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 18 postsecondary aspirations (3+ years) *</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>University degree by age 25</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average months unemployed (age 18 to 25) *</td>
<td>5.9 months</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full-time job at age 25</td>
<td>87%</td>
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<td>87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managerial /professional job at age 25 *</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolled in educational program at age 25 *</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td>31%</td>
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<td>Married/cohabiting at age 25 *</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent at age 25</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
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</table>
Dependent Variable Measures at Age 18 and 25

**Intrinsic Work Values:** Importance, in a full-time job, of:
- Work that gives a feeling of accomplishment?
- Work where you make most decisions yourself?
- Work that is interesting?

**Extrinsic Work Values:** ...
- Work that pays well?
- Work with little chance of being laid off?
- Work with good chances for promotion and advancement?

**Job Entitlement Beliefs:** Agreement that:
- If someone has worked hard in school, they are entitled to a good job.
- Everyone has the right to the kind of job that their education and training has prepared them for.
Mean Change in **Intrinsic** Work Values by Cohort

- Intrinsic work values increased from age 18 to 25 for both cohorts
- Non-significant cohort differences at age 18 and age 25
- No gender differences in pattern of change

![Graph showing mean change in intrinsic work values by cohort](image-url)
Mean Change in **Extrinsic** Work Values by Cohort

- Extrinsic work values declined for the Class of 1985 but rose for the Class of 1996
- Cohort differences non-significant at age 18 but significant at age 25
- No gender differences in pattern of change

<table>
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<th>Age 18</th>
<th>Age 25</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class of 1985</td>
<td>Decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 1996</td>
<td>Increase</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Mean Change in Job Entitlement Beliefs by Cohort

• Belief in job entitlement declined for both cohorts

• Cohort differences non-significant at age 18 but significant at age 25

• No gender difference in pattern of change
Possible Predictors of Age 25
Work Values/Beliefs

• Work value / belief at age 18
• **Cohort (Class of 1985 versus Class of 1996)**
• Gender
• Family SES
• Academic performance/aspirations (age 18)
• Education and labour market experiences (age 18 – 25)
• Adult statuses age 25 (e.g., FT job, married, parent)
Predictors of Intrinsic Work Values at Age 25

• Age 18 Intrinsic work values $\beta = .23^*$
• University degree by age 25 $\beta = .15^*$
• Employed full-time at age 25 $\beta = .09^*$

• $R^2 = .12^*$

* $p < .05$

Cohort did not predict intrinsic work values
Predictors of Extrinsic Work Values at Age 25

- Age 18 Extrinsic work values $\beta = .32^*$
- Cohort (Class of 1996 = 1) $\beta = .24^*$
- Parent(s) university educated $\beta = -.08^*$
- Grade 12 grades $\beta = -.13^*$
- Postsecondary aspirations (age 18) $\beta = -.18^*$
- Student at age 25 (yes = 1) $\beta = -.07^*$
- Parent at age 25 (yes = 1) $\beta = .11^*$

- $R^2 = .20$

* $p < .05$
Predictors of Job Entitlement Beliefs at Age 25

- Age 18 Entitlement beliefs $\beta = .35^*$
- Cohort (Class of 1996 = 1) $\beta = .38^*$
- Gender (female = 1) $\beta = .38^*$
- Postsecondary aspirations (age 18) $\beta = -.13^*$

- $R^2 = .19$

* $p < .05$
Cohort Differences in Predictors of Age 25 Work Values / Beliefs

Analytic strategy:
• Split sample into Class of 1985 and Class of 1996, and compare slopes for predictor variables (a test of interaction effects involving cohort)

Findings:
• **Intrinsic work values**: no significant cohort interaction effects
• **Job entitlement beliefs**: adult statuses (age 25) had more impact in the Class of 1985, but cohort differences are difficult to explain
• **Extrinsic work values**: cohorts differed in effect of post-secondary credential (university degree by age 25)
Effect of University Degree on Age 25 Extrinsic Work Values by Cohort

Class of 1985:
Acquiring a college diploma or university degree associated with decreasing extrinsic work values

Class of 1996:
Acquiring a college diploma or university degree associated with increasing extrinsic work values

Total (two-cohort) sample: Acquiring a college diploma or university degree had no effect on value change
Summary of Findings

• No cohort differences in work values and beliefs at age 18
• **Intrinsic** values increased (age 18 to 25) for both cohorts
• **Extrinsic** values declined for the Class of 1985 and rose for the Class of 1996
• **Job entitlement** declined for both cohorts, but not as much for the Class of 1996
• Family SES had small, mainly indirect effects on values and beliefs
• Young women reported stronger job entitlement beliefs
• Unemployment experiences had limited effects
• Acquisition of a university degree had a positive effect on change in **intrinsic** values in both cohorts (main effect)
• Acquisition of a college diploma or a university degree had a negative effect on change in **extrinsic** values in the Class of 1985 but a positive effect in the Class of 1996 (interaction effect)
• Extrinsic work values were stronger at age 25 among parents
Five General Conclusions

• We find some evidence of cohort differences in work values and beliefs, with the Class of 1996 being more extrinsically motivated and showing less decline in job entitlement beliefs; even so job entitlement declined for both cohorts; overall, the cultural change is not as large as many public commentators would suggest

• It is important to recognize both individual and cohort change; young people’s work values and beliefs change significantly during emerging adulthood;

• Unemployment experiences did not have a significant effect on value change during emerging adulthood for either cohort; instead, a shift towards a more precarious labour market, increased investments in post-secondary education, and the taking on of adult roles appear to be more important

• Family background continues to help shape work values, but largely indirectly through educational experiences

• Gender continues to matter, but in new ways (e.g., young women are more likely to hold strong job entitlement beliefs)
Acknowledgements

• Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
• Government of Alberta
• University of Alberta
• Population Research Laboratory, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta