8-2019

Emerging Adult Career Pathways: Understanding Aspirations and Switching

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Citation

Emerging Adult Career Pathways:
Understanding Aspirations and Switching

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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August 2019
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Abstract

Emerging adulthood is a stage of life characterized by a high degree of fluctuation in identity formation and future decision-making (Arnett 2015). During this life stage, emerging adults make decisions about their future career by assessing whether they want to continue with their current career pathway or whether they intend to switch. The present study investigates this process in terms of its overall prevalence – or how often emerging adults intend to switch career trajectories – and the correlates of it. Previous studies on career switching have focused largely on educational switches. This quantitative study operationalizes career pathway by using the major occupational groupings by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and investigates the degree of career switching versus stability by assessing current majors and occupations compared to later career aspirations using data from Wave 4 of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NSYR). The results indicate that most emerging adults in the sample who are in their mid-to-late twenties intend to switch careers. However, women are less likely to switch than men, but non-Whites are more likely to switch than Whites. Those currently enrolled in school are also more likely to intend a change in their careers. Implications for research on emerging adulthood, as well as for industry and policymakers, is discussed.

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I. Introduction

Emerging adulthood is a relatively new stage of life that is characterized by a high degree of fluctuation in identity formation and future decision-making (Arnett 2015). Moreover, changing economic circumstances surrounding adulthood transitions can cause disjointedness between career aspirations and actual career outcomes (Casner-Lotto and Barrington 2006). In career decision-making, emerging adults often need to assess whether they want to continue with their current career pathway, or whether they intend to switch. Thus, this study investigates how emerging adults navigate career pathways. In particular, this analysis provides answers to the first and overarching research question: (1) *To what extent is there stability or switching in career pathways during emerging adulthood?*

One issue contributing to the dearth of information on this question is an absent mode of operationalizing career stability versus switching. To date, the focus has been on switching majors in educational settings (Arnett 2000; Chen 2013), which may obscure larger switches between career paths in other ways. For example, it may not be particularly fruitful to focus on switching from being a chemistry major to a biology major, all while remaining a pre-med. Rather, more central is a larger substantive switch from pre-med to pre-law. Likewise, an emerging adult may complete their schooling and look to switch careers with additional certificates or another degree (or, perhaps, use their existing degree in a different way). To understand career switching in this more substantively meaningful way, I create and test a method for describing career pathways. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS; Torpey 2015) defines major occupational groupings based on workforce data, and I investigate whether these occupational groupings are discernable at earlier points in career trajectories, within a nationally representative sample of emerging adults. To the extent this approach is successful, it offers

survey researchers a method for studying career pathways at earlier stages in life-course development than analyzing occupational data alone can provide.

Having first defined larger career pathways, I then investigate the degree of career switching versus stability by assessing *current* majors and occupations compared to *later* career aspirations. This will provide a novel approach to assessing the extent to which emerging adults generally engage in relatively stable career pathways versus the prevalence of intending to switch paths. In understanding the potential importance of career path stability versus switching, I will then investigate the role gender, race, and social class differences exist in the likelihood of emerging adults intending to change career paths. Thus, having first investigated the overall prevalence of career switching versus stability, I subsequently ask: (2) *Are emerging adults from different social class backgrounds or different genders and races more or less likely to switch career paths?*

II. Literature Review

Before describing the methods for investigating career pathways, I first provide background on the key theories engaged in this analysis: emerging adulthood, career pathways (stability and switching), social class, and cultural inequalities in parental socialization styles.

Emerging Adulthood

In recent years, an increasing number of individuals have chosen to pursue higher education beyond high school, and the average age of marriage and first childbirth have risen significantly in parallel (Fussell and Furstenberg 2005; Shanahan et al. 2005; Arnett 2007; Arnett 2015). These trends have led to the emergence of a new life stage labeled by scholars as "emerging adulthood." Emerging adulthood is a time during which individuals are not entirely bound by social norms (Arnett 2000; Arnett 2015) and thus, are more open to exploration. One

of the key characteristics of emerging adulthood is identity exploration (Arnett 2000; Shanahan et al. 2005; Luyckx et al. 2008; Krahn, Howard and Galambos 2015; Schwartz 2016). Schwartz (2016:308) describes emerging adulthood as a "fork in the road" from where an individual gains autonomy to choose their path in life. According to this theory, identity exploration gives emerging adults relative autonomy from social constraints. This relative freedom from social expectations encourages emerging adults to pursue different interests and travel down different roads to explore the different options available to them (Arnett 2000; Luyckx et al. 2008; Settersten and Ray 2010; Lee 2014; Krahn, Howard and Galambos 2015), including various career pathways.

This independence to explore various career paths may mean that the life trajectory of emerging adults can vacillate, resulting in numerous changes. For example, emerging adults may choose certain majors which may lead them on a path toward their future career (Arnett 2000). However, after some time, that previous choice may no longer appeal to them as their perception of the ideal future career may change. Therefore, as emerging adults are exploring different options, there may be fluctuations in their career choices and thus, more switching in their career pathways (Arnett 2000).

Career Pathways

Career pathways can be defined as ways in which education and specific occupations are connected. Hamilton (2012: 8) defines such pathways as, "an articulation of knowledge, skills, and competencies, which connect education with work in an occupation.". Similarly, Reid (1999: 446) uses a navigation analogy while speaking of designing career pathways and states it is akin to "obtaining a reference point, and navigating a course through specific targets or landmarks to reach a destination." Moreover, she further adds that having a designed career pathway is

important as, "most of us use a map or a timetable to plan our travel routes. Those who do not may well end up wandering in circles somewhere on the motorway system or the underground" (Reid 1999: 446).

As is clear from the statements above, individual career choices are based on what may appeal to a person and also on the type of profession they envision themselves settling into as adults. The juncture between these two aspects can evolve as emerging adults more firmly establish their personal identity, and as they learn more about their match to available career options. On the one hand, an emerging adult's career path may remain stable. On the other hand, career pathways can also switch over time. In the present study, the career clusters and career pathways created by the BLS (Torpey 2015) are used to understand the prevalence of stability or switching in career pathways during emerging adulthood. Thus far, studies on career switching have focused mainly on switching majors in school settings. In contrast, the BLS clusters and pathways do not concentrate solely on specific majors. Rather, these clusters emphasize a broad grouping of occupations and industries (Hamilton 2012) that serve as a link between education and occupations. Rather than narrowly focusing on switches between majors, this broader focus aids a view of larger switches that are happening between the career paths of emerging adults.

Career Switching Versus Career Stability

A switch in career pathways can result from individuals, and their social surroundings, evolving over time (Schoon, Martin and Ross 2007). For instance, younger individuals may find their interests, as well as the available employment opportunities, shifting as they proceed with their education (Bradley and Devadason 2008). As such, shifts in career pathways may start during one's early twenties and continue well into one's early thirties. Alternatively, other young people may feel confused regarding their future career choices, especially during the tumultuous

transition period that follows high school, and change pathways as they discover which careers are most or least appealing to them. This transition period, and the changing trajectory of career pathways, coincides with the life stage called emerging adulthood, and thus the expectation is that emerging adults will evidence a high degree of career switching.

However, all emerging adults do not necessarily switch their career pathways. Career pathways may remain stable. Bradley and Devadason (2008: 23) label individuals who remain steady on the same career as "stickers." They explain that a person who "sticks" to the same path does not necessarily remain trapped in an unfulfilling occupation. Rather, a "sticker" may be an individual who systematically pursues the same path they previously had chosen. Yet, being on a stable career does not completely remove the possibility of a switch. Bradley and Devadason (2008) show that stickers are open to changes in career circumstances, despite remaining on the same trajectory.

Overall, the expectation is that there should be a smaller, but sizable, population of career stabile emerging adults. Yet, there is a dearth of information on the prevalence – that is, the actual proportion – of career switching versus stability during emerging adulthood. Moreover, in the limited information that exists on career switching during emerging adulthood, the focus has largely been on switching majors. For example, in two separate longitudinal studies on emerging adults, Shulman et al. (2014) and Azmitia, Syed and Radmacher (2008) explore changing majors. Similarly, focusing on pre-medical students, Lam (2017) investigates students changing their careers, but the emphasis is on moving from pre-medical studies toward a distinct major, such as education. In contrast to this body of prior research, the present study focuses not on switching majors, but rather on the broader implications of career switching by focusing on

career pathways. In doing so, I aim to create a more comprehensive picture of on the prevalence of career switching during emerging adulthood.

Social Class

The concept of "social class" is embedded within many of the fundamental facets of the discipline of sociology (Lareau 2010). Social class is a remnant of the early industrial era when social class was defined by "occupations," but doubts have been raised over the utilization of the term social class when it is framed as such (Grusky and Weeden 2010). While the term's position within contemporary sociology is somewhat precarious, as terms such as inequality and stratification have risen in prominence, Grusky and Weeden (2010) assert that social class continues to be employed by sociologists to study inequality as a matter of tradition. Informed by this theoretical lineage, I assert that operationalizing socioeconomic status as occupations is not sufficient for understanding the social implications of parental backgrounds on emerging adult career stability and switching.

Rather, Hout (2010) offers a conceptualization of class as a shared lifestyle characteristic. For example, the ways people earn and expend money, and the amount of money they retain, defines their class. This focuses analysis on shared earning and spending prowess, characteristics that are deemed more direct in affecting social interaction and mobility than occupational groups, especially in contemporary times. Thus, individuals who belong to the same class would have common concerns, and these shared concerns make people aware of their own position within the society. I employ this approach by conceiving of class as a group of people who share similar earning and spending potential.

Likewise, in contemporary analysis of social class, other aspects, such as educational attainment (Grusky and Weeden 2010) need to be incorporated. For example, Lareau (2010)

maintains that a single definition of social class may no longer be possible, as the concept is contingent on several interwoven aspects of society. Instead, Lareau (2010) favors the broader term "class." Since class can influence everything from health to lifestyle behaviors (Hout 2010), it follows that the concept would also matter when discussing emerging adults. Indeed, paying attention to class raises concerns as to whether Arnett's (Arnett 2007, Arnett 2015) and others' theories on emerging adulthood are viable across different social classes. For example, Silva (2016) states that the idea of an extended period of identity exploration is not a feasible one for individuals who are working class. In fact, by showing that emerging adults have the freedom to explore and pursue different interests, emerging adulthood as a concept is not acknowledging the limited options available to working-class people (Silva 2016).

While attention to class issues poses challenges to a homogenizing view of emerging adulthood, life course development theories and class theories can co-exist. For instance, emerging adult scholars acknowledge that there may be different life paths across different social classes (du Bois-Reymond 2016; Furstenberg 2016; Silva 2016). Despite this attention to class differences, Arnett (2016) maintains that there are sufficient commonalities in life-course experiences, across class differences, that emerging adulthood remains a useful concept in describing a common life stage. For example, emerging adults from all class backgrounds aspire to explore and improve their lives, while all generally have an optimistic outlook on their future prospects. Recent work by Arnett (2016) also adds an emphasis on the importance of social class, especially when emerging adults are considering pursuing tertiary education. This is congruent with Hout's theory: emerging adults who share the same social class may make similar life decisions, including career aspirations.

In this vein, Bynner (2005) states that a family's social position – and the history that is associated with that social position (i.e., education and employment of the members of the previous generation, employment opportunities and possibilities of social mobility within the individual's neighborhood) – shapes the career trajectory of an individual. For instance, young adults belonging to a background in which college education is seen as an essential part of adulthood may decide on their career trajectory earlier in life (Rojewski and Kim 2003). Conversely, individuals from a lower socio-economic background may delay their entry into college after completion of high school (Roksa and Valez 2012), and this delay can affect their career pathway stability. Thus, parental social class can impact the career pathways of children.

Thus, in the present study, I will examine the potential effects of class on emerging adulthood. Specifically, I analyze the relationship between class and career switching versus stability, since career decision-making is a key aspect of emerging into adulthood. To do so, I will examine the role of both parental income and parental educational attainment as multiple dimensions of social class.

Social Class, Cultural Inequalities, and Parenting Styles/Support

In addition to operationalizing the specific social class resources that parents may have to draw upon in supporting emerging adult career decision-making, it is also important to pay attention to the complex cultural patterning. That is to say, much of the social class effect on career pathways may operate through cultural knowledge found among some social classes. Cultural inequalities may exist in the ways that parents advise, support, challenge, or exert pressure upon their children's sorting of career pathways. For example, Lareau (2002, 2015) found that children of middle-class parents benefit greatly from parental intervention during their formative years (receiving a "concerted cultivation" style of parenting), whereas working-class

children often expected to navigate on their own (receiving an "accomplishment of natural growth" style of parenting).

Studying these parenting styles longitudinally, Lareau (2015) found that distinctions in parenting styles continued to have impact into young adulthood, when children of middle-class parents found it easier to advance their careers using the previously acquired knowledge from their parents. Lareau (2015) maintains that children of working-class parents often failed to grasp the workings of institutions. As a result, they often had difficulty in obtaining and retaining employment. In addition, individuals from lower social classes frequently lacked self-esteem (Rojewski and Kim 2003), which can be linked to their lack of finesse in navigating the education and employment system. The aspiration to gain higher education and obtain prestigious careers was also less prevalent among people from working class backgrounds, but the skills to navigate those aspirations in large formal systems varied (Rojewski and Kim 2003; Schoon et al. 2007).

This capacity to navigate institutions stems from possessing certain types of "cultural knowledge." Cultural knowledge can essentially be gained through familial and institutional guidance. Individuals may possess or lack certain types of cultural knowledge, which can affect the trajectory of their education and subsequent professional careers. Cultural knowledge is often gained from parents. Thus, individuals with parents who possess the middle-class cultural knowledge can transfer this knowledge to their child through advice and support. The result is that emerging adults from middle-class backgrounds are more likely to find ease in making realistic career choices and have ultimately have more successful careers.

Researchers also place a similar emphasis on parental involvement concerning children's educational needs. For example, Carlson (2014) views parental advice giving as an essential part

of the parent-emerging adult relationship. Likewise, Kim and Schneider (2005) and Carlson (2014) find that parents who know how to obtain relevant information and resources, such as finding scholarships, are more likely to have their children successfully progress through the education system. However, the researchers further add that parents who are willing to provide support to their children can do so, even if they are in a disadvantageous socio-economic position. Therefore, parental knowledge is influential in shaping a child's career trajectory, but so too is the degree of support and advice offered, net of particular resources available.

Thus, examining conditions in families of origin that can influence an individual's career pathway is essential to understanding the extent to which switching, or stability occurs in career pathways. Family remains a fundamental guiding force, and the cultural inequalities that exist in a person's family of origin can influence career pathways. From the above discussion, it is evident that parental styles, advice, and support – in conjunction with objective parental social class measures – are important to assess in understanding career pathways. For the present study, I am not going to elaborate on the influence of families of origin on an individual's career pathway. However, future research can explore how families of origin, especially parents, can influence an individual's career pathway. More specifically, future research can investigate if parental guidance can influence a person to switch to a career path which can provide more social mobility and thus, the possibility of moving onto a higher social class and conversely, if parental guidance can convince a person to stay within the same career pathway, if parental advice suggests that the present career path is what is beneficial for future prospects.

III. Methodology

To reiterate, the current study examines two inter-related questions: (1) *To what extent is there stability or switching in career pathways during emerging adulthood?*

(2) *Are emerging adults from different social class backgrounds or different genders and races more or less likely to switch career paths?* To address these, I utilize a quantitative method approach as outlined below.

Data

This study employs quantitative data. Secondary analysis is conducted on data from the National Study of Youth & Religion (NSYR). The NSYR is a national, longitudinal study on a millennial cohort sample begun in their adolescence and following them through to adulthood. While existing longitudinal data provide ways to examine switching in career pathways, the NSYR affords the additional ability to connect these data longitudinally from emerging adult outcomes to adolescent parental social class status. The quantitative survey data on switching and parental social class enables a better understanding of the ways social class and cultural inequalities may shape stability and switching in career paths.

The NSYR began by studying a sample of young people (n=3,290) who were between 13-17 years of age (Smith and Snell 2009). Three additional waves followed this initial wave. The present study focuses on the emerging adult survey from Wave 4 when the respondents were in their mid-to-late twenties (ages 23 - 28), with a retention rate of 67 percent from Wave 1 respondents (NSYR n.d.).

Measures

Variables

As key measures for identifying the intent to switch careers, I employ measures that identify both the current career pathway and future career pathways, which are subsequently used to identify career switching (misalignment between current and future career paths), and career stability (alignment between current and future career paths).

Current Career Pathways. To identify current career path, I use the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) career clusters and pathways where jobs are grouped under specific career pathways (Torpey 2015). Overall, the BLS identifies 16 different career clusters that are then further divided into 79 total career pathways (Torpey 2015). For example, the career cluster Health Science contains five career pathways including Therapeutic Services, Diagnostics Services, Health Informatics, Support Services, and Biotechnology Research and Development. All career clusters and pathways are listed in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

I subsequently map these 79 career pathways onto the NSYR respondents by, first, using information on their current job as reflected in the variable *currempl_text_w4*, where respondents provided their own response to the open-ended question "What is your current occupation?" If there was too much ambiguity or breadth in their responses, I, second, used information on their current job as reflected in the variable *currempl_w4*, which asked each individual to identify their current primary occupation as listed in one of 29 categories (National Study of Youth and Religion 2013). Third, for those individuals who are students and/or housewives/househusbands, I treated them as unemployed. For the NSYR wave 4 respondents, the breakdown of these career

categories is displayed below in Figure 1. Using all of this information, I created a new variable cpath_c ("Career Pathway (BLS) - Current").

Future Career Pathway. Intended careers is operationalized by combining data about each NSYR respondent's expected job at 35 years of age, as well as their intended major (for those who intend to return to school). Specifically, these questions ask, "What job or occupation do you think you will have when you are 35 years old?" and "If you do return to school, which degree(s) do you intend to complete in the next ten years?" (see variables jobat35_w4 and the variables for intent to go back to school by degree type). I used these questions in a hierarchical manner. First, I use responses from the question regarding expected jobs at 35 years of age, which is provided as a text entry where respondents provided an open-ended name of the occupation they expected to have when they are 35 years of age. I then categorize according to the same BLS career paths as those for current career path (see Table 1). Second, if a respondent did not provide an intended career path but specified that they intended to go back to school, I use their major(s) upon completion to identify the closest BLS category. I have treated those who intend to go back to college but are unsure about which major they would choose as being stable (i.e., their intended career path is the same as their current career pathway). Likewise, if an individual did not specify an intended career path at age 35 and did not indicate an intention to go back to school, I assumed that their career path would be the same as their current career path (this affects approximately 1 percent of total respondents). The intended career paths of NSYR wave 4 respondents are displayed in Figure 2 below. Together, I used all this information to create a new variable called cpath_Int ("Career Pathway (BLS) - Intended").

Career Stability and Switching. To explore career stability or switching, the focal variable for the current study, I compare current career paths to intended careers paths by

calculating a dummy variable for switching (1 = switch). Specifically, if a person's current BLS category (cpath_c) is different from their intended career path (cpath_Int), they are considered to have switched career paths. Additionally, descriptive data regarding the most common career paths, and the most common switches between career paths, are also provided in the accompanying appendix.

Crucially, it is important to note that some respondents may intend to make differing degrees of career pathway change. For example, a respondent currently employed as a marketing communications specialist (part of the marketing cluster) and may intend to become a marketing manager (also part of the marketing cluster), while another respondent may currently work as a human resources staff member (part of the business management and administration cluster) but intend to go back to school to become a teacher (education and training cluster). Both respondents would be classified as having switched careers, though they may not be comparable in the magnitude of that intended change. Thus, my analysis is conservative on the degree of stability: individuals are only considered stable if they remain within the same BLS sub-category, not the same BLS cluster. Though it is beyond the scope of the current analysis to parse out different degrees of switching, I return to this issue in my concluding remarks.

Parental Social Class. To operationalize parental social class, I focus on two primary measures drawn from the NSYR's wave 1 data: parental income (pincome1 – pincome3) and parental (father's) educational attainment (peduc1 – peduc3). Both variables are drawn from the first wave of surveys, which is when parents were surveyed and provided information on their own income and education levels.

Additional Control Variables. In order to contain the potential for spuriousness associated with other key factors and to examine the unique relationship between social class and career

switching, I employ measures to control for (a) gender (during wave 1, parents were asked "Is [your teen] a boy or a girl?"), as well as (b) race and ethnicity "What race or ethnic group do you consider yourself?" Likewise, I also control for whether the respondent is currently enrolled in college ("Are you in school now?") and whether the respondent intends to return to school ("Do you see yourself going back for more education some day?"). Combined, these control measures facilitate an analysis focused on differences attributable to social class dynamics, rather than gender, race and ethnicity, or current college enrollment status.

Analysis

Given the dummy variable nature of the dependent variable (1 = career switch), quantitative analysis is completed using logistic regression in the Stata statistical software package. First, I present descriptive statistics for our sample of NSYR respondents with an emphasis on information on their current job and future intended careers mapped onto BLS categories. I show what percentage of the current career pathway fall into each of the BLS categories. Then, I illustrate when respondents do make the switch where are they switching to.

Second, I conducted a series of bivariate analyses exploring the association between key independent variables; parental social class based on parental education, parental social class based on parental income and the control variables of gender, race and ethnicity, current enrollment status and my dichotomous outcome, switching. For this purpose, I conducted chi-square tests.

Third, the bivariate analyses can suggest that some respondent characteristics may be related to career switching. To further understand these relationships, I estimate a series of multivariate logistic regression models predicting career switching with respondent

characteristics controlled simultaneously. The goal here is to assess whether intended switching is impacted by gender, race, current enrollment status and parental social class.

IV. Results

Distributions of Current and Intended Careers in NSYR Respondents

I begin by showing the distributions of both (a) the current occupations of the respondents across the BLS categories and (b) the intended occupations of those same group of respondents across the same BLS categories. The focus here is on not only which occupational categories are most prominent in terms of current and future work, but also on how the respondents reflect an intent to change out of their current category (e.g., which BLS categories shrink/grow when thinking about the intent to switch).

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

I start by exploring the *current* occupations of respondents. I note, first, that respondents fell into 54 different occupational categories (out of a possible 67). Second, the largest portion of respondents belong in the "not in the work force" category (16.6 percent). Recall that for the present analysis, I treated students as unemployed and approximately 10 percent of the respondents are currently students. The second largest portion of the respondents (14.2 percent) are in the operations management pathway. This pathway includes jobs such as sales manager, broker, store manager, wholesale and retail buyer. This is followed by the therapeutic pathway (9.6 percent) which includes nurses, physicians, and therapists, and the teaching/training pathway (9.2 percent). Other career pathways include sizeable shares devoted to personal care services (6.8 percent), teaching and training (6.4 percent), restaurant services (5.2 percent), business management (4.9 percent), engineering and technology (4.3 percent), administrative support (4.6 percent).

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

Figure 2 presents the distribution of the *intended* careers of the respondents by BLS categories. I find, first, that all 67 BLS categories have a respondent, making the diversity of intended careers greater than among current occupations. Second, respondents in the therapeutic pathway (14.9 percent) represent the largest percentage of all categories, roughly 5 percentage points higher than its percentage when examining current occupations. Additionally, 8.7 percent of the respondents have intended careers belonging to multiple BLS pathways, closely followed by the teaching/training pathway (8.6 percent), which is over 2 points higher than among current occupations. Other categories – for example, business management (7.6 percent) and family and community services (3.3 percent) – make up sizeable proportions, with every other category constituting only a small percentage of all respondents. Interestingly, respondents were currently employed in operations management 14.2 percent of the time, meaning that this category lost significant ground relative to other types of work when respondents considered their own future careers. In contrast, there was minor growth in the family and community services occupation (from 2.5 to 3.3 percent). Third, only 4.6 percent of the respondents intended careers belong in the "not in the work force" category, compared to 16.6 percent in the current occupations (likely reflecting those who are students intending to enter the workforce).

Taken together then, Figures 1 and 2 show that current NSYR respondents are primarily not in the labor force or are concentrated in a few particular occupational categories. Indeed, the top five most common BLS categories – not in the labor force, operations management, therapeutic services, personal care services, and teaching and training – account for 53.6 percent of all respondents. In contrast, those same categories account for only 33 percent of all intended careers among the same respondents, indicating a high degree of intended switching in the

aggregate. At the same time, Figures 1 and 2 also illustrate that some categories shrink while other gain: where a greater proportion of respondents are currently not in the work force, few intend to remain in the same category, while more respondents intend to enter the teaching and training occupational field in the future relative to the same occupations currently.

Bivariate Associations with Career Switching

I turn now to a series of bivariate analyses exploring the association between key independent variables and my dichotomous outcome, switching (1 = switch as describe in my methods section above). Displayed in Figures 3 through 18 of the appendix, these bivariate analyses illustrate several key relationships between whether a respondent switched and my key independent variables. I note the following key findings. First, there are no gender differences in the likelihood of intending to switch career paths, but there are distinct racial differences. Specifically, Figures 4 and 5 show that race has a statistically significant relationship with intended career switching with non-white respondents (versus white) and African American (versus non-African American) respondents being more likely to intend a change in careers (other group comparisons for Latino vs. non-Latino, Asian vs. non-Asian, and other race vs. not other race found no statistically significant differences at $p<.05$). Second, the current enrollment status of a respondent has a statistically significant relationship with intended career switch (Figure 10, $p<.001$). Third, Figures 11 through 18 indicate that social class generally doesn't impact whether a respondent intend to switch careers, though lower/working class and middle-class respondents who are currently enrolled are more likely to switch (Figures 15 and 16).

Multivariate Results Predicting Career Switching

Though informative, the bivariate relationships provided in the appendix suggest only that some basic respondent characteristics and their educational status (enrolled versus not) may be related to career switching. To further disentangle these factors, I turn now to multivariate logistic regression models predicting career switching with respondent characteristics controlled simultaneously. Table 1 displays the results of these models (with odds ratios for ease of interpretation): model 1 includes controls for gender and race (Black, Hispanic, and Other with White as the reference), model 2 includes all of model 1 plus enrollment status, model 3 adds social class as defined by parental education, model 4 adds social class as defined by parental income, and model 5 includes all variables in a fully saturated model.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

I note the following key findings. First, Model 1 shows that there is a significant relationship between race and intention to switch. Specifically, African Americans are about 67.8 percent more likely to intend to switch BLS career paths (odds ratio = 1.678, p<.05) than are Whites, the reference group in these models. Similarly, "other race" respondents are about 68.9 percent more likely to intend to switch (odds ratio = 1.689, p<.05) than Whites. Second, turning to model 2, I observe the same relationships between race and intent to switch, but also find current enrollment matters, too. Respondents who are currently enrolled in school are over twice as likely to intend to switch BLS career paths than those who are not (odds ratio = 2.099, p<.05). Here also, Hispanic ethnicity emerges as an important predictor: Hispanics are 86.7 percent more likely to intend a career switch than Whites (this holds even in the fully saturated model 5 with an odds ratio of 1.867, p<.05).

Third, models 3 through 5 indicate that social class – measured both in terms of parental income and parental education – do not impact the intent to switch careers. Fourth, gender has a statistically significant association with switching. Specifically, in model 5 that includes all variables, women are about 24 percent less likely to intend to change careers (odds ratio = .763, p<.05) than are men. This result holds even after controlling for social class, enrollment status, and race.

Overall, individuals who are presently enrolled in college express a strong intention to switch career paths on future. This is one of the most consistent associations across all models. Likewise, African Americans more commonly express the intention to switch their career paths than Whites, as are those respondents in the "other race" category and Hispanics. In contrast, women are less likely to intend to switch career paths than men.

V. Discussion

This study investigated how emerging adults navigate career pathways. The predominant research question it sought to answer was: to what extent is there stability or switching in career pathways during emerging adulthood? Using major occupational groupings created by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the study, first, investigated whether these occupational groupings can be identified at earlier points in career trajectories when individuals are completing their education and first entering the workforce. Second, the degree of career switching was investigated by assessing current majors and occupations compared to later career aspirations. Third, the role of gender, race, and social class on stability or switching in career pathways during emerging adulthood was explored alongside several other key covariates (e.g., current enrollment).

I noted four key observations from my analysis of the NSYR data. First, there is a high degree of intended career switching across the NSYR sample. Approximately, two-thirds of the survey respondents, who are currently in their mid- to late-twenties, intended to switch their career pathway by the time they were in their mid-thirties. Noticeably, the percentage of individuals in the "not in the work force" category shrank significantly in intended occupation categories compared to current occupation categories. Moreover, occupational categories had a much greater range of diversity among the intended careers than among current careers: for the current occupational categories, respondents were clustered within a few specific categories (for example, operations management, personal care services, teaching/training, and therapeutic services together accounted for 37.1 percent) or were unemployed (16.6 percent), whereas respondents were more evenly dispersed among the intended careers (for example, the same categories above accounted for only 28.5 percent) and fewer respondents were unemployed (4.6 percent). In short, I found evidence that most emerging and young adults intend to switch careers, reflecting a wider range of occupations than those in which they were currently employed.

Second, there was a significant relationship between gender, as well as race, and the intention to switch occupational categories. Controlling for other important individual characteristics, females were less likely to indicate they intended to switch careers. Black, Hispanic, and other non-White respondents were more likely to intend to switch careers than were White respondents. Importantly, these findings were observed even after controlling for current educational enrollment and social class, the latter using both by family education and family income.

Third, I found that individuals who were currently enrolled were more likely to intend to switch careers. Again, controlling for key demographic and social class, respondents who were currently enrolled in school (again, respondents were in their mid- to late-twenties) were more likely to indicate they were changing occupational categories. Relatedly, fourth, a respondent's parental social class did not influence their intention to switch their careers. That is, neither the respondent's familial education nor income was associated with their own likelihood of switching careers.

Many previous studies on career switching have focused on switching majors (e.g., Azmitia, Syed and Radmacher 2008; Shulman et al. 2014; Lam 2017), detailing how college students move from different educational trajectories as they explore different career options and hone their own identities. By focusing on and operationalizing early career stability versus intended switching, the current study helps illustrate another part of the exploration and change that are characteristic of emerging adulthood. Rather than focusing on educational switching (e.g., changing majors), this project disentangles the subsequent occupations of emerging and young adults.

Emerging adulthood provides the relative freedom to explore different options both in the personal and professional spheres (Arnett 2000; Luyckx et al. 2008; Settersten and Ray 2010; Lee 2014; Krahn, Howard and Galambos 2015). While this process entails trying out different educational majors, emerging adults continue that exploration and identity formation process by exploring different career pathways. By operationalizing career pathways, the current study articulates career switching in a concrete way by illustrating present career and future career aspirations from the perspective of different occupational categories. In doing so, it shows how occupations are a crucial part of emerging adulthood and creates a more comprehensive picture

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of on the identity exploration during emerging adulthood. Therefore, this study contributes to prior literature by utilizing a new method that takes into account early and intended career paths as reflected in BLS categories along with education.

The age of individuals belonging to the life stage emerging adulthood may range between 18 to 29 years of age (Arnett 2015) roughly coinciding with the age of college population when they enroll in a 4-year program in college (NCES 2018) and graduate. Since identity exploration is an indicator of emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000; Shanahan et al. 2005; Luyckx et al. 2008; Krahn, Howard and Galambos 2015; Schwartz 2016), we may assume that the college is also a time for identity exploration, of which the early career path marks an important step in refining that identity. If we take finding long-term employment to be a hallmark of adulthood and assume that by the end of college students should be able to find long-term employment, then studying career pathways at an earlier stage represents a key part of how college students make that transition to adulthood more successfully. Identifying career pathways at an earlier stage may also help in repairing the possible disjointedness between education and employment (Spreen 2013), removing any obstacles to a student's transition into gainful employment and also reducing future career obstacles such as workplace retention (Minefee et al. 2018).

Theoretical Contributions

Existing studies on emerging adulthood change have often focused on switching majors. The present study focused on the much broader implications of career switching by focusing on early career and intended future career pathways. This focus on career pathways opens up new avenues of understanding career switching versus stability as it combines educational majors and both current and intended future occupations, which can be helpful in understanding the implications of career path switching and stability among emerging adults.

As noted above, one of the key features of emerging adulthood is identity exploration (Arnett 2000; Shanahan et al. 2005; Luyckx et al. 2008; Krahn, Howard and Galambos 2015; Schwartz 2016). In the present study, we can identify this quest to find one's own identity when we observe that there is a high degree of intended career switching. Approximately two-thirds of the sample intended to switch their career pathway. This intention to pursue other avenues can be viewed as a desire to explore as the respondents are in the emerging adulthood period (even though many have already completed their education). With a relative degree of freedom from social expectations that are associated with both childhood and adulthood, the respondents are welcome to explore various career options. If they feel that the present career options are not congruent with their occupational expectations, they have the freedom to abandon their present career path and choose a different one.

However, along with the concept of identity exploration, the current study also has implications for the notion of floundering being associated with emerging adults (Nelson and Padilla-Walker 2013; Krahn, Howard and Galambos 2015). In the present study, we observed that there were participants who had previously been enrolled in college, employed in various occupations, and intended to switch to an entirely different career pathway in future. Emerging adults who frequently modify their career paths may be viewed as ineffectual individuals who lack a proper aim and are floundering as they bounce from one option to the next (Krahn, Howard and Galambos 2015). However, the concept of floundering could be interpreted differently when considering future switches between different career pathways but staying within the same career cluster. Any movement within the same cluster might, alternatively, be viewed as a career switch that better reflects intentional exploration and/or a desire to better fit

their career with their desires and broader identity. In this manner, it may not be so much floundering as a deliberate move towards a definite career goal and a higher position.

As an example, the present study found 14.2 percent of respondents were currently in the operations management pathway, which includes salespersons and retail workers. Regarding intended career switches, only 3 percent of the respondents were within the same operations management pathway. This means that many of those who are currently in the operations management pathway do not intend to stay in it and intend to switch to a different pathway. However, that may not necessarily indicate a move towards an entirely different career cluster and a new direction in future career. If those within the operations management career pathway, for instance, eventually desire to move to the business management pathway – which includes senior management positions – for the purposes of the current study and for many real-world observers, this would be considered a career switch. In reality, the individual very well may continue to stay within the business management and administration cluster, and indeed it would indicate a vertical move towards a higher ranked position within the same career. Therefore, understanding the nature of career switching may change how floundering is viewed and the current study suggests that further disentangling the precise manner in which individuals switch bears on the issue of intentionality versus floundering in emerging adulthood.

Policy and Program Implications

Beyond the emerging adulthood literature, the findings of the present study have clear implications for educational policy, as well as for workforce development. On the one hand, in the US, labor force participation among recent college graduates has increased over the last few decades. In 2011, 85.2 percent of recent college graduates were participating in the US labor force (Spreen 2013). This rate was higher than that of 2010, when the labor force participation

among recent college graduates was 83.3 percent (Spreen 2013). However, an increase in labor force participation may not be an indication of an education system which has been successfully creating employees with the right amount of preparedness for the labor market. The expectation employers have from employees may not match their skill levels. Indeed, employers reported that only 64.5 percent of their employees, who had a four-year college degree were adequately prepared for an entry-level job (Casner-Lotto and Barrington 2006). They also expressed overall dissatisfaction with their leadership and communication skills. Thus, there is a distinct lack of connectedness between education and occupational preparedness and the findings of the current study showing the widespread prevalence of early career switching might suggest that education and industry continue to "miss" in terms of preparing individuals for the workforce in ways that produce greater stability upon employment.

This disjointedness between education and occupation can also be viewed as a lack of awareness among many different groups, including students, educators, and potential employers, about the diversity that exists within career pathways. The present study illustrates the existence of variety of different occupational trajectories. With a clearer understanding of what a career pathway is and what variations exist within it could help educational institutions better inform students about what different careers look like and how they are connected with each other. A keener awareness of which career path the student is on and how they can be prepared for the occupations existing for individuals on that career pathway may help them become more stable, either by placing them in specific occupations that better suit their desires and goals or by promoting strategic movement (rather than floundering). Moreover, employers can also learn about the distinct career pathways and provide more clarity about the skills needed for particular jobs and the job prospects of different career trajectories.

The current study also revealed that the race of an individual influences their decisions regarding intended career switch. When compared to White respondents, more African American, Hispanic, and other race respondents intended to switch their careers. The underrepresentation of certain groups of people in some occupations might be one of the reasons behind the prevalence of African American individuals wanting to switch their future career (Minefee et al. 2018; Bayer and Rouse 2016). Those who start their journey in one occupation may find their progress impeded due to various reasons and this may lead them to choose a different career path. For instance, in 2014 there were 500 doctorate degrees awarded to US citizens in Economics and among them 42 were awarded to ethnically non-white candidates (Bayer and Rouse 2016). This lack of diversity is not limited in the graduate level. Rather it begins in the undergraduate level and continues well into the job market. In the business and management sector, employing and retaining ethnic minorities has been a persistent issue (Minefee et al. 2018), where individuals may start at the business and management sector but leave before progressing further on that path due to biased assessment processes and efforts by dominant groups to maintain status quo. Overall, industries that are interested in a more diverse workforce might look to retention within careers – that is, reducing early career switching as observed in the current study – as a way to increase and maintain diversity.

Alternatively, compared to those who are White, racial and ethnic minorities may find that their educational preparation for the workforce hasn't provided them with the social and human capital necessary to find stable career pathways upon graduation. That is, minorities may experience more disconnection between the tangible skills and connections needed for even identifying the occupational trajectories most compatible with their identity and long-term economic goals. As a result, they may find that they are under- or misplaced across the

employment spectrum relative to White emerging adults, necessitating a higher degree of career switching as they transition into full adulthood.

Additionally, the current study observed that women were less likely to switch careers than men. This could indicate that women are more certain in their career goals. Indeed, among young adults, women appear to be more motivated to achieve career goals than men (Schoon and Ross 2007). The fact that they are less likely to switch could be an indication that they have retained that motivation and have achieved their educational and occupational goals by their twenties. Therefore, they do not intend to switch and are more likely to be stickers (Bradley and Devadason 2008).

Conversely, gendered expectations may be holding women back and in that they are less likely to pursue their desired career goals. One of the chief aspects of such gendered expectations centers on the cultural and biological norm of motherhood (Schoon and Ross 2007). Indeed, within the present sample, women respondents included being a full-time mother among their desired career goals. There is often an assumption that women are to be the primary family caregivers, and, in turn, there is a general lack of support for them in the workplace (Sadler et al. 2012). These factors may lead women to modify their career goals and not pursue their desired career pathway, making them less likely to intend to switch as I found in the current study. If the lives women anticipate living include having a family along with educational and occupational goals, then their career trajectories may not always follow the originally envisioned ideal trajectory. Modifications may be needed to create a more balanced work-life combination (Barthelemy, McCormick, and Henderson 2015). Therefore, women may choose not to switch, but rather remain within the same career pathway that would allow them to have both a career and a family.

This could have implications for policies related to both the industry and education sectors. If women are interested in a diverse array of careers, but gendered expectations related to family and motherhood are holding them back, then emphasizing a work-life balance orientation could eliminate the idea that motherhood is something that needs to be pitted against career. In fact, the creation of this environment can begin during the formative years of school. For example, women often feel unwelcome in STEM related careers (Sadler et al. 2012), where they report indirect sexism being used as a way to push women toward certain types of roles. Here, educators can help create a more gender-neutral environment by curbing stereotypical gendered educational expectations (i.e., girls are weak in mathematics, women are natural caregivers and thus are more suited for occupations that require such qualities, etc.). Thus, in both the employment and educational sector a change in attitude and policies to endorse any such changes can be beneficial and, in turn, reduce the likelihood of women being placed in early careers that reduce their likelihood of switching (should they desire to do so).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the current study makes a number of important advances, I acknowledge that it has its limitations, as well. First, the study examined intended career switches among the respondents of Wave 4 of NSYR. To discover whether the intended career switches transformed into concrete or actual career switches, future researchers can follow up with the respondents to explicitly capture whether their intentions were met with action. By observing who switched and who remained stable, we may further discover if gender, race, and social class impacted such decisions.

Second, the different degrees of career switching were not fully explored within the present study. Switching would have different implications for individuals moving to a different

career pathway while remaining within the same career cluster than it would for those who not only move to a different career pathway but also to a different cluster. These variations need to be explored to further understand the significance of career switching more thoroughly. As with the first direction for future research, additional empirical research in this area could also untangle whether different types of career switches – for example, vertically within the same cluster, horizontally to related clusters, or horizontally to unrelated career clusters – are undertaken differently by some gender or racial/ethnic groups more or less than others.

Finally, the current study focused only on the United States and, thus, the findings may not be applicable to a more global population. In future, the scope of the study could be expanded beyond the U.S. and into a more global perspective. The education and career experiences of first-generation individuals from immigrant families could be included in future studies on career pathway switching and stability, while more global research could also explore the unique circumstances of emerging adulthood in different cultural and structural contexts.

The advent of emerging adulthood as a new life stage marks a time when young people tend to prolong their entry into adulthood as they explore different avenues in both their professional and personal lives. Emerging adulthood remains crucial in understanding the experiences of this distinct age group as they explore and create their identities. This study, among many others, contributes to the continued exploration of this important stage of life and provides a useful foundation for future studies on the transition to adulthood specifically, and occupations and education broadly.

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Appendices

Table 1: Career Clusters and Career Pathways

Career Clusters	Career Pathways
Agriculture, food, and natural resources	i. Agribusiness Systems Career Pathway ii. Animal Systems Career Pathway iii. Environmental Service Systems Career Pathway iv. Food Products & Processing Systems Career Pathway v. Natural Resources Systems Career Pathway vi. Plant Systems Career Pathway vii. Power, Structural & Technical Systems Career Pathway
Architecture and construction	i. Design/Pre-Construction Pathway ii. Construction Pathway iii. Maintenance/Operations Pathway
Arts, audio/video technology, and communications	i. A/V Technology & Film Career Pathway ii. Printing Technology Career Pathway iii. Visual Arts Career Pathway iv. Performing Arts Career Pathway v. Journalism & Broadcasting Career Pathway vi. Telecommunications Career Pathway
Business management and administration	i. General Management Pathway ii. Business Information Management Pathway iii. Human Resources Management Pathway iv. Operations Management Pathway v. Administrative Support Pathway
Education and training	i. Administration & Administrative Support Pathway ii. Professional Support Services Pathway iii. Teaching/Training Pathway
Finance	i. Securities & Investments Pathway ii. Business Finance Pathway iii. Accounting Pathway iv. Insurance Pathway v. Banking Services Pathway
Government and public administration	i. Governance Pathway ii. National Security Pathway iii. Foreign Service Pathway iv. Planning Pathway v. Revenue & Taxation vi. Regulation Pathway vii. Public Management & Administration Pathway
Health science	i. Therapeutic Services Pathway ii. Diagnostic Services Pathway iii. Health Informatics Pathway iv. Support Services Pathway v. Biotechnology Research & Development Pathway

Table 1: Career Clusters and Career Pathways (Cont.)

Career Clusters	Career Pathways
Hospitality and tourism	i. Restaurants & Food/Beverage Services Pathway ii. Lodging Pathway iii. Travel & Tourism Pathway iv. Recreation, Amusements & Attractions Pathway
Human services	i. Early Childhood Development & Services Pathway ii. Counseling & Mental Health Services Pathway iii. Family & Community Services Pathway iv. Personal Care Services Pathway v. Consumer Services Pathway
Information technology	i. Network Systems Pathway ii. Information Support & Services Pathway iii. Web & Digital Communications Pathway iv. Programming & Software Development Pathway
Law, public safety, corrections, and security	i. Correction Services Pathway ii. Emergency & Fire Management Services Pathway iii. Law Enforcement Services Pathway iv. Legal Services Pathway v. Security & Protective Services Pathway
Manufacturing	i. Production Pathway ii. Manufacturing Production Process Development Pathway iii. Maintenance, Installation & Repair Pathway iv. Quality Assurance Pathway v. Logistics & Inventory Control Pathway vi. Health, Safety & Environmental Assurance Pathway
Marketing	i. Marketing Management Pathway ii. Professional Sales Pathway iii. Merchandising Pathway iv. Marketing Communications Pathway v. Marketing Research Pathway
Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics	i. Engineering & Technology Pathway ii. Science & Mathematics Pathway
Transportation, distribution, and logistics	i. Transportation Operations Pathway ii. Logistics Planning & Management Services Pathway iii. Warehousing & Distribution Center Operations Pathway iv. Facility & Mobile Equipment Maintenance Pathway v. Transportation Systems/Infrastructure Planning, Management & Regulation Pathway vi. Health, Safety & Environmental Management Pathway vii. Sales & Service Pathway

Table 2: Logistic Regression Models Predicting Career Trajectory Intended Switching

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	.835	.819	.781*	.817	.763*
	(.083)	(.082)	(.088)	(.085)	(.089)
Black	1.678*	1.653*	1.675*	1.656*	1.619*
	(.278)	(.276)	(.37)	(.29)	(.36)
Hispanic	1.460	1.401	1.785*	1.438	1.867*
	(.296)	(0.287)	(.454)	(.305)	(.493)
Other	1.689*	1.615*	1.617*	1.674*	1.696*
	(.310)	(.299)	(.345)	(.321)	(.378)
Enrolled	-	2.099*	2.127*	2.232*	2.242*
	-	(.264)	(.305)	(.293)	(.335)
SES - Education	-	-	1.107	-	1.132
	-	-	(.071)	-	(.086)
SES - Income	-	-	-	.994	.970
	-	-	-	(.046)	(.061)
R^2	.009	.025	.028	0.028	.032

Figure 1: Current occupation (cpath_c) by BLS categories
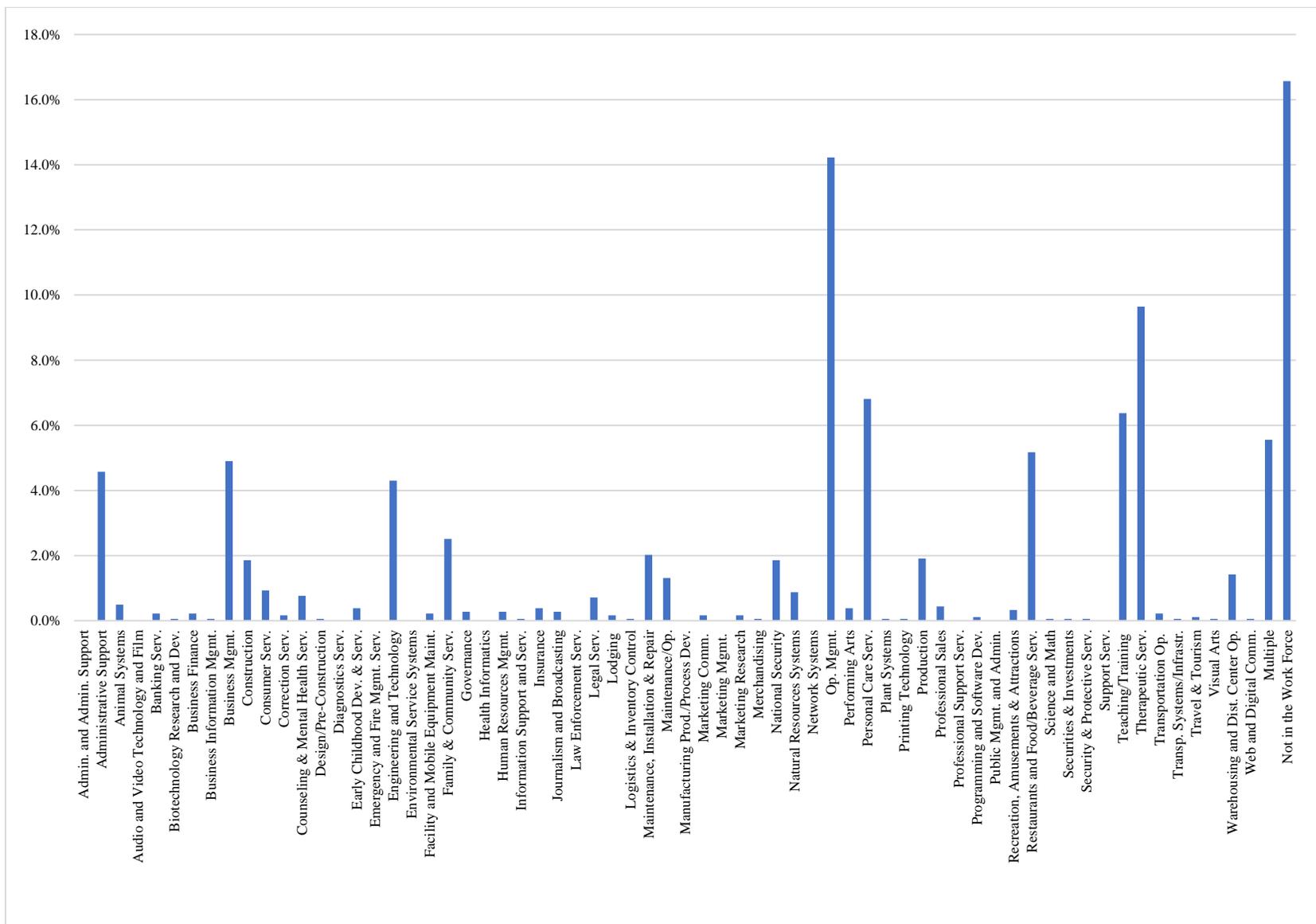
Figure 2: Switching (cpath_Int) by BLS categories
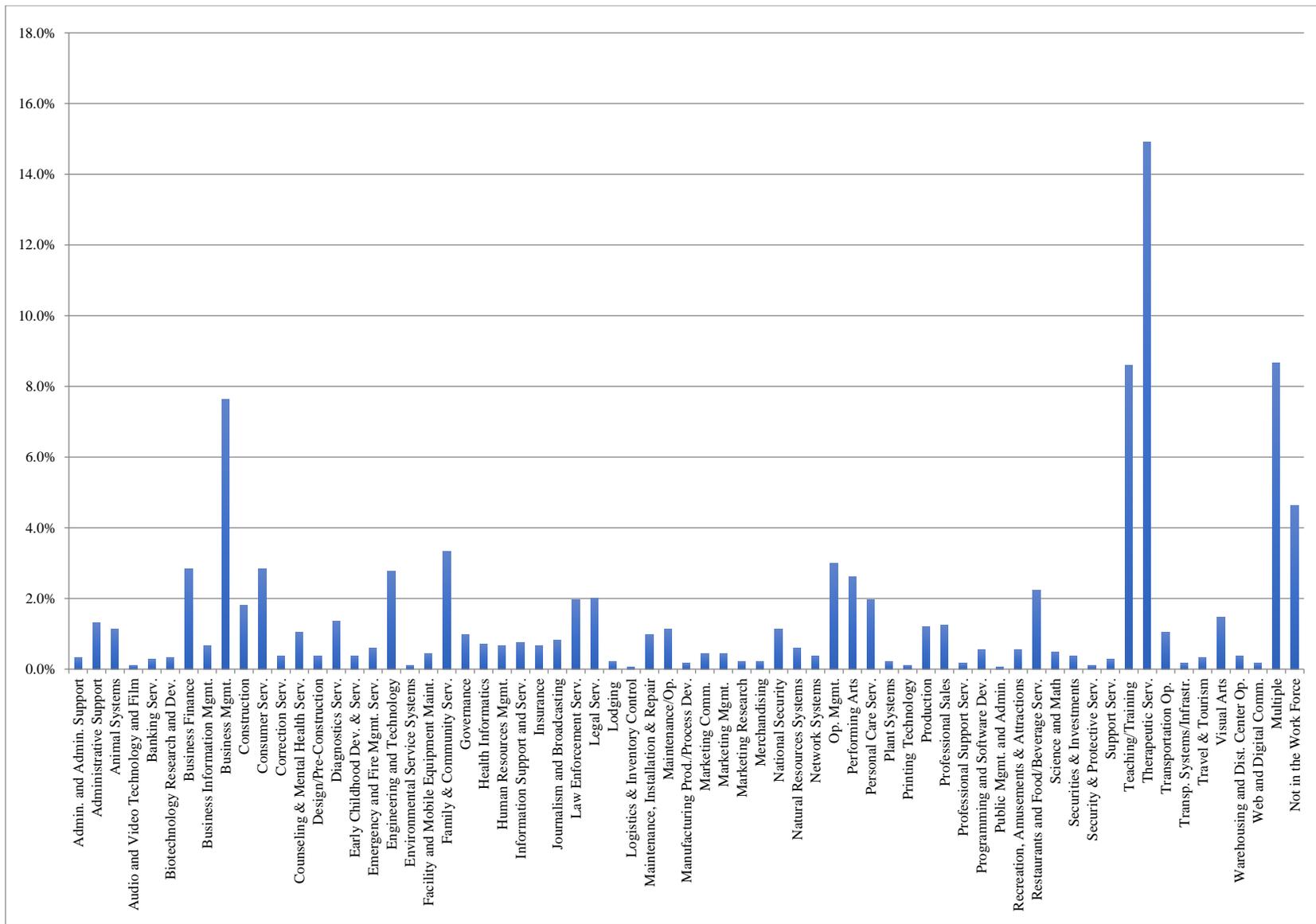
Bivariate Analyses
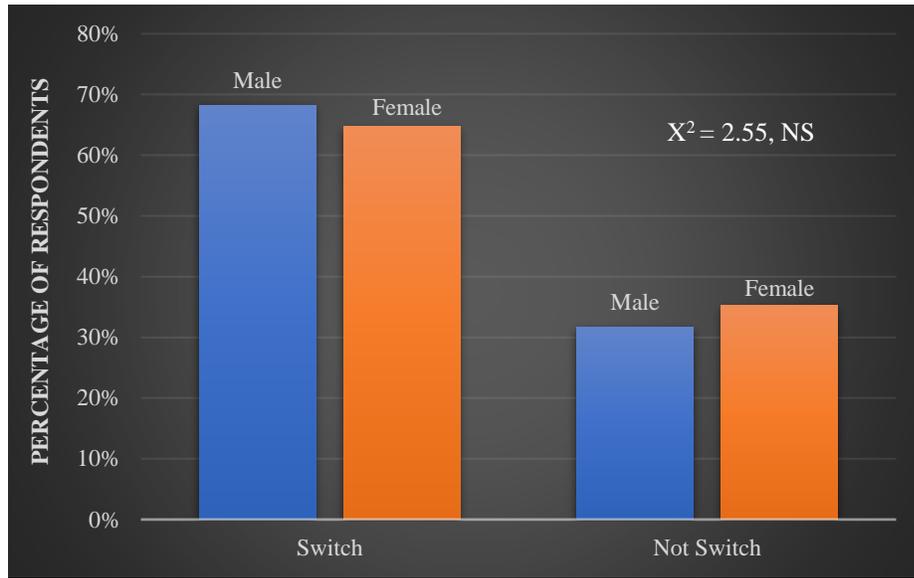
Figure 3. Switching by Gender
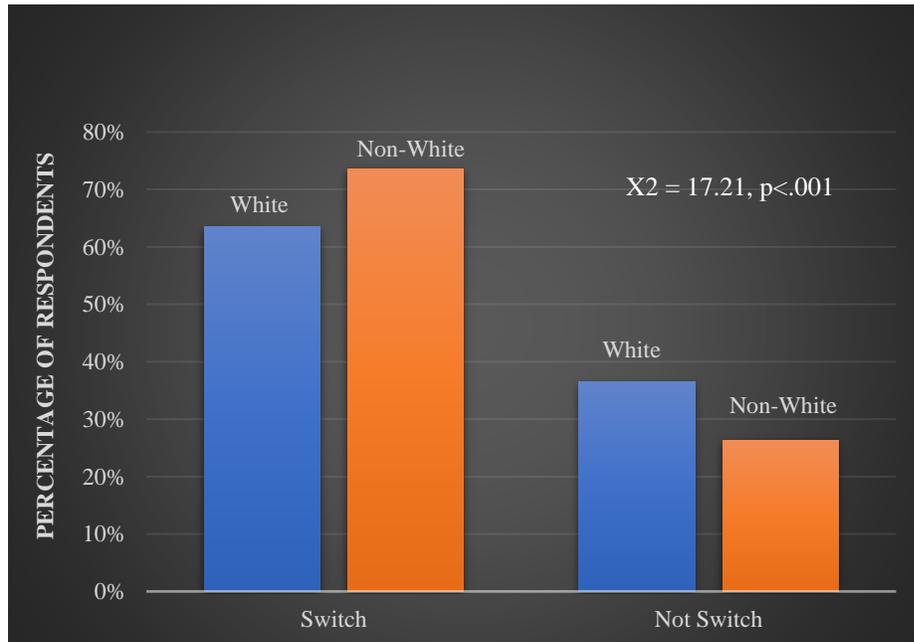
Figure 4. Switching by Race
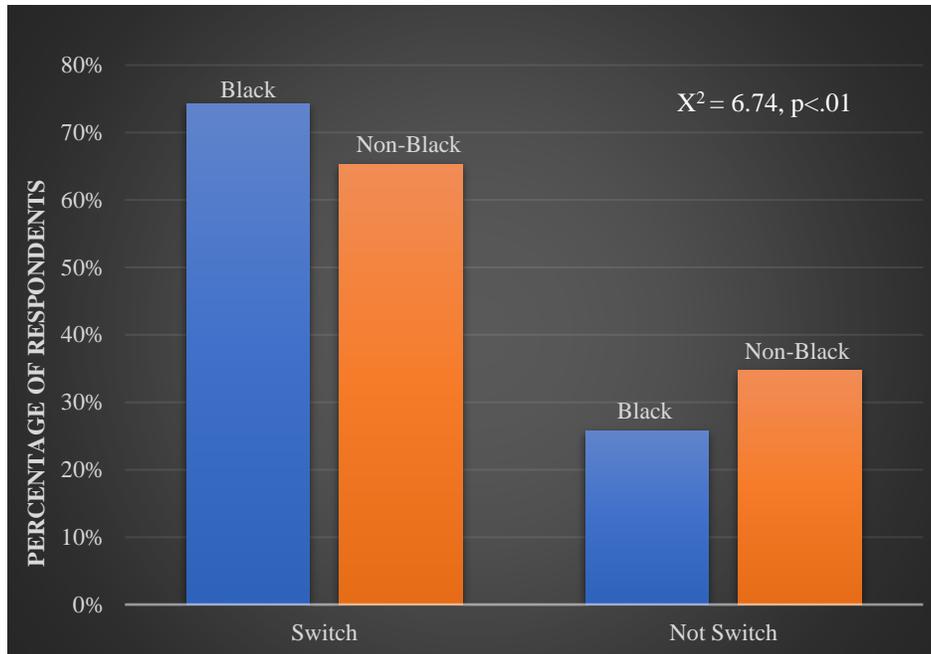
Figure 5. Switching by Race
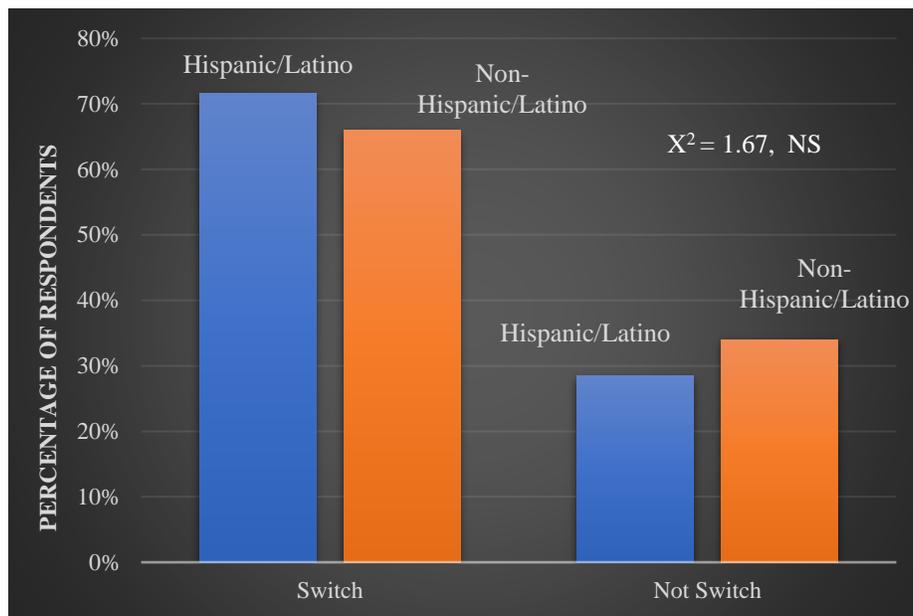
Figure 6. Switching by Race
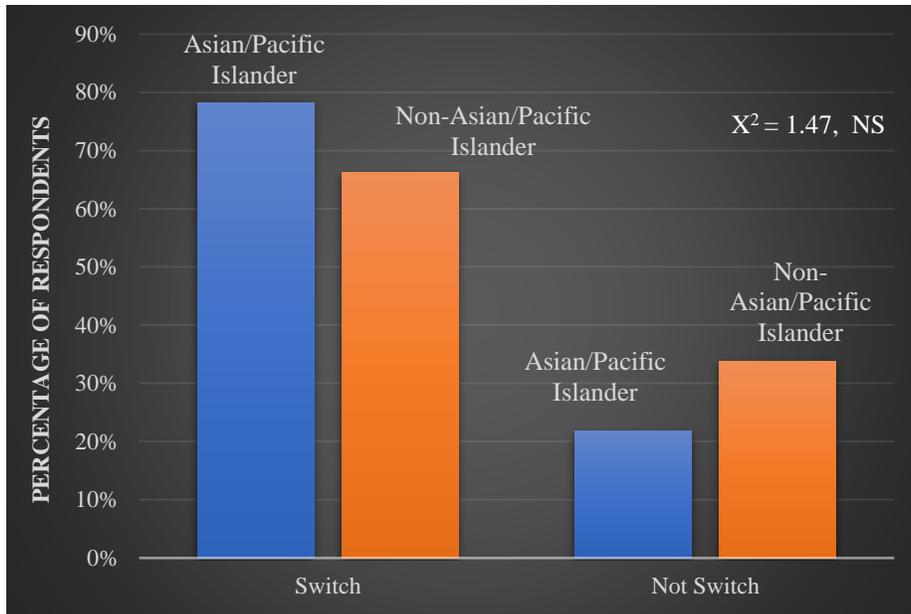
Figure 7. Switching by Race
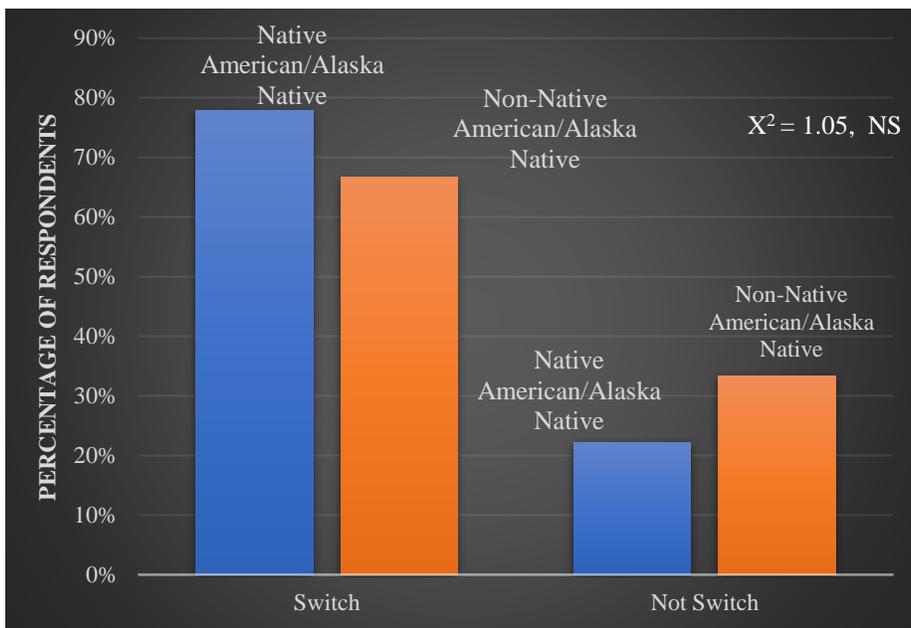
Figure 8. Switching by Race
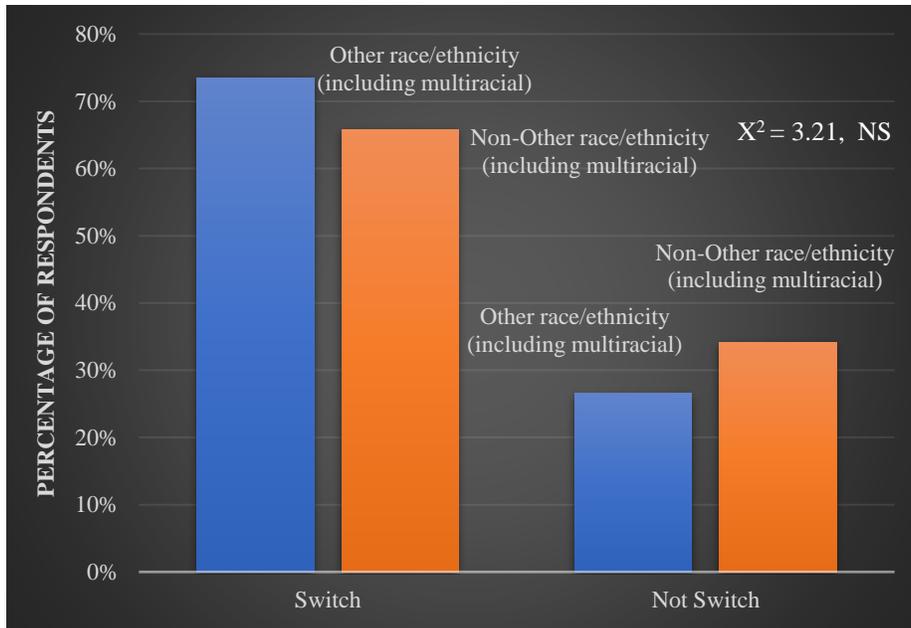
Figure 9. Switching by Race
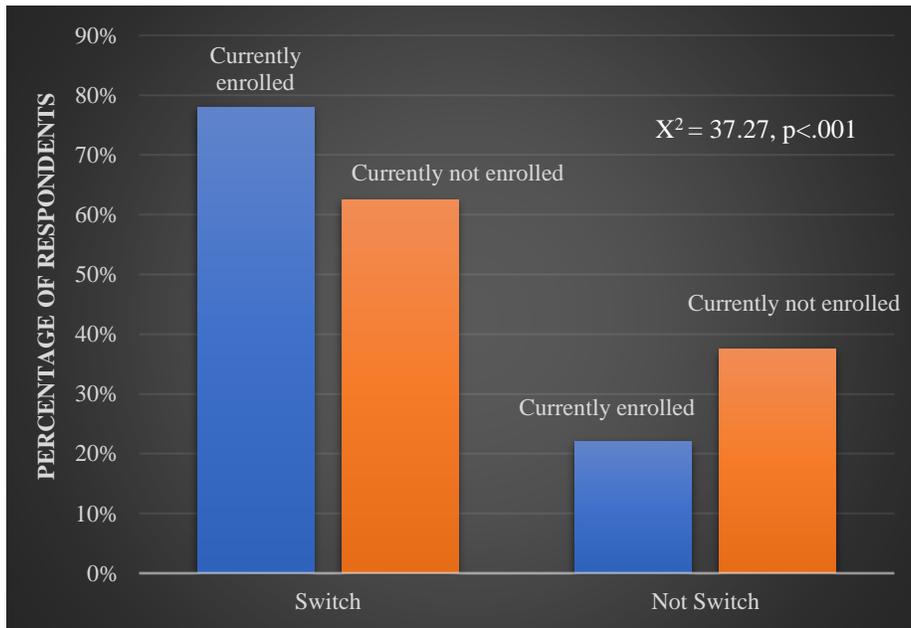
Figure 10. Switching by Enrollment Status
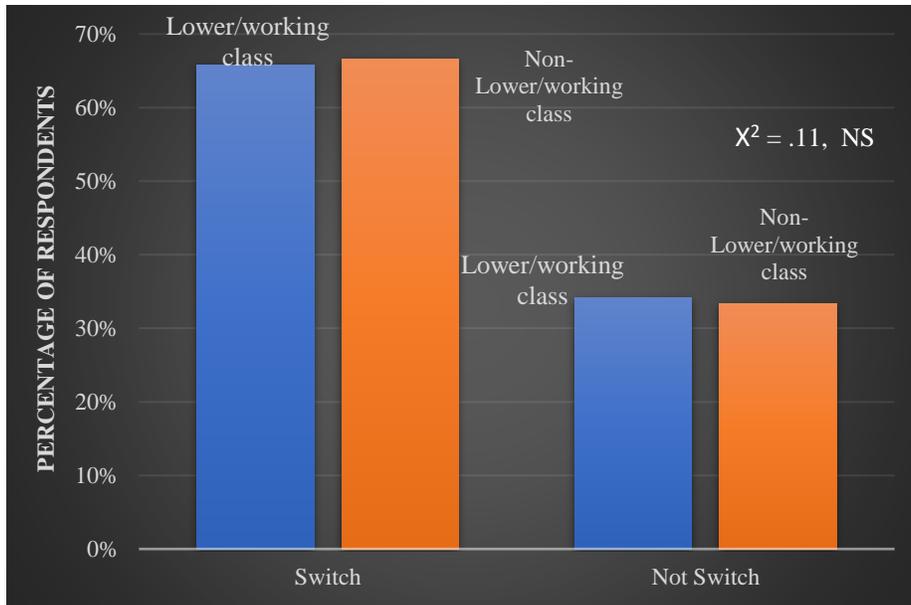
Figure 11. Switching by Parental Social Class
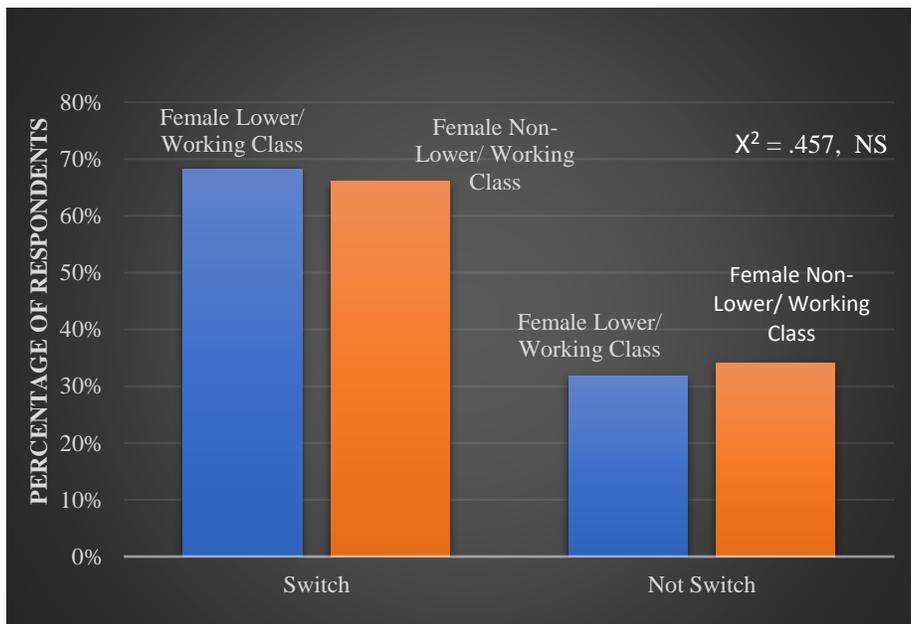
Figure 12. Switching by Female Lower Social Class
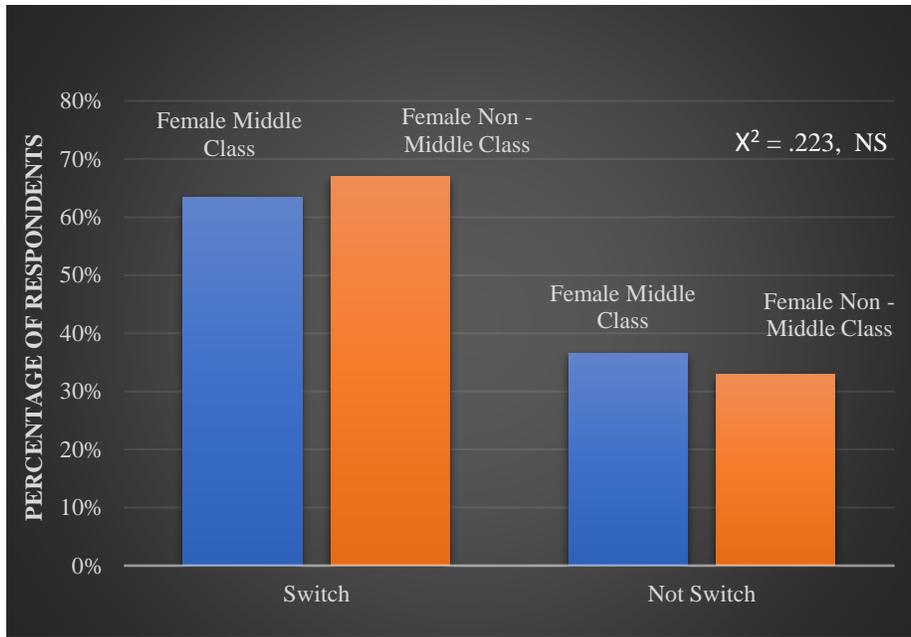
Figure 13. Switching by Female Middle Social Class
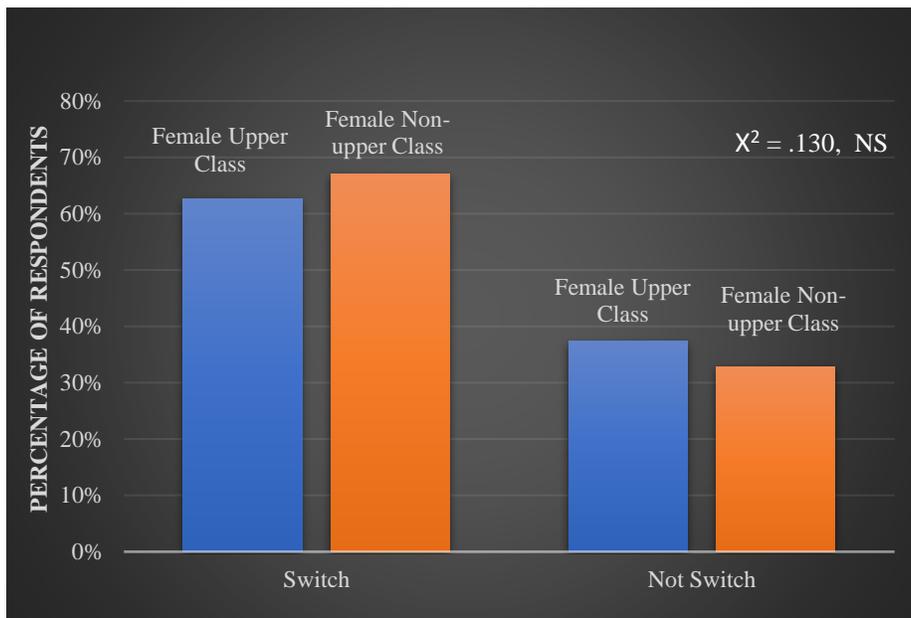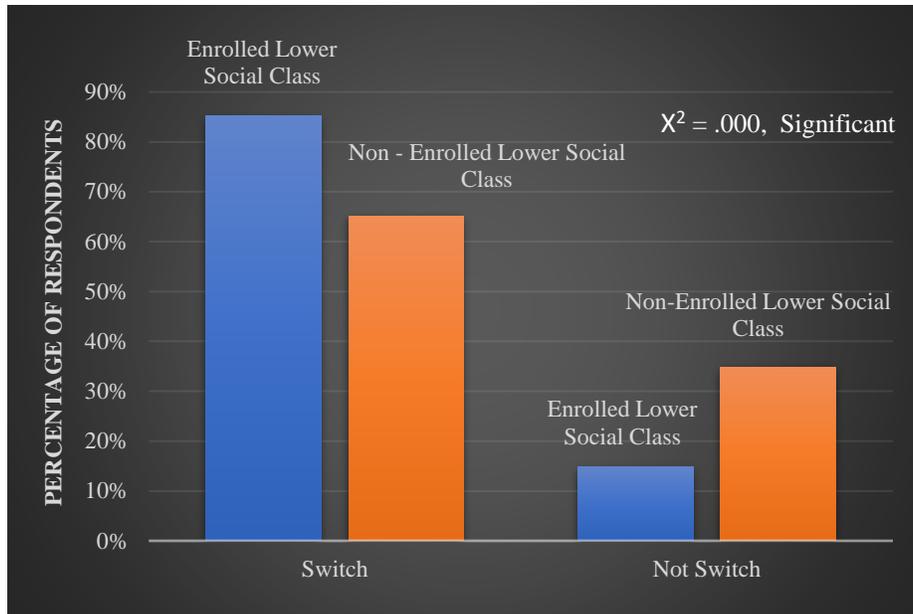

Figure 14. Switching by Female Upper Social Class

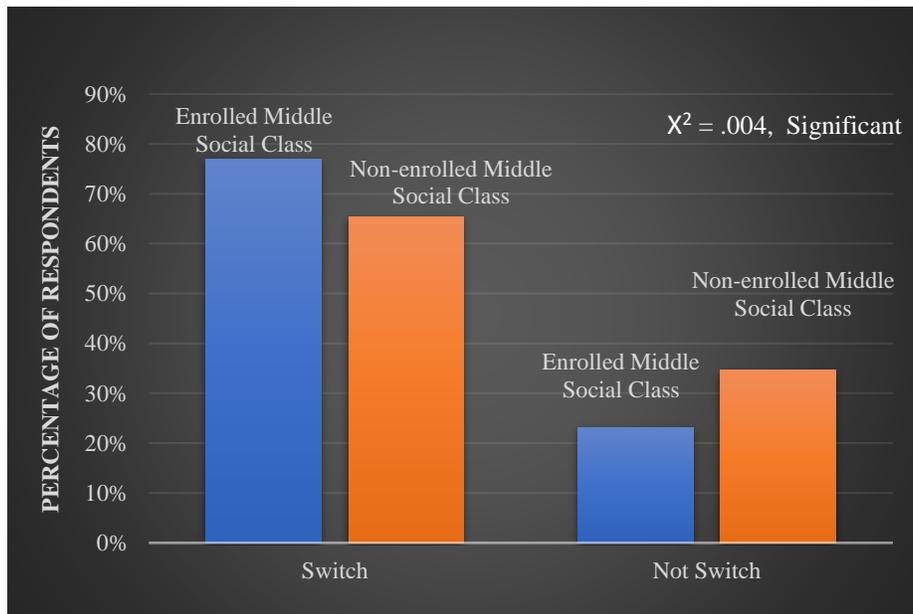**Figure 15. Switching by Enrollment Lower Social Class**
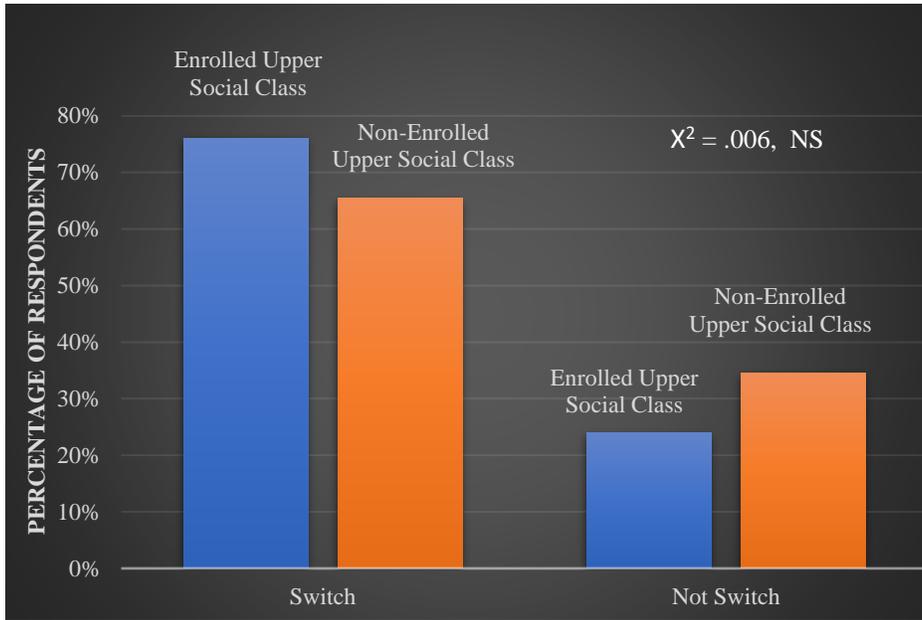

Figure 16. Switching by Enrollment Middle Social Class
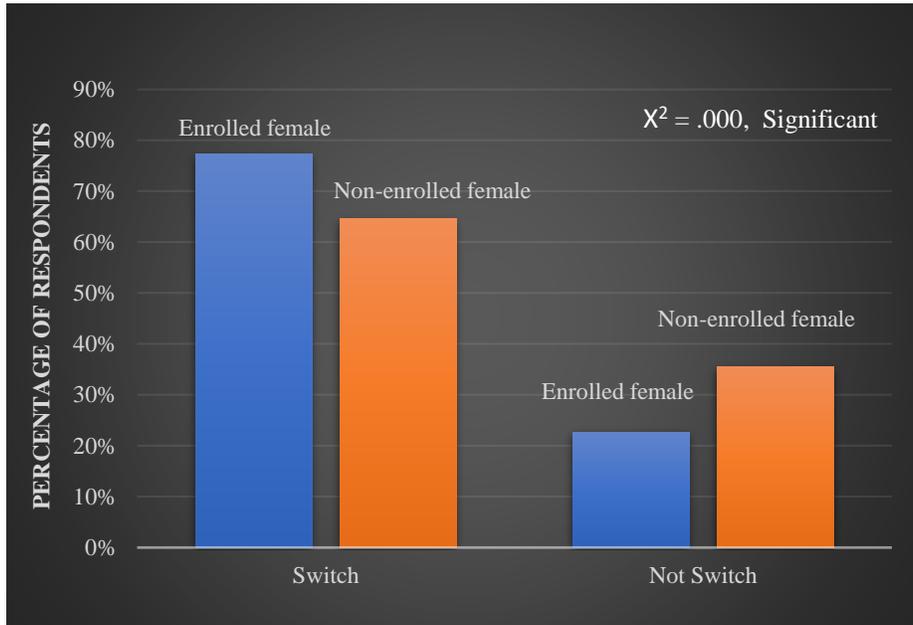
Figure 17. Switching by Enrollment Upper Social Class

Figure 18. Switching by Current Enrollment Female

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

To:	Tasmiah Amreen BELL 4188
From:	Chair, Douglas James Adams IRB Committee
Date:	04/20/2018
Action:	**Review Not Required**
Action Date:	04/20/2018
Protocol #:	1804115587
Study Title:	Emerging Adult Career Pathways: Understanding Aspirations and Switching

Please keep this form for your records. Investigators are required to notify the IRB if any changes are made to the referenced study that may change the status of this determination. Please contact your IRB Administrator if you have any questions regarding this determination or future changes to this determination.