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ABSTRACT

Demographic shifts have lengthened the transition to adulthood and altered home-leaving patterns. Though all emerging adults are affected, little research has examined the experience of poor youths in this context. Using The National Survey of Families and Households, this study examined age of home leaving, repeated home leaving, and exit destination (N = 1,517). Poverty was related to these patterns. Young adults who experienced childhood poverty or public assistance were less likely to leave for school; those who experienced poverty were less likely to ever leave or experience repeated home leaving; and those with a public assistance history were more likely to leave early. These emerging adults may require assistance to transition out of the home and transition to school.

Recent demographic trends in the United States include the shift to later home-leaving patterns and broader exit destinations for emerging adults (Arnett, 2000; Cherlin, Scabini, & Rossi, 1997). Though all young adults seem to be included in this trend, it is less clear how family economic status affects this key transition in young adulthood. Poor young adults have consistently poorer life chances than their nonpoor peers, as evident by their lower educational attainment, lower future income, and higher adult public assistance use (Besharov, 1999; Powers, 1996; Wilson, 1999). Home-leaving behaviors are integral to the transition to adulthood and are essential to achieving self-sufficiency. This study looks at home-leaving behavior for poor versus nonpoor emerging adults in the United States, defined by both the federal poverty line and a history of family public assistance use during childhood, to assess differences in patterns related to age at home leaving, repeated home leaving, and exit destination.

Emerging adulthood is a key period in a young person's life requiring many transitions that are important for determining later success (Arnett & Taber, 1994; Hogan & Astone, 1986; Rindfuss, 1991). This transitional period is now considered a distinct developmental period from age 18 to about age 25 (Arnett, 2000). Though, as Arnett (2000) has noted, this period is difficult for low-income emerging adults to navigate as they are often forced to move into adult roles sooner, and therefore have less opportunity to explore possible life directions.

Diversity in residential status is one of the unique demographic patterns of this period (Arnett, 2000). Over the past 20 years, changes in the age of marriage, educational attainment, and employment opportunities have affected the nature of this transition period and the move out of the parental home. These demographic changes have influenced the timing of home leaving, subsequent living arrangements, and the likelihood of repeated home-leaving behavior.

As emerging adulthood has evolved into a distinct developmental period and home-leaving behaviors have

changed, researchers have examined this important transition. Considerable attention has been paid to general home-leaving trends in the current U.S. context around timing, cycling in and out of the parental home, and exit destination, as well as the influence of family structure, race, and gender. However, less research attention has been paid to the impact of family economic status on these patterns.

Research on the timing of home leaving suggests that, in general, today's young adults leave home later than in previous generations and remain dependent on their parents for longer periods (Buck & Scott, 1993; Cherlin et al., 1997). Emerging adults have also created new standards for what is thought necessary for independence, keeping them in the parental home until additional skills and assets are acquired (Galland, 1997; Nave-Herz, 1997). In addition, less favorable economic opportunities (Cherlin et al., 1997), an increase in college attendance (Westat, 2000), delayed and decreased rates of marriage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), and later age at first-time parenthood (Matthews & Hamilton, 2002) have deferred home leaving.

With this delay in home leaving, patterns of repeated home leaving are also changing. Young adults, particularly those who leave home for reasons other than marriage, often return home to live with their parents at some point (DaVanzo & Goldscheider, 1990; Goldscheider, 1997). Though individuals who leave for marriage are least likely to return home, those who cohabitate are more likely to return to the parental home when the relationship ends (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994). Young adults who leave home to attend college often spend several years living on their own and then return to some level of dependence on their parents over the next several years (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994). These trends all indicate increased rates of repeat home leaving for the emerging adults of this generation.

In addition to examining these demographic changes, researchers have assessed the pathways emerging adults take out of the parental home. In the United States over the past 30 years, with the increase in the average age of first marriage, young adults have become less likely to leave the parental home to marry (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). With fewer young adults exiting to marriage, they are less likely to have a spouse to depend on for support and shared income. Given the decline in marital living, semi-autonomous living arrangements, including dormitories, military barracks, and group quarters, have become increasingly popular (Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1986). Further, given the large increases in college attendance in the past 30 years (Westat, 2000), more youths are leaving home for college and therefore to semi-autonomous living arrangements. These developments have led to almost 50% of young adults ages 18 to 24 living with their parents and the other 50% split between living as spouses, as heads of their own households, or with unrelated individuals (Goldscheider, 1997).

Moving beyond examining general home-leaving trends, researchers have considered factors related to this transition, suggesting differences for early, on-time, and late home leavers, as well as for exit destination (Tang, 1997b). The impact of family structure, race, and gender has been well examined. Family structure has been shown to influence the timing of home leaving and living arrangements after leaving the parental home. Single-parent and stepparent households were associated with early home leaving among emerging adults (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Mitchell, Wister, & Burch, 1989). Young adults from two-parent biological families were more likely to leave for school versus other independent arrangements compared to those from other family structures (Aquilino, 1991). Gender is also a determinant of home-leaving behavior (Aquilino; Garasky, Haurin, & Haurin, 2001; Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1986; Mitchell et al., 1989) and may moderate the relationship between other characteristics such as race and family structure and home-leaving behavior. Black males are less likely to leave the parental home to live independently than to remain with parents (Garasky et al., 2001). Race influences exit destination (Garasky et al.), timing of exit (Tang, 1997b), and repeat home-leaving behavior (Tang, 1997a). Being White is positively related to repeated home leaving (Tang, 1997a) and White young adults are more likely to leave home before age 25 (Tang, 1997b), whereas Black young adults are less likely to exit to marriage and are more likely to live with parents (Garasky et al.).

Although researchers have examined how the above factors have influenced home-leaving behavior, less attention has been paid to how this experience differs based on family economic status in this new context. Though utilizing large-scale national datasets, such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), and the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), existing studies use older data. Findings based on economic status are mixed, with some researchers suggesting that socioeconomic status does not impact home-leaving behavior (Garasky et al., 2001; Mitchell et al., 1989) and others suggesting an impact (Aquilino, 1991; Avery, Goldscheider, & Speare, 1992; Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1986). Measuring socioeconomic status by parental educational attainment, Mitchell and colleagues (1989) did not find that SES influenced the timing of home leaving in a national sample of Canadian emerging adults in 1984. Garasky and colleagues (2001), looking at young adults from the NLSY between 1979 and 1991, found that economic variables did not impact exit destination. Other researchers have found a relationship between family economic status and the timing of home leaving (Avery et al., 1992; Whittington & Peters, 1996). Using data from the 1984 panel of the SIPP, Avery and colleagues (1992) found little impact of family income on simple home leaving. However, they did find that young adults in families with higher incomes were less likely to

leave home for marriage. Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1999) looked at parental social class. When measured by educational attainment and occupation, emerging adults whose parents had more education and higher occupational status were more likely to leave home at any age. However, when measured by childhood public assistance receipt, there was little effect on timing. Meanwhile, Tang (1997a) found that family public assistance use predicted an increase in repeated home-leaving behavior in the NSFH from 1988.

Though it is unclear how family economic status, as variously measured, impacts home-leaving behavior, young adults with childhood histories of poverty experience other demographic changes differently than nonpoor individuals. Economically disadvantaged young adults continue to enroll in college at lower rates than other young adults and therefore may have fewer job opportunities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). Over the last 20 years, the gap in wages and unemployment rates between college graduates and non–college graduates has increased considerably (American Council on Education, 1999). These trends may make poor emerging adults less likely to leave the home of origin for semi-autonomous arrangements or less likely to have the economic capital to leave home at all. As home-leaving rates increase with economic independence (Goldscheider, 1997) and job opportunities are linked to transitions out of the parental home, poor individuals may be at a disadvantage when establishing independent residences.

Though the extant research has illuminated some patterns of home leaving associated with family economic status, additional research in this area is needed to more fully understand the experiences of poor young adults in the United States. Studies have not examined family poverty or public assistance use and their impact on the timing of home leaving, repeated home-leaving behaviors, and exit destination in today's context. With this article, we attempt to fill this gap in the literature. Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1999) did use the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) dataset to look at parental social class and home leaving; however, they used data from Wave 1, collected back in the 1980s. Those data mainly came from interviews of the main respondents who may have passed through emerging adulthood years before the data were collected. Though the Goldscheider and Goldscheider study is an important contribution to knowledge in this area, the current study uses more recent data to better understand this key transition in this particular historical context. Using data from young adults who experienced emerging adulthood in the early 2000s, this study provides an updated picture of the home-leaving experience of today's young adults. Linear, logistic, and multinomial regression analysis is used to better understand the pathways out of the parental home for poor and nonpoor emerging adults and to examine what demographic factors influence these relationships.

Method

Dataset

The data used in this study were based on Waves 1, 2, and 3 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; Sweet & Bumpass, 1996, 2002; Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). The NSFH is an ongoing longitudinal dataset comprised of interviews with adults (Waves 1, 2 and 3) and their children (Waves 2 and 3). Wave 1 data were collected in 1987 and 1988 and consist of surveys from 13,017 randomly selected adults in households in the United States. Sampling for the NSFH was conducted based on a probability sample for the main respondents (9,643 interviews) with double sampling used to ensure adequate numbers of respondents from underrepresented groups (3,374 interviews), including ethnic minorities, single-parent households, families with stepchildren, and cohabiting and newly married couples. One adult per household (i.e., the primary respondent) was randomly selected to be interviewed.

The second wave of data was collected from 1992 through 1994 and contains follow-up interviews with 10,007 primary respondents (82% follow-up rate) from the original sample and a sample of their children (n = 2,505) who were between the ages of 5 and 18 at Wave 1 (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). The third wave of data, collected in 2001–2002, consists of follow-up interviews with a subset of the primary respondents (n = 7,277) and interviews with all eligible children (n = 1,952), regardless of whether they were interviewed at Wave 2 (Sweet & Bumpass, 2002). This analysis focused on the 1,517 children (aged 18–33 at Wave 3) for whom there were complete data on key variables for the three data collection points.

Measures

Demographic variables. Demographic variables for the parent included race and educational attainment. Using Wave 1 data, parents' education was categorized into less than a high school education, a high school degree, and some college education. Race was characterized as White, Black, and other. Other races were collapsed given the low percentages of respondents in these categories. Focal child variables included age, gender, teen parenthood, and educational attainment. Teen parenthood was defined as becoming a parent prior to age 20. Educational attainment for the youths was defined in the same categories as for the parents. Information about race was only collected for the parent and was used as a proxy for the child's race.

Family economic status. Family economic status was operationalized using both the federal poverty line for the family at Wave 1 and family public assistance use during childhood. Families were characterized as at or below the poverty line or above the poverty threshold based on family size. Given that the poverty line indicator was measured using an income estimate at a single point in time, we also looked at family public assistance use as a measure of family

Table 1. *Demographics and Comparisons by Poverty (N = 1,517)*

Characteristics	Full sample (*N* = 1,517)	Poor youth (*n* = 141)	Nonpoor youth (*n* = 1,376)	Test statistic and significance
Child characteristics				
Age				
Mean *(SD)*	26.2 (4.3)	25.7 (4.0)	26.2 (4.4)	-1.52
Gender				
Male	47.0%	36.2%	48.1%	7.26*
Female	53.0%	63.8%	51.9%	
Teen parenthood				
Have child when ≤ 19	8.2%	24.8%	6.5%	57.4*
Child's educational attainment				
Did not complete high school	5.9%	17.0%	4.8%	
H.S. graduate	29.1%	39.0%	28.1%	
Some college	65.0%	44.0%	67.2%	48.1*
Family characteristics				
Race				
White	82.1%	63.1%	84.0%	
Black	12.2%	21.3%	11.3%	
Other	5.7%	15.6%	4.7%	44.17*
Parent's educational attainment				
Did not complete high school	9.0%	25.2%	7.3%	
H.S. graduate	41.2%	50.4%	40.3%	
Some college or more	49.8%	24.5%	52.4%	67.6*
Family income at Wave 1				
Mean *(SD)*	$40,231 ($42,924)	$5,952 ($4,375)	$44,282 ($43,520)	-29.1*
Family structure				
Family intact at child's birth	81.5%	71.6%	82.5%	10.0*
Family public assistance use				
On public assistance during child's life	14.7%	56.0%	10.5%	211.7*
Family poverty				
At or below poverty line	9.3%[a]	–	–	–

[a] No significance test was performed.

* Significant differences exist at the $p < 0.01$ level based on poverty line status.

Table 2. *Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Age at Home Leaving and Early Home Leaving*

	Linear regression Age at home leaving						Logistic regression Early home leaving					
	Poverty line			Public assistance			Poverty line			Public assistance		
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	β	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*
Youth characteristics												
Age	0.12	0.11	0.03	0.10	0.11	0.03	-0.16	0.21	0.85	-0.11	0.21	0.89
Educational level[a]												
H.S. graduate	0.78	0.23	0.18**	0.73	0.23	0.17**	-1.26**	0.30	0.28	-1.18**	0.30	0.31
College	0.42	0.23	0.10	0.35	0.23	0.09	-1.88**	0.32	0.15	-1.76**	0.32	0.17
Teen parent	-1.37	0.20	-0.19**	-1.30	0.20	-0.19**	1.54**	0.27	4.67	1.43**	0.27	4.19
Family/parent characteristics												
Race[b]												
Black	0.52	0.17	0.09**	0.58	0.17	0.09**	-0.30	0.32	0.74	-0.38	0.32	0.69
Other	0.25	0.25	0.03	0.32	0.25	0.04	-0.15	0.43	0.86	-0.20	0.43	0.82
Parent's education[a]												
H.S. graduate	0.02	0.20	0.01	-0.03	0.20	-0.01	-0.33	0.34	0.72	-0.28	0.35	0.78
College	-0.47	0.21	-0.12*	-0.56	0.21	-0.14**	0.42	0.35	1.52	0.54	0.35	1.72
Family intact at child's birth	0.24	0.14	0.05	0.22	0.14	0.04	-0.30	0.24	0.74	-0.24	0.25	0.79
At/below federal poverty line	-0.25	0.20	-0.04				0.35	0.34	1.42			
Family public assistance use				-0.27	0.16	-0.05				0.53*	0.25	1.70
	R^2 = .068			R^2 = .069			χ^2 = 94.83**			χ^2 = 98.03**		
	F = 9.74**			*F* = 9.88**			*df* 10			*df* 10		

Note. OR is odds ratio. *B* is unstandardized B.

[a] The reference category is high school dropout.

[b] The reference category is White.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

economic status. Public assistance data were available from the primary respondent from as early as 1982 through Wave 1 and Wave 2. Public assistance was defined in the NSFH as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), general assistance, food stamps, and emergency assistance. Families were characterized as having received public assistance if the primary respondent reported receiving public assistance in any given year during the child's life. Public assistance serves as an appropriate proxy for poverty status as families must be low-income to qualify for these programs.

Outcome variables. Three constructs were used to model outcomes: (a) age of home leaving, (b) cycling behavior, and (c) exit destination. Age of home leaving was examined using a continuous age variable and a dichotomous definition of early home leaving. Early home leaving was defined as leaving home prior to age 18. This categorization is consistent with previous literature and with U.S. Census Bureau definitions, which consider on-time home leaving to occur between the ages of 18 and 24 (Tang, 1997b). Cycling behavior (moving in and out of the parental home) was conceptualized using two definitions: returning home and repeat home leaving. Returning home was defined as ever returning to the home of origin for periods not including school vacations. Repeat home-leaving behavior was defined as leaving the parental home, returning home for periods not including school vacations, and then leaving home one or more additional times. Exit destination was categorized as leaving the home of origin to semi-autonomous arrangements—for example, school or the military (DaVanzo & Goldscheider, 1986), for marriage or cohabitation, or for other residential independence (e.g., seeking independence, parents' divorce, starting a job, wanting to live on one's own).

The same set of covariates were used for each regression model except where there were indications of exact linear dependency between a covariate and the outcome variable, as was the case with young adult educational attainment and exit destination (Allison, 2001). In that regression model the covariate was excluded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included descriptive statistics including frequency distributions, chi-square tests, and *t* tests. They were used to summarize and analyze the data and to compare the young adults based on poverty status. Linear and logistic regression, including multinomial logistic regression, were used to determine factors associated with home-leaving patterns.

Results

Sample Description

The sample was predominantly White (82.1%), roughly equivalent to the U.S. population around the time Wave 1 data was collected (75.6% White in 1990; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The mean age of the sample was 26 years (*SD* = 4.3; see Table 1). Participants were split fairly evenly between males and females. Overall, education levels were high, with 65% of emerging adults attending at least some college. Almost 10% of the sample experienced poverty during childhood. Differences were found in almost all demographic characteristics based on the poverty line. Poor young adults were more likely to be Black, have lower educational levels, be teen parents, and have parents with lower educational attainment. Results were similar when examining demographic differences based on family public assistance use.

Home Leaving

Over 90% of the young adults in the sample left their home of origin to live on their own for a period of at least 4 months; 151 emerging adults, including 18.4% of individuals who experienced poverty in childhood and 9.1% of those who did not experience poverty, never left home during the study period. Poor young adults reported leaving home less frequently than those who were not poor, $\chi^2(1, N=1{,}517) = 12.5$, $p < 0.01$. Logistic regression indicated that young adults who grew up in families at or below the poverty line had much lower odds of leaving home—one-half the odds of leaving home for the nonpoor—when controlling for other factors. Public assistance use was not significantly associated with this outcome in either the bivariate or the multivariate context.

Age of Home Leaving

One question related to leaving the parental home during emerging adulthood involves the timing of this exit. Of young adults who left home at some point, the mean age at exit was 19.6 years (*SD* = 2.0). Family economic status, defined by the poverty line and public assistance use, had no impact on the average age that emerging adults left home: 19.7 years (*SD* = 2.8) for poor young adults and 19.6 years (*SD* = 1.9) for nonpoor young adults (t = 0.45, NS); 19.1 years (*SD* = 2.3) for those with a history of public assistance use, and 19.5 years (*SD* = 1.9) for those without this history (t = 1.25, NS).

Additional analysis was conducted categorizing emerging adults as early home leavers (<18 years old). Results indicate that 8.0% of the full sample (n = 121) were early home leavers. Bivariate analyses did not demonstrate a relationship between early home leaving and poverty based on the poverty line indicator. Leaving home prior to age 18 was no more common for young adults who grew up in families living at 100% of poverty or below and those above poverty, $\chi^2(1, N=1{,}517) = 1.5$, NS. When examining early home leaving based on public assistance use, a larger percentage of emerging adults with this history (15.3%) left home before age 18, than those without this history (6.7%), $\chi^2(1, N=1{,}517) = 18.8$, $p < .01$.

Multivariate analysis was also used to examine age of home leaving and the relationship to family economic status.

Linear regression results indicate that economic status, based on the poverty line and public assistance use, is not a significant predictor of the age of home leaving when controlling for additional variables. Race, educational level, and teen parenting status all predict the age at which young adults leave home. Dropping out of high school and teen parenthood were associated with earlier home leaving. Having parents who attended college was related to later home leaving; this may be due to the impact on the youth's educational progress. Black youths left home later than White youths.

Further multivariate analysis, categorizing young adults as leaving home early, indicated that higher young adult educational attainment was linked to normative home leaving, whereas teen parenthood was associated with early home leaving. Poverty-line status was not predictive of early home leaving, whereas public assistance receipt in childhood predicted leaving home prior to age 18. For those with a family history of welfare receipt, the odds of early home leaving were 1.63 times the odds for emerging adults without this history ($p = .05$).

Cycling Behavior: Returning Home and Repeated Home Leaving

A second issue related to pathways out of the parental home involves emerging adults' likelihood of cycling in and out of the home (Table 3). Cycling in and out of the parental home may be an indicator of a young adult's ability to rely on parents for additional support while they are struggling to become self-sufficient. Overall, young adults in this study left home an average of 1.3 times ($SD = 0.60$; range 1–4). About 30% of the full sample returned home after initially leaving. There were no significant differences in returning for poor and nonpoor young adults, based on poverty status (26.1% of poor and 33.1% of nonpoor emerging adults), $\chi^2(1, n = 1{,}366) = 2.4$, NS. Results were similar based on history of public assistance use (27.4% of those with welfare history and 33.4% of those without this history returned home), $\chi^2(1, n = 1{,}366) = 2.7$, NS. In the multivariate context, age and gender were significant predictors of returning home in both economic status models. As the sample ranged in age from 18 to 33, some of the respondents had less time to experience this outcome. Older participants had more time to have this experience, and hence, had returned home more. Males were less likely to return home than females.

After examining returning home, we looked at repeated episodes of home leaving. Repeat home leaving includes leaving the home of origin for 4 or more months, then returning home for reasons other than school vacations and eventually leaving home again. After returning home, 79% of emerging adults left home again. For those who had ever returned home, they left again an average of 1.2 times ($SD = 0.50$, range 1–3). There were significant differences in repeat home leaving based on poverty status in the bivariate analysis. Young adults at or below the poverty line were less likely to experience repeat home leaving than those above the poverty line: 63% of the poor participants and 80% of the nonpoor participants left home again after returning, $\chi^2(1, n = 444) = 4.98$, $p < 0.05$. Results were similar based on the history of public assistance use: 63.0% of those with welfare

Table 3. *Logistic Regression for Variables Predicting Returning Home and Repeat Home Leaving*

	Returning home						Repeat home leaving ($n = 444$)					
	Poverty line			Public assistance			Poverty line			Public assistance		
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*
Youth characteristics												
Male	-0.29**	0.13	0.75	-0.28*	0.13	0.76	-0.47	0.27	0.62	-0.44	0.26	0.64
Age	0.25**	0.02	1.16	0.15**	0.02	1.16	0.02	0.03	1.02	0.02	0.03	1.02
Educational level[a]												
H.S. graduate	-0.04	0.28	0.96	-0.01	0.28	0.99	-0.31	0.58	0.73	-0.22	0.56	0.80
College	0.05	0.27	1.05	0.07	0.27	1.08	-0.55	0.57	0.58	-0.53	0.57	0.59
Teen parent	0.39	0.23	1.48	0.35	0.22	1.42	-0.43	0.41	0.65	-0.48	0.40	0.62
Family/parent characteristics												
Race[b]												
Black	-0.16	0.20	0.86	-0.16	0.21	0.85	-1.03**	0.36	0.36	-0.98**	0.36	0.37
Other	-0.21	0.31	0.81	-0.25	0.31	0.84	-0.39	0.61	0.67	-0.45	0.61	0.64
Parent's education[a]												
H.S. graduate	0.12	0.24	1.13	0.16	0.24	1.07	-0.39	0.49	0.68	-0.37	0.48	0.69
College	0.05	0.25	1.05	0.09	0.24	1.10	-0.23	0.49	0.79	-0.24	0.49	0.79
Family intact at child's birth	-0.35*	0.16	0.70	-0.36*	0.16	0.70	0.62*	0.29	1.86	0.58*	0.29	1.79
At/below federal poverty line	-0.37	0.24	0.69				-0.79	0.47	0.46			
Family public assistance use				-0.13	0.19	0.88				-0.75*	0.35	0.48
χ^2	119.80**			117.82**			26.50**			28.10**		
df	*11*			*11*			*11*			*11*		

Note. OR is odds ratio. *B* is unstandardized B.

[a] The reference category is high school dropout.

[b] The reference category is White.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

history and 81.5% of those without this history experienced repeat home leaving, $\chi^2(1, n = 444) = 10.0$, $p < 0.01$. Logistic regression modeling repeat home leaving found no differences based on poverty line, but found a significant difference based on public assistance use. Significant predictors in both models were race and family structure. Black young adults were less likely to experience repeated home leaving, whereas young adults from nonintact families were more likely to experience repeated home leaving. Repeated home leaving was less common for those with a history of family public assistance ($OR = .48$, $p = .04$).

Exit Destinations

A third home-leaving question focuses on the living arrangements of emerging adults. Young adults in this study left their home of origin to various exit destinations; i.e., semi-autonomous arrangements (school or the military, $n = 702$), homes with partners (marriage or cohabitation, $n = 202$), and other independent living situations ($n = 462$). The reasons for exit included going to school ($n = 646$), joining the military ($n = 56$), getting married ($n = 123$), wanting to cohabitate ($n = 79$), wanting to live in their own home ($n = 270$), and other reasons ($n = 192$) including seeking independence, parents' divorce, starting work, and travel.

Young adults from disadvantaged economic backgrounds left home to different exit destinations than their more advantaged peers. Specifically, a lower percentage of the disadvantaged emerging adults (30%) moved to semi-autonomous arrangements, such as school or the military, than their more advantaged counterparts (53%), $\chi^2(1, n = 1{,}366) = 24.7$, $p < 0.01$. Different destinations may be confounded by differential rates of college attendance. The results demonstrated that even among the college bound, a smaller percentage of poor young adults left home to attend school (48%) than nonpoor young adults (69.6%), $\chi^2(1, n = 880) = 11.4$, $p < 0.01$. Among those who left home to live with partners, poor and nonpoor respondents showed no difference in leaving for cohabitation or marriage, $\chi^2(1, n = 202) = 0.08$, NS. A higher percentage of poor young adults (53%) moved into other independent living situations than nonpoor young adults (32%), $\chi^2(1, n = 1{,}366) = 20.7$, $p < 0.01$. These arrangements included living on one's own, living with friends, or living with roommates. Living with relatives or moving to live with a previously nonresidential parent were not considered independent living. Results based on public assistance use were similar to those obtained using the poverty line indicator. Young adults with a history of public assistance were less likely to leave home for semi-autonomous arrangements and more likely to leave home to independent living situations.

Multinomial logistic regression (see Tables 4 and 5) was used to investigate pathways out of the home to school or the military (semi-autonomy), marriage or cohabitation, and other residential independence. These models, using poverty line and public assistance history to indicate family economic status, contrasted the likelihood of (a) leaving home for other residential independence versus semi-autonomy, (b) leaving the home of origin for marriage or cohabitation versus semi-autonomy, and (c) leaving home for marriage or cohabitation versus residential independence.

Poverty was a significant predictor of exit destination for emerging adults in the multinomial model. Living at or below the poverty line was associated with an increased probability, 1.6 times the odds, of leaving the home of origin for residential independence versus school or the military (semi-autonomy). Higher parental education ($OR = 0.26$,

Table 4. *Multinomial Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Exit Destination for the Poverty Model*

	Model 1: Poverty line								
	Residential independence vs. semi-autonomy			Marriage vs. semi-autonomy			Marriage vs. residential independence		
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*
Youth characteristics									
Male	0.38**	0.13	1.46	-0.72**	0.19	0.49	-1.10**	0.19	0.33
Age	0.002	0.02	1.002	0.13**	0.02	1.14	0.12**	0.02	1.13
Teen parent	1.87**	0.34	6.49	2.58**	0.36	13.20	0.71**	0.25	2.03
Family/parent characteristics									
Race[b]									
Black	0.16	0.20	1.17	-0.97**	0.36	0.38	-1.13**	0.35	0.32
Other	0.33	0.32	1.39	0.58	0.40	1.79	0.25	0.37	1.28
Parent's education[a]									
H.S. graduate	-0.50*	0.26	0.61	0.15	0.35	1.16	0.65*	0.31	1.92
College	-1.35**	0.26	0.26	-1.02**	0.36	0.36	0.33	0.33	1.39
Family intact at child's birth	-0.56**	0.17	0.57	-0.34	0.24	0.71	0.22	0.23	1.25
At/below federal poverty line	0.48*	0.25	1.62	-0.11	0.35	0.89	-0.58	0.31	0.56
Likelihood ratio χ^2	850.6								
df	828								

Note. OR is odds ratio. *B* is unstandardized B.

[a] The reference category is high school dropout.

[b] The reference category is White.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Table 5. *Multinomial Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Exit Destination for the Public Assistance Model*

	Model 2: Public Assistance Use								
	Residential independence vs. semi-autonomy			Marriage vs. semi-autonomy			Marriage vs. residential independence		
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*
Youth characteristics									
Male	0.38**	0.13	1.46	-0.69**	0.19	0.50	-1.07**	0.19	0.34
Age	0.008	0.02	1.008	0.13**	0.02	1.14	0.12**	0.02	1.12
Teen parent	1.86**	0.33	6.42	2.49**	0.36	12.06	0.63*	0.25	1.88
Family/parent characteristics									
Race[b]									
Black	0.08	0.20	1.08	-1.05**	0.36	0.35	-1.12**	0.35	0.33
Other	0.34	0.32	1.40	0.53	0.39	1.69	0.19	0.37	1.21
Parent's education[a]									
H.S. graduate	-0.50*`	0.26	0.61	0.22	0.35	1.25	0.72*	0.31	2.05
College	-1.31**	0.26	0.27	-0.91*	0.36	0.40	0.40	0.33	1.49
Family intact at child's birth	-0.50**	0.17	0.61	-0.29	0.24	0.75	0.21	0.23	1.23
Family public assistance use	0.66**	0.20	1.93	0.54*	0.26	1.72	-0.12	0.24	0.89
Likelihood ratio χ^2	896.38								
df	902								

Note. OR is odds ratio. *B* is unstandardized B.
[a] The reference category is high school dropout.
[b] The reference category is White.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

$p < .01$) and an intact family structure at birth ($OR = 0.57$, $p < .01$) were associated with lower odds of home leaving for residential independence versus school or the military, whereas teen parenthood ($OR = 6.49$, $p < .01$) was associated with higher odds of leaving the parental home for residential independence than to school/military.

Additional analysis indicated that emerging adults with a childhood history of public assistance use were more likely to exit to independent arrangements than to school ($OR = 1.93$, $p < .01$) and were more likely to exit to marriage/cohabitation than to school ($OR = 1.72$, $p < .05$) when compared to those without this history. Male respondents were more likely to leave home for residential independence than for school ($OR = 1.46$, $p < .01$) and more likely to leave to school or residential independence than to marriage ($OR = 0.05$, $p < .01$). Young adults who became parents when they were teenagers were much more likely to leave home for residential independence than for school ($OR = 6.42$, $p < .01$), to leave to marriage versus school ($OR = 12.06$, $p < .01$), and to leave to marriage versus residential independence ($OR = 1.88$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The present study sheds light on the home-leaving patterns of poor emerging adults in the United States. Few studies have examined the impact of family economic status on this important developmental transition that sets the stage for later success. This study fills the gap by highlighting how family economic status experienced during childhood, defined by both the federal poverty line and family receipt of public assistance, affects the likelihood of home leaving, age at home leaving, cycling in and out of the home of origin, and exit destination in the current social context, characterized by later home leaving and broader exit destinations. Our results suggest that, overall with either measure, poor emerging adults experienced home leaving differently than the nonpoor. Specifically, poor young adults were less likely to leave the home of origin, though if they did leave, they were more likely to leave at younger ages, based on family public assistance use. Poor respondents were also less likely to experience repeat home leaving (defined as leaving home, returning, and then leaving again) than nonpoor respondents. Exit destinations also differed for emerging adults based on poverty status; poor young adults were less likely to leave home for school than other living arrangements, such as marriage/cohabitation or residential independence.

Further, demographic characteristics that may be tied to poverty were linked to age at home leaving. Race, teen parenthood, and education level were significant predictors of age at home leaving. Being Black and having a high school diploma increased the likelihood of exiting the home of origin at later ages, whereas being a teen parent and having parents with some college education predicted home leaving at younger ages. However, poverty status was not a significant predictor of age at home leaving, when controlling for other variables.

Cycling in and out of the home was more evident for nonpoor emerging adults in this study. This may reflect their increased likelihood to leave home for schooling, which may lead to moves home as a transition between school and work. Work by Ermisch (1999) suggests that high housing costs and low income increase the likelihood of returning to the home of origin; this study suggests similar rates of returning home for poor and nonpoor young adults. Though poor and

nonpoor young adults return home at similar rates, those who were at or below poverty during childhood were less likely to leave the parental home again. Poor families may lack the resources necessary to support young adults' transition back out of the home once they return. In addition, women and, not surprisingly, older young adults were more likely to experience multiple episodes of home leaving.

Emerging adults with a childhood history of poverty are less likely to pursue higher education (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). In the public assistance model, those with this history were less likely to leave home for semi-autonomous living arrangements than for marriage/cohabitation or for independent arrangements. This study does not support the hypothesis that poor young adults are less likely to marry (Ooms, 2002), at least as the reason for leaving the home of origin.

In this sample, the rates of college attendance for poor young adults were far below those of nonpoor young adults: 44% versus 65%. This lack of advanced education limits opportunities for high-paying jobs and stable employment. Even when poor young adults did attend school, they were less likely to go to school away from home and more likely to attend community college. In our sample, 52% of poor young adults, as measured by the poverty line, who attended college did not leave home for school compared to 30% of the nonpoor. Over 55% of poor respondents who went to college attended a community college versus 45% of nonpoor respondents. Further, of the poor young adults who attended a community college, none went on to get a bachelor's degree, versus almost 20% of nonpoor young adults. Past research has suggested that commuters had lower cognitive gains and poorer personal adjustment, and were less likely to establish an adult identity than students who lived on campus (Jordyn & Byrd, 2003; Pascarella, Bohr, & Zusman, 1993; Wilson, Anderson, & Fleming, 1987). Research also suggests lower earning potential and higher rates of unemployment for students who attended a community college rather than a four-year college (Grubb, 2002). This may put poor emerging adults at a disadvantage even if they do attend college.

Though marriage rates have declined in general and age at first marriage has increased (Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale, 1995; Huston & Melz, 2004), young adults with a history of childhood public assistance were more likely to exit to marriage/cohabitation than to school or the military. Furthermore, women, non-Black young adults, teen parents, older young adults, and young adults whose parents do not have any college education were more likely to leave for marriage versus semi-autonomy, whereas those with parents who had some college education and whose families were intact at birth were more likely to exit to school or the military than for residential independence, consistent with previous research (Aquilino, 1991). These findings may also relate to poverty, as educational attainment and teen parenthood are associated with family income (Boonstra, 2002; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

This research highlights the fact that poor young adults may require additional assistance in making a smooth transition out of the home and in making the transition to school. The importance of education cannot be overstated as the benefits have been widely examined (for a review see Wolfe & Haveman, 2001). Education is positively related to increased earnings, better health, greater regional mobility, higher savings rates, reduced alienation, fewer social inequalities, and reduced dependence on government assistance during the prime working years. Helping poor young adults to transition to and excel in school is an important step in ending the cycle of poverty and improving the chances of a successful adulthood.

Low-income young adults are less likely to attend college than their more affluent counterparts (Rouse, 2004). A number of factors, including a lack of information, poor credit, and lower quality elementary and secondary schools, have been cited as explanations for this discrepancy (Ellwood & Kane, 2000; Heckman & Lochner, 2000). Further, though there are similar levels of college aspiration, a study with a nationally representative sample of high school seniors found that low-income young adults are less able to convert those aspirations into actual college enrollment (Rouse, 2004). Of the low-income respondents to this national study, only 41% expected to complete a bachelor's degree.

Some programs have been developed to increase the college enrollment of low-income, often minority young adults. One such initiative, the Young Scholars Program, aims to expand the number of minority youths who meet entrance criteria and graduate from college (Newman & Newman, 1999). Implemented in 1988, the program recruited low-income minority students in sixth-grade classes in urban Ohio cities, with the objective of forming relationships between Ohio State University, students, and families through tutoring, math education, cultural and social activities, mentoring, and summer college seminars. Provided students completed the program and maintained a 3.0 grade point average in high school, they were guaranteed admission to Ohio State and a nonloan financial aid package. Evaluations found higher 2-year retention rates for participating students compared to the full freshman Ohio State class and a comparison group (Newman & Newman, 1999). The Newman and Newman study found particularly important interventions to be the strong ties to Ohio State, financial aid, and staff and peer support that increased academic self-confidence and motivation. A study by King (1996) with low-income SAT takers, found that those with more rigorous high school preparation, those who received information about college and financial aid information directly from universities, and those who saw a school counselor several times in their junior and senior years were more likely to attend a 4-year college.

Other findings regarding repeat home leaving and exit timing suggest that poor emerging adults were less likely

to leave home again once they returned and more likely to leave home at an early age. These results suggest that poor families may need additional assistance in providing for older children and maintaining support as youths enter the period of emerging adulthood. Only a few states currently provide support for families who have children over the age of 18 who are full-time students (State Policy Documentation Project, 2004). Welfare policy makers could examine ways to help families support their children until they are old enough to make informed decisions for their future. By helping emerging adults stay at home longer and providing a place for emerging adults to return home to, parents may be better able to support their children until they are able to be self-sufficient. Giving emerging adults time to adequately prepare for their futures and acquire the skills and education needed for success may improve their life chances and help to alleviate intergenerational poverty. One possible model, the New Deal for Young People implemented in the United Kingdom, targets welfare-to-work services to unemployed young adults between 18 and 24 years old (*Design of the New Deal for 18–24 year olds*, 1997). Evaluation results suggest that the program has increased employment and lowered welfare use (White, 2004).

In addition to less parental support during emerging adulthood, poor emerging adults are also at a disadvantage due to the increased risk of teen pregnancy (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-being 2001,* 2001). Though in general marriage rates in the United States are declining and individuals are postponing marriage, they are not necessarily forgoing childbearing (Ooms, 2002). In this study, teen parents were more likely to leave home for cohabitation or marriage than for school or the military. They were also more likely to leave home at younger ages, therefore losing the benefit of parental emotional and financial support. Although teen pregnancy rates are decreasing, it continues to be a problem in the United States because of limited access to contraceptives and limited sexuality education in the schools (Boonstra, 2002). Improving these services would further decrease teen pregnancies and give youths more options, including making higher education more of a possibility.

Though this study provides valuable insight into the home-leaving patterns of emerging adults, it is limited by several factors. The NSFH data, though longitudinal, is limited by the few interview time periods. Specifically, data used to determine poverty status during childhood were taken from one time point (Wave 1). This may have made it more difficult to assess childhood poverty; it was not possible to determine the duration of childhood impoverishment, and emerging adults who were poor at other time periods not reflected in the study data may have been misclassified in poverty status. To compensate for this, we also used a measure of public assistance to reflect family economic status. Given that public assistance data were gathered for all years, this measure may be a more accurate reflection of which emerging adults experienced childhood poverty. We used both economic measures as the public assistance use indicator does not capture poor emerging adults whose families were not relying on government support.

A second limitation relates to the fact that home leaving may take place over a period of years. With an increase in emerging adults living at home in their late twenties, (Goldscheider, 1997), the home-leaving experience of younger adults in this sample may not have been accurately captured. As respondents in this sample were between the ages of 18 and 33, additional data may be needed to understand their patterns of home leaving. Attempts were made to control for the young adult's age in the multivariate analyses.

Lack of information about the emerging adult's race is another important limitation of this data. The NSFH did not collect information about the emerging adult's race separately from their parents, forcing the race of the responding parent to be used as a proxy. Children may not share racial characteristics with their parents, which may lead to inaccurate reporting of emerging adult race.

Despite these limitations, this study is an important step in understanding the unique impact that family economic status has on home-leaving patterns. Policies that work toward alleviating poverty, creating ways for poor parents to support older youths, decreasing teen pregnancy, and helping impoverished young adults obtain additional education would improve the life chances of poor emerging adults. Additional research with longitudinal data is needed to more accurately describe pathways out of the home. Further, policies and programs should be implemented and evaluated to assess how best to assist poor young adults to more successfully negotiate this transition.

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