

Dissertation Title

“Life Course Transitions among the Working Class in Emerging Adulthood: The Role of Education and Social Class in the Timing of Unions and Parenthood in the U.S.”

Angelika R. Gulbis

Committee

Dr. Wendy D. Manning (Advisor), Dr. Susan L. Brown, Dr. Alfred DeMaris, and Dr. Catherine Kenney

Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of post-secondary education in the timing of unions and parenthood among American working class young adults. Past research focuses on the dichotomy in union and fertility patterns between the middle-to-upper and disadvantaged classes, where, on average, advantaged females tend to delay marriage and parenthood in favor of completing post-secondary education, and disadvantaged females tend to have children earlier and delay marriage for other reasons, such as a perceived lack of financial preparedness. Though working class individuals are not entirely ignored in this discourse, they are often not the primary analytical focus. In this dissertation, I use the National Survey of Families and Households focal child interviews to compare the transitions of working class young adults with both advantaged and disadvantaged young adults aged 18-33 in 2001. Variations by gender and race are examined as they add an even greater level of complexity in the explanation of working class transitions. It is important to characterize the ways in which working class individuals negotiate their pathways through the life course to develop policies directed toward easing these transitions.