DIVERSITY AND INEQUALITY IN THE TRAJECTORIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES

ANA MIRANDA / ANALIA OTERO

Ana Miranda and Analia Otero are researchers at Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), Sede Académica Argentina, Ayacucho 551 (1026), Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-MAIL: amiranda@flacso.org.ar / aotero@flacso.org.ar
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Abstract:
The objective of this paper is to contribute knowledge on the complex relationship between education and work, based on an analysis of the trajectories of recent secondary school graduates. The presented information was obtained by following up on the young people and working with various methodologies. As a function of quantitative surveys, the graduates' employment and educational situation were addressed, as well as their family environment in the years following their graduation. Subsequently, qualitative techniques were used to analyze the graduates'discourse with regard to their transformations in employment and family groups.

KEY words: young people, secondary education, education and employment, unemployment, graduates, Argentina.

Introduction

Studies on young people's transitions have repeatedly indicated that the passage from education to employment, no longer short and foreseeable, has become a complex set of possibilities and improvidence. Research has also argued that transitions to adult life tend to be disassociated in different spheres (economic independence or independent housing, for example), and increasingly prolonged. For this reason, the definition of youth has been extended to older ages, while economic independence during youth no longer implies the formation of the young person's own family group.

The factors associated with the new conditions of life transition are diverse. They include transformations of the labor market, the extension of education among young people and the changes in family structures. At the same time, these factors influence the loss of homogeneity in collective references that characterized these passages a few decades ago. In other words, the transitions to adult life have become diversified and individualized, and have acquired new and growing risks (Cachon, 2000; Morch *et al.*, 2002; Biggart, *et al.*, 2004).

In this framework, five years ago we carried out research on the employment of secondary school graduates.[1] The study arose from a series of concerns linked to the transformations experienced in the secondary school level in Argentina, during the 1990s. One of the main precedents of these modifications is the reform defined by the Federal Law of Education.[2] The changes, however, were not a consequence only of the modified structure of the instructional divisions and levels, but also of the scarcity of resources assigned to education, the sizable increase in secondary school enrollment[3] and the incorporation of new sectors in secondary school. The changes were related to the metamorphosis of the social context of secondary schools. Thus the phenomena of the educational system combined with a sizable increase in the number of people living in conditions of poverty, the acute deterioration of the job market and modifications in the lifestyles and conditions of young people.

Numerous studies have indicated that the passage through secondary school and subsequent employment have acquired growing complexity, and are no longer a common path that allows the delineation of long-term plans (Jacinto, 1996; Paiva, 2000; Filmus *et al.* 2001). In effect, the greater heterogeneity of transition through

youth—along with the tendency of reproduced differences of socioeconomic origin and widespread difficulties for young people in the labor market—as led to an unequal structure of opportunities for those obtaining a diploma of analogous value.

In this context, throughout this article we shall base our analysis on the information produced in the framework of the project, "La inserción ocupacional de los graduados de la escuela media" ("Employment of Secondary School Graduates"). On this occasion, we shall present data prepared by various methodologies. In first place, as a function of quantitative surveys, we shall describe general aspects of employment and schooling as well as the young people's family situation. In second place, we shall analyze the discourse of graduates with respect to the transformations in their employment and family groups, based on the results of qualitative research techniques.

The Employment of Secondary School Graduates

The project, "La inserción ocupacional de los graduados de la escuela media"[4], was based on following up on graduates of secondary schools in the cities of Buenos Aires, La Plata, Rosario and the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. During the first stage, quantitative techniques were used. In 1999, a questionnaire was completed by students in the final year of secondary school; between 2000 and 2002, three annual surveys were carried out by means of a telephone questionnaire.

The second phase made use of instruments of qualitative methodology, based on focus groups of some of the graduates from a selected sample.

During the first stage of the research and based on an analysis of the principal traits of the selected sample,[5] we verified that different educational circuits persist at the secondary level, and that each circuit attracts students from a different socioeconomic origin. These circuits are marked by divergence in the schools' learning conditions, associated with the teachers' academic credentials, school equipment and infrastructure, and the extension of the school day. Different stories are found in each segment. For example, the greatest number of students with excess age was concentrated in schools of a "low" level,[6] while all of the students in the "high" group finished their schooling at the expected age.

Based on the hypothesis of segmentation, and by following up on graduates' employment and educational activities, we confirmed the central traits of unequal opportunities faced by young people who obtain diplomas that are equivalent in formal terms.

As shown by the information in Chart 1, inequality is shown in first place in terms of participation in the job market: the graduates of the middle and low circuits revealed greater economic activity than those of the high circuit (see rate of economic activity).

In second place, and independent from participation in the job market, the possibilities of finding an occupation were lower among the graduates of the low circuit (see employment rate).

CHART 1
Rates of Activity, Employment, Unemployment and Schooling by School Group

	2000			2001			2002		
	Low	*Middle*	*High*	*Low*	*Middle*	*High*	*Low*	*Middle*	*High*
Rate of Activity	72.8	75.0	45.4	73.6	75.9	50.0	83.3	77.2	58.0
Rate of Employment	47.7	51.7	32.8	51.1	53.2	35.6	54.5	56.3	42.1
Rate of	34.5	31.0	27.8	34.1	29.9	28.8	32.2	27.0	27.4

Unemployment									
Rate of School Attendance	46.1	57.8	85.7	45.7	64.1	95.8	40.4	64.6	93.5
Attend School and Are Economically Active	28.8	35.3	36.1	29.6	41.9	45.8	27.5	44.2	51.4
Attend School and Are Economically Inactive	17.3	22.4	49.6	16.1	22.3	50.0	12.9	20.4	42.1
Neither Attend School Nor Work	23.0	11.6	6.7	20.6	9.1	0.8	17.4	9.1	1.9

Source: All the charts in this article were prepared by the author, based on data from the project, "La inserción ocupacional de los graduados de la escuela media" in FLACSO.

In third place, when the students were contacted in their final year of secondary school, almost all (96%) expressed their desire to continue on to higher education. Yet only those students from the schools in the high circuit were able to do so in majority form (see attendance rates). In a parallel manner, this group had the highest proportion of young people who dedicated their time entirely to school, without dividing their efforts between school and work (see those who attend school and are economically inactive).

Lastly, the data allow us to identify the young people who are in a vulnerable situation: even after finishing secondary school, they neither attend school nor work.

What type of employment for secondary school graduates?

The results of this research allow us to identify the different opportunities for graduates in terms of the content of the jobs they find. We are referring to the job rating of positions filled by young people subsequent to their graduation. The literature indicates that a secondary school diploma permits performing tasks of a technical nature (INDEC, 1998); however, the transformations of the labor market have led to important modifications in the relation between diplomas and tasks performed. Among the graduates in our sample, more than seven out of every ten who are working, have obtained a job with a low rating (operative or not rated) (Chart 2).

CHART 2

Distribution of Employees by Job Rating and School Group (November, 2002)

	Groups of Schools			Total
	Low	*Middle*	*High*	
Professional	0.0	3.4	20.0	5.0
Technical	13.4	15.5	37.8	18.6
Operative	39.2	42.2	22.2	37.6
Not rated	47.4	38.8	20.0	38.8

Over-education[7], however, does not equally affect all of the employees. The graduates from the low and middle circuits were most likely to show a lack of correspondence between their qualifications and the activity being performed. The social and family setting also contributed to the differences of access in getting a job,

since most of the interviewed young people stated having found work through relatives or acquaintances.

Another significant aspect revealed by the research regards the field of economic activity of the graduates' work. Wide study has been made of the fact that the transformations of the past twenty years have caused a major modification in the secondary or manufacturing sector, and broad expansion of the tertiary sector in Argentina (CEPAL, 2000). In this context, 78.5% of the working graduates perform activities related to the tertiary sector (commerce and/or services), while only 15.6% are related to the production and repair of assets (Chart 3).

CHART 3
Distribution of Employees by Field and School Group (November, 2002)

Field	Groups of Schools			Total
	Low	Middle	High	
Administrative, legal, planning, information systems	10.8	13.2	39.5	16.5
Budget, accounting, financial	07.5	01.9	00.0	3.8
Marketing, transport, storage, telecommunications	38.7	34.0	18.4	33.3
Basic social services	6.5	05.7	18.4	08.0
Various social services	15.1	17.0	21.1	16.9
Mining, energy, construction, infrastructure	03.2	09.4	00.0	05.5
Industrial production and repair of consumer goods	17.2	13.2	02.6	13.1
Auxiliary to the production of goods and services	01.1	04.7	00.0	02.5

The graduates' distribution among the fields of economic activity also shows significant differences. The graduates from the high circuit were concentrated primarily in administrative professions and social services, and did not participate in the tasks of the manufacturing sector. Some graduates from the middle and low circuits had more presence in commercial activities (mostly retail sales), in addition to occupations in the production and repair of goods.

The Family's Place

During the 20th century, the family as a form of social organization experienced noticeable change. From an historical perspective, up to the middle of the 18th century, the tasks of production and reproduction occupied the same space: the home (Sennett, 2000). The expansion of the relations of capitalism determined that family unity should be differentiated from production. Thus work came to be associated with employment and wages; i.e., with productive economic activities performed outside of the home. The type of organization that characterized the postwar period was that of the "nuclear family", in which the central figure of the adult provider was the sole support of the home. This model also created the space necessary for new generations to complete their formal education without becoming involved in productive activity (Carnoy, 2000).

During the final decades of the 20th century, the nuclear family suffered important modifications associated with the transformation of women's place and roles, changes in fertility and mortality, the population's aging, and the extension of one-parent homes, divorce, and new assembled families, etc. (Jelin, 1998). Young people were also becoming more dependent on their family groups. Statements have been made that such increased dependence is related to the extended presence of young people in the educational system, employment insecurity, the change of inter-generational relations (that make staying in the family home more attractive), and the absence of government institutions that would facilitate forming a home of one's own (Biggart *et al.*, 2004).

In previous articles, we have pointed to the complexity acquired by the transitions between education and employment in contemporary societies, based on the experiences of young people in the initial years after their graduation from secondary school (Filmus *et al.*, 2004). In this case, we are interested in addressing the general characteristics of the graduates' homes. With this objective, our work is based on data collected during the third year after the interviewees' graduation.

The data in Chart 4 show that most of the graduates in the sample continue to live in their home of origin. Looking at all categories, we find that only 11.1% have a home of their own– vidence of an established link of dependence between the graduates and their family nucleus. This situation has characteristics different from those of earlier decades, when completing secondary school was the prelude to forming a stable marriage and consolidating an autonomous family group. On the other hand, Chart 4 also shows that even though the complete nuclear home continues to predominate, we find traits of diversification of family groups, especially in the form of incomplete nuclei and of young people who live with their friends.

CHART 4
Distribution of Graduates by School Group and Type of Home (November, 2002)

Group of Schools	Type of Home					
	Lives alone	*Married*	*Complete nuclear family*	*Incomplete nuclear family*	*Extended family*	*Lives with siblings or friends*
Low	2.8	10.7	60.7	16.3	6.2	3.4
Middle	1.9	5.3	68.4	14.6	5.8	3.9
High	0.9	0.9	65.4	27.1	2.8	2.8
Total	2.0	6.3	64.9	17.9	5.3	3.4

*The categories of families are detailed in the methodological annex.

Differences are also seen between graduates from the distinct types of schools. Graduates in the high group show a greater tendency to remain in their home of origin, since only 4.6% live away from their family. On the other extreme, the graduates from the low circuit demonstrate greatest independence from the family home: 16.9% were living alone, with friends or a spouse. The low group had the largest percentage of married individuals.

The distribution of homes with an incomplete nuclear family is of interest, since it is most represented by the graduates from the high group. It can be inferred that this social sector has the economic conditions for supporting this sort of home, without resorting to an extended family.

Young Graduates in Today's World

After following up on the young people during the first three years after their graduation, the final stage of research was to invite part of the initial sample to a series of discussions. The group selection was based on a typology of activities prepared by using a panel technique on the follow-up data. This typology allowed us to make a longitudinal analysis of the two main factors linked to young people's social acceptance: education and employment. In this manner, we defined various groups: young people whose central activity was work; those who exclusively attended school;

and those we called "erratic", who alternated various activities without a clear definition of any activity.[8]

The topics addressed during the group sessions were related to the family, employment, educational experience in secondary school, the young people's current situation, future expectations, etc..

As an introduction, we observed the distinctive traits of the groups invited to each session. In the first case, we invited graduates with an erratic trajectory[9] who had attended secondary schools from the middle and high segments. This group included vocational projects devised after graduation from secondary school. In other words, on completing their secondary education, the students had not yet planned their near future. Some tried various fields of study before making a choice, and others ultimately devoted themselves to working.

In the second group, the participating young people were graduates of schools from the low segment and had dedicated their time exclusively to higher education; a predominant activity was the training of secondary school teachers for the city of Buenos Aires. The young people in this group stated that remaining in school required great effort, because of the inadequate education they received in secondary school and the requirements of non-university higher education, among other factors.

The third group, consisting of young people who had begun working and had stopper their education after secondary school, transformed the content of the topics addressed in the session. There was a notable absence of references to long-term projects and great discouragement regarding the content of their work. Most of their jobs were precarious, with a low rating, except for the graduates of technical schools.[10] In this case, the young people worked in occupations linked to their specialized studies and they highly valued their jobs.

Having seen the general panorama of the groups, we organized the presentation of material as follows: at the first level of analysis, we addressed the young people's perceptions of the world of work; and in the second, we interpreted their views of the family, with emphasis on the transformations that the young people recognize in both settings.

The World of Work
This section addresses issues relative to graduates' views of the world of work. More specifically, we concentrate on one hand, on the contributions of secondary school in obtaining employment; and on the other hand, on the young people's working experience. To study the contribution of secondary education, we work with the young people's retrospective look of their own school experience. To analyze the work aspect, we start from the framework of the general deterioration in opportunities and the quality of employment currently affecting young people (Jacinto, 2004). In both cases, the young people's verbatims combine concrete experiences with general evaluations of occurrences in both settings. We illustrate our interpretations by mentioning the young people's comments during the group sessions.

The Contributions of School in Obtaining Employment
The discourses of the groups of young people revealed that during their passage through secondary school, they obtained the guidelines of general culture necessary for functioning in their social setting. More specifically, the graduates indicated a set of social practices, including rules of discipline and interaction. They also pointed to the role of their school diploma in obtaining work. Mention of acquiring relevant qualifications for performing an occupational task was made only by graduates from

technical school, and their comments were always in reference to the activities carried out in workshops or through participation in vocational practices.

In response to the coordinator's question about what the participants thought secondary school had offered them, some of the responses were:

> General culture and the social aspect. It is a stage when you pass from being a child to being an adult; from a teenager to an adult. You start to relate to the teachers, the professors, older people and the social setting.

> It gave me general culture and it helps us to get work because they generally require you to have finished secondary school... (Group 3: Graduates who only work, from middle/low group of schools)

The three groups evaluated their practical and productive projects. The participants widely recognized the practical work completed both in and outside of educational institutions. Practical work experience was viewed as a positive contribution because it is an introduction to the demands of work and in certain cases provides access to the first job.

> What I liked most about school was when we did practical work– he final project the last year. One day a week, all year, you go to work at a company. I had two. The best part was that it gives you an idea of the panorama when you finish. You find out more or less what you are going to encounter. And it helps your résumé, which is important when you get your first job [....] It was the best thing for me (Group 1: Graduates with erratic trajectory, from middle/high group of schools).

Work Experience
More specifically, we shall now address perceptions associated with the world of work. The young people pointed out that their principal link to employment is related to the possibility of perceiving a wage; in other words, the graduates' verbatims revealed a prevailing instrumental meaning attached to work activities. This perception, although present in all of the participating groups, was emphasized in groups whose trajectories have involved entering the world of work without continuity in their higher education.

We must point out that the trends we observed in the groups of young people have been verified by studies on the transitions between school and work in Europe. These studies, in spite of the particularities of the labor markets of each nation, have argued that the prevailing tendency among young people is the predominance of the instrumental character of work (Biggart *et al.*, 2004).

In our study and in certain situations, however, work was also associated with aspects like dignity and honesty. Yet the potential of this space– a broader panorama than income– was overshadowed by the effective conditions in which young people now enter the labor market.

> They know you need work and they take advantage of you. The idea of work has been corrupted because you have to grab what you find in the conditions that you find it. So, on one hand, work is a source of income and it's honorable and I don't know what else, but on the other hand, they tire you out. (Group 3: Graduates who only work, from middle/low group of schools)

The young participants, based on their own experiences or surroundings, indicated various situations that illustrate how the weight of the current economic situation and the conditions they face as workers generate obstacles to building work trajectories. For several years, the argument has been made that precarious and low-quality jobs seem to have become young people's way of accessing the labor market (Jacinto, 1996). The labor crisis has aggravated this situation and the mode of entry often becomes a permanent condition.

The graduates also pointed out that their working conditions, and especially the extension of the work week, place strong limitations on working and studying at the same time. The vision of a trajectory that combines both activities seems to be associated with enormous efforts and few possibilities of success.

> [...] I also think there is a lot of willingness to work long hours. I see people looking for work, too many, too many people. They don't give you time for anything; they want you to be "one of them" maybe. It's good to have an employee who is going to school. Besides, for example in a law office, it seems to be good to be studying law; it's good to have a secretary who's studying law but I don't think they give you many chances for that. My sister worked at a firm and last year she got her law degree. And well, nothing happened. They were paying her 400 pesos for eight hours. She figured out how to be there eight hours and continue going to school. She is almost an attorney, a fellow professional, and they do nothing, they make nothing easier for you. (Group 1: Graduates with erratic trajectory, from middle/high group of schools)

Also of interest are the young people's comments on the requirements of the current labor market and the incongruity of qualifications and tasks. In this respect, the analysts agree in affirming that business prerogatives have increased during the past decade, following the job crisis and the increase in unemployment. The young people point out that the qualifications required for filling positions continue to rise, even when the actual task performed does not require the qualifications.

> You open the newspaper and see: "University graduate, age 25, with 8 years of experience, ability to speak English, Portuguese and French and knowledge of cleaning windows." (Group 1: Graduates with erratic trajectory, from middle/high group of schools)

The verbatims illustrated that training and experience are central requirements of the labor market. High school diplomas are recognized as basic for obtaining a job. This requirement was contrasted with a concrete experience when a participant narrated his own story, which shows how the demand for certificates forms part of a broadly extended social practice in the labor setting.

> The day I went I forgot the copy. I thought, "I forgot the copy, so I won't get the job. But I'm here anyway." I went in and they told me, "the copy?.. " "No, I forgot it." "Well, when we sign the contract, bring it." That same day they called me and told me I would start working. They never asked me again for the copy." (Group 3: Graduates who only work, from middle/low group of schools)

Another topic emphasized by the graduates was the different positions of the generations in the workforce. These positions relate to objective as well as subjective conditions: the objective conditions are the employment context, and the subjective conditions are the relation that each generation has established with that context. The

elements expressed in the young people's discourse refer to life projects that are notably different from those of their parents' generation. According to the participants, stability and a long-term career do not seem to be a synonym of a successful trajectory in the world of work.

> I think the advantage we have over older people is the ability to make a mistake. If we make a mistake, we can start over, but not older people. So they are more afraid of being flexible and changing, of losing what they already have because they know if they lose it, they don't have that possibility. (Group 1: Graduates with erratic trajectory, from middle/high group of schools)

> I think that the more security they offer you, the fewer the risks you take. Older people who have been anchored in the same position for a thousand years, those people will not take risks … (Group 1: Graduates with erratic trajectory, from middle/high group of schools)

In short, the graduates obtained their first job in a highly deteriorated market, and their working conditions as new hires were very precarious. In this context, their main link to the labor world is related to the possibility of receiving income. For this reason, we emphasize the instrumental meaning that the young people have attached to their work. Both employment stability and keeping the same position over the long term have lost their centrality and importance for this generation, precisely because of the different connotations they perceive in comparison with previous generations.

The Family
As we stated above, families as social groups have undergone important mutations during recent decades. Such transformation has been associated with factors that imply the existence of a wider diversity in the conformation of family groups. We have also mentioned that leaving home at a later age has been frequent, along with less consolidation of new family groups in the years after secondary school.

As a function of those statements, we are now interested in addressing the graduates' perspectives of transformation in family settings. Two relevant aspects must be underlined in interpreting their stories. In the first place, all group participants were still living in their homes of origin; in second place, they did not express, in general, their desires with regard to forming their own families.

Based on their experiences and those of their peers, the participants recognized various family models that coexist with the traditional model. What is the main difference? The answer is diversity, in terms of family extension and roles within the family, as well as in terms of the links and forms of interaction generated in families.

> My parents are separated. But I still consider them my family although my mother and my father are both with other people now. It is not the typical family of the mother, the father and the children, but it doesn't seem bad to me. Quite the opposite. I think they wanted to separate twenty or thirty years ago but they didn't. They didn't want to be together but they couldn't separate. And now they are doing more what they feel like doing. I think it's a good example. (Group 3: Graduates who only work, from middle/low group of schools)

> The situation used to be different because women put up with more. "No, I'm not going to divorce and I'm not going to separate!" They used to put up with it. Now they don't care. "Yes, I'm separated! Bye!" The setting makes you be like that. "Look at that guy, that old

man with a sixteen-year-old fool." It's normal and it's like that. And it's going to get worse...
(Group 3: Graduates who only work, from middle/low group of schools)

In these different types of families, decision-making is also subject to flexibility. The adult male, head of the household, is no longer the sole referent in making decisions regarding the family in general and the lives of the children in particular. We observed various strategies in searching for a referent, and not an immediate turning to the head of the household. Strategies combine trust and experience, but are always an individual option and not group behavior. The referent is an aid, a voice of experience, who can guide but not determine the behavior to be followed.

[]… It depends on the decision. Sometimes your parents tell you, based on their own experience, what they would do. Sometimes you have friends. It depends on the decision you want to make... (Group 3: Graduates who only work, from middle/low group of schools)

Taking into account the arguments associated with the delayed abandonment of the family home and the extension of young people's dependence on their home of origin, we have noticed clear differences in the discourse of young people from different socioeconomic groups. As we indicated above, increased dependence is related to the young people's extended presence in the educational system, along with employment insecurity. We also mentioned that although insecurity affects the graduates as a whole, remaining in school is closely linked to the young person's social group of origin. Young people from homes with high resources have a wider range of choices than young people whose circumstances do not always leave room for selection.

In other words, on one hand you have money, and on the other, you have free time. I choose free time. I prefer not to work. I prefer a tiny amount of money each money to live on, with a lot of free time. I play the guitar and I spend all day in my room. I write songs, I'm in a band. Maybe I have two pieces of fruit for the rest of the month, but I figure it out. Because I think, on comparing, that free time is what helps me more. (Group 1: Graduates with erratic trajectory, from middle/high group of schools)

In my case, I had no choice. I had to go to school and work to help support my family (Group 1: Graduates with erratic trajectory, from middle/high group of schools).

Of course, for us, going to college or school after high school is complicated because we are working class and our parents are working class. Because you go to school and you work and you don't have time for anything, maybe because you work. I worked from nine in the morning until six in the evening. If I asked for time, they would give me time to go to college. But if I get home at eleven or twelve at night, when do I do my homework? Then, the weekend. Forget about your friends, forget about your girlfriend, forget about everything. Life gets complicated. (Group 3: Graduates who only work, from middle/low group of schools)

Transformations in the family setting are a factor among the graduates of secondary school. Since they have lived with different family groups since childhood, it is not unusual that their referents are diverse and are strategically linked to concrete topics. Such diversity also forms part of the modifications in the figure of the "normal" adult "— male and head of household"a— s the core element in the transition to adulthood in the model of the nuclear family (Urresti, 2000).

On the other hand, in addition to family transformations, we were able to identify the presence of varying discourse with regard to dependence on the home of origin. The inequalities verified in the quantitative stage of the study were evident in the young people's perceptions.

Final Reflections

Based on an analysis of the results of a follow-up study, we have made a panoramic description of various aspects of the situations of young people during the first years after their graduation from secondary school. The findings of this research support the hypothesis of the segmentation of the educational system in Argentina. The results also show how this division is reflected in the beginning trajectories of graduates from different segments of the educational system. In this regard, we proved that graduates from institutions in the high circuit tended to continue their education as a primary activity, while the graduates of the low circuit revealed a large percentage of vulnerable individuals who were neither working nor in school. A follow-up on the educational and employment activities of young people disclosed the heterogeneity of their trajectories and the unequal opportunities of graduates who have obtained diplomas of analogous value.

As a function of the information obtained through follow-up, we observed the general characteristics of the composition of the young people's homes. Family ties continue to be the primary organizers of the household group, although we verified new trends in the diversity of family conformation. We also proved that most graduates continue to live with their families during the initial years after their graduation from secondary school. We indicated that remaining in the family home is associated with continuing in school, among other factors. The trend of living in the family home predominates among the graduates from the high segment, while the low segment shows the greatest proportion of young people who live in groups other than their family of origin.

Taking into account the findings of the quantitative work, we addressed the young people's perceptions of their generation's current situation in the world of work and family transformations. In this case, we were interested in exploring the young people's discourse regarding their own transitions.

We mentioned that the passage to adult life is no longer the short, foreseeable road predominant in the postwar generations. In light of current conditions, the transition to autonomy among the younger generations seems to be separated into different spheres. Finding a job and acquiring a degree of economic independence does not necessarily imply autonomy from the family of origin and/or the conformation of one's own family group. Undoubtedly, these changes are related to the characteristics of the jobs young people obtain on graduating from secondary school, as well as to transformation in the life cycles of families. In this regard, Jelin indicates:

> The "ideal" model of family life cycles had predictable transitions and a long duration for each stage: childhood and adolescence in a complete nuclear family, with a father, mother and siblings; marriage and a home for the couple until the birth of children; a complete nuclear family until the children married; followed by the couple living alone ("empty nest") and widowhood/death. In comparison with this model, current reality includes much more variability, unpredictability and shorter time periods (1998:96).

Transformations in the time periods of life cycles were also present in the young people's discourse, in terms of their experience and future possibilities in the labor market. We observed that stability and long-term employment— bjective and

subjective— re not elements that correspond to their experiences or play central roles in their future projections. The relationship with employment is conceived as a function of trajectories of an unpredictable duration, with less emphasis on the long term.

The changes that have occurred in the transition between education and employment have affected young people in different ways. The new conditions of transition toward adult life present growing risks and occur in a context of increasing inequality. Such inequality leads to widely different opportunities in young people's trajectories. Thus we believe a priority is working to generate conditions of equality for young people in the various spheres— ork, education, housing, etc.— hat configure their transition toward autonomy, thus reaffirming their character as holders of rights rather than objects of tutelage.

Methodological Annex
Methodological Strategy
The main characteristic of the project, "La inserción ocupacional de los graduados de la escuela media", was to follow up on graduates during the initial years of their participation in the labor market. With this objective, the follow-up technique was used to interview participants when they were in school, followed by new surveys during the early years of their employment. The use of this technique has been unusual in Argentina, in which studies on graduates have been carried out by means of tracer studies— technique that interviews individuals after graduation and asks them about their past years in school. Among these studies, the most representative are those carried out by Gallart (1985) relative to graduates of technical secondary schools.

The primary advantage of follow-up studies is that they provide detailed information about individuals' educational trajectories, and permit an analysis of the relation between education and employment as well as an analysis of the educational level. The use of this technique allowed us to follow up on graduates from 1999 to 2002, with a current sample of 570 cases and a loss of only 8% of the participants.

Sample of Schools
To select the educational institutions for surveying students in the final year of secondary school, a non-representative sample of schools was used. An effort was made to guarantee the heterogeneity of the sector's groups, the type of school and the socioeconomic origin of students. The schools' geographic location is the city of Buenos Aires and its metropolitan area, and the cities of La Plata and Rosario. The sample consisted of a total of eighteen schools in which 622 students were initially interviewed. The composition of the sample is described below:

CHART A1
Composition of sample by socioeconomic level in attendance, type and sector

Type	Sector	Socioeconomic Level		
		High	Middle	Low
High School	Public	1	1	2
	Private	2		

Commercial	Public		1	1
	Private			1
Technical	Public		3	3
	Private	1		
High School	Public			1
Commercial	Private			
Agricultural	Public		1	
	Private			
Public			1	

Post-secondary Trajectories
The construction of the typology was based on a review of the literature focused on studies of professional transitions; this field frequently produces trajectories that describe the transitions of young people in different societies (Cachon, 2000; Morch, *et al.*, 2002; Biggart *et al.*, 2002). Because of the characteristics of this study,[11] the definition of trajectories includes a specification of a series of situations in transition that are key to constructing graduates' trajectories. It attempts to represent dynamic processes that can be modified in the near future, either because of outside conditions (contextual) or changes of a personal type (subjective).

   We have delineated the following typology of post-secondary trajectories:

-   School as principal activity: represents young people who continue on to college or post-secondary education, and who have remained inactive or have worked only in sporadic form.
-   Work as principal activity: groups the employed as well as the unemployed, who have an economic activity during the school year and are not enrolled in higher education.
-   Combination school/work: secondary school graduates who continue their education while working or looking for employment.
-   Erratic: those who show oscillations in their passage through the employment market and educational system; i.e., those who have shown no clear, sustained trend in their activities. For example, the first year after graduation, they did not attend school or work, and during following years, they carried out one of the two activities.
-   Vulnerable: those who attended school or worked the first year after graduation, but not in subsequent years.
-   At risk: those who are absolutely inactive, and those who remain unemployed and not enrolled in any type of school after graduating from secondary school.

Family Group
The construction of the variable for the type of home is described below:

-   Lives alone: a one-person dwelling.
-   Married: all possible combinations of young people who life with a spouse, including married couples who live with parents.
-   Complete nuclear family: young people who live with their parents and with or without their siblings.

- Incomplete nuclear family: young people who live with only one parent and with or without their siblings.
- Extended family: may be a complete or incomplete nuclear family, but includes other relatives or non-relatives.
- Lives with siblings or friends: no parental presence, young person lives with siblings or non-relatives.

Notes

[1] In Argentina, the structure of the educational system was modified with the promulgation of the Federal Law of Education number 24195, sanctioned in 1993. Before this reform, schooling was organized into the initial level, primary school (7 years), secondary school (5 years) and higher education. The law defined a new structure organized as: initial level, three instructional divisions of basic general education (EGB, 9 years), poly-modal (3 years) and higher education. The last two years of EGB correspond to the first two years of the secondary schools of the past. We must clarify that during the fieldwork for this study, we interviewed young people who finished their schooling in the old system. Therefore, when we refer to secondary school, we are talking about the five-year instructional division that serves young people at the theoretical ages of 13 to 17.

[2] It is also necessary to point out that the new norms, mentioned in the previous note, define the extension of compulsory education to ten years of formal schooling: preschool plus three instructional divisions of basic general education.

[3] The text in Spanish uses the terms, *escuela secundaria* and *nivel medio*, as synonyms.

[4] The project, "La inserción ocupacional de la escuela media", was carried out at Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Sede Académica Argentina, from 1998 until 2003, under the direction of Daniel Filmus and with financing from Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica. At present, the projected is directed by Ana Miranda with support by CONICET.

[5] The statistical annex presents in detailed form the composition of the selected sample.

[6] The index of socioeconomic level is based on the following variables: occupational category of the head of the household, job rating of the head of the household, and maximum educational level of the father and mother (average). The constructed index permits identification of three groups of schools: the group we have categorized as "high" concentrates mostly families in which the head of the household has been to college and performs hierarchical or professional work; while the "low" group includes very few students from families with university experience and high job categories; in the third group, the intensity of the segmentation is less, with a more heterogeneous population of students from different backgrounds, although the middle sectors predominate.

[7] Overeducated and underrated refer to the lack of correspondence between the diploma obtained in the formal education system and the rating of the job performed at the workplace.

[8] For greater detail on the construction of the typology used, see the methodological annex.

[9] The category includes those who show oscillations in their passage through the labor market and educational system. In other words, they do not yet show a clear, sustained trend in their activities. For example, the first year they neither went to school nor worked, and in the following years they performed one of these activities.

[10] Technical schools are a type of secondary school. They include six years of study (one more than other secondary schools) and offer an education that combines practical and theoretical aspects in different technical/professional specialties. Although the Law of Education modified the structure and curriculum of the technical schools in the city of Buenos Aires and in other jurisdictions, they continue to operate.

[11] Since this study focused only on young people who have finished secondary school, their trajectories cannot be generalized to the entire universe of their age group.

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