Emerging Adulthood: The New Life Stage After High School

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What is emerging adulthood?

- Lasts from about age 18-25; for many, lasts through the twenties
- Begins with the end of secondary school; ends with the attainment of full adult status--?
- Exists mainly in industrialized societies, but growing in developing countries
Social changes leading to emerging adulthood

- Later ages of marriage and parenthood
- Longer and more widespread education
- Birth control, fewer children
- Tolerance of premarital sexuality, cohabitation
- Changes in women’s roles
- Ambivalence about adult status
College Enrollment, 1900-2000

Graph showing the percent of 18-24 year-olds with some college education from 1900 to 2000, with a trend line indicating an increasing enrollment over time.
Median U.S. Marriage Age, 1950–2000

YEAR

AGE

- MEN
- WOMEN
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrialized Countries</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Developing Countries</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>India</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five features of emerging adulthood

- (Based on 300 interviews with American ages 18-29, diverse backgrounds.)
- The age of identity explorations
- The age of instability
- The self-focused age
- The age of feeling in-between
- The age of possibilities
The Age of Identity Explorations

- Trying to find out “who I am”
- Trying to find a place in the world in love and work
- Love: searching for a “soul mate”
  ---”When you marry, you want to find your soul mate, first and foremost.” 94% of Americans 20-29 agree.
- Work: searching for self-fulfillment; money is not enough
  ---“They pay well, but I hate my job! There’s no opportunity for growth there.” Tamara, age 22, legal assistant.
The age of instability

- Average number of job changes from age 20-29 in U.S.: Seven
Rates of Moving, by Age

% Who Moved in Past Year

AGE

10-14 15-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-44 45-54 55+

The graph shows the percent of people who moved in the past year, categorized by age groups. The highest percentage of moves occurs between the ages of 20-24, with a peak around 25-29. The percentage decreases steadily after the age of 30.
The self-focused age:

- More independent from parents
- Not yet tied to others
- “I think I want to get more in touch with myself. I want to be a little selfish for awhile, and selfishness and marriage don't seem to go hand in hand. I'd like to be able to experience as much as I can before I get married, just so I can be well-rounded.” (Rosa, 24 year-old Latina)
The age of feeling in-between

- Not yet fully adult, and definitely not “kids” or “adolescents”
- Adults in some ways but not others.
Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?

![Bar chart showing the percentage of people who feel they have reached adulthood by age group (12-17x, 18-25, 26-35, 36-55). The chart includes bars for yes, no, and yes and no responses.]

- Yes: [Bars for different age groups showing the percentage of people who feel they have reached adulthood.]
- No: [Bars for different age groups showing the percentage of people who do not feel they have reached adulthood.]
- Yes and no: [Bars for different age groups showing the percentage of people who have mixed feelings about reaching adulthood.]
Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?

“Not absolutely, because I still sometimes get up in the morning and say, ‘Good Lord! I’m actually a grown up!’ ‘Cause I still feel like a kid. I’ve done things like just got up one morning and said, you know, ‘I’m going to Mexico’ and just get up and go. And I should have been doing other things.” (Terrell, 23 year-old African American)
Top criteria

- Accept responsibility for yourself.
- Make independent decisions.
- Financial independence
Bottom criteria

- Finish education
- Marriage
- Parenthood
You know where DUDE meets DAD? I’M THERE.

Whoa, that happened fast, didn’t it?
The next 18 years will zip right by, too.
So don’t wait until Junior
is a senior to figure out how
much life insurance is enough
to protect your new family.
Let State Farm® help. Call, click or visit a
State Farm Agent today, because Like a good neighbor,
State Farm is there.
The age of possibilities

- “I am very sure that someday I will get to where I want to be in life.”
- 96% of Americans ages 18-24 agree
The age of possibilities:

Do you think your life will be better or worse than your parents’ lives have been?

“Better economically. Better personally. I just think by the time my parents reached my age, they'd already run into some barricades that prevented them from getting what they wanted, personally and family-wise. And so far, I've avoided those things, and I don't really see those things in my life. I don't like my job. I'm frustrated about the lack of relationships with females. But in general, I think I'm headed in the right direction.” (Bob, 23 year-old White American)
Variations by social class

- Education looms large, now and later.
- Age of finding a 5-year job: college grad, age 26; hs grad, age 28; hs dropout, age 35.
- EAs from lower class backgrounds feel adult earlier, marry 2 years earlier, have children earlier.
- BUT—the same five features apply across social classes.
Implications for Higher Education

- Identity issues are key.
- May take 5-6 years to get a “four-year” degree.
- Even after bachelor’s degree, may head in new direction.
- Mixed feelings about adulthood.
- Optimistic, energetic, creative
Implications for High School Counselors

- Post-secondary education and training is more important than ever!
- Few will know as high school seniors what the next decade will hold—even if they think they do!
- Best strategy is to make a 5-year Plan—but be prepared to revise it.
Is It Generational?

- Baby Boomers, Generation X… Y? Z?
- Distinctive features of today’s EA generation:
  - The “new media” generation
  - More globally aware, globally connected.
  - More accepting of differences in religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation.
- BUT: EA is here to stay
Trends in EA behavior, recent decades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performed volunteer work</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in organized</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstration</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialized with someone of</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>another racial/ethnic group</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trends in EA behavior, recent decades

- Drank beer in past year (men): 45%
- Visited an art gallery or museum in past year (men): 53%
“Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties,” by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Oxford University Press.

www.jeffreyarnett.com