

Emerging ADULTHOOD

Thirty years ago, the average 21-year old was either married or engaged to be married; caring for a baby or expecting one; completing their education or on the cusp of completing their education; and was settling down into a long-term job or the role of a full-time mother. Generally, young people grew up quickly and made serious life decisions at an early age.

Nowadays, the average 21-year-old's life goals are immeasurably different. Marriage and parenthood occur at least five years later. Also, education lasts an extended amount of time, with many students finishing a *four-year degree* in five to seven years' time, with many continuing on to a graduate or professional school after.

This rise of medium age for marriage, parenthood and completed education is not considered an *extended adolescence*, according to Dr. Jeffrey Arnett, PhD Arnett, in a 2000 article for *American Psychologist*, as there is more independence and less parental control than that of an adolescent.

Arnett proposed the concept of *emerging adulthood*—for this period from the late teens to mid-twenties (18-25 years old) and has spent the last decade researching emerging adulthood within the context of developmental psychology. According to Arnett, there are five main features of emerging adulthood -

Identity Explorations

One theory attempting to explain the increase in age before marriage and parenthood is based on the introduction of the birth control pill, and the less severe standards of sexual morality after the 1970s sexual revolution. Young people no longer felt they needed to be married in order to have a regular sexual relationship.

Arnett also points out that the increase in time attending educational institutions may put off marriage and parenthood for years. Two-thirds of young people enter college after graduating from high school—a *higher proportion than ever before*, states Arnett. Of those who graduate college, approximately one-third continue on to graduate school. The majority of young people wait until they complete their education before they think about marriage and parenthood - meaning postponement until at least their mid-twenties.



Instability

Young people view the role of being a spouse and a parent differently than they did thirty years ago. Arnett states the reason behind this shift in thinking is derived from upheavals created during the Great Depression and World War II. A way for young people to obtain stability during this time was to create homes, marriages and families. Also, many planned to have up to five children, so the planning process required them to enter parenthood earlier. Today, marriage and children are not likely to be seen as achievements during the emerging adult stage, more as something to be avoided until later years. The thought process being - **Yes, but later on.**

Self-Focus

Women's roles have vastly changed within the context of emerging adulthood. In the 1950s, young women were under tremendous social pressure to have a husband, and few women attended college. Occupations for women were restricted and temporary. Now, young women are focusing more on developing their education- 56% of undergraduates are female. With these new social standards comes new freedoms for women, and now any occupation is obtainable for women.

According to Arnett, there is no other time in life that is more self-focused than during emerging adulthood, as there is little authority to answer to. Being self-focused during this time is healthy, normal, and temporary. By focusing on themselves, emerging adults are able to gain a better understanding of who they are, and what they want the foundation of their life to be. They are able to learn self-sufficiency before taking commitments in work and love.

Feeling In Between

Emerging adulthood is an exploratory phase in which the person is not an adolescent, yet not quite an adult. This instability of between years leaves most questioning if they feel adult or not. A study conducted by Arnett concluded that emerging adults feel in between until they are able to accept responsibility, make their own decisions, and are financially independent. During the process of developing these qualities, they will continue to feel in between an adult and an adolescent.

Possibilities

This period in a young person's life is laden with possibilities, and many different paths remain open. It is a time of hope, opportunity, and expectations as the person's direction in life has not been decided for certain. Emerging adults tend to see their future in a well-paying, satisfying job, a loving marriage, and happy children who are above average.

Arnett's theory of *emerging adulthood* is one of many that pertain to the developmental stages of life for young adults. However, it is not a universal period of development as it occurs within certain environments and only in particular cultures. Emerging adulthood is a time of exploration, instability, and countless possibilities.

Boomerang Kids

Boomerang Kids is a term used to describe a prolonged period of emerging adulthood. While emerging adulthood is healthy for self-realization, the key is for it to be a *temporary* period. Boomerang Kids are adult children of Baby Boomers that have a financial effect on their parents' real estate decisions and retirement options. A recent survey found that **51%** of young adults (aged 21 to 29 years old) still live at home.

If you feel overwhelmed by your adult child living at home, or want to find a way to help encourage them to take steps towards their independence. call your EFAP.



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